

Young People and the Arts

A response from Graeme Smith, Head of Croydon Music and Arts and
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Introduction

Children and young people, just like everyone else, engage with the arts as consumers and as participants. However for children and young people an important part of their engagement is education and it is this element in particular which is, and should continue to be, supported by public funding. This response concentrates on arts education and within that music education.

Arts Education: enabling young people to develop as artists

Children's cultural development starts in the home and their local community. Young children explore their world through play, and play is often in artistic forms.

This natural propensity for the arts is then taken forward in formal education where children can develop their artistic skills. As well as developing skills in different art forms the role of education is to build on children's experiences at home and in their communities and introduce them to a wide range of artistic forms. Children develop their preferences for the way in which they wish to express themselves through the arts and many will wish to take up additional activity beyond their class lessons in school. Arts activity should continue to link to young people's lives, including other areas of learning, and to the world of the arts.

It is the intellectual challenge of developing and working with others as young musicians and artists which provides the additional educational and personal development benefits which derive from a good arts education. It is capturing the interests of young people in arts activity which helps them to learn through the arts.

The school has a pivotal role to play. It takes forward children's early cultural development, in some cases needing to make up for a lack of early cultural development at home. While developing children and young people's skills in different art forms, the school introduces them to a wide range of arts and culture and provides, or signposts, additional opportunities for pupils to develop their own artistic voice beyond the classroom.

At the school level the arts can be used for young people to share, understand and participate in arts from different traditions. This mirrors how the arts have always been used to build connections and understanding across communities. In order to achieve this, the core of arts education should be children and young people developing as young artists.

Just as schools are needed to provide arts education beyond that which is available at home, a structure is needed above the school level to provide opportunities beyond that which is available in a school. For music this is the opportunity to learn a wide range of instruments and make music with other young musicians in choirs, bands, orchestras and other groups. These cover a wide range of musical styles which interest children and young people from local, national and world traditions, including western classical music.

This opportunity to develop as musicians and artists is vital to training the next generation of musicians, artists and teachers to enable our cultural life to continue to flourish and regenerate.

Policy, Funding and Structures: ensuring access and enabling progress

If arts education is to be accessible for all then funding and structures need to be in place to enable both access and progress.

Schools are funded to provide arts education, but inspections and measures of school effectiveness contribute to many schools not making the most of the potential of music and the arts. This means many young people do not have access to quality arts education in school. It is not enough to have aspirations for arts education. We need to have better levers of advocacy and persuasion to improve access to arts education in schools. For example, making evidence of a quality arts education a part of Ofsted judgements would immediately improve the priority schools give to the arts.

Beyond the school level there needs to be a support structure in place to enable the wider community of artists and cultural organisations to provide meaningful support to arts education.

Music Services and Music Education Hubs

The need for specific funding beyond the school level to support music education has been recognised for many decades. From local education authorities developing music service teams through the setting up of the Standards Fund grant for music services to the current Music Education Hub grant, funding beyond the school level has been used to enable young musicians to develop in ways which would not be possible within individual schools.

Funding has been used to develop first access whole class instrumental programmes – which used to be called wider opportunities. This provides a critical step in music education where developing instrumental playing skills is added to singing and exploring music through practical music making. After this young people should continue to develop their playing skills and enthusiasm through class music as well as having access to specialised instrumental and vocal lessons.

Funding has been used to enable wider access to instrumental lessons and to playing in ensembles which individual schools could not provide. This provision is essential to enable young musicians to realise their potential and to make the link to further study and ultimately a career as a musician.

However, recent reductions in funding have meant that access for all and opportunities for all to make progress have been compromised. Funding is not a sufficient condition for quality music education, but it is necessary and further reductions in funding will result in reduced access and progress.

The recent move to Music Education Hubs was an attempt to ensure the combined resources of schools, music services and the cultural sector worked together to provide the most effective music education offer to children and young people. To enable this to happen music education hubs need a lead organisation with three aspects:

- an education organisation with expertise in teaching and learning and enabling progress in music education;
- a cultural organisation with expertise in partnership working and developing and using a variety of funding streams;
- a community organisation small enough for schools and the local community and local authority to have ownership.

Monitoring, Accountability and Quality Development: ensuring progress

Policy, funding and structures can provide the framework for successful arts education, but there does need to be a process of monitoring, accountability and quality development to ensure access to arts education also ensures young artists make progress.

Two things are necessary.

- First, an agreed understanding of what success in arts education looks like in order to provide a way of comparing current practice with what we are aspiring for. This does not mean creating a model of how success can be achieved because that always depends on the context of the wider school, local and national aspirations.
- Second a process of peer support to enable all to aspire to and achieve the best. Those who are most successful in achieving high quality are, with some facilitation, best able to support others.

Music Mark has been active in both areas but we believe more needs to be done.

As the Federation of Music Services, one of the organisations which merged to form Music Mark, we ran a peer support and challenge programme for music services

through the Music Service Evaluation Partner (MSEP) programme. The current monitoring for music education hubs concentrates on partnership development and diversity of funding streams. The quality of teaching and learning and the progress young musicians make does not form part of the relationship between hubs and the Arts Council as fund holder. A similar process to the MSEP programme needs to be in place to provide information about the effectiveness of hubs and to develop quality.

Last November's Ofsted report on music in schools suggested that Music Education Hubs should have a role to play in improving school music. There were unintended headlines at the time which suggested that Music Education Hubs were failing because of the state of school music. Ofsted has since clarified that it is schools which are accountable for the quality of their music education. However, music education hubs do have a role to play and Music Mark had already bid for, and subsequently were awarded, funding through the London Schools Excellence Fund for 'Peer-to-Peer' a programme of peer support for Key Stage 3 music. Through our network of music services / hubs, we intend to enable such peer support to be available across the country.

This joined up working also needs to extend outwards to the wider cultural sector. Children and young people's engagement with the arts as a consumer or through projects is not a substitute for arts education where children and young people make progress as musicians and artists. However it can make a significant contribution where cultural organisations are working in partnership with schools and music education hubs to ensure they are supporting the development of young musicians and artists.

As has always been the case, there are areas where there is exemplary work joining up the different aspects of music and arts education. We need to maintain and, over time, grow funding levels to make such work possible for all children and young people. But we also need to have the quality development processes in place to turn that possibility into a reality.

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