



In association with **NORMANS
EDUCATION**



2026

MUSIC EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Breaking Barriers - Empowering Music
Curriculum Access, Diversity & Quality for All

FRIDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2026

University of Warwick Conference Centre



DARREN ABRAHAMS

Keynote Speaker: Inspirational
Regenerative Change Maker,
Singer, Trauma Therapist and
Performance Coach.



MARTIN FAUTLEY

Emeritus Professor of Music
Education at Birmingham City
University

Conference 2026

Breaking Barriers *in association with Normans Education*

6th February 2026, University of Warwick Conference Centre



Welcome!

We are delighted to welcome you to our first-ever Heart of England Music Hub Conference in association with **Normans Education**.

Our theme, “*Breaking Barriers*,” invites music educators to explore and overcome the challenges that limit access, diversity, and quality in music education today. We are pleased to welcome Darren Abrahams—inspirational Regenerative Change Maker, Singer, Trauma Therapist, and Performance Coach—and Emeritus Professor of Music Martin Fautley as our keynote speakers. Martin and Darren are joined by a range of workshop leaders to address our conference theme.

We are hugely grateful to **Normans Education** for their generous sponsorship of today’s conference, to **Charanga** for their support of our two keynote speakers, and to **Presto Music** for their support of our morning workshops.

£500 Prize Draw*

Please do take time to visit our principal sponsors, **Normans Education**, in the exhibition area and register for their prize draw to win a **£500 voucher** to be used at Normans.co.uk. The draw will take place during today’s closing address. **Delegates must be present to receive their prize. If not, there will be a re-draw.*

Delegate 25% Discount Offer

All delegates will receive a 25% discount voucher from Normans Education via email to their registered email address after the conference. All Music Hub Schools who complete our conference feedback survey will receive a 25% discount on Lead School Support until July 2026.

Our thanks also go to our amazing Music Hub Lead Schools, Music Service management, and administration teams for their support in planning and delivering today’s conference.

We hope you enjoy the conference.

Mark

Mark Steele
Coventry Music



Richard

Richard Hart
Warwickshire Music



Claire

Claire Batty
Solihull Music



Morning Programme

09:25 **Welcome**

09:30 **Keynote**

Safe to Sing: Breaking Barriers with Music

Darren Abrahams

As music educators, you already hold one of the most powerful tools for creating Safety, Belonging and Purpose across the entire school community. Drawing on his practice as a trauma therapist and three decades as a community musician working in schools, refugee camps and fractured communities across the world, Darren reveals how music affects us biologically, psychologically and socially to rebuild trust and safety and open up the potential for human flourishing. Get ready to view your practice in a very different light!

Keynote supported by **Charanga**



10:35 **Workshops 1**

Slate 1	Radcliffe 25	Radcliffe 30	Radcliffe 33	Radcliffe 37
Makaton Makes Music	From Theory to Practice - Your Toolkit for Breaking Barriers	Understanding the new Ofsted approach to Music Inspections	Samba For All	Unlocking Creativity in the Primary Classroom with Charanga
Click here for workshop notes and handouts where available				

Workshops Supported by **prestomusic**

11:35 **Coffee & Exhibitors**

Refreshments with time to visit our exhibitors and network with colleagues.

12:00 **Workshops 2**

Slate 1	Radcliffe 25	Radcliffe 30	Radcliffe 33	Radcliffe 37
Sing It Out!	GCSE Composition		Oodles of Noodles, Buckets and Beats	Technology for the Music Classroom
Click here for workshop notes and handouts where available				

13:00 **Choir Performance**

Join us in the main space to hear children from Music Hub Schools performing works developed in the Sing It Out! workshop.

13:15 **Lunch & Exhibitors**

Buffet lunch with time to visit our exhibitors and network with colleagues.



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We're proud to be supporting the Heart of England Music Conference

Please drop by the Normans Education stand and have a chat with Jack and Andy about how we can support your school this year.

While you're there, don't forget to enter our Prize Draw for the chance to win a £500 voucher to spend at [Normans.co.uk](https://www.normans.co.uk).



Conference Exclusives

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Afternoon Programme

14:15 Keynote

Professor Martin Fautley: *Assessment and Progression in Classroom Music*

Martin problematises notions of assessment and progression. Although these are both terminologies in daily usage in schools, nonetheless their meanings are not always transparent, and they each carry with them a lot of 'baggage' of assumptions and suppositions. This keynote will both present what these issues are, and how music teachers might go about thinking, and subsequently operationalising assessment and progression thinking in their own classrooms. We know that music educators often have a thorough grasp of formative assessment strategies, and so this aspect will run throughout the keynote.

Keynote supported by [Charanga](#)



14:55 Workshops 3

Slate 1	Radcliffe 25	Radcliffe 30	Radcliffe 33	Radcliffe 37
TiME -Table of Tech! New Accessible Instruments	Creating music that connects – at KS3 & KS4 with Charanga	Assessment in the Music Classroom	Inspiring Music in the Early Years: Building your Practical Toolkit	Songwriting with GarageBand for iPad
Click here for workshop notes and handouts where available				

15:55 Coffee & Exhibitors

Refreshments and final exhibitor visits, with time to network.

16:15 Closing Address & Prize Draw!

Conference closing remarks and £500 Prize Draw* by Normans Education.

**Delegates must be present to receive their prize. If not, there will be a re-draw.*



16:30 Departure



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Workshop Details

Workshop	Deliverer	Details
From Theory to Practice: Your Toolkit for Breaking Barriers	Darren Abrahams	<p>Ready to put these ideas into practice? Through hands-on musical activities and real classroom scenarios, you'll learn simple nervous system techniques to shift students from dysregulation to calm, recognise when a student has moved from safety to threat, and use your voice, instruments, and presence to co-regulate challenging moments. Experience how small changes to your sessions can break down barriers to learning across your school. Leave with practical activities you can use immediately—not to add more to your workload, but to transform how you use the musical skills you already have to create genuinely inclusive spaces where all learners can flourish.</p>

Workshop	Deliverer	Details
Assessment in the Music Classroom (KS2 and KS3)	Professor Martin Fautley	In this session, the main focus will be on assessment across KS2 and KS3. Professor Fautley will ask teachers to reflect on what they teach, why they teach it, and how they then go about assessing what they and the pupils do as a result of this. He will also be asking teachers to think about their own assessment practices, and how these mesh (or maybe don't!) with whole-school or wider systems within which they have to fit.
Unlocking Creativity in the Primary Classroom	Simon Evans, Charanga	Discover how to transform your primary music lessons with innovative digital tools and resources that make music education fun and accessible to every pupil. In this hands-on session, you'll explore practical techniques for composing using Charanga's YuStudio DAW. You'll learn how to use and record instruments, build melodies and layers, all while building your confidence to deliver an exciting, inclusive music curriculum. Whether you're an experienced teacher or a novice, you'll leave with tried-and-tested methods you can use immediately
Creating Music That Connects at KS3 and KS4	Max Wheeler, Charanga	Join recording artist and music producer Max Wheeler as he explores inclusive approaches to delivering composition and music technology at KS3 and KS4. Max will introduce teachers to YuStudio, a full-featured DAW designed for education that makes music production accessible to everyone. Through practical demonstrations, you'll learn how to compose music for film and create tracks in popular genres including Grime, Pop, and House. This workshop is perfect for teachers wanting to inspire more learners to take music at GCSE.
Understanding the New Ofsted Approach to Music Inspections	Susan Hickerton & Claire Potts, SMBC	This workshop will enable participants to understand the key changes in Ofsted's 2025 framework and grading system. Know what inspectors look for in music curriculum intent, implementation, and impact. Be able to prepare evidence and strategies for music curriculum evaluation. Identify ways to break barriers for inclusion and progression in music education.
Sing It Out!	Sarah Stretton, Kimberley Dipple, Kira Hewitt (Hub Lead Schools)	Approaches to develop and enhance singing in schools. A practical workshop featuring children from Music Hub Schools.

Workshop	Deliverer	Details
Oodles of Noodles, Buckets and Beats	Madaleine Turner, Scott Wilson, Wendy Russell (Music Hub Lead Schools)	Breakdown walls and build up rhythm! This high-energy workshop blends noodle and bucket drumming with the power of reading and writing rhythmic notation—making music accessible, inclusive, and empowering. Come explore how unified beats can break barriers and bring a school community together, one rhythm at a time.
GCSE Composition	Andy Johnson & Kevin Robson (Music Hub Lead Schools)	"The Blank Canvas" – practical approaches and strategies that remove barriers in the effective and creative delivery of GCSE composition work.
Samba For All	Josh Boxall & Sharon Vincent (Music Hub Lead Schools)	Developing Whole Class Ensemble Work in your school at KS3 through Samba Beats. A hands-on practical music-making session with ideas and materials to take back and implement in your classroom right away.
Makaton Makes Music	Suzane Whiston, Sarah Twiddy, Danielle Land (Music Hub Lead Schools)	Imagine a place where everyone's voice can be heard - whether spoken, sung, or signed. Explore the world of a Makaton choir, which combines the joy of singing with the beauty of Makaton signing - a unique communication system using signs and symbols to support speech and song. A Makaton choir is inclusive, expressive, and full of heart.
Table of Tech! New Accessible Instruments	Kate Rounding & Richard Llewellyn (TiME)	Kate and Richard will demonstrate many new, fully accessible digital instruments available for students with SEND. They will also discuss different examination options now available. Then, try the instruments yourself, including the Mood Pan, Mugo, Weaver, the amazing new Airwave, Travel Sax, Finger Drums, CMPSR, Cosmo Dots, and more!
Technology for the Music Classroom	Ben Sellers	This session explores how we can use online technology and iPads to support creative and inclusive classroom music-making. It will cover freely available online resources as well as a selection of iPad apps.

Workshop	Deliverer	Details
Songwriting with GarageBand for iPad	Ben Sellers	This practical session introduces an accessible approach to songwriting using the GarageBand app on iPad. Suitable for complete beginners, it covers beat making, chord progressions, recording vocals, and adding effects. iPads will be provided.
Inspiring Music in the Early Years: Building Your Practical Toolkit	Helena Lock & Mel Cotton (Warwickshire Music)	Join the EYFS team for a practical session designed to spark new ideas and deepen your understanding of how music supports learning and development. Explore building blocks like choosing repertoire, accompanying sessions on ukulele, and movement/child-led exploration.



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Biographies

Darren Abrahams



Darren is a regenerative Change Maker, singer, trauma therapist (Somatic Experiencing Practitioner) and Certified High-Performance Coach working with individuals, groups and communities. He is co-founder of both the One World Orchestra, a UK-based intercultural ensemble using music as the catalyst for community cohesion and of The Human Hive, a social enterprise which trains, supports and empowers regenerative Change Makers of all ages.

As an associate artist and Board member of Opera Circus, Darren leads pastoral care for international youth-led projects fostering global citizenship through the arts.

As a trauma attuned trainer he works across multiple sectors, including the arts, education, humanitarian aid and the justice system, working with organisations such as Musicians Without Borders, Music Masters and BID UK. Darren co-hosts the Conscious Creative Leadership podcast and publishes the Spiralling Home newsletter. He has been working to support artists to develop Trauma Attuned work in Ukraine since 2022.

[@abrahamsdarren](https://darrenabrahams.com) <https://spirallinghome.substack.com>

Martin Fautley



Martin is Emeritus Professor of Music Education at Birmingham City University, UK. After many years as a classroom music teacher, he undertook full-time doctoral research in the education and music faculties at Cambridge University, investigating teaching, learning, and assessment of classroom music-making.

His main areas of research are assessment in music education, classroom composing and creativity, policy in the English education system, and understandings of musical learning and progression. He is the author of ten books, and over one hundred journal articles, book chapters, and academic research papers. He is co-editor of the British Journal of Music Education.

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Max Wheeler



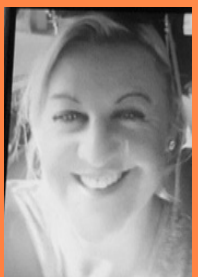
Max is a recording artist as one half of the duo Anushka with over 10 million plays worldwide. The group has received Radio 1 plaudits from Annie Mac, Skream, Mary Anne Hobbs and toured the world from Texas to Siberia via Vietnam! He wrote and performed his first orchestral work, *Grown: A Grime Opera*, in 2018 – the same year VIP collected a Music Teacher Award for Best Digital Resource. Max has worked as a music educator for over 20 years, working extensively with young people with special educational needs and those unable to engage in mainstream education. Most recently, he has led three successful projects in collaboration with Music Services in West Yorkshire (the Integrate project), Devon (the Daisi project), and Waltham Forest, Hackney and Newham Music Services

Simon Evans



For over 30 years, Simon has taught music across the North West of England, working with young people of all ages and abilities. His career encompasses extensive work in secondary education, where he has delivered GCSE, BTEC, and A-level music. In recent years, Simon has expanded his remit through his local music service, bringing curriculum music to primary and special schools. He has provided both whole-class and individual brass tuition, while serving as musical director for youth and community bands.

Susan Hickerton



Susan is a highly experienced education leader with extensive expertise in school improvement, leadership, and management. As Senior Education Adviser and Moderation Manager for Solihull, she plays a pivotal role in supporting schools to raise standards, strengthen leadership capacity, and ensure effective moderation practices across the local authority. In addition to her advisory responsibilities, Susan is a practising Ofsted inspector with over 20 years of inspection experience. Her deep understanding of inspection frameworks, combined with her practical knowledge of school leadership, enables her to provide robust guidance and challenge to educational institutions.

Claire Potts Claire is a Senior Education Improvement Adviser at Solihull Local Authority.

Ben Sellers



Ben is a teacher, trainer and researcher who specialises in inclusive practice and emerging technologies. Author of the 'Teaching Music with GarageBand for iPad' textbook, Ben is an Associate Musician at Drake Music, leads the MEHEM UpRising project, and has previously worked with organisations including the Tokyo and BBC Symphony Orchestras, German-Turkish Youth Bridge, and the Royal College of Music. He is currently undertaking UKRI-funded doctoral research at the UCL Institute of Education.

Kate Rounding



Kate is Executive Director of TiME (Technology in Music Education UK), a national organisation championing music technology in education. She leads projects connecting industry and education, supports accessible and inclusive music-making, and contributes regularly to *Music Teacher Magazine*. Kate is a member of the Leicester Music Board and co-organiser of the Leicester Music Conference. With a background in further, higher, mainstream and SEND education, Kate works closely with music services, schools and corporate partners to promote innovation, inclusion and progression routes for young people in music and the creative industries.

Richard Llewellyn



Richard is the CEO of TiME (Technology in Music Education UK), an organisation created to help increase the awareness of music technology in education. With a career spanning over 35 years, Richard has held key leadership and education roles at world-renowned music companies, including Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, Make Music, PreSonus, Steinberg, Yamaha, and most recently ROLI. He also writes a regular Music Tech article in the *Ensemble* magazine for the Music Teachers Association, and for the *Music Teacher* magazine. Beyond his professional work, Richard is an accomplished musician, serving as a trumpet player in The Band of the Royal Yeomanry, Army Reserve Band.

Kimberley Dipple



Kimberley has proudly served Fordbridge Community Primary School for the past 22 years. She began her career as a Teaching Assistant, gaining invaluable experience supporting both children and teachers across the school. As her passion for education grew, she qualified as a teacher seven years ago, a role she continues to love and remains deeply committed to. As Music Lead, she has worked tirelessly to develop and embed a progressive, high-quality music curriculum that ensures every child can experience the joy and creativity music brings. She has collaborated closely with local music hubs to broaden the opportunities available to pupils. Her

work extends far beyond the classroom. Kimberley has organised a wide range of inter-school music events, including hospital visits, competitions, Christmas celebrations, and the unforgettable experience of taking children to Young Voices. These events have strengthened community links and provided pupils with memorable opportunities to shine. After more than two decades at Fordbridge, Kimberley is excited by the prospect of shaping music education across a wider network. Her leadership experience, passion for music, and ability to inspire others mean she is ready to take on a Lead School role within the multi-academy trust. She is committed to driving excellence in music education and ensuring that children across multiple schools have access to rich, meaningful musical experiences

Kira Hewitt



Kira is Head of Music at George Eliot Academy, a lead music school for the Heart of England Music Hub. With over 18 years of teaching experience, she has led the department since 2019, delivering KS3 and KS4 music fostering high-quality, inclusive music education. Kira is well-versed in Eduqas and Edexcel GCSE specifications and the Pearson BTEC Tech Award in Music Practice. She is passionate about empowering young people through creativity and building vibrant musical communities.

Madaleine Turner



Madaleine is a passionate educator and musician who currently serves as a Primary Headteacher in a Music Hub Lead School. With over 20 years of teaching experience, she has inspired countless pupils through her love of music. As an experienced Subject Leader for Music, Madaleine has championed creativity in the classroom and beyond. Her personal passion shines through in her work, and she believes music should be accessible to everyone. Madaleine is dedicated to breaking down barriers and creating exciting opportunities so that every child can experience the joy and confidence that music brings. Her vision is for every school to be a place where music is a vibrant part of daily life—sparking creativity, building confidence, and connecting communities together.

Scott Wilson



“There’s no such thing as rock stars; there’s just people who play music.” – Frank Turner

This philosophy is key to Scott’s ethos in teaching music. Scott Wilson teaches at Clifford Bridge Academy, one of the Lead Music Schools for the Heart of England Music Hub. He has taught in EYFS for the last 10 years and is also the Music Lead at his school. Scott believes deeply that music can be the most inclusive subject in the curriculum – everyone can be a musician. He has helped to develop the music curriculum at the Inspire Education Trust to be broad, inclusive and fun! Scott has led the school’s rock band, Take It To The Bridge, for over 10 years, as well as organising gigs for other school bands. He has further demonstrated his love for music by organising guitar, keyboard and whole

school music concerts every year for the last decade. He also leads the school choir and has been responsible for fostering links with many primary schools to organise performances for the schools and wider communities. He is a great believer in music being a practical as well as theoretical subject and every year organises opportunities for children from across Coventry to perform in venues across the city.

Wendy Russell



Wendy is a Music Specialist Teacher at Ravensdale primary school in Coventry which has been awarded Music Hub Lead School status. With over twenty-two years of teaching experience, Wendy has a strong track record of engaging children through high-quality vocal and multi-instrumental music provision. After working as a class teacher for thirteen years, Wendy now teaches music across the whole school, from Reception to Year 6. She has a particular passion for choral music and for leading children’s choirs, fostering a love of singing and musical excellence in young performers. Wendy is an active musician herself, enjoying singing with a number of choirs and playing the piano. Under her direction, the KS1 and KS2 choirs give regular recitals

and performances at a range of prestigious venues, including Holy Trinity Church, Stoke St Michael’s Church, Coventry Cathedral and the University of Warwick. Recent highlights include performing alongside the Coventry Philharmonic Choir and taking part in When a Child Is a Witness, a work commissioned and produced by Ex Cathedra as part of Coventry’s City of Culture programme.

Andy Johnson



Andy trained at the University of Nottingham, majoring in vocal performance. He also plays piano and regularly accompanies a variety of vocal groups and soloists. Andy directs and MDs local theatre companies outside of school and has recently formed a duo called Encore Entertainment with a friend, providing musical entertainment spanning from 1940s vintage performances to musical theatre. Andy trained to be a teacher at the University of Worcester way back in 2003 and is currently Head of Enrichment at Langley School, Solihull.

Kevin Robson



Kevin is currently Subject Leader for Music at Tudor Grange Academy Solihull and has previously worked as Director of Music at both Edgbaston High School and Elmhurst Ballet School for fourteen years. Prior to this he worked as a teacher of music at Handsworth Grammar School (Boys) and Old Swinford Hospital. He has enjoyed working with pupils from nursery age to music graduates and trainee teachers. Kevin was invited to join the Leads Schools Programme at its inception and is excited to be a part of this project covering music provision and training in Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull. Alongside a twenty-year career in education, Kevin has continued his career as a concert performer working alongside his brother, John, as a piano duo, performing throughout the UK, Europe and the Far East.

Sharon Vincent



Sharon has been teaching since 2002 and leads the Performing Arts department at Stoke Park School, a Lead Music School for the Heart of England Music Hub. She is committed to removing barriers and putting students first, developing enrichment opportunities including opera visits, orchestral experiences, and ambitious school productions. Sharon is currently completing her NPQSL to further strengthen her leadership in education.

Josh Boxall



Josh is the Head of Music at Blue Coat Church of England School in Coventry, where he brings more than 14 years of classroom experience to a vibrant and forward-thinking music department. A committed and inspiring educator, Josh has guided countless pupils through their musical journeys, many of whom have gone on to build exciting and diverse careers across the music industry. Before entering the teaching profession, Josh built a successful career as a session musician, performing across a range of live and studio settings. His musical background is rich and varied, spanning pop, jazz, and Latin American traditions—expertise that continues to shape his creative approach to teaching and learning. Josh is passionate about nurturing young musicians, developing their confidence, and encouraging them to explore the breadth of musical possibilities both within and beyond school. His leadership combines professional warmth, industry insight, and a deep commitment to helping students thrive.

Suzanne Whiston & Danielle Land



Suzanne and Danielle work at Oak Wood Secondary School, which is a school for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities located in Nuneaton. Oak Wood Secondary School is a Music Hub Lead School. The pupils who attend Oak Wood Secondary School are aged between 11 and 19. Suzanne is the Headteacher and Danielle is the Intervention and Behaviour Lead. Suzanne and Danielle recognise the benefits that the establishment of a Makaton Choir has had on building the students' confidence and communication whilst promoting inclusion.

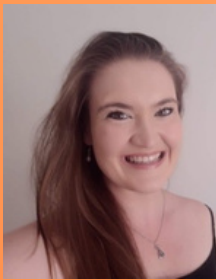
Since the formation of the Makaton Choir, the choir has been in high demand in the local area and frequently performs at internal and external events. We are looking forward to showcasing the achievements of our Makaton Choir today.

Sarah Twiddy



Sarah is an experienced teacher with 23 years of service at Forest Oak School, specialising in supporting pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties within SEND education. Throughout her career, she has worked across all primary age phases, which has enabled her to develop a strong, inclusive teaching practice tailored to the diverse needs of students. Her commitment to providing accessible and engaging education has been central to both her work in and beyond the classroom. Alongside her teaching role, Sarah serves as the Music Coordinator, with responsibility for music development across both primary and secondary phases of curriculum. In this role, she liaises with multiple tutors and leads from Solihull Music to arrange peripatetic music lessons for students. At the primary phase, upper Key Stage 2 students learn ukulele as a whole class, while in Key Stages 3, 4, and 5, the offer expands to individual or small group lessons in guitar, keyboard, drums, and music media. Sarah also runs a choir for primary children during lunchtime, while a music therapist leads a choir for Key Stage 4 and 5 students. Sarah is a practising musician who enjoys playing the flute and is currently expanding her skills on the ukulele, which she has been learning for the past two years. She plays in a ukulele ensemble outside of school and has been a member of a choir for nine years, singing alto. Passionate about providing pupils with high-quality musical experiences, Sarah has had the privilege of performing alongside students at prestigious venues, including BP Pulse Live as part of the Young Voices concerts, The Cavern Club, and the Music For Youth Proms at The Royal Albert Hall. These experiences reflect her belief in the power of music to build confidence, foster inclusion, and create memorable learning opportunities for all students.

Helena Lock



Helena is the Access and Inclusion Strategy Manager for Warwickshire Music. With more than 10 years' experience working with music services to break down barriers to music education, Helena is dedicated to empowering teachers and leaders to provide and deliver accessible, inclusive, and high-quality musical opportunities for all children and young people.

Mel Cotton



Mel is Warwickshire Music's Vocal, Partnerships and Ensembles Lead and is also a qualified early years practitioner. Having previously led an early years setting rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, she continually seeks to create innovative music-based resources that support practitioners in integrating music throughout all areas of learning.

Our Exhibitors

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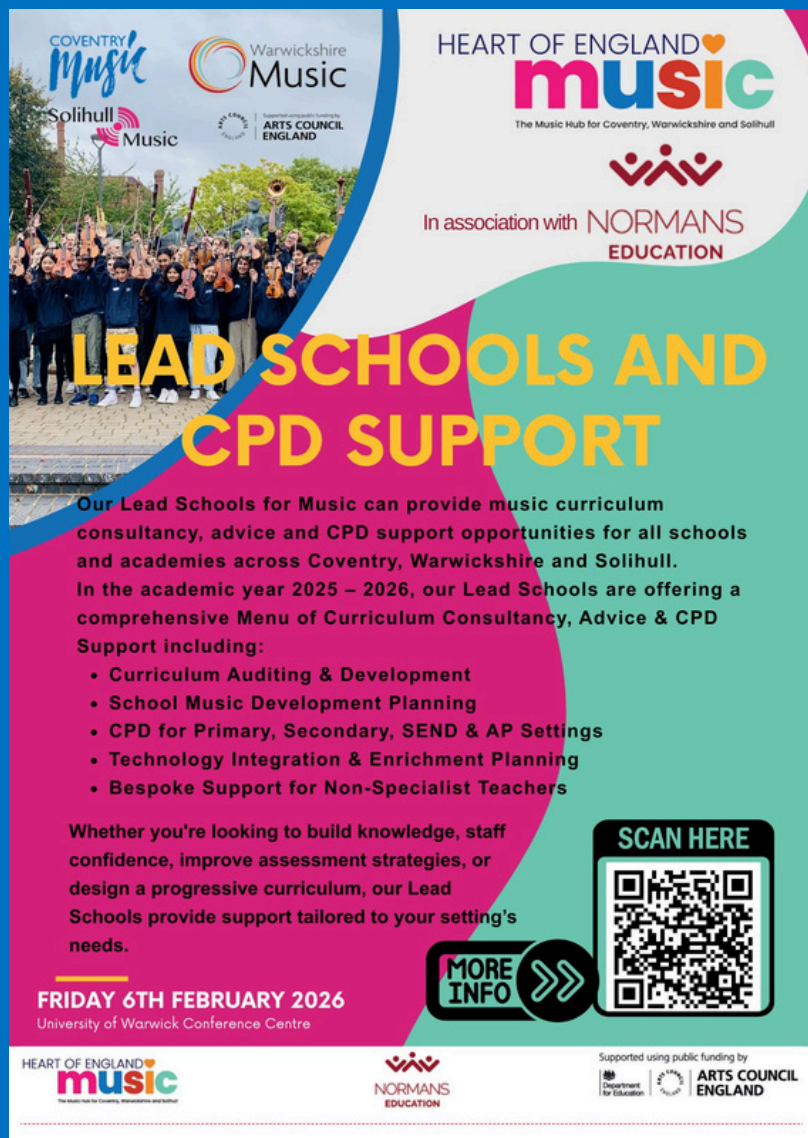
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LEAD SCHOOLS AND CPD SUPPORT

Our Lead Schools for Music can provide music curriculum consultancy, advice and CPD support opportunities for all schools and academies across Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull. In the academic year 2025 – 2026, our Lead Schools are offering a comprehensive Menu of Curriculum Consultancy, Advice & CPD Support including:

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- School Music Development Planning
- CPD for Primary, Secondary, SEND & AP Settings
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