

Report summary

Music in schools: wider still, and wider

Quality and inequality in music education 2008–11

This report is based primarily on evidence from inspections of music provision between September 2008 and July 2011 in 90 primary, 90 secondary and four special schools in England. A further nine primary schools and one special school were visited to observe examples of good practice.

Many of the concerns identified in Ofsted's last triennial report, *Making more of music*, remain.¹ Inspectors found wide differences in the quality and quantity of music education across the schools visited. While some exceptional work was seen and heard, far too much provision was inadequate or barely satisfactory. Nearly all schools recognised the importance of promoting a diverse range of musical styles but far fewer had a clear understanding about how all students should make good musical progress as they moved through the curriculum in Key Stages 1 to 3. The scarcity of good singing in secondary schools and the under use of music technology across all phases were also significant barriers to pupils' better musical progress.

The quality of teaching and assessment in music also varied considerably. Examples of memorable, inspiring and musical teaching were observed in all phases. However, in too many instances there was insufficient emphasis on active music-making or on the use of musical sound as the dominant language of learning. Too much use was made of verbal communication and non-musical activities. Put simply, in too many cases there was not enough music in music lessons. Assessment methods were often inaccurate, over-complex or unmusical, particularly in Key Stage 3. This also limited the time available for practical music-making, and detracted from pupils' musical improvement and enjoyment.

Across the primary schools visited, inspectors found considerable variation in the impact of the nationally funded whole-class instrumental and/or vocal tuition programmes, more commonly known as 'Wider Opportunities'. Survey evidence showed very clearly that some schools and groups of pupils were benefiting far more than others from these programmes. While most primary schools were involved with

¹ *Making more of music: an evaluation of music in schools 2005–08* (080235), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080235.

the national singing strategy, the quality of vocal work was good in only 30 of the 90 schools inspected.

Inspectors found wide differences in the continued participation and inclusion of pupils from different groups. Pupils with special educational needs, children who were looked after, and those known to be eligible for free school meals were considerably less likely to be involved in additional² musical activities than others, particularly in secondary schools. Across the primary and secondary schools visited, around twice as many girls as boys were involved in extra-curricular music activities.

Overall, a good or outstanding music education was being provided in 33 of the 90 primary schools and in 35 of the 90 secondary schools inspected. This is low in comparison with overall school performance: at 31 August 2011, 70% of all schools were good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection.³

The good and outstanding schools ensured that pupils from all backgrounds enjoyed sustained opportunities through regular classroom work and music-making for all, complemented by additional tuition, partnerships and extra-curricular activities. The films that accompany this report exemplify aspects of good practice in music teaching and curriculum provision which meet the needs of all groups of learners. Examples are also included which highlight the impact that external providers can have on musical achievement and participation. Headteachers in these schools, and others where music was judged good or outstanding, were key to assuring the quality of teaching in music. They ensured that music had a prominent place in the curriculum and that partnership working provided good value for money. However, not enough senior leaders demonstrated sufficient understanding of what is needed to secure good music education for all their pupils.

The Henley Review's rationale for a new approach to organising aspects of music education through area music partnerships is well founded and welcomed by Ofsted, as is the government's commitment to continued funding for these hubs. However, this Ofsted report shows that national strategies for widening access to music education have not, by themselves, been enough to bring about sufficient improvements in the quality of provision over the past three years. Local decisions about music education funding and provision, including decisions made in individual schools and academies, proved to be crucially important. The National Plan for Music Education⁴ also makes very clear the importance of schools in building the new

² 'Additional' musical activities include individual or small-group instrumental/vocal tuition, and extra-curricular music groups. In almost all schools, these were provided in addition to regular whole-class curriculum lessons.

³ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2010/11*, Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/annualreport1011.

⁴ *The importance of music – a national plan for music education* was published in November 2011 (after this Ofsted survey was completed);

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-00086-2011.

music education hubs. To ensure better musical education in schools, significant improvement is needed in the quality of teaching and the quality of vocal work, and in better use of music technology. Central to these improvements will be more effective musical leadership and management by heads and other senior staff in schools, to challenge the quality of provision and to secure better musical teaching.

Key findings

- Good or outstanding musical education was seen in 68 of the 180 primary and secondary schools inspected. In 41 of the 180 schools, provision for music education was inadequate. These results compare poorly with overall school performance in inspections.
- There was considerable variation between the participation rates of different groups of pupils. In primary schools, one in every three girls was participating in extra-curricular music, compared with one in every seven boys. In secondary schools, only 6% of students with disabilities or special educational needs were involved in additional instrumental or vocal tuition, compared to 14% of students without these needs.
- The most effective schools recognised that regular, sustained experiences were essential to secure good musical progress. Schools where curriculum provision was weaker showed limited understanding about musical progression or did not give enough time for music.
- Too much music teaching continued to be dominated by the spoken or written word, rather than by musical sounds. Lessons were planned diligently, but not always prepared for musically.
- Assessment in secondary schools was frequently over-complicated and did not focus enough on the musical quality of students' work. In both primary and secondary schools, insufficient use was made of audio recording and teachers' listening skills to assess and improve pupils' work.
- Achievement in singing was good or outstanding in only a third of the primary schools visited. Not enough emphasis was placed on improving the quality of vocal work or developing other aspects of musical learning through singing. Singing was a major weakness in nearly half of the secondary schools visited.
- The use of music technology was inadequate or non-existent in three fifths of the primary schools and over a third of the secondary schools inspected.
- Local authority music services made good contributions to the musical and personal progress of particular groups of pupils. However, there were considerable inequalities in funding and provision between local authorities, and between schools within local authorities. Two thirds of the primary schools were

participating in 'Wider Opportunities' programmes. However, the length and quality of these projects were variable, and continuation rates were too low.

- Not enough school leaders and managers were holding external partners to account, or robustly challenging the quality of classroom curriculum music provision in their own schools. There was limited take-up and impact of continuing professional development (CPD) in both primary and secondary schools. The professional isolation of music teachers was again apparent, as it was in the last Ofsted music survey.
- Continued government funding and support for music education is welcomed by Ofsted, as are the new music hubs from September 2012. However, inspection evidence suggests that these alone are not sufficient to provide a good musical education, and that the quality of schools' music provision and their coordination with external partnerships is of crucial importance.

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