

Making More of Music (Primary perspective)

Key findings or focus

One of the review's main findings is that although there was good provision for music in half the schools visited, and pupils were seen to enjoy music, there was too great a variety in the quality and range of provision for music in the schools visited overall. This relates to inconsistency of musical opportunities offered, which in turn results in lack of musical progress, particularly at the top of Key Stage 2 where after reasonable standards in Years 3 and 4, progress slowed due to "insufficient challenge" in years 5 and 6. Further findings identify a number of contributing factors; firstly, the variation in time devoted to music reported by student teachers, which must have been a concern for many teacher educators in recent years. This was identified as a major issue by Ofsted. The report observes that time given to literacy and numeracy "*often overshadowed the musical learning that might have taken place*" (Part A: 52). Examples are cited where music was not taught at all in Year 6 to provide more time for English and mathematics. It comments that: "*While there is no statutory requirement for subjects to be taught in every year, stopping music severely curtailed pupils' progress*" (Part A 53). This statement in itself is a truism - but the idea that it is acceptable not to teach music every year is disturbing.

A second factor picked up by Ofsted is, unsurprisingly, primary teachers' lack of subject knowledge and understanding, and weak assessment. In the section entitled 'What will enable greater musical progress?' the following strengths are identified:

- *Subject expertise*
- *Generic pedagogy*
- *Subject knowledge*
- *Subject focus*

(Part B: 171)

Primary school class teachers were found to be strong on 'general pedagogy', but weak in the areas of 'subject knowledge' and 'subject expertise'. The area of 'subject focus' – "*knowing what is important and what outcomes to aim for*" (Part B: 171) also seems significant here in term of ensuring progression. The report observes (as an outcome perhaps of this deficiency), an over-reliance on published music schemes: in order "*to meet pupils' needs, they required much more adaptation than the schools acknowledged*" (Part A; 46). Adaptation of course requires knowledge and understanding. Without this, how can teachers be expected to plan for and assess music effectively? Assessment was seen in fact seen as the weakest aspect of teaching in the primary schools visited. (Part A: 41)

Less effective teaching included:

- *lack of musical expectation from the teacher*
- *insufficient consolidation of learning*
- *work aimed only at the middle,*
- *too much talk, not enough demonstration*
- *inappropriate use of notation*
- *over-simplification of profound steps of learning.*

(Part A: 28)

These are significant points. They indicate teachers who simply do not have enough understanding of the nature of the subject to teach it effectively or to help pupils make progress. It is useful to read the mini 'case studies' which are highlighted in grey throughout the report; it is a one thing, however, to give examples of good practice, quite another to ensure that music teachers understand how to develop similar practice. Each of these 'performance indicators' could form the focus for valuable continuing professional development.

A root cause of weak teaching was indeed identified by the report as the lack of professional development: "*Helpful continuing professional development and challenge were rare*" (Executive Summary). In the primary sector, the report sees this as a crucial role for the subject leader, strong subject leadership being seen as a vital factor in improving provision of music in primary schools. A specific finding was that "*Developments in music education had gone unnoticed or been disregarded and, in the primary schools visited, the subject leaders were frequently not given enough time to monitor and support the work of their colleagues.*" (Executive Summary). Interestingly, leadership and the monitoring of quality in music teaching (something the Report highlights as a real need), was seen as a much more important factor than whether classes were taught by music specialists or class teachers.

So what about the impact of recent initiatives such as the Wider Opportunities Scheme? Local authority music services were seen to have contributed significantly in terms of broadening the provision in primary schools. There were, however, often instances where the range of the curriculum provided failed to meet the specific abilities and interests of pupils, and teachers frequently missed opportunities to enable pupils to make connections between different musical experiences and activities. There was insufficient dialogue between classroom teachers and specialist instrumental teachers, and their involvement with the school was too short to have any lasting impact (Part A: 60). Inspectors often identified extra-curricular activities as an area for improvement.

Part B aims to consider 'the essential components of effective teaching in music' in both primary and secondary schools – what might be seen as OFSTED's vision for music education, drawing on the best practice gleaned from the evidence. This part of the report discusses five key areas of evidence:

- *Awaking musical intelligence – the language of music*
- *Developing musical creativity – releasing musical imagination*
- *Increasing musical progress – seeing the wood for the trees*
- *Ensuring continuity – achieving longer-term impact*
- *Building coherence – increasing effectiveness*

The terms 'musical intelligence', 'musical imagination', 'aural imagination', 'musical creativity' and 'musical progress' are used as sub-headings in this section of the report. Whilst the term 'musical progress' and 'musical creativity' will not be unfamiliar to most teachers of music, the other terms are perhaps more esoteric. What is the difference for example between 'musical' and 'aural' imagination? What does it mean to be musically intelligent? (There is no reference to the work of Howard Gardner here). There is room for much more exploration of these terms and their implications. A significant point made in this section is the need for teachers to focus on increasing the **depth** and **quality** of pupils' musical responses (Part B: 169), and achieving this is dependent on the teachers' grasp of these ideas.

Recommendations

The report makes recommendations for the [DCSF](#) and the [DCMS](#) to help improve the provision for music in schools. A main recommendation is developing a music strategy for primary subject leaders. It is not clear what this would involve, but it does raise the question of whether this would be enough. With the status of music in primary schools so low and the amount of time devoted to it often inadequate, there is a question as to whether primary subject leaders could realistically be expected to 'turn round' what is such a serious problem without much more infrastructural support.

This is recognised by the Cambridge Primary Review in which Robin Alexander puts the blame for the erosion of overall entitlement to the arts and humanities firmly on the "*policy-led* belief that breadth and standards are incompatible". (Cambridge Primary Review News Release 20.2.09). Whilst the new primary curriculum, currently being reviewed by Rose (Interim Review of the Primary Curriculum January 2009) and due to be implemented in 2011, may offer some loosening of curriculum constraints in primary schools, Rose states that there will be still be continued emphasis on literacy and maths; and while "*the Government's recent announcement to explore the possibilities for improving aspects of assessment in Key Stage 2 is timely*" (Interim Review of the Primary Curriculum January 2009 1.22), until that time, SATS and the pressure of league tables will continue to take their toll on the broad curriculum, and in particular music.

In reading the report, the reader needs to be aware of some of the challenges in interpreting the findings. Firstly, the report makes a distinction between the terms: '**standards**' and '**progress**' which is a little confusing, e.g.: "*In Key Stage 1 standards were generally above average in about one fifth of lessons*" (Part A: 4) followed later by "*Progress was satisfactory overall in Key Stage 1*" (Part A: 9). Although an explanation is given for this in Footnote 4 (Part A: 3) as to why: "*...inspectors' judgements about progress and the quality of teaching are more positive than judgements about standards*", the distinction is not very clear and could be misleading for the reader at first glance. The report also makes a distinction between standards in **schools**, (46 out of 84 primary schools were good or outstanding) and standards in **lessons** observed (one third of the 264 lessons were above average). It is important to note that the judgment that standards were '*generally above average*' in this review indicates that "*pupils' responses were at least **in line** with the national expectation, securely and consistently*" (Part A: 3, Footnote 3), rather than going beyond it as the phrase might suggest.

The report acknowledges that the lessons observed, forming the evidence base from which the findings were gathered, were selected largely by the schools in the light of inspectors' requests to see some teaching in each key stage (Part A: 3, footnote 4). This inevitably suggests that the teachers chosen by the primary schools in the sample would have been those who were more confident and experienced in teaching music. It also means that these teachers were by no means representative of other teachers in the school and therefore consistency and progression is inevitably in question. The rather distorted sample suggests that the report is almost certainly more positive than the national picture overall, so the need for radical improvement is an urgent one.

The report does offer some useful advice but the advice needs further exemplification and interpretation. For instance, understanding what is meant by 'musical quality' not only presupposes a level of musical knowledge on the part of the primary teacher, but would certainly challenge the inexperienced or less effective teacher in terms of understanding what it means in the reality of their classroom. Teachers need to observe and experience musical quality first hand if they are to be able to foster it in their own classrooms. It cannot be done through reading alone, or even access to helpful websites (another key recommendation). The need for significant CPD for primary classroom teachers as well as subject leaders should not be glossed over.

Reviewed by:
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