

Music Unlocked

Guidance for School Leaders on Musical Learning and COVID-19

The [UK Association for Music Education– Music Mark](https://www.musicmark.org.uk) is a subject association for music and a membership organisation for those providing musical learning across the UK. Through our network of over 150 music education provider Members, such as Music Services, we have been able to celebrate and champion music provision in over 6,500 Music Mark Schools.

Music Mark and its Members understand that schools and school leaders will be under strain as they reopen, and nobody is expecting an immediate return to business as usual. The lockdown has had a dramatic impact on the lives of children and young people and Music Mark urges you to include music and creative arts in your recovery curriculum, as a way to help them settle back into a positive learning environment.

The music service and other music education providers in your local area, which in England come together into partnerships called Music Education hubs, are available to help, support and advise you, working with you and your staff in the best way for your school at this time for the benefit of your pupils.

Studies and many schools' own experiences have shown that, as well as being intrinsically valuable as a subject, music:

- readies children for learning across the curriculum;
- improves memory by stimulating both hemispheres of the brain;
- has unrivalled connectivity across the whole curriculum;
- correlates with improved progress in a range of other subjects;
- is highly effective as a strategy for school improvement¹.

In formulating this COVID-19 related guidance, we have reviewed academic studies, and consulted our Members, the Music Teachers' Association, the Music Industries Association, the Incorporated Society of Musicians and the Musicians' Union, as well as individual sector experts, headteachers and teachers.

Wellbeing

The benefits to pupils of participating in musical activity in terms of their wellbeing are well-known. Sheffield University's music department has a specific research group dedicated to wellbeing; many mainstream and special schools fund music therapy sessions and music is a staple of youth work and mental health projects. The charity Mind devote a page of their website to the [benefits of music to mental health](#).

During lockdown, many music education providers have found creative ways in which to enable students and families to continue engaging in music making. Where possible, 1:1 instrumental and vocal lessons have gone online, and variously across the country, thousands of children have taken part in singing and

¹ To find out more, read [The Power of Music](#) by Prof. Susan Hallam, MBE and [Ten Things Every School Should Know about Music](#).

playing, in weekly tutorials, in Youth Voice consultations and simply in social events led by music tutors. Parental and student feedback has highlighted:

- the importance of musical learning and participation to children’s wellbeing and self-esteem;
- children’s joy at being able to interact with friends they were missing from school;
- the benefits that structured time with a professional brought when normal routines were impossible.

Music has for many children and young people been an outlet for expressing and working through the emotional impact of lockdown, and the subject has significant potential to support pupils as they return to school.

Music in the curriculum

We recognise that it may not be possible to return immediately (or even imminently) to delivering the full range of programmes schools previously offered. However, local music providers such as the Music Service stand ready to work with you, to support you and your teachers to find the best ways to for music to be a central part of your recovery curriculum.

If your school buys (or is allocated) time for whole-class, curriculum, ensemble or choir work, talk to the music providers you work with about what support they can provide to your subject or phase leads as they look to create schemes of work and resources that:

- are musically sound, progressive and academically valuable;
- link to learning in other core subjects;
- address pupils’ wellbeing and PHSE needs;
- empower pupils to express themselves freely;
- help pupils to feel valued and that their voices are heard.

Although some music services and other providers have furloughed staff or seen staff redeployed to essential services, you should be able to make contact with someone within the organisation who can speak to you about the possibility of flexible delivery, taking into account both pupils in school and those who will not yet have returned. Recognising the ongoing restrictions, and the likelihood that many schools will want to limit visiting teachers initially, most music education providers are preparing for a blended offer of face-to-face and online provision and are expecting this to persist for some time. As well as live teaching which could continue over video-conference, many music education providers have created pre-recorded tutorials, ‘how-to’ videos and other resources.

To help with music making in schools – delivered by your teachers or, where possible, visiting staff - Music Mark has provided guidance on singing and using musical instruments safely in the classroom, which is based on recent and emerging specialist research. The providers you work with will be able to advise and support your staff and pupils on a more practical level, but the guidance can be found [here](#) and the research from which it has been developed is [here](#). Under no circumstances should wind and brass instruments be shared, and in addition to the general social distancing procedures you are putting in place for staff and pupils, there are some musical activities for which teachers will need to consider further measures.

Instrumental and vocal tuition

In due course, and subject to robust safety measures, both tutors and pupils will be keen to return to face-to-face tuition. However, currently, and in order to accommodate children in and out of school, it is likely a flexible approach will need to be discussed. In some parts of the country, children have been taught online since before Easter 2020 and policies and protocols to address safeguarding concerns have been developed following national guidance and locally in consultation with Local Authority Safeguarding officers. Whilst nothing can replace the invaluable face to face experience, many music education providers will be in a position to discuss alternative methods of delivery, including on-line options.

Ensembles and choirs

Choirs and ensembles in school may, in the coming months, be able to restart but it is clear that these activities will require a lot more space and care than previously to ensure everyone remains safe. The [Music Mark guidelines](#) include advice for all sorts of ensembles and choirs, based on the latest medical and scientific research. The key message however is that, based on current research, both singing and ensemble activity should be possible if 2m social distancing and good ventilation are observed.

Music around the school

Music creates friendships and builds the school community: Music Mark has been told of many examples of pupils and the adults they work with who are hungry for the engagement with school life that music can offer. Although welcoming visiting staff into school is likely to be limited for some while, many music education providers have developed expertise in creative and exciting ways of sharing the music that pupils and teachers make online. Some case studies are available on the Music Mark website [here](#).

Make music part of your school's 'new normal'

Music Mark hopes that the partnership with your local music education providers, such as the music service, will help you to ensure your pupils and staff can access the academic, wellbeing and social benefits that come from having music as part of school life. These benefits are key as the country's children and young people return to their classrooms but can enhance and expand the value of the holistic provision you offer. We would therefore encourage you to put music at the heart of your school now and into the future.

Acknowledgements

Music Mark would like to thank its Members, The Music Teachers Association, The Incorporated Society of Musicians, The Musicians' Union and the Music Industries Association for their help and support in preparing this guidance.