# Recorder playing among primary pupils halves amid widening music education inequality



In a recent survey conducted by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, a notable decline in the number of children playing the recorder has been reported, drawing attention to broader concerns regarding music education in the UK. The percentage of primary school children engaging with the instrument has dropped from 28% in 2014 to just 16% today.

Historically, the recorder has been a cornerstone of musical education in the UK, particularly since the 1950s when educator Carl Orff included it in his famous "Schulwerk" programme. This instrument has served as an accessible entry point into music for countless children due to its low cost, ease of learning, and portability. It has notably seen historical significance, being favoured by notable figures including Henry VIII and the current monarch, who recently made headlines for playing a carrot-shaped recorder at a public reception.

The decline in recorder playing appears to mirror a shift in educational practices, as instruments like the electric guitar, flute, and ukulele grow in popularity. However, this transition may also signify deeper issues within the music education landscape. An Ofsted report from 2023 highlighted that while nearly every primary school includes music in its curriculum, only about half provide any form of instrumental or vocal tuition. The report further noted a significant drop in music participation, particularly at ages 12 and 15, alongside a concerning decrease in GCSE music entries.

The shortage of qualified music teachers exacerbates these challenges. Since 2012, the UK has seen nearly 1,000 fewer music teachers in secondary schools, with one-third of current educators indicating they do not plan to remain in the profession beyond a five-year period. The report underscores that the quality of instruction is critical, as a good teacher is often the key differentiator between a melodious performance and a cacophonous one.

Though the recorder may be losing ground to more modern instruments, its affordability continues to make it a viable option for introducing young learners to fundamental musical concepts such as melody, rhythm, and technique. The decreasing popularity of the recorder could suggest a narrowing of access to music education, particularly as only well-funded schools can provide instruments like electric guitars for younger students.

The situation has prompted responses from government officials, including education secretary Bridget Phillipson, who has expressed concern that access to the arts, including music, is increasingly becoming limited to families with additional financial resources. With a government-commissioned review of the national curriculum on the horizon, advocates for music education are pushing for its recognition as a core subject on par with maths and English. The UK Association for Music Education has also highlighted a significant funding shortfall, estimated at £161 million, which impacts music hubs established in 2011.

As the debate continues, the investment in music education remains a topic of discussion. Proponents argue that music not only cultivates personal skills—such as self-discipline and focus—but also has the potential to enrich lives both personally and professionally. In a notable statement, Labour leader Keir Starmer reflected on his early experiences, revealing that his musical background at the Guildhall influenced his path before entering law and politics.

The unfolding narrative about music education in the UK underscores both its cultural importance and the challenges faced in ensuring access and quality for future generations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/870d5cbc-f10f-4266-a31e-d12a0c610236> - This article reports on a recent survey by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, highlighting a significant decline in recorder playing among UK primary school children, dropping from 28% in 2014 to 16% today. It also discusses the shift towards instruments like the electric guitar, flute, and ukulele, and the broader challenges in UK music education, including reduced GCSE music entries and a shortage of qualified music teachers.
2. <https://www.ism.org/news/12-5-decline-in-gcse-music-entries-great-concern-says-ism/> - This report from the Independent Society of Musicians highlights a 12.5% decline in GCSE music entries since 2022, emphasizing concerns over the diminishing role of music education in UK schools and the impact of government accountability measures like the EBacc on creative subjects.
3. <https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/content/news/report-finds-42-of-state-schools-no-longer-entering-students-for-gcse-music> - This article discusses findings from the Cultural Learning Alliance, revealing that 42% of state-funded schools in England no longer enter students for GCSE music. It also highlights a 43% decline in A-Level music entries between 2010 and 2023 and a significant shortage of music teachers.
4. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/business_hq/19750204.ukelele-taking-recorder-school/> - This article examines the shift in school music education, noting that the ukulele is increasingly replacing the recorder in classrooms. It references a survey by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, indicating a 47% decline in recorder playing since 2014 and a rise in ukulele use from 1% to 15%.
5. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/gcse-and-a-level-arts-entries-and-grades-2023/> - This report provides data on the decline of arts subjects in UK schools, noting a 35% fall in GCSE arts entries since 2015 and a 37.5% decline in music entries. It also discusses the impact of the EBacc on arts subject uptake and the challenges schools face in delivering these subjects.
6. <https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/content/news/sharp-decline-of-gcse-music-entries-labelled-a-great-concern-by-ism> - This article highlights the Independent Society of Musicians' concerns over the sharp decline in GCSE music entries, noting a 36% drop since 2010 and a 12.5% decline since 2022. It also discusses the impact of the EBacc and Progress 8 accountability measures on music education.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/870d5cbc-f10f-4266-a31e-d12a0c610236> - Please view link - unable to able to access data