

Music in schools: promoting good practice

Guidance from HMI for teachers, headteachers, and music hub leaders when observing musical teaching and learning

'Schools, all other funded providers of music education, and providers of Continuing Professional Development should work together to... strengthen senior leadership of music in schools by increasing headteachers' and senior leaders' knowledge and understanding about the key characteristics of effective music provision, including the appropriate use of musical assessment and the importance of teachers' musical preparation, so that they can more effectively observe and support music in their schools.'

Music in schools: wider still and wider, Ofsted, 2012

This guidance has been produced by specialist music HMI in response to this key priority from the 2012 Ofsted triennial music report. The six video studies of good practice, published alongside the report at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110158, also provide musical illustrations to exemplify the key principles for observation. The videos show very clearly that there is not a single, definitive, 'approved' format for structuring effective music lessons. Inspection evidence shows that there are, however, some broad principles for all good musical teaching and learning, common to all music education contexts.

The principles and key questions contained in this guidance are applicable to **all** forms of music teaching and learning – in the classroom, in additional instrumental and vocal tuition, in ensemble work, and in project work led by music professionals and amateurs. The guidance is intended for use in schools, in music hubs, and in music education partnerships. It is intended to support dialogue between teachers, headteachers, and music education hubs. The principles can be considered whether the pupils are in Key Stage 1, part of a whole-class classroom ensemble programme, composing in a popular style, studying for GCSE or A Level, preparing for a Grade 6 practical examination, or taking part in a gamelan workshop. When observing, account must always be taken of the context of the school, teacher or music leader, and pupils concerned.

Inspection grades are always arrived at by Ofsted inspectors using their professional judgement. They take into account a balance of evidence across a range of lessons, in the context of the school and pupils being inspected and against nationally agreed standards.

This guidance is not an inspection or performance management instrument, and should not be used as such. Rather, it is intended to promote dialogue and understanding about the features of good teaching that results in good musical learning.

Key principles

- Planning **musical** learning intentions is crucial to the success of a lesson. Effective planning of **musical** learning intentions identifies how **musical** activities will result in improvements to the quality of pupils' **musical** responses and **musical** understanding.
- Some of the best music lessons have a single learning intention, albeit with clear expectations about the musical outcomes that are expected. This is particularly the case where time is limited, such as a 20-minute instrumental lesson.
- It is not always necessary or most effective for learning intentions to be shared at length with pupils at the start of a lesson, particularly if this is done through detailed verbal explanations. Inspection evidence has shown that such strategies can delay pupils' musical engagement.
- In the best instances, teachers demonstrate their secure understanding of the learning intentions by communicating these intentions **musically**. They plan to do this from the start and throughout the course of the lesson.
- It is always important that teachers promote pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and reading in particular, across all areas of the curriculum. However, where good musical teaching and learning take place, the development of pupils' musical skills and understanding is the primary consideration. Literacy and numeracy skills should always be considered, but also always as appropriate to and in support of the musical learning.
- Planning must consider progression. **Progression in music is, simply, about improving the quality, depth and breadth of pupils' musical responses over time.** Planning should show awareness of what the pupils have achieved musically in recent lessons. This is not the same as recording the activities that they took part in. Teachers should be clear about how the lesson intends to build on that musical learning, progressively. 'Being musical' is much more than just the physical act of playing an instrument or participating in singing – it is about the quality of the response, the degree to which the pupil creates and plays music with appropriate accuracy, expression, feeling, sensitivity and sophistication. Good planning shows ambition to improve the quality of pupils' responses, to improve their musicality.
- It is crucial that planning takes into account the **musical** learning needs of all groups of pupils – including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and those who benefit from additional instrumental and vocal tuition outside the classroom.
- The resources chosen and prepared by the teacher may also tell you if teaching and learning are likely to be musical. Well-presented worksheets or online tasks can be useful, but they should be supporting musical learning. Remember – pupils should be increasing their knowledge **of** music through engagement with musical sound, supported by acquiring further verbal knowledge **about** music. It is also important to choose appropriate music and particularly songs for the ages and stages of the pupils, taking into account voice range and musical difficulty, as well as lyrics. Instruments must be set up correctly; practical tasks should include guidance about how the instruments should be played, as well as the musical ideas to be used and the musical response expected.

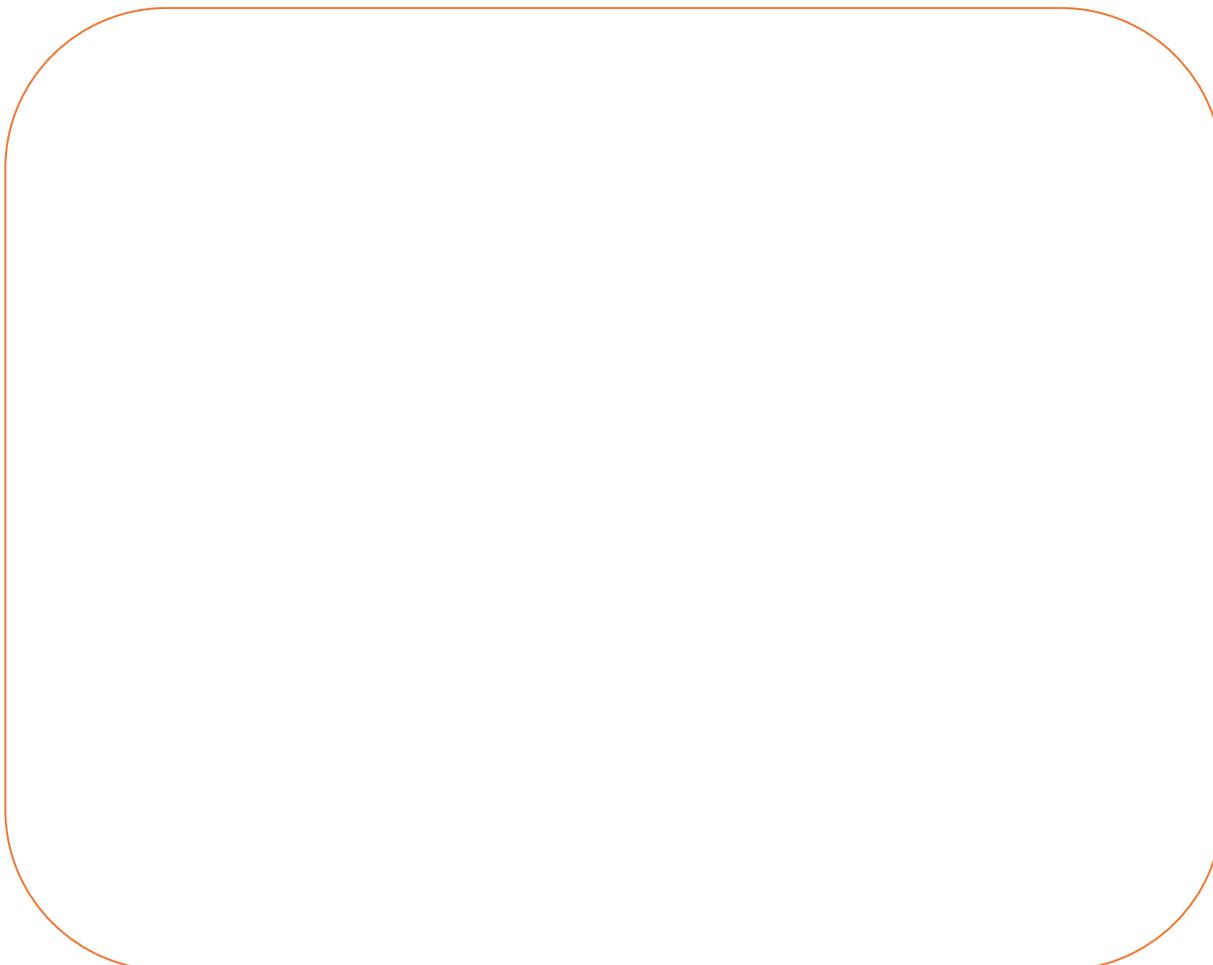
Before the lesson, talk to the teacher and consider the teacher's planning and preparation. Ensure that the observer understands any particular musical concepts or terminology to be used in the lesson. Evaluate how musically the lesson has been set up. How well prepared is the teacher, musically, to lead the class in musical learning?

Planning, preparing, and starting – your observations

Key questions for observation

- How musical are the learning intentions for this lesson, and how clearly do they articulate the quality of expected musical response from the pupils?
- How well has the teacher prepared him/herself musically, before the lesson, so that these learning intentions are conveyed to pupils musically?
- How does the teacher’s planning demonstrate an understanding of progression in music – that is, how do the planned learning intentions build on pupils’ prior experiences and understanding of music? Does planning set high standards and expectations for the quality of pupils’ musical responses?
- When appropriate to supporting musical learning, how well are literacy and numeracy skills promoted and developed?
- How well does the teacher know the pupils – as shown by planning and preparation that takes into account disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and pupils with additional musical skills and experiences? How well are tasks designed to enable pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to make a meaningful musical response?
- How appropriate and well prepared are the resources chosen by the teacher?

Your observations



Key principles

- If the planned learning intentions are genuinely musical, then musical teaching should flow naturally. Musical sound should be the 'target' language of the music classroom; pupils should be learning to use and interpret that language confidently and with increasing accuracy. Words and notations are important, but they should support rather than drive musical learning. The development of pupils' aural understanding of musical sound is central to good teaching and learning over time.
- Good music lessons engage pupils musically straight away – that is, by getting them to listen to and think about musical sound, or by involving them in a music-making task. Learning intentions are shared musically – for example, by the teacher modelling a song performance in tune with good diction, articulation and phrasing to show the pupils the intended musical outcome.
- In good teaching, starting activities are often linked to the main part of the lesson. For example, where pupils are to compose music using a pentatonic scale, the lesson may start with a pentatonic song – which in turn may reinforce the learning intention.
- In a lesson where instruments are used, look for the teacher giving clear direction and guidance about correct performance technique and posture – but in a way that also maintains a focus on the musical quality of response. Correct technique and posture can make it easier to respond musically.
- Assessment in music is often overcomplicated. There are only eight National Curriculum levels for music (plus the exceptional performance level). These levels are **not** divided into sub-levels, or separated into individual performing, composing and listening criteria. Teachers that do so often spend too much time explaining criteria to pupils, rather than actually engaging them musically. Remember that the levels are designed to reflect standards holistically over time, rather than to grade individual pieces of work.
- Good musical teaching provides clear structures and guidance, but also allows for and encourages creative, original responses. The most effective type of assessment involves the teacher listening to and watching pupils' responses, accurately analysing the quality of those responses, and then showing them how to improve their work. Less effective assessment over-praises work which is of poor quality – for example, telling pupils that their singing is 'excellent' when it is out of tune. Good assessment leads to an enhanced musical response from the pupil – more focussed and perceptive listening, better control or expression in performance, or the creation of more complex musical ideas.
- Good teaching uses the body to help pupils internalise music – to take in, memorise, recall and understand musical ideas. Good teaching of singing takes every opportunity to improve posture, to help pupils sing better in tune, to improve their phrasing and diction. Good teaching also uses physical movement to help pupils respond to and understand, for example, concepts of tempo, pitch, rhythm and articulation.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) should be used effectively as a tool to develop musical understanding – the music takes priority over the technology. If pupils are using ICT, the main purpose should be for them to thoughtfully and musically explore, record and manipulate sounds to make a cohesive musical response.

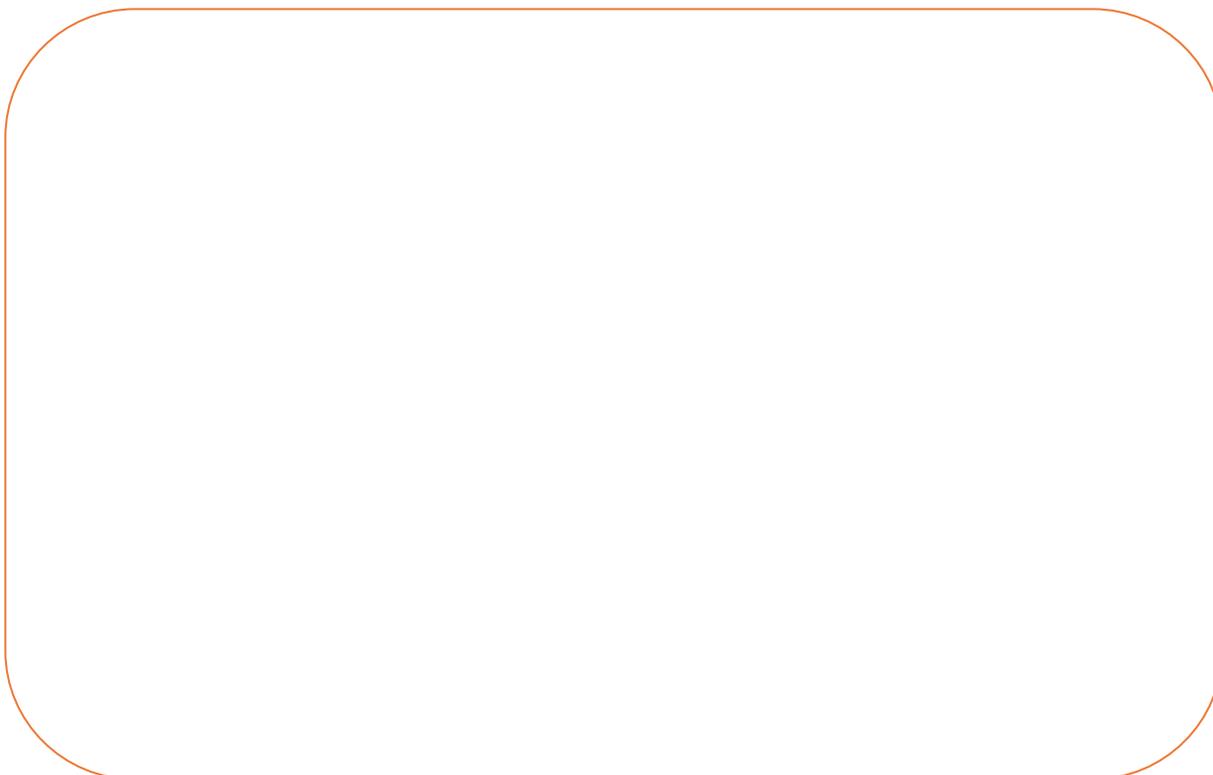
There should be no doubt that you are in a musical lesson. Pupils should be given every opportunity to experience, listen, engage, explore, respond to and work creatively with the language of musical sound. Teaching should listen carefully and strive consistently to improve the quality of pupils' musical understanding and response.

Teaching, learning and assessment – your observations

Key questions for observation

- To what extent is musical sound the 'target' language of this lesson? How confident and accurate are pupils' use and interpretation in the language of musical sound?
- How quickly do all pupils become involved in deep and sustained engagement with musical sound at the start of the lesson?
- How effectively does teaching enable pupils to develop their knowledge **of** music in relation to their (factual and theoretical) knowledge **about** music?
- Do words and notations support musical learning, rather than drive it?
- How well are pupils taught to play and use musical instruments? How well does teaching promote good posture and technique, while retaining a good focus on the quality of musical response?
- How robustly is singing taught – with good attention to diction, singing in tune, phrasing and posture? How effectively is the voice and physical movement used to help pupils internalise and understand music?
- How musical is assessment? How accurately does the teacher listen to and analyse pupils' musical responses and, indeed, encourage and respond to pupils' creative, unexpected responses?
- How well does the teacher provide good structure and support for pupils' creative responses?
- How musical is the teacher's and pupils' use of ICT?

Your observations



Work samples and wider participation – guidance

Key principles

- As with any observation and evaluation of teaching, it is important to look behind and beyond what you see in the classroom on any one day. Very often, this evidence will confirm what you saw in the lesson, but sometimes it will provide an alternative viewpoint. In music, there are four main sources of evidence to help you build a bigger picture of pupils' achievement, and help you come to an overall view about the effectiveness of teaching.
- It might be most productive to scrutinise and evaluate this evidence in dialogue with the music teacher. He/she should be able to show you the evidence you need, and you will be able to ask questions that will help you in your evaluation.
- First, good teaching over time can be evident in recordings and scores of pupils' work. A key feature of good teaching is that audio or video recordings are made of pupils' performing and composing, to help them listen to and improve their work. These recordings can show improvement in the quality and sophistication of pupils' musical responses and they can show good assessment – over a long period or in a short project.
- Second, you might see written notes by older pupils and/or the teacher (including in practice logs for instrumental or vocal performance), or annotations on scores and recordings of compositions. Older pupils may keep diaries of the pieces that they have listened to. These could record their feelings towards and understanding of the music, or formalise their knowledge of key terms and concepts. It is important, however, to ensure that written records are supported by evidence of their practical understanding. For example, do not assume that simply copying out a table of rhythmic values means that pupils can accurately clap a two-bar rhythm using crotchets, quavers and semiquavers. Words and notations should be supporting musical learning.
- Listening diaries and schemes of work can tell you if pupils have experienced a broad and diverse range of musical styles and genres, and if they have experienced good-quality music by professional composers and performers. Again, look beyond the listing of factual information about the music or musician, and look to see how pupils' personal musical responses are informed by recognition of the music's working and provenance.
- Third, the teacher should be able to tell you which pupils are benefiting from additional instrumental and/or vocal tuition, and those who participate in regular extra-curricular musical activities – in and out of school. Good teaching would have already identified these pupils through differentiated planning in the lesson observed. Inspection evidence tells us that the extent to which pupils from all groups participate equally – including boys and girls, those in receipt of free school meals, and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs – is often indicative of an effective curriculum.
- Last, inspectors always talk to groups of pupils, to explore their views about provision. Talk to pupils about the provenance and quality of the music that they listened to, performed or created in the lesson. Listen to their recordings with them and ask them how they have made improvements over times. Holding such discussions may help to confirm your views from the lesson observation and work sample.

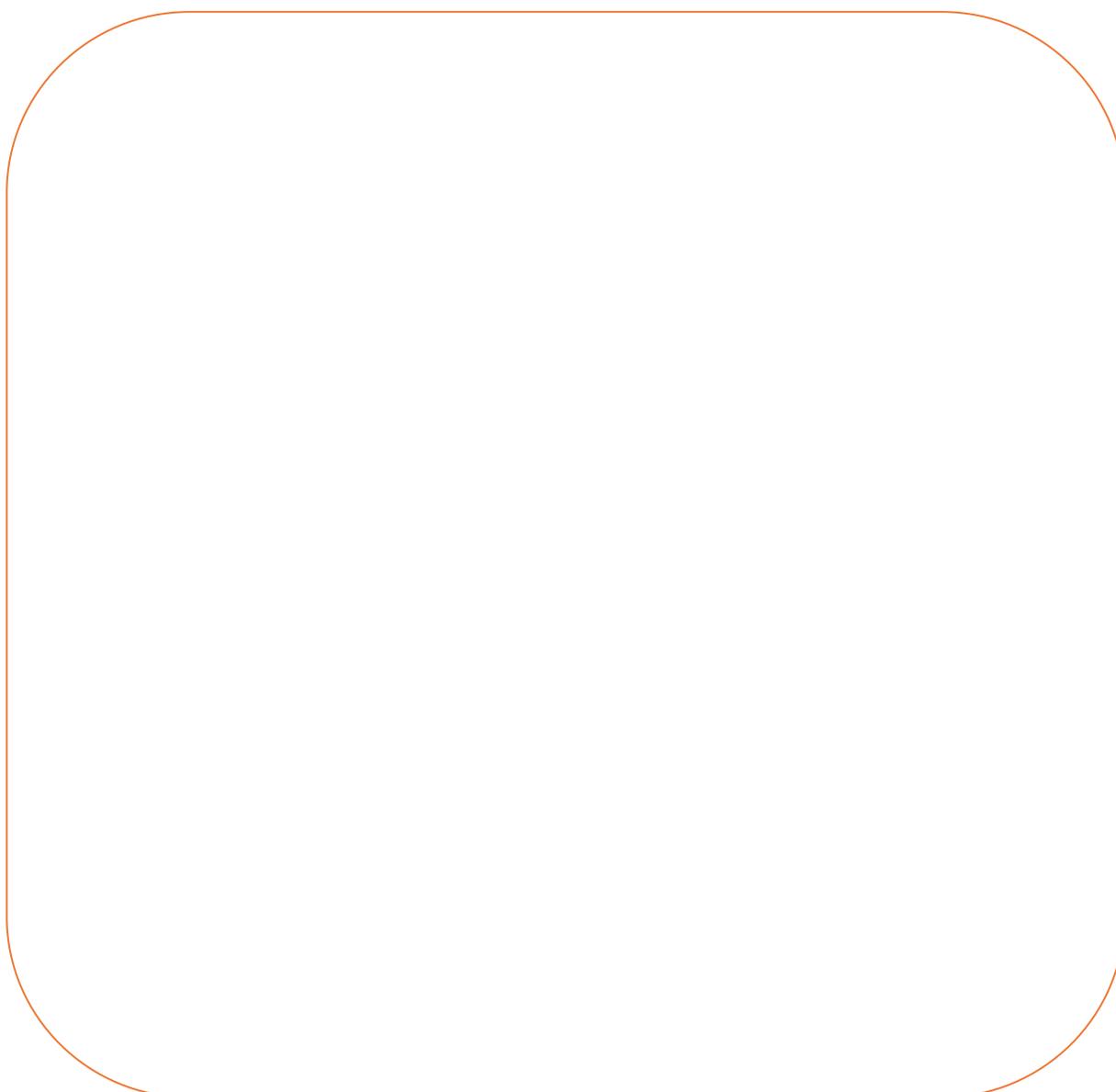
Compare your lesson observations with evidence taken over time from audio and video recordings and scores of pupils' work, records of musical progress, participation and retention rates in additional tuition and musical activities, and discussions with pupils.

Work samples and wider participation – your observation

Key questions for observation

- How regularly are recordings made of pupils' work, how effectively are these recordings used and evaluated? What do they tell you about the musical progress that all pupils are making?
- What evidence is there that pupils have experienced a broad, diverse range of musical styles? What evidence is there of pupils' increased musical understanding and responses, supported but not driven by written records?
- To what extent do pupils from all groups benefit from additional instrumental and/or vocal tuition, and/or regular extra-curricular musical activities?
- What do discussions with pupils tell you about the quality of their musical knowledge and understanding, and the extent of their participation?

Your observations



Summary - evaluating teaching and musical outcomes

Key principles

- Whatever the pedagogic styles or strategies employed, there is one overriding consideration: **How effectively does musical teaching improve the breadth, depth and quality of musical understanding and response for all pupils?**
- At the heart of this issue is how pupils have improved the quality of their musical responses. It is about the progress they are making in becoming better listeners, better performers, and better creators of music – as shown by their increasingly confident, effective control and manipulation of musical sounds. It is about the extent to which they show, through their musical responses, their understanding of the way that melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, form, texture and timbre work together to create musical effects, traditions and styles. It is about the way that their knowledge of musical provenance – the history and circumstance of music - helps them to become better listeners, performers and composers. It is about the extent to which all groups are participating in music, not just in the classroom curriculum but also in additional tuition and extra-curricular activities.
- Good musical teaching promotes high musical standards, ensures that pupils make good musical progress, and enables both the active participation **and** the good musical achievement of all groups of pupils. Good musical teaching has a clear focus on musical sound as the 'target' language of learning with the development of pupils' aural understanding at the heart of learning. Good teaching is characterised by the teacher demonstrating strong musical modelling and listening skills that elicit good musical responses from pupils.
- Re-read your notes on pages three to seven, and then summarise your thoughts about the quality of teaching and pupils' music achievement.

Your summary

