

# Consultation on the provision of music in Special schools in Wales, Summer 2021: Executive summary

## Context

Anthem, Live Music Now Wales and Disability Arts Cymru have been working together to strengthen musical provision for Special schools in Wales. As part of this initiative, a national online event 'We are all musical' was held in November 2021. This event included the presentation of summative overview data from a survey consultation of Special schools concerning both their current provision and ambitions for music.

## Main findings

There are 40 maintained Special schools and 6 independent schools in Wales. Of these, eighteen responded to the survey (17:40 maintained [43%] and 1:6 independent [17%]), equating to data from 39% of Welsh Special schools overall.

- Most of the schools (4:5 [82%]) offer whole class music lessons, but not all. A smaller proportion (approximately 1:2) offer small group [53%] and one-to-one [59%] music sessions for their pupils. A minority [41%] provide instrumental lessons.
- In addition, music appears at other times in the school day, such as to signal transitions, and at lunchtime and breaks. Music is also used to enrich other areas of the curriculum, such as language and literacy, numeracy, art and drama. The potential wider benefits of music are used to promote pupils' health and wellbeing. Music is also reported to be part of assemblies for individual classes, phases (groups of classes) and whole school assemblies.
- Although all age groups receive music, from early years through to sixteen plus, the amount of music is variable. For a small minority of pupils (around 7-8%), music is seen as a daily activity up to age of sixteen, but it is more common weekly and this level of provision is seen to reduce with succeeding age groups, such that older pupils (Key Stage 4, aged fourteen and above) are more likely to experience music occasionally, or not at all.
- Despite the Covid-19 pandemic over the past two years and its highly disruptive impact on all sectors of education, most of the participant Welsh Special schools (4:5 [83%]) used modern communications technology platforms, such as Zoom and Teams, to access live music for their classes. This included streaming of live concerts

[58%], provision of music for children at home [50%], and sessions for individuals or small groups of children [33%]. However, there were caveats expressed in the written commentary by individual respondents.

- ‘Only a handful of our pupils would be able to benefit from an online provision, whereas all of our pupils would be able to access and benefit from a face-to-face experience of music.’
- ‘Good in that people can access it from wherever...But nothing can beat live music! The interaction between the players and the audience, and the feel of the music in the atmosphere around you! People, not just children, benefit more from live music when they can 'feel' and be more involved in the music.’
- In terms of the teaching of music, approximately two-thirds [61%] reported that music sessions were led by class teachers, with a small proportion [17%] led by teaching assistants. Only a minority of schools [28%] employed a part-time or full-time music specialist, although a larger number – around half [56%] – used visiting musicians.
- Within those individuals who taught music in the participant schools (n=31), approximately one third [29%] reported holding no specific music qualification. However, just under half [46%] of class teachers had Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) which included music as part of their original award. However, given the uneven and often somewhat cursory nature of music in UK initial teacher education provision leading to QTS (see Zeserson et al, 2014 and the *inspire-music* website), it is unclear what this level of professional expertise in general music education represents. Within the schools which reported specialist music staff, just over half [56%] held QTS with music or a specialist music diploma.
- Overall, participant schools reported very little or no professional development in music education over the past year, perhaps not surprising in the context of the pandemic. When this set of responses is set alongside the general reported level of expertise in music education (see previous bullet), however, there appears to be a clear need for continuing professional development (CPD) and written responses suggest that this would be welcomed. This professional need can be seen in the context of (1) a growing international recognition of the value of the arts, including music, in promoting general health and wellbeing (e.g., Fancourt & Finn, 2019) and (2) the potential for music to enhance many other aspects of social, intellectual and emotional development (*cf* Welch et al, 2019).
- With regard to Special schools’ choice and design of music curricula, some had created their own [28%], and/or adapted commercially available music schemes [39%]. Two schools used curricula provided by the Local Music Service. Overall, a significant minority (1:3) reported no documented music curriculum.
- Concerning the numbers of children receiving individual instrumental music lessons, data were available from fifteen of the eighteen respondent schools. These schools reported 33 children in total, with all but one learning at a basic level. The most popular instruments were percussion (n=10), Guitar (6), and Piano and Ukulele (5 each). If these total numbers are applied in the context of the 5,220 pupil population in Special schools in Wales (StatsWales, 9 Sept 2021), this would equate to less than 1% (0.6%) of pupils receiving some form of instrumental tuition.

- Approximately 1:4 schools engaged in music collaboration projects with others, such as local Special schools, local mainstream schools, or the local music service. These tended to happen on a termly basis. In contrast, 3:4 schools reported that they never had such projects.
- In terms of any Special school offering any formal recognition to celebrate their pupils' musical behavior and learning, 2:3 schools [65%] responded 'none'. A small number of individual schools provided some form of certification. This ranged from their own music certificate, vocation training that included music, instrumental/vocal grades, or Arts award.
- In contrast, participant schools had a range of ways in which they might track the musical progress of pupils. These included reporting to parents (usually termly), such as by drawing on external assessment criteria, as offered in frameworks such as P Levels, Sounds of Intent, and B Squared. However, a majority [57%] reported that they never assessed pupils in music.
- Schools were asked about the musical resources available. Concerning musical instruments, nearly all schools had classroom percussion instruments [94%] and around three-quarters [71%] had a selection of band instruments, such as keyboards, guitars and drums. Slightly fewer (2:3 [65%]) had a piano and less than half had a dedicated music room [41%] or a shared music room [12%]. A majority of Special schools had a sound system in the school hall [76%] and separate sound systems in multi-sensory areas [71%], whereas around half [53%] reported a sound system in the hydrotherapy pool. One third of schools had musical instruments in an outside installation [36%].
- As might be expected, schools had a wide range of modern technology available, although not all schools had specialist music technology. Just over half [59%] had an ultrasound beam system to translate movement into music/sound (such as Soundbeam, Optimusic), and/or specialist switching devices (such as Jelly Bean switches) [53%], and/or digital percussion instruments (such as Drum pads) [47%]. Three-quarters of schools had specialist music software for pupils' use [76%] and a significant minority [41%] had either a dedicated music studio or microphones. Nearly all schools [94%] had non-specialist technology, such as iPads, which could be used for music.
- Overall, a majority of respondent Special schools in Wales reported that they did not provide music therapy [59%], although a minority did [41%]. Where music therapy was available, there was a wide difference in the amount of provision, varying from one to twelve hours a week – sometimes individually, or in small groups. Occasionally, therapy was provided on a class basis. Similarly, the numbers of pupils receiving music therapy was also quite variable in individual schools, reported to be between 1 and 35 pupils. It would seem that, where available, music therapy tended to be funded from school budgets. Generally, these schools valued their therapy provision and reported it as being beneficial.
- All respondent schools [100%] reported that they had individual pupils who showed a particular interest in music and could offer illustrations of how this manifested itself. They also valued music's contribution to other areas of their pupils' development, such as related to communication [94%], engagement [100%], confidence [88%], creativity [94%], self-expression [82%], emotional development [88%], as well as the development of fine motor skills [65%] and social skills [76%].

- Nevertheless, despite these perceived musical and other-than-musical benefits, only two schools [18%] reported that music was ‘most important in your school compared with other subjects’. The majority reported music to be ‘quite important’ or ‘equal to other subjects’.
- It is possible to compare the data from this Welsh (2021) Special schools and music survey with an earlier related survey from Special schools England (Welch et al 2015) (see Table 1 below). Analyses of the data indicate that provision for music in the participant Special schools in Wales has much in common with that in England six years ago, although this is not identical. With the caveat that the numbers of participant schools are not equal, it would seem that music appears to have a higher priority in England in terms of dedicated space for music, resourcing and weekly curricular time.

| Survey findings  | Wales (2021) | England (2015) |
|--|--------------|----------------|
|  | 18 schools   | 57 schools     |
| • Schools have a dedicated music room                        | <1:2         | 2:3            |
| • Music is a common element in other lessons                 | √            | √              |
| • Music is common at lunchtimes and breaktimes               | √            | √              |
| • Technology is commonplace                                  | √            | √              |
| • Music therapy is available for pupils                      | 41%          | 40%            |
| • Schools use Sounds of Intent to assess progress            | 6%           | 33%            |
| • Music tends to be weekly from Early Years to KS3 education | 46-65%       | 94-97%         |
| • Schools employ a specialist music teacher FT/PT            | √            | √              |
|  | 56%          | 80%            |

- However, there is much to celebrate in the Welsh data. Although provision appears to be uneven across the participant schools, there are some schools for whom music is a high priority, with clear structured curricula, high levels of resources, and appropriate mechanisms for pupil assessment and reporting, as well as a budgetary commitment in terms of staffing and music/sound-making provision.
- Amongst the reported barriers to increased music provision across the Special sector, written comments from respondents suggest that more funding is needed, such as to address a lack of suitable instruments and staffing, as well as increased professional development to support teacher self-efficacy in music. Schools would welcome more expert guidance to ensure that their music provision was more effective.
- Given the increasing neuroscientific and clinical research into the nature and wider benefits of music, as well as the psychological and cultural research into the value of music in its own right, the results of this survey might be seen as an opportune moment for Special schools in Wales to adopt a more sector-wide holistic approach to ensuring effective and differentiated learning in and through music for all pupils.

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## References

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