

SUSSEX MUSIC HUB EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGY 2026/27

1. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT

Sussex Music Hub is committed to making a step-change in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), believing that this is a key driver in realising our vision for a future where children and young peoples' lives are forever transformed by the power of music, the value of belonging and opportunities without barriers.

To achieve this we will centre the voices of children and young people as we work with our partners and stakeholders to inspire engagement with a diverse range of high-quality music experiences.

We are committed to being more representative and to better reflect the communities we serve, in all areas of our work, from our placed-based programmes to our staff team and governance structure.

This commitment is underpinned by our belief that:

- Music has the power to illuminate and transform.
- Music has no hierarchy.
- Music is for anyone.
- Music brings communities together.

This EDI Strategy is a live document, designed to develop and change over time as we work with children and young people, our partners and stakeholders to ensure it remains relevant and able to meet the changing needs and wants of the communities we serve.

2. INCLUSION LEAD

The Sussex Music Hub Board holds ultimate responsibility for this strategy. To enable the effective implementation of this work, the Sussex Music Hub has designated Emma Collins, Deputy Director and Strategic Lead for Quality and Inclusion at Create Music as the Inclusion Lead for the Sussex Music Hub. The Inclusion Lead will work with the Hub Board, as part of the Create Music/West Sussex Music Leadership Team and with wider staff teams, partners and children and young people to realise the ambitions set out in this strategy and in our Local Plan for Music Education.

3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We have identified five strategic priorities to drive change in terms of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Supported by data and co-developed with our

stakeholders, these priorities are:

1. Access and Participation

Working with schools, partners and local communities to identify and better understand barriers for currently under-represented groups accessing the Music Hub; and working collaboratively to find creative ways to facilitate participation.

2. Diversifying Musical Opportunities

Reviewing and developing our Music Hub programme to offer a wider range of authentic musical experiences and progression pathways that better represent the musical identities, cultures and interests of children and young people.

3. Governance and Workforce

Fostering a diverse and representative Strategic Board that has the skills and experiences to drive change and developing a diverse and skilled workforce who facilitate high-quality experiences in music and multiple, inclusive, progression pathways for children and young people across our region.

4. Youth Voice

Embedding the voices of children and young people in the development, delivery, evaluation and governance of Sussex Music Hub, ensuring that their experiences, aspirations and ideas help shape provision, influence decision-making and drive continuous improvement.

5. Data Collection and Evaluation

Better understanding our localities and communities by collating and analysing data to inform development of place-based responses that meet local needs.

4. DEFINITIONS

Due to the changing nature and different understanding of language around equality, diversity and inclusion, we have developed the below definitions to explain what we mean by some of the key terms used in this strategy.

Equality – we recognise that true equality can only be achieved through equity – to us, this means ensuring that everyone is given what they need in order to succeed.

Diversity – we recognise that everyone is different in a variety of visible and non-visible ways. At Sussex Music Hub we want to make sure that those differences are recognised, respected and valued.

Inclusion – this means the actions that we take to create an environment where opportunities are open to all, diversity is valued, and where everybody can reach their full potential without fear of harassment, prejudice or discrimination.

Belonging – we understand this to be a sense of fitting in or feeling like you are an important part, or a member of, the Sussex Music Hub. Experiencing belonging can also have a positive impact on well-being.

Access – this means making sure everyone has the ability, feels they have permission and/or has the right to take part in an activity or benefit from services provided by the Sussex Music Hub.

5. SUPPORTING ACCESS TO TUITION

We know that the cost of tuition can be a barrier to participation for some children and young people and so the Sussex Music Hub offers a range of support for families, including bursary schemes, a SEND tuition scheme and instrument loan.

BURSARIES

Details of local arrangements for bursaries/funding support are published on the Create Music and West Sussex Music websites:

Create Music (Brighton & Hove, East Sussex):

<https://createmusic.org.uk/information-for-learners/fees/help-with-fees/>

West Sussex Music:

<https://www.westsussexmusic.co.uk/bursary>

SEND TUITION SCHEME

In summer 2023, Create Music introduced a new scheme for children in receipt of an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to increase equity of access to instrumental tuition. In many cases, children with SEND require an individual lesson, and while this was available for pupils at the beginner stage of learning, there was a higher cost for this tuition. Create Music has increased the available subsidy, so that children and young people with an EHCP can now access a 20-minute individual lesson at the same rate as a group lesson, meaning that the cost of tuition for all beginners is the same. Pupils in receipt of an EHCP are eligible for this scheme whether they attend mainstream or special schools. As with the Young Musician's Bursary Scheme, Create Music; this work is supported by our fundraising strategy.

INSTRUMENT LOAN

Most instruments available to learn can be hired from Sussex Music Hub and it is recommended that parents/carers hire an instrument, particularly in the early stages of learning. The instrument hire service offers access to instruments at a subsidised rate and families eligible for financial assistance are prioritised for the hire of an instrument if stocks of a particular instrument are low.

The Music Hub provides free instrument loan (subject to availability) to benefits-related free school meal pupils, including Looked After Children, with their tuition or ensemble membership. The Hub also provides subsidised instrument loan for

non-benefits related free school meal pupils whose families receive other state benefits.

Instruments are also loaned free of charge to schools engaged in Classroom Instrumental Lessons (CIL) programmes. These instruments may remain at a school for the duration of the CIL programme if it is continuing from one term or one year to the next.

Following receipt of the Capital Grant, Sussex Music Hub is also building a library of instruments, including accessible instruments and music technology to support music learning. In the majority of cases, instruments are loaned to schools (free of charge), where they can be accessed and used by all pupils.

6. OUR FUTURE MUSIC

'Our Future Music' was a five-year strategic programme funded by Youth Music that the Southern Music Hub Alliance (which includes Create Music and West Sussex Music) worked on, to increase musical inclusion for children and young people. The programme offered diverse and inclusive music programmes, supported young people with SEND, facilitated youth-led music spaces, and co-developed training and resources for inclusive approaches. The programme has a significant legacy, impacting the way that Sussex Music Hub continues to work, with an ongoing focus on developing, embedding and advocating for greater musical inclusion. In 2024 we launched a new website with resources and case studies focused on musical inclusion to support the wider music education sector and embed learning from the 'Our Future Music' programme:

<https://ofm.createmusic.org.uk>

7. I'M IN!

I'M IN is a self-analysis diversity & inclusion (D&I) tool created by Music Masters which enables organisations working in and with music to evaluate how, where and why D&I is considered within their strategy, structure, practices and policies and – crucially – to identify where improvement and change is needed.

When first coming together as the Sussex Music Hub, Create Music and West Sussex Music took part in the 'I'M IN!' process, bringing together groups of staff working across the Music Hub to complete a process of self-review and reflection, focusing on 5 core areas of our work. The 5 dimensions that we reviewed were:

1. Motivation
2. Leadership and Accountability
3. Organisational Responsibility
4. Recruitment
5. User Experience (focus on CYP and parents/carers)

Following the completion of this process, colleagues met to share the outcomes and identify common areas for development, which have been used to inform the creation of the Sussex Music Hub EDI Action Plan. This plan is updated annually, please see below for the 2026/27 plan.

8. TARGETS FOR 2026/27

To monitor and support progress in this important area, the Sussex Music Hub SMART objectives for 2026/27 include the following targets:

- 850 children and young people take part in inclusive programmes (featuring genres and traditions of music other than Western Classical)
- 850 children and young people with SEND take part in activities with the Sussex Music Hub.
- 1500 digital badges, recognising informal learning and skill development to be awarded, with a target of 45% acceptance rate from young people.
- 18,000 children and young people access music-making using instruments/equipment/technology provided by Sussex Music Hub.

9. RESEARCH

From 2018-2021, Create Music worked closely with a doctoral research candidate from the School of Psychology, University of Sussex. Dr Maruša Levstek worked alongside teachers and pupils at Create Music, focusing on the impact of inclusive music-making on well-being. This work supported the evaluation of the 'Our Future Music' programme and the development of inclusive practice across Create Music and partner Music Hubs in the south east. During this period Dr Levstek had two articles published and produced several reports, presentations and resources for teachers. Sussex Music Hub continues to work with Dr Levstek, who is now a member of the Sussex Music Hub Board, with a special interest in supporting evaluation, development of youth voice and understanding of effective inclusive practice.

10. REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE AND GOVERNANCE

SMH values the diversity of our workforce and users. We aim to make our services as accessible and responsive as possible to all existing and potential users, and to provide a service to them which recognises and respects their differences. We recognise that our ability to meet their needs is improved by having a diverse workforce which generally reflects our customer base. We also wish to provide the best opportunities for the Hub's workforce to develop and thrive and to experience a sense of belonging.

Brighton Dome, Brighton Festival's (BDBF) Equality and Diversity Policy covers all aspects of the HLO's employment practices, including advertisements, recruitment, induction, pay, conditions of service, staff development, change management, promotions, grievance and disciplinary procedures, training and development and assessment. It applies also to relationships with suppliers and contractors, as well as to potential employees. In the past year we have undertaken further steps to improve transparency and access within our recruitment process for example by undertaking anonymous shortlisting for all roles and providing all candidates with questions in advance of an interview.

In line with the policy and priorities of the HLO, SMH values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination. Create Music and West Sussex Music encourage and welcome applications from all backgrounds and all parts of the community, particularly people with disabilities and from ethnic minorities who are currently under-represented. All applications are judged on merit and, for those working with children and young people, are subject to safer recruitment practices.

Our commitment to achieving greater workforce diversity through our recruitment processes is also evidenced by the HLO being a Living Wage Employer, a Disability Confident Employer and Create Music being a founder member of Black Lives in Music.

Prior to 2024, both Create Music and West Sussex Music undertook governance reviews. Following these reviews both organisations instigated new recruitment processes designed to engage a more diverse and representative group of board members to lead the strategic development of each respective Music Education Hub. This process was transformational, with the outcome being a Board with hugely increased diversity.

In September 2024 the new Sussex Music Hub was launched and members of the existing Create Music Board and West Sussex Music Hub Boards came together to form the Sussex Music Hub Board. Since its formation the SMH Board has been asked to take part in annual diversity and skills monitoring to ensure that the group remains sufficiently diverse to support and challenge the Sussex Music Hub and to represent the communities which it serves.

11. HOW THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE USED

The Sussex Music Hub Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy sets out our ambitions and intentions to bring about positive change, believing that inclusion is a key driver in realising our vision for children and young people. Inclusion is central to our vision and mission as a Hub and as such, is represented in our SMART objectives for 2026/27.

The implementation of this strategy will be regularly monitored (through the Action Plan below) by the Create Music/West Sussex Music Leadership Teams, with progress reported to the Sussex Music Hub Board and ACE on a regular basis. A summary of this strategy will also be published on the Sussex Music Hub/Create Music/West Sussex Music websites and shared with schools, Hub partners, our pupils and their families.

12. SUSSEX MUSIC HUB EDI ACTION PLAN 2026/27

Sussex Music Hub is committed to ensuring that every child and young person has the opportunity to access, enjoy and benefit from high-quality music education. Inclusion, equality, diversity and belonging are therefore integral to the way we plan and deliver our work, rather than being separate from our core educational and artistic priorities.

This Action Plan builds on the Hub's previous EDI work and focuses on moving from broad commitments towards measurable and sustained action. It recognises that providing equal opportunities does not always mean providing the same opportunities to everyone; effective inclusion requires us to understand where barriers exist and take proportionate action to address them.

The Plan reflects the direction of national education policy, particularly the Department for Education's 2026 white paper *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*. The White Paper places a strong emphasis on combining high standards with inclusion, broadening children's educational experiences, ensuring that children who have been underserved are included, and strengthening relationships between schools, families and communities.

For Sussex Music Hub, these priorities reinforce the importance of:

- widening access to high-quality music education;
- reducing barriers to participation and progression;
- strengthening inclusive practice for children and young people with SEND;
- ensuring that children encounter a broad and diverse range of musical traditions, genres, composers and artists;
- giving children and young people meaningful opportunities to influence the provision they receive; and
- developing a diverse, skilled and inclusive workforce.

During 2026–27, the Hub will focus particularly on turning these commitments into practical changes in curriculum, teaching, participation, workforce development, programming and partnership working.

Progress will be monitored throughout the academic year, with responsibility assigned to relevant leaders and teams and an annual review used to inform priorities for 2027–28.

Priority	Specific actions for 2026–27	Success measures
1. Inclusion is embedded in leadership, planning and decision-making	• EDI Lead meets with SMH Leadership Team managers responsible for each major area of SMH activity. • Add an EDI/inclusion section to all new programme proposals, curriculum plans and major event planning. • Include EDI as a standing item at SMH Leadership Team meetings at least termly. • Termly reporting on progress towards SMARTs to SMH Board	• 100% of new major programmes/events demonstrate consideration of inclusion. • EDI discussed termly by Leadership Team and Board (via review of SMARTs) • Annual dashboard completed and used to identify priorities for 2027–28. • Staff can identify how their role contributes to SMH EDI objectives.

Priority	Specific actions for 2026–27	Success measures
	• Review the EDI Action Plan termly and publish an annual progress summary. • Develop an annual EDI dashboard using agreed measures.	
2. Improve access and participation for children who are currently under-represented	• Identify groups under-represented in SMH participation using available demographic and participation data. • Map participation by geography, SEND, disadvantage and other available characteristics, while avoiding unnecessary collection of sensitive data. • Identify 3 priority participation gaps and develop targeted interventions with schools/partners. • Review pricing, instruments, transport, venues, audition processes and progression routes for potential barriers. • Develop targeted partnership work with schools serving communities currently less well represented.	• Participation baseline established during autumn 2026. • Three priority gaps identified with actions agreed by December 2026. • At least three targeted interventions delivered during 2027. • Evidence of increased participation or improved progression in priority groups.
3. Strengthen SEND and inclusive music-making	• Audit current instrumental/vocal teaching and ensembles against inclusive practice principles. • Develop an SMH minimum standard for inclusive music-making, covering adaptations, communication, environment and reasonable adjustments. • Provide practical CPD for teachers on adaptive teaching and inclusive ensemble practice. • Develop a bank of adaptations/resources for instrumental teachers (building on Our Future Music website). • Work with schools to understand how SMH provision can complement their emerging SEND provision and the direction of national SEND reform.	• Inclusive teaching standard adopted across SMH provision. • All instrumental/vocal teachers offered relevant CPD. • Resource bank available and used by teachers. • Increased confidence reported by teachers in supporting SEND learners. • Positive feedback from participating CYP, families and schools.
4. Make curriculum, repertoire and	• Complete a structured review of repertoire currently taught across key instruments/ensembles.	• Repertoire audit completed for priority curriculum areas by spring 2027.

Priority	Specific actions for 2026–27	Success measures
programming more representative	• Establish agreed criteria for assessing breadth and representation rather than relying solely on quotas. • Each curriculum area identifies composers, artists, musical traditions and repertoire currently missing or under-represented. • Include music from a broader range of cultures, traditions, genres, genders and lived experiences without presenting cultures as tokenistic “special topics”. • Support schools to consider breadth and representation within their own music curricula.	• Each curriculum area introduces identified new repertoire, with updated curriculum documents and schemes of work for 2026/27. • Teachers report increased confidence in selecting representative repertoire. • CYP encounter a demonstrably wider range of musical traditions and creators.
5. Give children, young people, families and communities greater influence	• Establish a clear Youth Voice mechanism for SMH, rather than relying solely on occasional consultation. • Hold at least two structured CYP consultation sessions during 2026–27, with feedback showing what changed as a result. • Introduce a standard set of EDI/accessibility questions into parent/carer and CYP surveys. • Introduce an “You said, we did” approach following significant consultation. • Gather accessibility feedback following major performances/events and act on recurring issues. • Involve CYP in decisions about repertoire, programming, events and communications where appropriate.	• Youth Voice activity takes place at least twice during the year. • CYP feedback leads to identifiable changes in provision. • Consultation findings are communicated back to participants. • Accessibility issues identified through feedback have named actions and owners.