

'Artistic Aspirations' - Music is for YOU!

Abbie Houston - Seaburn Dene Primary School

All About Us

Aspiration, Determination, Respect, Kindness: our school values.

At Seaburn Dene Primary School, music is valued: one of our four curriculum drivers is entirely focused on the arts; however, the Covid-19 pandemic practically decimated our practice. The report, 'The heart of the school is missing: Music education in the Covid-19 crisis' [ISM: 2020] found that during lockdown, music learning broadly only took place when access to technology was available, or parents/ carers could afford virtual instrumental lessons. When schools were reopened to all pupils, guidance on safe practices was published late and debilitating restrictions were placed on singing and sharing resources.

In September 2021, we started to rebuild and by July 2022 had re-established our singing assembly, peripatetic music lessons and whole-class teaching timetable. In September 2022, we set our sights higher: how could we raise the aspirations of our children and help them to understand that a career in music is within their reach?

The Vision

When I took over the music coordinator role at Seaburn Dene, I realised that our children struggled to see beyond their class music lessons and weekly instrumental teaching; music was a hobby and didn't feature in long-term plans. In particular, classical music was viewed as being for 'other' people and any exposure to it resulted in somewhat nervous and silly behaviour. I worked with the rest of the Senior Management Team to theorise on how this could be improved. We all agreed that if children could interact with professional musicians in person, it would help them to understand the future possibilities for themselves.

The Project

Sunderland Music Hub informed me of a pilot project taking place with MishMash Productions, where classical musicians would be placed in primary schools to become part of the community. MishMash's intention is to 'transform perceptions of what classical music could and should be, particularly for young and family audiences'.

We were connected with Dov (clarinet) and Alanna (violin) who have both played for the Royal Northern Sinfonia. They were scheduled to spend half a day at our school for ten weeks and would involve themselves in school life - what that would look like in practice was up for discussion. We decided as a group that Dov and Alanna would spend most of their sessions working with small groups of children from Years 2-6 who had been chosen for their potential musical aspirations, motivation to follow them and potential lack of exposure to classical repertoire previously. These sessions would be linked with art to further round children's creative knowledge. Dov and Alanna would also perform during independent learning sessions in Early Years and Year 1 and in the dining hall during lunch service.

The Challenges

Primary school timetables are crammed with the content of the broad and balanced curriculum we all strive to provide for our children. Every subject has a curriculum lead with their own agenda and priorities. Staff continue to focus their efforts on closing gaps that Covid left behind. In short, it is difficult to ring-fence time, access staffing and secure the buy-in required to make a project such as this one successful. The structure of the short,



fortnightly intervention sessions, lunchtime concerts and performances during independent learning meant that disruption to whole-class teaching was minimal; this also meant that the requirement for teaching staff buy-in at the outset was nominal.

The Successes

Dov and Alanna quickly became 'famous': places in the nurture groups were coveted and everyone was keen to spend time with the newest members of our team. To enable more children to work with them, we introduced 'workshop' sessions at lunchtime, where children could read and listen, play a percussion instrument, or have a hands-on introduction to the violin or clarinet. The immediate result of this was an increase in numbers for our peripatetic music tuition.

The performances in Early Years led to children making and playing instruments during independent learning and the nurture groups provided an opportunity for children to make links between artists and composers from similar periods of time, plus some opportunities to enhance their geographical knowledge.

The most obvious impact for me became apparent at our 'celebration' event, when we took thirty children from the nurture groups to watch the Northern Sinfonia rehearse. Alanna greeted the children then took her place on the stage. The final piece of the jigsaw slotted into place: the children were finally able to see that Alanna is not only a member of our school community, but a professional musician who earns a living playing the violin. The difference in the children's attitude towards classical music was also lovely to see: they sat quietly, respectfully, focussed and all spoke about their enjoyment afterwards.



The Future

We are incredibly grateful to Sunderland Music Hub and MishMash Productions for the opportunity to take part in this pilot. We would love to continue with the project longer term and have Dov and Alanna in school for an extended period of time. We would use this opportunity to involve parents and use our evaluations from the adults and children involved in the pilot to shape opportunities with even more impact. In the meantime, we are keeping our 'artistic aspirations' momentum going:

we have recently taken our older children to see a hip-hop/ beatboxing play at the Theatre Royal in Newcastle and are currently rehearsing for a Year 3/4/5 musical with a live band. Classical music continues to increase its profile through classroom listening opportunities.



<http://www.mishmashproductions.co.uk/>

<https://sunderlandmusichub.org.uk/>

<https://sagegateshead.com/royal-northern-sinfonia/>

https://www.ism.org/images/files/ISM_UK-Music-Teachers-survey-report_Dec-2020_A4_ONLINE-2.pdf