



INFLUENCING
SUPPORTING &
CONNECTING

OHMI Speech by Bridget Whyte, CEO, Music Mark

Saturday 8th September 2018

I am delighted to be here! I feel honoured to speak as part of such an esteemed and inspiring group of speakers across the two days of this exciting conference.

In case you were wondering, the company I run, Music Mark is a membership organisation for those working in Music Education. Our membership includes Music Hubs and Services in England and the wider UK, a growing number of other national and regional music education organisations, individual music educators, Corporate organisations and over 4,500 schools nominated by Music Hubs and Services.

We support our members through events, training and regular communications, and we lobby on their behalf at a regional and national level. At the moment that includes consulting with and representing our Membership whilst the sector discusses the future of England's National Plan for Music Education – a roadmap of how all those involved in providing a musical education for children and young people might work together to provide quality opportunities for everyone.

I don't need to tell everyone in this room how important and valuable music is to all children and young people, and I expect few would disagree that for those with additional needs music can be a particularly strong tool for learning and connecting with others. Indeed, there is a plethora of research (including much you have heard over the past two days) which can back this up – studies highlighting the musical, educational, social, health and psychological benefits singing and playing a musical instrument can provide.

And this is why successive governments here in the UK have invested in additional music educational activities over and above the curriculum provision which they expect to be provided from 5 to 14yrs. Currently in England that investment includes £75m for Music Education Hubs.

For many this funding is seen as primarily being used to meet the aspiration of a past Minister for Education - David Blunket – who stated in 1998 that 'every child should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument'.

Wider ops, whole class, first access, whatever it is called locally, this is now the programme which provides at least a term, and in most cases a year, of music instrumental tuition to whole classes of children. Of course there are other areas of Music Education – including developing singing, providing ensemble opportunities, and ensuring progression from first access - for which the government want the ring-fence Music Education Grant to be used, but for now I'd like to focus on that aspiration that all children can learn a musical instrument.

For me this aspiration is great, and there are many, many great examples of how children and young people are getting opportunities to learn all sorts of instruments in class groups. However, I'm not the only one who knows there are challenges in truly realising this worthy aim for every child.

In terms of ensuring all children in mainstream schools can learn a musical instrument the work of OHMI and others to find innovative ways to ensure that no child in a class is excluded from the opportunity is extremely important. As more and more children with additional needs are integrated into mainstream schools this work is vital. There is now really no excuse to segregate or exclude a pupil because they might not have the ability to play a particular instrument.

Indeed Music Mark is keen to champion the fact that there should be more done to think about which instrument a class might learn. It should not longer be appropriate for a Music Service to simply tell a school that they will be delivering, for example, whole class violin lessons.

To me partnership is the key – a true collaborative partnership between the school and the music service/hub. If they are working together to plan for the whole class ensemble teaching they can identify the needs of all the pupils in the class who will have the opportunity and discuss instrument choices and if necessary the need for adaptive instruments to ensure all can take part. By doing this, when the music services' teacher joins the class for the first time, everyone is able to learn, to participate on an equal basis. Of course we need to, and are trying to, make music services and schools aware of the existence of adaptive instruments which is why the work of OHMI is so important.

What I also think we need to do, is work harder to ensure that children and young people who are not in mainstream schools – those who attend (what we call in the UK) special schools – have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument too. Whilst technology is making for more and more accessible opportunities for all children to learn, the assumption that I-pads should be the instrument for all disabled children is not enough. Again, there are some excellent programmes of work taking place across the UK, but more needs to be done to connect those who have the skills, knowledge and expertise to provide instrumental learning experiences for these pupils with the music services and hubs who are expected to deliver opportunities in these settings. Here, as in mainstream schools, it needs to be a partnership – the teacher in the classroom who understands the needs and artistic aspirations of the children they work with working together with the musicians who have been engaged to deliver instrumental learning opportunities, so that the children receive an exciting, valuable experience.

As I said at the beginning, part of Music Mark's job is to lobby government on behalf of the sector. Currently we are working on providing advice to them on a future National Plan for Music Education. Back in 2011/12 when it was published it outlined what schools and the wider music education sector should do to ensure that all children had access to a quality music education. The plan is now due for review and whilst the current version is very comprehensive, there are many who feel that more could be done to focus on how Music educators might provide a fully accessible music education for all. So, as we continue to campaign for music education to be a right for all children and young people within and outside the classroom, I am keen to particularly shine a light on the importance of the word 'all' – giving examples and case studies which demonstrate how this might be achieved and how Partnership Working will be a key way in which to do that.