

# Music Education and

With the results of the Henley review as yet unknown, we reprint here a post from [Jonathan Savage's](#)

**T**he publication of the White Paper heralds an important moment in this Coalition Government's reform of education in the UK. It sets out a series of proposals and allows us, probably for the first time, to see their vision clearly.

This has been a worrying period of time for music education. It is currently under a governmental review, being led by Darren Henley. So, it is interesting to examine this White Paper to see what, if any, conclusions can be drawn about music and its place within the school curriculum.

Please note that the following thoughts are solely my own, have not been shared with colleagues at MMU or any other organisation. Please note, unlike the White Paper itself I have also used technology to spell-check this document!

## Another Revision of the National Curriculum

Firstly, there is going to be another revision of the National Curriculum. Despite this being the first academic year when the whole of Key Stage 3 is being taught the current version of the National Curriculum for the first time, the Coalition has made a clear decision that this is not fit for purpose. I will make no further comment here about this decision. Rather, I will merely state that I see, every week, excellent music teaching that is innovative and creative and inspired by the current curriculum framework.

When it comes to the primary and secondary curriculum, the general theme of the White Paper is to reduce what the Coalition sees as unnecessary prescription, bureaucracy and central control. Their view is that the National Curriculum in its current form weighs teachers down and saps their ability to be innovative and creative.

So, the White Paper proposes to review the National Curriculum over the next year or so, leading to the implementation of a new National Curriculum in September 2013. The next generation of the National Curriculum will, if you believe the White Paper, set out 'clearly the core knowledge and understanding that all children should be expected to acquire in the course of their schooling' (4.7). Part of this revision will be a greater focus on subject content (4.9). The final documentation will be 'slim, clear and authoritative' (4.12). At this point, it

mentions that parents should be able to use its contents to hold schools to account. The examples are informative: English language and literacy, core mathematical processes and science. Note, no surprises here: these subjects are in!

## English Baccalaureate

The establishment of an English Baccalaureate has a prominent place in the White Paper. This will be awarded to students who secure 'good GCSE or iGCSE passes in English, mathematics, the sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography'. Note, no mention of the arts here.

Schools will be keen to develop this award as there will be a separate record of the number of pupils getting this new award in the performance tables. Those schools that, in the words of the White Paper, 'succeed in giving their pupils a properly rounded academic education' will be more easily identified (4.22). Note, arts subjects clearly fall outside this boundary. The White Paper does not say that they are not part of an academic education. But, by omission, I think we can see that the view is that the arts are clearly not thought of as academic nor worthy of inclusion in this award. It would have been easy to include the arts subjects within this award but someone decided that was not desirable.

Paragraphs 4.27 onwards confirms this with more worrying rhetoric:

There is much of value that children need to learn and experience which sits outside the traditional subject disciplines – the languages, sciences, humanities and mathematics which make up national curricula across the globe.

Again, note the emphasis on supposedly 'academic' areas and a complete misunderstanding/misrepresentation of other countries' national curricula which do include the arts.

### A Cultural Education

Para 4.31 sees one of the few (3) references to music in the White Paper. Here it is in full:

Children should be expected to be given a rich menu of cultural experiences. So we have commissioned Darren Henley to explore how we can improve music education and have more children learning to play an instrument. The Henley Review will also inform our broader approach to

# the White Paper

highly regarded personal website [jsavage.org.uk](http://jsavage.org.uk).

cultural education. We will support access to live theatre, encourage the appreciation of the visual and plastic arts and work with our great museums and libraries to support their educational mission.

Fine words, but a little too late. Music education is lumped, alongside other arts, as part of a 'cultural education' package. Clearly by now, we see that it falls outside the core National Curriculum that will be put together and, it seems, left to schools (i.e. Headteachers) to decide how and when it is offered and to whom. Note, the inclusion of Music (like other arts) in the curriculum will be at the whim of Headteachers or other curriculum managers.

From other comments made by the Secretary of State in interviews on Radio 4, BBC Television and Radio 5 yesterday, it seems that he is imagining that schools will spend 50% of their time on the National Curriculum subjects, with the other 50% being at the discretion of the school. Note, no prescription leads to no entitlement and no coherent, systematic and developmental progression for music education.

At Key Stage 4, there is a prescription in the White Paper that schools will be encouraged to offer 'a broad set of academic subjects to age 16, by introducing the English Baccalaureate'. Well, as we have seen already, Music is clearly not conceptualised as an academic subject in this White Paper nor is it, or any of the arts, within the Baccalaureate. Note, I anticipate this leading to a reduction in course provision at Key Stage 4 in Music.

If all this sounds rather gloomy, do not forget that we have David Cameron's promise, made whilst standing alongside Gary Barlow at Brine Leas High School in Nantwich, for a national music competition! (For those of you interested, there is a good comparison here between the scandalous cutting of School Sports Partnership funding and the provision of a schools Olympic initiative instead; but the music competition will not be nearly as well funded).

## Summary

So, in a specific conclusion for music education this White Paper:

- Defines Music, and other arts, as non-academic subjects;
- As a consequence, places Music outside the National Curriculum;

- Therefore, Music will not be a core entitlement for all children but will fall, instead, within a broader cultural curriculum;

- Precisely how that cultural curriculum offer is constituted and delivered is still being discussed, and the Henley Review will advise on that.

Therefore, I find myself unable to retract the statements I made and hour or so before the publication of the White Paper. For completeness, here they are again:

## Prediction 1

Music will not be part of the new National Curriculum. It will fall outside the 50% of prescribed core subjects that the Secretary of State wants to legislate for. He says that in slimming the curriculum down schools will have more time to other things – he even mentioned Music as one of those 'other things' in his Radio 4 Today programme interview this morning.

## Prediction 2

I say that removing Music from the core entitlement of a child's education will damage, irrevocably, the entitlement that all children have to receive a coherent, systematic and development music education. Whilst some will harp back to successes in music education within a previous golden era prior to a National Curriculum and the entitlement it represents, I say that times have changed. Many headteachers will conveniently ignore Music as a subject area within the curriculum, and leave it to a mish-mash of private, unregulated, extra-curricular provision for music (for 'music' here read 'instrumental learning') delivered by unqualified teachers.

## Postscript

Finally, additional worries about a two tier system are still very prevalent. As we see in 4.14, academies and free schools will have the freedom not to follow the National Curriculum at all 'where they consider it appropriate' not to do so. But they will be required to teach a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. But this phrase, although having a historical resonance, is not defined. I anticipate that this will lead to many children not receiving any music education at all within their compulsory schooling. ■■