

# A Sound Start



Music, movement and storytelling  
at Altmore Infant School

End of project report, summer 2014

**‘A Sound Start’ involved the delivery of music workshops in 4 Nursery and 5 Reception classes every week at Altmore Infant School in East Ham, London Borough of Newham. Sessions were 45 minutes long and included a mixture of singing, storytelling, instrumental activities, and movement.**

The costs of the programme were met through a combination of direct funding from the school, funding from Youth Music, plus a contribution from The Ingles Charitable Trust.

***“The continued involvement of the EYFS with this program has played a part in enabling our end of EYFS outcomes to rise by 16% at the end of 2013-14”***

- Carolyn Marles, head of school

In addition to Creative Futures’ own monitoring, the project was evaluated by Dr Jo Saunders from the Institute of Education.



**The school has 96% of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and high levels of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as learning delay.**

**The objectives of the project were:**

- To improve the personal, social and emotional development of young children at higher risk of delay through participation in creative musical activity.
- To improve the communication, language and literacy development of young children at higher risk of delay through participation in creative musical activity
- To improve the quality and standards of music delivery for children and young people.
- To embed learning and effective practice in host and partner organisations and share practice beyond the project.

## **Workshops included the following activities:**

- Singing: traditional and improvised songs; nursery rhymes and songs from around the world
- Instrumental activities: involving instruments available at the school
- Storytelling: creating and telling stories, with some use of puppets and toys
- Movement and dance

A key consideration in planning sessions was the curriculum topics that groups would be studying and we included a variety of activities that enhanced and embedded the learning of students.

For example, in the topic about the emergency services:

We picked up the idea of 'heartbeats' to frame rhythm work

We used the sound of sirens to model vocal warm ups

We used items from a doctor's kit to work on syllables and word stress

In an animals topic:

We sang songs with about different types of animal, such as *I Have a Little Spider, Mr Bear* etc.

In a food topic:

We created a samba piece using the names of different foods

We used a story that the class was reading, *The Gingerbread Man*, as a stimulus for composition, creating soundscapes and

We also considered how a holistically devised creative programme would meet the objectives of the EYFS Framework:

### **Communication and Language**

**Listening** and **attention** are developed while listening to, and appraising, music and giving a musical response; in copying phrases or rhythms back; in turn-taking; and through waiting for the right moment to join in with the music, or when responding to a conductor.

**Understanding** is reinforced when music is added to stories, or actions to songs.

**Speaking** is enhanced by exposure to new vocabulary and structures, and pronunciation by work on the sounds (phonics) and syllables of words, and the natural rhythm of language.

### **Physical Development**

**Moving and handling** development includes the use of locomotor movements in dance, the use of fine and gross motor skills with soft play materials and a variety of instrumental playing techniques

**Health and self-care** is promoted through the use of dance.

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

**Self-confidence and self-awareness** is built through singing and dancing together and in front of others, and through mirroring activities. Time is always allowed for children to share their thoughts and responses and to contribute suggestions for new actions, lyrics or performance decisions.

**Managing feelings and behaviour** We use song as a means of expressing how we are feeling, singing about our moods and emotions, and respecting those of the others in the group.

**Making relationships** when using instruments we highlight the importance of taking turns, and children experience leading the group through conducting.

### **Literacy**

Aural discrimination is vital for blending phonics; and performing actions without words (and vice versa) prepares children for the internalizing needed for silent reading. We also work on creative writing, both word substitution in song lyrics and writing new poems.

### **Mathematics**

In addition to songs that have counting in the lyrics, music is also naturally full of repetition, pattern, sequence and ratio. In some units we also create simple graphic scores to visually represent music.

### **Understanding the World**

We sing about our daily routine, our physical environment and use instruments and songs from different cultures.

### **Expressive Arts and Design**

We make our own instruments, develop characters and scenes from stories, use a variety of stimuli for children to improvise and compose new words and music, and include some free play.

# Impacts — an overview

In Dr Jo Saunders' evaluation she found that our project had many benefits and that they largely fell into 4 broad categories - musical skills, physical skills & coordination, curriculum learning, and social and emotional learning. This extract from her report shows examples of the impacts across these 4 categories.

Specific  
Musical skills...



*For example...*

- ✓ Rhythm
- ✓ Discovering the voice
- ✓ Pitch
- ✓ Notation
- ✓ Playing with instruments
- ✓ Composition

Physical skills &  
co-ordination...



*For example...*

- ✓ Clapping and pulse
- ✓ Coordination
- ✓ Movement
- ✓ Breath control
- ✓ Spatial skills

Wider aspects of  
curriculum  
learning...



*For example...*

- ✓ Numeracy
- ✓ Literacy (including oral language)
- ✓ *History*
- ✓ *Geography*

Wider aspects of  
social and emotional  
learning...



*For example...*

- ✓ Empathy and understanding
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Listening
- ✓ Effective communication in the classroom context

*From - A Sound Start: Making Music Together  
by Dr Jo Saunders and Suzie Le Mesurier (2014)*

# Impacts: pupils

At the end of the Early Years stage in the summer of 2014, compared to the same time the previous year, the school saw a 16% rise in pupils achieving an overall Good Level of Development (GLD). The table below breaks down these results across different areas of the EYFS framework.

## Communication and Language

	2012 - 13	2013 - 14
Listening & attention	77%	93%
Understanding	78%	93%
Speaking	69%	87%

## Literacy

	2012 - 13	2013 - 14
Reading	66%	76%
Writing	56%	66%

## PSE

	2012 - 13	2013 - 14
Making Relationships	85%	95%
Self-confidence & Self-	82%	93%
Managing feelings &	77%	94%

## Expressive Arts and Design

	2012 - 13	2013 - 14
Exploring Media and Materials	84%	97%
Being Imaginative	84%	94%

*Data outcomes from Altmore Infant School at the end of EYFS*



# Impacts: pupils

## In her evaluation of the project, Dr Saunders found that:

“For Year R [reception] pupils there was a positive change in mean ratings for all aspects measured by the pupil questionnaire.” (The aspects measured were pupil identity as a musician, pupil identity as a learner, pupil sense of self and social inclusion, and pupil participation in singing and music making.)

“The observed behaviours of the pupils within sessions have suggested that with appropriate support even the youngest of pupils are able to sing, play, compose and listen with control and understanding. They demonstrate control over physical responses such as maintaining a rhythm, matching pitches, dynamics, timbre and tone of voice. They demonstrate peer leadership skills, the ability to enter into long dialogues and a willingness to reflect upon their own work and the work of others. They demonstrate that they are able to make links across their own learning.”

*Saunders & Le Mesurier, A Sound Start: Making Music Together.*

“There is some evidence indicated by the pupil questionnaires that over the course of the year, different aspects of Musical Identity, Learner Identity and Self and Social Inclusion have been strengthened.”

*Saunders & Le Mesurier,  
A Sound Start: Making Music Together.*





# Impacts: pupils

**Feedback from the school was also extremely positive. For example, 100% of class teacher respondents answered positively to the statements:**

- The music workshops have positively impacted on pupils' oracy skills
- The music workshops have positively impacted on pupils' communication skills
- The music workshops have positively impacted on pupils' concentration

"The children have enjoyed contributing their ideas and seeing how their ideas can make an impact, creating songs and rhythms.

*Reception teacher, July 2014*

"In both reading and writing, children have to be able to blend and segment single letter sounds (phonics). Their ability to do this is affected by their early ability to discriminate sounds, to hear rhythm, rhyme and alliteration. These aspects are focused on in nursery. The input from Creative Futures at this young stage supports their ability to do this competently."

*Altmere Infant School, end of year report, July 2014*

The best thing has been....

"....Using music in story-telling. Especially since this has been related to the topics and stories we have been learning about in class. It has helped the children become more engaged in the stories and understand them."






*Reception teacher, July 2014*



# Impacts: pupil case study

The case study below shows the progress over the year of Child A.

**“Child A began the school year with almost no English. Now, he can learn a new song as quickly as any of the other children. He particularly enjoys any rhythm or lyric writing activities, and he loves conducting and being conducted.”**

<b>Reception pupil</b>					
Ability to discriminate pitch	X				O
Ability to discriminate dynamics	X				O
Ability to discriminate rhythm	X				O
Can sing back melody accurately	X				O
Can clap back rhythm accurately	X				O
Can use percussion instruments	X				O
Listens and responds to performance of others		X		O	
Volunteers non-musical ideas (i.e. “let’s put a carrot on the pizza” or “let’s use our feet”)		X			O
Volunteers musical ideas (i.e. improvises a rhythm, “let’s sing it louder/faster”)			X		O
Will perform in front of the group if asked	X				O
Volunteers to perform in front of the group	X				O

X – September 2013

O – June 2014

We carried out case studies in all classes and the above shows a typical example.

# Impacts: staff development

An important part of our music programme was the delivery of an Inset programme. This consisted of a number of twilight sessions over the two years aimed at embedding skills and practices in Foundation Stage staff. Some sessions were also targeted at Year 1 staff, in order to ensure that the pupils moving on from Reception were able to benefit from some musical progression. These sessions featured a task-setting and then mentoring approach, with activities being modelled and scaffolded.



***Staff are more confident in their delivery and practice is extended by what they observe. Transition songs are part of all practitioners' routines; developing soundscapes to accompany stories has helped children focus on the rhythm of texts and enabled children to creatively retell familiar stories.***

***Giving gap tasks has enabled teachers to take activities and extend them. This has really shown the CPD impact on staff development. (Carolyn Marles, head of school)***

The final stage of our Inset programme was led by Zoe Palmer, who spent a day observing classroom practices across 3 Reception classes. She then reported back to the teachers on ways in which they have made use of music, and suggestions for other opportunities in which to incorporate music into the routine of the day. We hope that this will further strengthen the growing musical ethos at this school.

# Impacts — staff development

The diagram below shows the involvement of a Nursery teacher in a session observed in October 2013.

The chart reads chronologically from left to right, so we can see that this teacher observed the music session for the first 20 minutes, then left the room for 10 minutes (or was involved in marking/tidying up/other non-participatory activity), returned for 5 minutes to help an individual student involved in the session, then left again for the final 5 minutes.

Teacher activity	Minute								
	0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	
Observing	■	■	■	■	■				
Joining in									
Contributing ideas									
Helping an individual student							■		
Modelling as a participant role model									
Modelling to whole group as leader - vocal									
Modelling to whole group as leader - non vocal									
Evidence of embedding music in daily routines									
Evidence of use of music between sessions									
Evidence of continuation of practitioner activities between sessions									
Use of musical vocabulary / understanding of concepts									

*Note: Certain activities may have taken place for, for example, 4 or 6 minutes rather than an exact 5, but coloured 5-minute blocks are used for ease of viewing & interpretation.*



# Impacts: staff development

“There is evidence that the teachers and teaching assistants who have been involved with this project do provide the key to the longevity of the working practices exemplified in the intervention. The extent to which teachers have embraced the project and supported the evaluation of the potential impact is impressive and is a strong indicator of a willingness to address learning through a wide lens.”

*A Sound Start: Making Music Together*  
by Dr Jo Saunders & Suzie Le Mesurier, 2014

“One of the TAs in reception was leading on a drum by the end of the year. She commented on how much she enjoyed it and was looking forward to doing more”

*Zoe Palmer, practitioner*





# Evaluation of Creative Futures' practitioners

**“The practitioners were able to demonstrate key leadership skills across the observed sessions. These skills underpin the use of musical activities to successfully engage and facilitate pupils in a wider breadth of learning activities.”**

Creative Futures practitioners are:

**Well informed leaders** who are able to introduce a wider breadth of learning to the pupils that helps them to understand the world beyond their classroom and their own experiences.

**Creative leaders** who are able to create tasks and learning experiences for the pupils that stretch beyond the classroom context and yet build solidly from what they know.

**Positive Leaders** who are able to acknowledge the value of pupil contributions and the level of pupil engagement and approach the learning experience with enthusiasm.

**Inclusive Leaders** who are able to create an inclusive learning context in which all are able to participate and do their best.

**Musical Leaders** who are able to establish a musical way of being. The addition of simple rhythmic accompaniments to the pupils singing creates a performance feel and the use of instruments within the classroom setting is clearly a new (and very exciting) experience for many of the pupils. As musical role models you are positive and are able to capture the imagination of the pupils.

*From - A Sound Start: Making Music Together  
by Dr Jo Saunders and Suzie Le Mesurier*

# Conclusion

2013-14 was the third year of Creative Futures' flagship early years project 'A Sound Start' at Altmore Infant School. The programme has been reviewed and refined over this period through a combination of academic-led evaluation, observation by our own staff, and discussion with class teachers and senior management. The result, delivered in 2013-14, is a carefully constructed and progressive 35-week programme for both Nursery and Reception, closely woven around certain curriculum themes, and linked at every stage to children's early learning and development.

'A Sound Start' embodies the Creative Futures ethos:

- It is led by expert and inspiring artists who bring their passion for creativity into the classroom.
- It is tailored to the needs of this particular school and cohort of pupils.
- It involves close working with the school's senior management as well as the class teachers who work alongside our practitioners.
- There is two-way skills-sharing between practitioners and class-teachers in the workshops.
- Children are put at the centre of the process, leading the creative activities and shaping the content and direction of the workshops.
- The programme is constantly reviewed, modified and refined with input from all involved, including independent researchers

The school's results for 2013-14 (see p.7) are a testament to the fact that our approach can significantly impact on the early development and learning of children including those with English as an additional language and a range of special educational needs. The improvements in attainment can be seen across all the prime and specific areas of the EYFS, most notably the areas of Communication and Language where the year's pupils were consistently achieving 15-18% higher than the previous year.

Creative Futures continues to refine this programme as it moves into its fourth year at Altmore Infant School, and we continue to strive for even greater impacts on pupils in the future. Grateful thanks to the external funders who have helped to make this programme possible.

We are extending this programme (adapted to every new setting) to other parts of London, and planning an element of action research. This will involve a new collaboration with speech and language therapists to develop activities which can specifically impact on pupils with speech and language developmental delay.



**Report by Julian Knight & Vanessa Stansall**

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