

How to support your Visiting Music Teachers (VMTs)



A guide for schools



Musicians'
Union







“I am delighted to introduce this guide, designed to help schools understand how best to support their visiting music teachers (VMTs).

“Some VMTs are employed while others are self-employed, but all do a job that is different from most other teachers – for example, teaching at more than one school, teaching one to one or in small groups, and working outside normal timetables.

“We have compiled this guide to help schools support their VMTs in the specialist work that they do. We hope that VMTs will find the guide useful when explaining what they need from schools.”

Naomi

Naomi Pohl
MU General Secretary



Who are VMTs?

VMTs, also known as peripatetic music teachers or “peris”, are a vital part of the school community.

They take on a wide range of roles, including:

- One-to-one instrumental/vocal lessons
- Whole-class instrumental/vocal/ensemble teaching
- School orchestras, bands and other ensembles
- Curriculum/classroom music teaching
- After-school music clubs and groups

VMTs can be employed or self-employed. They can be engaged directly by the school, by pupils’ parents, or by a third party like a music service or hub. We’ll come on to employment matters later in this guide.





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What do VMTs need from schools?

Note to VMTs

If you work for a third-party organisation like a music service, the school may supply the information, on the following page, to them.



Did you know that the MU has an Access Rider that self-employed disabled VMTs can supply to schools to specify their access needs?

To find out more scan the QR code or visit:
→ theMU.org/AccessRider

First things first

VMTs need a lot of information to do their job. It can sometimes be hard for VMTs to get the information they need.

So schools can help by providing:

- Opening times and building access details
- Information about parking (and, if possible, priority parking for teachers with access needs or a lot of gear to carry)
- Information about school meals and staffroom facilities, including staff toilets
- Emergency evacuation and fire drill details
- School map
- Timetable and key term dates like dates of exams, reading/revision weeks, sports days
- Information about any forthcoming inspections or observations
- Key staff information and contacts, including the designated safeguarding lead
- Policies and procedures that relate to the VMT's role – e.g. policies regarding safeguarding and digital devices
- Any emergency phone numbers
- Pupils' learning needs, health needs or safeguarding needs if relevant
- Expectations for lessons, e.g. any upcoming concerts or exams to prepare for

A suitable teaching space



Schools need to provide a comfortable and appropriately equipped teaching space so that both VMTs and pupils can enjoy their lessons.

What makes a suitable teaching space?

A good teaching space should be **well equipped** with instruments as needed (e.g. piano or drum kit), good chairs and music stands. **VMTs can guide schools on what would make their teaching space ideal**, which will help pupils get the most out of their lessons.

The teaching space should be **well lit, heated in winter and with at least one**

window. VMTs have told us that they have sometimes taught in cupboards, corridors and even outside. Needless to say, these are not good teaching spaces!

If possible, schools should also **provide a secure space where VMTs can store instruments or teaching materials** between visits.



Did you know that the MU has a guide to Performance Health for Instrumental and Vocal Teachers? This can help you set up your teaching environment to promote good posture and technique, as well as providing guidance on a wide range of other topics from nutrition to performance anxiety.

To find out more scan the QR code or visit:
→ [theMU.org/Teachers-Performance-Health](https://www.themu.org/Teachers-Performance-Health)

A welcome into the school community

Schools can help prevent VMTs feeling isolated by welcoming them into the staffroom. Access to coffee, tea and snacks is always appreciated! VMTs often tell us that a warm welcome from schools can make all the difference.

Additionally, schools can support VMTs by ensuring that classroom teachers

do not prevent pupils leaving class for music lessons, and by encouraging pupils to attend lessons promptly.

Schools can help VMTs by approaching timetabling constructively, considering the time needed for lessons and any set-up or pack-up time, plus time for breaks as guided by the VMT.



Help with recruiting pupils

VMTs may need support from the school to recruit pupils. The school should have a plan for how it tells parents and pupils about opportunities to learn an instrument or sing.

Helpful options include:

- **A letter to parents explaining what lessons are available**
- **Opportunities to demonstrate instruments to pupils**

If VMTs are engaged by a third party, e.g. a music hub, then the responsibility to advertise lessons may fall to that organisation.

Help with disciplinary issues

VMTs may occasionally need support with disciplinary issues. Schools should support VMTs with this as they would any other teacher, recognising that one-to-one or small group teaching can come with disciplinary challenges that might differ from those associated with classroom teaching.

“As a Visiting Music Teacher, I am best supported when schools recognise my rights as a worker by respecting the pay and conditions that have been recommended by the Musicians’ Union. Fair pay and suitable working conditions, alongside being kept informed on school policies like safeguarding, mean that I am free to concentrate on the most important thing; supporting young people on their musical journeys.”

**Lynn Henderson,
Instrumental teacher
and Education Rep**





Photo by Celf Calon and Sinfonia Cymru

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What do schools need to know about employment status?

Supporting self-employed VMTs

Self-employed VMTs usually have a contractual relationship with their pupils' parents, and in some cases directly with the school. Sometimes both are in place – e.g. when parents pay for lessons and the school pays for ensemble coaching.

Self-employed VMTs' points of contact are different depending on who they are engaged by:

- Those engaged by pupils' parents should have parents' contact details and invoice them directly.
- Those engaged by a school or third party should not be in direct contact with pupils' parents unless a special arrangement is in place. Schools should therefore check before asking VMTs to contact parents.

Remember!

Direct phone, text or email contact between VMTs and pupils is not advised for safeguarding reasons.

If genuinely self-employed, VMTs have the right to set or negotiate their rates, use deputies to cover absences, change their teaching days and times, offer additional hours to make up any missed lessons, and devise their own teaching curriculum. Schools should respect that self-employed VMTs have these rights.

Some self-employed VMTs are engaged by third parties, e.g. music services. In this case, the school and the third party should agree whose responsibility it is to handle discussions about rates of pay, changes to teaching days and times, and any other practicalities. The mechanism for having these conversations should be clearly communicated to the VMT.

Remember!

MU members can contact us for advice if schools or other engagers prevent them from exercising their self-employed rights.

Although self-employed VMTs do not have access to the same rights and benefits as employees, they are legally protected from workplace discrimination. They are also covered by health and safety legislation.

Schools should not “performance manage” self-employed VMTs. If engaged by pupils’ parents, VMTs are primarily answerable to them, although schools should still expect VMTs to behave appropriately and professionally, and to follow all relevant policies and procedures.

Self-employed VMTs’ work should be limited to instrumental and vocal teaching and coaching. If schools want VMTs to undertake classroom teaching, this should be on an employed basis, whether employed directly by the school or by a third party.



Supporting VMTs who are employed by a third party

VMTs employed by a music service or other third party should have a contractual relationship with that organisation and not with the school or pupils' parents.

The school should therefore communicate primarily with the third-party organisation, which should then pass any necessary information on to VMTs.

The engager should take responsibility for any issues or problems with the VMT's work.



Did you know that the MU has a guide to Employment Status for Instrumental and Vocal Teachers? This discusses the issues described above in much greater detail. Find out more here

To find out more scan the QR code or visit:
→ theMU.org/Employment-Status-Guide



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Further helpful info



Safeguarding

Safeguarding is an area that every music teacher needs to know about.

→ theMU.org/Safeguarding



Disclosure Checks

Find out about the requirements for disclosure checks across the UK.

→ theMU.org/DisclosureChecks



Music Teaching Rates of Pay

The MU's recommended teaching rates are annual figures released ahead of each academic year.

→ theMU.org/TeacherPayRates



Teaching Contract Guides and Templates

Whatever work you do as a music teacher, it should be covered by a written contract.

→ theMU.org/TeachingContracts



Musicians' Wellbeing Guidance Pack

Explore expert advice to support your mental and physical wellbeing as a musician.

→ theMU.org/Wellbeing-Guidance-Pack



Specialist Musicians' Health Services

Access expert medical assessments and mental health support through MU partners.

→ theMU.org/HealthServices

Notes

Use this space for more contacts, resources and other notes. Type them in below or, if your device or assistive tech doesn't support typing in this document, feel free to record this in another way. This could be in a notebook, on your phone, or in a voice note.

Did you know?

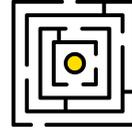
The MU provides lots of resources to help schools as well as teachers.



Contract templates



Safeguarding training



Continuing professional development



£10m public liability insurance



Wellbeing support



Recommended minimum rates



Inclusive teaching resources



Performance health advice



Community of music teachers