Music: A subject in peril?

10 years on from the first National Plan for Music Education

March 2022
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Report by Dr Jodie Underhill,  
Research Associate at the ISM
Executive summary

It has been more than 10 years since the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) was published, 12 years since the introduction of the EBacc, and seven years since the introduction of Progress 8, all of which follows years of cuts to education spending.

Schools are now attempting to recover from two years of serious disruption due to COVID-19, which impacted music provision across the country. Meanwhile, we await the long-anticipated refreshed NPME, due to be published in Spring 2022.

Against this backdrop, the ISM has published its latest music education report. The report takes stock of music provision in England’s secondary schools and looks at what must be done to improve it. The report collates and analyses findings from the ISM’s recent survey of music teachers in England. Their accounts paint an honest and often sobering picture of decline and inequality in music provision across our schools. They also highlight the many wider policy issues beyond the scope of the refreshed NPME that need to be addressed by government if they want to deliver significant improvement.

Music plays a valuable part in young people’s lives, both in the intrinsic value of studying music for its own sake, and in its wide-ranging extrinsic benefits. Susan Hallam, Professor of Education and Music Psychology, has shown that music can enhance language skills and literacy, support motor skills, motivate disaffected students and contribute to their health and wellbeing. As the needs of employers change in the 21st century, and businesses look for broader skills and in its wide-ranging extrinsic benefits. Susan Hallam, Professor of Education and Music Psychology, has shown that music can enhance language skills and literacy, support motor skills, motivate disaffected students and contribute to their health and wellbeing. As the needs of employers change in the 21st century, and businesses look for broader skills and in its wide-ranging extrinsic benefits. Susan Hallam, Professor of Education and Music Psychology, has shown that music can enhance language skills and literacy, support motor skills, motivate disaffected students and contribute to their health and wellbeing. As the needs of employers change in the 21st century, and businesses look for broader skills and in its wide-ranging extrinsic benefits. Susan Hallam, Professor of Education and Music Psychology, has shown that music can enhance language skills and literacy, support motor skills, motivate disaffected students and contribute to their health and wellbeing. As the needs of employers change in the 21st century, and businesses look for broader skills and
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Summary of the ISM findings

In order to establish the current situation of music education in our schools and to seek the views of teachers both on the impacts of DfE policy and on how the NPME should be refreshed, the ISM ran a survey of classroom and peripatetic music teachers between November 2021 and January 2022.

Over 500 primary, secondary and peripatetic music teachers from all types of settings responded to the survey. The findings lay bare just how bad the situation is in our schools. They confirm that inequality in music education in England, which the NPME was meant to address, still exists – in classroom and instrumental provision, in Senior Leadership support, in the type of schools pupils attend and, most starkly, in funding.

Nearly 100% of respondents thought that music teachers should be consulted on the draft refreshed NPME before publication as originally promised by the DfE. Teachers shared their thoughts on how the NPME should be refreshed, with several themes emerging:

- Provide increased and ring-fenced funding for music departments and instrumental and vocal tuition
- Reverse the narrowing of the curriculum and reform the EBacc
- Support the workforce
- Raise the status of music
- Make provision diverse and accessible
- Ensure the NPME is realistic to deliver

The results also show that music education provision varies greatly, with some schools offering the bare minimum, and others offering a wealth of both classroom and extra-curricular experiences. COVID-19 is still having a negative effect on some musical activities, mostly within primary settings, with extra-curricular ensembles and choirs still not having resumed in some schools.

Teachers reported that the Key Stage 3 (KS3) curriculum continues to be narrowed, mostly in academies, either through placing music on a carousel or rota system with other subjects, or through a shortened KS3. They also told us overwhelmingly that accountability measures such as the EBacc and Progress 8 have caused harm to music education, both in relation to KS3 provision, KS4 subject uptake and post-16 options.

Lack of funding for music departments came across strongly in the data. Overall, 61% of respondents said that their budget was insufficient. 67% of teachers working in academies and free schools and 57% of teachers working in maintained schools said their budget was insufficient. Our survey data showed that the mean yearly departmental budget in maintained schools was £1,865, while in academies and free schools it was £2,152 and in independent schools £9,917.

Teachers reported low per-pupil spending (in one case as low as £1 per pupil per annum) and significant budget cuts, which they felt was limiting the learning of pupils and stifling department growth. They often had to raise additional funds through concerts, in order to provide resources for their students, and in some cases paying for smaller items like drumsticks themselves.

Overall, the responses provide a heartbreaking account of the neglect and marginalisation of music in schools. The government’s failure to consult teachers about the refreshed NPME only reinforces the impression that the subject is undervalued, and its teachers are not respected.

Music teachers consistently show an extraordinary level of passion, resourcefulness, self-sacrifice and commitment, particularly evident during the pandemic, and their views deserve to be heard. This report seeks to tell their story.

Headline findings

99% of respondents think they should be consulted on the draft refreshed National Plan for Music Education before it is published

Less than 1/2 (43%) of respondents had read the government’s Report on the Call for Evidence from August 2021

59% of respondents had not responded to the government’s Call for Evidence in February 2020 for the refreshed National Plan

Of these, 60% did not think it was an accurate reflection of what is currently happening to music in the maintained sector

93% of respondents said the EBacc and/or Progress 8 had caused harm to music education provision

Of respondents who provided a reason for not responding said they were not aware of it

Over half (55%) of those who provided a reason for not responding
The refreshed National Plan for Music Education

The refreshed NPME was scheduled to be published in Autumn 2020, but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is now expected in Spring 2022. The government ran a Call for Evidence from 9 February to 13 March 2020; however, its exact remit is unclear.

The intention, as outlined in the Call for Evidence, was to seek views on music education to inform proposals for a refreshed national plan for music education. Yet despite the DfE’s claims that views were being sought on how the NPME should be revised, the Call for Evidence contains no such questions. It also makes it clear that the refreshed NPME will not address the impacts of policy issues, stating that, ‘Wider Departmental policy, for example on assessment, accountability or school funding, does not fall within the scope of the National Plan for Music Education, and therefore does not fall within the scope of this call for evidence.’

On 6 August 2021, the DfE published its Report on the Call for Evidence, which revealed that little has changed since the NPME was first introduced. Over a third of respondents (36%) said the Call for Evidence was the first time they’d heard of the NPME, and is now expected in Spring 2022. The refreshed NPME was scheduled to be published in Autumn 2020, but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is now expected in Spring 2022. The government ran a Call for Evidence from 9 February to 13 March 2020; however, its exact remit is unclear.

Despite the Call for Evidence placing critical issues such as accountability measures and funding outside its scope, the DfE’s report outlined a number of examples which highlighted exactly these issues. For instance, it found that ‘music in Key Stage 3 suffered from being included as part of a carousel…’ and ‘for those young people who wanted to study a music qualification but were not able to, a number of them said that they felt under pressure to choose other subjects instead or that music was not available as a GCSE or A-level option at their school.’

The ISM’s findings correspond with the ISM’s own research and the refreshed NPME will not have a meaningful impact if it does not tackle these critical issues. This also makes the need for consultation on the draft Plan with the workforce even more important.

Background to the ISM survey

The ISM, in its role as a subject association for music education, has regularly surveyed the workforce and acted as its voice. In the absence of any meaningful consultation on the contents of the refreshed NPME by the DfE, despite our requests, we invited teachers to share their experiences and views with us directly.

Our survey gathered teachers’ opinions on the current music education provision in English schools (curricular and extra-curricular), and the impact of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8 secondary accountability measures. It also asked teachers’ views on the Call for Evidence and Report on the Call for Evidence, alongside their ideas for what should be included in the refreshed NPME. The survey ran from 16 November 2021 to 10 January 2022 and drew responses from 508 music teachers in England.

47% of respondents were working in academies, 36% in maintained schools, 15% in independent schools and 2% in free schools.

Just over half of respondents (53%) were working primarily as secondary school music teachers, and a quarter (25%) as primary school music teachers, 18% were peripatetic instrumental and/or vocal teachers, and 4% were private instrumental/vocal teachers.

Respondents were working primarily as:
- Secondary school music teachers
- Primary school music teachers
- Peripatetic instrumental and/or vocal teachers
- Private instrumental/vocal teachers

Respondents were working in:
- Academies
- Maintained schools
- Independent schools
- Free schools

**Respondents were working primarily as:**

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**I struggle to maintain aged resources and have to pay for strings, leads, sticks etc with my own money.**

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘I’d love to invite people to lead workshops but that is too costly.’

PRIMARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘We really need a proper ICT suite with up-to-date machines and software.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘We train to be examiners to save on CPD costs.’

MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

‘Option process at KS4 is heavily weighted towards history/geography/languages and many students are not able to choose music because of the way the option blocks are organised to promote the “proper” subjects.’

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Survey findings

Music provision

Teachers’ responses revealed a shocking picture of inequality in music provision across the sectors. The most varied experiences were in primary schools, where provision ranged from ‘virtually none’ to weekly classroom lessons for all pupils with a specialist music teacher, complemented by whole-class ensemble teaching, multiple ensembles and a full range of peripatetic instrumental lessons. Independent schools were more likely to have these comprehensive offers. This was often due to more pupils receiving instrumental tuition, and peripatetic teachers running ensembles and choirs. However, there were also some examples of state schools with flourishing provision.

In some cases, classroom music lessons were being delivered to cover planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, not always by specialist teachers and in one case by a teaching assistant (TA). Occasionally, it appears that whole-class ensemble teaching is being used as a replacement for classroom music lessons, rather than an addition to it, contrary to its intended purpose.

...music delivered in PPA time by myself and other visiting staff but only for some year groups. Focus is on delivering limited curriculum content through playing or singing.

MAINTAINED SCHOOL TEACHER

Despite COVID-19 restrictions being lifted in schools in July 2021, primary school music provision in particular is struggling to recover. Some respondents reported that extra-curricular activities or group singing had not resumed, or that numbers attending were greatly diminished. 90% of these responses came from teachers working in maintained schools.

In secondary schools, teachers also reported examples of curriculum narrowing – either through a shortened, two-year KS3 or music being taught on rotation or carousels. Of these teachers, 68% worked in academies, 22% in maintained schools and 10% in independent schools.

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‘Music taught to year 7 once a week for 40 mins, and year 8 on a carousel with drama and food technology’

MAINTAINED SCHOOL TEACHER

‘50 mins per week for years 7 and 8; options taken and started in year 9’

MAINTAINED PRIMARY PERI

‘Two x 50-minute lessons in year 7 and year 8. One x 50-minute lesson in year 9.’

MAINTAINED SCHOOL TEACHER

‘KS3 music, KS4 (Year 11 only now), no longer any KS5 provision.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY PERI

‘Lessons are once a fortnight at KS3. A 50% cut since the Trust took over.’

ACADEMY TEACHER

‘Class music year 7 and 8. Option for year 9 going into GCSE. Currently two A-level students in year 12.’

INDEPENDENT SECONDARY PERI

‘There are secondaries I work with who have 12 students in year 12 A-level – there are schools who can’t sustain GCSE at all.’

MAINTAINED SECONDARY PERI

‘We teach KS3 (Y7-8) on a carousel with three other subjects, they have 20 weeks of music annually’

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL TEACHER

In some maintained schools and academies, the provision differed by year group, most often with Year 7 receiving more teaching time than Year 9. However, there were also cases where the reverse was true.

‘Normally, I would also lead weekly singing assemblies, a choir and various clubs... currently suspended due to COVID mitigations.’

MAINTAINED SCHOOL TEACHER

‘Year 7 and 8 receive one hour per week. Year 9 half that time.’

ACADEMY TEACHER

‘Year 7 & 8 receive three hours across the two-week timetable. Year 9 receive two hours across the two-week timetable.’

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Peripatetic teachers, many of whom worked in a range of schools, echoed the experiences of their classroom colleagues. In primary schools, they reported differences in classroom provision with lessons being delivered by either specialist music teachers, general classroom teachers or Hub teachers. In secondaries, they reported narrowed KS3 provision and reduced KS4 and KS5 opportunities across all sectors.

‘Music lessons for every class. Music clubs which include a junior orchestra, more advanced orchestra, wind ensemble, rock band, samba band, choir, handbell group, musical theatre club, free instrument lessons for Year 4 (each child can trial 2 instruments).’

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL TEACHER

‘We have peri staff if children want to pay for lessons. All class music lessons are delivered by non-specialist classroom teachers. I am the only specialist and I have my own class. Anything extra-curricular is what I can fit in around my regular teaching commitments.’

ACADEMY TEACHER

‘Music delivered in PPA time by myself and other visiting staff but only for some year groups. Focus is on delivering limited curriculum content through playing or singing.’

MAINTAINED SCHOOL TEACHER

‘Music is taught as “PPA cover” in afternoon sessions.’

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‘I am employed by [a] Music Hub to provide music lessons usually as PPA cover, in EY and KS1.’

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MAINTAINED SECONDARY PERI
Peripatetic teachers also highlighted the issues surrounding instrumental and vocal lesson uptake, which directly affects their income. In some cases, COVID had impacted the numbers of pupils learning an instrument but more often the cost was the greatest barrier preventing pupils taking lessons.

‘This is very mixed... Independent schools instrumental learning - very good provision of course, parents can afford it... State schools instrumental learning - a lot on offer but again, often only for people who can pay and/or are organised enough to find out about it. State schools extra-curricular - mixed.’

PERI WORKING ACROSS THE SECTOR

**Budgets**

Our data showed a vast difference in departmental budgets for music, ranging from £0 to £100,000, with clear differences between school types. Respondents from independent schools received over four times the departmental funding of academies and free schools, and over five times the amount of maintained schools. The mean yearly budget in maintained schools was £1,865, in academies and free schools it was £2,152, and in independent schools, £9,917.

Overall, 61% of respondents said that the budget was insufficient - 67% of teachers in academies and free schools and 57% of teachers in maintained schools. Teachers reported low per-pupil spending and significant budget cuts, which they felt was limiting the learning of pupils and stifling department growth. A lack of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) funding was also highlighted, with teachers looking at alternative routes, such as training to be examiners.

‘I work in 12 schools. Most of the work is done by music service teachers. We do instrumental/vocal lessons and whole class teaching... Most secondary schools struggle to recruit instrumental pupils except for drums, guitar and vocal. Only a few schools have any ensembles.’

MAINTAINED PERI

‘Instrumental lessons are often there but parents in the vast majority of cases can’t afford the cost that the school passes on. This prices those poorer pupils out of having lessons, and is a scandal.’

ACADEMY PERI

Many teachers told us that they raised additional funds through concerts or paid for items themselves. This was often to supplement budgets that covered only basic costs such as stationery. Most teachers do not receive additional pay for extra-curricular activities, or for the time required to plan and deliver concerts. In these cases, they are essentially working for free to raise additional money for their departments.

‘The children should have access to the best instruments we can offer, as well as a digital resource to support singing or curriculum.’

MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

‘We rely on fundraising at concerts and events...’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘Concerts and shows essential to provide sufficient funds to maintain equipment.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘Until recently we supplemented our budget through concert funds. This has recently been removed and we will no longer see the benefit of ticket/raffle proceeds.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

Many music departments did not have an allocated budget. In these cases, teachers had to request funding to cover what was needed.

‘Money currently has to be bid for.’

MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

‘I plan what I will need/want for the year and put in a budget request which is usually granted.’

INDEPENDENT PRIMARY TEACHER

‘Budget not really given. Asked to put in orders in the hope they will be accepted. Always having to justify every little thing even if reason is obvious. Long wait times for processing.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘The IT equipment is not up to date and therefore needs replacing, this is way over my yearly budget.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘We have three computers for all students, running Cubase 5 slowly.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

Teachers also expressed frustration regarding a lack of IT investment, and the associated costs for updated equipment and software, as well as not being able to offer a full range of opportunities for their pupils. Many reported a desire to buy in workshops or visits from professional musicians, but their budget did not allow for this.

‘The IT equipment is essential to provide the best opportunities for their pupils. Many reported a desire to buy in workshops or visits from professional musicians, but their budget did not allow for this.’

MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

**Impact of the EBacc and Progress 8**

The majority of teachers told us that accountability measures such as the EBacc and Progress 8 have negatively impacted music education in secondary schools. Further information about accountability measures can be found in the Appendix.

Overall, 93% of respondents said that the EBacc and/or Progress 8 had caused harm to the provision of music education, with three themes emerging: a decline in the uptake of KS4 and KS5 courses, an impact on option choices, and the devaluing of music as a subject.

Teachers reported fewer pupils taking GCSE or BTEC music, sometimes resulting in courses being dropped from the curriculum completely. This had a knock-on effect on A-level provision, with one teacher stating that no secondary schools in their city offered A-level music. It also impacts the workforce, with music teachers’ hours decreasing if KS4 and KS5 courses do not run.

‘Concerts and shows essential to provide sufficient funds to maintain equipment.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘The introduction of Progress 8 and EBacc have done huge damage to music in schools... resulting in courses not running and music departments shrinking.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘...candidate numbers decreased in music. As a result, my school’s curriculum became so narrow that I was made redundant as there was no music to teach.’

MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

‘Numbers opting to study music at both KS4 and KS5 have plummeted to the point where we are not always able to offer the A-level and GCSE is now clinging on by a whisker.’

MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

The children should have access to the best instruments we can offer, as well as a digital resource to support singing or curriculum.

MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

‘The budget significantly limits the activities and musical learning we are able to provide.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘Annual budget works out at £3.79 per student studying music...’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘We have three computers for all students, running Cubase 5 slowly.’

SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘The IT equipment is essential to provide the best opportunities for their pupils. Many reported a desire to buy in workshops or visits from professional musicians, but their budget did not allow for this.’

MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

‘...candidate numbers decreased in music. As a result, my school’s curriculum became so narrow that I was made redundant as there was no music to teach.’

MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

‘Numbers opting to study music at both KS4 and KS5 have plummeted to the point where we are not always able to offer the A-level and GCSE is now clinging on by a whisker.’

MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER
Music: A subject in peril?

The way in which schools present KS4 option choices for pupils, as a result of the EBacc and Progress 8, also affects the uptake of the subject. More able pupils are often encouraged to take EBacc subjects, those who can afford the time in order to improve results.

Finally, teachers felt strongly that these accountability measures had devalued music as a subject, particularly among parents. In some cases, music was seen as a hobby to be continued outside of formal education. This effect of creating subject hierarchies often trickled down into perceptions at KS3.

Of the respondents that had not responded to the government’s Call for Evidence…

Less than half of respondents (43%) had read the government’s Report on the Call for Evidence, published in August 2021. Of these, 60% said it was not an accurate reflection of what is happening in the maintained sector.

Thematic analysis revealed five clear themes in the responses. These were the erosion of music as a subject in schools, issues in primary schools such as SATs and a lack of specialist music teachers, a lack of recognition in the variation of music provision between schools, a lack of adequate funding and it not being representative of their circumstances.
The refreshed National Plan for Music Education

An overwhelming 99% of respondents said they should be consulted on the draft refreshed NPME before it is published. They were clear that teachers’ voices from across the sector working in a range of socioeconomic areas should be included, and felt that the current process did not do that.

"It needs to be written by somebody who knows what really happens in the classroom ie, a music teacher (which Darren Henley was not)."
MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

"Talk to teachers directly – particularly the ones who are doing their job well."
INDEPENDENT SECONDARY TEACHER

"By involving a wider range of people... having working meetings - visiting schools to get best practise from a range of settings."
MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

When asked how they would like to see the NPME revised, seven clear themes emerged: increased, ring-fenced funding, addressing the narrowing of the curriculum and reforming the EBacc, supporting the workforce both in and out of the classroom, giving the subject a higher profile and increasing its value, more diverse and accessible provision, consultation with current teachers, and for it to be realistic.

Increased, ring-fenced funding
Supporting the workforce both in and out of the classroom
Giving the subject a higher profile and increasing its value
How respondents would like to see the NPME revised
Consultation with current teachers
More diverse and accessible provision
Addressing the narrowing of the curriculum and reforming the EBacc
For it to be realistic

Many teachers commented that without adequate funding, the contents of the Plan were largely irrelevant. Peripatetic teachers felt strongly that instrumental and vocal lessons should be free or heavily subsidised for all pupils, to ensure that cost was not a barrier to learning.

"Aspirations are great but only if they come with funding which will be devolved largely to schools and ring-fenced specifically for music, so they don’t get absorbed into general budgets."
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PERI

"Make instrumental lessons zero cost to parents. Scotland have done this so why can’t we?"
ACADEMY PERI

"Talk to teachers directly – particularly the ones who are doing their job well."
INDEPENDENT SECONDARY TEACHER

"By involving a wider range of people... having working meetings - visiting schools to get best practise from a range of settings."
MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

Teachers also felt that the NPME should include clear expectations that music should not be taught on a carousel system, and that a three-year KS3 should be reinstated in all schools. Many called for the Plan to mandate this level of provision, including a minimum of one hour a week of classroom music, believing that the current guidance should be made statutory. A large number also wanted to see music included in the EBacc and a few called for the EBacc to be scrapped.

"Ensure carousels don’t happen."
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

"Restoration of 3-year KS3... scrap the EBacc."
PRIMARY ACADEMY TEACHER

There were strong views on support for the music education workforce. Teachers felt that there should be more specialist classroom music teachers, particularly in primary schools, but at the least more time dedicated to music in primary ITE courses. Ongoing support through CPD to develop confidence and skills was also a feature of responses, alongside a recognition that teachers in single-person departments also needed support. Peripatetic teachers wanted to see an end to zero-hours contracts, and better protection for their pay and conditions.

"Music compulsory in every school until KS4 and where it belongs amongst the EBacc subjects."
MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

"A plan to recruit more genuine music specialists; every primary school should have one."
MAINTAINED PRIMARY TEACHER

"Contracts for peripatetic teachers."
MAINTAINED SCHOOL PERI

"A lot of teachers don’t feel confident, so real support for them so they are encouraged and willing to provide quality music lessons."
PRIMARY ACADEMY TEACHER

"Make music a sizeable element of ITT... time to practice skills, not just learning about music teaching."
PRIMARY ACADEMY TEACHER

Many teachers felt that music was not valued enough by the government and that other subjects were often given higher priority by parents, teachers, senior leaders and sometimes pupils themselves. Some believed that music should also play a more prominent role in Ofsted inspections, suggesting that schools should not receive the top gradings unless they provided a high-quality music offer.

"I just want music to be valued both as a subject and also for what it can do for students from all backgrounds."
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

"In primary – an expectation that music will be embedded across the school not just merely something that the hub delivers."
ACADEMY PERI

"Government placing equal importance on music as an academic subject against other STEM subjects."
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

Some teachers stated that the current curriculum and NPME were not inclusive or diverse enough, with too much emphasis on classical music. Widening the genres and including more technology were suggested as ways to address this. Some felt that the refreshed Plan needs to be more relevant to disadvantaged pupils and those from different cultural backgrounds.

"Include more contemporary music genres and technology to draw more students in...the current curriculum taught in a lot of schools is archaic and borderline elitist."
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

"Things too anchored in the classics, potentially stagnating enthusiasm and/or making music education feel unrelated to the world young people experience."
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

"More emphasis on practical musicianship and digital music."
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PERI
Teachers strongly believed that the NPME needs to be realistic. This was both in terms of recognising the lived experiences of teachers in a range of settings, and in terms of what could be delivered in the time available, with the resources at hand. Many respondents wanted the refreshed Plan to include a wider age range, as well as greater emphasis on supporting pupils with additional needs, all of which received minimal coverage in the original Plan.

‘...more realistic overview of what can be achieved in under one hour per week.’
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

‘...an acknowledgement that schools teach students from very different backgrounds and within very different contexts.’
SECONDARY ACADEMY TEACHER

SLT support

90% of all respondents working in schools said that their head teacher was supportive of music in the school. However, analysis of the qualitative responses revealed a more mixed picture. Some teachers reported that their headteachers and SLT were fully supportive. Others felt they had very little support.

‘Music is taught at the bare minimum with only 1 teacher who works 3 days a week. Instrumental teaching is not allowed to happen during the day, so pupils do not miss other lessons. GCSE can only be run if it is after school lessons.’
MAINTAINED SECONDARY TEACHER

Peripatetic teachers reported the greatest variance in support. Frustration was also expressed with wider school policies that restricted the times they were allowed to teach, therefore reducing the number of pupils able to take lessons.

‘Some are very supportive, and others don’t even know who I am.’
MAINTAINED SCHOOL PERI

‘Very supportive in one school, lip service in another. Many rules when children are allowed to have their instrumental lessons.’
ACADEMY PERI

In 2019 the Music Education: State of the Nation report laid out 18 recommendations for government to address the various issues surrounding music provision in schools, and the DCMS Select Committee called on the government to respond to them all. Despite this, the government only committed to consider some of the recommendations in the refreshed NPME, particularly clarifying the roles and responsibilities of schools and Hubs. They rejected concerns around the EBacc and narrowing of the curriculum, claiming that ‘the percentage of time spent teaching music in secondary schools has remained broadly stable.’ As noted in the Appendix, this statement is contradicted by the DfE’s own figures which show a 10% decrease in the number of hours of music taught in years 7-13 between 2010 and 2020. It is also greatly at odds with music teachers’ own experiences.

This new survey shows that the problems highlighted in 2019 remain, and many have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

What next?

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This new survey shows that the problems highlighted in 2019 remain, and many have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

It shows clearly, in teachers’ own words, what the profession wants: consultation on the contents of the refreshed NPME, increased and ring-fenced funding for music in schools, and reform of the accountability measures that have damaged their subject so badly. These findings echo those of the DfE’s own Call for Evidence and demonstrate what needs to be addressed.

The refreshed NPME alone will not solve the wider policy impacts identified in this report, and the narrow scope of the Call for Evidence suggests that the DfE was never interested in addressing them. But, if the government is serious about making good on its stated objective that the refreshed Plan will be the blueprint that promotes equal music opportunities, it is time for our Education ministers, Nadhim Zahawi and Robin Walker, who have been notably silent on the issue, to step forward and take responsibility for this. In short, it is time to reset the conversation around music education and reverse the decline of the last decade.

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Recommendations

The recommendations of this report relate to the current situation in school music departments in England, the continued decline of music in schools and the measures which need to be put in place to address them, including teachers’ own suggestions.

Music teachers want to be consulted on the draft refreshed NPME before publication. They also want the refreshed NPME to include:

• increased, ring-fenced funding for music departments and instrumental and vocal tuition
• action on the narrowing of the curriculum and reform of accountability measures
• support for the music workforce – both classroom teachers and peripatetic instrumental and vocal teachers
• recognition of the need for a higher subject profile and to increase its perceived value

They also want the refreshed NMPE to be:

• fully representative of Early Years, Post-18 and SEND provision, including a more inclusive and diverse curriculum
• realistic to deliver, recognising the differences which exist between schools, funding and resources

Based on the findings of this report, the ISM calls for the government to:

• keep its promise and consult the sector on the contents of the refreshed NPME before final publication
• ensure the refreshed NPME is the blueprint that promotes equal music opportunities, as promised

Appendix

History of the first NPME

Music Manifesto and the Henley Review

The Music Manifesto was set up by the Labour Government in 2004 to guarantee that all children had access to music education. Between 2004 and 2009, over £300 million of funding was made available for a range of projects, including Sing Up (a national primary school singing programme) and the Wider Opportunities initiative, which aimed to provide instrumental lessons for all primary pupils through whole-class ensemble teaching (WCET). Sing Up was a successful initiative, reaching 98% of all primary schools in England by 2012, when government funding ended. It continues to run as an independent organisation funded through school memberships, with over 60% of schools continuing to visit the purpose and delivery of whole-class ensemble teaching (WCET) also available for a range of projects, including Sing Up (a national primary school singing programme) and the Wider Opportunities initiative, which aimed to provide instrumental lessons for all primary pupils through whole-class ensemble teaching (WCET). Sing Up was a successful initiative, reaching 98% of all primary schools in England by 2012, when government funding ended. It continues to run as an independent organisation funded through school memberships, with over 60% of schools continuing to meet the government priorities of every child having the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and to sing.’ Despite these statements, the Henley Review highlighted threats and challenges to music education such as insecurity of funding, inequality of access and inappropriate accountability measures.

The Model Music Curriculum

The government published its Model Music Curriculum (MMC) on 26 March 2021. The aim of this non-statutory guidance was to identify ‘the core concepts that are needed for pupils to progress in their study of music’ and demonstrate ‘how pupils can build their understanding of these concepts from year 1 to year 9.’ The MMC recommends that KS1 and 2 pupils should receive a minimum of one hour of teaching a week and KS3 pupils should have a minimum of one weekly music period.

The MMC states that placing music with other subjects on rotas or carousel is not a substitute for teaching one lesson per week per subject across an academic year. There is also a strong emphasis on singing in KS1 and KS2, and notation is prioritised for all age groups. It is understood that the development of the MMC was in response to the fall in music education provision in secondary schools as a result of the impact of accountability measures, such as Progress 8.
Funding

Data from the Institute for Fiscal Studies\(^\text{22}\) shows that real-term education spending per pupil fell 9% in the decade from 2009 to 2019, representing the largest cut in over 40 years. Despite an additional £71 billion allocated to schools through to the end of the 2022/23 academic year, the per-pupil spending for that year will still be 1.2% lower in real terms than in 2009/10. In the most deprived secondary schools, real-term spending per pupil fell 14% between 2009 and 2019 compared to 9% in the least deprived schools. At the same time fees for independent schools rose by 23%. The gap between state school and independent school spending per pupil in the 2020 academic year was £6,500 (90%) – more than double the £3,100 (nearly 40%) difference in the 2009 academic year.

Although the government has invested significantly in Music Education Hubs, the most recent data from 2018 shows that Curriculum music is not centrally funded. Education Hubs, the most recent data from 2018 shows that real-term spending per pupil in the 2020 academic year was £6,500 (90%) – more than double the £3,100 (nearly 40%) difference in the 2009 academic year.

The 2000/01\(^\text{20}\) narrowing of the curriculum, often as a result of high-stakes testing, and Ofsted have reported a narrowing of the curriculum over more than 20 years. The narrowing, where a disproportionate or premature emphasis on teaching exam specifications was limiting pupils’ exposure to a broad and balanced curriculum over the course of their secondary education.\(^\text{21}\)

The most recent Ofsted report from 2019/20 found ‘Curriculum narrowing, where a disproportionate or premature emphasis on teaching exam specifications was limiting pupils’ exposure to a broad and balanced curriculum over the course of their secondary education.’ While the narrowing of the curriculum in 2000/01 was still significant, it is clear that many schools are choosing to do exactly this. Ofsted’s own research found that around half of schools had moved to a two-year KS3 model, which had resulted in the marginalisation of practical and creative subjects.\(^\text{22}\)

Although Ofsted state that they ‘have no view on the length of key stages 3 and 4’ and ‘that pupils should not “spend inordinate time preparing for GCSEs” it is clear that many schools are choosing to do exactly this. Ofsted’s own research found that around half of schools had moved to a two-year KS3 model, which had resulted in the marginalisation of practical and creative subjects.\(^\text{23}\)

Research by the University of Sussex found that statutory provision in KS3 was being curtailed, with some schools offering no music provision or just one day per year.\(^\text{24}\) DfE data also shows an almost 10% decline in the number of hours of music taught in years 7-13 from 92,700 in 2010 to 83,663 in 2020. This is in comparison to an 11% increase in the number of hours of English taught, and a 14% increase in maths in the same period.\(^\text{25}\)

The academisation of state schools has also contributed to a decline in music education. While academies and free schools are expected to follow a ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum, there is no requirement to follow the National Curriculum in these schools. School census data from June 2021 showed that academies and free schools made up 37% of primary schools and 76% of secondary schools. The total number of pupils attending these schools was 4.5 million – just over half (52%) of all pupils.\(^\text{26}\)

Accountability measures

SATs

In 2015, Merryn Hutchings carried out research on behalf of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). She found that in primary schools, many teachers reported an increase in the amount of time spent on English and maths in Year 6 as a direct result of SATs preparation. Consequently, subjects such as music, art and design and technology were taught less or not at all.

The 2019 Music Education: State of the Nation report found that in primary schools, where music was part of the curriculum, more than 50% of the responding schools were not meeting their curriculum obligations in Year 6, specifically citing statutory tests as a significant reason for this.\(^\text{27}\)

Darren Henry’s Review of Music Education in 2011 warned that if music was not one of the subjects included in the EBacc, then it risked being devalued. Over the past decade, this has proved to be true, and there have been renewed calls for the EBacc to be reformed or replaced, both from external organisations and from within government.\(^\text{28}\)

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The DfE’s 2020 Report on the Call for Evidence for the refreshed NPME found that: ‘For those young people who wanted to study a music qualification but were not able to, a number of them said that they felt under pressure to choose other subjects instead or that music was not available as a GCSE or A-level option at their school.’

Progress 8 and Attainment 8

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 were introduced in 2016 to measure schools’ performance based on the progress students make from the end of KS2 to the end of KS4. Maths, English and three EBacc subjects are included in individual Attainment 8 figures plus three other approved subjects. A student who did not take three EBacc subjects would receive a lower overall Attainment 8 score than a student who did.

Attainment 8 is weighted heavily in favour of EBacc subjects (70-30). This affects equality of access and impacts other subjects.\(^\text{33}\) Removing or reducing the focus on EBacc subjects would allow pupils more choice and enable schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum throughout KS4.

Workforce

A survey by the BPI in 2019 found that 29% of state schools saw a reduction in the number of qualified music teachers compared with 5% for independent schools.\(^\text{34}\) DfE figures show that the number of secondary school music teachers fell 15%, from 8,043 in 2011 to 6,837 in 2020.\(^\text{35}\)

Although for the 2020/21 academic year the target for secondary music trainees was met by 125%,\(^\text{36}\) this had dropped to 72% for the 2021/22 academic year.\(^\text{37}\) This was the largest decrease in all subjects.

On 13 October 2020, the DfE announced that training bursaries for arts, English and humanities subjects had been removed for 2021/22.\(^\text{38}\) Only geography has been reinstated for the 2022/23 academic year.\(^\text{39}\) Many specialist undergraduate primary courses and post-graduate secondary programmes have also closed, limiting the opportunities to pursue a career in music teaching. The BPI survey found that only 44% of music lessons in primary school were delivered by specialists.\(^\text{40}\)

Diminishing budgets, a focus on core subjects and less teaching time as a result of carousel systems all lead to a reduction in the number of classroom music teachers. Often, retiring teachers are not replaced.
Call for reform also came from within government with Robert Halfon MP, the Chair of the Education Select Committee, and the One Nation Caucus of Conservative MPs suggesting that GCSEs could be scrapped and replaced by a holistic bacalauréate at age 18. The latter also called for a review of KS2 tests.

More recently, reports from PECs, EPI and the Times Education Commission have raised the issue of narrow academic programmes of study, accountability measures and how these affect employability skills. Proposals for exam and assessment reform have also been put forward by educational coalitions such as Rethinking Assessment and New Era Assessment, who recognize that the current system is not working for either young people or employers.

Prior to the pandemic there was an increasing awareness of the detrimental effects of policy on the creative curriculum and assessment reform have also been put forward by educational coalitions such as Rethinking Assessment and New Era Assessment, who recognize that the current system is not working for either young people or employers.


Footnotes


34 https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/


51 Times Education Commission https://www.thetimes.co.uk/society/education/education-commission

Music: A subject in peril? 10 years on from the first National Plan for Music Education MARCH 2022
The ISM is the UK’s largest non-union representative body for musicians. It is also a subject association for music. Since 1882, the ISM has been dedicated to promoting the importance of music and supporting those who work in the music profession. It supports over 11,000 members across the UK, many of whom work in music education, and who have continued to teach throughout the pandemic. The ISM provides the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, and co-authored its seminal report, *Music Education: State of the Nation*, published in 2019. Since then, the ISM has researched the impact of COVID-19 on music in schools across the UK, and in December 2020 it published *The heart of the school is missing: Music education in the COVID-19 crisis*. 

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