

The National Curriculum for Music

Primary Overview



Introduction: A new National Curriculum for Music comes into effect in England from September 2014. This briefing has been prepared to help you understand the changes and challenges resulting from the new curriculum and to assist teachers in responding.

Contents:

1. What's changed? What's new?
2. What does this mean for the whole school curriculum?
3. What materials and resources are available to you?
4. Have you identified your gaps? What do you need to fill these gaps?

Key documents to read:

- [National Curriculum for Music in England](#) (September 2013)
- [National Plan for Music Education in England](#) (November 2012)
- [Ofsted's Review of Music Education](#) (March 2012)

1. What's changed? What's new?

The new National Curriculum for Music draws upon the key elements of the National Plan for Music Education (DfE and DCMS, 2012)

The importance of Music and the Arts within schools has gained additional external prominence; Sir Michael Wilshaw (Ofsted) recently announced:

"The effective teaching of art, music, drama and other creative subjects is important in ensuring students experience a rich and balanced curriculum. This is something our inspectors pay close attention to when they visit schools."

Since the inspection process is for all schools, this is a clear directive that the **importance of music as a subject within school is maintained, or where appropriate, strengthened.**

The power of music to engage young people in education, to motivate and excite them, to develop musical and transferable skills, also has a large body of empirical research. The new National Curriculum draws upon this in its Purpose of Study. A summary of the review: http://www.ism.org/news/article/how_powerful_is_music

Music maintains the status of a statutory subject and is an entitlement for all pupils up to the age of 14 in schools that must follow the National Curriculum.

The purpose of study points to an essentially musical experience, where learning about music comes through practical experience; it is good to see that 'creativity' has maintained importance within the new curriculum, and **many inter-related (see below) processes** such as 'performing, composing, improvising, singing, creating, manipulating, combining' **underpin the essentially practical nature of the subject.**

The framework document provides brief statements of 'Purpose', 'Aims' and 'End of Key Stage Subject Content Statements'. The detail within these highlights that composing, performing, listening and appraising are inter-related, meaning that, rather than being taught separately, they should be considered holistically.

There is a greater emphasis on singing in the new programmes of study, linking to the National Plan's aspiration for regular singing in all schools and at all key stages. This will also help with the development of 'internalising skills' which are specifically mentioned.

Mention is given of exposure to a wide range of music and exploring the history and context of the music. As mentioned in the *Purpose of Study*, this comes about through first-hand experiences of developing as a musician in a practical sense. This is not new; the previous version of the National Curriculum emphasised the understanding of music in terms of culture, context, time and place, particularly in Key Stage 3. In all Key Stages, teachers should contextualise musical learning.

The need for pupils to access live and recorded music is also explicitly mentioned.

As with all subjects, there is no guidance for assessment. The previous triennial review pointed out that the system of levelling (particularly sub-levelling) in music was not fit for purpose and that **whole-school assessment models based upon STEM subjects do not work for music**. Whilst this new curriculum gives an opportunity for a new and more meaningfully musical system to be developed, there will be an interim period where schools and hubs are expected to develop their own systems. As advised by Ofsted, systems should be based upon musical progression over time, with sound (audio/video files) providing evidence of musical development over time.

'Understanding a range of notations' is maintained. This should be a natural part of musical learning anyway as children explore, manipulate and combine sounds, thinking about shapes and then consider the relationship of sounds and symbols. However, this should not be limited to staff notation.

Music technology retains an important prominence in the new National Curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 3.

It is explicitly stated that learners should **play and explore musical instruments**, specifically, but not limited to, tuned and non-tuned percussion in Key Stages 1 and 2.

The phrase 'Musical Canon' may cause mild panic; however, the interpretation of this should be of music across wide range of historical periods, genres, traditions, composers and musicians – essentially, as Michael Wilshaw at Ofsted points out, to **create a 'rich and balanced' curriculum**.

There remains the need for CPD to increase generalist teacher expertise and confidence.

The skills, understanding and knowledge detailed within the new National Curriculum are developed across time and in all Key Stages. An integrated curriculum that is **taught regularly** across all Key Stages and builds on pupils' experiences in and out of the classroom should effectively deliver the expectations of the National Curriculum.

There are excellent opportunities for learning *about* music and learning *through* music across the primary curriculum in integrated ways in order to join up learning, so long as the knowledge, skills, understanding and breadth of music are meaningfully developed.

2. What does this mean for the whole school curriculum?

Some primary schools will need to **invest in musical instruments**, particularly tuned percussion.

Schools should use **audio/video based digital technology** in order to capture and develop musical learning in sound-based ways. This will form the basis of a new assessment system, in line with the expectations of Ofsted (2012).

Ongoing time and resources to develop teachers and teaching assistants are required.

Musical learning in primary schools must map onto, and develop from, early years provision and link integrally to musical learning in secondary schools.

Schools are responsible for the quality of all music provision in their schools, even that provided by external partners; they should quality assure this properly and in particular, make sure that any short-term workshops, whole class instrumental teaching (Wider Opportunities/First Access) etc... map onto the music curriculum, meet the musical needs of learners and continue to be developed through the curriculum on completion.

Musical learning both inside and outside the classroom needs to be taken into consideration when planning music lessons and activities in schools to make sure that all pupils are appropriately challenged and supported.

Time and resources will be needed, alongside additional support to create schemes of work, lesson plans and resources.

Many primary schools will want to keep their 'creative curriculum', as they feel this is the best way to teach children. New curriculum frameworks will need to ensure sure that musical learning is well planned for and progressive in terms of developing musical knowledge, skills and understanding and not just tokenistic.

Opportunities to take this forward might include: extra CPD inset days, staff meetings, shared CPD resource packs, shared CPD sessions, online support forums, shared planning/resources.

Ofsted expect music to be taught in Key Stage 3 and have stated this explicitly in their triennial review of music education.

Key extracts from their report *Music in schools: wider still and wider*:

*Common reasons for **inadequate** [our emphasis] judgements of music teaching included insufficient time allocated by schools for music in Key Stage 3.*

In too many instances [at Key Stage 3], decisions taken by a school to reduce time for music adversely affected the breadth and depth of curriculum coverage

In secondary schools, music provision was weakened by whole-school decisions to reduce time for the Key Stage 3 programme so that it was not possible to cover sufficient breadth or depth of music across the key stage.

More from this report can be found on the [Ofsted website](#) and we have also produced a [summary report of the recommendations](#).

3. What materials and resources are available to you?

Your **local music hub** will be operating whole class vocal and instrumental programmes. You should aim to contact your local music education hub to see how you can best make use of their expertise and resources. They may also be able to offer curriculum support.

You can find out who your local hub is at www.ism.org/education

The **Department for Education Expert Panel for Music Education** has developed online resources for trainees and existing teachers in order to help with interpretation of the curriculum and signposting new and existing resources.

<https://sites.google.com/site/primarymusicitt/>

4. Have you identified your gaps? What do you need to fill these gaps?

Questions to ask yourself:

Do you have Schemes of Work and sample lessons which are flexibly able to deliver the demands of the new curriculum?

Is there guidance at all on assessment in the new curriculum?

Do you have sufficient knowledge of the networks and forums that are available to support teachers?

How to answer these questions:

Look for examples of excellent planning. Explore possibilities across your music education hub to create case studies of excellent practice that demonstrate how musical learning is supported and developed across schools in your area.

Continue to develop networks across your music education hub, utilising Universities, cultural partners, lead schools and individuals to create CPD materials, deliver CPD events and then share/support on-going CPD/resources.

Hubs should undertake an audit of music provision in primary schools across the area to identify schools and individuals who can share with and support others.

Explore opportunities for teachers/trainees to meet and, where possible, observe music lessons in other local schools with teachers who are identified as outstanding. This will need the support of senior leadership.

Use the [DfE resources bank](#) when devising CPD and Schemes of Work (SOW).

Promote your local networks through your school leadership and work with colleagues in primary, secondary schools and across the hub to establish common understanding of assessment and progression, and to develop musical ways of assessing and evidencing this.

The **Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM)** is the professional body for musicians and subject association for music. We have over 6,500 members working across the music education sector and in the music profession. **Dr Alison Daubney** is a Teaching Fellow at the University of Sussex. With thanks to **Soundcity**, Brighton & Hove Music Education Hub.