

Can you smell a rat? Why music education may wither and die in our schools.

Thank goodness for reporters like Richard Morrison. His article in *The Times* on the 7th July highlighted a range of issues that face music education in our schools. As someone who has campaigned about these since the Coalition Government came to power, I was relieved to realise that I was not the only one who is worried. I suppose the key question that I want to ask is, are you?

There were two paragraphs in Morrison's article that caught my eye. Firstly, he highlighted the stark contrast in the way that music and the arts are perceived within the state and private sectors. He wrote:

*The fact is that children whose lives are enriched with music and the arts tend to do well in all subjects — and so do schools with the courage to offer this breadth of experience. That's well understood in the private sector. An independent school without its own orchestra, theatre and art studio would be out of business. Yet in the state sector, and among the politicians who control it, **the notion that music and art are a waste of curriculum time is still a widely-held fallacy.** [my emphasis]*

Secondly, Morrison he reported that many within our community are smelling a rat. In considering the question about the late arrival of the National Plan for Music Education, the rat is revealed! He wrote:

*Gove's department is [also] reviewing the entire schools curriculum. Clearly the music education plan must tally with that. But campaigners for music in schools smell a rat. They suspect that Henley was set up to produce a report trumpeting all the musical opportunities outside the curriculum — outreach work by arts organisations; youth orchestras and bands run by local authorities; initiatives such as the Sing Up! campaign — **so that the Government could argue that there's no need for music to remain in the curriculum.***

The problem is that if there's nobody championing music in a school — a specialist music teacher, preferably — then there is little likelihood of its pupils taking advantage (or even being aware) of those opportunities. That's already apparent in the thousands of primary schools where none of the staff has any musical training (another weakness noted by Henley) and where the head believes, rightly or wrongly, that the school will be judged solely on its pupils' performance in "core" subjects such as English and maths. [my emphasis]

Morrison has been consistent in this message and I've reported his analysis previously on my blog at www.jsavage.org.uk. My bigger worry is that there seems to be a deafening silence from the music education community about this direction of travel. This has caused Morrison and I to wonder whether John Cage is involved. The silence is deafening and likely to last longer than 4 minutes and 33 seconds! Either people like Richard Morrison and I have got this completely wrong and everything is as it ought to be in the world of music education. Or, music education is beginning to wither and die in many schools (as Darren Henley predicted it might within his report).

In light of this, a basic question need to be asked. What type of music education is worth fighting for?

Firstly, it is worth fighting for a music education for every child that involves **more than them learning to play an instrument and sing.**

Henley says:

'Schools should provide children with a broad Music Education, which includes performing, composing, listening, reviewing and evaluating'. Henley, Recommendation 1

Contrary to what some politicians think, Henley's first recommendation (and I take this as a deliberate choice on his part) provides a clear and unambiguous statement about the key informants of a broad music education. They echo, of course, the structure of the current National Curriculum for Music which underpins a holistic and integrated model of music education.

If Henley's opening recommendation is to hold sway, we will have to ensure it stays at the forefront of the debate over the coming months.

Secondly, it is worth fighting for a music education that is **developmental, coherent and a statutory entitlement for all**.

Henley's ninth recommendation is equally clear and unambiguous. Music must be a statutory subject within the National Curriculum. His text provides no grounds for any doubt in his mind. It is worth repeating here:

*There was an overwhelming view from both the written and verbal evidence sessions undertaken as part of this Review that music's place as a National Curriculum subject was of paramount importance. I concur with this view. There is a strong sense that the statutory requirement of being included in the National Curriculum provides a basis for all other music provision in and out of school. **Without the obligation for music lessons to be a part of the school curriculum, there is a very real concern that the subject might well wither away in many schools – and in the worst case scenario, could all but disappear in others.** (my emphasis)*

My worry is that the current review of the National Curriculum will see Music removed from its place as a statutory subject in all Key Stages. As I write this, I have numerous examples of schools across the country that are already minimising the amount of music education in their curriculum at Key Stage 3, quite legally and with little protest from any of our national musical organisations. Academies, of course, have the right to design and implement their own curriculum arrangements and employ whoever they want to teach it (more on this below). Similarly, free schools will determine their own policies and practices.

Go to my blog and read the stories of over 40 music teachers. Many are worried and reporting significant changes to music provision at Key Stage 3.

Thirdly, it is worth fighting for a music education that **positions Music happily alongside other curriculum subjects**, and does not lead to it being discriminated against by headteachers or parents.

Henley's fifth recommendation is equally robust about the opportunity for students to study Music at Key Stage 4 and beyond. He argues that it should be included within the English Baccalaureate. My recent correspondence with Michael Gove and Nick Gibb (private letters dated 24th June 2011 and 30th June 2011 respectively) indicate that there is no chance of Music being included within the EBacc. Worse than this, both letters indicate that it is highly likely that in the future the study of Music at Key Stage 4 and beyond may not be provided in every school. For example, Nick Gibb writes:

Although music is an optional subject at Key Stage 4, students have an entitlement to take an arts courses. Schools should make opportunities available, even if this entails them working together to provide viable courses for students from a number of schools. (private correspondence, 30th June 2011).

Many headteachers are already making decisions that disadvantage Music (and other arts subjects) in a significant way. NAME's own research has proved this to be the case for our current Year 9 students. Again, refer to many of the forty or so stories that music teachers have submitted to my blog recently. Many report significant changes to the uptake of Music at GCSE. This spells disaster for the subject longer term.

Those of you who work as Governors within high schools will know what happens when an individual subject becomes marginalised at Key Stage 4 and beyond. If no or few pupils opt for it, there will be many difficulties in maintaining staffing and resourcing for it at these levels. Redundancies will follow, especially if that subject finds itself removed from the National Curriculum. Earlier this year (13th May 2011), the *Times Educational Supplement* reported a 36% drop in the number of music posts being advertised compared to 2010. This trend will only continue as more teachers of music are either forcedly made redundant, or not replaced when they more on or retire.

'The future of music education is at risk. Our youth deserves an immediate commitment to music as part of the core education curriculum'.

These are not my words. They are the words of a Statement given by the Fellows at the Salzburg Global Seminar 479 on April 5, 2011. Across the world, it seems, many countries are downplaying the importance of music education in the lives of their young people.

Here in the UK, the music Education world is 'fragmented and uncoordinated'. Again, not my words but the words of Darren Henley in his report (Recommendation 34). 'fragmented and uncoordinated'.

We know that the Government does not like having to deal with so many different subject associations, pressure groups and think tanks. There are too many competing voices. There is also an inequality of resource when it comes to campaigning and canvassing. Certain groups have the platform and means to shout louder than others. Some, of course, are funded by Government departments directly. Others are not.

Henley urges us to create a unified voice for music education. Is this possible? Is it even desirable? I am not sure it is possible. Recently I have been reminded again how insular and introspective many of these groups are. They are each concerned with their particular niche of music education and how that can be best protected.

You might say I have done the same here. But my position is to stand up for the group that is often neglected and fails to be represented effectively: the school-based, classroom music teacher.

My worry is that given the broader policies already being adopted by this Coalition Government, Henley's review will fast become a small footnote in the history of music education's demise in the UK. What we are witnessing is the privatisation of music education and its relocation from local authorities and schools into the unregulated world of private providers. This will result in a patchwork of music education provision across the country, accessible by those in the right postcode and with the right means to access it. The principle and practice of a coherent, systematic and development music education for all children as part of their compulsory schooling will have been lost.

The question is, what are you going to do about it? Are you prepared to stand and fight for a music education all?

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Biographical note

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