



# Music: a guide for governing boards

Providing high-quality  
music education in schools



SUPPORTING  
CONNECTING  
INFLUENCING

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### **Acknowledgements**

This guide has been developed through collaboration between the National Governance Association, Arts Council England and The UK Association for Music Education – Music Mark, with special thanks to Sharon Bray, Head of Leicestershire Music.

### **Arts Council England**

We are the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

### **National Governance Association**

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

### **Music Mark**

Music Mark is a membership organisation and subject association for the music education sector. Its vision is excellent musical learning in and out of school, for all children and young people in the UK, which inspires and enriches their lives. It works to fulfil that vision through supporting, connecting and influencing in pursuit of a high-quality, diverse, inclusive music education for all children and young people.



# Foreword

Those of us who govern champion the right of children and young people to a high-quality and wide-ranging education, ensuring their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The value of creative education in the lives of our young people – and the important role that subjects such as art and design, dance, drama and music have to play alongside English, maths and science – has never been more apparent as we begin to recover from the educational, social and health impacts of Covid-19.

Throughout lockdown, pupils faced huge upheavals in their day to day lives. But we also saw the positive power of creativity in supporting their learning, mental health and resilience. Now, as we consider post-pandemic life, we need to ensure that high-quality cultural education opportunities are available to every child, no matter what their background. These opportunities should be both formal and informal, in the classroom as part of a broad and ambitious curriculum, and outside the classroom too. This is a matter of fairness and opportunity for all children.

As school governors and trustees, we have the chance to advocate for the right of all young people to benefit from high-quality cultural education and to be creative through their study of subjects such as art and design, dance, drama and music. We know that this isn't always the case and it's why we encourage governors and trustees to champion cultural

education in their schools, so that we can do our best to ensure quality arts education for all. Literacy, numeracy and creativity are the three pillars of a strong educational offer.

These cultural education subjects encourage pupils to express themselves, to build confidence and to develop creative thinking skills, unlocking young people's potential and preparing them to succeed in life. School remains the single most important place where children can access great cultural experiences. This is why we've worked in collaboration with the NGA and subject specialists to refresh our guide for school governors. We hope these resources will inspire you to develop your understanding the ways in which cultural education subjects can change the lives of children and young people and that they will support you in your crucial role.

## **Dr Darren Henley CBE**

Chief Executive, Arts Council England



Photo © Webster Primary School / Kelly Hodgkinson

**This guide is part of a collection developed to support governing boards. The collection covers art and design, music and dance and includes an introductory guide to arts, culture and creativity.**

**The collection is available via the [National Governance Association](#) and [Arts Council England](#) websites.**

# Introduction

**“Music is an essential part of a broad and ambitious curriculum for all pupils...[and] we want to see more children and young people supported to navigate the many exciting opportunities to progress music beyond their core school provision.”**

*Foreword from the National Plan for Music Education, 2022*

The joy of music can last a lifetime and often starts in the classroom. A high-quality music education offered in school engages and inspires pupils to develop a lifelong relationship with music. It helps them to develop their interest, and progress their talent, increasing their self-confidence, creativity, and sense of achievement.

Music education forms an important part of the broad and ambitious curriculum which governing bodies have a legal duty to provide. When looking for evidence of this, Ofsted considers the extent to which pupils are equipped with the knowledge, skills and cultural capital needed to succeed in life, and how they are supported to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.

However, legal compliance and meeting Ofsted’s requirements are not the primary reasons for governing boards to take an active interest in the music education provided by their school or trust. When taught well, music education embodies the values and positive school culture that governing boards seek to foster. It contributes not only to securing good academic outcomes, but to developing the ‘whole person’ by drawing out their potential and equipping them for life.

This guide supports governing boards to ensure that all pupils from all backgrounds benefit from a music education that is of the highest quality.

## The benefits of music education

### 1. Boosting school improvement

Music can be the catalyst that makes a good school exceptional. When music is allowed to permeate the whole curriculum, it can have a positive impact on everything from academic attainment to student attendance and wellbeing.

### 2. Developing life skills

Taking part in musical activities, such as mass singing events, helps children to recognise their own skills and appreciate those of others. These experiences build life skills such as teamwork, risk-taking, creativity, empathy, problem solving and communication, and a sense of responsibility and commitment.

### 3. Building cultural understanding

Music education should encourage pupils to explore and share their own culture. It will also enable them to appreciate and respect the richness and diversity of other cultures.

### 4. Creating community links

The relationship between a school and the community it serves can be strengthened and embedded through music. Schools and trusts can use their music education offer to connect with families and carers, or to add social value to the communities they serve, for example, through shared performances and workshops.

## 5. Supporting pupils' creativity

Music enables young people to express themselves like no other medium. It empowers them to shape their world through sound and allows them to exercise their imaginations.

## 6. Supporting mental health & wellbeing

Taking part in musical activity and learning musical skills builds resilience, improves self-esteem, and can have a positive impact on mental health for life.

The key benefits of music are further explored in Music Mark's **10 Things Schools Should Know About Music.**



Photo © Orchestras Live – Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
Project with SEND Schools / Samantha Gostner

## About the music curriculum

The early years foundation stage requires that children in early years settings, including reception classes, are provided with opportunities to explore music using a variety of songs and musical instruments, and to match movements to music.

Music is currently a statutory part of the national curriculum in primary and secondary schools. The national curriculum for music aims to ensure that all pupils aged five to fourteen:

- **perform, listen to, review and evaluate a range of different music**
- **learn to sing and to use their voices**
- **create and compose music on their own and with others**
- **have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and use technology appropriately**
- **progress to the next level of musical excellence**
- **understand and explore how music is created, produced and communicated**

In March 2021, the government published a model music curriculum (MMC) for key stages 1-3. This non-statutory resource provides a model of how the national music curriculum can be delivered. It offers guidance and ideas for teachers and provides a springboard from which to approach teaching.

# The characteristics of high quality music provision

**A high-quality music education is one where pupils are immersed in music – it is not just about the technical skills required to sing or play an instrument – it is about the expressive quality of the response, the musical accuracy, sophistication and fluency. Pupils should be taught to listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music to inform and improve their musical understanding, performance and composition.**

Good planning of music education is ambitious, it identifies the sequence of steps that pupils will need to take to incrementally improve musical understanding and develop their skills as active listeners, performers and composers.

**Whilst contexts may differ, all governing boards can use the following characteristics as a benchmark when discussing the quality and impact of music education in their school or trust.**

## Provision is inclusive and diverse

- The provision is diverse, valuing all musical styles, genres and traditions equally.
- Pupils and families facing the largest barriers are given support to engage in music learning as part of, and beyond, the curriculum.
- Pupils with SEND are able to participate and progress, perhaps supported by technology, tools and adaptive instruments.
- Pupils from all backgrounds learn about music, make music with others, learn to sing, and have the opportunity to progress to the next level – such as playing in an ensemble – if they wish to.
- The views of pupils and parents have been considered when developing music provision.

## Music is a consistent and valued part of the curriculum

- Music is a timetabled subject as part of the school's curriculum, for at least one hour each week of the school year for key stages 1-3.
- Music as a subject across key stages 1-3 should, as a minimum, cover the subject content set out in the [national curriculum programmes of study](#).
- Knowledge, skills and creativity gained from music education are utilised to impact on achievement in other subjects.
- Musical skills and interests are extended through co-curricular activities, such as ensembles, choirs, and creative activity, and all pupils are given the opportunity to participate.
- There is access to lessons across a range of instruments, and voice, and space for rehearsals and individual practice is made available.



Photo © Northway Primary / Xavier Fiddes

## Pupils showcase their work and experience performances

- Pupils have the opportunity to work with others through music, collaborating and sharing their work with audiences.
- All pupils, including the most disadvantaged and pupils with SEND, have an opportunity to perform from an early stage.
- Music performance is a prominent component of school life; with at least a termly school performance. In addition, music is performed in assemblies and events such as sports days and open evenings.
- The curriculum seeks to address social disadvantage by addressing gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and experiences, such as through giving pupils the opportunity to attend a concert and understand the conventions of live music events at least once a year.

## Pupils make good progress

- Good progress is demonstrated by secure and incremental learning of technical skills in playing, singing, composing (creating) and listening to music (evaluating and analysing).
- Pupils make good progress in performing by ear, from memory and notations and can talk about music that they perform, compose and listen to using subject-specific vocabulary to demonstrate their musical understanding.
- Pupils progress throughout their school life with secondary schools working collaboratively, where possible, with their feeder primaries and Music Education Hubs to support transition and building on skills developed at primary level.
- The depth, breadth and quality of pupils' musical responses develops over time.
- High-quality music education enables lifelong participation in, and enjoyment of, music.

### Music qualifications

There are a range of music qualifications suited to pupils of all ages. All schools should consider whether or not pupils have access to graded music qualifications (offered by exam boards such as ABRSM, Trinity College London and Rockschoo).

All maintained schools are required to offer at least one arts GCSE, which could include music. Secondary schools should consider GCSE, BTEC, RSL Music Practitioner, the NCFE V-Cert – all of which contribute to performance measures (including KS4 performance tables and UCAS points), as can graded examinations from Grade 6 upward.

At Key Stage 5, AS level, A level, BTEC, RSL level 3 and Pre-U are all possible choices.

Some schools may find that various level 1 qualifications are well suited to their needs. Arts Award, RSL and Pearson's BTEC are examples of music qualifications that can be studied at level 1.



# How to influence music education in your school

**There are many ways that governing boards, working at a strategic level, can make their ambition for all pupils to receive an excellent music education a reality.**

## Make music education part of your vision for the future

By making the provision of quality cultural education for every pupil part of the vision and strategy, the governing board are making a powerful statement that their school or trust is about so much more than core subjects. This will resonate not only with pupils and staff, but crucially with parents and the wider community.

## Use your vision to develop a School Music Development Plan

The power of music to change lives: a [national plan for music education](#) outlines the government's vision for school music provision. It states that 'Music should be represented in every school's leadership structure, with a designated music lead or Head of Department at school or academy trust level for primary and secondary phases'. It also proposes that every school will have 'a Music Development Plan that captures the curricular and co-curricular offer and sets out how it will be staffed and funded'.

Further details about the purpose of a School Music Development Plan is given within the National Plan for Music Education. Further guidance has been developed by [Music Mark and the Music Teachers Association](#). The Plan recommends that schools will work in partnership with their local [Music Education Hub](#) to develop and implement their School Music Development Plan.

## Invest sufficient resources

The governing board is responsible for ensuring that the school or trust has sufficient resources in place to deliver a high-quality music education.

Effective governing bodies work with school and trust leaders to design a curriculum that delivers both the educational vision and long-term financial sustainability. The following aspects should be considered:

- The resourcing and deployment of music teachers who are sufficiently trained to deliver a high-quality music education.
- The CPD required to ensure that a high-quality music education is delivered through effective practice.
- The facilities and equipment needed to create the conditions for high-quality music education.
- The resources required to make music education accessible to pupils of all backgrounds. For example, ensuring that the school/trust policy for charging for additional instrumental and vocal lessons does not restrict opportunity.

These resources do not need to be exclusively funded by the school or trust. The local Music Education Hub is there to help your school or trust establish partnerships that can provide access to resources and quality teaching support.



## Utilise partnerships

Music provision can be augmented through partnerships, for example with local music services and other music education organisations.

It is also worth reflecting on how relationships with local authorities, local employers, agencies, charities and faith groups, can help to drive the vision for music education. For example, through sponsorship and support for instrumental tuition, choirs and charitable performances.

## Music Education Hubs

Music Education Hubs are groups of organisations such as local authorities, schools, other hubs, arts organisations, community or voluntary organisations, working together to create joined-up music education provision, respond to local need and fulfil the objectives of the Hub as set out in the national plan for music education.

There is a network of Music Education Hubs which exist to support music education at a local level through partnership working. [Find details of your local Music Education Hub here](#). Whilst it is the responsibility of all schools to deliver music, Hubs should support and empower them to excel. Hubs are encouraged to work actively with schools to provide broad and high-quality opportunities for all pupils. This may include offering a range of services, including classroom instrumental lessons, CPD for specialist and non-specialist teachers, and advice which will enable schools to initiate discussions and develop their School Music Development Plans.

## Embedding creativity across the curriculum

Artsmark is the only creative quality standard for schools and education settings, accredited by Arts Council England. Artsmark helps schools develop and celebrate their commitment to arts and cultural education.

Embed creativity across your whole curriculum and address school improvement priorities using Artsmark's flexible framework.

Find out more at [artsmark.org.uk](https://artsmark.org.uk)



Photo © James Alden

# How to monitor progress, outcomes and impact

**There is a range of data and information which allows those governing to build a comprehensive picture of how their School Music Development Plan is being implemented. Some of this information will be quantitative and some will extend beyond what is easily quantifiable, such as increased confidence and enjoyment.**

We recommend that governing boards combine the following sources when monitoring progress, outcomes and impact.

Source	Description
<b>Headteacher and senior leader reports</b>	<p>An overview of progress, covering all or some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• curriculum time allocated to music education</li><li>• staffing and resource</li><li>• how music is assessed</li><li>• outcomes for all pupils and groups of pupils against locally and nationally developed standards such as graded exams</li><li>• case studies demonstrating the impact of music education on individuals or groups of pupils</li><li>• regular analysis of data including take up and retention rates of instrumental learning and participation in music clubs and activities</li></ul>
<b>Governance monitoring visits</b>	<p>An opportunity for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• discussion with subject leaders and key staff</li><li>• experiencing the music curriculum being delivered to pupils e.g. singing, composing, listening, performing</li><li>• experiencing the environment in which music takes place e.g. music rooms, performance spaces</li></ul>
<b>Attending performances</b>	<p>An opportunity to see first-hand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how pupils from all backgrounds and of all abilities are encouraged to perform in assemblies and other school events such as a termly school performance</li><li>• how performance consolidates the musical learning and enrichment of pupils</li></ul>

### **Pupil and parent voice**

Talking to pupils, parents and using surveys to:

- gain a perspective of how pupils and parents feel about the music education the school or trust provides
- find out the extent to which pupils interests are catered for and challenged by the music curriculum
- understand if pupils' existing musical knowledge and skills are being built upon
- understand barriers to participation e.g. economic, social and cultural
- explore how barriers can be overcome

### **Presentations from subject leads**

An opportunity to focus on specific aspects, such as:

- collaboration with the local Music Education Hub
- developments in practice
- staff CPD priorities and outcomes
- School (and where appropriate Trust) Music Development Plans
- funding opportunities

## **Questions that governing boards can ask about music education:**

The following are examples of the type of questions that governors and trustees might ask about music education in their school or trust. Consider how you might use these examples to construct your own questions, specific to your context and the issue you are discussing.

- Who is responsible for writing and updating the School Music Development Plan? Is it effective?
- What are the relative strengths of our music curriculum: what are the areas we need to develop?
- How does our music curriculum cater for the needs of pupils from all backgrounds and of all abilities?
- How is music present both within and beyond our curriculum?
- How are we utilising guidance such as the model music curriculum, national plan and other guidance provided by music subject associations?
- What opportunities do our pupils have to share the music they have learned or created with their peers, families, or carers?
- How do we make sure that our pupils are connected to opportunities to progress their music interests and talents outside of school?
- Are teachers and staff given the professional support and CPD needed to deliver a high-quality music education?
- Do we engage parents and the wider community in our music curriculum, through performance, for example?
- What is our relationship with the local Music Education Hub – does it extend beyond providing us with visiting music teachers?

# Further information and support

## National Governance Association

- [Cultural education guides for governing boards](#) including dance, art and drama
- Learning Link [Arts and cultural education e-learning module](#)
- [Being Strategic](#): a robust annual cycle for creating, monitoring and reviewing strategy for governing boards and school leaders

## Music Education

- [Model Music Curriculum](#)
- [The power of music to change lives: a national plan for music education](#)
- [Music Education Hub](#) area on the Arts Council England website
- [Music Hub Investment](#) programme area on the Arts Council England website

## Music Mark

- Music Mark's [resource page](#)
- [10 Things Schools Should Know About Learning Music](#)
- [CanDoMusic](#), a resource and campaign to support music in schools
- Discover the [Incorporated Society of Musicians \(ISM\)](#), another subject association for music
- Find out about the [Music Teachers' Association](#)

## Teaching for creativity

- [Creativity Exchange](#) is an online space for school leaders, teachers, scientists, researchers and parents to share ideas about how to teach for creativity and develop young people's creativity in and beyond school.



Photo © National Youth Jazz Orchestra - Academy Rich Mix gig / Daniel Devlin





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