

# Have Your Say

## Summary of survey findings from parents/carers, schools and young people

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**Author:** Ben Stevens

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## Surveys completed

The aim of the 'Have Your Say!' surveys is to improve the quality, relevance and accessibility of music education in Hertfordshire.

We value diversity and acknowledge that our stakeholders come from different backgrounds and have different needs, experiences and interests.

As in 2021 and 2024, Hertfordshire Music Service (HMS) surveyed parents/carers, school staff and young people.

The information from this survey will enable HMS to identify and address any barriers to accessing music education services or getting more information about them and continually improve the services offered or commissioned by the Hertfordshire Music Hub.

## Responses

There was a strong increase in responses from young people this year (+605), driven by stronger school support and engagement via the Lead Schools for Music network. This meant that the response rate was higher than 2021 but also spread out geographically much more (in 2021 the responses came mainly from just 2 schools).

We saw an increase in school responses (+24) too, again linked to better connections with school staff via networks, the Head of Participation & School Music role and regional team links with music leads.

The parent/carer responses fell once again, although this year the reduction was much smaller (-65 year-on-year, compared to -574 in 2024).

|                               | 2021  | 2024 | 2026 |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|------|
| <b>Parent/carer responses</b> | 1,375 | 801  | 736  |
| <b>Young people responses</b> | 579   | 171  | 776  |
| <b>School responses</b>       | 64    | 65   | 89   |

Table 1: Survey response data.

## Acknowledgements

This report is the culmination of months of preparation, proactive engagement and dedication from colleagues at Hertfordshire Music Service.

A huge thank you goes to Christina Luchies for leading the work, driving responses from stakeholders and ensuring her team had the time and resources to gain the insights that will go a long way to improving our service.

Congratulations also go to Jamie Adams – our Data Officer for whom this survey report represents the first big project he has completed with HMS from start to finish.

Our Regional Managers and their teams have also ensured that schools, parents and young people were aware of these surveys and continue to contribute a huge amount to the ongoing success of HMS.

Finally, a note to thank our whole team of teachers, operations staff and leaders for providing the musical, educational and social/emotional outcomes that respondents to our surveys celebrated. None of this would be possible without them and we're incredibly grateful.

Ben Stevens

Music Director, HMS

## Executive Summary

Music education in Hertfordshire continues to thrive and the Music Hub workforce delivers a highly valued, aspirational service to young people and their families. Engagement in music is strong across all areas of the county and families from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds engage with services.

Taken together, the survey results show that Hertfordshire residents live in a county with strong musical ambition, share a clear belief in the value of music, and experience many examples of excellent practice. Feedback also shows that the quality of the overall experience is shaped not only by teaching and opportunity, but by how clearly, consistently and accessibly those opportunities are communicated and organised.

Parents describe strong relationships with teachers and recognise the positive impact of musical learning on confidence, enjoyment and progress. Young people continue to report high levels of musical engagement, especially where they have good access to practical, creative and social music-making. Schools remain ambitious for their pupils and report increased leadership support for music, stronger development planning and growing awareness of innovative music education resources.

This reflects a healthy cultural foundation in the county: music is not seen as an optional extra, but as an important part of children and young people's education and wider development.

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*"Hertfordshire Music Service offers accessible, well-structured music education with supportive teachers and opportunities for our child to develop both musical and personal skills. The range of lesson formats and ensemble opportunities also makes it easier for us to find something that suits our child's needs and interests."*

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The strongest message from the parent/carer survey is that for many families, the lesson itself and the communication around it feel like one combined experience. Where progress is visible and teachers provide practical guidance for home practice, families speak very positively about all aspects of the service HMS provides.

Parents seem to evaluate the lesson quality by comparing progress with peers or siblings, achieving graded exams, and how often progress is celebrated at courses or concerts. Our new reality where people's attention has become commoditised means learning from other sectors and industries to compete effectively will be vital to maintaining engagement and access to music education.

The findings also reinforce the importance of convenience, clarity and trust in sustaining participation. In-school tuition remains highly valued because it reduces barriers for families and makes learning more accessible.

The youth and school surveys add an important broader perspective. Young people's responses suggest that music remains highly relevant to their lives, particularly when it is practical, collaborative, expressive and linked to their own musical interests.

Schools, meanwhile, demonstrate rising awareness of the National Plan for Music Education and stronger use of School Music Development Plans, showing that a more coherent infrastructure for music education improvement is developing locally that goes beyond HMS itself.

At the same time, schools continue to highlight the pressure created by funding constraints and the challenge of maintaining broad, high-quality access in a difficult financial climate. This creates a clear tension between aspiration and resource but also points to where targeted support can have the greatest impact.

Across the report, there is strong evidence that Hertfordshire's music education sector has both the appetite and the conditions to deliver a high-quality, inclusive and modern music education system for everyone.

The challenge now is to translate that ambition into more consistent and accessible musical opportunities. The best experiences should be achieved for everyone and not depend on an individual teacher, school or location. In this sense, the report is less about whether music is valued in Hertfordshire, and more about how excellent musical experiences can be secured for all children and young people more consistently.

For HMS, the most important strategic learning is therefore clear - communication and progress guidance need to improve, accessible entry points into music learning through schools needs to develop further, and Hertfordshire's wider aspiration should remain focused on equity and musical breadth, sustaining opportunities for all pupils.

Hertfordshire remains a county of musical opportunity, and the work HMS will deliver and oversee as the Hub Lead Organisation in 2026-27 will build on this success further, ensuring young people continue to discover and develop their unique musical voice, no matter their background or circumstances.

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*"We continue to use and support the work of Hertfordshire Music Service because it provides high-quality, accessible music education that genuinely enriches young people's lives. The teaching is engaging and supportive, helping students grow in confidence, develop musical skills, and enjoy being part of a wider musical community through performances and ensemble opportunities."*

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## Parent/carer survey

The parent/carer survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data to compare to previous years, as well as seeking more updated information on trends, needs and insights from service users.

## Geographical representation

There was a good level of representation from across the Hub area of Hertfordshire with key urban conurbations well represented. Once again, the more rural area of East Herts had the fewest responses.

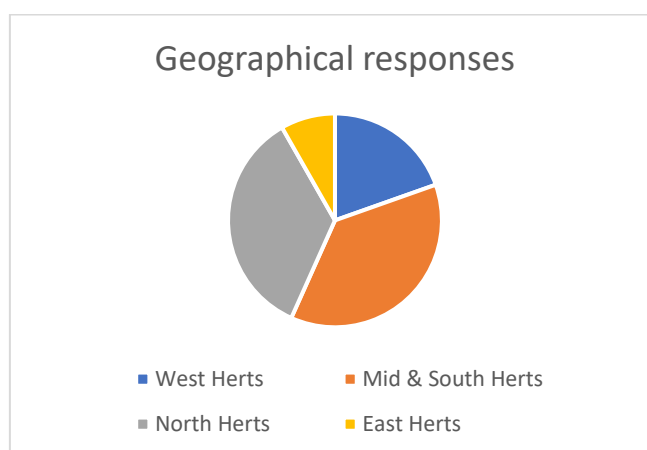


Table 2: Geographical data.

## Ethnicity representation

The percentage of non-White British participants increased once again. The highest percentage responses from specific non-White British ethnic backgrounds were:

- Any other white background - (13.5%)
- Indian - (4.5%)
- Chinese – (3.6%)
- Any other mixed background – (3.6%)

|                                | Countywide | 2021 respondents | 2024 respondents | 2026 respondents |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>White British</b>           | 72%        | 70%              | 62%              | 59%              |
| <b>All other ethnic groups</b> | 28%        | 30%              | 38%              | 41%              |

Table 3: Ethnicity data.

## Students already engaging in instrumental lessons

We asked parents/carers if their child already engaged in regular instrumental lessons.

|            | 2021 | 2024 | 2026 |
|------------|------|------|------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 62%  | 88%  | 76%  |
| <b>No</b>  | 38%  | 12%  | 24%  |

Table 4: Students engaged in lessons.

This demonstrates a return to more meaningful information from parents/carers who don't already engage in lessons, although still a minority of responses.

The data set is therefore skewed toward more engaged parents who are motivated either positively or negatively to complete a detailed survey.

Results from the survey responses is likely to show what engaged and motivated parents/carers care about most, especially when something is working well, or improvements are required to improve an experience.

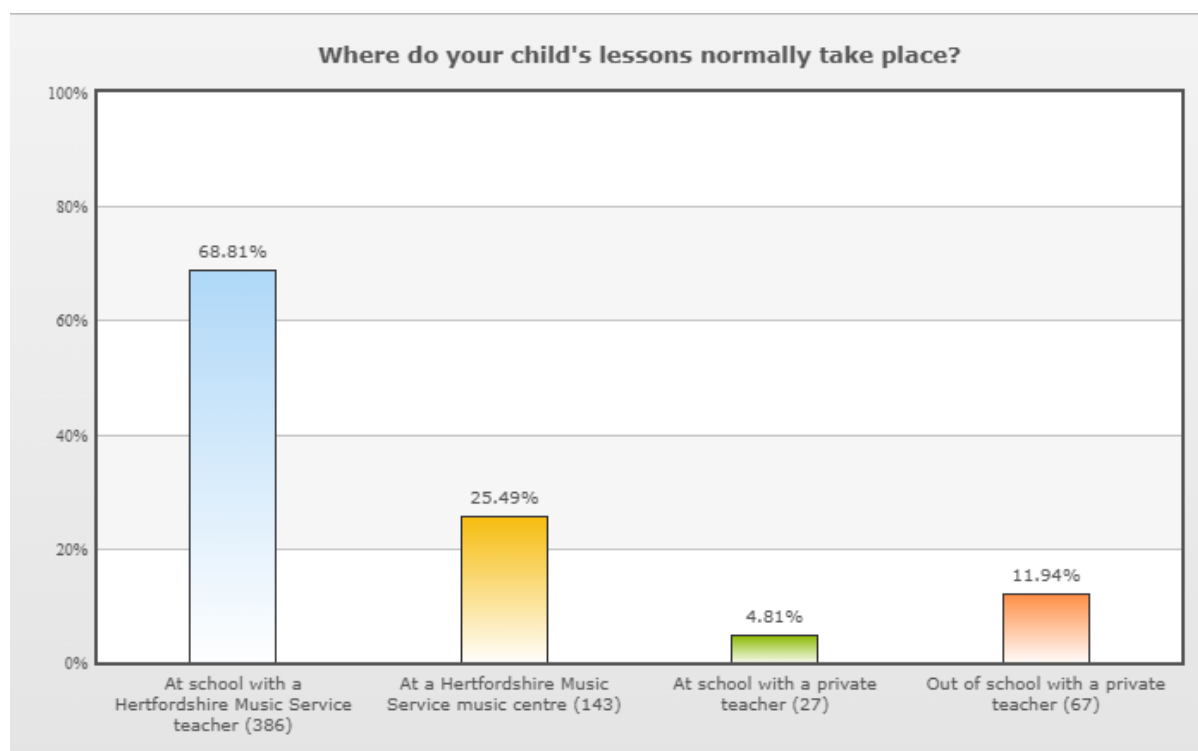


Table 5: Lesson location.

For the majority of respondents who already had a child engaged in lessons, the lessons took place in school with HMS. The main overall comment was that this was the most convenient and accessible option available.

## Enabling musical progress

Parents/carers of students engaging in instrumental lessons were asked about their confidence with supporting practice at home and about what might improve this.

We asked parents/carers about their experience with practicing at home as where practice is more regular, pupils tend to learn an instrument for longer and make better progress.

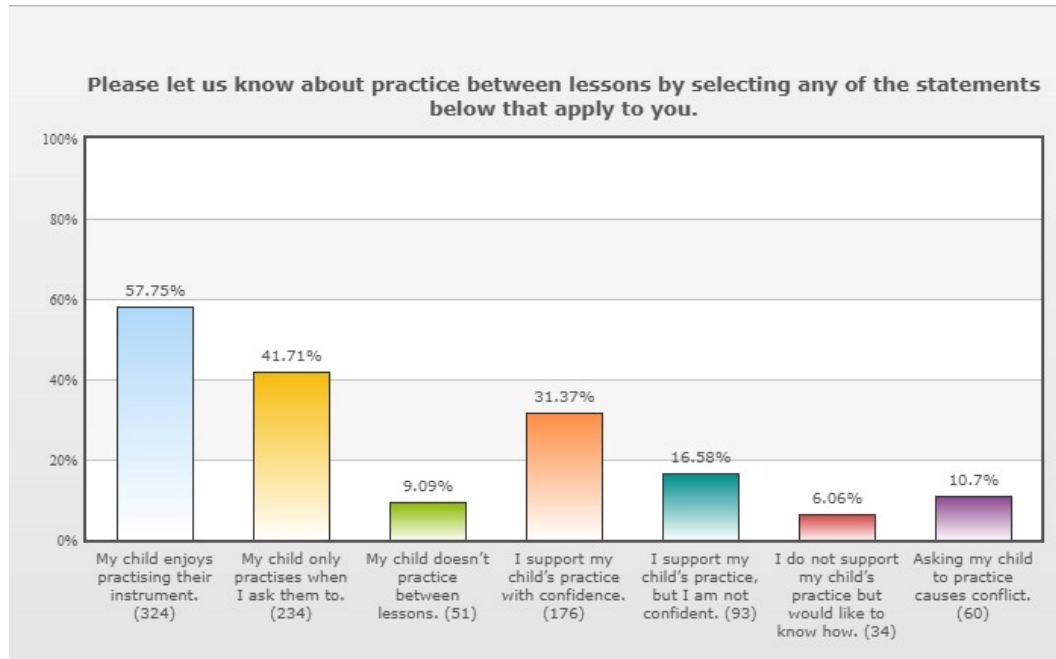


Table 6: Data on confidence with practice at home.

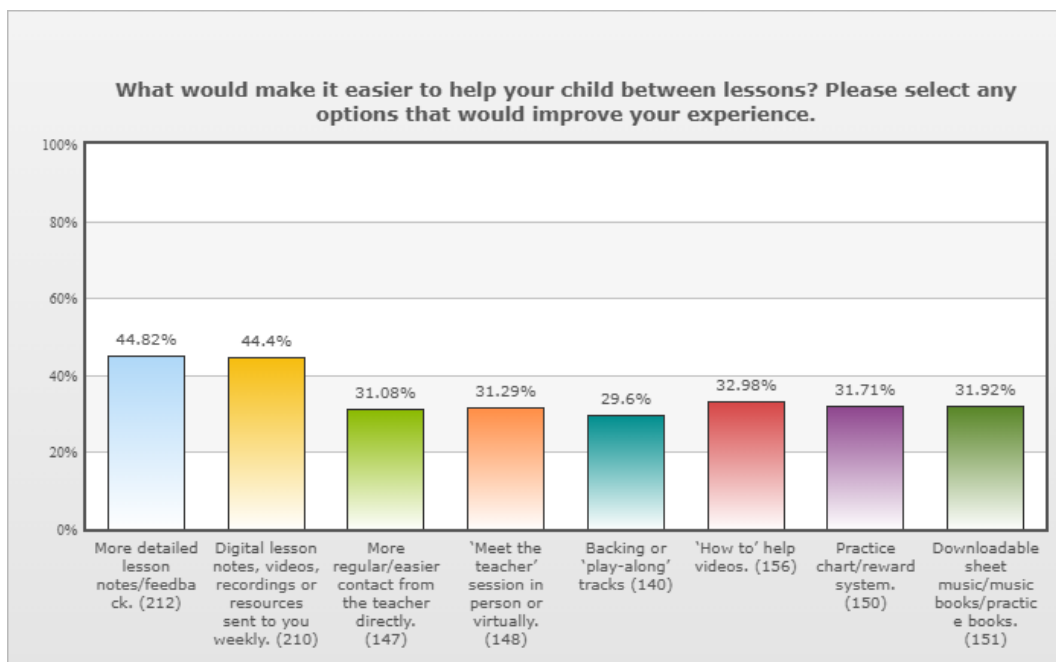


Table 7: What would make it easier to help with practice.

The questions about practice between lessons and helpful resources were both multiple choice, so parents/carers were able to select more than one option.

For example, of the 234 respondents who selected “My child only practises when I ask them to”, 167 parents also selected another option. This tells us that:

- Pupils are enjoying practice but still need reminding.
- Parents are actively driving practice, often confidently.
- Reminders to practice can create tension or conflict.

When linked with responses to other questions in the survey, the key findings are:

1. “Only practises when I ask” and “Asking my child to practice causes conflict” is strongly linked to parents needing more structured practice support and resources rather than a motivation issue.
2. Issues with prompted practice also links to weaker communication levels with the teacher or less regular feedback.
3. Pupils who enjoy practising and parents feeling more confident is directly linked to higher levels of ‘very good’ communication with the teacher.
4. Pupils who don’t practice at all between lessons are much more likely to be younger and in small group lessons.

Parents described a need for teachers to define what good practice looks and sounds like, share a clear ‘practice routine’, duration and frequency expectations, and a weekly focus.

There were also inconsistencies raised where children in the same family are learning with different teachers:

*“I have another child who has previously had violin lessons in her primary school setting, and she would come home with a note book each week where the teacher would have set what to practice on and then I could also note down what practice she had done in the week. This doesn’t happen with the guitar lessons that my son is currently having in the same school setting, and it makes practice/ what to do at home in between lessons more challenging.”*

## **Quotes**

*“It would be nice to see more comments in my child’s practice book.”*

*“There doesn’t seem to be a channel for teachers to share feedback with parents on how pupils are progressing, what happened in the lesson, what they need to work on etc. That would be greatly appreciated.”*

Overall, confidence with practice at home is directly linked to the quality of communications with the teacher and where expectations are clear, specific and easy for ‘non-musical’ parents to follow.

## Communications

Parents/carers whose child learns with HMS were asked how they would describe their experience with communicating with HMS in three different areas.

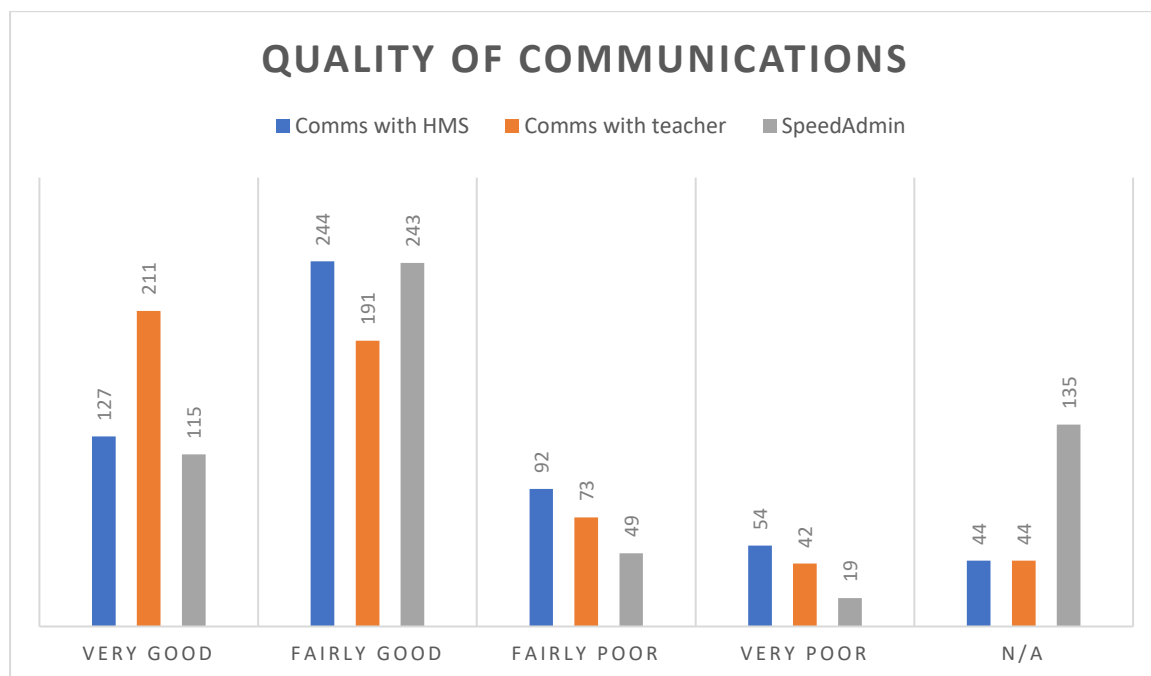


Table 8: Shows the number of responses for each communication category and ratings.

## Communicating with Hertfordshire Music Service

|                 | 2021 | 2024 | 2026 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| <b>Positive</b> | 68%  | 70%  | 72%  |
| <b>Negative</b> | 32%  | 30%  | 28%  |

Table 9: HMS communications data over multiple surveys.

## Signing up for lessons and using SpeedAdmin

|                 | 2021 | 2024 | 2026 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| <b>Positive</b> | 77%  | 75%  | 84%  |
| <b>Negative</b> | 23%  | 25%  | 16%  |

Table 10: SpeedAdmin usability over multiple surveys.

## Communicating with the HMS teacher

|                 | 2021    | 2024 | 2026 |
|-----------------|---------|------|------|
| <b>Positive</b> | No data | 82%  | 78%  |
| <b>Negative</b> | No data | 18%  | 22%  |

Table 11: Teacher communications data over multiple surveys.

Communication has been a consistent area that has needed attention over the last few surveys. As a result, HMS has embarked on a 'Customer First' project to make the improvements needed to meet the communication needs of parents/carers.

The single biggest change in 2026 was a positive improvement on using SpeedAdmin as a timetable and payment portal. The service is much more confident with this platform now, and more support videos and expertise is available to resolve issues as they arise.

The written comments supporting positive communication experiences tended to highlight individual and direct communications via email, phone and in person interactions – especially with teachers.

Issues regarding the type, quality, and frequency of communications were raised consistently from respondents in 2026, regardless of their overall view of HMS tuition or customer service, demonstrating an ongoing service wide communication issue.

This points to a more nuanced narrative from feedback that means although the feedback is 72-84% positive, there remain issues at key touchpoints that are reported in the written comments.

The positive scores for overall communication are genuine, but incomplete. There are strong relationships with many teachers, however even where there is strong teacher communication, parents still raised concerns about lack of progress updates and cancellations.

The most common issues raised were communication (including progress updates), billing (often the lack of a monthly payment option) and administrative issues (missed lessons and cancellations). The following quotes were from parents who rated the teacher communications as 'positive':

- Progress updates: *"We have no idea what our child should be practising."*
- System communications: *"The billing system is chaotic."*
- Administrative processes: *"We never get told if teachers are off."*

There are of course positive highlights too, with teachers supporting SEND learners in particular:

- *"My piano teacher is very good with my autistic grandchild and gives me good feedback."*

- *“The individual advice and support given to keen musicians is very valuable. My son wishes to pursue a career in music and has had some really helpful personal help. The high-quality ensemble courses are also important for him. My older child had the opportunity to do work experience with HMS which was very much appreciated.”*
- *“Our teacher is excellent at detailed notes that help us to practise effectively and optimise the time we have.”*
- *“No improvements needed as they are already in place - the things that are really helpful to me is being able to talk to her teacher when I drop her off and also being able to email him if there is something that she wants to learn at the next lesson.”*

## Summary of communication feedback

The key areas that parents feel cause challenges in their HMS experience have now been included in the HMS Teaching & Learning self-reflection process for teachers. We believe that if parents are not updated on progress or well informed about cancellations or changes, then the teaching quality is not at the standard required to make good musical progress.

In summary, the communication feedback demonstrates that parents value the service HMS provides highly, particularly the convenience of in school lessons and regular updates from teachers. However, the consistency of issues raised regarding progress updates, billing and lesson organisation means that overall, communications remain an ongoing area for development.

## Starting instrumental lessons

A key area of development for the Hertfordshire Music Hub is to drive increased participation in instrumental lessons as part of the Get Playing, Keep Playing strategy.

Parents/carers were asked to select the options that would best help their child to select an instrument to learn.

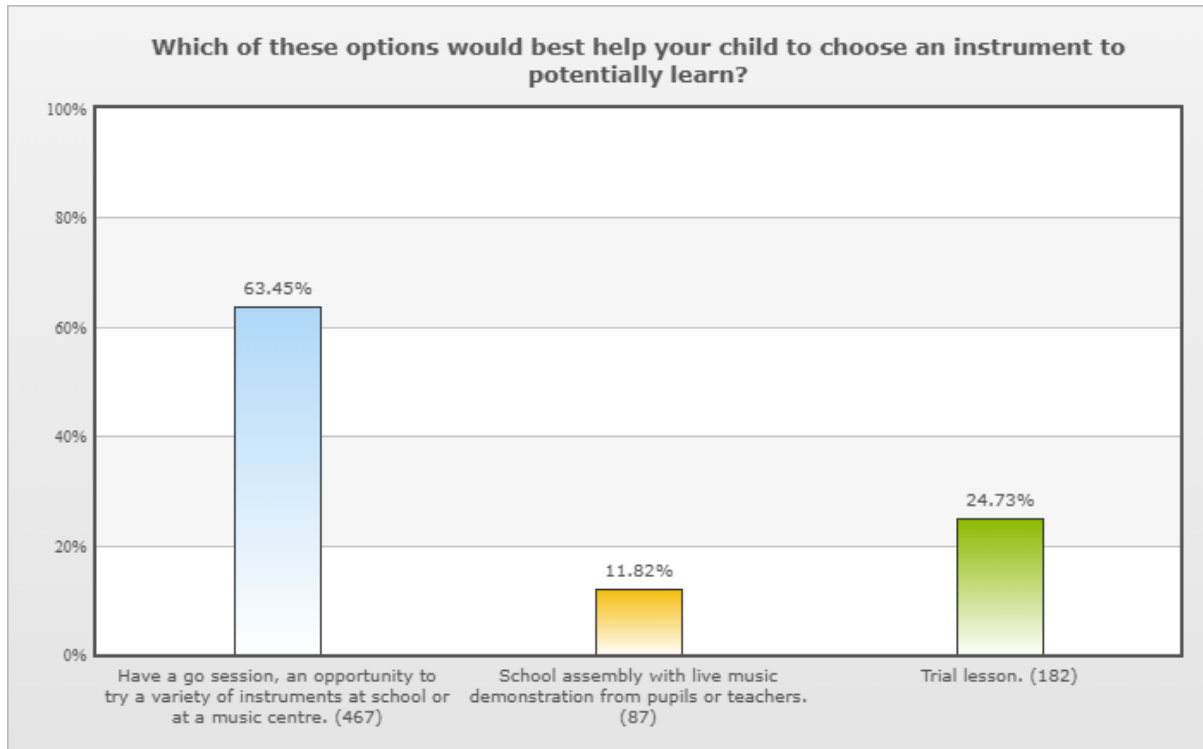


Table 12: Instrument selection.

The results of the same question asked in 2024 were broadly replicated again in 2026, albeit with more support for 'Have a Go' sessions and less support for trial lessons or assembly demonstrations.

The comments shed further insights into this aspect of our service, showing that parents valued a combination of approaches to maximise the chance of selecting the right instrument for their child.

Parents repeatedly said that children need to touch, hear, and try instruments before choosing and past experiences at 'Have a Go' sessions were highlighted as successful in helping their child choose an instrument to learn.

An 'ideal' journey was described as:

1. See instruments played and demonstrated.
2. Try a range of instruments the child is interested in.
3. Have a short trial lesson on the preferred instrument.

Comments that highlighted this theme included:

*“We went to a have a go session, which was great, but I think an assembly would be accessible to more children and encourage greater involvement.”*

*“I would say you need a combo of the have a go session and then a trial surely.”*

*“Or combination. Be inspired by a music demonstration and then try instruments to see what works best for the child.”*

The key practical takeaway was that parents want instrument choice to feel visible, accessible, low-risk (financially) and well informed.

## Lessons, ensembles and marketing

The survey included several repeated questions from 2024 with multiple choice response options that asked them about music centre access, instrument hire and how we might best contact them about learning a musical instrument.

## Lesson type and location

We asked parents what lesson type they would most likely select and where they would prefer the lesson to take place.

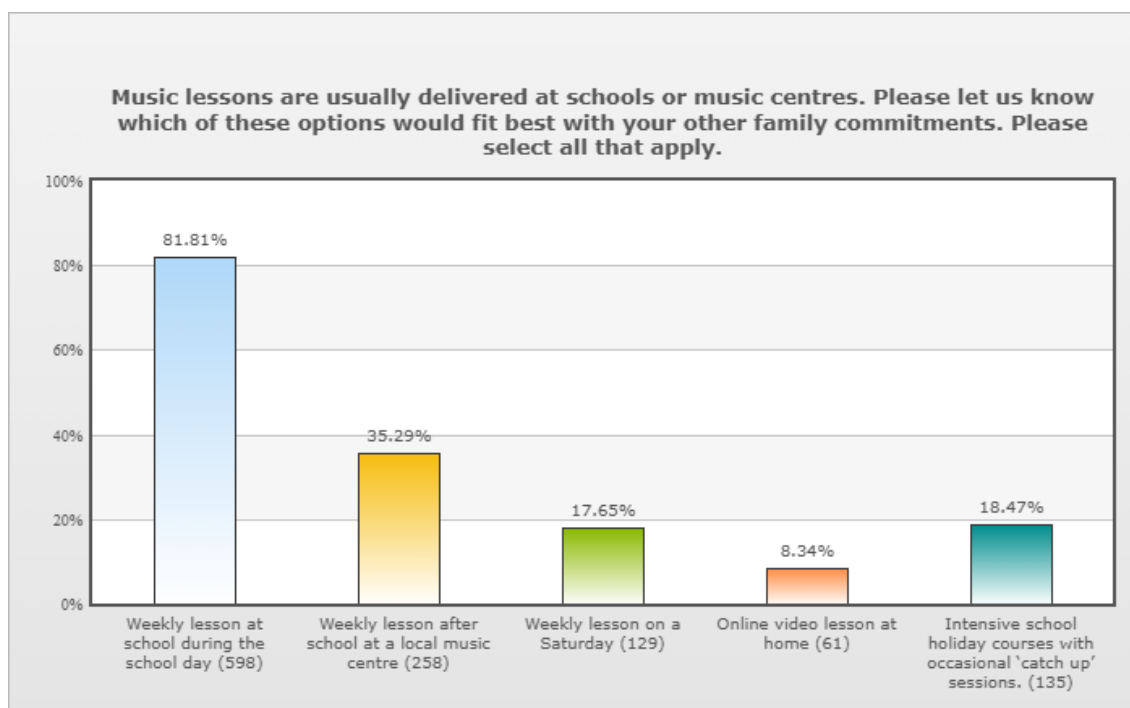


Table 13: Lesson location preferences.

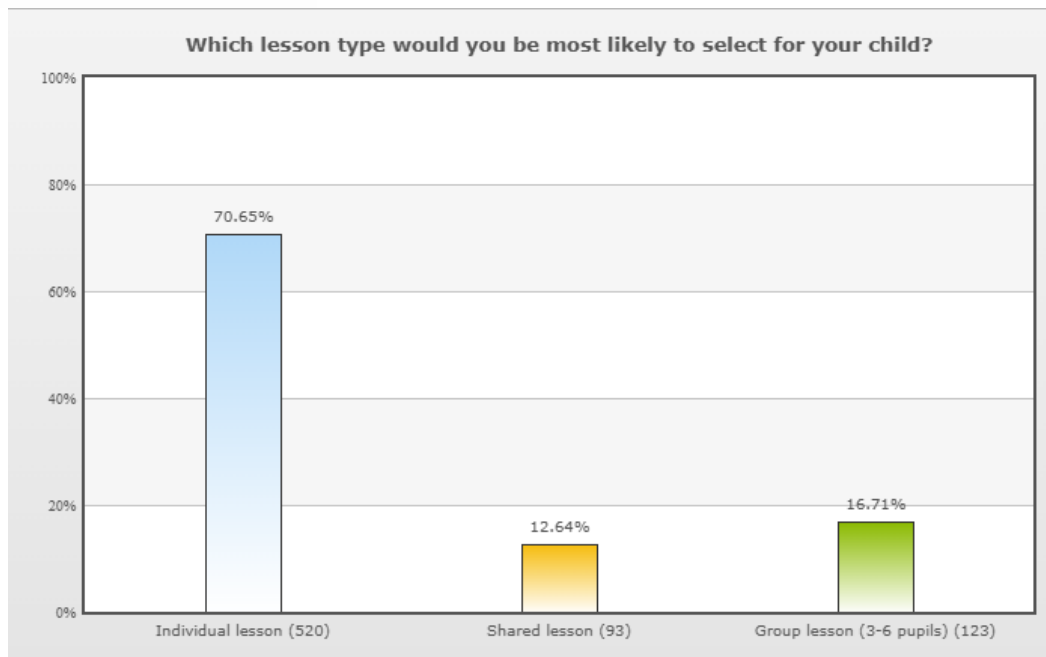


Table 14: Lesson type preferences.

The responses matched the 2024 results within 5-10% and once again demonstrated that parents valued convenience and accessibility of school lessons, mainly on a 1:1 basis. Compared to 2024, there was a slight increase in the number of parents who would select a group lesson (+5%) and a similar decrease in the 1:1 lesson option (-8%).

## Instrument hire and music centre activities

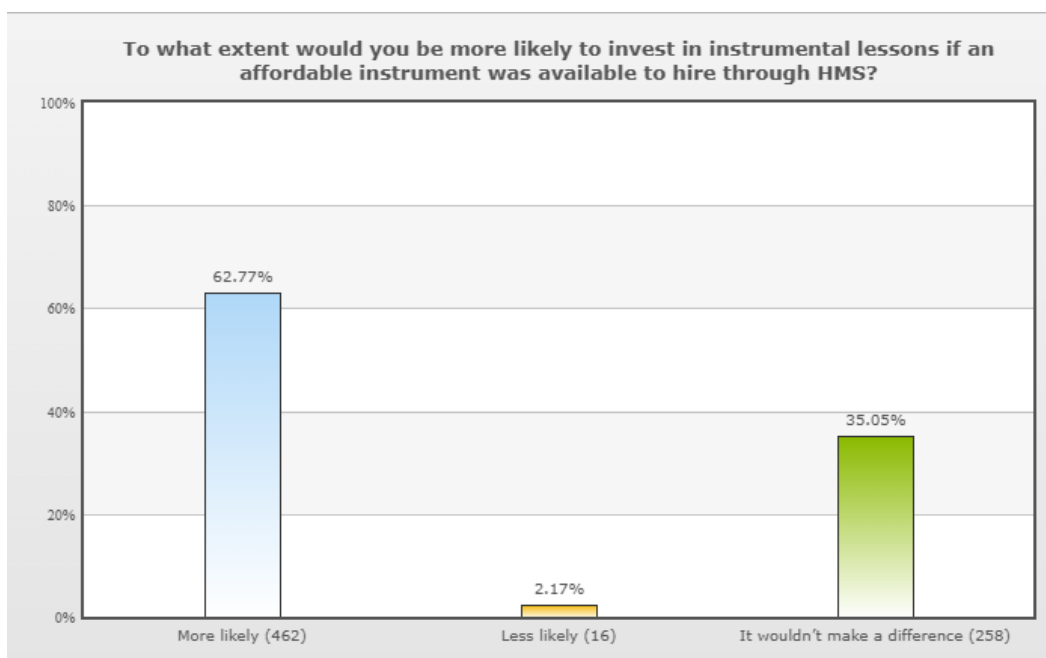


Table 15: Impact of instrument hire.

The results of this question are within 5-10% of the 2024 results and continue to highlight the importance of an instrument hire scheme that is on track to relaunch in 2026-27.

We also asked a number of questions about attending a music centre, travel and timings.

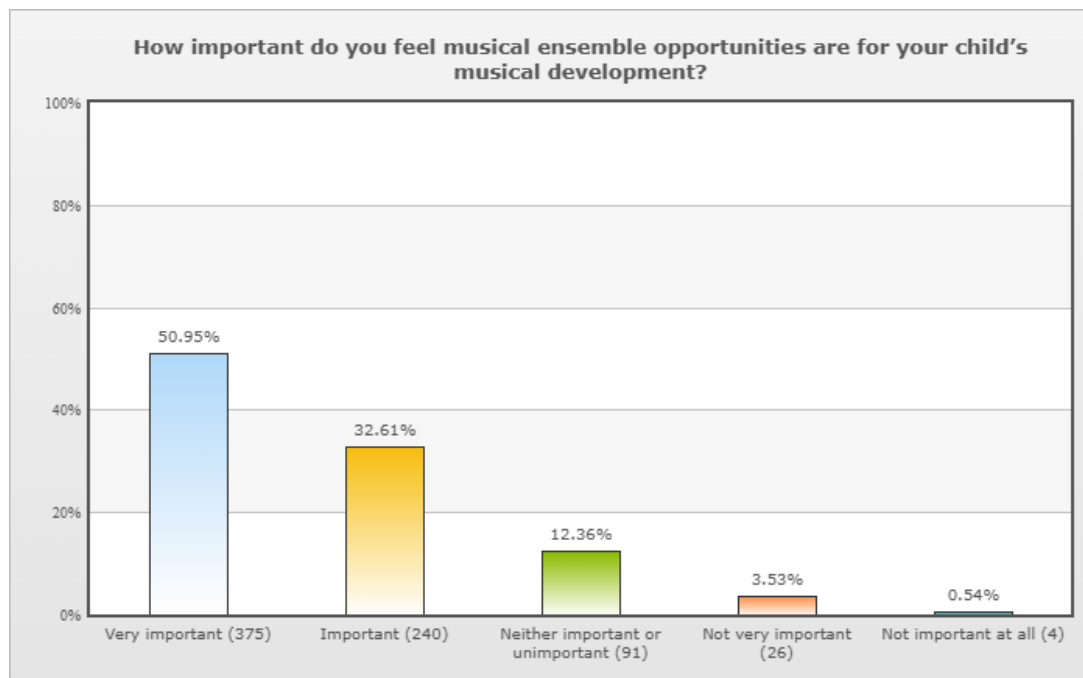


Table 16: Lesson preferences.

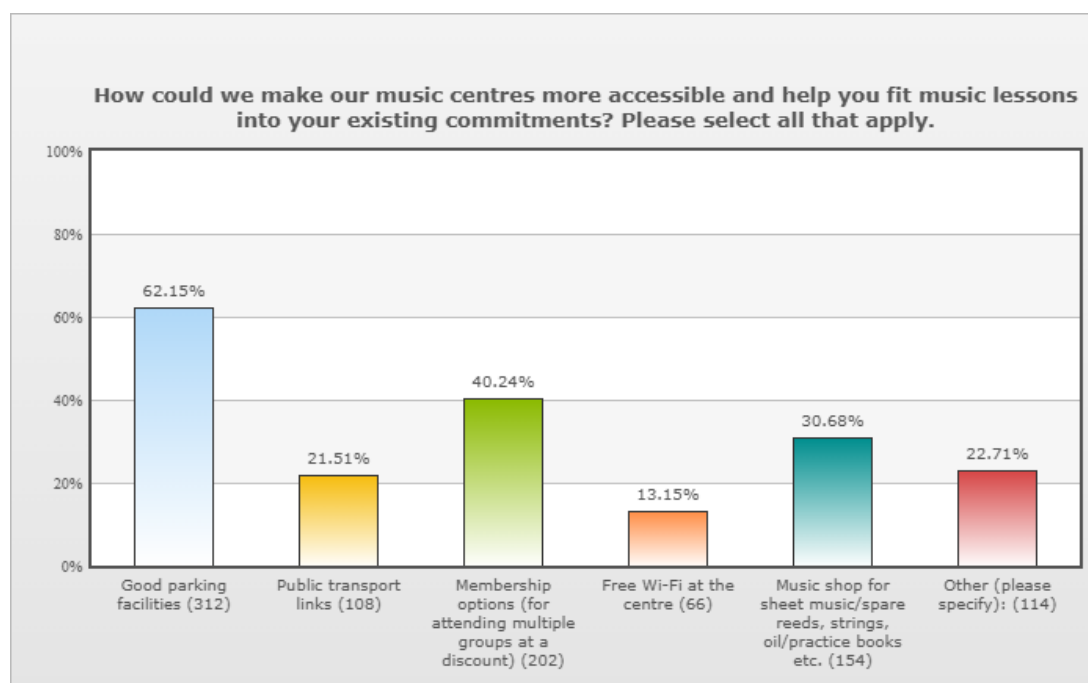


Table 17: Lesson preferences.

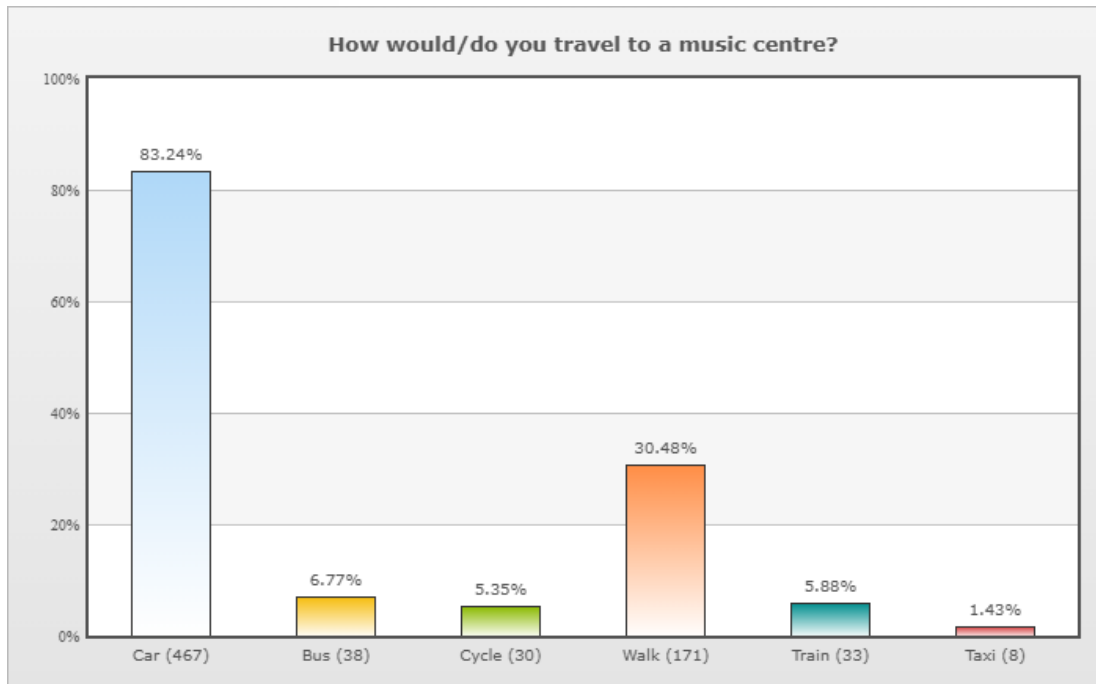


Table 18: Travel preferences.

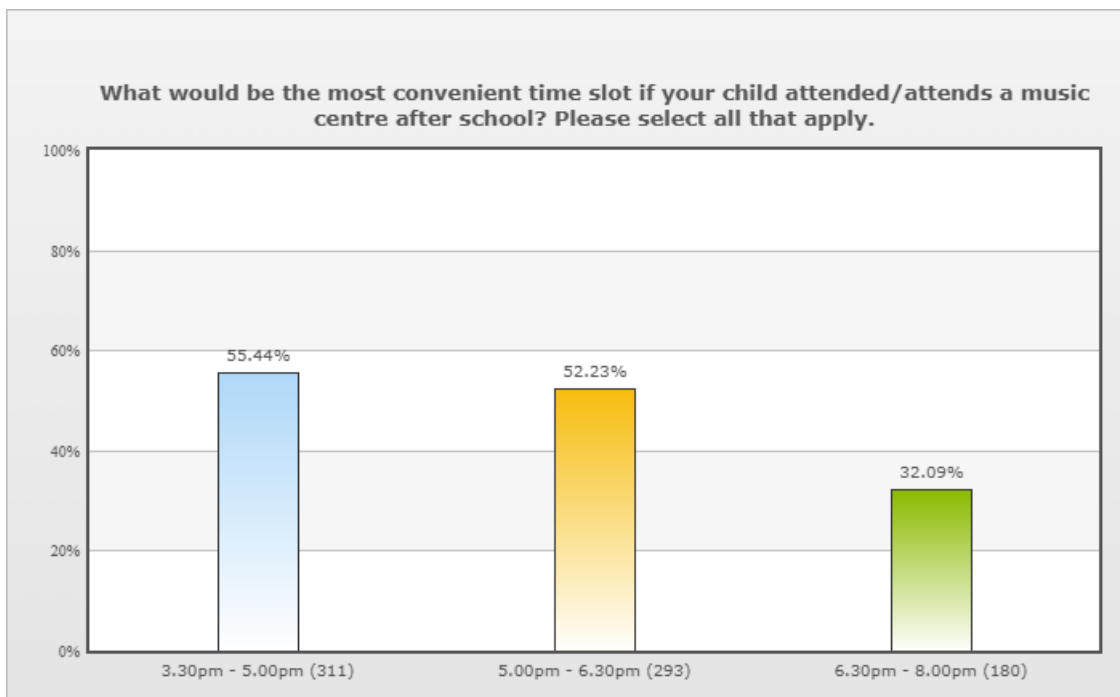


Table 19: After school timing preferences.

Overall, the few comments added by respondents show that parents care more about accessing a centre at a convenient time for the right activity for their children than the particular facilities or any 'added extras'.

## Marketing and brand

We repeated questions about how parents receive information about musical opportunities and written feedback questions about what HMS means to them.

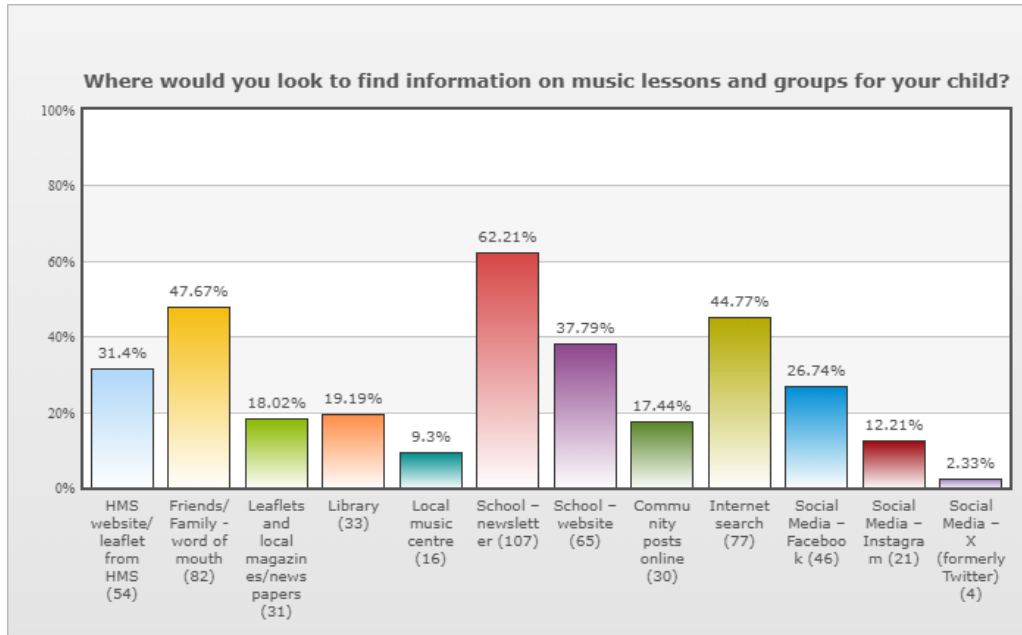


Table 20: Marketing preferences.

School channels and word of mouth continue to dominate routes to connecting with parents, consistently outperforming direct channels HMS use. This aligns with previous results in 2024.

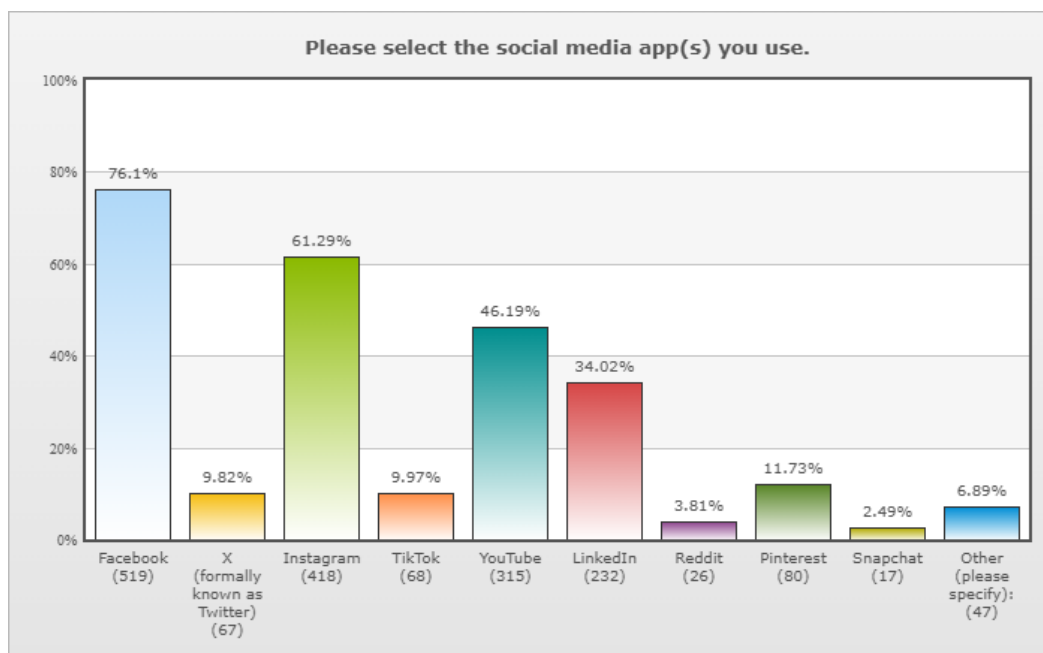


Table 21: Social media apps used.

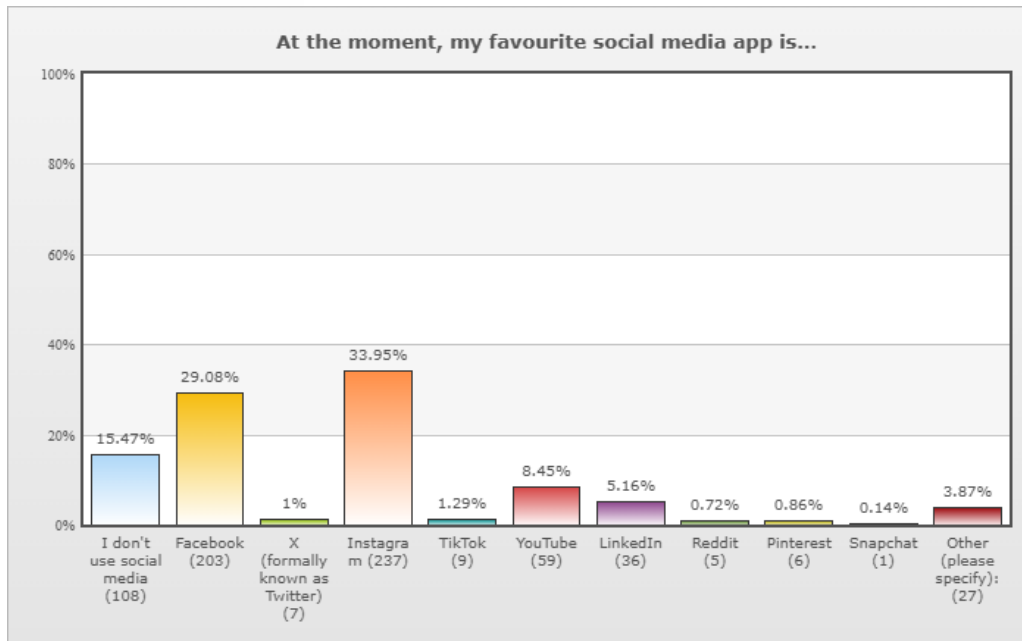


Table 22: Social media preferences.

The main social media route HMS doesn't currently make use of that parents value is WhatsApp.

HMS continues to work closely with school partners to share information, as demonstrated by the strong response rate to the youth survey that was sent via schools.

### Key findings from brand question responses

Parents were asked 4 questions that required written responses:

#### **Q17. What three words do you feel best describe Hertfordshire Music Service?**

Positive themes were friendly/welcoming, quality/reliable, accessible/convenient.

The implication here is that HMS brand messaging is strongest when it is warm, professional and easy to access – however parent-facing materials also need to be clear on price and process.

#### **Q18. What would you describe as the main benefits (up to three) that you and/or your young person take from learning with Hertfordshire Music Service?**

Benefits were wide ranging from skill and musical development to social and emotional outcomes.

Marketing should focus less on service mechanics (where and when) and more on outcomes like confidence, new skills, enjoyment, creative growth and easy access through school.

#### **Q19. Why is Hertfordshire Music Service your provider of choice for music education?**

Main themes included in-school convenience, local accessibility and teacher quality.

The important nuance here is that some responses suggested HMS is chosen because it is the only or default option available, not because parents see a differentiated brand with HMS.

Marketing should celebrate the convenience of HMS but also explain why it is the music provider of choice for so many schools.

### **Q20. We continue to use and support the work of Hertfordshire Music Service because...**

There were positive and negative responses here with family convenience, child enjoyment and progress/opportunity highlighted. Issues continued to focus on billing, payment timing and communication.

Messaging that supports retention should lead with happy children, trusted teachers and strong musical progress while service comms should proactively reduce friction around payments, admin and updates.

### **Conclusion of the parent/carers survey**

The survey highlights strong underlying demand and value in the HMS offer, particularly around in-school provision and teaching quality. However, there is consistent feedback that communication, billing, and administrative systems are creating friction in the customer experience.

These issues appear to be systemic rather than isolated, but they are not distinct from the teaching and learning itself, so improvement will require change and development from everyone at HMS.

Whilst there are some known weaknesses in the experience, demand remains high despite these challenges.

The first priority, based on parent feedback, must be to improve the reliability of the experience parents receive from HMS teachers regarding progress updates. The reason this should be the first priority is that it will have an immediate impact on the biggest issue we have which is parents don't fully understand progress or how they can help their child. By making this change, we can expect to improve retention, overall customer satisfaction, and increase the musical progress pupils make.

The planned projects of customer first communications and a move towards an updated billing platform are already in progress which will help the longer-term issues of administration, communications about learning, and billing issues.

Areas to focus on next should be prioritised as:

1. Improve communication outcomes - particularly progress updates and lesson change information. It is low cost, high impact, and affects a systemic issue.
2. Improve clarity on billing (even before changing the model) as parental perception is that bills arrive too early, the payment window is too short, they can't connect missed lessons

with the new invoice, and the wording feels 'harsh' or 'aggressive' especially when there is no monthly payment option available.

3. Standardise the customer experience. To do this, HMS needs to reduce the dependency on each individual teacher that currently impacts the perceived value of HMS most and create a more predictable parent experience.

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*Hertfordshire Music School is an absolute gem tailoring for every child and paying extra attention to children with special needs and incorporating opportunities, so everyone has a chance to shine!*

*The entire team needs to be congratulated for their passion and dedication to assisting all children on their music journey.*

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The survey results are not telling us whether HMS is valued - it clearly is. What the responses do say is where in the parental experience that value begins to break down.

All colleagues at HMS should be rightly proud of the positive impact they have on families across Hertfordshire every week – and as a music education organisation, this report provides an exciting opportunity to grow as a service and improve more lives through music.

## Youth Survey

The youth voice survey for 2026 again focused on the learning needs, ambitions and barriers to music for young people rather than their listening preferences or information about genres or styles of music that have largely become irrelevant recently.

Of the 776 responses to the youth voice survey, there was a much more diverse geographical spread of responses from across the county compared to 2024 where 82% of the youth voice survey responses came from students at one school.

The Lead Schools for Music network supported responses well – especially The Priory School in Hitchin, St Albans Girls' School, and Richard Hale School in Hertford. There were 5 responses from pupils in Elected Home Education or not in education.

Since the majority of responses are from pupils attending schools with very strong music departments, there are some common themes in the responses that indicate a well-supported music education (especially composition). Nearly half of respondents also knew that Hertfordshire Music Service provides lessons and ensembles.

The findings of the Youth Survey therefore demonstrate the experience of young people learning within a well-supported and engaged musical setting.

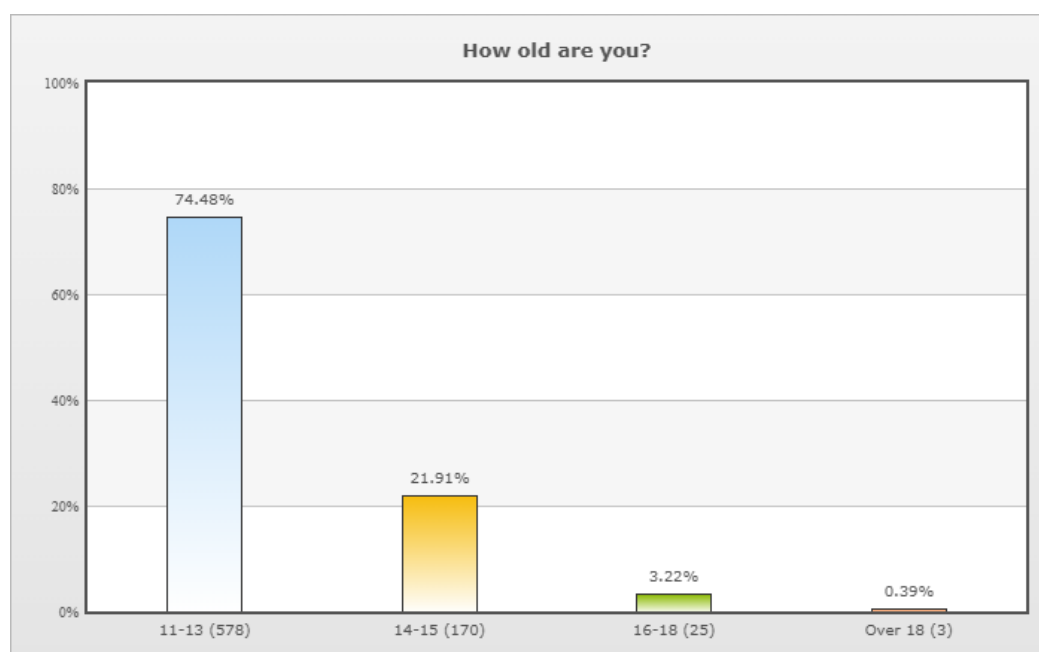


Table 23: Youth survey respondent ages.

Once again, the responses were mostly from pupils in KS3 – a pattern repeated in all previous youth surveys.

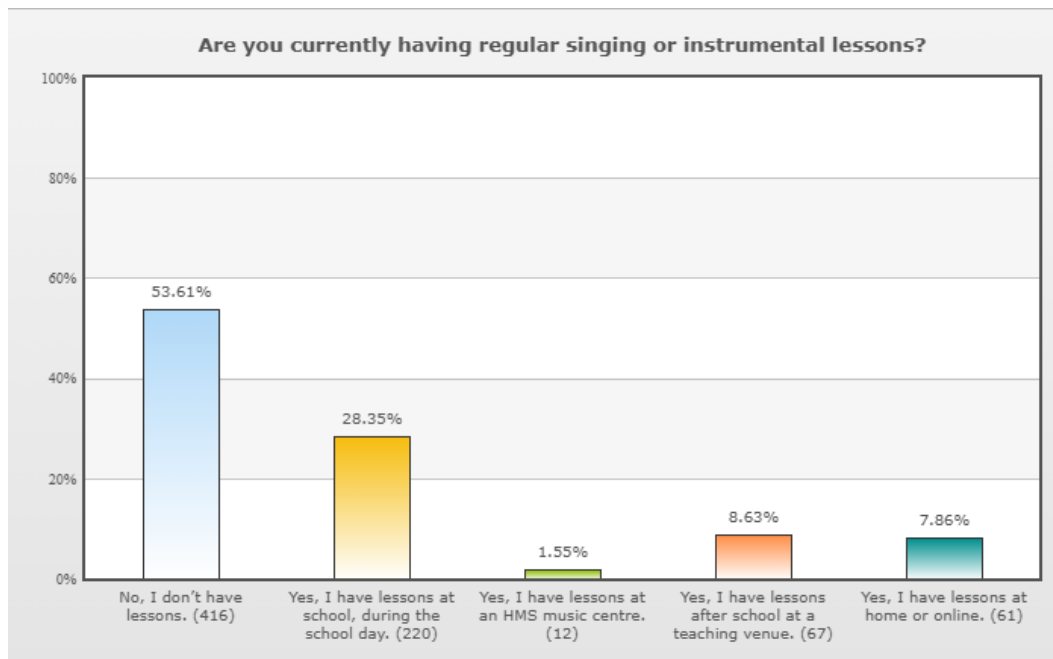


Table 24: Young people having regular lessons.

This was a new question for 2026 and demonstrates the musical engagement of the respondents, mostly from highly musical schools as 46% of respondents were engaged in regular singing or instrumental lessons.

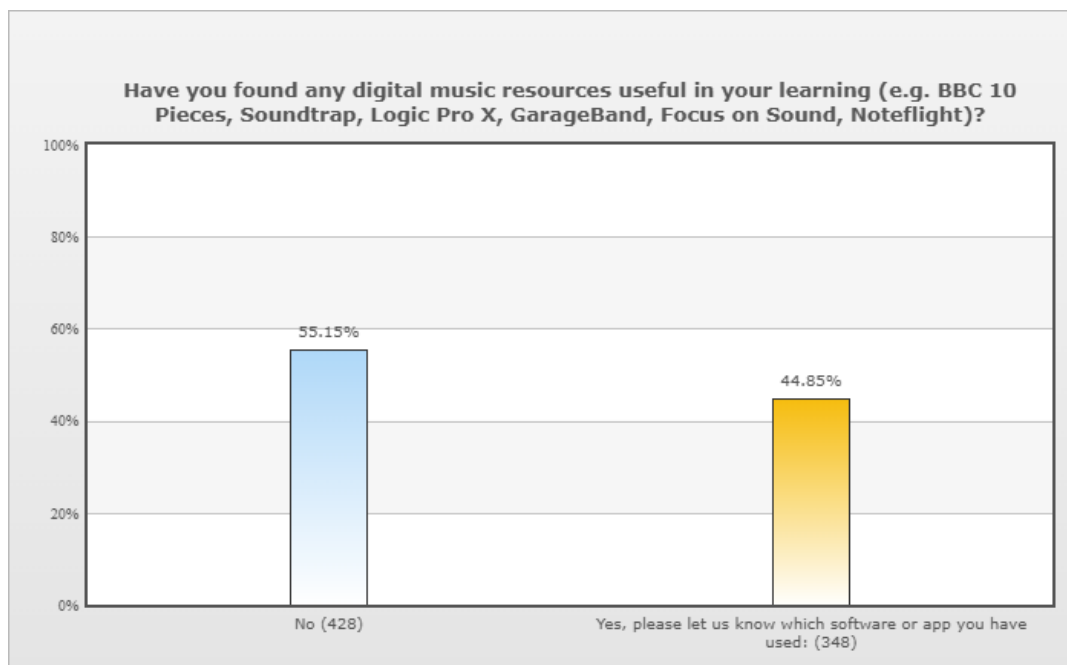


Table 25: Young people's use of digital resources.

45% of respondents used music software or a music app including Noteflight (composition tool), YuStudio, GarageBand and Soundtrap (all digital music production software).

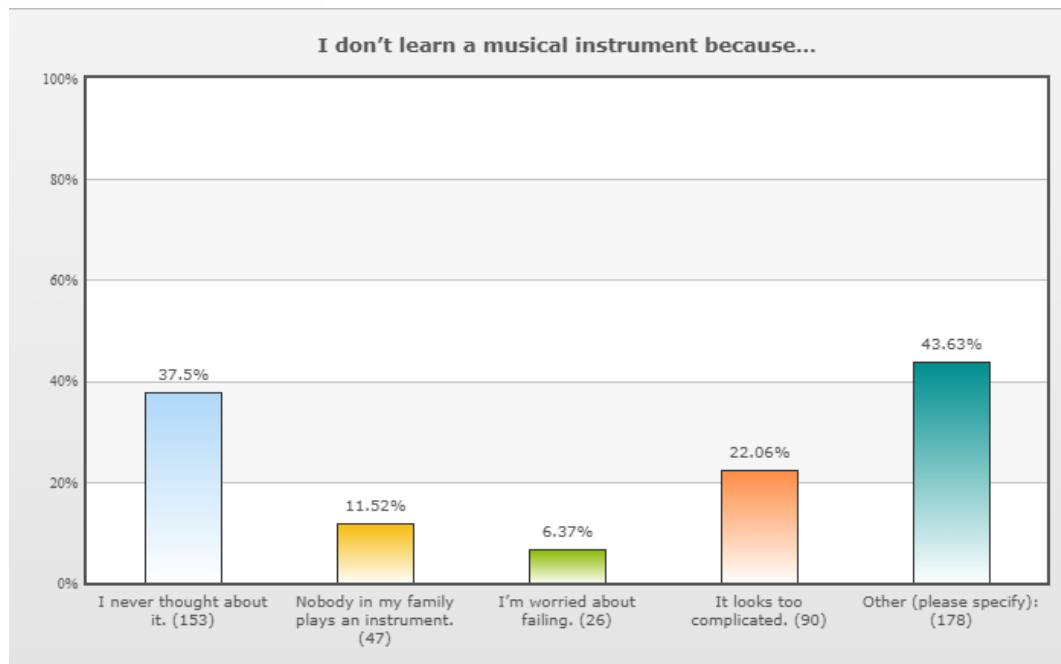


Table 26: Young people's reasons for not learning an instrument.

This question was asked for the second time and showed some changes in response percentages with a larger sample size. Fewer young people selected 'I never thought about it' compared to 2024 – possibly because the number of respondents from musical schools was higher.

'Nobody in my family plays', 'I'm worried about failing', and 'It looks too complicated' all aligned well to 2024 responses.

The 'other' option was new this year and showed that many young people are not completely disconnected from music – a significant number used to learn, still play casually or are self-taught and currently don't have formal lessons.

Other significant reasons were a lack of interest, time constraints and costs/access concerns.

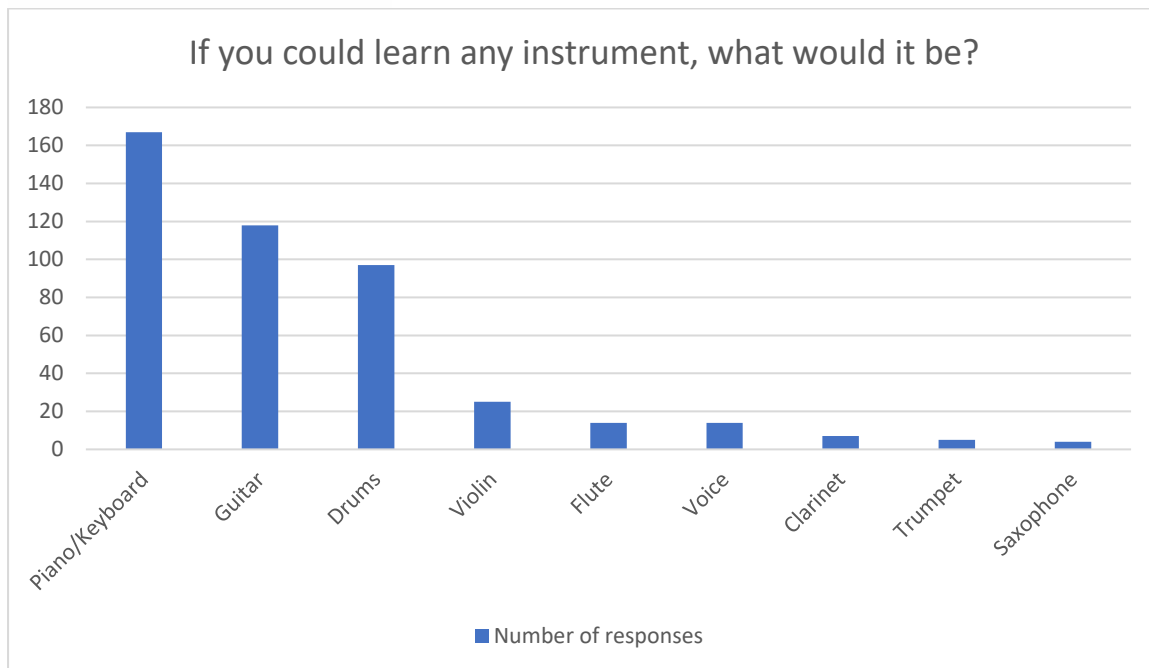


Table 27: Young people's instrument preferences.

When asked about what instrument young people would learn if given the choice, the majority chose piano, guitar or drums. This finding, and the orchestral instruments mentioned all align roughly to current demand for lessons across Hertfordshire with HMS.

Compared to 2024, brass instruments have reduced in popularity.

## Class and out of school music making

Young people were asked 3 questions:

### Q6. What is your favourite activity in class music lessons – and why?

Pupils most often enjoy the 'hands-on' parts of music: playing instruments (50.1%), composing (28.5%), singing and working in small groups (19.7%).

Practical, creative tasks are valued because they feel fun, expressive, collaborative and less passive than written work.

- *"It would have to be playing and getting it right. Which I know sounds silly but if you spend a lot of time practising something and you're accomplished it, it's quite a nice feeling!"*
- *"Composition as it allows me to express my own ideas"*
- *"Group activities where we are sent off to create our own pieces of music."*

### Q7. What would make you want to attend an after-school music centre?

Attendance is most encouraged by learning/improving a skill (28.4%), friends/social belonging (16.1%), and affordable/convenient access (11.5%).

- *“Learning and playing new songs on piano”*
- *“A fun and engaging atmosphere with my friends.”*
- *“If it was free or had a free or cheaper option for school pupils”*

Interest rises when centres feel fun, social and relevant. Pupils especially mention attending with friends, affordable pricing, convenient timings, and clear chances to learn instruments they actually want to play. This may point to future success with a ‘bring a friend’ week and other similar initiatives.

#### **Q8. Are there any reasons you wouldn’t attend a music centre?**

The strongest barriers are practical and emotional rather than musical ability alone. Lack of time is the dominant issue, followed by low interest for some pupils, then worries about confidence, belonging, cost and travel.

- *“I become worried at people judging my capability.”*
- *“If they are far away, boring and lasts long.”*

### **Musical preferences**

Young people were asked to select any statements from a predefined list that they agreed with.

| Statement                                                                            | 2024 | 2026 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| <b>I enjoy listening to music.</b>                                                   | 82%  | 91%  |
| <b>I do/would enjoy working out how to play my favourite songs on an instrument.</b> | 50%  | 55%  |
| <b>I do/would enjoy making music on my own.</b>                                      | 43%  | 45%  |
| <b>I do/would enjoy playing music informally with friends.</b>                       | 36%  | 48%  |
| <b>I do/would perform with a band, orchestra or choir.</b>                           | 28%  | 34%  |
| <b>I do/would work towards music exams or qualifications.</b>                        | 26%  | 27%  |
| <b>I do/would enjoy learning with a professional musician.</b>                       | 25%  | 29%  |
| <b>I do/would enjoy performing in solo concerts.</b>                                 | 18%  | 23%  |
| <b>I don’t want to learn a musical instrument presently.</b>                         | 14%  | 13%  |

Table 28: Young people’s musical preferences.

| Statement                                                     | 2024 | 2026 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| I enjoy learning new skills in music.                         | 53%  | 49%  |
| Music improves my mental health and wellbeing.                | 46%  | 52%  |
| Music makes me feel more confident.                           | 39%  | 46%  |
| Music allows me to express myself and perform.                | 33%  | 41%  |
| My music making makes my family proud of me.                  | 32%  | 27%  |
| Music is just a hobby for me.                                 | 32%  | 40%  |
| I can make new friends or meet new people through music.      | 27%  | 30%  |
| I can do music exams and gain qualifications.                 | 25%  | 26%  |
| Music isn't important to me presently.                        | 16%  | 16%  |
| Music is part of my faith or worship.                         | 16%  | 6%   |
| I don't enjoy learning music.                                 | 15%  | N/A  |
| I want to be a professional musician in the future.           | 14%  | 12%  |
| Music enables me to travel and visit new cities or countries. | 9%   | 10%  |

Table 29: Young people's view on music in their lives.

Overall, young people still enjoy listening to music the most (91%), learning their favourite songs (55%) and making music informally with friends (48%). This aligns to successful outcomes from partnerships like the Practice Roomz studio where space is made available to young people to use with no specific agenda or learning outcomes – informal music making, learning their favourite songs and engaging in music as a hobby.

Young people also reported increases in emotional and social outcomes – particularly improved confidence and mental health improvements through musical engagement.

The final comments section was not completed by many young people, but of those who did share additional comments, the strongest pattern was personal reflections about their own musical journey — what they play, what they enjoy, and what they hope to do musically.

## Summary of youth voice survey

It is clear that young people responding to this survey are musically engaged, particularly in strong music departments, and value both opportunities to engage in music informally and through more formal pathways in school with a focus on practical music making and composition.

There is a consistent growth in awareness with young people that music improves confidence, mental health and wellbeing.

For a music education organisation tasked with creating pathways to learn a wide range of musical instruments, there is a consistent challenge to increase demand for orchestral instruments which may link closely with findings in the parent survey regarding choosing a musical instrument to learn.

The continued success of developing a foundational musical curiosity in young people, made possible through a well-supported music programme in schools, will be vital to the work HMS does in raising awareness of different musical pathways that are available to young people.

If more schools are enabled to provide the fundamentals of music from an early age, especially nursery settings, then the role HMS plays in connecting young people to instrumental learning at the relevant point in their musical journey will become easier and more effective.

As the Hub Lead Organisation for Hertfordshire, HMS will continue to support teachers and senior leadership teams to deliver musically engaging learning in school through Hub funded roles working across the county.

## School survey

This survey was responded to by 89 school music teachers of which 67% were primary phase teachers and 33% were secondary phase teachers.

Respondents were asked to agree with some set statements across areas including musical activity, profile and value of music, knowledge of teachers, resources and training. The survey ended with the option to share ideas for improving music education in schools in the county.

### Musical activities delivered at schools

| Statement                                                                                         | 2024 | 2026 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| My school enables pupils to attend instrumental lessons during the school day.                    | 90%  | 93%  |
| My school provides access to whole class instrumental lessons.                                    | 66%  | 67%  |
| Pupils at my school have access to a school choir (not singing assembly or class music lesson).   | 87%  | 84%  |
| My school encourages pupils to attend out of school musical activities, e.g. HMS music centres.   | 66%  | 67%  |
| My school provides at least one concert or performance opportunity per term.                      | 66%  | 80%  |
| All pupils at my school engage in musical activities for at least 1 hour per week.                | 60%  | 58%  |
| My school subsidises instrumental lessons using e.g. EHCP or Pupil Premium funding.               | 49%  | 60%  |
| Pupils at my school have access to at least one school band, orchestra or ensemble (not a choir). | 28%  | 44%  |

Table 29: School responses on activities delivered.

### Profile and value of music in schools

| Statement                                                                 | 2024 | 2026 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| Music is valued and supported by my SLT.                                  | 90%  | 96%  |
| My school shares and celebrates musical achievements with parents/carers. | 87%  | 90%  |
| My school has a School Music Development Plan.                            | 51%  | 85%  |
| My school pays for musical activities provided by HMS.                    | 49%  | 51%  |

|                                                                                                          |     |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| My school staff are fully aware of the National Plan for Music Education and the Model Music Curriculum. | 42% | 60% |
| My school pays for musical activities provided by other organisations (not HMS).                         | 31% | 29% |
| My school supports other schools with music education.                                                   | 18% | 33% |

Table 30: School responses on music's profile in their setting.

Awareness of the National Plan for Music Education and creating a School Music Development Plan has increased since 2024 which demonstrates a clear impact of both the HMS support offer and the new Lead Schools for Music network.

### Knowledge, skills and understanding of your school's music subject lead/team

| Statement                                                                   | 2024 | 2026 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| At least one teacher at my school can play a musical instrument.            | 82%  | 89%  |
| My music subject lead has experience of teaching class music.               | 75%  | 56%  |
| Teachers at my school sing in music lessons and assemblies with confidence. | 64%  | 69%  |
| My music subject lead is a non-specialist teacher.                          | 40%  | 39%  |
| My music subject lead has a music teaching qualification.                   | 39%  | 56%  |
| My school has no music subject lead.                                        | 1%   | 0%   |

Table 31: School responses on activities delivered.

Anecdotal feedback from schools seems to align with the findings here that although more music leads have a relevant qualification, fewer music subject leads have experience of teaching class music. This connects to the continued turnover of teaching staff in schools where current teachers are leaving the profession to be replaced by Early Career Teachers with less practical experience.

### Music education resources and training

| Statement                                                              | 2024 | 2026 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| My school owns musical instruments for pupils to use in music lessons. | 91%  | 90%  |
| My school uses music resources or toolkits provided by HMS.            | 66%  | 37%  |
| My school delivers support for music education 'in house'.             | 55%  | 67%  |

|                                                                                                                             |     |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| My school uses other music resources.                                                                                       | 45% | 67% |
| My school is supported by HMS staff with music education (including HMS training via HfL and/or Alban Teaching School Hub). | 34% | 48% |
| My school is supported with music education by other (not HMS) training providers.                                          | 27% | 15% |
| My school does not have any musical instruments.                                                                            | 4%  | 1%  |

Table 32: School responses on resources and training.

CPD and training was mentioned less than previous years, and answers indicate that responses came from more musically confident teachers this year (more schools with an in-house support option and music leads with a relevant qualification).

Recent approaches to supporting schools has included much more signposting to external resources which supports the reduction in the use of HMS specific tools. Results do show an increase in support by HMS staff – driven by more regular school visits and proactive offers of support from the Music Hub.

## General feedback and comments

School music leaders were invited to answer the question:

*“If you could have one specific activity or resource to improve the musical outcomes of your school’s pupils, what would it be – and why?”*

Whilst there were a range of responses, the main themes focused on funding and practical support to maintain access to musical opportunities.

## Live music and taster sessions

A key theme in the response to what would improve musical outcomes was more practical, specialist sessions delivered by professional musicians.

44% of responses were linked to accessing a musician with a range of skills to offer, although this aspiration for music isn’t matched by available funding from schools.

Therefore, the requests for specialist music provision also included concerns about how to fund this time with many responses highlighting an expectation that it should be subsidised or free of charge.

Schools requested more visiting musicians, ensemble/choir sessions, live music performances, instrument taster lessons and composition/songwriting workshops.

There is a clear gap between current access to specialist music tuition in schools and what schools believe should be made available to their pupils.

*“Greater access to live musical performances. For example, visits from professional musicians, trips to concerts or workshops led by local performers. I feel this would help children develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of music beyond the classroom*

*and provide inspirational opportunities for many children who would not have the means to do so otherwise.”*

*“Inspiring external performances linked to workshops particularly in voice. We have many students who like to sing but refuse to engage in lessons or group singing due to self-esteem, peer-pressure and financial reasons.”*

*“As part of high-quality school music provision, we would like to provide pupils in the primary school with opportunities to participate in a choir, band, orchestra or other musical ensemble, enabling them to develop their musical skills, confidence, creativity and enjoyment of music through regular collaborative performance experiences.”*

The specifics of the requests show that a ‘musician in residence’ programme may be of benefit to a school or network of schools sharing a resource like this in order to provide a range of musical activities.

*“One resource would be a music specialist to be in school so a person rather than a physical item - encourage enthusiasm for music and confidence amongst staff. As music lead I am in class so someone to actively champion music with time to do so.”*

This approach involves a multi-skilled musician visiting schools regularly to provide a wide range of activities and has been championed by Simon Toyne (David Ross Education Trust and national music advisor) with early results showing positive impact. In Hertfordshire, there is a strong tradition of engaging community musicians to deliver workshops and projects, so reviving this approach may meet a growing need from schools.

## Funding

Responses demonstrate that school music leads continue to value music opportunities, including from HMS, however their own school funding restricts access to the provision they want or need for their pupils.

There remains a gap in understanding as to why subsidies for tuition or resources have reduced recently. Most responses describe the direct consequences of funding challenges rather than the wider causes by referencing affordability, costs and subsidy withdrawals rather than inflation, reduced funding or budget pressures.

*“Continued funding for Autumn 2026 from Herts Music Service - this would allow us to continue to provide weekly recorder lessons for Year 2. However, as funding is being withdrawn, we will have to withdraw the service and this impacts on the children.”* – a school that previously bought in a full year First Access project.

Overall interpretation of funding issues are understood at three main levels:

1. School budget pressure: “We’d like this but cannot pay for it.”
2. Service-cost pressure: “The service or provision is becoming too expensive.”
3. Equity pressure: “Children miss out when schools or parents cannot absorb the cost.”

## Primary and Secondary differences

Responses from teachers often demonstrated strong reasons for their requests that included increased engagement, confidence, inspiration and widening access.

When comparing responses from primary and secondary schools, primary schools more often asked about singing, Classroom Instrumental Learning and boosting teacher confidence to make music. Secondary schools mainly focused on composition, songwriting, music technology and lessons linked to GCSE music.

Overall, the difference was primary settings needed more universal or accessible provision, whereas secondary settings sought targeted enhancements to their existing offer.

## Summary of schools survey

Music leads in Hertfordshire schools are consistently ambitious and aspire to offer all their pupils access to a great music education, limited only by restricted budgets and funding sources.

While funding remains a challenge, more creative solutions will be required to continue providing great musical experiences for schools. HMS already plans to pilot an 'Instrument Discovery Programme' offer to meet some of the key requests raised by schools – mainly access to shorter, more impactful specialist projects that give pupils the chance to try a musical instrument as opposed to a long-term classroom instrumental learning programme.

Cluster projects or festivals were also raised as an option, and the Music for Youth event planned in Watford for spring 2027 will allow schools to take part in performance opportunities more easily, as will the partnership with the Benedetti Foundation in April 2027 providing workshops for schools in North Herts.

There is a risk that schools perceive HMS as charging more, removing previous opportunities or being generally less affordable. There is more work required to adapt that narrative to better explain the flat funding, why previous options are now unsustainable, and that HMS is working hard to maintain and protect access to key support that schools note is valued – especially music curriculum support.

The challenge is to communicate this more clearly, show what HMS has done to absorb pressure itself, and demonstrate that changes are designed to sustain pupil access as fairly as possible rather than simply pass costs on to schools.

## Recommendations and next steps

The following recommendations are made to help drive improvements from the learning and findings of this report. These recommendations are distinct and separate from the existing service objectives that HMS has developed for 2026-27 already.

### **1. Establish a 'Customer First' approach to lessons as a central driver of teaching quality.**

Parents consistently highlight unclear progress and lack of guidance on how to help with practice as a key issue, including where communications with HMS and teachers are rated as 'good'.

Parents use their own assumptions, comparisons and baselines to measure progress, justify the cost of tuition and to decide whether to continue lessons.

As learning an instrument is a slow, non-linear process, it is understandable that parents and pupils may get frustrated. By intentionally managing the reference points parents compare progress to, we can improve retention and perceived value more easily.

Expected impact would be improved retention rates, stronger musical progress and higher customer satisfaction rates. Over time this would create more sustainable timetables for teachers and allow HMS to recruit more teachers in new teaching locations.

### **2. Prioritise and strengthen school relationship management as a primary driver for accessibility and participation in instrumental lessons.**

In-school lessons remain the most valued and accessible model for families and by securing HMS' position as the core lesson provider in Hertfordshire schools, financial security can be maintained for HMS.

Expected impact would be delivering the budget to plan, sustained and increased participation, and stronger school partnerships.

### **3. Standardise key aspects of the HMS customer experience and communicate to all stakeholders clearly and effectively.**

The way customers currently perceive the quality of their HMS experience varies depending on teacher or setting. The recommendation is to clearly define what every customer should expect regardless of teacher or location.

Expected impact would be a more predictable and reliable service, reduced concerns or complaints, and improved satisfaction across all settings.

### **4. Simplify and clarify the billing and payment experience.**

Billing clarity and lack of flexible payment options are a source of frustration currently; however, not all of the issues are linked to the lack of a monthly payment option.

### Next steps

Next steps will be for ELT and the wider HMS leadership team to consider these recommendations in relation to existing objectives and prioritise them to ensure that any commitments HMS makes to improving the service are achievable within current capacity.