

Speech

Nick Gibb: Why good-quality music education matters

From: [Department for Education](#) and [Nick Gibb MP](#)
Delivered on: 22 March 2016 (Original script, may differ from delivered version)
Location: Mayor of London's Summit on School Music, City Hall, London
First published: 22 March 2016
Part of: [School and college qualifications and curriculum](#) and [Education of disadvantaged children](#)

The Schools Minister explains why both equity and quality need to be at the heart of music education.



Thank you Munira [Murza, Deputy Mayor of London for Education and Culture] for that kind welcome. And thank you for inviting me here today to talk about how good-quality music education should lie at the heart of every school in this country.

It is a privilege to speak to so many music teachers from across London. Many teachers tend, by necessity, to work in small music departments so days such as these provide an important opportunity to meet fellow teachers and share ideas.

I have enormous admiration for the work of music teachers: passing on a knowledge of and passion for music - of all forms - to new generations. I look back with great fondness and gratitude to the early exposure to music that I received as a child.

Singing in the St Edmund's Parish Church Choir in Roundhay, Leeds, gave me a lasting love for choral music. The delight I still feel today when I listen to 'Zadok the Priest' or Allegri's 'Miserere' can be traced back to my schooldays. That is not an invitation for you to ask me to sing today by the way.

An initiative from last year that the department helped achieve, and that I was delighted to see occur, was the Classical 100 music app - launched by the ABRSM in collaboration with Classic FM and Decca. This is a new digital resource, designed and made freely available to all primary schools. It includes recordings of 100 classical pieces of music composed over 10 centuries, ranging from children's classics such as 'Peter and the Wolf' and 'Carnival of the Animals', to works such as Beethoven's 'Fifth Symphony' and Handel's 'Messiah'. The recordings are supplemented by digital teaching resources, including information about the composers and the stories behind the music.

I saw the app trialed at the end of last year at St Charles Catholic Primary School in central London, where a wonderful teacher entranced her class by playing them Tchaikovsky's 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy'. So far, 339 London primary schools have signed up to use the resource, and I would encourage any here who haven't already to access it, and delve into the treasure trove of timeless pieces of classical music that it contains.

For me, the Classical 100 encapsulates 2 vital principles for music education in our schools. Firstly, ensuring that it is of a high quality. And secondly, ensuring that it is made available to all children, irrespective of birth or background.

Due to our focus on increasing the uptake of EBacc subjects at GCSE, the government has been accused by some of damaging the status of arts in schools. This is absolutely not the case. I

make no apologies for our belief that more schools should be offering a core academic curriculum to their pupils up to the age of sixteen. But there is no reason why this should imperil the status of arts subjects such as music: both can and should coexist in any good school.

In fact, since the EBacc was announced, the percentage of state school pupils entered for at least 1 GCSE in an arts subject has increased. And so has the number of entries to music GCSE.

The government is committed to ensuring that high-quality music education is not the preserve of a social elite, but is the entitlement of every single child. That is why funding for our highly successful music hubs, in which I am sure many here today are involved, is remaining at £75 million in 2016 to 2017. Nearly £11.7 million of that will go to hubs in London.

Music education hubs ensure that every child in England has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument through weekly whole-class ensemble teaching programmes. Music education hubs also ensure that clear progression routes are available and affordable, and many hubs subsidise the cost of lessons for pupils. Under this programme, any budding seeds of musical passion that young children have will not remain buried and unnurtured. I hope that in years to come, adults with a passion for music will have the work of music hubs to thank for first introducing them to musical performance.

Many schools work hard to nurture a love of music amongst their pupils. At St Charles Primary School in Ladbroke Grove, where 39% of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, the school provides subsidised small group lessons to all children in key stage 2 who want them. Over 50% of all key stage 2 pupils have instrumental lessons outside the class environment and this summer 35 of them will be taking ABRSM exams. Pupils are charged just £4 a lesson and many receive them completely free.

Learning a musical instrument can be a complicated business and children need support from their parents. But parents who have never learned to play an instrument themselves may

struggle to help their children. So I am delighted that the GLA has commissioned a new guide for parents from the ABRSM. The guide will be launched in September and some promotional films on the guide will be shown during the lunch break today.

Here in London there is the marvellous Mayor's Music Fund for Young Londoners. This provides 4-year scholarships to children who show significant musical ability and a real commitment to developing their talent, but whose families do not have the financial means to support ongoing tuition.

When it comes to provision of music education, the government believes in equity, but it also believes in excellence. Talented young musicians need the opportunity to make music with others of a similar standard, and access to selective ensembles and demanding repertoire. The music education hubs provide high-quality borough or county-wide ensembles and signpost the most talented toward specialist provision.

For the same reason, the government supports national youth music organisations such as the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and the National Youth Orchestra, to help ensure that no one is turned away because their parents cannot pay.

There is a clear concern amongst the public that careers in the arts have become the preserve of the privileged and privately educated. To ensure that this is not the case in years to come, the government will continue to fund over 500 full-time places at 4 specialist music schools, as well as a similar number of places at 4 specialist dance schools, through the [Music and Dance Scheme](#). The vast majority of pupils board, and means-tested bursaries are available to ensure that entry to the schools is based on pupils' talent, not on their parents' ability to pay fees.

The scheme also funds places at the junior departments of the 6 English music conservatoires, and at 6 music and 9 dance centres for advanced training. We fund almost 1,300 students to take up places at these institutions, over 60% of whom receive a full bursary. With 4 of the music conservatoires here in London, young Londoners are particularly well placed to take advantage of these opportunities.

In fact, with the wealth of cultural institutions on offer in the city, and the emphasis that the Mayor's office has placed on developing high-quality music teaching in schools, I can think of no places in the country where it would be better to be a pupil, or teacher, of music.

In terms of professional development for music teachers, I am delighted that the [Music Excellence London](#) network will be building on the work of the 'Peer to Peer' and 'Teach Through Music' programmes that were funded through the London Schools Excellence Fund. Music Excellence London will combat the isolation that some music teachers experience, and support teachers to develop and improve their classroom practice.

Important though it is, playing an instrument is not the only aspect of a good music education. [Music is also an academic subject](#), and the new national curriculum ensures that it will be taught as such. It sets the expectation that pupils will perform, listen to, review and evaluate music across a range of historical periods, genres, styles and traditions, including the works of great composers and musicians.

By the time they leave key stage 3, children from all backgrounds should be prepared to, if they wish, embark on a GCSE course with confidence.

That is particularly important now that the GCSE will be more rigorous. When we revised music qualifications last year, we were told that the gap between GCSE and A level music was too wide. Many students who did well at GCSE were unable to cope with the demands of the AS and A level syllabus. We have tackled that not by dumbing down the A level, but by increasing the challenge of the GCSE. At GCSE, students now have to read and write staff notation. And at least 1 area of study must contain music from the western classical tradition, better preparing pupils for A level study and beyond.

Our vision for music education in this country can be summed up in 2 words: equity and quality. From their first exposure to the joys of music at a young age, through to providing for the brightest and most talented young musicians, all children

deserve to be given the chance to fulfil their musical potential. Thanks to London's 28 music hubs and the Music and Dance Scheme, and thanks to the Mayor's music fund, these principles are clearly being fulfilled in the capital.

I would like to say thank you for the inspiring work you do, ensuring that future generations of Londoners live lives enriched by music, and I hope you all have a wonderful day here at the Mayor's summit.

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Published:

22 March 2016

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Nick Gibb MP

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