



Voices

Voices Foundation
Learning & Impact Report 2021/22

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Introduction

Manvinder Rattan
CEO



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



At Voices Foundation, we are committed to transforming music education so that every child can find their voice. Over the past year, we have worked creatively in partnership with schools, Multi-Academy Trusts, Music Hubs, and other education providers to achieve their ambitions for music teaching and learning and maximise impact for the pupils they serve. As a result of the immense dedication, commitment, and hard work of our supporters, schools, and workforce, we have provided 1,318 school leaders, teachers, parents, and other education professionals with high-quality music learning experiences over the past year. In turn, this work has benefitted over 38,000 pupils in England.

Our Theory of Change, which outlines *how* we aim to transform music education for children in England, has remained a central pillar of our work – guiding our strategy and outlining the benchmarks we must meet if we are to achieve our vision of a country where all children have access to high-quality music education. You can read our Theory of Change on pages 4-7 of this report. To assess whether our theory is working and learn about where we can improve, we have been carefully collecting data over the past year from our participants, staff, and stakeholders. We believe that we should be held accountable for the goals we have set ourselves and transparent in reporting our progress. The remainder of this report (from page 9 onwards) shares that progress with you.

In addition to ongoing reflection on our progress towards achieving the goals set out in our Theory of Change, we have undertaken in-depth work to examine how we can create stronger collaborative, co-learning partnerships with schools – a key factor underlying the success of our programmes (page 17). We have also listened to pupils, who have shared their reflections on taking part in music activity at school with us (page 19), and we have examined the evidence we have about the effects of music participation for children experiencing disadvantage (page 22). We have deliberately included both our positive and our not so positive findings, as we believe that openly reporting evaluation findings across our sector will provide us with the best chance of learning more about the benefits of music education for children, and as result, optimising that impact.

We hope you enjoy learning about the difference our work has made over the past year.

Our Purpose

Benefits of music



Why do we need music?

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

Research about the benefits of music

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.ⁱⁱ 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

Studies have found 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.^{iv} Children who participate in long-term musical programmes have also shown higher empathy than similar children who do not.^v 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 but without music.^{vi}

Music is a form of communication that can convey meaning, regardless of whether 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.^{vii}

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.^{viii}

Why does Voices Foundation exist?

To address this 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.

To address this 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.

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, 56.7% of pupils receiving state-funded education in England attend schools where there is no requirement to provide music education. Even in statutory contexts, the National Curriculum is extremely limited in scope and both the refreshed National Plan for Music Education and the Model Music Curriculum provide non-statutory guidance only. National assessment influences curriculum design and teaching, and accountability measures for maths and English results have placed pressure on other areas of the curriculum, leading many primary schools to deprioritise music or fall short of delivering their planned provision. In a recent survey carried out by the Incorporated Society of Musicians, more than 50% of primary schools who 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.^{ix} 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 for 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 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.^x 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.^{xi} This is bad news for pupils, as quality teachers are a critical determinant of student achievement.^{xii}

Whilst the lack of access to quality 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 from poorer backgrounds who miss out.^{xiii}

How Voices Foundation aims to make a difference



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 aim, we created a Theory of Change. A Theory of Change helps us to describe the process through which the change that 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 children's 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. Training one primary school teacher to deliver high-quality music activities in their classroom, for example, could benefit up to 900 children over the course of that teacher's career. Once confident to share their learning with other educators, this impact is further multiplied.

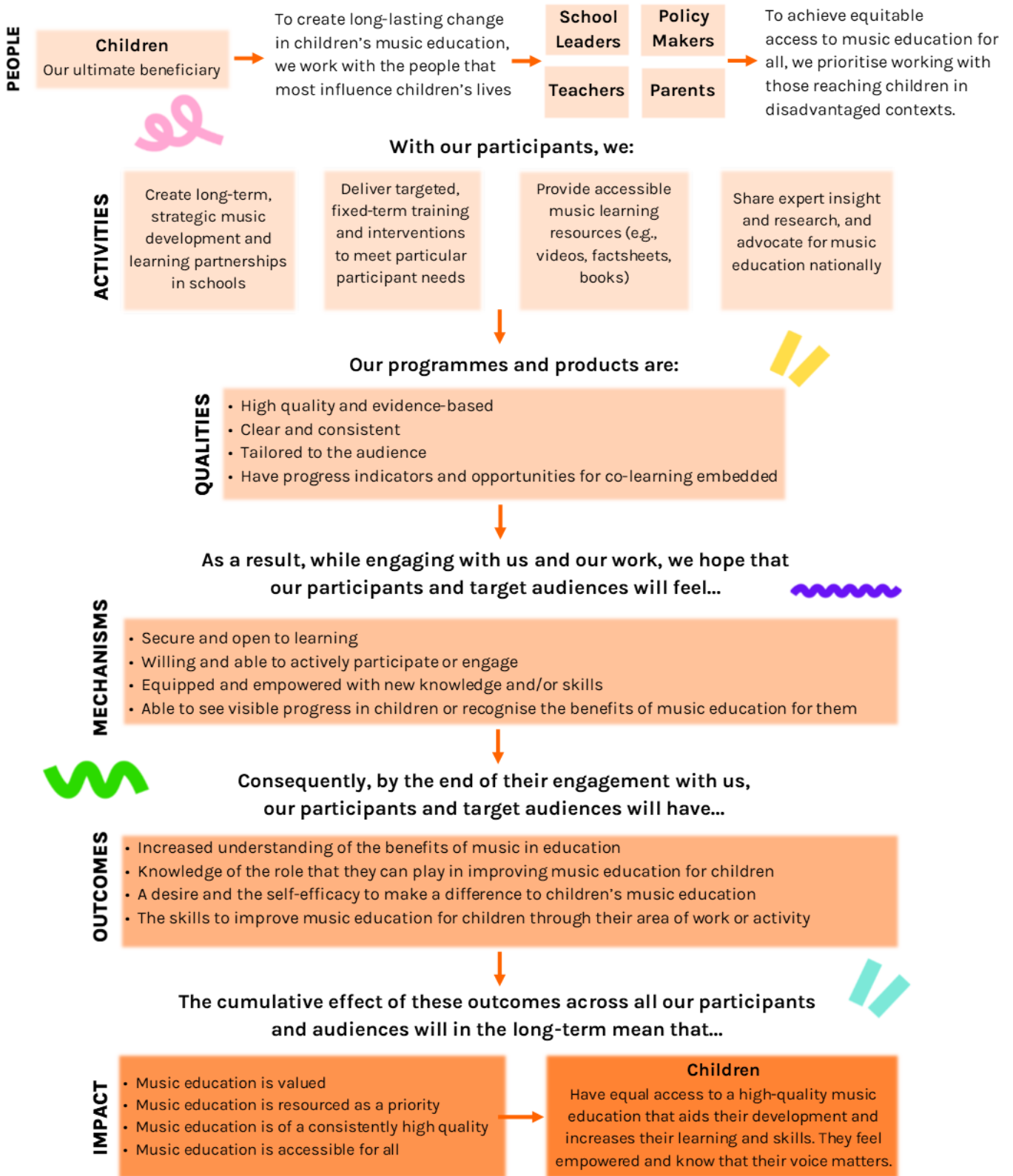
Our Vision:

Transforming music education so every child can find their voice.

By the end of their engagement with us, we aim for all our participants and audiences to have an understanding of the benefits of music education and 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.

The diagram on the next page summarises our Theory of Change.

How Voices Foundation plans to transform children's access to high-quality music education: Our Theory of Change



Our approach to music learning



Voices Foundation's vision is that all children have access to high-quality music education. Primarily, we work to achieve this 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, 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 is as follows:

- Voices Foundation uses 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/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 focuses on 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."^{xiv}
- Performing music, listening to music, and thinking about music are therefore essential components of Voices Foundation's pedagogical approach and give 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.

All Voices Foundation Practitioners use this methodology, and our accompanying Inside Music resource books are award-winning.



Our Impact

Our Theory of Change sets the goals for our work and shows us what to measure in order to understand whether we are creating the change to children’s music education in England that we want to achieve. The remainder of this report shares our progress towards achieving our vision.

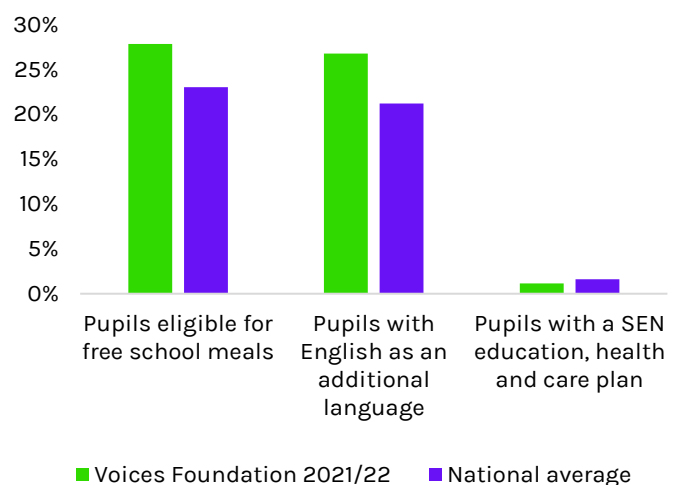
Activities

Over the past year, we have delivered the following activities.



Increasingly working with those most in need

Voices Foundation’s aim is that all children in England have access to high-quality music education. 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 graph to the right shows the proportion of pupils taking part in Voices Foundation’s programmes who are eligible for free school meals, have English as an additional language, or have a SEN education, health and care plan, compared with the national average.



Qualities

For our programmes and products to be successful, we believe that they must be high-quality, clear and consistent, tailored to our participants, and have progress indicators and opportunities for co-learning embedded. Over the past year, we asked school staff to give feedback on these areas. The results below suggest that Voices Foundation is doing well with respect to achieving these goals. The data is in line with last year's findings. We can improve further by better supporting teachers to adapt work to meet the needs of mixed-aged classes, ensuring that all terminology is clearly explained, and providing increased guidance about assessment in music, which in turn will better enable teachers to recognise pupils' progress.

High-Quality

95% of school staff in our long-term school partnerships rated Voices Foundation Practitioners as good or above for the overall quality of their delivery

"The Practitioner is extremely knowledgeable and gives relevant and useful feedback." **Classroom teacher**

"Children are incredibly enthused when the Practitioner comes in to deliver an assembly or a classroom session." **Classroom teacher**

"Exceptional singing training." **Classroom teacher**

"It has been delightful to work with the Practitioner. She not only delivers really good CPD for me as music lead but also whole staff development." **Music lead**

"The support is fantastic and the advice is very constructive." **Classroom teacher**

"Thank you to [the Practitioner] for her excellent coaching skills and making you feel you can sing!" **Classroom teacher**

Clear and easy to follow

91% of school staff in our long-term school partnerships rated Voices Foundation Practitioners as good or above for the overall clarity of their sessions and feedback to staff

"The Practitioner is very supportive and very clear with her instructions." **Senior leader**

"The Practitioner is very friendly and always supports us. I never feel like she is judging, I always feel she wants to help. She gives simple tips that can make a difference." **Classroom teacher**

"[The best thing about the programme is] clarity from Practitioners and their expertise to adapt songs and resources to suit our topics." **Classroom teacher**

"The book that accompanies the programme is brilliant - it explains things so well and is easy to follow." **Classroom teacher**

"This programme is easy to understand, easy to deliver and is enjoyable for both staff and children!" **Classroom teacher**

"Learning from the book isn't always clear, it sometimes uses phrases I'm not sure on, e.g., 'use phrase hands' but [this is] not explained." **Classroom teacher**

Tailored to our participants

93% of school staff in our long-term school partnerships rated Practitioners as good or above for their ability to adapt training to suit the needs of teachers and pupils

"[The Practitioner] gives great suggestions on how the songs can be changed to suit each child if needed." **Teaching assistant**

"The Practitioner makes you feel comfortable and is fantastic with the children! Could not ask for more! Thank you." **Classroom teacher**

"[The Practitioner] has formed strong relationships with all the staff and targets her support expertly." **Senior leader**

"Confidence of staff has improved hugely since we started on the programme, this is in part due to the fact that they have improved subject knowledge and personalised support to improve." **Senior leader**

“The Practitioner has such an in-depth knowledge of the needs of the staff and the school and is highly effective in targeting her support.” **Senior leader**

“I would like to see the progression more. With a mixed-age class, I am not sure how to adapt for different year groups.” **Classroom teacher**

Has progress indicators and opportunities for co-learning embedded

90% of school staff in our long-term school partnerships rated Voices Foundation Practitioners as good or above for their ability to support teachers to understand pupils' progression

“[I've valued the] assessments - using the closing eyes technique so I can see which children have the skills and which children are copying others and need more support.” **Classroom teacher**

“I understand the National Curriculum expectations and how the Voices Foundation scheme covers it... I use assessment effectively as I make notes about the children's engagement and enthusiasm during these sessions.” **Music lead**

“[The best thing about the programme has been] seeing the children progress as much as they have via the Practitioner's clear next steps and development points for myself.” **Classroom teacher**

“In our school, children love singing and engage in all musical activities. I am now able to see a progression in musical skills from KS1 into KS2.” **Music lead**

“[I see] consistency for pupils through the school in their music learning; there is progression through the school.” **Music lead**

“I really think that an assessment at the end of each taught unit would be a good idea.” **Senior leader**

Data source: Voices Foundation mid-year school survey, conducted in Feb-March 2022 with school staff taking part in a year-long Voices Foundation Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) programme. The results are based on 165 responses.



Mechanisms (participant experience)

As a result of the qualities outlined above, 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. This year, we asked school staff to reflect on the effects they were seeing for themselves and their pupils as a result of participating in our programmes, as well as the challenges they were facing. For the first time, we also utilised our Practitioners' visit reports to understand what kinds of experiences school staff were having during our sessions. Our Practitioners write these reports each time they visit a teacher in their classroom to provide a record of what happened during the visit and what feedback was discussed. Together, these two data sources enabled us to assess if participants' experiences of our work are in line with our targeted mechanisms. Learning from the two data sources is reported sequentially below, with a summary of overall learning at the end.

Learning from participants:

As a result of taking part in the Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) programme so far, school staff noticed that they were:

- Equipped with more techniques and materials for teaching music.
- Implementing newly learned musical skills and knowledge in their teaching, with particular emphasis on pitch, delivering warm-ups, and using appropriate musical terminology.
- Leading more music and singing activities in their schools, with increased confidence.
- Using music as a tool across the school day to support behaviour for learning, engineering efficiency, and cross-curricular learning.
- Able to better support pupils' learning, including improving their singing, increasing their music knowledge, and differentiating tasks to meet pupils' needs.
- Improving their planning and assessment of music.

"Children respond well to music lessons. I see an improvement in their behaviour during these sessions and I can take things from these sessions to my everyday teaching and the children respond by showing good behaviour for learning." **Classroom teacher**

School staff noticed that their participation in the CPDL programme was resulting in benefits for their pupils. Pupils were showing:

- Increased musical knowledge and skills.
- A role in making music part of the school culture, including taking ownership of their engagement in music outside the classroom.

- Increased confidence in singing and music activities, including in solo singing, ensemble singing, leading activities, and performances.
- High enjoyment and engagement in music.
- Improved wellbeing, behaviour for learning, teamwork, peer relationships, and listening.

"This is amazing for our pupils, this is great for mental health and wellbeing of all, teaching patience, coordination and teamwork. Children are happiest when singing together." **Classroom teacher**

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

- Concerns around timing, logistics, and staffing. Multiple participants reported experiencing challenges finding time to fit music activities into the curriculum.
- A lack of confidence to lead singing and music activities.
- Challenges relating to their own learning and skill development, including difficulties learning the songs, developing skills, and remembering new learning.
- Difficulties planning music activity/lessons.
- Challenges in meeting pupils' needs.
- Limitations in the resources available, particularly to support children's learning in upper key stage two.

Data source: Voices Foundation mid-year school survey, conducted in Feb-March 2022 with school staff taking part in a year-long Voices Foundation Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) programme. The results are based on 165 responses.



Learning from Practitioners' visit reports:

Goal one: Teachers have the capacity to actively participate and feel secure and open to learning

- Visit reports showed that, in some schools, there were issues that stopped school staff attending Voices Foundation sessions. At times, teachers were unsure when Practitioners were coming in, off ill, or had cover issues. At other times, teachers were participating in the lesson, but other issues, such as challenging pupil behaviour, interrupted the session and took the teacher out of the room. This is a concern as teachers cannot build their knowledge and skills if they're not able to be in the lesson.
- Practitioners were proactively addressing concerns that teachers had around fitting music into the school day. Multiple Practitioners encouraged teachers to focus on doing a little singing every day rather than big chunks.

"You have planned for three 10-minute sessions per week, which is more effective than a long music session each week" Practitioner visit report

- In some cases, the age of the children affected teachers' feelings of security, with teachers working with younger children feeling more secure to deliver music activity. Teachers previously working with other year groups may need support to transition to a new age group. For example, in early years' settings, teachers may need to be more patient, imaginative, and play-based, compared with lessons with older children.
- There is a link between using audio recordings and teachers' feelings of security. Voices Foundation is considering how recordings can support teachers to feel secure when needed, without being overused.

Goal two: Teachers feel autonomy in their learning, and by learning through doing, they see their own progress

- Generally, the visit reports were celebratory and affirmative – pointing out where delivery was effective, teacher-led, and where progress had been made. Affirmation was more frequently provided from the Practitioner's point of view. There were fewer examples of teachers seeing progress for themselves, although reading the Practitioner's comments would reinforce this.
- There is a sense from some visit reports that teachers continue to feel insecure about their skills. The reports help to address this – complimenting and offering guidance to secure or improve teachers' skills.

Goal three: Teachers and Voices Foundation co-learn about how to embed music in daily school life and the value this brings to pupils

- Visit reports tended to highlight Practitioners' own perspectives on pupils' development and achievement. It is unclear whether the teachers would recognise this progress themselves. However, we noticed that the Practitioner's language can help to bring developments for pupils to the forefront. Using the phrase 'did you notice', for example, points out pupils' progress whilst also allowing space for the teacher to reflect on their experience. At times, Practitioners linked pupil progress nicely to something done by the teacher.

"The children sing with a gorgeous gentle tone, which is all down to you" Practitioner visit report

- There was evidence that teachers and Practitioners were co-learning about how to embed music in school life. In one example, the Practitioner picked up on concerns the teacher had about the curriculum and suggested scheduling time to discuss this. In another case, the Practitioner suggested discussing with the teacher where they go next with repertoire. Phrases such as "we both noticed" also created a sense of shared learning.

Data source: Analysis of visit reports, written by Voices Foundation Practitioners for participants.

Summary

Finding time to deliver music activity was the number one challenge reported by schools, and Practitioner visit reports indicated that teachers weren't always able to attend sessions. This is a barrier to success and requires further attention. Many teachers reported gaining skills, although not all felt confident, which is reflected in the challenges teachers reported and the Practitioners' visit reports. Development of confidence takes time, and we don't expect all staff to feel confident in a year. However, for staff who don't have capacity or feel secure to participate in sessions, it will take longer, further highlighting that addressing issues around capacity and security is a priority. Whilst it was unclear from visit reports how much teachers were seeing the value of music activity for children, enthusiasm about the positive effects of music activity for pupils came through strongly in the staff survey. There was evidence that school staff and Practitioners were co-learning about embedding music activity in some schools, but not all. Going forward, we aim to further support collaborative working in this area.

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 and analysis of Practitioners' visit reports provided evidence about the extent to which participants were achieving our targeted outcomes.

Learning from participants:

94% Agree that they understand the benefits that musical activity can have for pupils

"Taking part in the training has made me more confident in using song in my daily practice and lessons which in turn has provided a benefit for my pupils by engaging them more within the lessons/daily routine and promoting their behaviour in a more positive way." **Classroom teacher**

"The pupils have gained more self-esteem and confidence. I have even seen these skills being transferred into other subject areas, for example, maths. It really has had a positive impact on the pupils." **Music lead**

76% Agree that they want to provide music education for pupils themselves

"I enjoy singing and music and I hope I am passing that love onto the new generation of pupils." **Classroom teacher**

"I now use music outside of my sessions. For example, the children love it when we sing to do the register." **Classroom teacher**

73% Agree that they are confident leading music activity with pupils

"Most teachers in school now feel more confident to have a go at singing in class." **Music lead**

"I am more confident to sing in front of children and lead a session. I have tried to incorporate music into my daily classroom runnings." **Classroom teacher**

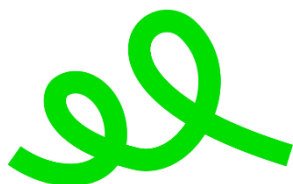
67% Agree that they have subject knowledge and skills to lead music activities with pupils

"[The best thing about the programme has been] the development in teachers' confidence and skills to teach well thought-out music lessons, which has developed our music curriculum greatly." **Music lead**

"Voices has allowed me to improve my skills and I have loved it!" **Classroom teacher**



Data source: Voices Foundation End of Year School Survey, conducted in July 2022 with school staff taking part in a year-long Voices Foundation Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) programme. The results are based on 124 responses.



Comparison with last year's results:

Results for our first two targeted outcomes are broadly in line with last year's data. However, there was a drop in the proportion of school staff feeling confident leading music activity (2020/21: 83%) and skilled to lead music activity (2020/21: 88%). However, our 2020/21 end of year survey had a lower response rate (25 responses) than the current year's survey, and so may be less representative of the feelings of all staff. Furthermore, the schools that Voices Foundation works with changes each year, and in 2021/22, we worked with a greater number of new schools, compared with 2020/21. This may also help to explain the lower levels of reported skills and confidence. For many staff, the journey to feeling skilled and confident will take longer than a year. For these reasons, like for like comparisons across years are difficult to make.

Learning from Practitioners' visit reports

Goal one: School staff have increased understanding of the benefits of music activity for pupils

- Practitioners' visit reports provided some evidence that teachers were seeing the benefits of music activity for their pupils and, as a result, making changes to their practice. For example, some teachers were using songs to support pupils' learning in other curriculum areas. At times, Practitioners highlighted progress being made by individual pupils in their visit reports.

"I was very interested to hear how the rhyme 'Mice, Mice' had inspired children's poetry writing."
Practitioner visit report

"You talked about what you think have been particularly positive points about the programme - everyone can have a go and achieve and you see children taking ownership which has been very motivating for them."
Practitioner visit report

"Did you notice the sense of achievement they had at learning a new song?"
Practitioner visit report

Goal two: School staff have increased desire to provide music education in the classroom

- There was limited evidence for this goal in visit reports. Where evidence did occur, it came in the form of Practitioners noticing that teachers were preparing well for visits and bringing their own ideas to sessions. Some Practitioners reported knowing that teachers were delivering music activity outside of the Voices Foundation visits because they could see the progress that had been made by the teacher and pupils. These behaviours suggest that some teachers had a desire to teach music, but it was difficult to say whether desire was increasing over time.

"I loved it that [child's name] sang his greeting to me immediately! That tells me loads about how much you are doing with your class and how at ease and confident they are with it"
Practitioner visit report

"You started with a warm up of Higgledy Piggledy which sounds really strong thanks to your regular singing with them"
Practitioner visit report



Goal three: School staff have improved confidence to lead music and singing activities

- Visit reports showed that, over time, participants' trepidation was being replaced with enjoyment and confidence. At times, teachers demonstrated increased confidence by using new resources that hadn't been recommended by the Practitioner.

"You mentioned that you have a lot more confidence in teaching a song and a game."
Practitioner visit report

"Well done for exploring new repertoire today."
Practitioner visit report

- For some teachers, increased confidence appeared to follow on from building musical skills and knowledge. The order in which participants achieve our targeted outcomes is an area for further investigation. It is possible that gaining new musical skills may lead to increased confidence to deliver music, which may in turn lead to an increased desire to deliver music.

Goal four: School staff have increased knowledge and skills to teach music effectively

- Teachers were increasing in knowledge and skills to teach music. This was apparent in every visit report. The progress was often cumulative, and teachers sometimes took several sessions to develop and master a new skill. For some teachers, praise increased and was more evident in later visit reports as they had had more time to learn and implement new skills.

"You are consistently using a good higher pitch now."
Practitioner visit report

Data source: Analysis of visit reports, written by Voices Foundation Practitioners for participants.

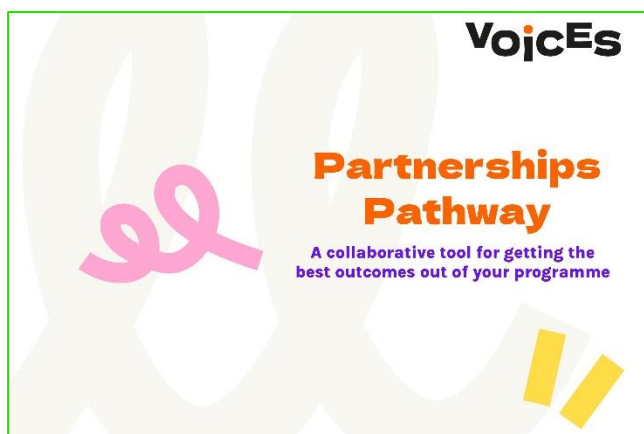
Summary

The staff survey found that school staff understood the benefits of music activity for pupils, and there was some evidence for increases in this area in visit reports. However, far fewer staff reported *wanting* to provide music activity themselves, and visit reports provided sparse evidence for this. Understanding the factors that affect motivation to deliver music activity is an area for further exploration. It may link to the lack of capacity and security teachers feel to deliver music, identified in the previous section. Not all staff felt confident and skilled to deliver music activity at the end of the year, but visit reports suggested that this was increasing across staff throughout the year.

Spotlight: The Partnerships Pathway: Improving participants' experiences and outcomes by creating collaborative, co-learning partnerships with our schools

The Partnerships Pathway was created following an evaluation of Voices Foundation's long-term school programmes, which was led by Sound Connections and Birmingham City University, and undertaken in collaboration with the pupils and staff at six David Ross Education Trust primary schools based across Hull, Grimsby, Northampton, and Kettering from 2018-2021.^{xv} This evaluation found that in some cases, teachers and senior leaders in our school programmes did not fully understand the rationale behind the Voices Foundation programme or its potential outcomes, which led to lower levels of buy in and commitment. This presented a significant barrier to maximising the potential impact of the programme and ensuring that music teaching and learning would be embedded in the schools in the long term. In order to address these barriers, we created the Partnerships Pathway.

The Partnerships Pathway is a collaborative Continuing Professional Development and Learning tool that enables us to explore, plan, and reflect with schools on the learning and impact that our programme is enabling. It is designed to be used by all programme stakeholders: senior school leaders, class teachers, teaching assistants, school support staff, and Voices Foundation staff. It aims to give everyone a clear, shared vision about the intended programme outcomes.



By meeting with all school staff at the very beginning of the partnership to discuss the learning and development goals of the Voices Foundation programme and how each person involved can contribute to achieving those, we aim to help everyone understand the important role that they play in the programme and its success. We then have termly check-ins with the school's senior leaders and music leads to track progress and adapt the programme as necessary in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

In 2020-21, we piloted our Partnerships Pathway process with five Voices Foundation schools. We found that the Partnerships Pathway helped to build whole-school investment in the Voices Foundation programme, helped to keep music on the agenda in schools throughout the year, and supported Voices Foundation and schools to create collaborative, equitable partnerships. This year, we continued to embed the Pathway across all new Voices Foundation schools. We also piloted the process with a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) for the first time. In addition to holding conversations with school staff to gain their feedback on the Pathway, we analysed notes taken during Partnerships Pathway meetings with schools. As a result, we learned that:

School staff's investment in Voices Foundation programmes is complex and affected by several factors:

- Our evidence suggests that the Partnerships Pathway plays a role in increasing school staff investment in Voices Foundation programmes. However, it's difficult to say how big this role is.
- Other factors can also affect investment. For example, we saw that when school senior leadership teams have musical experience or previous awareness of Voices Foundation's programmes, the programme tended to run smoothly. Meanwhile, schools that were facing issues such as a high staff turnover, the head being new in post, or other new curriculums being simultaneously introduced, were more likely to encounter challenges and show lower levels of investment.
- Going forwards, we have included a question about the risk factors mentioned in the bullet point above in the initial Partnerships Pathway meeting we have with schools – so that we can discuss with the school whether these challenges exist, and if so, how we might work together to mitigate them.

The Partnerships Pathway did not work effectively with the Multi-Academy Trust that took part in our pilot.

- The Voices Foundation programme was implemented in a standardised format across the MAT that we worked with, with no variation for individual differences among the schools. However, levels of existing music provision and expertise in the schools were varied and schools within the MAT had differing needs.



Data source: End of year learning conversations held with Multi-Academy Trust Directors, school senior leaders, and school music leads at schools taking part in the Partnerships Pathway process, combined with analysis of notes from schools' Partnerships Pathway meetings.

- Although we used the Partnerships Pathway with individual schools within the MAT, we failed to create collaborative partnerships with all schools. The music delivery for the year had been set and school staff on the ground hadn't had opportunity to shape the programme delivery. Whilst the programme was successful in some schools, other schools – particularly those with higher levels of existing music expertise – didn't feel that the programme was needed and investment was low.

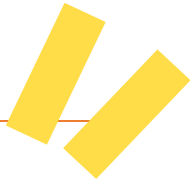
We need to adapt our processes for working with Multi-Academy Trusts by:

- Building relationships with staff working in each school within a MAT, as well as the MAT leaders.
- Considering each school within a MAT as an individual and working on the ground to understand the needs in each context – a one size fits all approach may not work.
- In addition to confirming the design and delivery of a programme with MAT leaders, we need to give school senior leadership teams and school music leads strategic ownership of the programme in its design and development phase.

There are other improvements we can make to the Partnerships Pathway, including:

- Where possible, delivering work in person rather than on Zoom. Some schools felt that programme launches held over Zoom were more awkward and less impactful.
- Booking in meetings at the start of the year and ensuring that check-in meetings are as efficient as possible. One school reported that these meetings felt repetitive, and another reported that they felt out of sync with the fast pace of schools.
- Ensuring the goals of our different programme activities (musicianship and choral) are clear.
- Including more support for schools transitioning between different years of a programme to help them feel confident the work is sustainable.

During 2021-22, we shared learning on piloting and implementing our Partnerships Pathway process at the Music and Drama Education Exposition, held in London, and the British Educational Research Association annual conference, held in Liverpool.



Pupils' experiences

Whilst we focus on working with the adults who influence children's lives, our ultimate aim is to improve pupils' access to a high-quality music education that supports their development and increases their learning and skills. We're therefore interested in pupils' experiences of music activity, and this year, we conducted an in-depth case study with a large Voices Foundation school to better understand how pupils feel about taking part in singing and music lessons at school. The school was taking part in their first year of a Voices Foundation programme. We conducted a survey with pupils at the start of year to provide a baseline measurement, and again at the end of the year to see if there had been any changes. The results are below.

Case Study: Pupils' perceptions in one Voices Foundation school

Beginning of the year	→	End of the year
73%	of children report that singing makes them happy	72%
73%	of children report that they are good at singing	73%
70%	of children report that singing can help them to remember things	75%
66%	of children report liking school more when they sing	63%
70%	of children report liking singing with other people	73%

These results are from one school, and therefore may not be representative of other Voices Foundation schools. In 2020-21, Voices Foundation conducted this pupil survey once during the year with three Voices Foundation schools who had all been taking part in the programme for three years or more. The results were between 2 and 13 percentage points higher than the end of year result from 2021-22, displayed to the right. This may be because singing is more embedded in the culture of schools who have taken part in the programme over several years.

Data source: Pupil survey, conducted with KS1 and KS2 pupils in a large primary school at the beginning and end of their first year of a Voices Foundation programme. The results are based on 277 responses.



As part of our case study, we asked pupils to look at the pictures below and select three faces that show how they feel when they sing at school. The purple shows the percentage of pupils who selected each face as one of their three faces at the beginning of the year. The orange number shows children's responses at the end of the year.



Data source: Pupil survey, conducted with KS2 pupils in a large primary school at the beginning and end of their first year of a Voices Foundation programme. The results are based on 139 responses.

We asked children to explain why they had chosen the faces above and grouped their responses into themes. The themes that we found at the end of the year, followed by example quotes from each theme, are below. The number in brackets indicates the number of children who said something relating to that theme.

Theme 1: Singing is good for me

- **I feel happy singing (32)**

*"Singing makes me feel happy and content."
"I feel happy when I'm singing."*

- **I like singing at school (20)**

*"I love singing."
"I like singing and sometimes it makes me laugh."*

- **Singing makes me feel calm (10)**

*"When I sing I feel good and calm."
"It makes me calm and it's very exciting to learn more songs in school."*

- **I like singing with friends (8)**

*"When I sing with my friends it makes me happy."
"I love it when we sing as a class."*

- **I feel confident singing (8)**

*"I am always very confident when singing and I love it."
"I feel confident about singing."*

- **I'm good at singing (6)**

*"I am good at singing and it is one of my talents and I also enjoy it because my friends don't judge me when I do sing."
"I'm very good at singing."*

- **It's fun and I like the songs (6)**

*"I love nice and catchy songs, I think I am a good singer (sometimes)."
"I like singing and it is fun to sing. Singing makes me happy. I like learning new singing things."*

- **It makes me feel silly (5)**

*"Singing makes me ok, calm and we get a chance to be a bit silly so silly."
"It makes me feel happy and silly."*

- **It makes me feel good (5)**

*"Singing makes me feel good about myself and because it is really cool to sing together."
"I feel excellent when I'm singing and I feel good when I sing and I feel cool when I sing."*

Smaller themes included it can help me with words (3), I like singing at events (3), it makes me feel cool (2), it makes me feel smart (1), and it can help me to remember things (1).

Theme 2: Singing at school can be challenging

- **I don't like singing (31)**

*"I don't like singing most of the time."
"I hate singing."*

- **I feel anxious/scared/embarrassed when singing (21)**

*"I don't really like singing because it makes me feel embarrassed."
"I get really nervous when singing because I'm not that good."*

- **Singing in front of others is hard (11)**

*"Sometimes I get scared because I don't like singing in front of people."
"I'm nervous singing in case people laugh at me."*

- **I'm not good at singing (4)**

*"I don't really know how to sing and I don't like singing."
"When I'm singing I feel really nervous and I feel like I'm about to cry because I feel like my voice (in singing) is really bad and I don't really like singing aloud and I get really frustrated if I don't get it right."*

- **Sometimes I don't like the songs (4)**

*"Sometimes the songs aren't brilliant but when they are good, I enjoy singing."
"Sometimes the songs that we have to sing are creepy so I kind of dread singing but other than that I enjoy singing in the end of year play for example."*

- **It's too noisy (3)**

"I don't like singing because it is too noisy."

Other smaller themes included I can feel tired (3), sometimes I don't feel good singing at school (2) sometimes I feel sad (2) I feel silenced (1) and other children say they don't like singing (1).

Theme 3: I have mixed feelings about singing

- **I have mixed feelings about singing (22)**

*"Sometimes I get sad when I sing because it makes me tired and scared. Sometimes I like it and sometimes I'm not sure"
"When I sing it makes me happy and also makes me feel nervous."
"I like singing but I don't like it a lot and other times I hate it."*

- **It changes depending on how I feel**

"I change when I feel happy about myself."

Summary

The numerical survey data from KS1 and KS2 pupils remained fairly stable from the beginning of the year to the end. There was an increase in the proportion of children who like singing with others and feel that singing can help them to remember things, but a small decrease in the proportion of children who like school more when they sing.

KS2 children's feelings about singing at school, as indicated by the faces they selected, were also fairly consistent. The number of children selecting the first face on the first row increased by 8 percentage points, but children selecting the third face on the first row, which also displays a positive emotion, decreased by 8 percentage points. Children selecting the fourth face from the left on the second row and the second face from the left on the third row increased by 10 and 7 percentage points, respectively. All the faces may be interpreted differently by different children, but these two faces suggest uneasiness or worry, and may indicate that an increased proportion of children felt more anxious about singing at the end of the year, compared with the beginning. This may simply reflect the increased presence of music in school life - and that for children who find singing challenging - it is now more salient in their minds.

In their written responses when asked to indicate why they had selected their chosen faces, many children reported positive experiences of singing at school, including how it helps them to feel happy, calm, and confident. Some children expressed feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and embarrassment around singing, and some children captured both positive and negative feelings about singing, showing the nuance in children's experiences, and how these may be shaped by the context, people involved, and type of song.

There was a lot going on in the world when this case study took place, and it's possible that the results reflect children responding to the pressures around them. Children have experienced huge disruption to their education throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and schools are seeing long-term impacts on children's confidence. We know that singing in front of others can feel scary, and it may be particularly difficult following a period of social isolation where children were unable to interact with others. Going forward, it would be interesting to understand whether there are links between how children feel about singing and their overall mental health. We would also like to know how children's thoughts about music compare with their thoughts about other areas of the curriculum, such as maths or sport, for example. Finally, we'd like to compare children's experiences of taking part in music activity with teachers' reports of their progress and achievement in the subject.



Spotlight: The benefits of music activity for children experiencing disadvantage:

We know from research that participating in music activities can be beneficial for children – increasing their learning, supporting their wellbeing, and fostering vital social, emotional, and cognitive skills.ⁱⁱ However, less is known about whether children benefit equally from participating in music activity. For example, do children experiencing disadvantage (broadly defined) benefit more, less or the same as their more advantaged peers? Could taking part in music activity mitigate some of the challenges that children experiencing disadvantage face? In collaboration with the pupils and staff at six David Ross Education Trust (DRET) primary schools based across Hull, Grimsby, Northampton, and Kettering, Voices Foundation sought to explore these questions. From 2018 to 2021, we delivered and tested our Singing Schools model with these schools. The Singing Schools model is an intensive teacher development programme that supports schools to embed daily singing into school life. This work was generously supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and our programme activities were evaluated by Sound Connections and Birmingham City University.^{xv} Our evaluation indicated that the Singing Schools programme could provide a tool for learning that is accessible to children experiencing disadvantage, as well as supporting their language and communication skills.

A chance to shine

School staff regarded singing as an activity that pupils experiencing disadvantage could succeed in, where elsewhere in school they may struggle. For pupils who lack confidence in core curriculum subjects, or for whom more traditional learning approaches create a barrier, the Singing Schools programme created a ‘way in’. One school leader described this as ‘providing a more accessible avenue of success’.

“Because of the simplicity of singing they can just dive in. [There] isn't the barrier there of reading, writing, maths, they just have to open their mouths and they're doing it. They put their hands up to volunteer, [it's] their way of showing they can contribute to the class. They don't feel that in other lessons.” **Teacher**

“Pupils who don't find academic subjects easy have been able to shine in Singing School lessons.” **Teacher**

“[There are] certain pupils, whether Pupil Premium or SEND who really came to life. Sometimes they struggle with the academic side of things. This gives them a really good opportunity to be themselves.” **Senior Leader**

The inclusion of music-based learning into daily classroom activities may therefore increase engagement and motivation and facilitate active participation – creating an environment where learning can take place. Songs about counting or times tables, for example, may help children with their maths. Teaching through music could therefore in turn increase pupils' learning in non-music subjects. Across all schools in the study, the proportion of pupils who were predicted to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths did increase throughout the duration of the Singing Schools programme. Whilst this is very positive, DRET were simultaneously implementing four other initiatives to support reading, writing, or maths. It's therefore difficult to conclude whether any of this change can be attributed directly to the Singing Schools programme.

Improving Language and Communication

School staff explained how the Singing Schools programme supported children's language and communication. This was particularly helpful for children experiencing disadvantage. Research shows that children from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds have significant disparities in language processing efficiency compared with their more advantaged peers.^{xvi} They are predicted to have been exposed to as many as 1.4 million fewer words than more privileged children by the time they start school.^{xvii} Singing is a way of introducing pupils to new words that they may not have encountered at home.

“Pupils come into school with a high language deprivation. Way behind pupils from middle class families. Exposure through Voices Foundation to different words and being able to apply them, [we] have seen that transfer in reading and writing. Pupils [are] explaining words to parents.” **Senior Leader**

“Really powerful for EAL students... for them to be able to take part... [it's] really impacted their reading, writing, vocab knowledge and comprehension.” **Teacher**

There were also particular benefits for children with speech and communication difficulties. Whilst teachers couldn't attribute change fully to the Singing Schools programme, they did feel that it contributed.

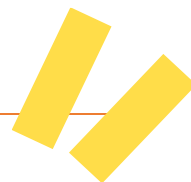
"I have a child who has ASD [autism spectrum disorder] and he loves to sing. At the beginning of the year he would hardly communicate. Since Singing Schools he stands in front of the class and sings. He's got that confidence and it's really helped him to feel part of something." **Teacher**

"One pupil in my class had speech and language difficulties. Singing was one of those things he loved... For him it gives him something that he can do, that he doesn't have to be worried about. The comparison [with other pupils] isn't there - in maths and English he can't do all the work, whereas in singing it gives him a feeling of equality. By the time we finished [the programme] his behaviour was so much better, concentrating better in lessons. [I can't say] whether or not [it was] entirely due to singing - but it will have been a part of it. His self-confidence was increased. He normally would struggle to remember things but with singing he seemed to be able to learn it better." **Teacher**

"Definitely for the pupils in my areas, [it] helped with communication and vocab. A song flows better than how they would say a sentence - [they] can express themselves through singing but with speaking they are more rigid." **Teacher**

In sum, our evaluation indicated that the Singing Schools programme provided an accessible method through which children experiencing disadvantage could learn. Furthermore, it played a key role in supporting their language and communication skills. We were unable to conclude whether the benefits observed translated into improved educational attainment for disadvantaged children, and if so, whether they progressed more, less or the same as their more advantaged peers. Such questions are difficult to answer. Pre- and post-project test measures showing positive change should be treated with caution - as children get older, you would expect their attainment to increase. As schools often run multiple interventions, distinguishing the effects of one over another is also tricky. Despite these challenges, in the case of this work, it is very encouraging to see that music activity created an environment where pupils experiencing disadvantage could participate, as a child cannot learn if this is not in place.





Case studies: Long-term in-school programmes

Eastfield Academy, David Ross Education Trust

Eastfield Academy, part of the David Ross Education Trust, is a single form primary school with nursery provision in Northampton. The school serves a diverse community: 50.6% of pupils have English as an additional language and 29.4% are eligible for free school meals. The school has been taking part in Voices Foundations' Singing Schools programme for the last three years. As a result of their long-term investment in music learning, Eastfield Academy have embedded a culture of singing across the school.

"The CPD has provided a common ground for all staff. The staff meeting sessions are fun and enjoyable - the Voices Foundation Practitioner is the master of getting everyone involved! The songs and resources shared are very relevant and easy for staff to take straight back into the classroom. This has developed both skill and confidence; staff are willing to have a go and are usually much better than they think they are. Class visits are supportive and provide really purposeful feedback with next steps as needed. The choral strand continues to raise expectations across the classes involved. CPD for our music leaders is excellent and they have both made superb progress from very different starting points as the CPD is crafted for the individual." **Clair Mills, Headteacher**

The increase in teachers' skills and confidence has meant that pupils have access to high-quality music education.

Our children love to sing! We sing daily in class, in choir and in weekly singing assemblies. Children's musical skills have definitely improved and we can see this progression moving through the school. Our EAL pupils enjoy singing and the programme enables them to join in slightly better than in some other lessons... The exposure to singing and the choral sessions mean pupils have higher aspirations and think nothing of going to events such as opera trips etc. Recent singing assemblies have focussed on singing in mixed age groups and they are a joy to watch!! I have thoroughly enjoyed watching everyone's confidence grow in music/singing at Eastfield. I am so proud of everyone and you cannot beat the feeling of hearing/watching the whole school sing together. Hearing the staff and children sing is just part of Eastfield now and I hope it stays that way. **Clair Mills, Headteacher**

Lane End Primary School

Lane End Primary School is a large school based in Leeds. In the school, 44.2% of pupils are eligible for pupil premium support and 60% have English as an additional language. Over 30 languages are spoken by children in the school.

The school started Voices Foundation's Musical Foundations programme in January 2022. In the short period of time between then and the end of the academic year, the school had made strong progress. In Voices Foundation's check-in meeting with the school, staff reported that children across the school were showing signs of improved confidence, including increased participation and volunteering ideas in lessons. Furthermore, staff shared that they were finding the programme accessible. They liked being able to deliver music activity little and often, which meant that it wasn't too overwhelming and there was no pressure for them to timetable large blocks of music activity into the school day.

"We now have music at least 3 times a week as the scheme allows for staff to pick up songs and teach them at any point in the day. Our motto in school is 'do less better' and Voices Foundation definitely caters to this. The pupils have gained more self-esteem and confidence. I have even seen these skills being transferred into other subject areas, for example, maths. It really has had a positive impact on the pupils." **Amy Nelson, Music Lead**

Next year, Lane End Primary School will take part in a full academic year's programme. Over the past year, one class per year group received in-classroom visits from a Voices Foundation Practitioner. Next year, all class teachers will receive visits. Amy, the school's Music Lead, continues to work on gaining full buy-in from school staff.

"I am still working on staff buy in and making music a subject area that is seen as as important as other subjects. Voices Foundation has definitely helped with this and more staff are enjoying music and seeing it as a worthwhile lesson." **Amy Nelson, Music Lead**



Case studies: Fixed-term training

ArtForms Leeds

Voices Foundation partnered with Artforms Leeds to deliver two in-person three-hour workshops. ArtForms Leeds is a music and arts service working with children, young people, families, and schools. The first training session was for staff from ArtForms Leeds and the Leeds Music Education Partnership and aimed to build attendees' understanding of how to engage children, teach musical skills through singing, and develop children's voices. In total, 40 Music Hub staff attended. The second session aimed to support primary school teachers to feel confident and skilled to teach music effectively through singing and deliver a high-quality music education that is in line with the Model Music Curriculum (MMC). The session was attended by 20 Music Leads working in primary schools across Leeds.

The feedback collected from both sessions was extremely positive. ArtForms reported that the content of the sessions was excellent, the intended learning objectives were met, and session leader was fantastic. Feedback collected from session attendees was also very positive.

"The Voices Foundation Practitioner did an excellent summary of the MMC and referred back to it throughout the session... Thanks again. We love working with Voices Foundation and with the Voices Foundation Practitioner who is just brilliant". **ArtForms Leeds**

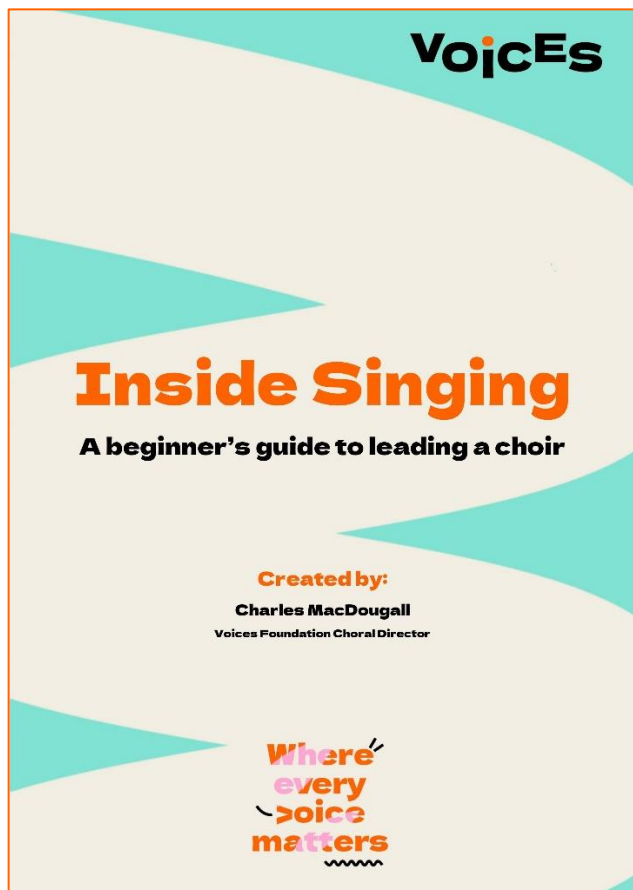
"The Voices Foundation Practitioner was the most animated course trainer I have met and her training was one of the BEST I have been on. I learnt so much and found it so inspiring. **School music lead**

"I have already been thinking about the ways that I can implement some of the techniques in school and will cascade these to other teachers in the school to allow children to develop their musicianship and musical skills. I really liked the links to vocabulary too. Thank you so much for an excellent course." **School music lead**

"I have already been around to my EYFS and KS1 staff this morning and asked them to introduce the 'Hey Hey' and 'Hello how are you?' [songs] into each day to give the children practice little and often. I have also requested staff meeting time to feedback to KS2." **School music lead**



Case studies: Resources



Inside Singing: A beginner's guide to leading a choir

Inside Singing is a repertoire resource for primary schools. It was created in response to the stark lack of accessible and suitably pitched resources available to help primary school teachers to lead age-appropriate songs with their pupils.

Inside Singing contains a collection of ten diverse songs and accompanying activities to help school staff learn and teach each one. The songs come from different cultures and countries around the world and are suitable for whole school singing assemblies, classroom singing, year group choirs, and aspirational choirs. The songs follow a progression suitable for the entry level choir leader, starting with call and response and then moving on to simple unison, before exploring three and four-part rounds and partner songs. Each song contains downloadable audio files to support learning, as well as a set of learning zones, which provide teaching guidance and ideas for introducing and developing the material. Three supplementary videos support school staff with the practicalities of leading singing with a group of primary school age children, including warming up, teaching a song, and refining a song.

Our evaluation of Inside Singing found that the resource supported teachers' confidence to deliver music activity and filled a gap not being met by other resources. Teachers reported that the resource was accessible, the accompanying vocal tracks were helpful, and that pupils responded well to the songs.

"The vocal audio tracks have been very useful in learning the songs myself to then teach to the children. Repetition within these tracks has been helpful and time saving, e.g., having the song played 2-3 times in a row, allowing me to listen and join in with the song and gain in confidence each time, meaning less time spent restarting the track. The warm-ups have been a useful resource, providing warm up activities using skills relevant to the repertoire and therefore linking to the song you will be teaching the children." **Music lead**

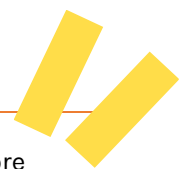
"I have really enjoyed the songs from the book, they are from various genres and allow the development of a range of musical skills." **Music lead**

"I've not really seen books like this before. Whoever [my school] had music from before, they bought so many programmes and stuff... They're all just very long songs with a very complicated accompaniment, which makes it hard to teach kids 'cause you've got so much you have to do yourself before you even start helping them."

Music lead

"I really enjoy the songs and the children react incredibly well to them. They find them fun and engaging." **Music lead**

"The resource is laid out clearly and the links make it easy to find material quickly." **Music lead**



Reflections

Catherine Hatcher Learning and Impact Manager

Over the past four years, Voices Foundation has increased its investment in learning. An in-depth evaluation of our programmes, led by Sound Connections and Birmingham City University in 2018-2021, provided a launch pad for deeper engagement with and reflection on the quality and impact of what we do. Since then, we have created a Theory of Change and embedded a new evaluation framework in our work. We are grateful to Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and others who wish to remain anonymous, for their generous support towards our learning activity.

Reflections on the learning process

Evaluating our work is a learning process and we are continually striving to improve. This year, we decreased the number of school surveys conducted from three to two, in attempt to reduce demands on teachers' time and increase response rates. We also reduced the number of questions and made some questions more specific. The response rates increased (2020/21: Jan: 64, Apr: 55, July: 32, compared with 2021/22: Feb: 165, July: 124). Despite this increase, we know that we didn't hear from many teachers, and these participants may be less engaged or feel less positively about our work.

As a team over the year, we reviewed 688 Practitioner visit reports, which gave rich insights into participants' experiences and the outcomes being achieved. As what you see in evaluation data somewhat reflects who you are, we benefited from a diverse range of perspectives and experiences being involved in this review, including the full office team and our Choral and Musicianship Directors. Voices Foundation Practitioners are required to complete visit reports, meaning the return rate is very high and analysing this information provides a holistic picture of our work, albeit only from the Practitioner's perspective.

For the first time this year, we also analysed schools' Partnerships Pathway documents, where notes from our meetings with schools are recorded. Whilst schools may frame their words more positively than if they were reporting anonymously, we felt these meetings did enable Voices Foundation and schools to create an open, ongoing dialogue, and analysing meeting notes helped us to see patterns across programmes. All the data collection methods discussed have strengths and limitations, but by utilising varied sources, we have been able to gain multiple perspectives on our

questions, corroborate evidence, and feel more confident about the conclusions made.

Reflections on our findings

Our findings suggest that our work has made a positive difference to the educators who participated, and we are making progress towards achieving our vision of a country where all children have access to high-quality music education. There is much still to be done, and going forward, we know we will need do more to improve the extent to which teachers feel secure and have capacity to lead music in their classrooms.

Despite the challenges reported, reading the survey responses from school staff was a joy. Many described in detail the benefits they were seeing the programme create for themselves and their pupils. Beyond the words used, the depth of their answers and the enthusiasm with which they were writing, in the context of a busy school life, conveyed something about the positive impact of taking part in a Voices Foundation programme.

Reviewing the data from pupils raised several questions. Our primary aim is that children have access to music education, but we are curious about the wider effects of participation in music activity for pupils. Whilst the benefits of taking part in music activity are documented in research,ⁱⁱ pupils' own thoughts about singing at school have been less well explored. Hearing children's voices is important to us. We wanted to find an accessible way of enabling children to report openly how they feel about singing and opted to present them with a selection of emojis that would help them to reflect on their feelings. We were surprised to see how anxious some children feel about singing. This is particularly concerning as some teachers who lack confidence to deliver music activity trace this back to negative experiences at school, where they felt embarrassed singing.^{xv} The last thing we want to do is contribute to pupils feeling anxious about singing, as these pupils may grow up to be teachers who feel nervous about delivering music education for the next generation of pupils. We want to better understand *why* some pupils feel anxious about singing so that, where possible, we can put mitigating strategies in place. Further work is needed and reducing pupil anxiety around singing may require the efforts of our whole sector.

Thank you for reading our report. Voices Foundation wants to learn together with others considering similar questions to us. If you have reflections on the topics covered, we would love to hear your thoughts.

Looking ahead

Looking ahead to 2022/23, we will continue our journey as a learning organisation. In particular, we aim to:

- Continue to improve our programmes and products, based on the learning we have gained over the past year. We know that we will need to continue working together with schools to find solutions to the challenges around having time to implement music into the school day and feeling secure to deliver music activity. We also want to better understand pupils' feelings about singing and assess how we can reduce anxiety.
- Explore how we can further embed a collaborative, co-learning approach to our work with schools and teachers. We are interested in investigating the extent to which it's possible to support school staff to lead their own enquiries into the relationship between music activity and the benefits for pupils, what factors contribute to and hinder success in this area, and if successful, how participating in this type of enquiry impacts teachers' own learning and investment in Voices Foundation's CPDL programme.
- Increase participant involvement in Voices Foundation's decision making. From 2022-23, we are establishing a Teacher Advisory Group so that we can better utilise the lived experience of our participants in our programme, product, and evaluation design. We believe that this will enable us to better tailor our work to participants' needs, and in the long-term, enable us to increase impact.



This report was written in October 2022 by Catherine Hatcher, Voices Foundation's Learning and Impact Manager, with the input of colleagues from across the charity.

Notes

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