

the voices foundation

transforming children through singing



*Creative
Education
Trust*

'Chorus' – Collaborative teacher development project with secondary schools Voices Foundation (VF) and Creative Education Trust (CET)

"I really enjoyed teaching my class about rhythm and notation through the songs provided and in the new ways they were taught to us in the training sessions" – Head of Music, Abbeyfield School

Seven secondary academies which are part of the Creative Education Trust (CET) embarked on a programme with the Voices Foundation (VF) in September 2016 to establish regular and high quality singing throughout their schools for all pupils aged 11-18.

CET is a non-profit educational charity recognised by the Department for Education as one of the leading multi-academy chains. They support a growing network of schools to improve standards and achieve academic success. As the name suggests, CET is a trust which believes in the power of creativity to transform the way young people learn and think, and they are committed to working with arts organisations in order to bring in expertise they don't have within the Trust.

This project involves 450 young people aged 11-18 and 14 music and drama teachers from 7 secondary academies in the Midlands and East Norfolk in a school-wide singing programmes. VF has engaged a team of music mentors and choral leaders who have been collaborating with pupils and teachers to develop new skills and confidence so as to establish singing as a core aspect of the education provided.

The project has three main strands:

1. 'Just Get On With it': a singing-based musicianship module for Year 7 pupils. Existing music teachers are trained by VF's expert music mentors in how to deliver this specially devised module which aims to get all Year 7 pupils to a similar level of music skill and understanding in the space of 10 weeks.
2. 'Chorus': a strand to establish school choirs, or develop vocal ensembles which are already in place. Working with one of VF's choral leaders, existing teachers are building their choral leadership skills including understanding of voice development, conducting skills and repertoire.
3. 'Singing Ambassadors': a project designed to develop senior solo singers' voices. Pupils work with a specialist vocal coach who introduces them to repertoire which is new to them and helps them to develop new musicianship, vocal and performance skills as they master songs

which are completely new to them. These pupils also act as advocates, raising the profile of singing in each school, and encouraging younger pupils to get involved.

All three strands come together in celebratory singing 'Festivals of Song' which allow each school to showcase vocal work and demonstrate progress made.

"I did wonder if I'd have to win over some Singing Ambassadors to classical music. However, I needn't have worried! One young baritone stands out in particular. In his audition he sang with a high tenor voice and although it was a lovely sound, it wasn't his natural voice. After working with him for a short while a rich baritone voice emerged. I decided to give him a piece from Mozart's opera Don Giovanni and, on my next visit, I played the piece to him: he could barely contain his excitement."

Charles MacDougall, choral director

Music teachers in each school are receiving development and support in the form of group CPD sessions and 1-2-1 support in the classroom and choir rehearsals. Schools are halfway through their programme and seeing real progress with their singing inside and outside the classroom. Over the past 6 months teachers have explored how the voice works as an instrument and what repertoire is suitable for their pupils as well as developed their choral conducting skills, singing in parts and harmonising. Teachers are also delivering the 'Musicianship through Singing' module in their music classes to create the foundations of musicianship for all Year 7 pupils through a voice-based curriculum. Each school choir or singing group, as well as their Singing Ambassadors, has come on leaps and bounds with their technique and repertoire in preparation for their Festival of Song performances at the end of the year.

For Voices Foundation, this is our first large-scale programme in secondary schools, and has enabled us to develop three strands which can be rolled out to other secondaries in order to increase and improve singing at this stage in young people's musical development.