

Report summary

Music in schools: sound partnerships

A short survey of music education partnership work in schools 2011–12

This report highlights the benefits and pitfalls of partnership working in music education. It is based on visits to 59 schools by specialist music inspectors between September 2011 and July 2012, together with six further visits to observe good practice.

Part A of the report identifies five key actions taken by schools that had developed effective music education partnerships. Part B draws on the good practice seen, by linking to eight good practice case studies on Ofsted's website. These highlight how the best partnerships have improved provision for music in primary and secondary schools and a special school.

The report includes guidance to help schools improve their partnership working in music education, including with the new music education hubs.

The report was commissioned by the Department for Education in November 2011 as part of the National Plan for Music Education.

Key findings

Most of the schools surveyed were using partnerships to offer a greater range of activities than the school could provide by itself. However, in too many cases these were not managed well enough by the schools. Too rarely did the partnerships result in significantly improved long-term outcomes for all groups of pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged. Only 10 of the 59 schools inspected were making good or outstanding use of partnerships to improve musical outcomes for all groups of pupils and achieve good value for money. The survey found that buying in additional instrumental and vocal teaching – the most frequent form of partnership work – is not a guarantee of sustained good-quality outcomes, however expert or reputable the partner organisation.

Inspectors identified five key actions taken by schools where music education partnerships were most successful.

- Significant, sustained levels of funding were matched by rigorous monitoring and evaluation. This enabled leaders and managers to take swift action where funding was not being used well. As a result, in these schools staff ensured that the music education partnerships provided good value for money.
- Schools ensured that all groups of pupils benefited from the partnership, particularly the most disadvantaged. Careful monitoring and tailoring of provision ensured that all groups achieved well.
- Provision was linked to individual pupils' needs, interests and abilities. Careful analysis of pupils' prior achievement and experiences – including in their feeder primary schools – secured high levels of engagement and good progress. As a result, projects complemented, augmented and supported other music work in the school.
- Partnerships were used to develop both school teachers' and visiting musicians' practice. Clear strategies were in place so they could learn from each other. This led to sustained, high-quality musical experiences for pupils during and beyond the partnership.
- Headteachers and senior leaders used the partnership to strengthen their own knowledge and understanding of the quality of music education. This enabled them to monitor and evaluate provision with increased rigour and resulted in improved outcomes for pupils, better quality of professional dialogue with music teachers, and better value for money.

In contrast, inspectors identified five pitfalls in schools where music education partnerships had limited effect.

- The effectiveness of the partnership was not monitored sufficiently well by school leaders. In these schools, the partnership was more likely to represent poor value for money because not enough pupils made good progress over a sustained period.
- Disadvantaged pupils such as those in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs did not benefit from the partnerships as much as others. This often resulted in widening gaps in participation and achievement between different groups of pupils, including at GCSE.
- Partnership programmes were not sufficiently aligned with the school's day-to-day musical provision or well enough informed by analysis of pupils' starting points and capabilities. In these schools, the value of the partnership was diminished because provision did not capitalise and build on pupils' prior learning.
- School staff and visiting musicians did not work together. This represented missed opportunities to develop the teaching skills of all adults involved in the partnership.

Senior leaders were not well enough informed to ask critical questions or make critical judgements about the quality of music education; too often, too much was

based on trust rather than rigorous challenge. Consequently, weaknesses in provision were not addressed.

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