

Ian Bauckham CBE  
Chair  
Ofqual  
Earlsdon Park  
53-55 Butts Road  
Coventry  
CV1 3BH

5 January 2022

Dear Mr Bauckham

I write on behalf of the ISM, which is the UK's largest non-union representative body for musicians and one of the two subject associations for music. We represent over 11,000 members, many of them music teachers as well as Heads of Department and senior school leaders. We have been working in the field of music education since we were set up in 1882 and are committed to all children getting access to an excellent music education as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

We were concerned to read your emergency timetable proposals for schools coping with high staff absences due to COVID-19, reported in the TES magazine on 3 January.<sup>1</sup> You suggested that the teaching of certain specialist subjects such as music could be suspended so that music teachers could be redeployed to cover other subjects. This is not the right approach to deal with the situation and in our view falls outside the role of Ofqual, which is to uphold standards and confidence in qualifications in England, and not to advise schools on which subjects to prioritise in a pandemic. By making such a suggestion it is possible that you have unfortunately overstepped your remit as Chair of Ofqual.

Far from advocating a reduction in music lessons, the Government recently emphasised the importance of music education as part of the recovery curriculum in schools. Its guidance "[Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery](#)" (November 2021) states that a "key priority in all key stages is a curriculum which allows a return to practical music-making through singing and playing instruments" and encourages schools to "foster pupils' re-engagement with a wide range of music".

The ISM notes that you have chosen to single out music as one of the subjects to suspend. Yet it has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic compared with other subjects. Our extensive report "[The Heart of the School is Missing](#)" (December 2020) revealed that all aspects of music education have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. Although many schools reinstated music teaching as the restrictions have been lifted, the level of provision has by no means returned to normal in all schools. To suspend music lessons, even temporarily, would cause even more damage to the subject. It reinforces the already strong impression that there is a hierarchy of subjects in our schools in which the creative arts are undervalued, as well as sending an unhelpful message to head teachers about prioritising core subjects to the detriment of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Moreover, it makes little sense to free up a specialist teacher to teach another subject as a non-specialist, which means students miss out both on high-quality music education

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ofqual-boss-pausing-specialist-subjects-could-free-teachers>

and on specialised teaching in other subjects. Music teachers have shown enormous goodwill in supporting their schools through the challenges of the pandemic, but volunteering to cover for an absent colleague is very different from being redeployed to teach another subject full-time. Indeed, your proposal contravenes the Department of Education's own statutory guidelines on teachers' pay and conditions in maintained schools.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, section 52.7 states: "Teachers should be required to provide cover in accordance with paragraph 50.7 only rarely, and only in circumstances that are not foreseeable." Given that the pandemic has now lasted for nearly two years, during which there has been a consistent lack of protection for pupils and their teachers, the current staff shortages have been all too foreseeable.

Music is a National Curriculum subject that plays a vital role in our education system. It brings enjoyment and significant educational benefits to students as well as being important for their social skills and general well-being. While the current staff shortages in school are concerning, and schools will be looking for solutions to cope with the current pressures, simply cancelling music lessons and redeploying music teachers cannot be the answer. Music teachers must be given the respect they deserve and music should be treated as the statutory subject that it is.

I would therefore be grateful if you could retract your proposals.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



**Deborah Annetts**  
**Chief Executive**

Incorporated Society of Musicians

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cc Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for School Standards

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