**A fresh perspective?**

I had a really helpful meeting yesterday with a colleague who is in charge of managing a hub.

We were talking about the hubs’ role of *challenging and supporting* *schools* in providing ALL their students with an entitlement to a good music education. The funding for this is provided to schools directly as part of their responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum or under the national curriculum, if that applies to them.

We also discussed the responsibility of the hubs to *augment* the schools’ provision through the (reduced) central funding and how it is so important to ensure that this money is well spent, not used to paper over the cracks of an inadequate music offer – or, to quote a more often used analogy, to put icing on a poor cake making it seem better than it really is.

In the past we have been complicit (for the best possible motives) in providing funding and music making opportunities to schools that provide an inadequate basic music education for their young people. We have provided them with the icing and a beautifully decorated cake, the substance of which was poor.

Hubs now have even less funding to augment the core music curriculum or to provide opportunities beyond those which an individual school can offer. It is therefore essential that those funds are used to help young people whose schools take full responsibility for what they do with their own funds. Not to do this is abdicating our responsibility to young people; wasting public funds and reinforcing behaviour that needs to change. We must still strive to help the others, but *they* must accept *their responsibility* and show *a genuine desire and commitment to improve their offer* for young people.

During the course of the conversation a *fresh perspective* occurred to me. Perhaps it is more like building a house on sand? If we continue to support poor practice without putting in place the support needed, paid for by the school because it wants to improve its music provision, we are in effect miss-spending the scarce centrally held funds, protected for music, and given to us as the people who should know best. If the foundations of a really good curriculum are not provided by the school, no matter how good the opportunities we provide, no matter how nice a house we build, the likelihood is that it will fall down and we will not have provided value for money or helped the young people in the long run.

First access programmes should be complementing and enhancing a good music curriculum.

Affordable and accessible progression routes for those who want to continue are of *equal importance* to the opportunity for young people to learn in the first instance. The same applies to the provision of appropriate *ensembles*. These core criteria are not hierarchical. They are of equal importance. Indeed, I would argue that we should not be giving young people First Access if we cannot enable them to continue after their first free period.

If we uphold quality and entitlement for all young people then the expertise of the hub and the reduced central funding will enable significant numbers of young people to have a good music education. When the economy picks up we will have the arguments and the evidence for increased funding so that, by 2020, the aspirations of the National Plan can become a reality for all young people. Is that a *fresh perspective*? It is certainly the one I have been aspiring to for the whole of my career and the one that I will continue to fight for. Together I still believe we can make this dream a reality. But it requires all of us to stand up for quality music education for young people. If not us, then who do we think is going to do it?