



**Open Letter from Matt Griffiths, CEO of Youth Music
to
The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP and the DfE Model Music Curriculum Panel**

Wednesday 22 May 2019

Dear Nick and colleagues

I write to you today as we launch the research findings from Exchanging Notes in collaboration with Birmingham City University and call for an urgent transformation of music in schools, to shake up the way it is perceived and taught.

Exchanging Notes was an action research programme and longitudinal study taking place over four academic years from 2014/15 to 2017/18 funded by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. Seven secondary, two special and one virtual school worked in partnership with music education charities to co-design and co-deliver industry facing curricula in their schools.

Our objective with Exchanging Notes was to explore the educational and wider developmental outcomes for young people at risk of exclusion and low educational attainment who participated in the programme from Year 7 right through to Year 10. We believed that bringing the expertise of teachers together with the expertise of music leaders from the charities had the potential to provide a diverse and modern music curriculum that they would be unable to provide on their own.

I thought the Exchanging Notes research findings would be of particular relevance to you all as you put together a model music curriculum for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. They can be found here: www.youthmusic.org.uk/exchangingnotes

In summary, the key findings are as follows:

- Young people at risk of exclusion at the outset of the programme maintained high levels of attendance (>95%) throughout the programme.
- The programme helped young people re-enter mainstream education after having been excluded.
- Over the four-year programme there was an increase in young people performing above expectation in Maths (from 14% to 21%) and English (from 15% to 28%).

Through effective partnership working between the schools and charities, young people participated in a music curriculum which reflected their diverse interests and existing lives in music. This contributed to their personal development and emotional well-being as a result of regular music-making.

An important factor was that the type of music explored in the curriculum wasn't imposed on them - it was instead decided and delivered *with* them.

We urge you and the panel to take these research findings into consideration as you put together a model music curriculum. Exchanging Notes tells us that this 'model' has at its core a creative, participatory and social approach to music that gives young people the opportunity to shape their own curriculum – driven by the music they are passionate about. By reimagining the music curriculum in this way and scaling up the findings of Exchanging Notes across the country, music in schools has the potential to re-engage young people in education across all subjects, develop their confidence, resilience and self-belief, and create a more positive attitude to learning.

The Exchanging Notes programme provides evidence of the broad-reaching outcomes that can be achieved through learning in music in schools. EBacc and Progress 8 measures are widely thought to have contributed to a decline in music in secondary schools; and teachers in the study told us that the focus on data and attainment made them feel less able to prioritise a personalised, creative and participatory approach in their classrooms. We urge the Department for Education, OFSTED, and DCMS to collaboratively develop an action plan to ensure a sustainable, innovative and diverse music curriculum in schools. School success measures *must* go beyond their current, singular focus on attainment to include, equally, outcomes for young people especially for their social and emotional wellbeing.

I would be very happy to provide further information about Exchanging Notes or other aspects of our work at Youth Music to help inform the model music curriculum and future policy direction.

All best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Griffiths', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Griffiths
CEO
Youth Music