

Supporting better music education

This is a briefing written specifically for senior leaders in schools, hubs and arts organisations. It covers the key points you need to pick up from Ofsted's report on music education, published on Friday 15 November 2013.

Ofsted (2013) have inspected music education hubs and schools. Their report looks at: 'the serious problems that continue to exist in the leadership of music in schools' whilst recognising 'the significant contribution that music can make to the wider life of each school and to broader school improvement.'

This report summarises what schools need to know

Ofsted state that **music is a demanding academic discipline, developed through exciting practical musical activity.**

There is work to be done to help school leaders and teachers realise this aspiration; the **music curriculum in most schools lacked depth and rigour.**

Ofsted states that Music Education Hubs should **expect and secure that all schools engage with hubs and the National Plan for Music Education.**

Music education provision in schools starts in the curriculum

- All school leaders should **ensure that music is regularly taught.**
- Schools should **evaluate their music provision more accurately**, especially in the curriculum.
- Schools and teachers should **ensure that all pupils are introduced to a wide range of music.**
- **Musical learning in schools should go beyond enjoyment and performance**, promoting a wider range of musical knowledge, skills and understanding which stem from 'exciting practical musical activity'.
- Planning across the whole curriculum should have progression at its core and needs to be more cohesive and less atomised. Ofsted warns that:

Key point: *In primary schools, and at Key Stage 3, the planned curriculum in the schools visited was too often a shallow musical odyssey, with ... units of work on various styles of music [e.g. world music, blues, hip hop, rap and pop]. ... it was rare for links to be made between them.*

- **Singing should be developed** through all primary and secondary schools.
- We need **higher expectations at Key Stage 3** and better planning for the development of the knowledge skills and understanding required in order to better prepare pupils for study at Key Stages 4 and 5.

School leaders need to effectively judge the quality of teaching and music

- Even where provision was not strong, senior leaders **frequently over-estimated** the quality of the musical activity in their schools.
- Senior leaders should make informed, realistic judgments on the quality of a lesson **based upon musical learning and progress** not non-musical factors.
- Senior leaders should observe and challenge the quality of music education provided by their own and visiting music teachers.
- Training and advice for teachers and senior leaders can be provided by hubs.

Key point: The assessment of music must be musical and appropriate.

“Elaborate whole-school assessment systems, not tailored to music specifically, disrupted the flow and musical purposes of the lessons.”

We need to help pupils access music in and beyond the curriculum

- Music provision should target a greater and wider range of pupils. External provision needs to enhance and support school and curriculum provision.
- Schools need to do more to encourage music within and beyond the curriculum at Key Stage 4. The negative impact of the EBacc has been noted by Ofsted.

Schools and hubs should work together to improve music education

- Hubs should work as champions, leaders and expert partners with schools. They can have systematic, helpful, challenging conversations with school and music leaders about the quality of music education and work with you to improve it.
- External music education providers must be challenged to provide relevant and high quality musical learning opportunities that are integral to and complement existing music provision. **This will help curriculum cohesion.**
- Hubs should develop a school music education strategy. A singing strategy should be integral to this.
- Hubs work with local music organisations. Music centres and local ensembles continue to provide some pupils with opportunities to sing or learn instruments and progress to more advanced learning. Schools need to be aware of such opportunities and signpost them.
- Work together needs planning time to help a hub and your school effectively implement and improve targeted musical learning.
- Your school can work with your music hub to access designated funding. Working in partnership, the impact of all provision on musical learning and participation can be effectively evaluated.

You can read our parallel summary for head teachers and teachers of Ofsted's (2012) report on music education *Music in schools: Wider still and wider* on the ISM website.