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A NATIONAL MUSIC SERVICE

HOW TO ENSURE EVERY CHILD CAN
ACCESS A GOOD MUSIC EDUCATION

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About the research

This report reviews the current state of music education in England and policy changes since 2010; sets out why ensuring every child can access high-quality music education matters; and makes recommendations for the future.

Since education is devolved, this project and the recommendations made apply to England only.

SUMMARY

- Music education matters. Young people want to participate in it, and it brings real benefits to the millions who do. It supports educational outcomes, improves health and wellbeing, and creates opportunities in growing sectors of the economy.
- But many young people in England are being denied access to good music education: in schools, there is reduced access to statutory provision and it is now often taught in rotation with other arts subjects. In 2021, nearly 11,000 fewer students studied GCSE music than a decade earlier.
- Music education hubs provide music lessons directly, as well as bringing together councils, schools and artistic and voluntary organisations to coordinate provision in a local area. But they are struggling to deliver. Their budgets have been cut by 17 per cent in real terms since 2011 – and their funding will be frozen at £79m until 2025. Just 61 per cent of pupils aged 5 to 14 received whole-class ensemble teaching for the recommended duration.
- We need to restore high-quality music education as a core learning entitlement, accessible for every child. The government should:
 - **Introduce a National Music Education Service (NMES)**, with: increased and multi-year central government funding; a workforce guarantee for teachers and leaders in hubs; and stronger data gathering and accountability measures. The NMES should aim to reduce inequality in music education and prioritise underrepresented groups.
 - **Improve music education in schools** by: introducing an arts education premium; requiring high-quality and accessible music education to be part of the ‘broad and balanced curriculum’; upgrading music teacher training and recruitment for teachers in primary and secondary schools; and supporting schools to engage professional musicians.

1. INTRODUCTION

Music is a core part of young people's lives and identities. One survey found that 97 per cent of young people listened to music in the last week, and 64 per cent considered themselves musical (before the pandemic).¹ Every day, millions of young people are singing, making music or learning a musical instrument.

High-quality and accessible music education matters. It is intrinsically valuable. And it brings real benefits to young people: it supports wider educational outcomes and social mobility, improves health and wellbeing, and creates opportunities to participate in growing sectors of the economy.

Educational outcomes

Music education supports cognitive development in children. Evidence suggests it can improve verbal language acquisition, literacy skills, and maths.² Children are more willing to apply themselves in all subjects and engage in independent learning, if music education is a prominent part of the school day.³ Engagement with music can help children from low-income backgrounds 'catch up' with their middle income peers, helping to mitigate the negative effects of deprivation on childhood literacy.⁴

Parents want music to be a core part of their child's education: 54 per cent of parents stated the quality of a school's music education was an important factor in deciding to send their child there.⁵ Parents were more likely to suggest putting additional time and resources into music education at school, than foreign languages or PE.⁶

Health and wellbeing

Being able to play music or sing has a beneficial impact on physical and mental health.⁷ Evidence suggests young people are better able to express emotions, cope with life's difficulties and self-regulate if they play music.⁸ And music education remains important throughout a person's life because it acts as a foundation to access the wellbeing improvements of music into adulthood.⁹ This is particularly important after the damaging impact of the pandemic and school closures on health and wellbeing.

Music education allows young people to participate in specific music traditions, whether different genres, regional specialisms or music from

around the world. It allows every young person the chance to express their own identity, and explore new ideas and perspectives.¹⁰ By bringing people together to make music, evidence suggests playing music or singing creates social cohesion and social inclusion – and tackles isolation.¹¹

Jobs and the economy

The creative industries, including the music sector, are an important part of the UK economy. Pre-pandemic, the music sector contributed £5.8bn in gross value added in 2019, employed nearly 200,000 people, and was growing well above the UK economic average.¹² Britain is a world leader in the creative industries, and they will only become more important for jobs and the economy in the future.¹³

High-quality and accessible music education in schools ensures a strong talent pipeline to sustain growth and innovation.¹⁴ It helps all young people access the opportunities created by the creative industries, especially those from diverse and under-represented backgrounds. Investing in music education will help end the inequality that results in 17 per cent of professional music creators being educated at fee-paying schools – compared to 7 per cent of the population as a whole.¹⁵

Music education is not just about preparing young people to secure opportunities in the creative industries, but across the rest of the economy too.¹⁶ Playing music enables pupils to develop the skills that are increasingly valued by employers in a changing world of work, including problem-solving, creativity, confidence and team-working. Parents recognise the benefits that music has in helping their children develop these skills.¹⁷

2. MUSIC EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

High-quality music education is clearly very important, but young people are being let down. For many, YouTube is the teacher and ‘do-it-yourself’ learning is on the rise.¹⁸ Free and easily accessible online learning has created amazing opportunities for young people that otherwise would not exist. But it has done so in the context of reduced access to good quality, affordable music education in schools and the wider community.

This is despite the promise of the 2011 Henley review into music education and the 2011 national plan for music education. Both set out a minimum expectation of music education in England, delivered in schools and through music education hubs. Back then, the government committed to using public funding to ensure every child has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. It has failed to deliver. The 2022 national plan for music education recognised, after a decade, “provision remains patchy”.¹⁹ Many of the barriers to music education remain.

Music in schools

Over the past 12 years, government policy has repeatedly restricted the ability for young people to learn a musical instrument at school – rather than widening access as promised.

For primary schools, a combination of cuts to real-terms funding, a lack of teacher confidence to deliver lessons, and an unequal focus on core subjects – at the expense of the wider curriculum – has reduced access to music education.²⁰ Previous Fabian Society research, in 2019, found that two-thirds of primary school teachers in England said arts provision, including music, in their school had decreased since 2010.²¹ Similarly, the research found that nearly half (49 per cent) said that the quality of arts provision in the primary schools they have worked in had worsened.²²

In secondary schools, extensive research has highlighted the significant decline of music education. Provision at Key Stage 3 has been marginalised,

with music being taught in rotation with other arts subjects.²³ Unlike maintained schools, academies are not required to teach the national curriculum for music education. And with 79 per cent of secondary school pupils attending schools that are academies, most young people aged 11 to 16 are now not covered by the national curriculum. Academies are required to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, but questions remain around how many actually do so when it comes to music.²⁴ A survey found that, between 2012 and 2016, the proportion of schools offering music to all students in year 9, which is compulsory under the national curriculum, fell from 84 per cent to 67 per cent.²⁵ This concern will only grow as the current government attempts to turn all schools into academies by 2030.²⁶

The number of secondary school music teachers has fallen by over 1,000 amid recruitment challenges, and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate assessment standard has disincentivised schools from offering creative and artistic subjects, including music.²⁷ Nearly 11,000 fewer students in England were studying GCSE music in 2021 than a decade earlier, as the number of GCSE entries declined by 23 per cent. Over the course of the same decade, the number of A Level entries declined by 44 per cent to fewer than 6,000 students.²⁸ More positively, many students have been undertaking non-GCSE or A Level ‘formal pop music qualifications’, resulting in more students taking any music qualification at school or college in 2020 than two decades previous.²⁹

Nevertheless for many young people, music education in schools, particularly secondary school, is now an experience that lasts for a few weeks of the year – not a core learning entitlement. Ofsted, in their 2021 review of music education, found: “time for music over the nine foundation years, even in the most generously timetabled curriculums, is short.”³⁰

Covid-19 also had a detrimental impact on music education. Over 60 per cent of primary school teachers and over 35 per cent of secondary school teachers in England stated that music provision was reduced as a direct result of the pandemic.³¹ Millions of children and young people missed out on school music lessons and extracurricular music activities during the pandemic.

Music education hubs

There are 120 music education hubs in England. They receive public money to ensure all children have access to weekly whole-class tuition; the opportunity to play in ensembles and perform from an early age; clear and affordable progression routes in learning an instrument; and opportunities to sing regularly.³² They do this by both providing tuition and lessons themselves, and coordinating councils, schools and artistic and voluntary organisations who provide other music education. They provide a link

between the activities delivered in a school and those outside school within a local area.

Music hubs are struggling to improve access to high-quality and regular music education across the country. The data provided by hubs to Arts Council England and the Department for Education is of limited quality.³³ Nonetheless, in the 2017/18 academic year (the latest for which we have publicly available data), just 61 per cent of pupils (aged 5 to 14) received whole-class ensemble teaching for the recommended duration of three terms – compared to 70 per cent in 2013/14.³⁴

There is also a postcode lottery in access to lessons provided by music education hubs.³⁵ Some hubs have improved the music education offer to children and young people in their area, including those who would otherwise miss out. Others have been unable to expand participation.³⁶ Schools are not required to engage with hubs, so there is a lack of consistency across the country.³⁷

In large part, the shortcomings of hubs are due to increased demands with less funding, and little certainty over budgets. Between 2012/13 and 2021/22, music education hubs have seen their budgets cut by 17 per cent in real terms. Funding has often been provided on an annual basis, rather than guaranteed for a number of years, and music education hubs have received little advance notice on their funding: for 2021/22 financial year, hubs were still waiting for budget details three weeks before the previous funding period ran out.³⁸ Relying on annual funding pots prevents hubs from focusing on the long-term.³⁹ But in June 2022, the government announced annual funding for hubs would be £79m for three years.⁴⁰ While providing greater certainty, the announcement means the budget of hubs will have increased by just £4m between 2011 and 2025.

Cuts to local government funding, and an increased reliance on contributions from parents and schools, have further restricted the ability of hubs to provide consistent access to the music tuition and lessons they provide.

Funding cuts have also led to a reduction in the working conditions of music teachers, employed or engaged by hubs, who are crucial to delivering a high-quality music education to every child. There has been a loss of well-qualified teachers in hubs, with an increase in insecure and zero-hour contracts, cuts to the employment rights of those employed, and widespread low pay.⁴¹

Inequality in provision

Inequality in provision means thousands of children miss out on music education – many of whom would benefit most. Those who face significant

barriers in accessing a high quality music education through schools or out-of-school activities include:

- **Young people from low-income families:** the cost of participation, in terms of tuition and the instrument itself, is a significant barrier.⁴² Children aged 5 to 14 from the wealthiest backgrounds are 27 percentage points more likely to be playing a musical instrument than children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.⁴³ School is not an equaliser: the Education Policy Institute has found that disadvantaged pupils are much less likely to take music as a GCSE option than their peers.⁴⁴ Child Poverty Action Group has identified school charging as a significant barrier to disadvantaged pupils participating in music education, including at GCSE level.⁴⁵
- **Black and minority ethnic young people:** there is little research focusing on the outcomes of young people participating in music education at school, with regards to race.⁴⁶ But significant participation gaps in music education beyond 18 exist, suggesting real challenges of participation and access for young Black and minority ethnic people at school.⁴⁷
- **Disabled young people:** 49 per cent of parents of disabled children experienced moderate or severe limitations in accessing a music lesson of any kind.⁴⁸ When disabled young people do access music education, they are often provided “bangers, boomers and squeakers” rather than instruments they might want to play at school or in a professional ensemble setting.⁴⁹
- **Young people in rural areas:** the barriers faced in accessing music education can be greater for young people in rural areas than for those living in cities and towns.⁵⁰ NYMAZ, a music charity, has argued that the delivery of cost-effective and high-quality music education in rural areas is challenging, especially for music education hubs.⁵¹

Box 1: The National Plan for Music Education in England

The 2022 national plan for music education in England sets out a vision where “music [is] valued and celebrated” in “every setting and school”, enabling “every young person [to] have access to a high-quality music education”.⁵² Music education hubs would support a “sustainable local ‘ecosystem’ for music education”, with progression, accessibility and inclusion central to their work.

However, while the national plan has an ambitious vision, it lacks the concrete policy levers to actually deliver high-quality accessible music education.

The entire plan is ‘non-statutory guidance’. Schools and hubs are not required to follow it. The plan is not currently backed up by the accountability metrics to encourage schools and hubs to deliver. The government has committed to monitoring progress on the implementation of the plan, but there are few details about how it will do so beyond the promise of a ‘national plan for music education board’.

The government has also failed to provide funding to support schools or music education hubs to deliver the vision. While the government wishes for every school to have a ‘music development plan’, setting out their music education offer to young people, there is no specific investment to fund such an offer. The government has guaranteed three more years of real-term budget cuts for music education hubs, following a 17 per cent fall in funding over the past decade. The announcement of £25m for musical instruments, equipment and technology is welcome, but it is less than a quarter of the recent Welsh government’s investment.¹

While there is some focus on the role of the workforce in the national plan, it is inadequate to the scale of the challenge in schools – and does not touch on the wider workforce employed or engaged by music education hubs. This is despite the crucial role they will have in delivering the national plan.

¹ Calculated on a per child aged 3 to 16 basis.

3. IMPROVING ACCESS TO MUSIC EDUCATION

Despite the good work of many schools and music education hubs, the current model is struggling to ensure access to high-quality music education. The government has not fulfilled its aim that children from all backgrounds should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, make music with others, sing, and progress to excellence. There is a need for new investment in schools and music hubs, combined with reform of how services are provided and new accountability measures, to ensure every young person can access high quality music education.

1. A National Music Education Service

At the heart of a reformed system of music education in England, we propose the creation of a National Music Education Service (NMES). This service would consist of a national coordinating body with stronger powers (either continuing within Arts Council England or as part of a different organisation) and a network of local organisations to provide services as hubs do now.¹ The service would offer national leadership and consistency in bringing together the music sector and schools – without stifling local identity, innovation and knowledge.

This proposal should learn from the work of the Welsh Labour government which, through its 2022 national plan for music, is introducing a National Music Service (see box 2).⁵³

Box 2: The Welsh National Music Service

The 2022 Welsh national plan for music education sets out how the National Music Service would operate from May 2022.⁵⁴ The music service will be comprised of key partners and organisations working together to ensure

¹ For clarity, this report will continue to refer to this network of local organisations that form part of the NMES as hubs.

that all children and young people (aged 3 to 16) have access to the opportunities to play, sing, take part in and create music.

The Welsh Local Government Association will be the lead body responsible for governance arrangements and allocating funding to deliver the priorities of the national plan.⁵⁵ The national plan sets out its responsibilities to include setting up a national instrument and equipment library, co-ordination of professional learning support, developing initiatives on diversity and inclusion, and ensemble development.

Unlike the model for England proposed in this report, the lead body for the Welsh National Music Service will not be responsible for commissioning or directly funding local music education organisations. But it will co-ordinate service provision by working with local government-funded music services, ensuring each body retains “its own identity, while the offer to children and young people is expanded”.⁵⁶

In 2021/22, the Welsh government invested £5.5m to purchase musical instruments (including ones adapted to support children with special educational needs) and musical technology as part of the national instrument and equipment library.⁵⁷ This library will help local authorities establish local libraries of instruments, resources and equipment to support access, especially for disadvantaged young people.

The past decade has shown that providing every young person with access to good quality music education in England cannot be done through limited reform. Only a more comprehensive and ambitious solution will ensure that no child falls between the gaps in local provision of music education. The NMES would go further than the 2022 English national plan for music education, and finally turn the vision of every young person able to access high-quality music education into a reality.

The detail of the NMES would need to be designed inclusively, through consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders, including the education sector, the music sector, parents, and young people themselves, but the new model should include a number of key features. The NMES should:

1.1 Commit to a core mission of ending fragmentation and inequality in the provision of music education

The landscape of music education is incredibly complex, with so many organisations involved: music education hubs, charities, schools, music educators and others. There is little overarching coordination, with 120 practically independent music education hubs often lacking the support to

share with and learn from each other. This creates gaps in provision and a patchwork of services that make it hard for young people, parents and schools to navigate.⁵⁸

A new NMES should commit to a core mission of ending fragmentation and inequality in the provision of music education for all children aged 3 to 16, just as the Welsh Music Service aims to do. Rather than 120 independent organisations, music hubs would be brought together – through partnerships at a local, regional and national level – as part of a larger organisation with a collective purpose. The NMES would reduce the complexity of navigating music education services by providing a national gateway to local services, while supporting quality, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. There would be an explicit obligation for all publicly funded schools to engage with the NMES, as many are already doing with local hubs, to ensure seamless provision. The national service should also provide clear pathways for charities, social enterprises, and businesses who want to help improve music education in England to do so – including by linking them up with areas and communities with the greatest need of support.

An independent national board would hold the NMES to account. This would be representative of the sector, music teachers, under-represented groups, young musicians, and other key organisations. It could be similar to the ‘national plan for music education board’ that the government has committed to establishing by the end of 2022.⁵⁹ Using improved data and accountability measures (see recommendation 1.5), this national board would mandate and hold to account the NMES with respect to reducing fragmentation and inequality in access to music education.

1.2 Prioritise engaging under-represented groups in music education

For disadvantaged pupils, disabled young people, and others from under-represented groups, access to music education is inconsistent. A young person’s background influences the quality and quantity of the music education they can access – and the benefits it brings.

The NMES should prioritise engaging under-represented groups in music education. Hubs would be expected to set out how they will increase participation in high-quality music education for under-represented groups – with provision for children with special educational needs, both in mainstream and special schools, a particular focus.⁶⁰ This must include equitable access to progression in learning to play a musical instrument, sing or use music technology. The service should be held to account for the work it does, underpinned by improved data collection. Best practice should be identified, rewarded and shared across the NMES network.

Similar to the 2022 national plan for music education in England, the NMES should require hubs to engage with children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (in schools and other settings), and develop capacity to support families to make music part of home learning activities. This should be supported by an appropriate increase in funding, which the current government has not provided.

The Welsh National Music Service is making early years, between the ages of 3 and 5 in particular, a key part of their service provision. There are clear benefits for development if children are encouraged to sing, rhyme and make music in the early years.⁶¹

1.3 Guarantee increased and multi-year funding from central government

The existing budget for music education hubs has been cut by 17 per cent in real terms since 2011 – and is frozen at £79m until 2025. In recent years, funding has been provided on an annual basis, with notice of budget settlements provided just weeks before the start of each financial year. Hubs have been expected to deliver a comprehensive set of services with an inadequate and insecure budget.⁶²

The proposed NMES for England should receive more money than its predecessor bodies – and it should have a long-term funding settlement, with annual allocations made well in advance of each financial year. The national coordinating body would then be in a position to guarantee increased, multi-year budgets for local hubs. In the first year of the NMES, this funding should be equal, in real terms, to the funding provided to music education hubs across England in 2011. For the 2021/22 financial year, this would have represented a budget of £89m. This money should be found within the existing Department for Education revenue budget. Funding for the NMES should also be guaranteed on three-year cycles, similar to the new Welsh National Music Service and the Westminster government's June 2022 announcement. But unlike three years of frozen funding for hubs, the NMES should receive at least inflationary budget increases every year.⁶³ This will enable a longer-term focus on improving accessibility of high-quality music education.

During the first three-year cycle, the government should review whether the level of public funding provided for hubs to deliver on their specific obligations is sufficient. Following this review, the government should provide an increased level of public funding if necessary. In doing so, the government will support hubs – and the NMES as a whole – to ensure the ambition of every young person able to access high-quality music education is met in the future.

In addition, £105m of capital investment should be provided over four years to establish a national musical instrument and equipment library to support the work of the NMES and schools. This would include the £25m announced by the Westminster government in June 2022.⁶⁴ It would support the purchase of musical instruments, adaptive musical instruments for disabled young people, and music technology. The overall funding would match the Welsh government's investment of £5.5m on a per child basis, and should come out of the Department for Education's capital budget, which was £5.6bn in 2021/22.⁶⁵

The instruments, equipment and technology selected as part of the library should be decided in consultation with young people and teachers, so it is relevant to music teaching in schools and local communities. Schools would be able to use the national library to source new instruments, especially those with adaptations, and replace worn-out and old ones. As in Wales, the national instrument and equipment library would ensure that young people from low-income backgrounds have access to musical instruments.⁶⁶

1.4 Create a music education workforce guarantee

The success of music education depends on the workforce.⁶⁷ Music teachers employed or engaged by hubs deserve good pay and conditions, regular work, recognition that their work is important, safe workplaces, and access to continuing professional development. This is often not the case.⁶⁸ The quality of education provided inevitably suffers, despite the best efforts of teachers.⁶⁹ There is little focus on the workforce in the 2022 national plan for music education.

The NMES should provide a music education workforce guarantee for those employed by the hubs, in the form of a charter that forms part of the funding agreements between the coordinating body of the NMES and local organisations. It should recognise that the workforce is key to delivery, and will give parents confidence that their children will benefit from high-quality music education. The workforce guarantee should set out guidelines on what teaching by well-trained and well-paid staff looks like in the hubs. It should offer secure work for all staff, rather than zero hour contracts – with the necessary flexibility on hours, for example, built in. For teaching staff employed directly by the hub, this will be the minimum employment standard.

The NMES should also set out that music teachers employed or engaged by hubs have a right to access training and skills development, with the time to undertake it. Teachers should have access to training on how to best support young people from under-represented backgrounds, including those with

special educational needs and disabilities, so they can confidently provide the best possible music education for all and in every setting.

There should also be support for music teachers and educators to form co-operatives if they wish. Freelancers who are commissioned by schools, hubs and parents should be encouraged to partner together and form co-operatives. This could allow teachers to have greater control over their own working lives.⁷⁰ The NMES should also set out best practice for those who employ individual freelance music teachers – with schools and hubs expected to follow it.

The coordinating body of the NMES should focus on improving representation amongst the music education workforce, especially of Black and minority ethnic and disabled teachers and leaders. It should also seek to establish a professional qualification for the managers within the local networks of the NMES, providing support so they can access training.

1.5 Improve data gathering and accountability measures

The data returned by music education hubs to the Department for Education and Arts Council England is flawed. It fails to focus on the quality of music education or the outcomes of work that happens in schools and hubs.⁷¹ The data merely counts how many young people engage with each hub; we have very little evidence if young people benefit from this engagement. It is also unacceptable that there is no easily accessible data on the performance of hubs since the 2017/18 academic year.

The NMES should improve data gathering and accountability measures. Every pound of public money invested in music education should be evaluated effectively, and every organisation should be held accountable for its work. There should be specific new accountability metrics, designed in consultation with the sector, on quality of education and accessibility.

Data gathering and accountability measures should be proportionate to the need for value of money, which is something we currently lack. We have music education hubs spending millions of pounds with limited understanding of how it is used. This is not the fault of the hubs, but of the government – and it must be tackled under the NMES.

Working with the NMES national coordinating body, Ofsted should consider inspecting hubs responsible for the delivery of high-quality and accessible music education. Ofsted last reviewed the work of music education hubs in 2013, visiting hubs in 31 schools.⁷² In the future, similar reviews by Ofsted should be conducted regularly and make recommendations on how to encourage best practice in partnerships between schools and the NMES.

2. Better music education in schools

For most young people, their schools are the main point of access to high-quality and supported music education. If provision requires students to pay, or if schools do not consider music a priority, then the main chance to ensure every young person has access to music education is lost. That is what is happening across England now, as schools are offering less time for music.⁷³ We need to improve music education in schools, so that access to music education is not dependent on the head teacher, the governing body or even the type of school a young person attends. The government should:

2.1 Introduce an arts education premium

Cuts to school funding and a lack of a dedicated funding stream for the arts in schools is a barrier to high-quality and accessible arts education – especially in music. While the national plan for music education provides non-statutory expectations for provision in schools, it has not provided the funding to enable schools to deliver.

The government should introduce an arts education premium. It previously committed to doing so for secondary schools in the March 2020 budget, but has since ruled this out due to Covid-19.⁷⁴ The government should return to its previous plans, and extend the premium to primary schools, special schools and other education settings.

Schools need a ring-fenced funding stream to guarantee funding for accessible music and arts education – just as PE and sports have. An arts education premium will allow teachers to focus on coordinating and delivering high-quality provision, rather than competing for resources.⁷⁵ It will ensure that a minimum standard of funding for the arts is delivered everywhere in England, reducing the postcode lottery.

The arts education premium would provide an estimated £380m, if available to all schools in England.¹ For schools with primary-aged pupils, the arts education premium would be worth the same as the PE and sports premium. For schools with secondary-aged pupils, it would be worth the same as the proposed arts premium abandoned by the current government in 2021 (£25,000 per school).

The arts education premium would support schools to encourage pupil engagement with all forms of art, and to support teachers in providing arts education - especially music. Schools would have flexibility to use funding as

¹ The PE and sports pupil premium provides primary schools with 16 or fewer eligible pupils £1,000 per pupil, and schools with 17 or more eligible pupils receive £16,000 and an additional payment of £10 per pupil.

they see fit within arts education, as they do with the pupil premium and the PE and sports premium. It could be used to employ specialist music teachers, support the professional development of existing teachers, or purchase new equipment.⁷⁶ The government, Ofsted and other organisations should support schools by publishing best practice for spending the arts education premium, as they do for the pupil premium and the PE and sports premium.

2.2 Require high-quality and accessible music education to be part of the ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum

The minimum entitlements for music education set out in the national curriculum are increasingly irrelevant for secondary school pupils: most attend academies which are not subject to the national curriculum. The current government intends for the same to happen in primary schools – and the remaining secondary schools which are not academies – by 2030. Academies are instead expected to provide a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’, with music education as part of that. But it is unclear how many are fulfilling this responsibility to a satisfactory level – even with the publication of the model music curriculum. The 2022 national plan for music education merely suggests it will monitor progress on the provision of high-quality music in schools.⁷⁷ This presents a significant barrier to ensuring every young person has consistent access to high-quality music education.

The government should require high-quality and accessible music education to be part of the ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum delivered in every school in receipt of public funding. During the Key Stages – where music education is compulsory under the national curriculum – all schools, including academies, should be required to deliver consistent access to the subject taught by well-qualified teachers, rather than alternating it with other subjects. The government has instructed Ofsted to inspect every school by 2025; as part of this, ministers should ensure that any school delivering a narrow curriculum without consistent access to high-quality music education will not be able to achieve a ‘good’ inspection result – regardless of whether or not a school is required to follow the national curriculum.⁷⁸

The government should also issue stronger guidance to schools, preventing them from charging for teaching, or the hire of musical instruments, for lessons that are an essential part of the school’s core curriculum or a part of examined courses. Currently, charging is prevented if the teaching is an essential part of the national curriculum – something that most secondary schools don’t follow and all schools will not follow by 2030. Guidance on charging must be updated to reflect this, including in any funding agreements signed with academies. The government should also make it clear that, since performance pieces are assessed as part of most GCSE and A Levels, schools cannot charge for the tuition or instruments necessary to prepare.

For other instrumental and vocal music tuition, in the short term, the government should prevent schools from charging any pupil eligible for pupil premium funding – just as the current regulations exclude charging pupils who are looked after by the local authority. Over time, all publicly-funded schools should be supported to eliminate charges for all pupils who want to access extra-curricular music education: however this is a longer-term aspiration, given the financial pressures facing schools at present. The introduction of the arts education premium (as recommended above) can be used to cover any reduction in income caused by restrictions on charging.

Ofsted should inspect schools on the ‘cost of the school day’, to ensure access to a broad and balanced education is not dependent on family resources. If Ofsted finds that costs (such as instrument hire) restrict access in a school, and that mitigation for low-income and under-represented pupils is inadequate, then this should negatively impact that school’s inspection results. The government and Ofsted should work with the education sector to develop the best way to collect and analyse such evidence.

2.3 Upgrading music teacher training and recruitment for classroom teachers in primary and secondary schools

Access to high-quality music education in schools depends on whether young people are being taught by well-trained teachers. This is not the case for many. In primary schools, many class teachers receive limited training in music, which means many lack the confidence and experience necessary to support pupils to learn.⁷⁹ At secondary school, recruitment of specialist music teachers is well below the level of vacancies, with just 72 per cent of the required teachers recruited in 2021/22 – and the government has scrapped initial teacher training bursaries for music.⁸⁰

The government should improve music-related teacher training and recruitment, working with the education and music sectors. For primary school teachers, the government and teacher training providers should ensure that all trainee teachers receive adequate support to teach music confidently and skilfully. The subject should be given greater prominence in initial primary school teacher training courses, so that every teacher has the expertise and confidence to deliver high-quality and accessible music education. In secondary schools, the government should recruit sufficient numbers of properly qualified music teachers – and to end the recruitment crisis. The government should reform the financial support provided – and consider restoring the bursary for trainee music teachers – to attract a diverse group of high-quality music teachers into our schools.

Schools and teacher training providers should also work with the proposed NMES to deliver accessible and effective continuing professional

development for music teachers in primary and secondary schools. This should involve strengthening links between teachers and local arts organisations.

2.4 Support schools to engage professional musicians

Many schools recognise the benefits of introducing young people to professional musicians, who do not teach but who deliver high-quality music experiences. If designed to be supportive of the wider music curriculum, these musicians can be an important part of school life, inspire young people, and improve well-being. But many teachers are confused and uncertain about bringing professional musicians into their school. Processes designed to safeguard pupils are often more complicated than necessary – putting off both schools and musicians from delivering accessible music experiences for every young person.⁸¹

The government should support schools to engage professional musicians as part of their music education provision. In each area, the NMES, local government, musicians and schools should be encouraged to establish a diverse list of trusted professional musicians to work in schools, reducing confusion and uncertainty – and with a focus on safeguarding children. The proposed NMES should set out standards to ensure that musicians are paid fairly and schools use good hiring practices. Schools should be encouraged to learn from others on how best to integrate these music experiences with the wider curriculum.

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