



THE STATE OF *Play*

ARE SCHOOLS DOING ENOUGH TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR MUSICAL EDUCATION AT KS3? ABIGAIL D'AMORE AND DENISE BARROWS SUSPECT WE COULD DO BETTER...

classroom music lessons; for too many children the nine-year entitlement to music for all school pupils, enshrined in the national curriculum, is not always fulfilled.

The impact of recent education policy changes has had the general effect of lowering the status of the arts in schools, with numbers progressing to GCSE in music amongst the lowest of the arts subjects at 7% last year.

However, the best music in schools is now significantly more inclusive, more musically diverse, and of higher quality than it was a decade ago. Where music is good it is often very good, characterised by creativity, engagement and above all musicality.

Some music teachers excel at using effective strategies for inclusive engagement, taking good account of pupils' own interests and skills and introducing diverse creative musical practices, performance opportunities and role models both in- and beyond school. Often these educators work with senior school leaders who actively support music.

Music support services have undergone a massive reorganisation under the Government's National Plan for Music Education, including the development of music education 'hubs'. However, there remain inconsistencies around the levels of advisory support available to music teachers and internally, music teachers often receive insufficient support from senior leadership teams.

The challenges ahead

Unhappily, our review has highlighted a real worry that the gap between the best and the worst music in schools is getting wider rather than narrower.

Of fundamental concern is the isolation felt by many secondary music teachers, with over two thirds of teachers surveyed not engaging in regular CPD, networks or professional conversations about music. Changes in teacher education resulting in trainee teachers being much more school-based, are leading to a reduction in the range of high quality teaching

For young people, the power of music lies as much in its capacity for social and personal development as for musical development. Music learning in secondary schools should be accessible to everybody; no school should be without a music department that offers high quality, practical music making opportunities.

These principles have underpinned the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's music education work, including, over the last decade, our Musical Futures initiative. We recently sought a broader picture of the state of schools-based music education in England and commissioned an independent review, led by Katherine Zeserson from The Sage Gateshead.

This landmark review, 'Inspiring Music for All – next steps in innovation, improvement and integration', draws on in-depth interviews with leading figures in music education, a roundtable discussion with sector specialists, youth focus group sessions, an online survey of

teachers and analysis of over 90 primary literature sources.

Music education in England has received significant commitment and investment from two successive governments for the last fifteen years. Yet despite this, Ofsted reports on music teaching throughout this period have highlighted vast differences in the quality of provision in schools.

There has been much debate in the past about why this is and how we should resolve the underlying issues. However, our review has identified for the first time a high level of consensus across the sector around the root causes. This represents a key opportunity to address key weaknesses and ensure schools-based music is delivered at a consistently high standard for all young people.

The national picture

The quality and reach of schools-based music education is still unacceptably inconsistent. Our review found that there is still too little music-making in many



role models and pedagogical approaches experienced by NQTs and teacher trainees.

There remain consistent weaknesses in curriculum and pedagogy across the country with a widely shared concern that music pedagogy is narrowing. A lack of consistent engagement in professional networks and CPD means that teachers are less inclined to challenge and innovate in their practice if the culture in their school or department militates against this.

As mentioned earlier, there is often too little music-making in classroom music lessons. This can be because of a lack of teacher confidence, poor spaces and lack of resources, and teacher strategies focusing too much on verbal and written analysis. Musical Futures aims to challenge this by providing strategies for high quality, practical, independent music making among students.

School assessment strategies and timetabling protocols at secondary level can constrain good practice – and may even be breeding bad practice. Where senior staff in schools are not confident about judging the quality of musical learning and teaching, they are not able to provide appropriate support to music teachers and external partners in terms of quality, CPD and progression for pupils. There also appears to be inconsistency among senior leaders as to the purpose of music education in secondary schools. Without a clear philosophy underpinning music's place and value, we see poor – or absent – opportunities for music learning.

The way forward

Major structural changes in how schools are funded and governed, and the establishment of Music Education Hubs, are creating new conditions for schools-based music. This is a chance to galvanise all partners to anchor the new National Curriculum inside the wide vision and diverse partnerships envisioned in the National Plan for Music Education.

The keys to this lie in better support for teachers, more rigorous and consistent focus on



CASE STUDY: OASIS ACADEMY

“Students often said music was their favourite subject, but this wasn't translated into good GCSE candidates and Key Stage 4 attainment seemed to reach a low plateau,” reports Paul Ibbott, head of music at Oasis Lord's Hill Academy in Southampton.

“After attending a Musical Futures training day, I realised that the attainment plateau was little to do with ability and everything to do with engagement – what I was offering was not really exciting the students.

Musical Futures gave me ‘permission’ to experiment and do something different ... I work with students to empower them to make creative musical decisions beyond simply learning to play the notes – they arrange songs, simplify parts and compose their own material.

Nearly all students say they prefer these lessons and feel they have made progress in learning instruments. KS4 music results have completely turned around and sustained at better than national average. This work has helped to make the department a more ‘cool’ place to be and has enabled me to raise the profile of the department in the school.”



quality of provision and more strategic and ambitious partnership working.

There is a growing national and international evidence base available to support good practice and a number of interesting new developments in teacher networking and CPD. Our own Musical Futures community and peer-to-peer support network rank among these, but we are by no means alone. Others with a secondary focus include the two pilot music programmes now being set up through the London Schools Excellence Fund.

Governing bodies and senior leadership teams need to be inspired and supported to understand and demand high quality music education – at the heart of school life – so that all partners can then work together to it.

Pupils' own musical interests, skills and aspirations need to be sufficiently taken into account in the planning and delivery of classroom-based learning. Increasingly,

meaningful ways of embedding technology into music teaching should be explored as a way of capitalising on pupils' confidence and skills, and bridging the gap between in- and out-of-school experiences.

Excellent examples of teaching and leadership practice in music should be the norm, not the exception. And perhaps most critically, we need to remind many music teachers of the reason why they entered the teaching profession in the first place – to inspire students with and through music.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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FIND OUT MORE...

- * To download *Inspiring Music for All – next steps in innovation, improvement and integration* visit phf.org.uk
- * Musical Futures supports teachers to improve their practice through its unique pedagogy, free training events, weekly

Twitter meet-ups (#mufachat) and via a wealth of teacher-created resources online including Musical Futures The App. For more information, visit musicalfutures.org

* Girls are achieving equal or better grades than boys at GCSE level in most STEM subjects and those that do A-Levels get higher A*-C grades than boys.