

STARTING AN INSTRUMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD



LEARNING TO PLAY AN INSTRUMENT IS A COMPLEX PROCESS that takes time and patience. It's not like riding a bike – there's no equivalent of that one magic moment when you let go of the saddle and your child pedals away. Playing an instrument is a much more gradual process that involves a number of different elements.

- Learning the techniques required to play fluently and with a good sound. This is a **physical process** - muscles must learn to move in ways that feel strange at first.
- Learning to **listen** well
- Learning to **read** music
- **Understanding** what the music is saying
- Putting all these things together

It's because so much is involved that **progress will inevitably vary from child to child**. Comparing your child to another, because they started learning at the same time, is never helpful.

PRACTISING IS THE KEY TO PROGRESS

Your child will need to practise in between lessons and you can really help to make this a positive and productive activity. Read through the *Clever Practice* tips with your child and work together to establish a good routine.

- **Practising every day** is the way to make the best progress. In the very early stages of learning, aim for ten minutes a day. A single, longer practice once a week doesn't allow learning to be consolidated.
- **Learning happens in stages**. Sometimes a child will work on something for a long time with no apparent improvement and then discover a sudden leap in ability. Other times, learning happens very quickly. The important thing to stress is that consistent practice will yield results.
- Set a **special practice place** at home. This should be a quiet place where your child feels comfortable and can concentrate without being distracted but it shouldn't be somewhere where she may feel isolated from the rest of the family.
- Set up a **regular practice time** each day. Some children are at their best in the morning, before school. Some parents set a time after the evening bath when the child is relaxed but not tired.
- **Be a positive part of your child's practice time**. Check that your child knows **what to practise** (this will be in the yellow notebook) and help him to decide **what to focus on** in each practice session. The work set by the teacher is for the whole week and it's not necessary to try and cover everything in every practice time.
- **Never make practice time a negative experience**, e.g. 'You can't go out to play unless you do your practice.' If your child is refusing to practise, **try to discover what the problem is** and if you can help to solve it. It may be that he's stuck on a particular piece and doesn't know what to do or he may be unhappy with the practice time or place. If there's no obvious reason, **raise your concerns with the teacher**, via the practice notebook.
- Be sensitive to your child's needs. Sitting with her for the whole practice session is not always helpful and sometimes she will want to **work independently**.
- It takes time and effort to produce musical sounds, so **don't make judgments** about the musical quality of your child's playing. Learning an instrument involves lots of squeaks, scrapes and wrong notes!
- **Praise your child** for each step forward and encourage other family members to applaud the child's efforts but don't expect your child to perform a 'party piece' after every practice session or every time a visitor arrives.

**'PRACTICE ISN'T THE THING YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE GOOD.
IT'S THE THING YOU DO THAT MAKES YOU GOOD.'**