

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	16 September 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Music Service Update
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/125
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Beth Edwards
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 At the Education and Children's Services Committee on 17th September 2024, the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning was instructed to continue to extend opportunities for music making through partnership working between the Music Service and Aberdeen City Music School and others; and report back on progress within one calendar year. This report provides an evaluative overview of the progress made over the 2024/25 academic session.
- 1.2 In addition, officers were instructed to include data about tuition at primary school level broken down by school in the next report. This is included as an appendix to this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 instructs the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to extend opportunities for music making through partnership working between the Music Service and Aberdeen City Music School and others; and
- 2.2 instructs the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to report back on progress in one calendar year.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Opportunities for music making

- 3.1.1 Members requested that the service continue to extend opportunities for music making through partnership working between the Music Service and Aberdeen City Music School and others.
- 3.1.2 In 2024-25, the Music Centre (extra-curricular ensemble) offer increased significantly with the introduction of weekly Saturday Music Centre activities, alongside activities on three week nights. In the 2023-24 academic year

ensembles met a couple of times before concerts, so the development of regular weekly rehearsals is notable.

The 2024-25 model of Music Centre has allowed for pupils to make substantial musical progress in their own playing and ensemble skills, develop friendships with other like-minded individuals, alongside providing the opportunity for Music Service staff to get to know pupils, parents and carers in a different context.

The ensembles on offer have included Junior Wind Band, Intermediate Wind Band, Junior Strings, Intermediate Strings, Folk Collective, Senior Ensemble Junior Choir, Senior Choir, Adult Choir, Piping Ensemble, Junior Guitars, Senior Guitars and Jazz Ensemble.

3.1.3 The Music Service programme of Festive and Spring Concerts at the Beach Ballroom is now well established, with two evenings of concerts being delivered in December 2024 and in March 2025. When these concerts were re-established following the Covid-19 pandemic, there was initially a single concert in December. As a result of pupil, parent and staff demand this has grown to Festive and Spring Concerts, taking place across two nights, with some groups playing in both concerts to ensure they were of a sufficient length. The 2024-25 academic session saw the Service deliver two fully distinct concert nights in December and March. This change reflects the significant growth in the number of ensembles and performance items and ensures that there are opportunities for more children to showcase their talents. In 2022 there were around 300 children involved, with this reaching 400 children in 2023. In the 2024-25 session we had around 500 children involved in our Beach Ballroom concerts.

3.1.4 The Music Service worked alongside Aberdeen City Music School during the Festive and Spring concerts. Aberdeen City Music School had standalone items in the performances and the pupils performed alongside Aberdeen City Music Service pupils in the massed finales that ended each concert.

The Music Service Senior Ensemble worked along composer Steve Pycroft, who created bespoke arrangements of pop songs for the group.

3.1.5 As part of the Tall Ships Festival programme, the Music Service received a grant from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This grant was to commission a composer to write a piece of music inspired by the Tall Ships Festival. The Music Service worked with emerging composer, and Music Service alum, Clara-Jane Maunder. Clara-Jane wrote a piece called 'A Sea Journey' and this was premiered at the Cowdray Hall in March 2025 by Abbotswell School, accompanied by pianist Ian Lovegrove, as part of the Art Gallery's Lunchbreak Concert series. Clara-Jane Maunder said, *"it has been a real delight to work on this commission for Aberdeen City Music service over the past couple of months, and it has been even more wonderful to hear it performed in such a beautiful and enthusiastic way by pupils from Abbotswell School. I benefitted hugely from the Music Service's instrumental tuition, ensembles, and orchestras as a young person, so this has been an absolute full-circle moment. It has been truly wonderful to have the opportunity to write for the next generation of young creatives, inspired by the city I grew up in. "A Sea Journey' follows the journey of a sailor (maybe from this century, or maybe from long*

ago) as they return to Aberdeen after a long time at sea, continuing with them past familiar parts of Aberdeen's coastline until they arrive home to the Granite City.'

In May 2025, 'A Sea Journey' was performed by four schools at the Aberdeen Big Sing 2025, this time accompanied by the Big Sing orchestra.

In July the piece was also performed again by Abbottswell School at the opening ceremony of the Tall Ships Festival.

- 3.1.6 As well as performing at the opening ceremony of the Tall Ships Festival, the Music Service was given the opportunity to perform on the main stage on the Sunday morning. This performance was due to feature the Music Service Intermediate Wind Band, Folk Collective and Senior Choir.
- 3.1.7 The Aberdeen Big Sing is now a keenly anticipated annual event. The 2025 event saw all 3000 Primary 4 pupils from Aberdeen City Schools and the independent sector singing together in Duthie Park, accompanied by a live orchestra made up of pupils and staff.

The Music Service received grant funding from Creative Scotland's Youth Music Initiative which meant that a team of singing instructors could visit schools throughout the year to teach pupils the Big Sing songs. In addition to this, the Service continued to work closely with Charanga to provide resources for class teachers to rehearse the songs with their pupils at a time of their choosing in the run up to the event. The Service increased the level and frequency of provision at Orchard Brae School and worked closely with staff there to ensure that pupils were able to fully access the performance.

To develop teacher confidence in rehearsing classes for the Big Sing, the Music Service developed opportunities for teachers to come together to engage in professional learning. In addition, the Service provided 'online live lessons' which were each attended by over 50 classes and meant that children could sing together online prior to the Big Sing event itself.

The Aberdeen Big Sing 2025 event has provided an opportunity for Aberdeen City schools to re-connect with schools in our twin city of Clermont-Ferrand. All Primary 4 children in Aberdeen City learned a song in French, which was performed at the Aberdeen Big Sing 2025. Pupils in Clermont-Ferrand have been learning 'Colour is a Beautiful Thing' and some of our Scottish songs including 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean'. Following a successful online 'live lesson', the next stage of the project was for schools to connect to sing together and get to know each other better. The French schools sent in recordings of themselves singing the songs, broadcast on the day on a large screen, which meant that they were able to sing together with the children from Aberdeen at the Big Sing. We are delighted to be able to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their language skills in real life contexts.

- 3.1.8 The Music Service continues to deliver a range of large group and/or whole class projects which are designed in conjunction with school leadership teams and have the aim of increasing access to high quality musical opportunities.

This included the development and expansion of the Ashley Road Woodwind Project, the first full year of Riverbank School's Riverband, and a number of schools benefiting from 'Plastic Brass', a project which used light-weight brass instruments to introduce pupils to the instruments. Pupils in these projects benefited from performance opportunities, including in school, at the Music Service Festive and Spring Concerts, at the Aberdeen Big Sing and at the Aberdeen Performing Arts Light the Blue Festival Family Arts Day in Union Terrace Gardens.

- 3.1.9 As part of the programme of provision funded by Creative Scotland's Youth Music Initiative, the Music Service organised for musicians from Live Music Now! to work in Orchard Brae School to deliver 29 workshops to 115 pupils. Comments from the musicians delivering the provision demonstrates the value of the work: *"The piece of feedback that we got multiple times a day from staff was that the students were the calmest and most content that they had been in ages. We had one teacher who said the music had directly helped a distressed student become emotionally regulated and asked us to come back whenever we had a few spare minutes between classes. We had a lot of groups that found a collective experience of regulation and quiet, most notably at the final concert."*

Five schools benefited from a week each of provision delivered by Scottish Culture and Traditions Youth. This allowed pupils in the upper stages of primary school to develop their skills on tin whistle, guitar, clarsach and Scots song which led to them being able to perform in concerts to peers and families.

- 3.1.10 The Aberdeen Performing Arts Light the Blue Festival allowed for numerous collaborative activities and performances. These included:

- Music Instructors being part of a week-long project to develop Playground Performances at Gilcomstoun School
- Bucksburn Junior Band, Fiddle Futures (Junior) and Riverband performing at the Family Arts Day in Union Terrace Gardens
- Fiddle Futures (Senior) collaborating with an inclusive dance company for a performance at the Bon Accord Shopping Centre as part of the Teenage Takeover Day
- The Music Service Intermediate Wind Band and Folk Collective performing at the Big Gig with their own performance items and alongside other young people from SC&T (Scottish Culture & Traditions) Youth, Big Noise Torry, Aberdeenshire Music Service and sound's Get Creative Ensemble.

- 3.1.11 The Music Service was part of the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust Day in February for the second year running. This year, a group of piping pupils performed on the pitch at the start of the Aberdeen vs Hibernian match. Following their performance, pupils and their music instructors were given tickets to watch the match. The performance gave the pupils the opportunity to perform in a unique setting and in front of a large crowd, equipping them with skills from which they will benefit throughout their lives.

- 3.1.12 Academic session 2024-25 saw the development of partnership activity with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO). In September 2024, the service

worked with the RNSO and Charanga to organise the orchestra performing at the Lemon Tree with several Primary 3 classes from across the city. Schools were given songs to sing with the orchestra and were able to watch the orchestra perform a variety of well-known pieces, learning more about orchestral instruments.

In addition to this work, the Music Service and the RNSO have worked together to deliver three workshops for brass pupils at the Cowdray Hall and the Beach Ballroom. These have allowed for more opportunities for the pupils to perform and receive guidance from professional musicians as well as developing their music making skills.

The RNSO has also provided tickets for their concerts at the Music Hall, leading the Music Service to develop a Concert Club, where young people can attend the concerts with their peers and are supported by Music Service staff. We have also worked with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra to organise for pupils to watch concerts in a 'school trip' format.

3.1.13 In order to develop an awareness of careers available to pupils who may wish to go on to work as musicians, the Music Service arranged a trip to Perth for the Intermediate Wind Band to watch the British Army Engagement Ensemble perform at the Perth Concert Hall. The pupils' feedback was that they immensely enjoyed the performance and the opportunity to travel to Perth with their Music Service friends.

3.1.134 The Music Service pupils performed at a range of festivals in the 2024-25 academic session, including a choir performance as part of Spectra, a Music Service Jazz Ensemble performance as part of the Aberdeen Jazz Festival and a Folk Collective performance as part of the Confucious Institute Spring Festival at the Tivoli Theatre.

The Confucious Institute partnered with the Music Service in the 2024-25 session in order for the Music Service to borrow a guzheng (a Chinese plucked zither) and for string pupils to learn how to play this through tuition from a student from the Confucious Institute. This led to numerous performances at a range of venues.

Once again, pupils from the service performed at Grampian Hospitals' Christmas Carol Concert at the Music Hall. This year this included a junior choir, a string quartet, pipers and instrumental soloists.

For the first time, the Music Service Junior Choir was invited to sing at the Aberdeen City Council Carol Concert at the Duthie Park Winter Gardens accompanied by Bon Accord Brass Band.

Pupils from the Music Service performed at the Aberdeen Highland Games in Hazlehead Park.

3.1.15 Locality Concerts continued to be an important part of the Music Service calendar, with performances from Don Locality pupils at Oldmachar Church,

Dee Locality pupils at Lochside Academy, and West Locality pupils at Northfield Academy. There was a noticeable increase in the standard of the performances, the number of children taking part and the audience numbers at these events, and they provide a valuable platform for pupils doing their first performances up to pupils working at more advanced levels.

For advanced pupils, there were additional opportunities to perform at the Cowdray Hall as part of the Art Gallery Lunchbreak Concert Series.

In June 2025 we held our second Leaver's Concert at the Cowdray Hall, and this will now become an annual event, allowing young people in S4-6 who are leaving school to perform in front of family and friends for one last time before leaving the Music Service. The number of young people choosing to perform in this concert increased, allowing it to be a full 2.5 hour event with an interval.

- 3.1.16 During session 2024-25 the Service ran the Scottish Young Musician Competition for the third year. In 2023 we had 30 entrants, in 2024 we had 67 entrants and for 2025 we had 120 entrants which meant that we had to hold several days of first round auditions. The final was held over two nights at the Cowdray Hall, with separate competitions for Junior and Senior finalists. The winner of the competition then went on to compete in the national final of the competition in Glasgow, securing an Early Music Prize.

We held an ensemble competition for the first time, with a number of groups competing for a trophy, with the Senior Vocal Ensemble winning the prize.

The service also worked closely with the North East of Scotland Performing Arts Festival, with many pupils entered into the solo and ensemble categories. Trips were also arranged for the string pupils to participate in a traditional music workshop in Inverurie.

- 3.1.17 The Music Service continues to participate in the 'In the City' programme, with provision delivered by staff during the October and Easter holidays.
- 3.1.18 In November 2024, the Music Service ran a family ceilidh for pupils and parents/carers of Music Centre attendees. The music was provided by a staff ensemble. This was successful, with many families attending and enjoying dancing together.
- 3.1.19 Following committee approval, a group comprising two Music Service staff members and six string pupils travelled to our twin city of Regensburg, in Germany. During their time in Germany the pupils performed at four concerts, including as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Aberdeen-Regensburg twinning partnership and Bürgerfest, one of Europe's largest street festivals. This was the first opportunity in many years for the Service to support pupils to travel and perform internationally. A report of the trip is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.1.20 Music instructors continue to prepare pupils for, and support, primary and secondary school Christmas, Spring and Summer concerts. These concerts provide valuable opportunities for children to perform individually and in

ensembles at school level and the Service values the close working relationships with school departments which enable these concerts to be successful.

- 3.1.21 The Music Service continues to engage in regular Quality Improvement visits which allow for areas of strength and development to be identified. Data from across the year feeds into the Service's annual Quality Improvement Plan, including information from parents/carers and children.

This includes the following statement from a parent/carer:

My daughter, now aged 13, joined the Music Centre whilst she was playing Percussion in Primary School. Since joining, her confidence has grown dramatically, not only with her music. All of the instructors and Music Centre staff are incredibly supportive, approachable and enthusiastic. My daughter has had so many wonderful opportunities to perform and compere. She has made friends from other schools, been to see the RSNO at the Music Hall and had a workshop with a world class professional Percussionist. My daughter has a medical issue and Beth has been so understanding, asking how best to support her, so that my daughter could continue to attend and perform. My daughter and I both feel extremely reassured and know that she will be looked after if she is feeling unwell or anxious.

My son, aged 10 joined the Music Centre this year and plays trumpet in the Junior Wind Band. He just loves performing. Prior to joining the band he performed at the Beach Ballroom in the Junior Choir at the Christmas concert and enjoyed every minute. He recently got to attend a special brass workshop with musicians from the RSNO and even got to attend the concert at the Music Hall the night before.

I am so grateful to the Music Centre staff and all the opportunities that have been given to my children. They are both growing in confidence, making great progress with their instruments, making friends and having fun! It is also very telling that my 16 year old son, who unfortunately missed out on the Music Centre when he was younger (due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic), has recently asked if he could join the senior guitar ensemble and perform at the Christmas concert. I am convinced that this is in part due to seeing how much his younger siblings are thriving with the Music Centre.

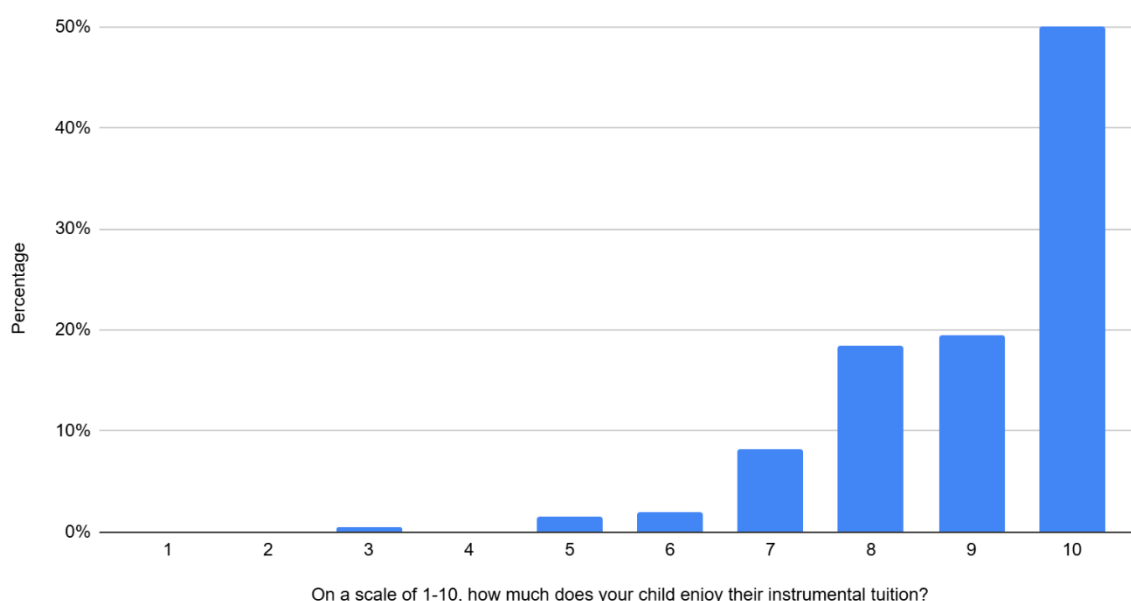
And the following statement from a pupil: *I play percussion which includes drum kit, glockenspiel and piano. I play in the intermediate wind band regularly and joined the String group for the Easter concert.*

I started in Junior Wind Band and I enjoyed it so much. I felt so important at the back top playing percussion and I loved to perform. I then moved into Intermediate Wind Band and I helped at the last Christmas concert with the Junior Choir, which was so fun and I learned a lot. I have also had the opportunity to compere for shows. Compering has really helped with my confidence, as I get very anxious about lots of things and I am so proud that I can now speak in front of a crowd. I was also asked to be the percussionist for the Intermediate string group, which was something very exciting and new.

Music Centre has given me so many opportunities including playing in many concerts at the beach ballroom, the Music Hall, the P&J Live, Pittodrie stadium and most recently at Duthie Park in front of thousands of people at the Big Sing, which was amazing! I feel so lucky to be able to play in these concerts. I have made so many good friends. Lastly, I would like to say how amazing all of the instructors are. They have taught me so much and they do so much for everyone, so thank you so much for everything you do!

A key aim for the Music Service is that pupils enjoy their lessons, therefore as part of the annual survey, parents/carers were asked to rate enjoyment levels on a scale of 1 to 10. The results demonstrate that most pupils enjoy tuition.

Percentage vs On a scale of 1-10, how much does your child enjoy their instrumental tuition?

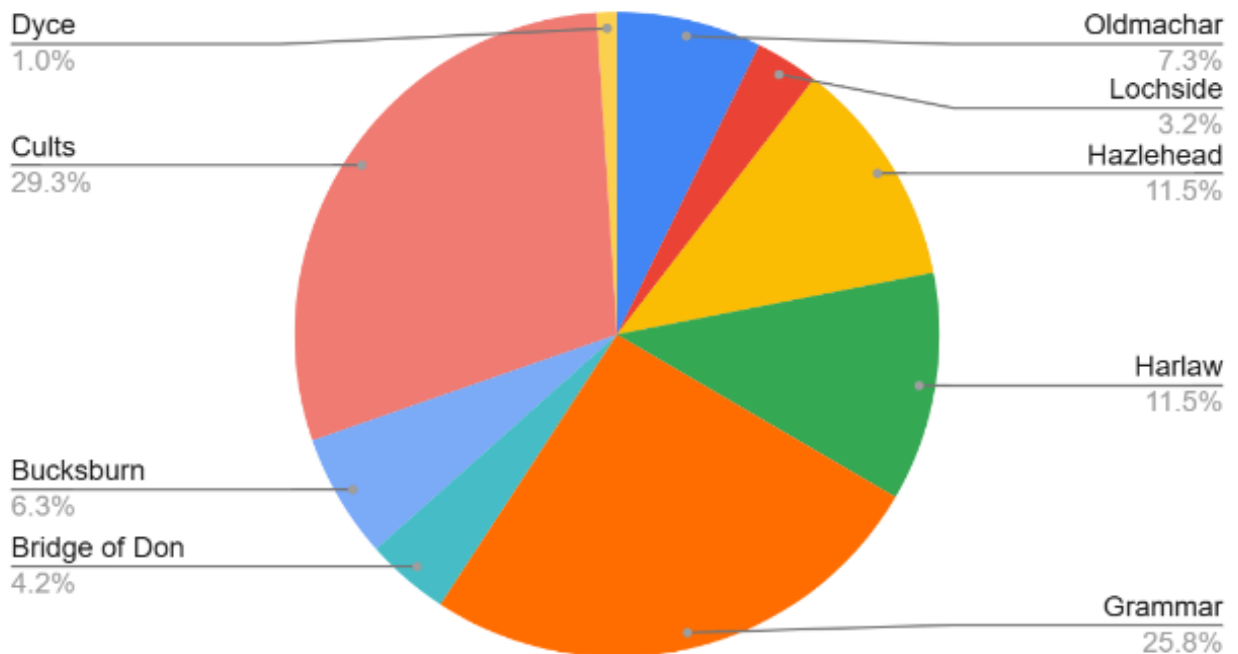


Performance

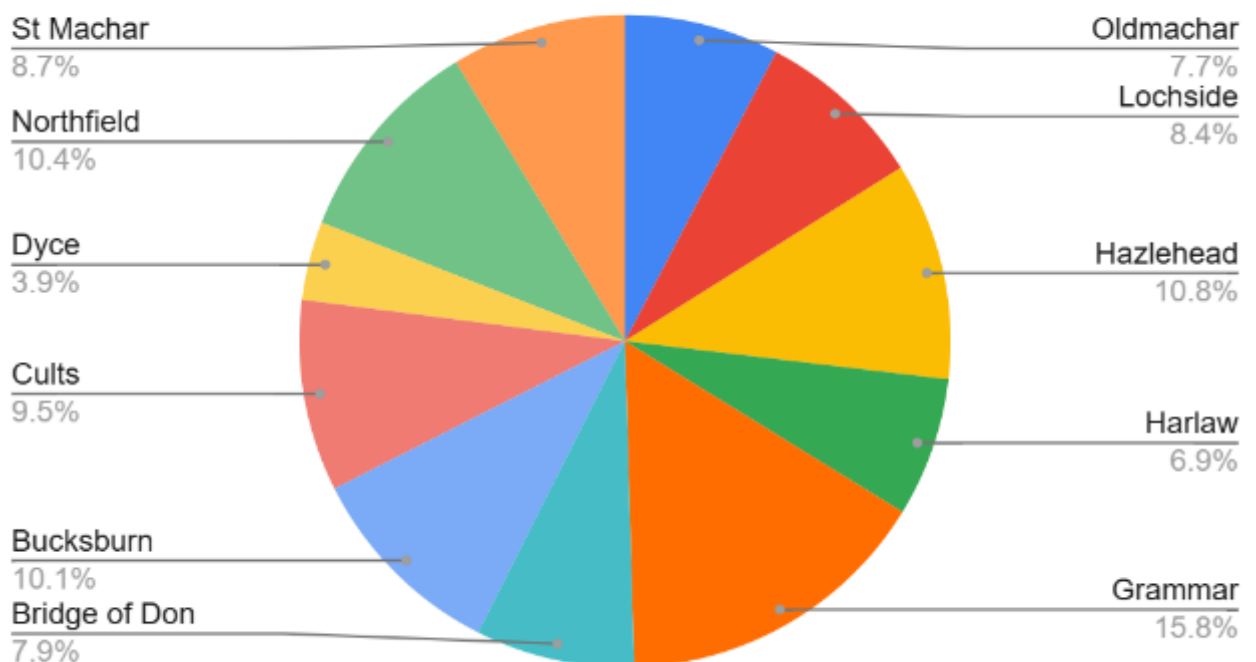
3.2.1 The Music Service continues to aim to offer high quality tuition to as many children and young people as possible. Pupil numbers are currently sitting at 2082 pupils receiving tuition in a small group/individually on a weekly basis. Pupil numbers have remained steady over the past three academic years and the service has focused on ensuring pupil/instructor contact time is maximised in Music Instructor timetables. The number of pupils engaging in whole class vocal and instrumental programmes continues to be over 5000 over the course of the academic year.

3.2.2 The charts below show the distribution of Music Service across Associated School Groups in August 2020 and in June 2025. This data shows continued progress towards the aim to offer tuition on a more equitable basis across the city.

August 2020



June 2025



3.2.3 The Music Service tracks SIMD profiles of Music Service learners and looks at this against the profile of the school population in the city. This supports the service in identifying areas for improvement and also with strategically placing provision and projects.

- 3.2.4 The impact of the Covid pandemic meant that for a period of time, we had an influx of beginner pupils, and fewer advanced pupils. As time passes, the beginner pupils have moved up through school and we now have many more pupils working at intermediate and advanced levels.
- 3.2.5 The Service continues to have over 2000 children on the waiting list for lessons. For some instructors who teach the most popular instruments (e.g. piano) they have over 270 pupils on each of their waiting lists. The Music Service looks to provide tuition to as many children as possible, however demand does outstrip capacity.

Plans for 25/26

- 3.2.6 Extra-curricular Music Centre activities will continue three evenings per week and on Saturdays. The format for the ensembles is now well established, so will continue to run as it has in the 2024-25 academic session with only slight changes – the addition of a Primary 1 – 3 choir and an Initial Strings Ensemble for our youngest learners. For our more advanced learners, the Service will provide an offer for them to complete the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Music Leaders Award.
- 3.2.7 The Music Service will continue to seek high-quality performance opportunities for learners to allow them to perform in a wide range of contexts that are age and stage appropriate. The Service will ensure that the programme of events on offer is sustainable in terms of staff workload capacity. The pace of change within the Service has been rapid over the past couple of years and the Service is now in a place where it would be challenging to provide more opportunities with existing resources.
- 3.2.8 The Service will continue to work with partner organisations, including professional orchestras and local groups. The first event of the 2025-26 academic session will be a visit from a British Army band who will spend a weekend playing side-by-side with our Junior and Intermediate Wind Bands and teaching them how to march.
- 3.2.9 Our programme of Locality Concerts, Festive and Spring Concerts, Lunchbreak Concerts and Scottish Young Musicians competition will continue. We have arranged to perform at the Grampian Hospitals Carol Concert in December 2025.
- 3.2.10 Pupil numbers will continue to be monitored at school, instructor and instrument level with measures put in place to develop any areas where there is an identified improvement need. The Service will continue to develop the registration process for pupils wishing to start lessons, and to raise the level of awareness of the Service in all schools.
- 3.2.11 The Music Service will develop the Big Sing so that it evolves to become The Aberdeen Big Play and Sing. This will see an additional opportunity for instrumental learners to be involved alongside our Primary 4 pupils singing. The Service will continue to develop links with twin cities to allow

for their continued involvement. For the 2026 Big Sing and Play event the Music Service is pleased to share that the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Charanga will be partnering the service as part of the event.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

The expansion of music service activity and more equitable distribution of tuition across the City assists the Education Authority in fulfilling its duty to secure that the education we provide is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of our children and young people to their fullest potential.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Compliance	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Operational	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Financial	No significant risks identified		L	Yes

Reputational	Risk that poor quality of provision will present a reputational risk to the Council	There will be regular quality improvement visits to the service with support being offered to any underperforming tutor.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified		L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	The Council's Delivery Plan states that the Music Service continues to work to maximise uptake, establish a Music Centre and welcome families back to concerts to celebrate the musical skills of our pupils. This report reinforces this aim and furthers it by offering increased rehearsal and performance opportunities for pupils.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	This report supports the LOIP Key Driver 7.1 Improving pathways to education, employment and training for identified groups (including disability, ASN, term time leavers and those from priority neighbourhoods) because it supports the Music Service giving additional musical opportunities for children and young people through more rehearsal and performance opportunities led by the Music Service and in conjunction with partners.
Regional and City Strategies Regional and City Strategies	The universal provision of education is fully aligned to the Prevention Strategy and a key partner to the Children's Services Plan.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1 - Music tuition pupil numbers broken down by school
Appendix 2 – Regensburg Trip report

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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