Music lessons to boost your child's academic achievements 'are a waste of money', scientists say

- Psychologist Glenn Schellenberg tested 167 children who play instruments
- He claims brighter children are more likely to take music lessons
- His findings challenge the idea that music lessons aid academic performance

By Nick Mcdermott

PUBLISHED: 18:16 GMT, 18 February 2013 | UPDATED: 02:03 GMT, 19 February 2013
It is just one of the ways in which ambitious parents try to give their children an edge at school.

But making a child learn a musical instrument to boost their academic achievement is a waste of money, according to scientists.

Although research has shown that youngsters who take music lessons are more likely to be top of their class, a psychologist claims this link is misleading.

Instead, improved academic performance may be because brighter children from privileged backgrounds are more likely to learn an instrument, rather than music classes helping to boost their intelligence.

‘Music may change you a bit, but it's also the case that different children take music lessons,’ said Professor Glenn Schellenberg of the University of Toronto, who added that parents’ education was the most influential factor on musicality.

He told the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual conference in Boston: ‘Children who take music lessons come from families with higher incomes, they come from families with more educated parents, they also do more extra-curricular activities, they have higher IQs, and they do better at school.’

In tests on 167 children who played piano or other instruments, they found their answer to personality tests could predict how likely it was for them to continue their music lessons.

Those who were more outgoing and conscientious were more likely to continue to play.

Although children who took music lessons did better at school, when the researchers adjusted the results to take into account their social background, there was no link to increased intelligence.

Instead, the research suggested upbringing and background played a crucial role.

Asked if so-called helicopter parents were wasting their money sending their children to music lessons in the belief they could boost their school results, Professor Schellenberg agreed.

‘You can explain almost all of the data that are out there by saying that high-functioning kids take music lessons,’ he added.

But Daniel Levitin from the McGill University, Canada, said: ‘There are benefits to having a society where more people are engaged with the arts, so even if music instruction doesn't make you a better mathematician or a better athlete, even if it only gives you the enjoyment of music, I think that is a good end in and of itself.'
Clever: Professor Schellenberg says that brighter pupils are naturally more likely to take music lessons

MOST READ NEWS

- Previous
- 1
- 2
- 3
- Next

Boxes of 'steroids', testosterone, needles and an unlicensed...
Given a snack and then taken out and shot: Horrifying last...

'I didn't put a gun to anybody's head': Mother of 11 defends...

Poisoned by every day life: Landmark study warns gender...

Inside the bathroom where Reeva was shot: First pictures of...

I tried to leap out of the window after my drink was spiked...

Kate puts her baby bump on parade as Prime Minister mauls...

Ramshackle shed bought for £6,500 is turned into stunning...
Clever kids with pushing parents do well, are not rude, are focus which keep them out of trouble compare to soft parents who let their kids loose, rude and get into trouble at school and with the law.

- *Mm*, NSW, Australia, 19/2/2013 23:17

Click to rate Rating 2

Report abuse

In other news scientists at thr University of Navel Gazing prove study that suggests bears defecate in the woods is a waste of money too. It is obvious. Clever kids with pushy parents do well. Clever kids with pushy parents do music lessons. Ergo kids who do music lessons do well. No brainer.

- *desperado*, south west uk, United Kingdom, 19/2/2013 22:12

Click to rate Rating 1
My son had music lessons from the age of 7, firstly on a trumpet, changing to a Tenor Horn at the age of 8. He played for the County band to the age of 18 and at 16 started learning the French Horn. In less than 2 years he gained merit at Grade 8 on the French Horn and is now studying at Trinity Conservatoire, in London, a music performance degree. These lessons are definitely not a waste of money, they have enabled my son to find something that not only did he enjoy doing, but something that he had a natural talent for. These opportunities must not be stopped.

- **Jane1957**, Alton, 19/2/2013 21:44

China and all the best academic schools where music is essential to a child's education PROVES this study wrong.


Nothing can be wasted on a child. Just do not expect she/he turns out to be another Vanessa Mae. The least it can do for the kids, music can train their right brain. Just take it as a form of exercise.

- **missglimmer**, San Francisco, United States, 19/2/2013 15:10

The result of this study is ridiculous because the premise is false. No one pays for piano lessons in the hope their children get better marks in literature essays in school. Music is a gift, and even if they do not persevere, it's something that will stay with them for ever and hopefully bring them pleasure.

- **Penny Pinching**, Cardiff, 19/2/2013 14:42

Ignorant scientists...

- **paevos**, USA, United States, 19/2/2013 13:18

@Rai - although I agree with most of what you say, I can't agree with "It encourages you from a young age that practice makes perfect." - it doesn't. Practice helps you to improve- you will never be "perfect"- you can strive for perfection- but no-one is perfect at a musical instrument. You should also enjoy the practice. If you force a child to practice for long periods of time, they will just drop it when they are older. Playing a musical instrument should be fun- a rewarding experience, but it is hard work and does take time and effort.

- **CoffeeBreak**, Guildford, United Kingdom, 19/2/2013 12:50
Report abuse

@Alfhay, Stockport: I'm supposedly adept at both (I hope this doesn't come across as big-headed!). My firsthand impression is that maths and the related field of spatial processing factor into music harmonically and melodically. Those great composers spoke of keeping mental track of 6-part harmony and such, which sort of correlates with mathematical ratios. Musical intervals are like fractions in a way? Throw in the factor of tempo and the on-the-fly processing/mental sums involved in improvising, and the connexion is quite clear.

- **Guerrilla**, in the urban jungle, 19/2/2013 12:40

Click to rate - Rating 8

Report abuse

It's the enjoyment of making music that counts. If a child doesn't enjoy it they won't stick with it for long and it simply becomes a chore.

- **Prime Certified**, Dunfermline, South Georgia And The South Sandwich Islands, 19/2/2013 12:36

Click to rate - Rating 9

Report abuse

The views expressed in the contents above are those of our users and do not necessarily reflect the views of MailOnline.

Ads by Google:
**Youth Sports, huh?** ParticipACTION.com/Bring-Back-Play That's Great, But Kids Need To Play Let ParticipACTION Bring Back Play.
**Private Music Teacher? privio.net** Privio helps you save time by billing your students automatically
**Montreal LAMBDA Music LambdaArts.ca** Piano Guitar Voice Violin Musical Theatre, Painting
**Webcam Guitar Lessons** www.jeffrey-thomas.com/ Perfect For Amateurs And Experts Customized for Your Musical Goals!
**Joann's Piano Studio** www.joannspianostudio.com In home affordable lessons Olympia Tumwater Lacey

---

Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd
Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

© Associated Newspapers Ltd