

# Voices FOUNDATION

## Learning & Impact Report 2022/23



- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Our Purpose**
- 3. Why is Voices Foundation needed?**
- 5. How Voices Foundation aims to create change**
- 7. Our methodology to music learning**
- 8. Our Impact**
- 9. Qualities**
- 11. Mechanisms**
- 13. Outcomes**
- 15. Spotlight: The Teacher Advisory Group**
- 17. Spotlight: Children's thoughts on singing in Key Stage 1**
- 19. Partnerships with other music organisations**
- 20. Spotlight: Evolution of the Choral Strand**
- 21. Spotlight: Strategic Support (Inspiring Music)**
- 22. Spotlight: Online Resource (Inside Music Song Bank Early Years)**
- 23. Reflections**
- 24. Looking Ahead**
- 25. Bibliography & References**

# Introduction

## Manvinder Rattan, CEO

Our goal at Voices Foundation is to transform music education so every child has the opportunity to find their voice. As we enter our 30th year, this aim has not changed – but the way we do it has. Since the pandemic, schools have been under increasing time and financial pressures, and we consulted and collaborated closely with each partner to find an approach that works within their current situation.



Musicianship programmes have become generally smaller and much more bespoke, with the flexibility to respond dynamically to an individual school's need. Similarly, on the Choral side, we have seen a big increase in Music Hubs requesting one-off events that they can build upon – like a Big Sing or CPD event. Additionally, our work with Multi-Academy Trusts has become increasingly varied, with greater demand for Detailed Curriculum Development projects. We have also responded to the call for teacher choirs, which are a great new way to impart CPD across a trust.

Even though many of our programmes have been smaller, the data from teachers and students show our delivery is still high quality, achieving the same positive impacts (see pages 9-13). In 2023-24, we will keep exploring new ways to support teachers, with the team already developing more interactive feedback forms, which use videos and audio to share skills and learning.

This year, we were proud to launch our new Early Years Online Song Bank (page 22) to incredibly positive feedback from Early Years teachers. It is still very new, so there is not a great depth of data to share, however we have already been exploring how this wonderful resource can have the best impact and widest reach.

In order to support our current and future practice, we recognise the need for greater depth of feedback and learning from our direct beneficiaries. To achieve this, we created the Teacher Advisory Group (pages 15-16), a panel of 12 educational professionals who either have Voices Foundation programmes in their schools, or have in the past. These meetings have already helped us develop new ways to support schools' priorities and make data capturing more manageable for teachers.

This year, we supported an incredible 44,800 children and 790 teachers, parents and education professionals have engaged directly with our work. Read more about the people we work with on page 8. We are immensely proud of our achievements this year and hope you enjoy learning about the impact of our work.

# Our Purpose

## The Music Advantage

### Why is music so important?

Music is central to the human experience and present in the everyday lives of people of all ages and cultures.<sup>i</sup> A wide variety of research shows that engagement with music can positively affect children's learning, development, and personal skills.

### Studies on the advantages of music

Recent research has shown that music can boost language and literacy skills, creativity, attainment and academic progress, enhance fine motor skills, contribute to better health and wellbeing, and motivate disaffected pupils.<sup>ii</sup>

Many of the brain functions used when taking part in music activity are also utilised by children to achieve key developmental milestones. Speech and music, for example, have several shared processing systems. Musical experiences can therefore impact language perception, which in turn affects learning to read.<sup>iii</sup> In fact, engaging with music may enhance several cognitive functions that are key to children's learning, such as planning, working memory, inhibition, and flexibility.<sup>iv</sup>

Some studies suggest that children who participate in music activities perform better in English, Maths, and Science, regardless of their socioeconomic background and previous academic record. In some cases, the difference between children who do and do not participate in music activity can equate to several months' academic progress.<sup>v</sup> Children who participate in long-term musical programmes have also shown higher empathy than similar children who do not.<sup>vi</sup> Plus, research has found that children who take part in tasks involving music are likely to be more spontaneously helpful afterwards, compared with children who take part in similar tasks without music.<sup>vii</sup>

Music is a form of communication that can convey meaning, regardless of whether or not it includes lyrics. Through music activity, participants can share emotions and express themselves non-verbally. Music activity, therefore, creates opportunities for children to be heard, and it may consequently improve children's self-esteem and confidence to express themselves in non-musical ways too,<sup>viii</sup> which our own internal research parallels.<sup>ix</sup>

Music doesn't only benefit the communication of children, it also provides educators, parents, and guardians with an additional form of communication. Adults can quickly and powerfully communicate instructions or set a mood by giving a musical signal or playing a particular song. As a result, they can use music to help children to regulate their behaviour, calm their emotions, prepare to start or finish a specific activity, or coordinate a collective effort to achieve a task more efficiently. This can result in a more productive use of time, improved focus, and increased learning.<sup>x</sup>

We wish to thank Paul Hamlyn Foundation, whose generous support enables us to retain our commitment to in-depth evaluation and learning activities. We are also extremely grateful to our supporters, including those who wish to remain anonymous, for championing our learning journey.



# Why is Voices Foundation needed?

Despite the unique and important role that music activity plays in children's education and development, music's place in the school curriculum has deteriorated. Music makes up just a few hours of Initial Teacher Training, and relevant Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) for teachers is hard to come by.

Although there is a National Curriculum in place for music, academies and free schools are not statutorily required to follow it. As a result, in 2022-23, 58% of pupils receiving state-funded education in England attend schools where there is no requirement to provide music education.<sup>xi</sup>

Even in statutory contexts, the National Curriculum is extremely limited in scope and both the refreshed 2023 National Plan for Music Education (NPME) and 2021's Model Music Curriculum (MMC) provide non-statutory guidance only. National Assessment influences on curriculum design and teaching, and accountability measures, such as SATs and especially the government's English Baccalaureate (EBacc), have placed pressure on other areas of the curriculum, leading many primary schools to deprioritise music and some secondary schools to drop the subject entirely.

In a survey carried out by the Independent Society of Musicians, more than 50% of primary schools that have music as part of the curriculum reported not meeting their curriculum obligations to Year 6, citing the pressure of statutory tests as a significant reason.<sup>xii</sup> Children experiencing disadvantage, and particularly those with literacy and numeracy challenges, can be even more acutely affected as they are often withdrawn from the music provision that does exist in order to receive additional practice in 'core' curriculum areas.

Music is also not prioritised in teacher training. A recent review found that a Manchester Metropolitan University student receives just four hours of music education as part of a one-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), and a mere six hours throughout a three-year undergraduate degree leading to Qualified Teacher Status. Students on the University of Sussex's primary PGCE course receive only two hours.<sup>xiii</sup> In its most recent subject report, Ofsted too have drawn attention to trainee teachers being offered shrinking amounts of music training.<sup>xiv</sup> Disappointingly, music was not included in the Department for Education's Initial Teacher Training funding for the 2022/23 academic year, which is likely to further exacerbate the problem.

Poor access to music-related resources, training, and professional development opportunities mean that teachers also do not receive adequate support to deliver music activities once in post. Despite successive Ofsted reports indicating a correlation between a lack of CPDL and poor classroom practice, more than nine in ten teachers report facing barriers that prevent them from accessing CPDL.<sup>xv</sup> This is bad news for pupils, as quality teachers are a critical determinant of student achievement.<sup>xvi</sup>

Whilst the lack of CPDL is a problem across all subjects, for music, it is made more acute by the lack of initial training that teachers receive.

For those attending schools facing additional challenges or with fewer resources, the problem is magnified. The quality and reach of schools-based music education is unacceptably variable and inconsistent, and it is overwhelmingly children experiencing poverty who miss out.<sup>xvii</sup>

## Societal level problem

Despite a wide variety of research demonstrating that participation in music is highly beneficial for children, the value of music activity and learning is poorly recognised in the education system in England, and as a result, music is not a priority in curriculum delivery.

## School level problem

Teachers are not given the initial training or ongoing learning opportunities needed to equip them with the skills and confidence to deliver high-quality music education. Consequently, children do not have equal access to an area of education that is fundamental to their learning and development. This disproportionately affects children from disadvantaged backgrounds attending schools facing additional challenges or with fewer resources.



# How Voices Foundation aims to create change

## Our Vision

Transforming music education so every child can find their voice.

Voices Foundation believes that every child should have access to high-quality music education, and we are committed to transforming music education so that every child can find their voice. To better understand how we plan to achieve this, we created a Theory of Change.

A Theory of Change helps us to describe the process through which the change we want to achieve will be made. In our case, our Theory of Change explains how we plan to address the two problems summarised on the previous page and provide all children with access to high-quality music education.

To achieve long-lasting and sustainable change for children, we focus on working with the people that most influence their lives – senior school leaders, teachers, parents, and policy makers. By equipping these participants with the learning and skills to improve children’s access to high-quality music education and to share that knowledge with others, we dramatically increase our impact for children, today and in the future. For example, training one primary school teacher to deliver high-quality music activities in their classroom, could benefit up to 900 children over the course of that teacher’s career. Once they are confident to share their learning with other educators, this impact is further multiplied.

By the end of their engagement with us, we aim for all our participants and audiences to understand the benefits of music education, and have the desire and skill to improve children’s music education through their work or activities. The cumulative impact of these individual outcomes across all our participants will be systemic change to the quality and accessibility of children’s music education in England.

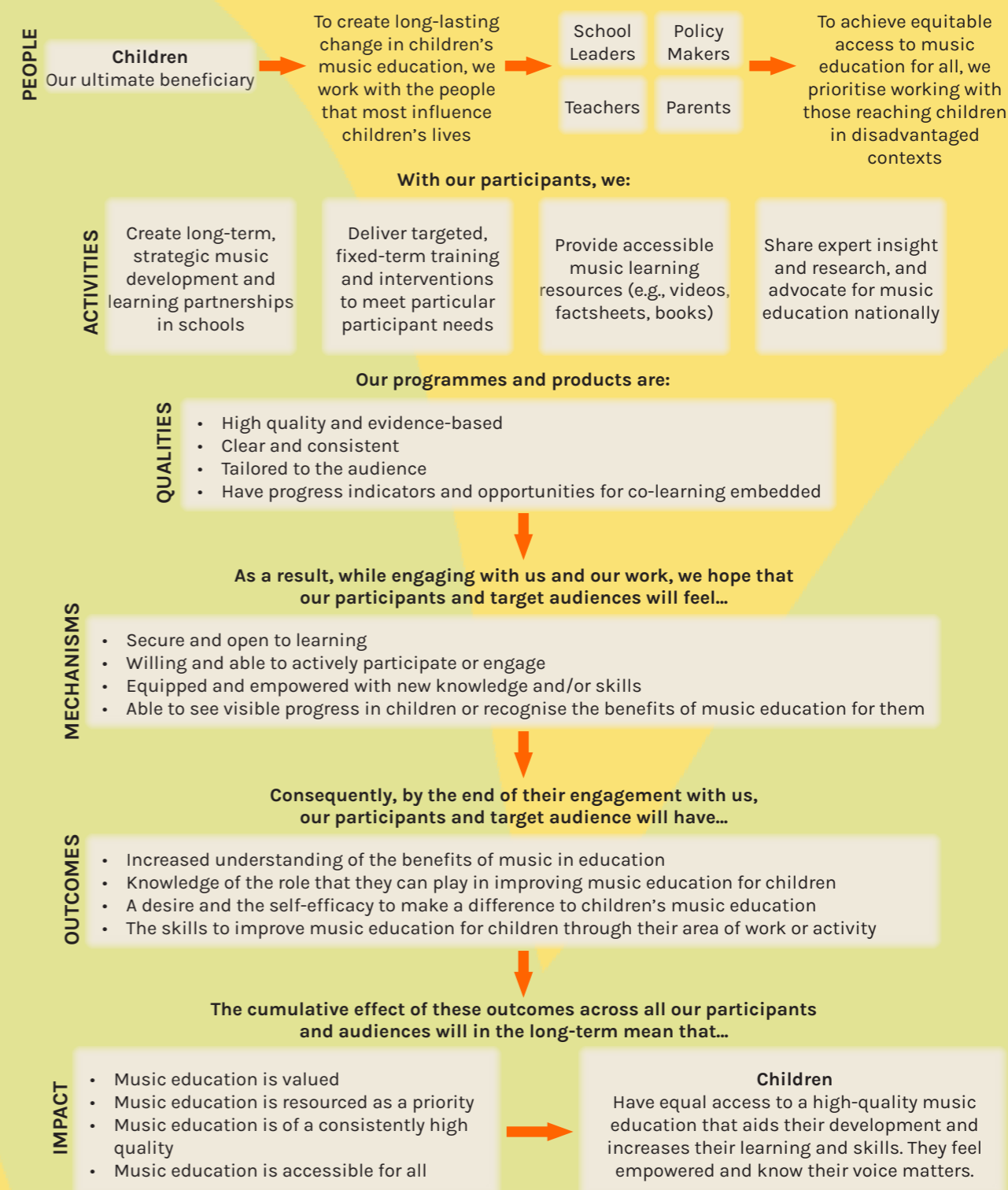
## Excerpt from: ‘Striking the Right Note,’ Ofsted, 2023

“Our research found considerable differences in how well teachers taught music. Many teachers in primary schools reported that they lacked the confidence and musical knowledge to teach aspects of the curriculum well. In some schools, the curriculum ‘on paper’ was designed to help pupils develop, incrementally, the procedural and declarative knowledge they need to become better performers, composers and listeners. However, teachers acknowledged that lack of musicianship limited its impact. It was not uncommon for teachers in primary schools to stick rigidly to curriculum plans without knowing (or hearing) whether pupils had secured the necessary knowledge to move on. Consequently, as pupils got older, they were increasingly asked to complete musical activities that were beyond their technical capabilities. Many headteachers in primary schools were aware of the weaknesses in teachers’ subject knowledge. Despite this, fewer leaders had a clear plan for addressing these weaknesses.

## Recommendations

Continuously develop teachers’ subject knowledge, including their musicianship skills and their understanding of what high-quality music making should sound like for pupils in the age group they teach; this approach should align with the choices set out in the school’s curriculum.”

# Our Theory of Change



# Our methodology to music learning

We work to achieve our goal of a transformed music education, primarily, by equipping teachers and schools to provide a high-quality, sustainable music education for all pupils. Our model of teacher development provides iterative Continued Professional Development and Learning (CPDL), developing non-specialist teachers' knowledge, skills, and confidence in teaching music through side-by-side work with Voices Foundation practitioners.

In addition to delivery in schools, we provide inspiring and accessible music learning resources. We also aim to build conversations around music education that will influence policy makers, with the support of high-quality evidence and insight.

## Our pedagogical approach to music education:

- We use singing as a tool to improve children's access to music education because it is practically universal (almost every child has a voice), accessible (there are no equipment or instrument costs and you can sing anywhere), and a powerful way for children to become proficient musicians.
- Inside Music is our progressive, evidence-based framework for teaching and assessing musical skills and concepts from Early Years to Key Stage 2.
- Inside Music is informed by the Kodály Method – a child-focussed, developmentally-appropriate approach to music education, which creates learning through immersion and interaction with music itself. In the same way that children's language development involves immersion in auditory environments before they learn to read, Kodály sees kinaesthetic experiences with music as an important pre-cursor to learning about music notation or theory. Research has suggested that music education programmes founded on the Kodály method "offer a superior contribution" to holistic child development "that is statistically significant."<sup>xviii</sup>
- Performing music, listening to music, and thinking about music are therefore essential components of our pedagogical approach, giving children the tactile experience of being 'inside music.' An understanding of musical concepts follows naturally from this tactile musical experience with a diverse and broad variety of songs.
- Inside Singing is our framework for supporting non-specialist teachers to bridge the gap between music curriculum and choral ensemble. This online resource includes repertoire for Primary Schools, which has been created to support the Voices Foundation Choral Excellence programme. It contains a collection of ten diverse songs and accompanying activities with steps to support the teaching of each song. The songs have been carefully chosen to be suitable for whole school singing assemblies, classroom singing, year group choirs and aspirational choirs, and they come from different cultures and countries around the world.

Inside Singing was designed to be used alongside support from a Voices Foundation Choral practitioner, as well as the Choral Pathway – which aids the development of teachers' skills, knowledge, and experience as beginner choir leaders. All Voices Foundation practitioners use this methodology, and our accompanying Inside Music resource books are award-winning.

# Our Impact

## People

Over the past year:



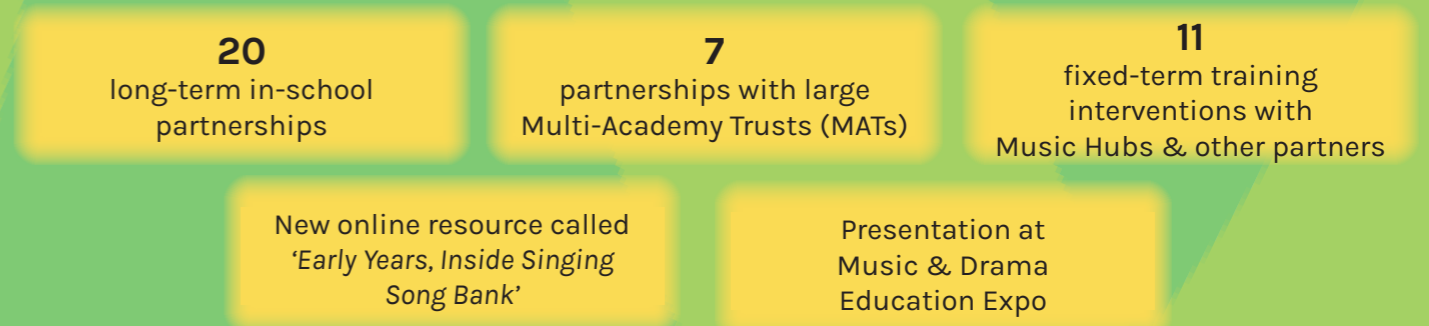
**44,800+**  
children benefitted  
from our work



**790**  
teachers, parents and  
education professionals  
engaged directly with our work

## Activities

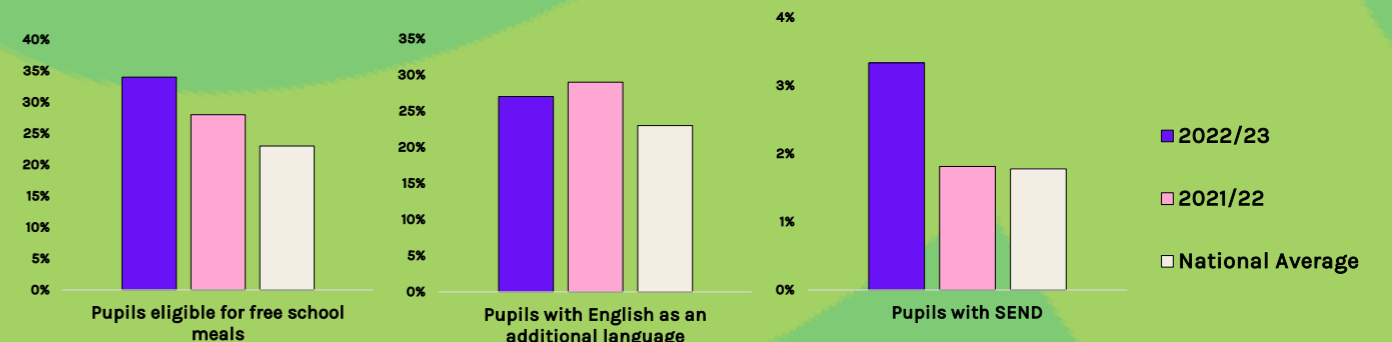
Over the past year, we have delivered:



# Growing our work with the most in need

Given that children in disadvantaged contexts are at particular risk of poor access to music education, we continue to prioritise our resources to supporting teachers and schools working and interacting with these children.

The graphs below show the proportion of pupils taking part in Voices Foundation programmes who are eligible for free school meals, have English as an additional language, or have an SEN education, health and care plan, compared with the national average.



# Qualities

We believe that in order for our products and programmes to be effective, they need to be of the highest calibre, consistent, clear and customised to our participants. They also need to have embedded co-learning opportunities and progress indicators. We solicited comments on these areas from school staff over the course of the 2022-23 academic year.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we have noticed a trend for smaller, easier to manage programmes with visits from practitioners but more tailored to the needs of a particular school. However, Voices Foundation continues to make progress towards accomplishing our objectives, as seen by the results below. The data is broadly in line with the past two year's findings. We can improve further by better supporting teachers with an online resource platform which will allow teachers to access support during the longer gaps between practitioner visits.

## High quality

88% of school staff feel the CPD inputs and time with their practitioner have provided sufficient support to be able to lead music activity in school.

*"We love having our practitioner in for CPD and always feel inspired. We would enjoy more sessions as these are invaluable to develop our practice."*

*"It is clear to see that music has improved throughout the school as a result of our training. The singing in class assemblies has gotten so much better and staff are more confident teaching music. I received really positive feedback after every session we had with [the practitioner] and I'm really looking forward to continuing our CPD next year!"*

*"[The CPD programme] has embedded a culture and expectation about engaging in music at school that did not exist before."*

*"High-quality training and support."*

*"The staff are naturally lacking confidence in some areas, however with the positive encouragement and support from [the practitioner], they are very willing to try, most of the time taking themselves right out of their comfort zones."*

*"All staff embrace this programme and are very enthusiastic and supportive."*

## Clear and easy to follow

92% of school staff rated Voices Foundation practitioners as good or above for the overall clarity of their sessions and feedback to staff.

*"Very supportive Voices Foundation practitioner. Giving useful demonstrations and giving helpful feedback with ideas to take forward."*

*"Encouraging, enthusiastic and helpful trainers."*

*"Provides support yet challenge at the same time."*

*"Supported staff with clear next steps and how to progress."*

*"A strong lead from the practitioners in the programme, make you feel confident to have a go."*

*"The [programme] is clear and shows progression in an organised and understandable way."*

*"[The practitioner] wasn't too pushy with making me do things out of my comfort zone but also gave me the confidence to try new things."*

*"Twilight sessions were engaging and enabling. A very safe atmosphere. Lots of fun. Easily transferrable ideas."*



## Tailored to our participants

91% of school staff rated practitioners as good or above for their ability to adapt training to suit the needs of teachers and pupils.

*"Our Voices foundation lead is amazing. She is so patient and knowledgeable. The staff and I feel very comfortable learning from her and find her guidance, positivity and overall passion a huge help."*

*"I felt supported by [our practitioner], she would find out what I wanted to learn/gain and supported me to achieve this. I feel more confident when teaching and have a love of music to pass on to my children."*

*"It has been very useful to learn new techniques and have a specific plan to follow dependent on the abilities of the children."*

*"Lots of help during lesson visits. Children really enjoyed learning new songs and it was clear how to support children in the process."*

*"[Our practitioner] adapts well to the needs of the children. She made them feel included and valued during her sessions."*

*"Supportive and taking into account my own skill level."*

*"Lovely mentors who give valuable advice and guidance."*

*"[The practitioner] made me feel comfortable and was really supportive."*

## Has progress indicators and opportunities for co-learning embedded

92% of school staff rated Voices Foundation practitioners as good or above for the ability to support teachers to understand pupils' progression.

*"Our children have developed their music skills and feel confident to sing out loud."*

*"I have learnt ways to introduce a new song and how to support all the children within my class, including SEN children."*

*"This has been a wonderful experience for our children and also our staff. We have all enjoyed helping our children find their singing voices."*

*"It is clear to see that music has improved throughout the school as a result of our training. The singing in class and in assemblies has gotten so much better and staff are more confident teaching music."*

*"Children very able musically and enjoying music in every aspect of the school day!"*

*"Clear development and progression in skills throughout the visits."*

**Data Source:** Voices Foundation School Survey conducted in July 2023 with school staff taking part in a year-long Voices Foundation Continuing Professional Development and Learning Programme. The results are based on 37 responses.

# Mechanisms (participant experiences)

As a result of the qualities outlined on the previous page, we aim to create an experience where participants engaging in our work feel secure; open to learning and able to actively participate; equipped and empowered with new knowledge and/or skills; and able to see visible progress in children or recognise the benefits of music education for them. With the majority of programmes being smaller this year, we wanted to monitor how participant experiences and outcomes have changed. We asked school staff to reflect on the effects they were seeing on themselves and their pupils as a result of participating in our programmes, as well as the challenges they were facing.

## Teachers' experience

87% of school staff recognised that their overall confidence in leading music and singing had improved.

*"I think everyone that has been in the training sessions has left feeling more confident. One of our Year 1 teachers has particularly grown in confidence and now really enjoys teaching music and often comes to show me videos of his lessons."*

*"Most teachers are confident with teaching singing with their classes but not so confident having to lead singing in whole school sessions."*

*"[The practitioner] has taught me how to confidently lead class and school wide singing."*

*"All staff have grown in confidence without a doubt!"*

98% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they now enjoy participating in musical activity with pupils.

*"I enjoyed teaching the beat to the children and trying out new games to get the children involved."*

86% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they feel more comfortable using their singing voice.

*"It gave me the confidence to sing in front of the Voices Foundation practitioners and try new songs. Especially leading the children in EYFS at the church, which I would never have done before."*

90% of school staff agreed that their musical skills had developed well this year.

*"The teachers who lead music lessons regularly, show greater skill development and confidence."*

*"[The programme] had helped me to enhance my skills and experience on how to deliver the lessons successfully."*

*"It has developed my skills in teaching music and the range of songs I am able to teach them."*

*"Learning new skills and gaining valuable experience where I can implement moving forward within my lessons and having a plan and structure in place."*

*"I developed my subject knowledge."*

79% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they feel confident and skilled to embed singing in their everyday teaching practice.

*"There is always a song which is relevant to our learning."*

74% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they are able to adapt music activity to suit pupils' needs.

*"This programme has helped build on my confidence to teach music and developed my love of music. I have learnt ways to introduce a new song and how to support all the children within my class, including SEN children."*

## Children's experience

83% of school staff agree or strongly agree that pupils have developed good musical skills

*"There was improved confidence in pupils' singing ability. The Singing Celebration and music concerts brought the community together again - really important events following the isolation of the pandemic."*

98% of school staff agree or strongly agree that pupils benefit from taking part in regular singing and musical activities.

*"Thank you - my children have gained lots from this!"*

98% of school staff agree or strongly agree that pupils are positive about participating in music activity.

*"Children have loved the singing."*

90% of school staff agree or strongly agree that all pupils engage with the music activity.

*"Children were able to take the lead during singing."*

95% of school staff agree or strongly agree that pupils are joyful whilst making music.

*"The singing celebration was amazing, and the children could have run it on their own - they were so confident."*

## Summary

Staffing was the number one challenge reported by schools for several different reasons, including a rise in staff on sick leave and a more rigid timetable (due to catching up on the curriculum missed) making the logistics of planning a class visit day much more challenging. In practitioner's visit reports, you can see an increased number of teachers who had to miss their class visit due a range of different reasons. This has been a huge barrier this year and requires further attention.

There were many comments about how the programme has increased teachers' confidence, however there were fewer comments in regards to the skills and musical knowledge. Many of the programmes were smaller this year, with the number of class visits shrinking from 6 visits throughout the year to either 3 or 4. This is also true in terms of Twilight CPD sessions. Further thought and attention needs to be given on how we can use technology to upskill teachers' music subject knowledge between visits from the practitioner.

School staff were also asked to describe the most challenging aspect of their programme. In order of frequency, these challenges included:

- Concerns about staffing, logistics and time - especially where to fit music into an already tight curriculum
- In MAT wide programmes, the distance to travel to other schools for CPD training sessions was raised several times
- Personal confidence when using the Singing Voice especially in front of colleagues
- No online resource to support KS1 and KS2 learning
- Engaging upper KS2 teacher participation
- Limited guidance on assessment
- Adapting for mixed year groups in small schools

Data Source: Voices Foundation School Survey conducted in July 2023 with school staff taking part in a year-long Voices Foundation Continuing Professional Development and Learning Programme. The results are based on 37 responses.

# Outcomes

By the end of their engagement with us, we aim for our participants to have an understanding of the benefits of music education and the desire and skill to improve children's music education through their work. This year, feedback from school staff collected at the end of the year provided evidence about the extent to which participants were achieving our targeted outcomes.

**98% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they now enjoy participating in musical activity with pupils.**

*"I enjoyed teaching the beat to the children and trying out new games to get the children involved."*

**86% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they feel more comfortable using their singing voice, singing and musical activities.**

*"It gave me the confidence to sing in front of the Voices Foundation practitioners and try new songs. Especially leading the children in EYFS at the church, which I would never have done before."*

**79% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they feel confident and skilled to embed singing in their everyday teaching practice.**

*"There is always a song which is relevant to our learning."*

**74% of school staff agree or strongly agree that at the end of this year's programme they are able to adapt music activity to suit pupils' needs.**

*"This programme has helped build on my confidence to teach music and developed my love of music. I have learnt ways to introduce a new song and how to support all the children within my class, including SEN children."*

## Summary

The 2023 Teacher Survey found that even though individual programmes have been condensed, the outcomes are still broadly in line with last year's data. The evidence shows that after completing one year of a programme, teachers' confidence and enjoyment of teaching music has increased, however far fewer teachers reported that they felt they had the skills and knowledge to teach music well and adapt their teaching to suit children's needs. Further exploration on how we can continue to upskill teachers with fewer visits and CPD training needs to be a focus for the following year.





# Spotlight: The Teacher Advisory Group

## Deepening our learning through active participation

The Teacher Advisory Group was created with a goal to gain deeper feedback in order to address barriers, inform our practice and design of programmes, and offer an opportunity to learn from teaching professionals about what is and isn't successful in the broader curriculum and school life as a whole. This group consists of twelve members including head teachers, music leads, non-music-specialist teachers, and teaching assistants. Each member is paid for their time (generously funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation) to prepare answers to supplied questions and attend online meetings for in-depth discussions.

### Learning from participants - Logistics

**Goal One: Focus on overcoming challenges around finding time for music in schools**

The feedback from both teachers and practitioners is that finding space for music in an already 'heavy' curriculum has been among the most common challenges in schools receiving support from Voices Foundation. We asked participants to share their experience of this with the group.

It was generally agreed that it was easier to overcome in KS1 with the 'little and often' approach of daily 10 minute sessions. One member commented that it was too easy for a very reluctant teacher in their school to drop these 10 minute sessions. Another member fed back that this had also been the case in her school, but this issue was immediately resolved when they agreed on a set time where every class was making music.

It was acknowledged that finding space in the KS2 timetable was much more challenging, with a consensus that 10 minutes was too short but an hour was overwhelming. 30 minute sessions seemed to be the most popular, alongside whole school singing, or a 10 minute catch up session.

*"In KS1, music has a fixed part of the timetable - The first 10 minutes straight after lunch."*

*"Music is currently taught during teachers' PPA time but from January music is going back to the teachers. [Our teachers] find the thought of an hour overwhelming so the plan is 30 minutes a week, but with 5-10 mins daily singing."*

*"We do 30 minutes because the 10-minute slot was getting lost, but 30 minutes was easier to preserve. When the music lead goes in, it happens."*

We also asked the group what more Voices Foundation could do to support schools to find time for music activity. Every member agreed there was a need for the books to be digitised and online in a format and language for learning that teachers can instantly recognise, i.e. to design lesson plans that resemble templates from other curriculum subjects. This would save time on planning, finding the songs and improve teachers' confidence, putting them in a more familiar format.

*"Using the books takes too much time. Teachers were just using the songs that had been taught to them by [practitioner]. You need to have it all digitalised."*

*"Access to quality resources. Pick and mix of quality songs. Supporting resources. High expectation, high level resources, but teachers are able to access it easily."*

*"Virtual resource to take a teacher through a lesson step by step. Teachers don't have time to plan. Links to recordings etc. Videos modelling songs. And how to lead sessions. Even behaviour management."*

*"In addition to digitization could there be a more streamlined version of the books. Songs for each year group, simple learning ideas, songs good for assemblies."*

*"A clearer scheme of work that teachers can recognise as such."*

### Learning from participants - Assessment

**Goal Two: Explore how Voices Foundation can better support teachers with assessment in music**

There are many mixed messages when it comes to assessment of music, and music leads in schools have reported that trying to fit music into a school's Assessment Policy is very challenging. Voices Foundation wanted to explore how we can best support teachers with assessment in schools.

We asked our participants how they currently assess music. There was a range of answers, from some schools currently having no planned assessment to other schools with a large evidence gathering plan in place. This corroborates with the above point, and participants agreed there is confusion around what is expected in terms of assessment.

*"[We] use informal assessment as built-into Inside Music books units of work."*

*"Videos of skills from music units at beginning and end (3 long music units). [We] also video class songs at the beginning and then performance at the end. Pupil voice is taken by class teachers and music lead. Informal observations in lessons/music enrichment etc. Summative end of year assessment against year group expectations."*

*"Across the term we record snippets of lesson 1 to compare to snippets of lesson 6. This informs our teacher assessments and provides evidence."*

When asked about what barriers teachers in their schools face in terms of assessment in music, they all agreed that the quality of assessment is directly linked to individual teachers' subject knowledge. Teachers cannot assess what they do not know. Time was also a common barrier with one music lead participant sharing that her Planning, Preparing and Assessment (PPA) time is spent loading up videos.

*"Teachers' level of training and experience. It's difficult to make judgements if they don't feel confident or competent."*

*"No set assessment scheme to help steer feedback. No way of tracking as reliant on verbal, in-the-moment feedback directly to pupils. How do you capture that? No system for passing on assessment and onward targets to next teacher."*

We wanted to focus on exactly which parts of their schools' assessment for music furthered the children's learning. The majority of the schools identified that it was the informal, 'in the

moment' giving of immediate feedback to children, which was reliant on the teacher's subject knowledge.

One participant shared that using videos taken in a session for children to assess themselves had proved to be very successful and allowed them to gather evidence at the same time. Another reported a music lead using video to support class teachers in their music subject knowledge and in making assessments.

*"Giving children instant feedback and addressing misconceptions allows them to make improvements."*

*"Verbal feedback - children can act on it immediately and develop throughout the lesson."*

*"Children can watch the videos and be guided by the teacher (as needed) to make improvements/changes to further learning."*

When asked what more Voices Foundation could do to help support schools with assessment, they agreed that online videos which shared what good assessment in music looks like would be very helpful. One member is currently completing an NPQ qualification and has found the use of videos in their training model very successful.

*"NPQ model: Use of videos [Similar to Voices Connect]. Video 1 - class activity, Video 2 - same video but with commentary from 'expert', Video 3 - same video with space for participant to reflect and write their own points."*

### Summary

The feedback from the Teacher Advisory Group allows us to explore what is happening in wider school life, including other areas of the curriculum. Sharing barriers and successes from all areas of the school environment, the group emphasised the importance of an online resource, as this has now become a basic expectation. The group agree that progressive clear steps in the books is excellent, but suggest that a change in format and language to be more familiar to general teachers may increase teachers' confidence and encourage more active participation.

The level of learning as an organisation that Voices Foundation is receiving from the Teacher Advisory Group has proved very successful.

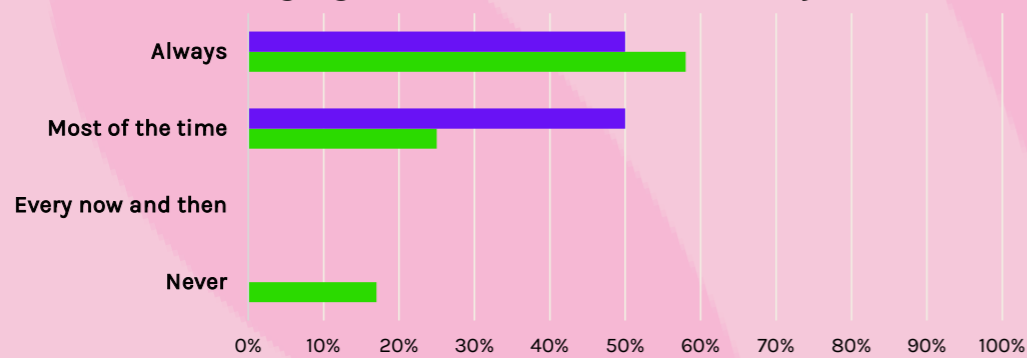
# Spotlight: Children's thoughts on singing in Key Stage 1

This year, we conducted a survey with a group of 12 Key Stage 1 (KS1) children who attend a school receiving their first year of a Voices Foundation programme - who shall be referred to as 'School A.' The same survey was also completed with another 12 KS1 children at a primary school who do not currently have music as a priority in their school development plan - 'School B.' We plan to repeat these survey when the children reach Key Stage 2 (KS2), to monitor if there are any changes or developments.

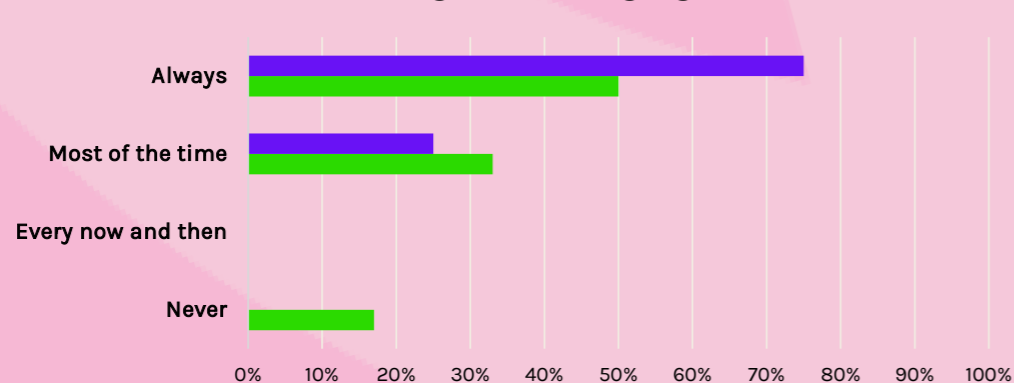
We believe the best way to help pupils access high-quality music education is through the adults that influence the most - their teachers. However, over the years, teachers have reported how challenging it can be to encourage certain year groups to sing, which can negatively impact the beginning of a programme. This really interests us at Voices Foundation, and we want to: explore children's perceptions on singing as they transition from KS1 through to KS2; discover if there are any changes in these perceptions as the children get older; and see whether there is a difference in children's thoughts regarding singing between a school with a programme and a school without.

■ School A (Voices Programme) ■ School B (No Voices Programme)

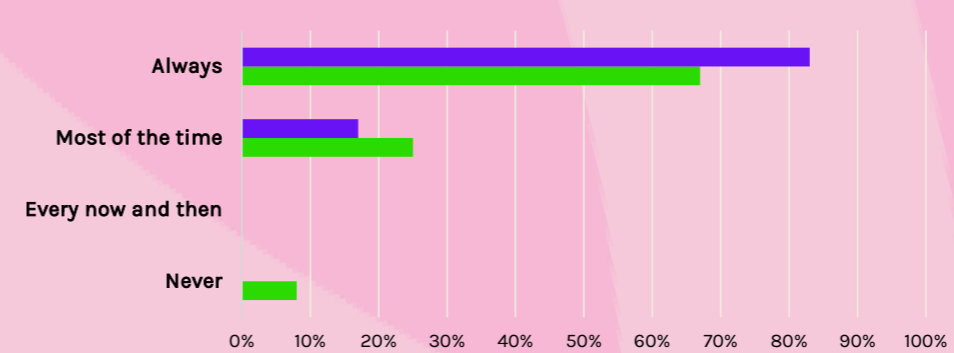
## Singing at school makes me happy



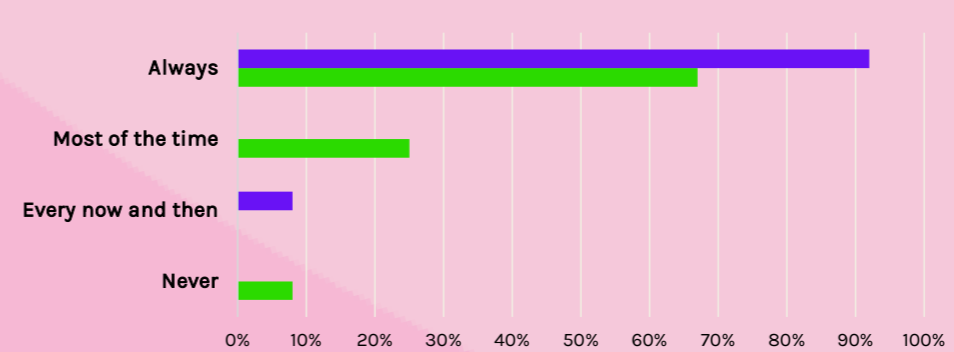
## I am good at singing



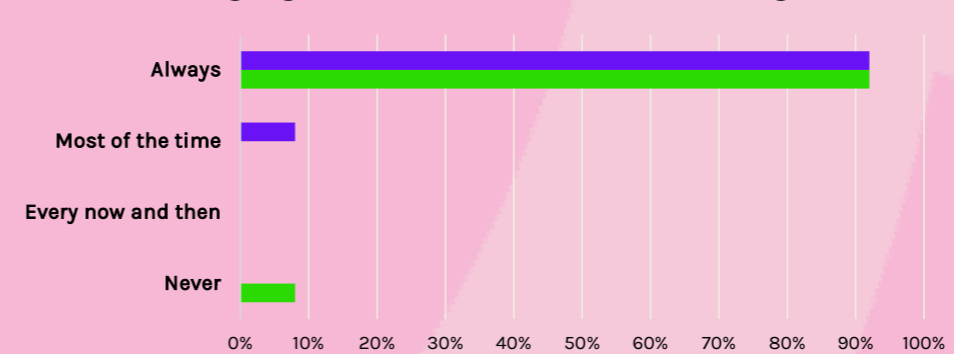
## I like singing with other people



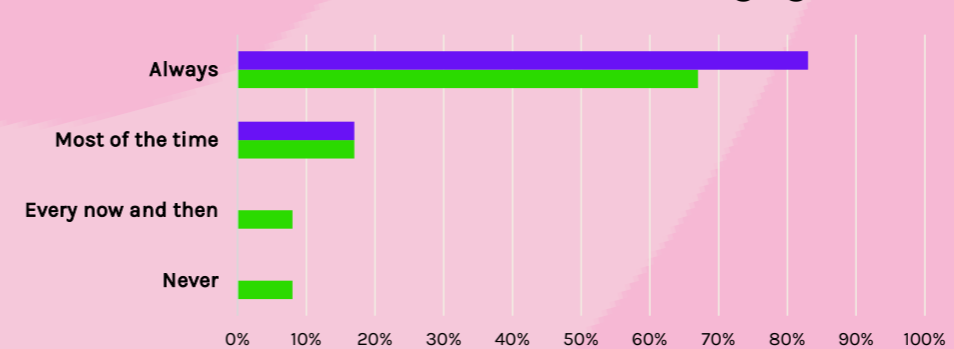
## Singing helps me with my talking



## Singing helps me to remember things



## I like school more when we do singing



The children were also asked about the best and worst thing about singing in school.

School A children had lots of comments on the best thing about singing including "getting to stand up," "learning new songs," "singing together." The worst thing being "when some scream" or don't join in.

It was interesting to note that the children from School B seemed to find these questions more challenging. Three of the children mentioned singing in the Christmas Play as their best thing and one of them mentioned singing in the Christmas Play as their worst thing.

When asked how singing in school could be made better, both school groups mentioned dancing and choosing their own songs to sing, and School B wanted to be filmed with microphones.

# Partnerships with other music organisations

## Primary Singing Toolkit



In 2022, the Independent Society of Musicians Trust (ISM Trust) approached Voices Foundation to collaborate on a project which would create a free digital resource to equip primary teachers with inspirational and practical examples of singing strategies, to enhance their music curriculum and increase their confidence in teaching singing. Music departments often have minimal funding and teachers have limited CPD opportunities, so we wanted this to be a free professional development resource, open to everyone. The resource is aimed at both specialist and non-specialist primary music teachers in Key Stage 1 and 2. We know that non-specialist teachers often receive minimal music training, and specialist teachers are not necessarily singing trained. Confidence is a huge issue amongst primary music teachers, particularly when it comes to teaching singing. We want to help teachers overcome their insecurities, feel empowered to teach, and realise they are not alone.

The online resource consists of 14 videos and accompanying downloadable lesson plans that encompass seven full music lessons. Both of Voices Foundation's Choral and Musicianship Directors, Charles Béquignon-MacDougall and Jenny Trattles, supported a Primary Teacher at Winterton Junior School in North Lincolnshire – a rural school in one of the lowest areas of deprivation in the country. The aim was to upskill a non-specialist teacher through small, simple, achievable steps and to demonstrate the learning opportunities that can grow from one simple song – 'Essequibo River.' We wanted the resource to be authentic, imperfect, and unpolished so that it is empowering and feels within the reach of all schools.

The resource was launched at the Music and Drama Expo in February 2023 with a further webinar launch in March 2023.

150,000+  
indirect beneficiaries\*

5000+  
individuals accessed the  
Primary Singing Toolkit

400+  
watched the webinar

We are delighted that the Primary Singing Toolkit has now been shortlisted for the 2024 Music and Drama Education Awards for Outstanding Music Education Resource.

Data provided by the ISM Trust  
\*Where each teacher is assumed to impact an average of 30 pupils

## Spotlight: Evolution of the Choral Strand

Our Choral strand is the younger sibling of our work in classrooms and was conceived as a response to the needs of our partner schools to create, support and develop whole school singing, singing assemblies and choirs. In itself, it is a dynamic response to the changing educational landscape.

Following the release of the New National Plan for Music Education (NPME), and in line with our legacy of responsiveness, our Choral strand has undergone a change of focus over the last year. Although our classic support of choral singing in schools remains – notably through partnerships with Multi-Academy Trusts, such as David Ross Education Trust and Southwark Diocese Board of Education – Voices Foundation has increasingly been developing partnerships with Music Hubs.

### Redbridge

For Redbridge Music Service, Voices Foundation practitioners have offered support in preparing for their annual celebration at the Royal Albert Hall. We brought together both primary and secondary teachers for training on repertoire and choral skills, as well as in-person support for the performance day, where practitioners modelled choral leadership skills and helped direct some choral work. Following a successful festival, we offered training sessions for both primary and secondary teachers to focus on taking advantage of the momentum the festival created, by supporting the development of choral skills to facilitate continued vocal work in schools across the borough. Across the CPD sessions, 17 teachers took part, while 510 pupils and their teachers participated in the festival.

### Hillingdon

For Hillingdon Music Service, we sent our Choral Director to lead their Primary Singing Festival in March 2023. The partnership involved him setting the repertoire, leading a launch CPD session focussed on choral skills and learning the Big Sing song, where he worked with 66 teachers, created filmed learning resources, visited 6 schools to support classes and choirs preparing for the festival, and jointly led a huge festival day working which reached 1,860 students.

Councillor Susan O'Brien  
on X (formerly Twitter):

"Thank you to...  
@Voices\_Found & our  
fabulous music teachers for  
your time @MusicHillingdon  
Primary Singing Festival the  
concert was so uplifting and  
there will be a hundred little  
people chatting about their  
experience all day today."



# Spotlight: Strategic Support Writing the Vocal Strategy with Inspiring Music (Central Bedfordshire Music Hub)

From November 2022 to June 2023, Inspiring Music (Central Bedfordshire Music Hub) engaged Voices Foundation as a strategic partner with a specific focus on our Choral Director, Charles MacDougall, helping them write their vocal strategy.

## Stage 1

Consultation day involving the management of Inspiring Music and their practitioner workforce and other stakeholders. This explored the current provision, past challenges and successes, current obstacles and opportunities, and identifying the specific needs of the Hub, as well as the context of the New National Plan for Music Education.

## Stage 2

Further consultation with the leadership of Inspiring Music and time to reflect on the information gathered. Arising from the needs identified, strategic aims were determined, as well as beginning to propose activities that would help achieve the strategic aims.

## Stage 3

A work in progress day, again with both leadership, practitioners, and other stakeholders, where the working strategic document was presented, interrogated and further refined.

## Stage 4

The presentation of the 'Final' version of the Vocal Strategy document to the leadership, along with the call to action to implement one of the key recommendations for Inspiring Music: engaging a Vocal Lead in the coming months to take charge of the implementation of the strategy.

The process resulted in a rigorously well thought-out document, over which both Inspiring Music's leadership and practitioner team felt ownership. It was specific to the Hub (rather than simply generally applicable), with clear achievable short, medium and long term aims, and proposed activity arising from those aims.

*"I cannot begin to express how informative it was to take the suggested approach of involving all vocal practitioners across the service and intertwining with our youth consultation, weaving around the new National Plan [for Music Education] to create a robust document that meets the needs of our local area. The strength in this was that our tutors felt heard as it had elements of previous delivery and strategies they wanted to bring to the table to discuss and was a very good opportunity for us to work together on what is relevant and appropriate for our community as it is now."*

*"Charles is an amazing fountain of knowledge - and it has been an absolute pleasure to have spent the last 12 months developing this strategy collaboratively with our team guided by his expertise."*

**Senior Leader at Inspiring Music**

# Spotlight: Online Resource Inside Music Song Bank - Early Years

The Inside Music Song Bank is our first step into an interactive online resource. Our first phase concentrates on the Early Years, and can be used in any EYFS setting from birth to five. It was created in response to teachers' constant feedback that they believe an interactive online resource would have a huge impact on their practice. Voices Foundation currently see this resource as complimentary to our existing programmes, however we are keen to explore how our future online resources can meet the needs of teachers who are not currently engaged in Voices Foundation programmes.

The first phase of this online resource contains all the songs, activities and knowledge you can find in our award winning book, 'Inside Music: Early Years,' with the addition of audio and video recordings of Voices Foundation practitioners demonstrating how these songs and activities can be adapted and extended; a dedicated section on planning for different age groups, with an explanation video; and an easy to use browsing tool, which allows teachers to navigate quickly to a required activity.

We ran an interim evaluation of the Inside Music Song Bank at an EYFS phase team meeting, which included a music lead, 3 teachers, 1 Early Years Professional and 3 teaching assistants. The teachers reported that the biggest impact for their practice has been on time saving and logistics. The interactive tools to narrow down the search for a particular activity are reportedly easy to use. Teachers have also commented on how beneficial the audio at the top of each song has been to support them remembering a particular song. When asked how this resource could be improved further, all three teachers commented on the difficulty in finding the online resource each time they log in, as it cannot yet be found in a search engine.

*"I really enjoy the listening activities now. [My practitioner] encouraged me to try some of the listening activities last year, but it was such a 'faff' with the CD. It's all there and easy to use now, so my class has done nearly all of them since March."*

*"Having this online really helps me when I am planning which I often do at home. There have been many times that I have left the book in school and so I usually end up using the same songs - now I have no excuse!"*

# Reflections

Motivated by our 4-year in depth evaluation of our programmes in 2018-2021, in partnership with Sound Connections and Birmingham City University, Voices Foundation continues to invest in our learning. Even though our programmes have changed dynamically, our Theory of Change still sits at the centre of all we do. We are grateful to Paul Hamlyn Foundation who have continued to support us in our Learning and Impact endeavours.

## Reflections on the learning process

Assessing our work is an ongoing learning experience, and we consistently work towards improvements. This year, as most of our programs commenced in January, we reduced the data collection points, aiming to alleviate the workload on teachers. We noticed, however, that the response rates from the school survey sent in July 2023 has decreased by 4.8% from 2022. This could be due to how the Choral strand has evolved this year. In the 2022-23 period, the Choral strand featured fewer 'in-school' programs but adeptly adapted to heightened demand from Music Hubs and other partnerships. Consequently, there is a need to evolve the current data capture model to align with this changing landscape.

This year marked the first opportunity for us to utilise our Teacher Advisory Group, allowing us to acquire a more profound understanding of our processes by tapping into their personal experiences and expertise. Through paid professional discussions, we were able to gain deeper insight into not only the music subject in schools, but the wider school life. Exploring efficient processes to encourage more teacher responses will be brought to this group for consideration in 2024.

## Reflections on our findings

Our findings indicate that the efforts we have put into our programmes have positively impacted teachers, moving us closer to realising our vision of a country where every child has access to excellent music education. While progress has been made, there is still work ahead. In the future, we recognise the need to enhance the sense of security for teachers and improve the efficiency of our resources so that a 'non-specialist' can effectively lead music in their classrooms.

Despite the difficulties mentioned, going through the survey responses from school staff was highly rewarding. Many respondents shared in detail the positive outcomes they observed for both themselves and their children. It was not just about the words they used, but the depth of their answers and the excitement in their writing, considering how busy school life can be, these responses truly highlight the positive impact of being part of a Voices Foundation programme.

# Looking Ahead Improving the way we capture impact

Moving forward into 2023/24, we will continue our journey as a learning organisation. In particular, we aim to:

Continue enhancing our programs and resources, drawing from the insights we gained in 2023. We acknowledge the necessity of ongoing collaboration with schools to address challenges related to incorporating music into the school day, and fostering confidence in delivering musical activities. Additionally, we aim to continue our focus and monitor children's experiences and attitudes to singing as they move from Key Stage 1 into Key Stage 2.

Examine ways to streamline and establish an efficient data capture process that works for both the Musicianship and the Choral strand. Our goal is to encourage more teachers to actively engage and contribute their perspectives to inform Voices Foundation's decision-making processes.

Continue digitising our current resources. We want to explore how technological opportunities can be best used for equipping teachers with skills and subject knowledge, whilst also delivering an outstanding music curriculum which can be taught by any primary school teacher.

*This report was written in November 2023 by Jenny Trattles, Voices Foundation Musicianship Director, with the input of colleagues from across the charity.*



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<sup>vii</sup> Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010

<sup>viii</sup> Mak & Fancourt, 2019

<sup>ix</sup> Voices Foundation, 2023

<sup>x</sup> Blasco-Magraner et al, 2021

<sup>xi</sup> House of Lords Library, 2023

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<sup>xiii</sup> Savage, & Barnard 2019

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