

Why Learn Music?

Research has shown that music is proven to be a learning accelerator and pupils who learn a musical instrument perform better than their peers academically, even when they miss occasional class lessons.

There is an overwhelming body of evidence, some of which is presented in the booklet 'The Fourth "R"' (Published by the Campaign for Music in the Curriculum, ISBN 1-899491-03-1), which quotes studies from Europe and the USA.

The foreword of the booklet states:

'There is now empirical evidence linking children's learning of music with significantly improved abilities in other subjects. This seems to be particularly the case when children start to learn music at an early age... Even when learning music slightly reduces the time spent on other subjects, the experience actually increases children's learning in the other disciplines.'

'Apart from the unique ability of music to be a general learning accelerator, there are many fine by-products of increased music lessons, such as the character-building effects of music in teamwork, co-ordination and self-discipline.'

It has been shown that music helps children improve:

- Reading ability
- Ability in maths, science and engineering
- Speech-fluency in native and foreign languages
- Team-working and social skills
- Memorising capacity
- Reasoning capacity
- Time management skills
- Learning ability
- Problem solving ability
- Ability to handle performance pressure
- Artistic ability and neatness

When you consider what children learn when they have instrumental lessons, this is not surprising: they are learning how to translate a code of symbols (musical notation) into an abstract medium (namely organised sound). They interpret this by co-ordinating muscles in the fingers, lips, diaphragm and tongue. Along the way, they learn mathematics - such as fractions and relationships between different note-lengths within a steady pulse, relationships between pitches, the complex patterns of key signatures, the science of how sound is made, including the harmonic series, and the functioning of the diaphragm and the processes involved in breathing. Add to that, a new vocabulary (largely Italian) and the historical context in which music is written.

On top of these 'scientific' aspects of music can, of course, be added the enjoyment and appreciation of music and art.

And all of this is delivered on an individual basis.

If your child is taken out of class for a one-to-one special session on maths, you would probably be delighted, and not too worried about the class lesson being left behind. Being so rich in educational content, music is even better for them! Some schools suggest that academically struggling pupils should stop music lessons in order to concentrate on, say maths. In reality, music may just capture a child's imagination and learning the relationship between a crotchet and quaver may just make fractions 'click' for them.

Universities, unable to distinguish between pupils with straight A-grades are increasingly looking at musical achievements, as are businesses, which recognise the discipline, dedication and motivation required to be successful on a musical instrument.

To conclude with a couple of quotes:

Charles Darwin (1809-1882): "If I had to live my life over again, I would have made a rule to ... listen to some music at least once every week. For perhaps parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use." (Autobiography)

Plato (c428-c347 BC): "Education in music is most sovereign because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the innermost soul and take strongest hold upon them, bringing with them and imparting grace if one is rightly trained."