# How teachers can help children enjoy singing

## By Jane Wheeler

22 July 2014

When children begin to find their voices in the safe comfort of singing with others; and when they learn about the strength of good singing posture, and how to project and be clear about the words of the songs they are singing, their confidence increases. This confidence boost is clear to any teacher who has had the opportunity to lead singing with the same group for a time.

Any opportunity to follow up with a well-planned performance allows children to receive tangible acknowledgement and encouragement, as they see the audience enjoy their singing. Their increased confidence naturally spills across into the rest of their lives in school, helping them shine all the more. When you sing in a group, you learn the pleasure of working together as a team to create something polished and special to share with friends and family. This is of great personal benefit, not just for young people, but adult singers too.

**How can you get students to overcome their shyness?**

Sometimes children feel too shy to put their hands up, or speak out in general class time. Singing as part of the whole class, or in an assembly, creates a safe space for such children to find their voice and learn to share it out loud in public. I have seen children who are shy to speak out, or who struggle with words for whatever reason, express themselves loudly and confidently when they have a song to sing. On many occasions, these children will sing a solo part too! This gives their peers an opportunity to see them in a different light.

**Isn’t it hard to get students to sing in a language that isn’t their own?**

Singing in a different language does several things. First, it helps everyone discover the challenges and joys of [**learning a few phrases in a new language**](http://blog.britishcouncil.org/2013/10/02/why-everyone-should-learn-1000-words-in-another-language/). This can help foster respect between children who have different languages as their first language. Second, singing in different languages puts everyone on the same level, except perhaps for the one or two children who happen to speak that language.

This brings me to a third benefit. In this country, for children who don't speak English as a first language, who may spend much of the time ‘hiding’ who they are, trying to catch up with ’native’ speakers, it is hugely empowering to become the person who can help with pronunciation and translation. Pride in oneself and one’s own language and culture is given space to breathe on such occasions. This recognition and acknowledgement can be the very springboard that a child needs to gain the confidence to succeed across the curriculum.

**Are there countries where singing is more woven into everyday life than it is in the UK?**

Cultural differences in singing across the world seem to be continually on the move. On the whole, in my experience, societies in more rural, traditional settings tend to sing more frequently and readily for everyday reasons, just to connect, pass the time, lift spirits, celebrate, commiserate and so on. In many rural parts of the world, people sing indoors, outdoors, while cooking and working in the fields; and children play singing games outside much of the day, in and out of school.

However, where formal, modern education is taking hold, often singing gets pushed into the background, as I have experienced in the Eastern Cape of South Africa and Kenya. It is seen as a traditional activity that will not help one progress academically in a modern world.

In the UK, our own tradition of singing has changed enormously over the last century. We used to have a culture of singing for entertainment at social gatherings and in church. Until recently, we had lost much of our traditional singing activity to formal and professional settings, where there's more of a divide between professionals who ‘can’ sing, and the audience, who ‘can’t'. Singing in church and football chants are perhaps two examples where 'inclusive' massed singing has continued to be welcomed.

However, recent research-based findings have shown that singing is invaluable for building personal and musical skills and confidence. This has led to the introduction of such programmes as [**Sing UpOpens in a new tab or window.**](http://www.singup.org/), and an increase in mass singing programmes for schools across the UK. I believe strongly that sharing songs and connecting singing leaders internationally can build understanding and respect between nations, provided it’s handled with absolute honesty and respect from the outset.

**Why singing? Why not another kind of musical performance?**

Singing lets us ‘become’ the music. It is not the violin that plays when a violinist plays, it is not the guitar, or drum kit. It is the musician. Their sense of time, rhythm, pitch, structure, dynamic contrast and overall expression can all be learned through singing, body beats and movement. And we all have a voice. It’s free!

I invite you to try an experiment: put a violin for the first time in the hands of a child who has been singing a wide range of songs for two years or more on a regular basis, and another in the hands of a child who has not. Then see which child makes the fastest progress towards mastering the violin. How satisfying for that child to only be grappling with the dexterity and co-ordination of playing the instrument, rather than both this and all the other aspects of music skill and understanding required to make a musical and rewarding sound.

**How can teachers incorporate the benefits of group singing in the classroom?**

There will always be different levels of skill between children in an everyday classroom. Some will have sung at home to nursery rhyme recordings since before they could walk. Others may have had quieter, more contemplative backgrounds.

On occasions where teachers feel too daunted to sing with their children, they can still enable their class to sing by being authentic and honest about their own fear and inviting more confident young singers to help them. It's OK for teachers to acknowledge that they didn’t have a chance to develop confidence in singing, and want to ensure this doesn’t happen to any of their pupils. I recall the fact that my mother never learned to swim. She was honest about this, and always told us she didn’t want us to be fearful of the water. I could swim well before I could even walk. Children also are much less likely to judge a teacher for the quality of their singing. They are more likely to judge them for not providing the opportunity to sing!

Children are our best teachers. They are generous in sharing what they know, and love to be able to teach their teachers. We can all grow and learn through new songs and new languages. As long as we open ourselves and our hearts to authentic and respectful connection, we can build new singing communities and learn new ways of expressing ourselves through music.

What do we think of music education?

To this day, music education is not a mandatory part of the educational curricula in schools around the world. However, it differs from one country to another; it has a more active role in the European education system where children can 'choose' to learn and play music if they wish to. Music professionals and teachers around the world are trying to justify the necessity of including music lessons in school programs, like other mandatory fields such as geography, mathematics, literature and history. This might seem merely in favour of musicians. But even if it is, it is based on scientific studies and educational demands. Considering the advent of technology in recent years, there has been a massive breakthrough in studying and analysing human's brain and the mechanisms of limbic and cognitive systems. Psychological studies with the help of recent discoveries have investigated and demonstrated the importance and benefits of music and music learning in cognitive and emotional development.

Learning and playing music is not a one-dimensional activity for the body and mind and it does not solely happen in auditory organs and brain parts. Music is a multi-dimensional process for body and mind in all the aspects of listening, learning and playing. During musical processes different parts of the brain and body are involved,  such as limbic, sensory and emotional parts and organs. Engaged in learning and playing music, the visual and limbic organs and different brain parts work alongside the auditory organs.

The subject of music-related processes of body and mind goes further from the present discussion. This article explores people’s and parents’ expectations and views on their children’s music education. What happens if music is included as a mandatory lesson in schools, what should parents expect as the result of this type of education?

In recent years in Iran, extra-curricular music lessons have been greeted and welcomed by upper and middle class parents. Parents consider music learning as a valued activity, they seek teachers and music institutes and spend on musical instruments and consequently expect to 'see' results and achievements. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with parents expecting results from their investment on their children. The unrealistic view is to expect all children to become 'professional musicians' after attending music lessons: to be able to perform and play popular and well-known songs. This expectation often is far from reality.

To clarify the problem here, I have to bring some examples: children learn mathematics at school for years, is it the case that all parents expect their children to become mathematicians? Or a historian as a result of studying history, or an author as a result of studying literature? The answer is probably no. Learning mathematics, history, literature, arts and other fields has a very different objective: to achieve the necessary abilities and knowledge (or at least the important ones) to survive and communicate and live in the world. And to be informed about one's own and others' culture. Even in the long run, children will choose different jobs and professions, sometimes irrelevant to their childhood talents and education. It is definitely not the case that every talented child in mathematics 'will' become a mathematician!

It is the case about music as well; the goal of music lessons (once a week for an hour!) is 'not' to become a professional musician. Music education in the first place should be considered as an educational tool for improving motor and mental skills and nurturing children with culture and arts. To perform music cannot be the ultimate goal for learning music, and children with different backgrounds, abilities and potentials should not be expected to fulfil the unrealistic goal of becoming a perfect performer. Finally music as an ancient and evolutionary phenomenon cannot be reduced to just another form of performing art.

Nowadays in Iran parents evaluate the quality of their children’s music lessons and learning based on their musical performances. This is when this quality can be evaluated with ways other than mere performance abilities. The improvement of children's mental and motor skills, their ability to sync their movements in playing, being focused, attentive and accurate, as well as memory improvement could be some of the results which parents can look for. These musical skills are somehow similar to the skills one can obtain from sports—synced mental and physical actions and reactions. In music learning and playing children learn to sync their visual and auditory processes consciously and attentively. They learn harmony and synchronisation and anticipation of the resulted sound. Last but not least, music is a human and cultural phenomenon, which transcends culture and promotes cooperation. During the process of learning and playing music, children learn to cooperate, empathise and synchronise themselves with others. They learn to express their feelings through a non-verbal medium and to understand other feelings in the same way. Music can be effective in children's creativity as well as narrative abilities. It might be better if we—especially parents—reconsider the music learning's 'how' and 'why'. We should realise that music is far more than playing an instrument, it is about evolution and survival, and it is an effective tool to improve and develop our children’s perception and cognition, and to teach them tolerance and empathy.

Playing classical music such as Beethoven and Mozart to young children boosts their concentration and self-discipline, a new study suggests.

Youngsters also improve their general listening and social skills by being exposed to repertoires from composers including Ravel, Shostakovich and Mendelssohn.

In addition, they are likely to appreciate a wider range of music in later years, according to a study from the Institute of Education, (IoE), University of London.

# Playing classical music to your child can improve their listening skills later on in life

* Playing classical music to young children boosts their concentration and self-discipline as well as their social skills
* The Institute of Education, University of London examined a scheme that introduces children to classical music in assemblies and classes
* Teachers said it increases pupils' listening power, musical knowledge, aspirations and in some cases improved their English.

Susan Hallam, professor of education and music psychology at the IoE, evaluated a programme developed by Apollo Music Projects which introduces children aged seven to ten to classical music and its composers. The scheme involves a whole school assembly followed by six lessons at class level, with children experiencing different instruments and musical concepts and a formal concert.

Musicians explain what children should listen for and launch question and answer sessions. As the sessions progress, the listening tasks become more complex.

The programme has been delivered to 4,500 children in 26 primary schools in Hackney and Tower Hamlets, East London, as well as to over 22,000 youngsters in assemblies and concerts.

26 members of staff and 252 children in nine primary schools were questioned about the programme.

Teachers rated developing the ability to listen as the main benefit, followed by musical knowledge and development and the boosting of concentration levels, aspirations, self-discipline and personal and social skills. Some staff also pointed to improvements to English.

One teacher said: ‘The children really enjoy the sessions. I think that listening to music in such an intimate environment (ie the classroom) engages them and allows them to develop their listening skills.’ Another said that pupils’ communication skills improved.

In a report on the scheme, Professor Hallam said children developed ‘enhanced listening skills and the development of other skills necessary for careful listening to take place including concentration and self-discipline’.

She added: ‘For some of the children the programme was inspirational. The children’s positive reactions suggest that they were ‘open-eared’ and had not developed prejudices against classical music.

‘We know that preferences for music are affected by the extent to which individuals are exposed to them, the greater the exposure the greater the liking.

‘Opportunities to listen extensively to classical music in the early years of primary school are therefore likely to lead to children appreciating a wider range of music than might otherwise be the case.’

[Michele Hanson](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/michelehanson)

The US is making music a core subject in schools, while in Britain the system is in tatters. Instead of a divisive, stultifying curriculum, our government should encourage collaboration, creativity and responsibility with orchestras

It isn’t always clever to follow the example of Americans. They love guns, their steaks are too big, they fought against free healthcare, they’re more or less obliged to say their prayers, and [a frightening number of them admire Donald Trump](http://www.vox.com/2015/12/11/9894072/donald-trump-muslims-poll). But when it comes to music in schools, they are streets ahead of us. Because their Senate has just approved the [Every Student Succeeds Act](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/us/politics/senate-approves-overhaul-of-no-child-left-behind-law.html?emc=edit_cn_20151210&nl=first-draft&nlid=56430841&te=1&_r=1), which will reduce over-testing, return power to local districts, and make music a core subject. Yes, music!

No such luck here, with endless testing, teachers leaving in droves and the[National Plan for Music Education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-music-a-national-plan-for-music-education) [in tatters](http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2015/oct/01/music-education-how-young-people-learn-exams). It promised that every child would learn a musical instrument. Fat chance. Try taking a child out of class for 15 minutes nowadays for an individual music lesson, as we used to in the 70s. They would miss some swotting for a test or wreck a target – and, anyway, what would the child play and how would they learn? What school could pay for instruments and one-to-one tuition? How could they ever build up an orchestra, [for poor as well as rich](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/may/17/cuts-to-music-education-funding-classical)?

Many do, because excellent teachers work themselves almost to breakdown, slaves to the dreaded [music hubs](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-24942737), [often on zero-hours contracts](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jul/28/music-teachers-zero-hours-contract-hubs-funding-cuts-pupils-musical-instrument-tuition), because they know music is worth it. If you want to encourage co-operation, collaboration, socialising, civility, creativity, responsibility and self-confidence, don’t bother with citizenship classes. Just have an orchestra. Or any musical group. They’ll do all of that and more. And playing in one makes you feel good. I know because I do it. It’s a lifesaver. But what’s the point of telling [Nicky “head prefect” Morgan](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/nicky-morgan) that? I may as well tell my tortoise. And, anyway, she is working for a rubbish ministry.

“Could you get a worse system?” says Fielding, 30 years a slave at the chalkface. “Did they sit down and work out as divisive, stultifying, exam-driven and competitive a curriculum as they possibly could?” Yes.

Every child, from any background, should have a chance to play music if they so wish. And they all can. It’s a myth that music is difficult; a useful myth, for our tightwad, snobby government. Copy music, not war.

# Why is music education in Britain so poor?

Music is taught at the majority of schools in the country, yet we still think that learning about the social and cultural context of music is the same as playing an instrument.

Oh. cool, you’re studying music! What instrument do you play?”

If you ever meet a music student who says they have not had a conversation that starts exactly like this, they are almost certainly lying to you. It’s a sensible question to ask on the surface, but it also betrays the completely strange way we think about music education.

Any number of (very relevant) Guardian articles bemoaning the sorry state of provisions for music education in the UK will, nine times out of ten, conflate music education with instrumental tutelage. Even Ofsted’s [2011 report on music education](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413347/Music_in_schools_wider_still%20_and_wider.pdf) devotes large chunks of attention to extra-curricular music and the importance of performance.

The reality is that being a “Grade 8” cellist isn’t the same as studying and thinking about music. Performance should not be the only way in. But that’s increasingly the way of things, thanks to the changing education system. Our music education does nothing to encourage children to build their social interest in music at an educational level.

There’s no doubt that exposing children to practical music is a very important part of getting them involved in musical culture. This is especially true for those from lower-income backgrounds, as practical music tuition is typically very expensive. As an example, [Sistema Scotland](http://makeabignoise.org.uk/), an offshoot of the famous Sistema project in Venezuela, has had remarkable success with young people from disadvantaged areas in Raploch, Torry and Govanhill. According to [a survey of parents](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/03/16082812/5) carried out by the Scottish government, 100 per cent thought their children were more confident and 93 per cent thought their children were happier as a result of taking part in the scheme.

While statistics like those from Sistema Scotland may make us feel warm and fuzzy, the reality of the situation is that such funding-reliant schemes will not be able to benefit all children. To treat these projects, and instrumental performance more generally, as the only way to get children interested in music, is a simplistic approach with a very problematic outcome.

Anyone tuning in to Radio 4’s Desert Island Discs will hear how influential early interaction with music can be on later life. In much the same vein as slightly ropey philosophy and psychology, many young people enjoy “coffee shop musicology”, with music of all forms becoming a big part of their social and personal identity. So why on earth aren’t more students interested in engaging with music academically? It’s because of how and what we teach, of course.

Ofsted’s report observed 300 music lessons: only 30 were deemed above average. Just 7 per cent of schools in a survey of 90 qualified as “outstanding” providers of effective music education, while 61 per cent were deemed satisfactory or inadequate. This figure stands in sharp contrast to the 66 per cent of schools considered to be providing an overall effective education. Key Stage 3 (years 7 to 9) were described as the weakest: “A direct consequence of weak teaching and poor curriculum provision.”

From all this, is it any wonder that music at GCSE and particularly A level are the most under-subscribed of all elective courses by some margin, with only 1 per cent of A-level entries in England in music or music technology?

Absence breeds apathy, which in turn breeds mockery. Academic music is seen by many students, and perhaps more dangerously by staff, to be a soft option. Often it is only those pupils who have been exposed to culture from a young age and who are proficient performers who are encouraged to take up music at GCSE and A-level.  The divide between those who are deemed appropriate for academic music is therefore set up almost as soon as students join the school.

This situation is not helped by the education secretary, Nicky Morgan, supporting the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). This scheme emphasises the traditionally “academic” subjects in schools, leaving music, art and the like behind. A drive towards “academic capitalism” and an obsession with economic impact has seen an “aggressive shift in ideology that seeks to determine the worth of these disciplines exclusively in terms of their utility value”, according to Emily MacGregor’s 2012 publication [*Whoever Pays the Piper Calls the Tune…*](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/criq.12020/abstract). The issue is not so much that English, maths and the sciences shouldn’t be emphasised, but more that “soft” subjects should be brought up to the same level and seen in the same academic light.

There is a reason, of course, why a lot of students think of music in this light: because the way it is being taught now is soft in a lot of cases. World famous violinist and outspoken supporter of music education Nicola Benedetti [said in May this year](http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/music/scots-violinist-wants-kids-to-swap-mario-for-mozart-1-3768462) that “needing the child’s approval for what they do in school is just such an alien concept when you’re talking about maths, science, history or English...but suddenly, when you bring music into the mix, it’s: ‘Oh no, we can’t show them anything that they don’t instantly love because that would be like forcing children into something that they don’t want to do.’” Benedetti’s complaints are indicative of a wider belief that, because music is a way of accessing profound emotional experience, it represents nothing more than mushy culture and shouldn’t be treated with academic respect.

Both the EBacc and the idea that music must be studied by the instrumentally (read: financially) endowed mean that classical music and musicology are seen as the preserve of the rich and privately educated. Despite the fact that music is taught at the majority of schools in the country, admissions at leading universities from state schools are on a par with subjects like classics and theology; both subjects traditionally seen only at independent schools. Professor Dan Grimley of the University of Oxford comments:

“My fear is that cuts in government funding for education mean that fewer students will have the opportunity to study music, either at school or beyond, whether practically or as part of the wider humanities. Music was once part of the[Quadrivium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadrivium) – since when did we lose our sense of its centrality? Music surrounds us in every aspect of our daily life. We need to understand how and why it works in the way that it does.”

Despite all of this, funding for music education does seem, finally, to be getting a look in at the national level. In January of this year the government and Arts Council England kept to their 2014 promise that ringfenced money for music education hubs would rise £17m up to £75m for 2015-16. However, real change will come not just from increased funding, but from a thorough reappraisal of the syllabus itself.

The teleology of the secondary education system, you would think, would be a drive towards knowledge and specialisation, with a projected goal of further education or apprenticeships. This is clearly the case with the cumulative learning processes associated with the sciences, languages, and, less consciously, the majority of the humanities. Music, however, is very different. A lot of lower school music is not at all reflective of the breadth of academic music, nor is it an apt preparation for study at a level above Key Stage 3. In turn, the GCSE and A-level syllabuses are poorly designed to prepare pupils for how music is studied at many universities.

Professor Elizabeth Eva Leach of the University of Oxford comments: “Personally I think students are better prepared by other A-levels that make them think and/or read (e.g. History, English Literature, Maths).” The fact that any A-level course can be deemed incapable of making students think or read is incredibly depressing. It would be insanely over-ambitious to expect any school syllabus to give a complete overview of the academic potential of a subject. But I don’t think it’s too much to ask that it show just a glimpse of the side to music that gets people talking about it in the first place: its place in history, in politics, in our everyday lives.

“Pure” music, it seems, is so much the focus of secondary music education, that any other approach must be ignored. Professor Dan Grimley says:

“A-level syllabuses are under tremendous strain from often competing demands, and there is only a certain amount they can be expected to cover, but I do spend a lot of my teaching time trying to encourage students to hear music in a wider cultural context – one informed by ideologies of race, power, ethnicity and gender, for example.”

In an increasingly complex world an approach like this should be encouraged and embraced much lower down the education system.

So, to go back to the start, as much as your friend may love playing the cello, I’m sure she has more interesting things to say about why she studies music. I catch myself asking the question too, but realistically it’s as odd, or should be, as asking an English student which part they play or a historian why they aren’t literally living in the Tudor court. The word “academic” shouldn’t have to be viewed as dry or uninspiring. That is only the case in a subject like music because, at the moment, the lines between “fun” performance and academic study are so clearly drawn, and yet so causally linked, hugely privileging those young people from families wealthy enough to afford instrumental tutelage.

Music education needn’t exclude those from lower-income backgrounds because of unaffordable instrumental tuition. Yes, we do need projects like Sistema Scotland to bring more young people from all backgrounds into performance, but they shouldn’t be used as an excuse or a reason to ignore studying music thoughtfully.

**NEA Publishes Arts in Early Childhood report**

## *A new study from the National Endowment for the Arts shows the value of arts education to young children's development*

**The**[**National Endowment for the Arts**](https://www.arts.gov/)**(NEA) – an independent federal agency created by the US Congress to fund and support the arts – has released a**[**report**](https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/arts-in-early-childhood-dec2015-rev.pdf)**revealing the importance of arts education in early childhood development.**

*The Arts in Early Childhood: Social and Emotional Benefits of Arts Participation, a Literature Review and Gap-Analysis (2000-2015)* may be a mouthful, but this surprisingly accessible review of 18 different studies reveals that the arts are crucial in the development of emotional regulation and social skills of young children.

The report is the product of the [NEA**'**s Interagency Task Force on Arts and Human Development](https://www.arts.gov/partnerships/task-force). The task force comprises of members from 19 different U.S. federal departments and organizations.

NEA Chairman Jane Chu summarised the question at the heart of their report:

'What do we know about the potential benefits of arts participation for our youngest Americans (from birth to eight years old)?'

Drawing on its extensive knowledge of education, psychology, arts and sciences, the task force created criteria which they use to select peer-reviewed studies from psychological and educational journals.

Chu states in the report's preface:

'While it was tempting to look at physiological or neurocognitive outcomes… researchers ultimately settled on social and emotional benefits of arts participation.'

The group found studies that examined how arts activities – focusing on visual art, music, dance and drama – affected the social skills and emotional regulation of children.

The studies compared social skills such as 'helping, sharing, caring, empathy' and the emotional regulation, or 'mood control and positive changes in affect and expression', of children participating in the arts to non-participating peers.

The improvement of social and emotional outcomes for infants, toddlers and children who took part in arts programs was near universal and substantially better than the outcomes of those who did not.

How does this translate? In terms of social skills, students who engaged with the arts had more positive feelings towards school and their peers and better regulated their emotions. For example, one particular study described how children who were asked to recall a distressing or upsetting memory recovered more rapidly from feelings of sadness if they were instructed to draw a house to distract themselves.

Linda Smith, the Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development said that this report makes it clear that:

'It is critical that children in early childhood programs – whether Head Start, child care, or pre-kindergarten – receive the opportunity to learn through art.'

Another function of the report was to examine research gaps in art-related studies. For example, when examining how gender factored into results, the report simply states:

'Gender has been shown to be an important characteristic in child development research…Yet many of the studies in this review did not find gender differences in the link between the arts and social-emotional outcomes.'

Although the research 'suggests positive social-emotional outcomes for special populations such as toddlers from families with low socioeconomic status, and children with autism or Asperger’s syndrome', the report does not take into account how participation in early education arts activities effects children with complex learning disorders over the long-term.

Though there is no clear path to implementation, the report encourages researchers to think outside the box and develop new strategies to fill the gaps to further arts research.

# Music education in England gets funding boost, back up to £75m for 2015/16

[**Alex Stevens**](http://www.classicalmusicmagazine.org/author/rhinegoldstevensa/)**- 22 July 2014**

The Department for Education has announced that central funding for the network of 123 music education hubs in England will be more than £75m in 2015/16, described as ‘an £18m funding boost’ by education minister Nick Gibb.

The £75m figure represents a year-on-year increase of nearly 30%, and is a cash terms return to the settlement in 2012-13, the year in which the music hubs system was first implemented. Funding subsequently decreased to £63m in 2013/14 and £58m in 2014/15.

Funding levels after 2016 will be dependent on the result of the 2015 general election.

A DfE statement said the funding ‘will mean thousands more disadvantaged pupils will have access to music lessons and enable hubs to purchase tens of thousands more instruments’.

Gibb said of the move: ‘Music hubs have made a very encouraging start – and now we want to build on that. That is why we are increasing funding by £18million. No children should miss out on the inspiration and excitement that music can bring to their lives.’

Darren Henley, the managing director of Classic FM whose review of England’s music education led to the National Plan for Music Education and the recommendation of the hubs model, said the announcement was ‘great news’.

‘I’m delighted the Department of Education is now spending even more in this vital area. Music hubs have already helped hundreds of thousands of children try a musical instrument, sing or join a choir or orchestra.’

The Incorporated Society of Musicians established the Protect Music Education Campaign earlier this year, initially in response to a DfE consultation document position on local authority funding of music education. It said the announcement was ‘a substantial victory for the Protect Music Education campaign’.

‘The campaign has been a united voice for music education, defending key funding ever since the Government launched a damaging consultation in March 2014 suggesting local authorities stop funding their music services.’

The ISM’s chief executive, Deborah Annetts, said: ‘This is wonderful news for all children and young people. This funding is a critical component in ensuring that access to music education is there and we welcome this decision by the new secretary of state.

‘We now hope that all political parties will commit to music education funding until 2020 and that the Department for Education remove the damaging guidance to local authorities when they respond to the recent consultation.’

England’s music education sector had been waiting for details of funding after next March for some time, with the awarding body, Arts Council England, having committed to funding the same hubs as are currently in place rather than run a reallocation process.

An ACE spokesperson told CM in June that ‘given the time scales involved we do not intend to run a bidding process for 2015-16. Existing arrangements will remain in place until the end of the financial year 2015-16, letting hubs focus on improving quality and delivery.’

A DfE statement said: ‘A key objective of music hubs is to give every 5- to 18-year-old the chance to learn to play an instrument as part of whole class tuition for at least a term.

‘Many hubs are also subsidising instrument hire to those on low incomes so nobody’s background is a barrier to music. For example, in Hull instrument hire is for all who are having music lessons at their Music Hub. In Brighton instruments can be hired for £37 a term but families on low incomes can hire an instrument for free.’

# ABRSM launches Classical 100 online resource for primary schools

[**Femke Colborne**](http://www.classicalmusicmagazine.org/author/femke-colborne/)**- 2 November 2015**

The [Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music](http://gb.abrsm.org/en/home) (ABRSM) has launched a new online resource to help teachers introduce primary school children to classical music.

[Classical 100](http://gb.abrsm.org/en/classical-100) – which has been created in partnership with [Classic FM](http://www.classicfm.com/) and [Decca](http://www.deccaclassics.com/gb/), with the backing of the Department for Education – will give teachers access to 100 specially selected pieces of music.

The resource includes recordings taken from Decca’s catalogue as well as information about the composers and the stories behind the music.

The pieces can be sorted according to a variety of criteria, such as mood, genre, country of origin or when they were written.

ABRSM is also planning to draw on its network of primary school experts to create a range of downloadable materials over the course of the next academic year.

The 100 pieces embrace a range of styles, from Hildgarde of Bingen to Graham Fitkin via JS Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Tchaikovsky and more.

The music can be used to meet the National Curriculum’s KS1 criteria of ‘listening to, reviewing and evaluating music across a range of historical periods, genres, styles and traditions, including the works of the great composers and musicians’.

Michael Elliott, chief executive of ABRSM, said: ‘Classical 100 is a listening resource, an approachable starting point that brings together an amazing collection of music in a format that is designed to be helpful.

‘Each and every piece included in the resource is designed to awaken the listener’s curiosity, encouraging further exploration of the rich and varied world of music.’

Schools minister Nick Gibb said: ‘At the heart of this government’s commitment to extending opportunity is a belief that all pupils should have access to an excellent, well-rounded education – music is a key part of this.

‘Music shouldn’t be the preserve of a privileged few. All children should have the opportunity to hear and appreciate the work of great composers and musicians.

‘These imaginative new resources, developed by experts in music education, will help schools introduce a new generation to the wonders of classical music.’

Schools can gain full, unlimited free access to Classical 100 by registering at [www.abrsm.org/classical100](http://gb.abrsm.org/en/classical-100).

# Big Noise orchestras praised by researchers

[**Katy Wright**](http://www.classicalmusicmagazine.org/author/katywright/)**- 19 May 2015**

The initial findings of a long-term study show that Sistema Scotland’s Big Noise orchestras are having a positive effect on the local community.

Researchers from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) concluded that the projects had the potential to ‘significantly enhance participants’ lives prospects, health and wellbeing’ and strongly endorsed the Big Noise projects.

The researchers have been examining the economic, education and community impacts of the Big Noise schemes since September 2013. They found that children taking part in the scheme had higher school attendance, improved handwriting and greater confidence.

The orchestras, based in Stirling’s Raploch and Glasgow’s Govanhill, were established in 2008 and 2013 respectively. Both schemes have attracted widespread acclaim, with Stirling’s programme praised for ‘exceptional achievement’ by government inspectors earlier this year.

Sistema Scotland chairman Richard Holloway said yesterday: ‘Today’s findings by independent experts show very conclusively that these orchestras can make a better Scotland – a fairer and happier country with the potential of its children fully realised. The heroes in all of this, though, are the children in Raploch and Govanhill who are showing us all the way.’

GCPH director Carol Tannahill said: ‘This evaluation strongly endorses Sistema Scotland’s approaches to delivery: the short and medium-term impacts of the programme evidenced at this stage of the evaluation are very encouraging. What is also certain is that Sistema Scotland’s Big Noise programme has the potential to significantly enhance participants’ lives, prospects, health and wellbeing through a variety of identified pathways in the long-term.’

Based on Venezuela’s El Sistema, Sistema Scotland draws children from disadvantaged backgrounds and immerses them in music. Approximately 1,300 Scottish children currently participate in the intensive orchestral programmes, which involve regular coaching, performances and trips to concerts.

The study will continue in order to observe the long-term effects of the Big Noise projects.

# RPS launches Musical Routes report

[**Classical Music staff**](http://www.classicalmusicmagazine.org/author/classical-music-staff/)**- 25 September 2015**

A report into the provision of musical education for school-aged children and young people has concluded that the national strategy for music education is not being evenly delivered.

[‘Musical Routes, A Landscape for Music Education’](http://royalphilharmonicsociety.org.uk/images/uploads/MUSICAL_ROUTES_report_-_Sarah_Derbyshire,_Royal_Philharmonic_Society.pdf), commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society and authored by Sarah Derbyshire, examines the provision of music education for school-aged children and young people in England, evaluating the equality of access, the nature of opportunities offered, and how well these opportunities help individuals to fulfil their musical potential.

The report identifies the lack of an infrastructure ‘that knits together the many and various strands for delivery’. The current structure for music education is acknowledged as complex and disjointed, with insufficient communication of opportunities both between organisations and to children, families, carers and teachers.

The report recognises a bias towards learning via the formal exam structure, and a tendency to downplay those who choose alternative routes to learn. It concludes that the sector has yet to embrace fully the richness and diversity of musical forms and the ways in which young people engage with music, and recommends that mechanisms are put into place to encourage Music Education Hubs to extend their horizons beyond local areas and embedded practices.

Other recommendations include ensuring that children are aware of the pathways open to them, encouraging an entrepreneurial approach to developing teaching models, and ensuring that a national statement of music education gives equal weight to different pathways, with each striving for musical excellence.

To implement these recommendations, the report suggests implementing a network of national musical mentors and champions to widen diversity in music, creating a national online music education map and resource centre to improve communication, and launching a national celebration of young people’s many and varied musical achievements.

It also recommends instituting six building blocks for musical progression:

1. Singing
2. Reading music
3. Access to instrumental tuition – formal and informal – with feedback on progress
4. Introduction of relevant digital technology
5. Attending live performance
6. Creative involvement – composition, improvisation, performance of their own work

Speaking at the launch of the report at Wigmore Hall on 25 September, RPS chief executive Rosemary Johnson suggested that we don’t celebrate variety enough and cautioned that the aim was ‘evolution, not revolution’. ‘There’s so much extraordinary work in the music sector, yet so many are still missing out’.

Presenting her findings, Sarah Derbyshire highlighted regression, diversity and workforce as concerns, but also recognised that there was ‘much to celebrate’ since the introduction of a national plan. She said: ‘Let us try making the musician the starting point of what we do.’

Dame Evelyn Glennie, who was presented with her Royal Philharmonic Society honorary membership at the event, said: ‘It is important that the music profession takes careful note of areas of difficulty highlighted in the report, and comes together to find a way forward. We need to inspire, to create, to engage and to empower every child with an interest in music to fulfill his or her potential.’

# Would Chinese-style education work on British kids?

**The Chinese education system - with its long school days and tough discipline - tops global league tables. But how did British pupils cope when five Chinese teachers took over part of their Hampshire school?**

For the BBC documentary Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Chinese School, an experiment was carried out at the Bohunt School in Liphook. Fifty children in year nine had to live under a completely different regime - one run by Chinese teachers.

For four weeks, they wore a special uniform and started the school day at 07:00. Once a week there was a pledge to the flag. Lessons were focused on note-taking and repetition. Group exercise was undertaken. The pupils had to clean their own classrooms. There were two meal breaks in a 12-hour day.

## Neil Strowger, headteacher, Bohunt School

In Shanghai last year, I had seen the incredible commitment of the students, enormous class sizes and immaculate behaviour. I had also witnessed PE lessons where the students stood in groups chatting, as PE was considered neither important nor a respite from the interminable monotony of the Chinese classroom.

In early spring, parts of my school were taken over. The Chinese flag was flying proudly over the sports field.

I had met the Chinese teachers at dinner shortly before the project began and was impressed by their determination.

But as early as the second day reports were coming in that the pupils were behaving badly - disengaged with the lessons, chatting and not listening to their teachers.

Chinese teaching methods were on a collision course with teenage British culture and values. Our pupils are used to being able to ask questions of the teacher - they expect their views to be considered with respect.

Furthermore, British pupils expect to have variety in their learning. They are not used to being incarcerated in a large group and in the same classroom studying a very narrow curriculum.

As the weeks passed, thanks both to the support of Bohunt's pastoral staff and a slight shift towards a teaching approach more recognisable to our pupils, behaviour improved.

Perhaps as a result of the amount of time spent together, teacher-pupil relationships got better and some pupils began to express a preference for the Chinese style.

They liked having to copy "stuff" from the board as they thought this would help them remember it. Some more able pupils also liked the lecture style of the Chinese classroom.

What have I learned from the experiment? I believe that a longer school day would have value for our pupils and that teachers should not on occasion be afraid of delivering monologues in the classroom.

It is, however, abundantly clear to me that Chinese parents, culture and values are the real reasons that Shanghai Province tops the oft-cited Pisa tables rather than superior teaching practice.

No educational approach or policy is going to turn back the British cultural clock to the 1950s. Nor should it seek to.

I'm a normal teenager - I like my sleep and my freedom. But I traded it all in for more school than sleep each day, for four weeks with pushy teachers, all while wearing a completely atrocious tracksuit for almost 12 hours a day.

The project wasn't what I expected - I had envisioned something like normal school but maybe with a little more homework or a silent classroom.

That is most definitely not what I got. It felt like we had no say in our education and what the teachers said went.

Acting like robots was the right way to go. For me, it was something I found difficult to get used to. I'm used to speaking my mind in class, being bold, giving ideas, often working in groups to advance my skills and improve my knowledge.

But a lot of the time in the experiment, the only thing I felt I was learning was how to copy notes really fast and listen to the teacher lecture us.

One of the hardest things to deal with was different expectations of me as a student. It felt like we had to always be the best. That there was no longer any point in trying if you weren't going to be top of the class. Only the scores on tests mattered.

The classroom environment felt stressful and enclosed. When you have 50 other pupils in the room it's hard enough to concentrate without being made to feel as if you are competing against them all the time.

Science was particularly challenging. On one of the first days we were having the normal, slightly boring lectures from Ms Yang. Then we were given questions to answer on the subject and I understood nothing. I hadn't realised I would be this self-conscious, not being able to pick up a new topic at such speed and it got to me.

I felt stressed out sitting in my lesson completely muddled. It was awful knowing I not only had my peers watching me, but the cameras too. I felt stupid and just utterly pulled under by the weight of everything. The Chinese teachers think the pupils in their classes are like bulletproof sponges, sucking in information yet conveniently ignoring the fact they are tired and very bored.

However there were definitely some good bits. I loved learning about fan dancing and Chinese cookery. These were certainly welcome distractions from dull lectures about Pythagoras's theorem and English grammar. I shall always remember trying out Chinese-style education - it was one of the most interesting months of my life.

I'm grateful that I could take part in the entire experimental project. It taught me a lot.

As a form teacher, I successfully introduced Chinese classroom management - where the class is a unit.

I established a class committee and routines for students on duty. Leaders were selected for each class activity. This allowed the students to bear responsibility, as well as to exercise their leadership, communication, cooperation and organisation skills.

I believe if we give students a stage to perform, they will surprise us.

Originally I was confident about my teaching method, but at Bohunt I encountered unexpected problems. Some of the students found it hard to adapt. When I first introduced Pythagoras's theorem, I decided to let the students find the proposition, prove and apply the theorem. That process is an important feature of maths teaching in China.

But a lot of students said they found it unnecessary to prove Pythagoras's theorem - knowing how to apply it was enough.

I became more familiar with the British students' learning habits but I insisted on my ways of teaching.

I introduced the Chinese Ring Puzzle to the students. I brought 70 puzzle pieces from China. I gave every student one puzzle to solve as an exercise, and I told them to keep it as a small gift from me. Unfortunately after the evening study session, some students left the ring puzzles on the desks, some even left them on the floor. The empty boxes were all over the floor. When I was doing the routine classroom inspection that evening, I felt very embarrassed.

Another thing I remember is that one afternoon in the third week, a boy named Joe fell down in the classroom and hurt his hand. He was crying. After the school doctor's examination, he was given some ice packs and advised to go to hospital.

When Joe's mother and younger brother were picking him up, one little thing impressed me in particular. Joe was carrying a heavy bag on his other side, but he didn't request us to help. Joe's mother did not offer to help him carry the bag, nor did Joe ask for help. Even when Joe's brother tried to help him carry his bag, Joe refused. I wonder if this is the result of the British education, that trains the children to become independent. This makes me think a lot.