

Omnishambles 101 ? The DfE's Model Music Curriculum

Dr Ally Daubney
4th September 2021



A personal 5-minute provocation for the ABCD conference debate on the MMC

image source: int.pmu.se

We make a lot of assumptions about music. We may need to get rid of these before we begin. For example, music isn't crotchets and quavers. It's not dots on paper. It is sounds.

- Paynter (1972) in Mills and Paynter (2008:26)

Before we get into the MMC: The shared vision for music education?

- Musical inclusive?
- Diverse Musical pathways?
- High levels of engagement?
- A Musically inclusive education that is accessible to, opens up and builds upon informal, non-formal and formal engagement across the age span, across contexts, regardless of means and circumstance?
- Valuing self-expression, creativity, agency and authenticity?
- Engagement that is inherently 'musical', i.e. embodying music?

A brief potted history of the Model Music Curriculum

Multiple reports highlight shortcomings in music education:

- Limited time for music in primary ITT/ITE and a reduction in specialist course routes.
- Consistent under-recruitment to secondary music ITE.
- Limited or no opportunities for primary trainees to see music being taught whilst on placements.
- Schools focussing on subjects which are linked to accountability measure – these totally exclude the arts at primary and secondary level. The arts become ‘squeezed out’ of the curriculum.
- The length of WCET (First access) programmes has reduced and schools are increasingly paying more money as a contribution for these as the grant falls in real terms.
- An increasing number of pupils with SEND are unable to access WCET, even within a mainstream setting.
- ‘Poor continuation rates after “first access” programmes.
- Catch-up’ in other subjects (e.g. math) means that some pupils have limited or no access to music in school.
- The cost of music tuition is too expensive for many and is becoming the preserve of those who can pay.
- More diversity on music education is required – it often does not recognise the community / context and ignores pupils’ cultural background, ambition, musical life beyond the classroom and interests.
- Recognition of the need to decolonising the music curriculum.
- Lack of opportunities to engage in music beyond the classroom in some schools.
- There has been a dramatic fall in the number of pupils taking music at GCSE and A level since 2010.
- The number of music teachers employed by schools has reduced considerably since 2010 whilst the number of teachers in EBAcc subjects has risen.
- Multiple ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has curtailed music.
- **Only one report mentions the need for a Model Music Curriculum as the solution to these. This is the Music Commission report, led by the ABRSM, who were also awarded the £15k contract to draft the MMC.**

The rhetoric...

“A rich variety of music should be part of the daily life of every school. We want all schools to have a rigorous and broad music curriculum, that inspires their pupils to love music, and stands alongside high levels of academic attainment...”

“After the most difficult of years, it’s time for a musical renaissance across England’s schools and I hope this will inspire a new generation of musicians.”

Nick Gibb, School Standards Minister

March 2021

The current reality

- Consistent devaluing of the value of music in education by multiple government policies since 2010
- School accountability measures that actively exclude the arts
- A constricted and further narrowing view of curriculum from the Department for Education
- Apparent denial by both the DfE and Ofsted of the large body of research on music education and musical learning which has been considered and developed from many different angles over many different years.

Leading to...

- Further narrow of access to music education in primary and secondary schools
- Falling amount of time allocated to music in schools – and the total eradication in others
- Falling number of teachers
- Falling uptake at KS4 and KS5

I agree with this

“Two things unite the people...

*That we want to provide the best possible musical experiences and education **for pupils in** our care*

And that the Model Music Curriculum is far from perfect”

Don Gilthorpe, Chair Elect (now chair) of the Music Teachers Association (Formerly known as the Masters and Mistresses Association)

The best point about the MMC:

The MMC is **not statutory**.

A school's statutory obligation is to provide a curriculum that is 'at least as ambitious' as the National Curriculum, not to teach the MMC.

The MMC is not a pre-requisite for Ofsted – there is no expectation that a school will use this Non-Statutory curriculum

“There will be no pre-requisite from inspectors that schools should adopt the Model Music Curriculum...”

*However there remains an expectation that schools have in place a music curriculum that is ambitious, well sequenced, implemented well and leads to good musical outcomes for **all pupils.**”*

Mark Phillips from Ofsted, Ofsted: March 2021

<https://twitter.com/EnglishCadence/status/1376503463459356674/photo/1>

The foreword perhaps tells us everything we need to know about **the authors' very limited understanding of musical progression:**

“The plan aims to support all pupils in their musical progression from Year 1 – where they’ll be introduced to beat, rhythm and pitch - through to secondary school, where pupils will be introduced to more technical aspects of music like quavers, treble clefs and staccato and legato.”

(MMC foreword)

Focus of the Model Music – 'Learning about' music

- *More young people will have the opportunity to **listen to and learn about** music through the ages, from Mozart and Bach to The Beatles and Whitney Houston, as part of a new plan for high-quality music lessons in every school.*
- *As part of the curriculum, pupils **will learn about the great composers of the world and develop their knowledge and skills in reading and writing music.** They will be **taught about** a range of genres and styles covering historically-important composers such as Vivaldi and Scott Joplin, world renowned pieces like Puccini's *Nessun Dorma*, and **be introduced to instruments and singing from Year 1.***

MMC Press release

Some viewpoints of composing in the MMC – just one of the areas that has been critiqued and shows significant flaws

- *“The composing area has a mix of ideas which primarily seem to support understanding of formal structures and traditional notation, with clarity on creative learning that supports an awareness of ‘how music works’ largely missing.”* (ISM review of MMC)
- “Why the approach to composing in the MMC is so poor” – a review by Robert Bunting.

<https://jfin107.wordpress.com/2021/05/11/why-the-mmc-approach-to-composing-is-so-poor-robert-bunting-april-2021/>

Musical Understanding - “why is it so disappointing that the Model Music Curriculum fails to address it at all?”



alison.daubney@googlemail.com

Video from Kevin Rogers, produced on behalf of the ISM

MMC 'more positive aspects'

1 hour per week,
plus WECT

Materials are for 5-14 age
range (but not acknowledging
Early Years learning)

It's opening up discussion on
curriculum

Attempt at providing a
breadth of listening (but with
significant limitations)

Singing materials show some
aspects of progression (but
come from an inherent
misunderstanding of young
voices)

Repeated familiarity year-on-
year with pieces of music

Just some of the MMC limitations/weaknesses...there are many others

Who is it for? Not clear.	What is it for? It doesn't map onto the National Curriculum	No clear conceptual framework	Lack of integration of musical processes	It recolonises, not decolonises, the curriculum	Ignorant of music education research about how children think and learn
Lack of breadth and diversity	Focus on outcomes not the journey	Very poor understanding of musical progress is shown throughout	Focus on a Western Canon; other music not always well defined / labelled and excluded	Controlled and narrow focus, e.g. in relation to 'composition'	Over-importance placed on notation
Lack of contemporary music, especially rock / pop	No curriculum ownership or authenticity/relevance encouraged	Significant issues with inclusivity	"Performance" lacks clarity, diversity and purpose	Sequence of musical learning not coherent	No recognition of musical learning that has taken place in early years
Could have been more careful with the use of language and some of the repertoire choices	No room for pupil engagement / ownership.	Very rigid learning modes – teacher as the giver of knowledge	"Empty vessels" approach to learning	Promoting models of music education from a bygone era	Potential for making / creating music using technology significantly ignored

Curriculum design should start from the premise that...

"...a music teacher never meets musically ignorant, untutored or uneducated pupils."

(Folkestad, 2006:136)

[There is no recognition of this in the MMC]

The Model Music Curriculum is an example of content-as-curriculum

"There is a tendency in education today to think of the curriculum in terms of a delivery model. Within this model, teachers are the white-van curriculum delivery service, dropping off pre-ordained packages of curriculum content within a set timetable of deliveries."

(Jonathan Savage, 2013, p. 85)

The MMC shows an astonishing misunderstanding about what a 'curriculum' is.

Going full circle...

The shared vision for music education?

- Musical inclusion?
- Diverse Musical pathways?
- Engagement?
- A Musically inclusive education that opens up and builds upon informal, non-formal and formal engagement across the age span, across contexts, regardless of means?
- Valuing self-expression, creativity, ownership and authenticity?

Fine and worthy aspirations.

Unfortunately this is not what the Model Music Curriculum will lead to.

In conclusion...

- Empowering and supporting teachers and pupils to take ownership of music education - appropriate to their specific context - and nurturing respectful professional relationships is crucial in this process going forward; putting the weak MMC in the middle of this would be a mistake.



alison.daubney@googlemail.com



The Model Music Curriculum:



Too many organisations and individuals
are happy to ignore the
(multiple)elephant(s) in the room



alison.daubney@googlemail.com



Thankfully, other popular schemes used in many primary schools are still fine to develop your curriculum from (and are resourced)

- Charanga
- Music Express
- Kapow
- Sing Up

(and others – these are some of the most well-known)

These are all designed to meet the requirements as set out by the **National Curriculum**, which is where a school's statutory obligation lies.

Further reading on the MMC

ISM review of the MMC <https://www.ism.org/news/reviewing-model-music-curriculum>

Robert Bunting review of the MMC <https://jfin107.wordpress.com/2021/05/09/critical-thoughts-on-the-model-music-curriculum-robert-bunting-2021/>

Why the MMC approach to composing is so poor <https://jfin107.wordpress.com/2021/05/11/why-the-mmc-approach-to-composing-is-so-poor-robert-bunting-april-2021/>

Music for all and the MMC – uncomfortable bedfellows? <https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/opinion/article/opinion-music-for-all-and-the-model-music-curriculum-uncomfortable-bedfellows>

The very model of a model music curriculum? <https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/opinion/article/the-very-model-of-a-model-music-curriculum>

The Model Music Curriculum: Omnishambles 101? <https://musiceducation.global/the-model-music-curriculum-omnishambles-101/>

Model Music Curriculum is a missed opportunity: <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/model-music-curriculum-missed-opportunity>

The model music curriculum: a chance for a reset? <https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/opinion/article/opinion-the-model-music-curriculum-a-chance-for-a-reset>

Making a model music curriculum: What's right for your school? https://issuu.com/primarymusicmagazine/docs/primary_music_magazine_issue_5.2_summer_term_2021/s/12494753

Soundstorm podcast on the MMC - three separate podcasts -, Ally Daubney, Stephen Berryman and Elizabeth Stafford <https://soundstorm-music.org.uk/news/podcast/>

alison.daubney@googlemail.com