

Could do better?

Charlotte Gardner marks the report card of a UK scheme designed to further music education in schools



Last September the UK government launched Tune In: Year of Music. The year-long national celebration of its existing music education schemes is essentially a PR drive, designed to entice aboard those schools not yet participating. An accompanying report by Susan Hallam outlines the broader educational benefits of music, such as increased concentration and improved linguistic skills, and various artistic bodies have signed up to engaging with any school that contacts them. The timing is key. After this summer's general election, the new government will have to decide who loses out in the inevitable ensuing budget cuts. Year of Music, then, is the project's government champions' last chance to prove their schemes worthy of post-2011 funding: their end-of-school report.

Some lucky individuals breeze through school on a tide of universal popularity and academic success. Others are social and academic disaster-areas. During the 1990s government music strategy fitted that last scenario. A decade after the 1988 Education Reform Act devolved spending decisions to schools and axed local authorities' responsibilities to deliver music services, music provision had dropped to just £30m per year from £100m. Once in power, the current government was slow to improve the situation. The 2004 Music Manifesto raised music's profile considerably but it wasn't until 2007, when £332m of funding was allocated

over four years, that real progress happened. Today, 80 per cent of primary schools are signed up to Sing Up!, the 2007 initiative to get every primary school in England singing daily. Meanwhile, Wider Opportunities (2008) aims to provide every primary-age child with instrumental tuition, free for a year, and afterwards at an affordable rate should they wish to continue. In the pilot projects 70-100 per cent of children did wish it, and the figures so far for nationwide roll-out are similarly strong.

However, schools watchdog Ofsted's 2009 *Making More of Music* report found that a third of surveyed schools didn't know about the schemes. Even when they do know, John Banks, the National Union of Teacher's head of education, talks of the "misconception that foundation subjects such as music and art are second order," so "you're not likely to get into music if you're worried about numeracy and literacy". Ofsted also found that, while "the best programmes were making a real difference...not all were of sufficient duration or quality". Furthermore, the current schemes focus just on primary schools.

Ofsted found that no singing whatsoever took place in over three in 10 secondary schools.

Richard Hallam, the schemes' national participation director, hopes Susan Hallam's report will persuade reluctant schools, as will Local Authority Music Plans drawn up to target disengaged schools. He insists Wider Opportunities means long-term tuition, saying it's "starting with seven- and eight-year-olds but continuing right up until they leave school".

Sustainability is also built into Sing Up!, with two singing teachers trained per school to allow for staff turnover. However, he does admit that secondary schools are losing out. "There's never going to be enough money," he mourns. "So, we felt that if we really put enough resources into primary schools, you get a whole generation of young people coming through from a different starting-point".

Scott Ellaway is director of Orchestra Europa. Independently from government initiatives, Europa adopted King Solomon Academy in north London. He fears for the government's schemes' sustainability and that at base level they're performance-based rather than linked to the curriculum, despite the best programmes linking the two. "The way orchestras currently operate in this country is via the workshop method, or inviting children to concert venues," he explains. "I went into the school with our education officer and asked how we could be a part of the curriculum rather than a nicety brought in every now and again". In Europa's scheme, every other week two orchestral members help the music teacher to deliver the class curriculum. Once a term, they lead workshops. The children also visit orchestral rehearsals to sit alongside the musicians. It's a uniquely tailored relationship, intended to see pupils through from the age of four to 18, and the orchestra is signed up for the long-term.

Both Banks and Ellaway support the Year of

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Music but believe the true key to success lies in the past. "In a sense, the Year of Music is a consequence of the government's efforts to bring back what local authority music services used to offer", says Banks. "But

this constant drive to devolve everything to individual schools affects creative services badly. I think there should be a consistent resurrection of LA music services. There should also be an expectation that schools themselves offer a comprehensive individual music tuition to individual kids". Ellaway agrees, saying, "peripatetic lessons from the County Music Service are important, and Europa will never replace that".

The question, then, is whether the government's strategy as it currently stands will flourish as it graduates beyond 2011. Perhaps, to quote one memorable school report, it "has finally found its feet, but still needs to locate its socks". Hopefully that's enough for the funding to continue. ☉