I am writing as a passionate advocate for the transformative power of music education, who wants to see more children learning to play musical instruments. It’s because I want to support you in the great work you do that I was so disappointed by the content of the recently released video *Keeping Children Safe in Music*. By telling your music teachers that they should avoid any physical contact with children, it sends out completely the wrong message. It plays to a culture of fear among both adults and children, reinforcing the message that any adult who touches a child is somehow guilty of inappropriate contact. We must move away from this presumption and the Department for Education is taking steps to restore common sense to this whole area.

There are many occasions when it will be totally appropriate, indeed positively right, for teachers or tutors to be in physical contact with a pupil. It is entirely proper and necessary for adults to touch children when they demonstrate how to play a musical instrument, when they show how to play certain sports, when they are leading a child away from trouble, when they are comforting distressed or disconsolate children and when they are intervening to prevent disorder and harm.

It is particularly important that those teaching music feel confident that they can demonstrate how to master and improve technique by interacting physically with children. Whether it’s adjusting the position of a violin or demonstrating how to handle drumsticks, showing how a trombone slide should work or introducing new
subtleties in oboe playing, teachers should be trusted to touch children without feeling they are somehow transgressing the rules of appropriate conduct. If we stigmatise and seek to restrict all physical contact between responsible adults and children, we will only undermine healthy relations between the generations. If we play to the assumption that any physical contact is somehow suspect then we will make children more suspicious of adults and adults more nervous and confused about their role in our society. We will drive good people away from teaching for fear of crossing some arbitrary line and our children will lose out as fewer and fewer adults feel comfortable working with young people.

Teachers and other staff who avoid all forms of physical contact with pupils, perhaps as a consequence of instruction or encouragement from their head teacher, are unable to carry out their duties fully to support and protect their pupils. I am aware that many schools have put in place “no contact” policies on the assumption this somehow protects their staff. It does not. If any school does try to enforce a ‘no contact’ policy there is actually a real risk that such a policy might place a member of staff in breach of their duty of care towards a pupil, or prevent them taking the action needed to prevent a pupil causing injury to others.

The Coalition Government is determined to ensure that the law does not prevent necessary and appropriate physical contact between staff and pupils in schools. Which is why we are publishing shorter, sharper, clearer and more common sense guidance on this subject.

Naturally, I am aware that some teachers feel concerned that physical contact may give rise to false allegations of abuse. In our current system, false, unfounded, or malicious allegations can have a devastating effect on a teacher’s health, family and career.

It’s because I am so concerned about the damage these false allegations can have that we are changing the rules to give teachers more protection. We are changing the rules so that any allegation of abuse made against a teacher or tutor is dealt with quickly in a way that provides effective protection, not just for the child where necessary, but also for the person who is the subject of the allegation.

I also want to ensure that the authorities understand the importance of their role in the proper handling of allegations made against teachers by pupils. With this in mind, I will shortly publish revised advice to schools setting out the procedures I expect to be followed to ensure staff are properly protected.

In addition, in line with our Coalition Government commitment, I intend to introduce reporting restrictions preventing the identity of a teacher who is employed or engaged at any school and who is accused of committing a criminal offence against a pupil from being made public until the point at which a criminal charge is made. I intend to restore a more balanced approach in this area and peripatetic tutors will also reap the benefits of this change.
I am sure we are all in agreement about the importance of pupils getting a solid musical education and opportunities to progress as far as possible in their musical interests. I'm sure you would also agree that it is important that pupils are safe. Neither of these can happen if teachers are deterred from using appropriate techniques to teach and protect pupils.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove