

Hitting the right notes

Somehow been given the music coordinator role? It can be daunting but rewarding to lead a subject not emphasised in ITT but now under more Ofsted scrutiny. Try these tips.

We'd like you to take on the role of music coordinator. Didn't you say you had grade three flute?

Many a headteacher has uttered words such as these and many a teacher has answered with a nod/grimace, a creeping sense of dread rendering them momentarily speechless. Okay, a slight exaggeration, but long queues for the role of music coordinator are not a common sight in many primary schools.

Research shows that teachers, who, without a second thought, daily deliver lessons on subjects they are not specialists in, feel hugely lacking in confidence and worried when it comes to teaching music.

Be brave, be enthusiastic

Kate Smart, who was a joint winner of Classic FM's 2013 Music Teacher of the Year award and is music coordinator at Corpus Christi Primary School in Brixton, London, said she was terrified when she first started leading music 17 years ago.

'Nothing prepares you for it, but you just need to be brave, take a deep breath and throw yourself in,' she says. 'Be enthusiastic, make them laugh, make it so much fun that they are dying for their half-hour music lesson every week.'

And Sally Cathcart, director of development at The Voices Foundation (a music education charity working with primaries), says it is enthusiasm and a willingness to learn, not the ability to play four instruments like a virtuoso, that are the key qualities for the job.

'They just need to have an enthusiasm for the subject that they can share with everyone else in school; a desire to excite and inspire the children so that they can experience the beauty

of music,' she says. 'Often I go into schools and the curriculum leader just doesn't know where to start, and why should they?'

'Maybe they sing in a choir one evening a week or did a bit of clarinet when they were a child, so they suddenly find themselves the music coordinator.'

But she says that with the right training – as well as the requisite enthusiasm – even the least confident teacher can become an effective music leader.

Music in the spotlight

In 2011, the coalition government published *The importance of music: a national plan for music education*, which led to a radical shakeup of music services.

New music hubs, selected through a bidding process arranged by Arts Council England, were set up last year with the aim of tackling

Sally Ashworth
Teacher and journalist

wide disparities in the quality of music provision nationwide. Hubs' responsibilities include providing all children with the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and play in ensembles, making sure all children are singing regularly, and helping schools to deliver a high quality and challenging music curriculum by offering training and expertise.

However, in November, Ofsted published a critical report saying there was some way to go before hubs have a major impact on music teaching and learning. In *Music in schools: what hubs must do*, the inspectorate said schools should take better advantage of what hubs have to offer, including expert advice on curriculum planning, and for their part, hubs must work more closely and effectively with schools to

With the right training even the least confident teacher can become an effective music leader.





Recorders and ukeleles are both cheap and relatively straightforward to teach and learn.

help them deliver a high quality music education.

Too often, the schools visited expected little of pupils. They failed to ensure all pupils understood, and could use practically, common musical features such as notation, time signatures, scales, melody shape, chords and key signatures.

Many primary schools considered, without good reason, that pupils were not ready for such learning, involving musical theory, and believed that they would not enjoy it. (Ofsted, Nov 2013)

So if you are a primary music leader and any of Ofsted's opinions on music teaching strike a chord, what can you do to improve matters in your school? Here are some key areas to look at:

Developing a curriculum

One of Ofsted's biggest criticisms of primary school music is that it often lacks 'rigour', challenge and progression. As coordinator, encourage teachers to plan music lessons around a learning objective and success criteria – the same as any other subject. Yes, you want enjoyment in music to be communicated to children but lessons and units of work need to demonstrate clear progression and appropriate challenge for different

age groups and abilities.

Lesson objectives need not be overly complicated or daunting though. Sally Wagter gives an example of an objective for younger children as being able to clap a two or three-note rhythm. Again, hubs are there to help you improve your school's music curriculum. Ask them for advice; this is not something you have to tackle alone.

Many schools choose to pay for packages such as Charanga's Musical School, which offers ready-made and easy to follow units and resources. These often come with CPD training included and are a possibility well worth exploring.

Training

As a maths or science coordinator, you would automatically seek to develop your skills in those subjects; the same opportunities exist for music. Contact the hub in your area and ask about training available. They can help you access CPD appropriate to you and your school.

Looking beyond hubs, there are many other organisations offering courses, some very short and others involving up to a year of in-school mentoring and support. Kate Smart

suggests that as well as talking to your local authority or hub, see if there are any Advanced Skills music teachers in your area and get in touch with them for advice and support.

Sally Wagter, an experienced primary music teacher who has developed her own range of teaching resources called Active Music, believes teachers need to be offered more music training as students and throughout their careers.

'Enough time needs to be given to music training; the odd twilight session is really not enough. Teachers need to be able to build up their repertoires; learning one or two things and then building and building on that until they feel skilled.'

As well as giving you the skills you need to lead music, training will also increase your confidence to do so.

Resources

More and more schools are using or have started to experiment with music

Contacts

These groups and organisations are all very keen to help music coordinators. This list is obviously not exhaustive and an internet search will turn up many other useful points of contact.

- www.musicmark.org.uk The UK subject association for music. Offer training, books and information and involved in shaping the 2014 curriculum. Tel: 020 3747 4616
- www.musiceducationuk.com An online magazine and news service with lots of information about hubs, Ofsted and technology
- www.voices.org.uk Work with the government, LAs, hubs and primary schools to deliver sustainable solutions for teaching music. Offer one and five day training courses, in school programmes and workshops. Tel: 020 7730 6677
- www.singup.org 'Become a singing school'. Not-for-profit offering resources, training and a song bank through membership package. Tel 020 7908 5148



When children sing, do they get chance to see the musical notation as well as the words?

technology – particularly with the increasing expectation to embed ICT and computing across the curriculum.

Ask around to see what other schools are using, talk to experts at your local hub or there are many useful websites specialising in music technology for schools. If you have iPads, explore the range of music-making apps available; children love using them and you will be very popular. Kate Smart recommends the Garage Band app for a fun route into composition.

Special trips and visitors are a valuable addition to a well-planned music curriculum. But, as you would with any subject, make sure the workshop or visit fits in with what the children are learning. 'Try to make it part of the bigger structure, not just a fun afternoon,' says Sally Cathcart.

Music in a creative curriculum

Music lends itself brilliantly to being used in a cross-curricular context and there are opportunities to develop musical skills to be found at every turn.

Several more pages would be needed to explore this topic in sufficient detail, but it is worth at least starting to think about how you could weave musical learning into more lessons. Jonathan Barnes, a former primary teacher and

now senior lecturer in education at Canterbury Christ Church University, has written widely on cross-curricular approaches to music, and his work would be a useful starting point.

Singing

Singing plays a central role in primary school music and all children should have the chance to sing regularly. There is more to this than switching on a backing track and asking the children to sing along. Are teachers and those leading singing able to teach children the importance of good diction, how to sing in tune, or how to think about and improve phrasing and posture?

Are the children being taught age-appropriate songs? You wouldn't expect year 2 to tackle the same literary texts as year 6, and the same goes for works of music. 'Cauliflowers Fluffy is a good example of a song which is really difficult for young children to sing but gets used a lot because of the cute words,' says Sally Wagter.

On the other hand, it is important not to underestimate what children are capable of musically, so gaining a real understanding of what is suitable for different age groups is a crucial part of the music coordinator role.

When the children sing, do they get chance to see the musical notation as well as the words? This helps them to

understand melody shape, rhythm, beat and rests. Do teachers understand how to assess progress and attainment in singing?

It can initially seem a lot to think about, but with the right training and experience, it will start to feel as straightforward as planning and delivering lessons on any other subject.

Learning an instrument

Opportunities to learn a musical instrument for at least one term are available through the First Access scheme, formerly known as Wider Opportunities. Your local authority or music hub will be able to give you more information about this.

Does your school have any instrumental clubs? The recorder and ukulele are both popular choices, being both cheap and relatively straightforward to teach and learn. Many children no longer get the chance to learn an instrument on a one-to-one basis because lessons can be very expensive, so school clubs are providing a more important service than ever.

Are there any musical parents who would like to help? Ask around and make use of volunteers.

Hubs provide musical opportunities outside school, such as orchestras, ensembles and choirs, which cost little to join. Part of your role might be to let parents know about these, as they are not always aware of what is on offer.

Add to the fun

Being a music coordinator is a challenging role, particularly if your own musical experience is limited. But if you feel overwhelmed by the task you have been given, remember that the help is definitely out there, and what a difference a well-planned and creative music curriculum will make to your pupils' primary school experience and the ambience of the school – and just how much fun it can be.

In the words of Kate Smart, 'You are lucky if you are the music coordinator because music is the one thing that absolutely everyone likes and that taps into an area of our consciousness that nothing else can reach in quite the same way.'

PTU