

The Provision of Music in Special Education (PROMISE) 2015¹

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Abstract

The paper reports the outcomes of a national survey of music in special schools in England that was conducted in the summer of 2015. The survey sought to uncover the current state of affairs in the sector, whilst also allowing a comparison to be made with the findings of a related study undertaken at the end of the last century. The survey outcomes also provide contextual data to inform the design of a current wider national initiative to improve the overall effectiveness of music education in the UK for all children (the *inspire-music* project). In total, fifty-seven special schools responded to the on-line survey. Findings suggest that music is taught at least weekly to 95% of children aged 2–13 years (noting that 5–13 are the statutory ages for music in mainstream schools), with slightly smaller proportions for 14–16 year-olds (83%), an age group for whom music becomes an optional subject in mainstream schools, and less for the oldest age group (66% of 16–19 year-olds). Eighty per cent of schools reported that they employed a specialist music teacher, which appears to be a much higher proportion of musically qualified staffing than almost two decades earlier. Where schools have a formal music curriculum, over half (59%) report that this is specially designed and adapted from existing models, such as the new *Sounds of Intent* framework. Music was also reported to be a common element in other lessons by 3:4 schools, and common at lunchtimes/break times (2:3). Regular and systematic input from outside music agencies was reported to be relatively common (3:4 schools). Four-fifths of schools had a dedicated music room, and music technology use was commonplace. Music therapy was reported to be available in 1:3 schools, a similar proportion to 1999–2000, but for relatively double the numbers of children (11%, compared to 5% earlier). In addition, virtually all

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schools (96%) reported children with a particular interest in music and almost all schools felt that music was important. The detailed data imply a clear positive shift since the late 1990s, with more musically qualified staffing, a broader range of resources for the music curriculum, more external organisations available to support music, increased use of music technology and improved music therapy provision. Nevertheless, given the small number of schools responding to the survey compared to those in total within the special schools sector, it is not yet possible to confirm that *all* children have access to an effective music education.

Introduction

The latest statistical data from the UK Government suggests that there are 1.5m children and young people of school age in England that have some form of special need, being approximately 18% of the total school population (DFE, 2014a). Of these, 232,190 pupils have formal 'statements of SEN' (2.8%), meaning that their special need is such that it requires some form of statutory support. Within this sub-group are a special school population of 41,585 children with *severe learning difficulties* (SLD) or *profound and multiple learning difficulties* (PMLD) in a ratio 3:1, collectively referred to here as pupils in special schools.

In the late 1980s, the first iteration of a statutory National Curriculum was emerging in England, with music being introduced in 1992 and quickly undergoing its first revision in 1995. However, despite these policy initiatives, there was a distinct absence of a national music education strategy for children and young people in special schools. Indeed, a schools' inspection summary report at that time (Ofsted, 1999) stated that one third of special schools had so few music lessons that it was impossible to make a judgment on their quality. Furthermore, where it was possible to make a judgment, only half of the schools demonstrated music provision that was satisfactory or better. Deconstructing these figures suggested that only one third of special schools in England at that time had observable effective music education provision. There was also little evidence about of music therapy in special schools.

As a consequence, the authors, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation with support from the RNIB², undertook a research-based enquiry into the provision of music in special education in England (termed the PROMISE enquiry, see Welch, Ockelford & Zimmermann, 2001). The research was conducted in three phases across the 1999–2000 academic year and included questionnaire sampling and school visits, supplemented by informal discussions with teachers and other professionals. A total of 53 schools participated, representing 2,758 pupils, and

²Royal National Institute for the Blind, since renamed as the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

equating to approximately 10% of special schools. Although the research was exploratory in nature, the data suggested that there was considerable variation in the quantity and quality of music education and music therapy available to pupils. Nevertheless, there was evidence of examples of effective educational practice that could provide the basis for raising standards across this special school sector if these could be grounded in an appropriate, evidence-based national curriculum framework.

The outcome of the research, the 'PROMISE' report, offered evidence of a widespread recognition of the potential benefits of music for children in special schools, both as an area of development in its own right, as well as in supporting wider learning and well-being (Welch, Ockelford & Zimmermann, *op.cit.*). Schools reported that they would welcome clearer guidance on how to ensure high quality music provision for their pupils.

However, in the absence of official guidance at that time as to how to frame music education for this group of children and young people, the team secured further research funding from various sources³ to address this need. The new funding led to the establishment of the *Sounds of Intent* project whose aim, firstly, was to undertake basic research to map the musical development of children and young people in special schools (see, e.g. Ockelford et al., 2005; Welch et al., 2009; Cheng et al., 2009; Vogiatzoglou et al., 2011; Ockelford and Zapata Restrepo, 2012) and, secondly, through applied research, to provide evidence-based guidance on appropriate music pedagogy for all children in special education (thus informing policy and practice).

Once the mapping phase was complete, an interactive web-based version of the resulting developmental framework was designed, trialled and launched, with the intention of enabling practitioners and parents/carers to gauge their children's levels of musical attainment, to chart any changes that may occur over time and, in response to particular musical experiences and interventions, to record qualitative observations in the form of written, video or audio data, thus building up a profile of a child's experiences, achievements and development (see www.soundsofintent.org – Welch & Ockelford, 2015).

The official version of the website went live in February 2012. Since then, the online platform has had over 6.2 million unique visitors from all over the world, with 937,745 resources opened, streamed or downloaded (to 26 March 2016), comprising, for example, video and audio files, work-cards and pupil registration

³ External research funding for *Sounds of Intent* has been received from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Amber Trust, Soundabout and RNIB, alongside 'in kind' support from the Institute of Education, University of London (now UCL Institute of Education) and Roehampton University.

forms. There are currently over 630 registered practitioners, of whom 250+ are actively using the assessment tool. These represent over 190 special schools or schools with specialist SEN units/provision, with 3,586 pupils currently being assessed using the online system that holds over 9,000 recorded sessions. The framework, either in the original English or through translation, is being used to support music education for children with special needs in the UK, USA, Haiti, Spain, Portugal, Colombia, Taiwan, Japan, The Netherlands and Pakistan.

Notwithstanding the interest in the *Sounds of Intent* project and its official recognition by the English schools' inspection body, Ofsted, as an exemplar of good practice in music education⁴, a recent independent review of school music education nationally (Zeserson et al, 2014) suggested that, in general, the place and status of music continues to vary widely across the country, despite being more inclusive, musically diverse and better quality than a decade earlier⁵. This finding was echoed at an expert meeting in London (February, 2015), called by the UK Music Education Council (MEC), to discuss the current status of music in the special school sector.

Consequently, given this background, alongside the interest in *Sounds of Intent* (and its new offshoot, *Sounds of Intent in the Early Years*, www.eysoi.org), it seemed appropriate to revisit the original PROMISE research findings and to investigate more formally the perceptions of the current status of music education in special schools.

Methodology

Accordingly, an on-line survey was piloted, designed and (with appropriate ethical approval) distributed to special schools across England in June 2015, with responses requested by the end of the academic school year (July). The original PROMISE survey had been sent to a sub-section of special schools that were believed to cater specifically for children with learning difficulties—although we discovered subsequently that there was considerable overlap in school pupil populations across the sector. However, given the significant changes within the sector over the past two decades, with schools changing official designation and population and some being incorporated into larger units, the decision was made to survey [all special schools](#) in England in the Summer of 2015 rather than to go back to the original set of responders from the turn of the century. The team felt that the resultant data were likely to be more representative of the special school sector as a whole

⁴ Ofsted (2012) published six exemplars of good practice in music education as part of a wider triennial review of music education and related professional development materials. See <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110158>
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/383377/Music_professional_development_materials.pdf

⁵ See <http://www.inspire-music.org> for more details of the independent PHF-funded report into the nature and status of music education in England in early 2014.

(101,500 pupils in 1,033 schools). In total, 57 schools responded, representing 7,306 pupils, and drawn from all nine English regions.

The focus for the PROMISE 2015 survey was on seeking information using the same general categories as in 1999–2000. Questions related to the nature and type of music education being offered, including staffing and resources, as well as music's place and perceived value in the curriculum.

Main findings

(i) Access to music education

There was a mix of pupil access to music education, with 91% ($n=51$) of schools providing whole class music lessons, 65% ($n=36$) offering sessions to small groups and just over half (57%, $n=32$) providing 1:1 lessons. In addition, 40% ($n=23$) provided instrumental lessons and over one-third of schools listed other kinds of regular, usually weekly, music-based education, including music therapy. A common comment concerned the use of, and opportunities for, music (including singing) throughout the school day.

Overall, music was being provided at least weekly for 95% of children aged 2–14 years, including all those required by statute to have music education from ages 5 to 14⁶. In addition, early years music provision was universal (100%), being at least weekly in schools that responded to this question ($n=36$). Encouragingly, 4:5 schools (83%, $n=46$) taught weekly class music lessons to pupils in Key Stage 4 (ages 14–16), an age phase for which music becomes optional in the National Curriculum; 2:3 (66%, $n=32$) provided music for their oldest pupils at least weekly (ages 17–19).

(ii) Music staffing

Specialist music teachers taught music in the majority of schools (80%, $n=39$) and class teachers taught music in half of the schools (51%). There appears to be a much higher proportion of musically qualified staffing compared to two decades earlier where under half (43%) of school music coordinators had a music degree, or had specialised in music in their teacher education. A fifth of schools also had music led by classroom assistants (which our previous observations had suggested to be more common with younger children). Two schools mentioned class teachers or classroom assistants who had received specialist training and had instrumental skills. These members of staff provided certain types of musical experience, such as resonance board activities. Instrumental teachers taught specific instruments, either in small

⁶ Within the English school system, this pupil age range is divided into three phases, labelled Key Stages 1 to 3, ages 5-7, 7-11, 11-14.

groups, or 1:1. Two schools had a music technology specialist providing 1:1 sessions. Another had a braille music tutor.

In terms of staff music qualifications, the survey answers suggested that this was an aspect not widely known within schools and, consequently, the reporting was more varied. Where knowledge existed, as might be expected, specialist music teachers and instrumental teachers held qualifications in music, and three quarters of these also held Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Overall, most schools were able to call upon someone with experience of music education on their staff, whether classroom teachers, specialist staff member, classroom assistant, and/or visiting instrumentalist. Additionally, between 43–55% of schools reported some form of music professional development in the previous twelve months, either led internally (43%, $n=37$), or by an external specialist, either at the school (55%, $n=40$), or by staff attendance at a local Music Hub⁷ session (43%, $n=37$).

The majority of respondents had plans for professional development in 2015–2016, with one third ($n=15$) focused on music technology (e.g., iPads, Soundbeam, Beamz, Kaoss pads and Charanga resources). Other needs were more general (e.g., singing, support for music making by non-specialists, basic training for music lessons involving children with complex and moderate needs, and training using resonance boards through Soundabout). Five schools made specific mention of a need for new members of staff to be inducted into the use of *Sounds of Intent*.

(iii) Music curricula

Many schools that responded were not obliged to follow the English National Curriculum for Music. Responses ($n=49$) suggested that schools drew on a wide variety of curricular sources: over half (59%, $n=29$) devised their own music curricula, some (12%, $n=6$) adopted/adapted a local Music Hub curriculum, and/or a commercial scheme (20%, $n=10$). Only a small proportion (16%, $n=8$) did not have a documented curriculum.

(iv) Music in other areas of school life

Respondents ($n=50$) offered a wide range of comments on the use of music in other areas of school life, including supporting other aspects of the curriculum, such as topic work, literacy and drama ($n=8$), foreign languages ($n=2$), numeracy/mathematics ($n=5$), physical education and dance ($n=10$), humanities

⁷ ‘Music Education Hubs are groups of organisations – such as local authorities, schools, other hubs, arts organisations, community or voluntary organisations – working together to create joined-up music education provision, respond to local need and fulfil the objectives of the hub. Hubs are coordinated by the hub lead organisation, which takes on responsibility for the funding and governance of the hub. The total amount of hub funding from the Department for Education in 2015–16 is £75 million.’ Retrieved 1 November 2015 from <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/cyp/music-education/music-education-hubs/>

($n=5$), religious education ($n=3$), science ($n=3$), and art ($n=2$). Music was also commonplace across early years activity.

In terms of incidence, music was reported as being evidenced regularly in non-music lessons by nearly three-quarters of respondent schools, i.e., daily (60%), $n=30$ or weekly (14%, $n=7$). Similarly, two-thirds of schools reported music at lunchtimes, either daily (36%, $n=18$) or weekly (32%, $n=16$). One third of schools also had music scheduled after school (such as group work, dance club, signing choir) and most (80%, $n=40$) had music at special events, including fundraising. Musical cues were used at transition points in the school day ($n=10$), including greetings, signifying the day of the week, lining up, tidying up, lesson changes and goodbyes. One school noted that their Early Years class sang and signed every day. Two others reported that “all lessons start with music of reference”, and “We use music as a way to communicate with the pupils on a daily basis.”

(v) Engaging with external organisations and musicians

Some schools used their local networks to engage in regular, termly projects with local mainstream schools ($n=18$, one of which was weekly) and/or other local special schools ($n=15$). Similar numbers ($n=15$) were involved in projects with local Music Hubs. Nevertheless, around half of the respondents either did not have such partnership music projects, or did not know if they did.

Thirty-seven schools (75%) named outside music agencies (Music Hubs ($n=12$), local or national disability organisations, e.g., Live Music Now⁸ ($n=12$) and Jessie’s Fund⁹ ($n=3$)) or freelance musicians with whom they had worked in the previous twelve months; some schools had worked with several, with 41 other music organisations mentioned. These included regional and specialist music centres (such as Sage Gateshead, Royal Opera House, Purcell School, Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, English Touring Opera, Opera North, Music for Youth), as well as specialist charitable organisations (including Music for Autism, Music for Life, Music in Hospitals, Live Music Now, Music in the Round, Amber Trust, YAMSEN). Most of these external agencies visited the school for a day, but some took residencies, usually of a term. Musicians (from organisations or freelance) might be called in to contribute to days when the whole school investigated a particular topic, as in one school that has regular “Enrichment Days” where a specific country becomes the school focus.

⁸ Live Music Now is a registered charity that has focused on live music education provision for disadvantaged people since the early 1980s, including older people and those within the special education sector. The charity draws its inspiration from the life and work of one its founders, Yehudi Menuhin. <http://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/about-us>

⁹ Jessie’s Fund was established as a registered charity in April 1995 with the aim of helping seriously ill and disabled children in all areas of the UK through the therapeutic use of music. <http://www.jessiesfund.org.uk/our-aims/>

(vi) Music accreditation available to pupils and assessment

Because of pupils' special needs, the National Curriculum for music is likely to be disappplied (i.e., not required). As might be expected, therefore, relatively few children and young people within this respondent population had their music learning accredited. Nevertheless, some accreditation was evidenced, both internal and external. A small number of schools ($n=8$) presented children with their own, internal, music certificate. Two schools ran GCSE music classes. Eleven schools ran accredited vocational courses that included a musical element, and 17% ($n=7$) had some pupils taking graded instrumental examinations. In total, 21 different types of external, national music learning accreditation were mentioned, such as ABRSM, BTec, GCSE, A-level, Rock School, and Trinity. There were also more vocationally-based qualifications that included music elements (available through ASDAN¹⁰)¹¹.

This consideration was reinforced by another school that their pupils were only able to reach a standard for an internal certificate, implying that there is a gap in accreditation provision that could recognise music achievement at a special school level that was not just the application of a mainstream award designed for so-called 'neurotypical' pupils.

In terms of musical assessment, $n=45$ schools commented and 2:3 (65%, $n=33$) reported formally about music progress termly to parents. The most common assessment schemes were P Levels¹² (56%, $n=32$) and B Squared¹³ (20%, $n=11$), reported termly (sometimes monthly). Where *Sounds of Intent* was being used, this tended to be more frequently (4 schools weekly, 4 monthly or termly).

¹⁰ ASDAN is a curriculum development organisation and awarding body, offering [programmes](#) and [qualifications](#) that explicitly grow skills for learning, skills for employment and skills for life. Developed and managed by practitioners, ASDAN grew out of research work at the University of the West of England in the 1980s and was formally established as an educational charity in 1991. <http://www.asdan.org.uk/about>

¹¹ One respondent wrote, "This is something that needs looking into. Music accreditation from the nationals – ABRSM and Trinity – does not allow for 'special needs' in the same way that a special needs school means. Giving extra time to someone that is autistic is not up to scratch for making it actually inclusive. There, for example, could be a SEND music medal scheme that could run alongside the ABRSM music medals."

¹² 'P Levels' are 'Performance – P Scale – attainment targets for pupils with special educational needs' aged 5 to 16 who are perceived to be 'unable to access the National Curriculum' (DFE 2014b). They emerged initially as part of a Government response in the early 1990s to the recognition that children in the special school sector (and some pupils in mainstream schools) were likely to need alternative official guidance on attainment. The first National Curriculum has been introduced in Primary schools in 1989, with music emerging in 1992. Although the English National Curriculum for Music no longer has levels of attainment in its latest (fifth) iteration (2014), P Levels continue as statutory guidance (a somewhat paradoxical situation). The *Sounds of Intent* project arose out of the perceived inadequacy in the design of the P Levels for music.

¹³ B Squared (<http://www.bsquared.co.uk>) is a commercial assessment provider that offers software-based tools for measuring attainment in all National Curriculum subjects, as well as in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and for P Levels.

(vii) Resources for making and listening to music – spaces and sound sources around the school

Overall, 86% ($n=49$) schools either had a dedicated music room ($n=31$) or a music room that was shared with other activities ($n=18$). Over four-fifths of schools had a hall with a sound system and keyboard, with similar numbers reporting a sound system in their multisensory areas. Half of respondents had a sound system for their hydrotherapy pool (where this existed) and similar numbers had musical instruments in an outdoor installation. Free text commentary suggested that other accommodation was being used flexibly for music-related activity, such as music therapy. One school had a sound system that fed into two playgrounds; another had a designated music area with instruments for the two early years' classes. Two schools mentioned having additional small music rooms for music therapy or intensive interaction, one of which doubled as the instrumental teaching room, and, for one school, a space for "song writing and composing".

(viii) Music technology and other resources

Music technology is commonplace, as might be expected with the widespread public availability of new technology-related media. The largest category was non-specialist, such as Apps on tablets. Four-fifths (79%, $n=45$) said that they had this kind of technology. There was widespread availability of music software available for pupil use (such as Garage Band and Audacity) in 2:3 schools (65%, $n=36$). Just under half ($n=24$) had digital percussion, with similar numbers having the means to record pupils' musical work in a studio, or with microphones. Alongside mainstream music technology, half (52%, $n=30$) had specialist switching devices that used sound, such as Skoog, BigMack and Jelly Bean, with slightly fewer ($n=25$) having beam systems, all traditionally considered specifically for people with "special needs". One caveat to these details is the extent to which, notwithstanding availability, schools regularly use such devices. Some comments suggested that this was not always the case.

In terms of other music resources, all school accessed music material online, and most used CDs ($n=42$) and songbooks ($n=36$). Two schools reported that having no access to YouTube restricted what could be used. Two schools said they made their own materials, such as Powerpoint, with song lyrics along with pictures "to help word recognition". The most frequently used resources were percussion (tuned and untuned) and other acoustic instruments, including keyboards and ukuleles. When asked to name a favourite song/soundtrack/type of music, all respondents had at least one, with popular music genres predominating.

(ix) Music therapy

One third of respondent schools ($n=19$) had some form of music therapy being provided for pupils. This represents a similar proportion of schools (1:3) to 1999–2000. There is an average provision of 5.5 hours music therapy reported per week across 293 pupils (range 2–60 pupils; mean $n=15$ pupils), representing approximately 11% of this respondent school population. This is double the level of provision reported in 1999–2000 (5%)¹⁴. Four schools offered 1:1 sessions for all children, whereas the others provided a mix of group and 1:1 sessions. Therapy provision was usually by referral or a child's Statement of Special Educational Needs. Therapy was mainly funded from school budgets, but this was an issue for some.

Summary

The survey data evidence suggests that there is a greater awareness of the potential significance of music in special education, with 96% schools reporting children and young people with a particular interest in music (including 100 pupils in each of two schools). The majority of respondents (70%, $n=40$) valued music as (at least) equally important to other subjects in the curriculum and frequently as the most important. The detailed data imply a clear positive shift since the late 1990s, with more musically qualified staffing, a broader range of resources for the music curriculum, more external organisations available to support music, increased use of music technology and improved music therapy provision. Nevertheless, there is always more than can be done and survey respondents would welcome increased opportunities for staff development, curriculum enrichment and funding for resources, in order that many more children are able to engage and be successful *in* and *through* music, whatever their needs. The reported success of the *Sounds of Intent* framework, for example, provides an ideal opportunity for increased numbers of schools to ensure a more systematic assessment of pupils' musical attainment and progress. This, in turn, could support a (national) music accreditation structure that is more sensitive to the needs of the special school population, a topic that is under active discussion with Trinity College London.

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¹⁴ The proportion of pupils receiving music therapy in 1999–2000 was estimated at 5% in respondent schools and 2% of the total special school learning difficulties population. The comparable proportions for 2015 were 11% of respondents and 4% of population.

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