

Berkshire Music Hub Summary

Ofsted began publishing a series of research reviews in April 2021, with the aim of collating current subject-specific research evidence that might help subject leaders with their curriculum planning. The music review was published in July 2021

The Value of Music in the Curriculum

This report emphasises the importance of music in the curriculum, stating that ‘In England, all pupils should study music until the end of key stage 3.’ Further to this, the review emphasises the importance of music as a subject in its own right.

‘This review starts from the assumption that a central purpose of good music education is for pupils to make more music, think more musically and consequently become more musical.’

The benefits of music for pupil wellbeing, confidence and engagement were clearly recognised by all respondents to the Call for Evidence on Music Education (DfE August 2021). This evidence review casts some doubt on the transferability of skills between academic disciplines. The emphasis is clearly placed on the benefits of music education for its own sake.

3 Classes of Knowledge

The report includes lots of detail on three different classes of knowledge which are required for musical learning and progress. At a time when there is a focus on a knowledge rich curriculum, this is particularly helpful.

Tacit Knowledge (experiential) – informal, gained through listening and experiences within our culture.

Procedural Knowledge (practical) – knowledge of how to complete a practical task. For example, the knowledge required to develop instrumental skills. This knowledge requires practise in order to become embedded. Over time, secure procedural knowledge will result in skills becoming automatic.

Declarative (facts) – factual knowledge that is committed to long term memory. For example, knowledge of music history and music theory such as how to build chords.

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3 Pillars of Progression

The report emphasises the need to continue to plan a curriculum that focusses on the development of skills in performing, listening and composing with the following pillars of progression supporting this:

Technical – ability to control sound using your voice, an instrument or music technology. Ability to use musical notation such as staff notation or guitar tab to support this.

Constructive - Knowledge of the musical elements/interrelated dimensions of music and knowledge of the components of composition

Expressive - musical quality, musical creativity and knowledge of musical meaning across the world and time

Curriculum Design

Curriculum content should be considered with the following in mind:

Cognitive Overload - Students are unable to take in more than 4 – 7 pieces of new information at any one time, and it is therefore important to ensure that the acquisition of practical skills such as learning an instrument are properly structured and scaffolded to ensure success.

Time available – where limited curriculum time is available for music, careful consideration should be given to the amount of curriculum content. Adequate time needs to be committed in order to ensure instrumental skills become automatic. Practice and consolidation is essential in order to achieve this.

Continuity – learning a series of different instruments is unlikely to result in secure procedural knowledge and automatic skills. Teaching a different instrument in each year group should be avoided.

Content – the music curriculum should be tailored to your students and school. Attempts to cover a very broad range of genres, styles and instrumental skills can result in lack of security in both procedural (skills) and declarative (factual) knowledge.

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Assessment

The report emphasises the need for high quality feedback and summative assessment that is driven by the needs of learners.

- Formative assessment should emphasise live musical feedback during lessons, allowing the teacher to demonstrate musically and the student to make corrections in response. Written feedback is unlikely to be useful in this context. In early years, photographs of pupils playing instruments are also unlikely to be useful evidence, video is much more effective.
- Assessment should be used to check curriculum effectiveness, rather than the curriculum being driven by assessment. Frequent reporting requirements driven by whole school policy may result in an assessment driven curriculum. The amount of time allocated to music curriculum must be considered when deciding on frequency of reporting.
- The amount of consolidation and practice needed for any procedural knowledge (eg. instrumental skills) to be learned well enough to support the next stage of progression will be significant. *'Assessment schedules should not assume that one instance of success equals long-term learning and, on this basis, require pupils to demonstrate further 'progress' a term later.'*
- Assessment of specific musical skills is likely to be more effective and a better predictor of future progress than a broad grade.
- Summative exam assessments such as GCSEs and A levels are the result of complex layers of cumulative study over many years. Too much focus on examination content in the early years of study is likely to limit pupils' opportunities to develop wider knowledge. In the early stages, formative assessment of the components that lead to high quality compositions and performances is likely to be more useful.
- Schools should be cautious about using prior attainment in Maths and English to set target grades for music. *'It makes no sense to tie music students' musical achievement to their scores on standardized maths and reading scores.'*
Pupil experience of instrumental tuition outside of school should also be considered.

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Features of strong school systems for music

Schools that demonstrate strong music provision are likely to ensure support for the following through their timetabling and school systems:

- Adequate curriculum time – likely to be an hour a week.
- Extra-curricular provision that includes students across different year groups, for example orchestras and choirs.
- Provision of small group and individual instrumental tuition within the school day.
- Musical events such as school concerts and attendance at other performances.
- In primary school, provision of CPD for non-specialist teachers.

‘The wider musical life of a school will be underpinned by staff having time outside their curriculum hours to run the clubs, workshops and trips that provide the memorable experiences central to a life-long love of the subject. This will be hard for single-person departments or when staff are expected to manage this while also teaching a full curriculum load. Musical activities are often vertical, which can be hard to manage in a school system that mostly works horizontally (for instance, by year group). Schools with a strong musical culture will find creative solutions to enable music to flourish alongside other subjects.’

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