



# **Whole Class Ensemble Teaching (WCET)**

## **Final Report**

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## **Executive Summary**

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## Whole Class Ensemble Tuition (WCET): Final Report

### Key Findings

It is possible to implement WCET in ways that lead to high standards of instrumental playing and high continuation rates.

For WCET to be successful senior and other school staff need to be supportive and committed to the programme. Mutual positive partnership between providers and individual schools leads to successful WCET provision.

WCET is more successful where children have experience of high quality general class music lessons prior to WCET.

WCET teachers need to have high expectations of what participating children can achieve.

Differentiation through high quality music materials and arrangements is required to meet the musical needs of all children.

WCET teachers need to be enthusiastic, inspirational and have a wide range of teaching strategies.

Participating children need to be given opportunities to practise at home or school.

Children need to be given the opportunity for participating in frequent performances including those in prestigious environments.

Parental support is crucial in supporting continuation. High quality performances are crucial for engaging parents.

High continuation rates require opportunities for seamless transition to music hub ensembles or ensembles with other schools.

Continuation may be through:

- ongoing whole class tuition;
- large or small group tuition;
- individual tuition (offered by the hub or privately);
- membership of a hub ensemble;
- independent learning (e.g. peer learning, internet learning).

Ways of collating data relating to each of these need to be found.

Head teachers recognise the value of the programme in developing the intellectual, personal and social skills of the children.

Schools and hubs are concerned about the financial challenges of the ongoing implementation of WCET.

The challenges facing WCET providers vary depending on location (urban or rural) and levels of deprivation.

## Executive summary

### Introduction

In 2001, the government in England pledged in the White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* that over time all primary school pupils who wanted to should have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. Focusing on pupils at Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11), this built on and extended the statutory entitlement to music education provided by the National Curriculum and became known as the ‘Wider Opportunities’ programme. Since then the initiative has developed in response to the National Plan for Music Education (2011), government requirements and the findings of research relating to it. Changes in the wider education system since 2001 now make it timely for providers to reassess what they offer in their programmes to meet the needs of schools, children and parents going forward.

### The aims of the research

The aims of the current research were three-fold:

- to identify examples of high quality Whole Class Ensemble Teaching (WCET) with a view to video-recording them and making the recordings widely available to providers and others involved in the training or CPD of WCET teachers;
- to provide a context for WCET identifying the nature of programmes on offer, the role of schools, and the challenges faced;
- to investigate how WCET can make best use of music education hubs specialist instrumental teaching and learning pedagogy in whole classes to encourage further musical development and interest amongst young people.

### The research design

**Stage 1:** Providers of WCET who were members of Music Mark were invited to submit proposals for individual instrumental teachers working in specific schools to be included in the research with a view to being video-recorded. Providers were asked to set out the key elements of their programme that they believed contributed to its success and details about the length of the programme, whether it was part of a carousel, the length of lessons, whether whole or part classes were taught, the instruments taught, and which teachers were involved. Information was also requested about the opportunities that pupils had for performance. Fifty-one proposals were received from 40 different providers.

On the basis of this information the steering group convened by Music Mark proposed that visits be undertaken to 22 schools where the instrumental teaching would be observed. The research team finalised the programmes to be visited taking account of the advice of the steering group while also ensuring a balance of instruments, length of programme and how the programme was delivered.

**Stage 2:** Between February 8<sup>th</sup> and April 26<sup>th</sup> 2016, 22 visits were made to schools where the instrumental teaching was deemed to represent ‘good’ practice by their music hub.

The visits included:

- discussion with the head teacher or other member of the senior management team about how the programme contributed to the school in terms of the musical

- development of the children and staff, any other benefits and any challenges that they faced. Where senior staff were not available they were emailed following the visit;
- discussion with the WCET teacher(s) about the aims of the programme and the observed session;
  - observation of the lesson. A detailed written record was made of what occurred in each lesson;
  - brief discussion with pupils as they entered and left lessons;
  - follow up discussion with the WCET teacher(s);
  - discussion or email contact with the provider to explore their beliefs about what contributed to the success of the programme, how they assessed success and the challenges that they faced.

**Analysis of data:** The detailed accounts of the teaching were summarised and key exemplary features identified. The data gathered from hub leaders, school senior managers and pupils were analysed identifying emerging themes in a process set out by Cooper and McIntyre (1993).

## **Findings**

The factors identified as key to the success of programmes included:

### ***Partnership working between providers and individual schools including:***

- partnership support from the Senior Management Team;
- involvement of school staff and professional development opportunities for them;
- flexibility to meet the needs of schools;
- complementing existing provision in schools; and
- musical learning prior to the commencement of WCET.

### ***The quality of teaching including:***

- enthusiastic and inspiring WCET teachers with high expectations;
- the enjoyment and engagement of the children;
- facilitation of the development of general musical skills, specific authentic instrumental skills, creative skills, musical literacy, and transferable skills;
- links with the National Curriculum for music and the musical life of schools;
- differentiation;
- pupil choice;
- ensemble experiences;
- high quality materials;
- appropriate instrumental resources;
- opportunities for children to undertake practice between lessons;
- quality assurance in terms of instrumental teaching.

### ***Opportunities for performance***

### ***Progression routes following the programme***

## **Partnership working between providers and individual schools**

The commitment of the school senior management team was crucial to the success of the music programme as was the commitment and involvement of school staff. In the schools where the observations took place class teachers and teaching assistants supported learning, some taking up opportunities to learn to play instruments themselves. In some schools, school staff took rehearsals or ‘clinics’ during the week. Class teachers or teachers were present during the lessons and offered support to children who were experiencing difficulties. In some cases they supported the WCET teacher by dealing with minor problems with instruments.

Providers had a wide range of programmes to offer schools. These varied in terms of the year groups to be taught, the length of lessons and the size of groups to be taught. The length of the provision reported varied from half a term to six years although the majority of the sample provided tuition for a whole year. All observed lessons were in Key Stage 2 (KS2). While there was variability in the specific year group participating, typically WCET was offered in Year 4. This provided opportunities for children to participate in general class music prior to WCET gaining important basic musical skills also giving them sufficient opportunities to develop high level instrumental skills before progressing to secondary schools. The great majority of lessons were either 60 minutes or 45 minutes. Almost all participating providers taught whole classes. Providers offered a wide range of whole class instrumental tuition to schools. Nine offered a carousel of instruments, some in specific year groups. In some cases classes focused on an individual instrument, others combined a range of percussion instruments in samba groups or steel pan groups. Several offered a 'band' approach where there was a mix of instruments, strings, brass or woodwind. Recorder, tin whistle, ocarina or fife tended to be offered in Year 3 in preparation for learning other instruments in later school years.

In some cases WCET was in place for most school year groups. This ensured immediate continuation and was successful in embedding high quality music provision across the school. Following WCET a range of continuation activities were offered including whole class, large groups, small groups and individual tuition.

Providers were increasingly recognising that 'one size did not fit all' and that they needed to be able to offer a range of programmes to schools.

In some cases children had begun to play instruments prior to the WCET programme. Providers adopted a range of strategies to manage this. Most of the schools visited had a range of musical groups in which the children could participate. Sometimes these were directly related to the WCET programme and in other cases complementary to it. They included choirs, bands, orchestras, ukulele clubs and recorder groups.

Generalist musical tuition prior to learning to play an instrument was seen to be hugely important in the success of WCET programmes. This sometimes included learning the recorder, ocarina, fife or tin whistle. In some cases tutors were involved in generalist and specialist programmes which supported transition.

## **The quality of teaching**

High quality teaching facilitated the development of general musical skills, specialist instrumental skills, creative skills, musical literacy, and transferable skills.

The most successful teachers had very high expectations of what participating children could achieve.

The pace of teaching varied between WCET teachers. A faster pace with activities linking swiftly one to another meant that the children remained focused and did not become disengaged.

There was variability in the extent to which WCET teachers attempted to improve the performance of particular exercises or pieces of music once they had been learned. Some

provided extensive feedback in relation to all activities. This was less the case for singing which largely seemed to be adopted as a vehicle for learning notation or the sounds of a piece to be learnt on instruments.

WCET teachers provided clear explanations and in most lessons question and answer sessions were short and to the point. Where these were lengthy some children lost concentration.

While the children concentrated when they carried out exercises there was a clear advantage when they were playing pieces of music. A focus on making music was important for performing which was a key factor in engaging parents

WCET teachers frequently used demonstration. This was in relation to rhythm exercises, singing of new pieces to be learned and instrumental skills. Some teachers demonstrated to the children how to practice.

All of the WCET teachers observed had a good rapport with the children.

The observations and the conversations with the children left no doubt as to the extent to which they enjoyed the lessons. Many of the children spoken to informally indicated that it was the most enjoyable activity of the week.

Successful lessons typically included the playing of well known music, pieces which required improvement and new pieces which offered challenge, although there was variation in relation to this depending on whether concerts were imminent.

**The development of general music skills:** There was variability in the extent to which programmes emphasised that they met the requirements of the National Curriculum (NC). Some providers indicated that this was the purpose of the programme, while others had a more specialist instrumental focus, while also meeting NC requirements. In some classes, particular attention was given to children learning the terminology and understanding the meaning of musical concepts. In other cases the terms were used as part of the explanation and feedback process in relation to learning the instrument.

**The development of specialist instrumental skills:** There was wide variation in the time spent on the teaching of specific instrumental skills and on particular activities, for instance warm up exercises. Most teachers adopted highly effective rehearsal techniques with much constructive feedback and praise for the children as they improved. A key difference between observed lessons was in terms of expectations of what could be achieved. Expectations varied between those teaching the same instruments and were substantial.

In most of the schools visited the children were not allowed to take instruments home to practise and there was no provision for them to practise at school. In some cases WCET teachers gave pupils a few moments to carry out individual practice in lessons or to work in pairs. Some WCET teachers encouraged mental practice, silently rehearsing fingerings while others were playing. Given the lack of practice opportunities it is surprising that the pupils achieved the standards that they did.

**Creative skills:** All of the providers included composition and improvisation as part of their programmes. Examples of both were seen in the observations. Improvisation was more common than composition. Children typically improvised individually as part of a longer

piece of music. Improvisation was more meaningful musically when the teacher provided guidance as to what notes to include.

**Musical literacy:** In all observed classes children learnt to play by ear. There was variability in the extent to which there was a focus on reading traditional musical notation even when children were learning instruments which required literacy to participate in traditional ensembles. Initial introductions to notation tended to focus on rhythm. In some generalist classes prior to WCET quite young children were observed to have developed considerable facility in reading rhythmic patterns.

**Assessing the development of musical skills:** All providers indicated that assessing children's progress was important. The extent to which this was formalised varied. Some providers had developed assessment systems which assessed progress on the instrument and in relation to musical skills. Several providers made use of Arts Award Discover, some finding it useful for adapting their teaching to pupil needs.

**Transferable skills:** Teachers (class and WCET) and members of the senior management teams of schools commented on the non-musical outcomes for pupils including performing skills, confidence, self-esteem, concentration, improved behaviour, resilience, perseverance, independence, listening skills, team working, peer support, and creativity.

**Differentiation:** Differentiation was approached in several ways. Some providers arranged parts to provide easy and more difficult tasks for the children. Sectional rehearsals in two programmes enabled more individual attention for pupils. WCET teachers also devised ways to challenge more advanced pupils. In most observed classes teaching assistants offered support to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Class teachers commented that children with SEND and those with English as an Additional Language were able to participate in the WCET programme on an equal basis with other children.

**Pupil choice:** Pupil choice was catered for in a range of different ways. This was sometimes in terms of the instrument played but also in terms of repertoire and opportunities for improvisation and composition.

**Ensemble experiences:** All WCET programmes provided ensemble opportunities in terms of the whole class experience. The extent to which this provided an authentic musical experience varied. Where WCET took the form of orchestra or band, the ensemble activity was authentic, particularly when the children were playing different parts. Where single instruments were taught the experience was frequently enhanced musically by the use of backing tracks which provided accompaniment. It is important for continuation that children are seen to have an authentic musical experience that is recognised by others, particularly parents. Parents are more likely to support continuation if the musical activities that they see when their child is performing are of a high standard and they are able to recognise them as being perceived of value in the wider community.

**High quality materials:** Many WCET teachers made use of white boards and backing tracks in their teaching. They were skilled in doing so. The quality of these materials varied. Many of the most successful had been developed by the teachers themselves to meet the needs of their classes. All of the observed teachers had developed complex rhythm and pitch games to support children in developing their general musical skills. Most had developed exercises to support the learning of technical instrumental skills.

Where backing tracks were played to accompany children learning brass instruments they were sometimes difficult to hear when the children were playing unless they were played at very high volume. Some providers made Charanga available to their WCET teachers. This had the advantage of children being able to use it at home.

Where WCET was based on brass or windbands, WCET staff had frequently made their own arrangements as there was perceived to be a lack of appropriate resources. These facilitated differentiation and enabled authentic performance.

**Appropriate instrumental resources:** The instruments observed in the teaching sessions were generally of good quality. However, there were examples where children had to share instruments in lessons. A challenge for WCET teachers was carrying out small repairs during lessons while maintaining musical activities. In some cases class teachers or TAs had learned how to carry out small scale maintenance. This was extremely effective. In many cases the children could not take the instruments home to practise as they were shared between classes, although there were cases where they could have been taken home but the school or provider would not allow this.

**Enthusiastic and inspiring WCET teachers:** The observations found evidence of high quality WCET and enthusiastic and inspiring WCET teachers. Senior staff in schools indicated that the personal qualities and professional skills of the WCET teacher were crucial to the success of the programme. Particularly important were the rapport that the WCET teacher developed with the students and the expectations that they had of them which led to high standards of performance.

**Quality assurance issues:** Several providers indicated that they had training programmes for new instrumental staff who were inducted into WCET through an apprenticeship model where they worked with an experienced WCET teacher before teaching alone. Several also monitored the quality of teaching of all of their teachers.

**Opportunities for performance:** All of the programmes recognised the importance of performance and almost all offered performance opportunities within the school where the programme was implemented. This was frequently in the context of school assemblies, concerts or specific festivals. About a quarter of the children were able to participate in ensembles with other local schools, while over half of the responding providers organised mass events for children participating in WCET sometimes in prestigious locations.

**Progression routes:** In the original submissions and later in relation to school visits providers were asked to provide continuation rates. The percentage continuation rates that were reported varied from 15% to 100%. The issue of continuation rates is sensitive and contentious and can be considered in a number of ways including continuation of WCET, large group electives, small group tuition, individual tuition or participation in extra-curricular activities. Where schools continue to fund WCET beyond its initial implementation this is an indication of its success and the value that schools place on it. Current ways of assessing progression do not take account of ongoing informal learning.

Some providers had recognised that continuation required opportunities to be available which provided a smooth transition from what was essentially a school based classroom activity to activities where the children were developing an identity as a musician with music as part of their social life.

Providers and schools were aware of the financial constraints precluding some families from supporting their children to continue with small group tuition. The Pupil Premium was sometimes used to support continuation. Providers sometimes reduced fees for a period of time to encourage continuation.

Providers commented on the importance of children having the opportunity to see inspiring performances by professional musicians, in some cases their own teachers, to develop their aspirations and support choice of instruments. Children were also inspired by seeing and listening to more advanced children playing either within school or through large concerts arranged by the hub.

Overall, it is clear that it is possible to have high rates of continuation, although geographical constraints and issues in areas of social deprivation are particularly challenging for some providers.

**Assessing success:** The main ways in which providers assessed their success were the musical progress of the children, feedback from schools and continuation rates.

**Wider benefits of WCET for schools:** In addition to the benefits to their pupils school staff perceived other benefits of the WCET programme. Where the children performed to a high standard, parents, particularly those who previously had no contact with the school, increased their engagement. Generally, parents were surprised by and impressed with the standards achieved. The programme had the potential to enhance the reputation of the school externally and internally enhance ethos and school climate. Schools also reported that the programme offered the staff an opportunity to interact with the children in a different context as they were not leading the lesson.

**Challenges identified by providers and schools:** Providers and schools raised concerns about financial pressures and competing demands on budgets. Providers in rural areas faced particular financial challenges in terms of being able to offer free access to all remote and small schools.

Providers faced challenges in engaging schools and persuading them to commit fully to the programme. School staff were sometimes reluctant to collaborate or participate. There were sometimes difficulties in communication with schools and timetabling was an issue as schools increasingly did not want instrumental tuition in the morning. Teaching accommodation was increasingly a problem particularly as schools were expanding the number of children on roll.

The nature of WCET staff contracts, particularly when staff were self-employed created challenges, particularly in rural areas, in recruiting and replacing WCET staff. The hourly paid nature of much of the work force was challenging in terms of delivering Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which was perceived as crucial to address the lack of relevant skills in new staff, the need for existing staff to update their skills particularly in relation to differentiation and inclusion, and the need to develop materials for teaching.

Maintaining high continuation rates was a concern shared by most providers. The challenges were greater for providers in rural areas and where children were from homes of low socio-economic status.

## Conclusions

The findings of this research demonstrate that it is possible to implement WCET in ways that lead to high standards of instrumental playing and high continuation rates.

To raise standards across the sector requires WCET teachers to have high expectations and to pay greater attention to the development of instrumental skills while continuing to make use of relevant games, exercises and singing to support the development of more general musical skills. For most children WCET provides their first introduction to playing an instrument. If they are to continue to engage with making music, this experience must be of high quality.

Enhancing rates of continuation requires providers to have planned progression routes, which support children in making the transition from a class based activity to one where they identify themselves as musicians and musical activities become a part of their social life outside school. The importance of high quality performances in ensuring the support of parents in this process cannot be overestimated.

While what constitutes continuation remains a contentious and sensitive issue, it is clear that high rates of continuation are possible where the appropriate systems are in place. Ideally, these include:

- high quality general music teaching prior to the WCET programme;
- high quality WCET teaching with high expectations of what can be achieved;
- opportunities to continue instrumental tuition in whole, large, small or individual classes;
- plentiful opportunities for performance in and out of school with some in prestigious environments;
- a range of ensemble provision which children can engage with while participating in WCET or immediately after which seamlessly link with higher level ensemble provision.

There is also a need to devise ways of recording continuation which occurs in other hub organisations and informally.

For further resources and to download the full report please visit:

[www.musicmark.org.uk/WCETresearch](http://www.musicmark.org.uk/WCETresearch)

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This document, full report and accompanying resources are available for download online at:

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