

Speech: Nick Gibb: the importance of high-quality arts education

It is a pleasure to be at the Music and Drama Education Exposition. This event offers teachers and organisations promoting music and drama education the opportunity to attend seminars, workshops and debates. And after the growth in popularity over the past 5 years, the exposition will be visiting Manchester in October, giving teachers from all over the country the opportunity to benefit from what the exposition has to offer.

Thanks to the likes of Pinewood Studios, the West End, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Britain is world leading when it comes to film, theatre and music. The arts contribute to the wealth of our nation, both culturally and financially.

As a child I was in the church and school choirs and began piano lessons at the age of 5; alas, ceasing piano lessons at the age of 6. But every day in school assemblies we were played a piece of classical music; we never knew the names of the pieces but it introduced us to the wonders of the best music ever written and from that I became a lifelong lover of classical music.

That's why I am keen for primary schools to become involved with the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM)'s Classical 100. This free resource, designed specifically for primary schools in conjunction with Classic FM, Decca and primary teachers, can help introduce pupils to classical music. Since it was launched, over 3,000 English primary schools have registered to use the resource.

Last month I visited 2 schools in Birmingham to see Classical 100 in operation. I joined in with a class of year 3 children in Bournville Junior School playing Beethoven's Ode to Joy on bell plates and hand chimes.

It is important that all pupils are taught about and have the opportunity to participate in the arts. When I returned to the Department for Education in 2014 as Minister of State for School Reform, one of the first announcements I made was that funding for music education hubs would increase from £58 million in 2014 to 2015, to £75 million in 2015 to 2016. And in November last year I announced that [music education hubs would continue to receive £75 million every year until 2020](#).

That funding should support all pupils, whatever their background, whatever their family's income, and whatever particular special needs or disabilities they may have. No child should be excluded from music because their parents cannot afford to pay for lessons or an instrument, or because they have physical disabilities or other special needs.

Last week I met Stephen Hetherington, founder of the [One-Handed Musical Instrument Trust](#) and heard about the excellent work the trust is doing to remove the barriers to music faced by physically disabled people. This

includes a pilot, with the [Birmingham music education hub](#) and others, teaching children to play one handed recorders and specially adapted trumpets. I am delighted to see that Stephen is here today with colleagues from Birmingham City University and I urge you to find out more about their work and how it could help your pupils.

The Department also provides £29 million for the [Music and Dance Scheme](#), which ensures that exceptionally talented young musicians and dancers are able to fulfil their potential. The vast majority of pupils at the specialist schools like the Royal Ballet School and Yehudi Menuhin School receive means-tested support.

Similarly, the £13.5 million [Dance and Drama Award scheme](#) provides means-tested support for aspiring young dancers and actors, helping many young people on their way to careers in the performing arts.

The government provides funding for the national youth music ensembles such as the National Youth Orchestra and Youth Music Theatre UK. And we provide funding for In Harmony, an intensive orchestral experience focused on schools in some of the country's most deprived communities.

These specialist schemes are vital, but they do not reach everyone, which is why the government has focused on improving the quality of arts education in schools. Music and art and design are compulsory in the [national curriculum](#) from the age of 5 to 14. Dance is a compulsory part of the [PE curriculum](#) for 5- to 14-year-olds. And drama is a compulsory part of the [English curriculum](#) for 5- to 16-year-olds.

Following the review of the national curriculum, a greater emphasis was placed on teaching pupils the core knowledge and techniques underpinning these subjects:

- The new [art and design curriculum](#) has a stronger focus on the teaching of drawing from an early age and a new emphasis on knowing about the historical development of art through a greater emphasis on teaching about great artists and designers.
- The revised [programmes of study for music](#) place a greater focus on the historical development of music and listening to the work of great composers. For example, there is a new reference to pupils being taught to appreciate and understand a wide range of high quality live and recorded music in key stage 2.
- And, in the new [drama GCSE](#), pupils will study at least 1 play in depth and 2 extracts from a second contrasting play. This rigorous study of pieces of drama will be accompanied by participation in at least 2 performances.

And today, I can announce that the government has updated [content for the GCSE in drama](#) and [A level in drama and theatre studies](#). This update specifies that all pupils will now have the entitlement to experience live theatre, reaffirming the government's commitment to providing pupils with an enriching arts education. When studying for qualifications in drama, pupils should not be limited to watching a DVD or a peer performance; they should have the

opportunity to sit in the audience, experiencing a live performance.

The government is committed to ensuring that high-quality arts education is the entitlement of every single child. All pupils, whatever their background, should have access to the best that has been thought and said, including a secure grounding in the arts.

In 2010, the government inherited a school system where the curriculum had been stripped of the rich knowledge content that all children deserve to be taught. For our society to be socially just and socially mobile, all pupils must be endowed with the core knowledge needed to be culturally literate.

The government acted.

As well as ending the grade inflation that devalued the public's faith in exams and removing many so-called 'equivalent' qualifications, the government, through the introduction of the [EBacc](#), has placed greater emphasis on ensuring pupils are taught a core academic curriculum.

The government now publishes both the proportion of pupils entering and the proportion of pupils achieving a good pass in the 5 EBacc subjects: English, maths, a science, a humanity and a language. In 2010, just one-fifth of pupils were studying this combination of subjects. This has since risen to two-fifths, with the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc rising year on year.

Yesterday, I launched the [New Schools Network's report into the importance of the arts](#) – alongside Matthew Hancock, Minister of State for digital and culture policy. The report examined the relationship between arts education and the EBacc.

Despite the success of the EBacc in ensuring greater numbers of pupils are now taking the combination of subjects that facilitate pupils pursuing any post-16 path they should choose – including attending one of the country's world-leading universities – the policy has consistently come in for criticism.

This report puts to rest the tired and inaccurate criticisms of the EBacc policy, a policy which is designed to make this country more meritocratic. In fact, a recent [Sutton Trust report](#) found that schools enthusiastically adapting their curriculum to enter more pupils into EBacc subjects were more likely to achieve good English and maths GCSEs and go on to take A level or equivalent level 3 qualifications, as compared to a set of schools with similar characteristics. Additionally, the pupil premium gap closed slightly more in these schools compared with schools with similar pupil intakes.

But a particularly damaging criticism of the policy is that it is driving the arts out of education. This is not true, as the report makes clear. The EBacc was deliberately restricted to 5 subject areas to ensure that pupils could take the EBacc and still pursue a number of other subjects, including arts subjects. Data suggests that on average pupils in state-funded schools enter 9 GCSE subjects which count in the performance tables – rising to 10 for

pupils with higher prior attainment – leaving ample room for pupils to study a number of arts subjects alongside the EBacc. The proportion of pupils in state funded schools taking at least 1 arts subject has increased from 45.8% in 2011 (when the EBacc was announced) to 48.0% in 2016.

But the report is correct that the government must do more to extol the importance of a high-quality arts education. The government's vision for arts education is encapsulated in 2 words: equity and quality. And this vision must be backed up by concrete action.

That is why I am here to speak today: to express my gratitude to you for what you do for arts education in this country, and to offer you my support as you help to ensure all pupils – whatever their background – receive the high quality music and arts education they deserve.

Thank you.