

# Music Education Policy Guidance

## Summary

---

‘Excellent music education opens opportunities, but it is not simply a means to an end: it is also an end in itself. It gives young people an opportunity to express themselves, to explore their creativity, to work hard at something, persevere and shine. These experiences and achievements stay with them and shape their lives’ – The Power of Music to Change Lives: A National Plan for Music Education

84% of children in the UK say that music is important for their mental health and wellbeing, but a 2022 Ofsted subject report found that many schools were reducing subsidies or withdrawing instrumental and vocal lessons due to pressures on school budgets. This reduction has not been without impact; in 2025, 7/10 children currently play or have played an instrument, down from 3/4 in 2020.

As well as a detriment to youth mental health, this shift is also likely to have implications for the UK economy, wherein the music industry makes a £7.6b contribution and employs 216,000.

In its National Plan for Music Education, the Department for Education establishes the following aims for school music provision:

- Timetabled curriculum of at least one hour each week of the school year for key stages 1-3.
- Access to lessons across a range of instruments, and voice.
- A school choir and/or vocal ensemble.
- A school ensemble/band/group.
- Space for rehearsals and individual practice.
- A termly school performance.
- Opportunity to enjoy live performance at least once a year.

But these relatively low standards are often not met in schools that consider music a secondary, or even tertiary subject, teaching it in carousels with other subjects.

Because each school is expected to publish a unique Music Development Plan, it can be difficult to identify useful points at which to apply policy influence. But the relationship between school and national policy is mediated by the regional Music Hub, and often the multi-academy trusts to which many schools now belong. On behalf of the DfE, Arts Council England operates 43 Music Hubs around the country. Working alongside schools, charities, and other bodies, these hubs deliver music education and ensure the accessibility of instruments, equipment and technology within their region. Aims established in documents like the National Plan are increasingly localised, then, first through hubs, then often trusts, and then individual schools.

## Key Points

### **Technology is increasingly important in and out of classrooms**

A 2024 ABRSM survey found that 43% of children use YouTube to help learning and 30% use an app – 22% record their music on phones and/or tablets. Around a third of music educators receive continuous personal development (CPD) on bringing technology into the classroom and using online resources to enhance the curriculum.

### **Significant impact on wellbeing and mental health**

According to Youth Music's 2024 Sound of the Next Generation report, 84 % of children say music makes their world better, 71% say that music is a big part of who they are and 70% say music helps them feel connected to others.

## Challenges

### **Around half of respondents to a call for evidence in the development of the National Plan for Music Education said that music education is not being delivered in line with government vision.**

Care must be taken not to conflate policy recommendations with enacted policy.

### **Budgets are not aligning with recommendations.**

An independent costing from DEMOS identified a funding gap of £162.6m that will need to be filled over the next five years for the government's National Plan for Music Education to be actualised.

## Music Hubs

Hubs have relative freedom to enact the DfE’s National Plan for Music Education in accordance with regional challenges and resources. The National Plan assigns them three key aims:

1. Support schools and other education settings to deliver high-quality music education.
2. Support all children and young people to engage with a range of musical opportunities in and out of school.
3. Support young people to develop their musical interests and talent further, including into employment.

Hubs help schools and multi-academy trusts in their region to create a Music Development Plan. This plan outlines a school’s individual strategy for curriculum music, co-curricular music, as well as musical experiences, and meeting the aims of the National Plan.

Each hub establishes Local Lead Schools that oversee particular sub-sections of music education in the region, including primary, secondary, alternative provision, and special educational needs. These Lead Schools use their specialised knowledge to help other schools within their hub to improve their music provision.

All hubs are expected to develop and publish an inclusion strategy, and work to understand and respond to the barriers faced by children and young people in their area. Four hubs function as centres for excellence: one for inclusion, one for continued professional development, one for music technology, and one for pathways to industry. Alongside local duties, these hubs concentrate specialism to foster partnerships with external organisations that support the entire hub network.

**Vision: ‘to enable all children and young people to learn to sing, play an instrument and create music together, and have the opportunity to progress their musical interests and talents, including professionally.’**

- *The Power of Music to Change Lives*

## Important Bodies

---

Department for Education

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

The Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)

Estyn

Inspects education and training in Wales.

Education Scotland

Inspects education and training in Scotland.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Inspects education and training in Northern Ireland.

Standards and Testing Agency

Government body developing and delivering assessments for children between reception and the end of key stage 2.

Education and Skills Funding Agency

Was responsible for funding education and skills providers in England. Now folded into DfE.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Oversees assessment and qualification in Northern Ireland

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Oversees skill development outside of schools by working with employers to develop apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical qualifications. Being folded back into DfE and succeeded by Skills England

Skills England

Will succeed the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education with greater attention to economic growth.

Oak National Academy

Independent public body providing approved resources for teaching.

Children's Commissioner

Advocates for children's rights and interests. Publishes lots of useful research and survey data.

## Music Mark

Large national network of those engaged in music education. Develop and collate large amounts of research on the subject.

## National Governance Association

Provides news and resources on school governance. Good for understanding the practicalities of school budgets, bureaucracy and etc.

## Young Sounds UK

Provide funding and opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and lots of CPD for teachers.

## Youth Music

Produce lots of material with a focus on inclusion and social justice. Publish the yearly 'Sound of the Next Generation' survey report.

## Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

Large musical education charity partnered with the Royal Schools of Music. Influential advocates and prolific publishers of research into a range of topics.

## Discover! (Creative Careers Programme)

DCMS funded programme supporting young people into careers in music both directly and indirectly through the provision of teaching materials.

## Technology in Music Education UK

Provide resources helping teachers understand music technology and incorporate it into their lessons and curricula.

## Useful Documents

---

### [DCMS, 'The power of music to change lives: A National Plan for Music Education'](#)

Sets out a vision to 2030, aiming to realise the proposals of the Model Music Curriculum

Has a [Welsh equivalent](#)

Northern Irish equivalent contained in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's ['Youth Music Strategy and Action Plan'](#)

Scotland has no-such document.

### [DfE, 'Model Music Curriculum: Key Stages 1 to 3'](#)

Example curriculum showing how curriculum standards can be met.

### [DfE, 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child'](#)

Sets out ambitions for education, as well as plans for achieving these ambitions. Provides broader context for music education.

### [DfE, 'Guidance: Pupil Premium'](#)

Pupil Premium is an additional funding source for schools with a large amount of disadvantaged pupils. This site explains how funding is allocated and how it can be spent.

### [Ofsted, 'Education Inspection Framework'](#)

Establishes how Ofsted will inspect education providers, and the standards against which such providers shall be held.

### [ACE, 'Music Hub Data Dashboard'](#)

Provides an enormous amount of data on the activity and performance of Music Education Hubs.

### [ACE, 'Fair and More Inclusive Classical Music long-term action research report'](#)

Appraises the inclusivity of the classical music sector. Discusses how inequalities in education translate into inequalities in access to classical music.

### [ACE, 'Local Plan for Music Education Guidance'](#)

Establishes what is expected from each Music Education Hub's LPME. Useful in identifying whether the hub is a useful target for policy influence.

[Sheffield Music Hub, 'Local Plan for Music Education \(LPME 2023-24\)](#)

Useful example of a LPME.

[Leicestershire Music Hub, 'Leicester & Leicestershire's Local Plan for Music Education – \(LPME\) 2024-25 \(Transition Year\)](#)

Another example LPME.

[DEMOS, 'Facing the Music: Meeting the ambitions of the National Plan for Music Education'](#)

Independent costing of the National Plan for Music Education. Identifies budget shortfalls and makes recommendations for remedying. Funded by Music Mark.

[Ofsted, 'Striking the right note: the music subject report'](#)

2023 Ofsted report covering the teaching and examination of music in schools.

[ABRSM, 'Extending our Ambition for Music Education in the UK'](#)

Summarises results of a survey responded to by 1021 children, 1011 adults and 1958 music teachers.

[Youth Music, 'Sound of the Next Generation'](#)

Summarises results of Youth Music's surveying 2100 young people. Establishes their relationship with music and examines the role of background and education in said relationship.