



Working together to move the needle on inclusion in five West Midlands music education hubs

Solihull Music Education Hub (MEH) is part of the MAC MEH Strategy Group – five hubs who meet monthly, to support and challenge each other to move the needle on inclusion in their organisations and partnerships. The group is facilitated by Holly Radford, who leads 'MAC Makes Music', part of Midlands Arts Centre, and one of the founders of Youth Music's Alliance for a Musically Inclusive England. The work is funded by Youth Music.

My Inclusion Journey:

Claire Batty, Assistant Head, Solihull Music Service & Music Education Hub

When Claire Batty began her music education career, she looked destined to follow the well-worn path of many music educators. A cello player and a BMusic and PGCE graduate of Northern College of Music, she was, she says, 'all about growing instrumental players'. She began her career as a strings teacher at Solihull Music Service, eventually becoming Head of Strings and now Assistant Head of Service. But like a growing number of music educators, she's become determined to widen the reach and impact of the music service. A personal experience, and working as part of the MAC Music Education Hub Strategy Group, were catalysts for a rethink of who and what music is for. Anita Holford spoke with Claire to find out more.



Can you give a short overview of the Hub and music service?

Solihull Music Education Hub is led by a small local authority music service, with the full time equivalent of three managers and 28 tutors. Most of the core Arts Council England funded hub work (particularly whole class instrumental tuition in schools and out-of-school ensembles) is delivered by the music service. We also provide one-to-one and small group instrumental and singing lessons paid for directly by parents or bursaries for those who can't afford them. A few key partners are brought in to deliver specialist work and/or to help us develop our workforce in specialist areas. We have

high level of engagement from schools – we deliver the primary school curriculum in a lot of schools, and also PPA cover at KS1 and 2. 60% of local schools contract us to deliver whole class programmes.

How inclusive would you say your service was, before you started working with MAC?

We started working with MAC in 2013. At that time, no-one had any real understanding of inclusion. It just wasn't talked about. As a service, we were more focused on nurturing the most accomplished musicians. Music services like ours just offered what they

could deliver – rather than designing programmes and allocating resources based on the needs or interests of children and young people and those who work with them. We had very little interaction with PRUs or SEND settings, and staff were unaware of the barriers to learning and participation that many pupils generally faced.

Working with MAC was a big step for us and really positive for those young people. But at first, we didn't do much more than commissioning work. We identified some settings where there were young people facing barriers to learning music, and MAC tutors worked in those settings, fully funded by their Youth Music funding.

At the time, what were your team's biggest fears about inclusion?

I guess it was all about quality. We were all concerned, to different degrees, about how that would be affected. There was this idea that inclusion work wasn't high quality music education work.

And what were the biggest incentives or sources of inspiration?

Watching these practitioners made me realise they had a wealth of teaching and mentoring skills and repertoire, the quality was high, but they were focusing on different outcomes.

It was seeing the impact that MAC's inclusive workforce could have on young people. Traditionally, a lot of music services work is teacher-directed, and focused on instrumental or vocal technique. Watching these practitioners made me realise they had a wealth of teaching and mentoring skills and repertoire, the quality was high, but they were focusing on personal and social outcomes as much as musical ones. The buzz in the room, the energy – and the creativity was amazing. At times it looks like chaos, and that's often the point at which traditional tutors will start to question quality. But I had enough experience to see that there was more going on than that.

How did you move on from commissioning inclusion work, to beginning to deliver it yourself?

In 2016/17, MAC offered hubs in the area the opportunity to work together to take a more strategic approach to inclusion. Our tutors would shadow theirs, to develop their skills in inclusive practice; and we'd be part of a group of hub leads who'd meet regularly to discuss progress.

We signed up because we recognised that we needed to change our approach. We had 'Kickstarter' inclusion projects but they had short term impact. Even though schools valued the work MAC music leaders were delivering, they weren't prepared to invest for the long-term. We needed a culture change. Working with MAC to develop our vision for inclusion, and a route map to help implement it, gave us the impetus we needed to commit to and advocate for change.

It also happened at a point where I had my own experience of exclusion. My son was born with verbal dyspraxia: he'd been in speech therapy since 18 months old and was still mute when he started pre-school. We were using Makaton (sign language) to communicate with him. He's really bright, and I noticed that adults made assumptions about what he needed and was capable of, because of the way he presented. I had to fight for him to remain in mainstream education, and it is this ongoing battle for his needs that proved to be a real lightbulb experience for me.

So I would challenge colleagues about their attitudes to inclusion and give Tom as an example, saying, "Just remember my son will be coming to a classroom near you". I think that helped.

We began to talk more about inclusion, and then I started attending the monthly two-hour meetings with five other music hub leads, to share what we were finding difficult and what solutions we had found. Holly would bring in speakers to talk to us about aspects of inclusion, such as attachment theory and adverse childhood experiences or cultural diversity. Sometimes one of us would present, for example, someone from Coventry Music Hub talked to us about the Thrive approach used in schools. Open Orchestra came to present and we've ended up developing a partnership with them.

Our music service tutors were shadowing the MAC tutors, and they were also paid for reflective time after each session, and that was transformational. Tutors who had different backgrounds and views about their practice, were able to learn from each other, and reflect on what they were doing. Our staff are often isolated, spending days in schools not seeing other colleagues, so that professional dialogue and support was really valuable.

Watch vlogs from the tutors about the difference this made.



Now, when there are children who are for example autistic, or have distracting behaviour, our tutors are more inclined to reflect on where that behaviour is coming from, and how they can get the best out of them.

What impact did working with MAC on projects, have on your organisational development?

We started to realise that we'd been living in a bubble. We'd been assuming that most people can access our services – and most people can't and don't! Once that bubble had burst there was no going back.

Creating a strategy really changed things. In 2017, MAC brought in inclusion consultant and community music trainer Phil Mullen to work with the group. We developed common strategic priorities which helped us to think about what we're for, and who we're there to serve.

Together, we created a joint strategy - see the [initial MAC Music Education Hub Strategy Group Musical Inclusion Strategy 2018-2021](#) and we had versions that went into more detail about our specific Hubs. It set out the purpose, definitions and characteristics of inclusive practice, challenges and possible actions, and then strategic priorities and an action plan with timescales.

We started to realise that as a music service, we'd been living in a bubble. We realised there's this whole part of society that's bigger than we thought, and which is facing all sorts of barriers to access. A part of Solihull that had never engaged with us, and we'd never made the effort

to go out to them. Our approach had been “this is what we offer, what do you want?” rather than asking schools, parents or pupils what they needed.

Once that bubble had burst, there was no going back. We’ve all been on an internal journey, and the culture of the music service has changed for the better. Already this inclusion strategy is driving and reinvigorating what we do as a ‘business’: how we act, what we offer, as well as how we deliver our work.

How did you move from having a strategy document, to taking action?

Inclusion involves change. It is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students. It is an ideal to which Hubs can aspire but which is never fully reached. But inclusion happens as soon as the process of increasing participation is started. An inclusive Hub is one that is on the move.

(Quoted in the strategy: adapted from Booth and Ainscow, 2002: 3)

Initially, we sat in our SLT meeting and said, “where do we even start?” To be honest, it was a bit overwhelming.

But it gave us milestones. And it gave me a reason to start to ask for specific things to change: like making inclusion part of all CPD/INSET days, and every management team meeting.

It really helped to have a regular time - the monthly MEH Strategy Group meetings - when we knew we would need to discuss progress and would be inspired and supported by other hubs.

But I felt we needed something to ‘show’ people, to set out our inclusion stall if you like. So we created Beats Music, a programme from the music service, which champions music as a vehicle to improve the attainment of children in challenging circumstances. Currently it’s delivered by MAC as we wanted to ensure high quality from the start: but the aim is eventually for our tutors to deliver it.



Music leaders and teachers taking part in Mac Makes Music CPD

We piloted it in two primary schools, and both wanted to target looked-after children. One school provided match funding themselves, the other had match funding from the Virtual School. It’s now in the second year and has been really successful.

Beats Music inclusion programme

- Small groups of primary or secondary school pupils
- Meeting once a week for 1-3 hours in school time, for a year
- Sessions tailored around the diverse needs, interests and abilities of the young people
- All styles of music making and learning valued equally, from rap to songwriting to composing to instruments
- Encouraging resilience and agency through creativity and team work
- Focused on personal and social outcomes

[Find out more here](#)

How did you begin to spread awareness of your inclusion work?

We were able to talk more confidently about our ability to meet the personal and social needs of young people, rather than just musical.

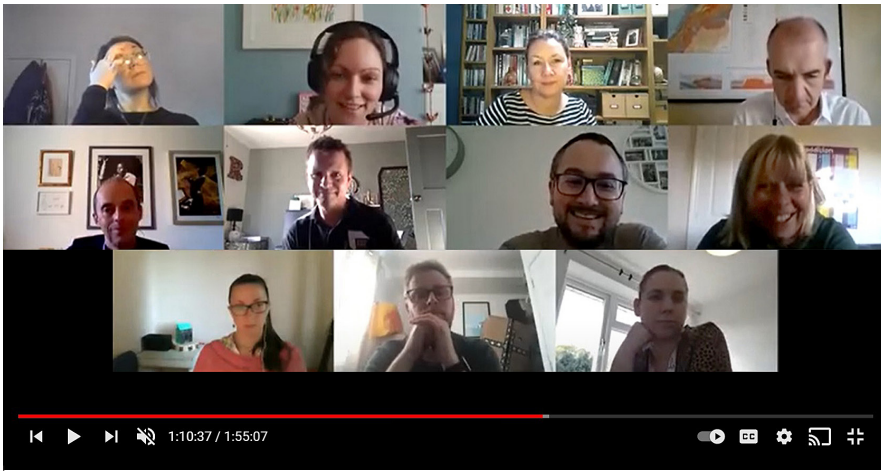
Gradually the perception of what we do, and the value we can bring, began to change. We started to look at the Hub through different lenses, and that started to change the language and images we choose to use in our promotional literature for schools. I prepared PowerPoint presentations and documents that I could show or send to schools. They were really clear about our purpose being much more than just ‘teaching music’. We gave a presentation to SENCOs on our strategy and vision for musical inclusion in Solihull. I began to feel more empowered to interact with the Virtual School and supported them at sessions for designated teachers responsible for LAC children.

We were able to talk more confidently about our ability to meet the personal and social needs of young people, rather than just musical. We could begin to back this up because now, we could show that we were committed to developing our whole workforce to meet young people’s needs.

We started to understand more about what is happening in schools around vulnerable young people, for example using the Thrive approach to social and emotional wellbeing, and we developed our programmes to take account of those.

We became more firm about walking away from settings who said they couldn’t afford it: we needed to know a school was really invested in this work and valued it enough to pay for it.

At the same time, we had also started a programme of work in one school with Open Orchestras, subsidised by MAC, and that was a complete gamechanger. Previously,



MAC MEH Strategy Group Meeting

we didn't have a relationship with the school and they bought in music therapy from other providers. But we'd never asked them what they needed from us before. The Open Orchestra programme gave us an opportunity to start to do this, and their perception of what a music service could offer started to change too. That was a big success story and now we're in that school 1.5 days a week, as well as afterschool, paid for by the school. We're also now a partner for the [West Midlands Inclusive Choir](#), and are developing a Solihull offer. The choir is open to everyone but particularly those with severe and profound learning disabilities.

Our next new partnership is with the Council's Youth Offending Service. Holly introduced us to the team manager, and provided some seed funding for us to start a pilot programme involving one-to-one mentoring for six young people. Three of Holly's team have delivered sessions alongside YOS officers, and the aim is for our tutors to deliver next. This has meant that I now have a good relationship with that team manager so it means that MAC will eventually step back and we'll be able to look at ways forward with the YOS, including joint funding bids.

Are there still concerns among staff about the move towards inclusion?

Some staff have worried that we're diluting what we do, and losing what our brand is all about. But I think it's had quite the opposite effect. It's been a process of reinstating our purpose, asking, who are we there to serve, and what role can music have in their lives?

I always have a sense of urgency and it feels like we're not going fast enough. But no matter what the pace of change is, the

most important thing is that the thinking has changed. In most cases, staff go on inclusion training and say, we want to do more, we want to understand how we can be more equitable and accessible. Staff feedback on our CPD programme backs this up too.

Where would you say you are you now with your inclusion journey?

Now, every conversation we have always has an inclusion aspect to it. We're constantly saying, is that inclusive? We've definitely come on a journey.

Up until lockdown we still had very traditional ensembles: youth orchestra, windband, etc. You had to audition or have reached a certain grade on your instrument. Also, there was no flexibility: if you wanted to play the violin you had to come on a Wednesday evening because that's when the strings orchestra meets.

Now, the numbers are down and it's a time to challenge that thinking and reimagine the future offer. For example, does it really matter who you play with, as long as you're playing in a group? And I'd like to get to the point where anyone and everyone, no matter what additional needs they have, is welcome throughout all of our services.

Now we're thinking in this way, there are lightbulb moments happening. Some are simple things like realising almost our photos are of young white able-bodied people playing classical instruments. So we're looking at the communities in Solihull, and thinking how we best represent them.

And we've started using the [Youth Music ED&I audit and planning tools](#) to self-assess our progress. But we know we need some external challenge too. We need greater diversity in management and governance. So we're looking at how we diversify our recruitment processes as well the role of Youth Voice throughout the service.

In the meantime, we've set up an inclusion subgroup of the Hub – which includes our local councillor for Education, Children's Services and Skills; the head of SEND for the borough council, the virtual head, a headteacher, myself and Holly from MAC as Chair. That will challenge us further as we'll be able to look in more detail at council priorities, data and benchmarks for who is missing out. We're also continuing to work out how we're embedding inclusion in the Core and Extension roles (see page 6).

We're still meeting as a MAC Strategy Group, but now as well as heads of service and inclusion leads, we invite other team members to challenge and help us. That's really important because they often don't get to see that wider perspective and feed into those conversations. The fact that we come back every month, for two hours shows that we all still really value those open, honest conversations. We're open about failure and worries and that's where real change can happen, at the personal level.

Having one-to-one support from Holly at MAC has been critical: we talk each week, she's a combination of support, advice and critical friend. That's a big investment in time from MAC and it definitely pays off. Holly's drive and expertise has been instrumental in our journey and so much of our progress is down to that. I really don't think the strategy would have had the same impact without MAC's ongoing expertise, passion and consultancy.

We still have a long way to go but the desire to change is much more apparent in our workforce than ever before. Now, every conversation we have always has an inclusion aspect to it. We're constantly saying, is that inclusive? We've definitely come on a journey.

Interested in receiving inclusion consultancy support for your hub, from MAC Makes Music?

This is a charged-for service but can be tailored to your budget and goals. Contact holly.radford@macbirmingham.co.uk



My Inclusion Journey:

Toby Smith, Head of Solihull Music Service & Music Education Hub

When you started at SMS four years ago, how inclusive would you say your service was?

We 'looked' successful – but we were attracting the same sort of children and young people.

On the face of it, we came across as quite inclusive. Our Saturday morning music centres were affordable, diverse in genres and participants, and attracted more than 400 young people. But that was the easy part.

I came from the further education sector – I was working for Access to Music, and I was quite shocked at the first meeting when I saw an entirely white staff. I gradually realised that the sector as a whole had quite a way to go in terms of inclusion.

We 'looked' successful – but we were (and still are) attracting the same sort of children and young people – relatively wealthy, white, middle class, who could afford to pay for instrumental or vocal lessons. Data is a problem: whereas in FE, Ofsted assess you and provide data about who you're reaching and how inclusive you are: in music education, you don't have that data. The only thing we could do was look at where we thought the gaps lay.

I was very aware of what happens to young people if they don't have music that engages them. I learned violin briefly but gave up and I hated music in school, and



didn't take GCSE. I didn't start again until I was 16 when I formed a band with friends. So I can see things from the point of view of the kid that was left out of music.

Also, I started to hear stories about pupils being left out of whole class ensemble tuition because they had to go for an intervention, or their behaviour had been poor. At the time, we had no way of challenging that, but we do now, thanks to our work with MAC Makes Music.

So I felt there was an intention to be more inclusive, but we had a long way to go.

What were the biggest worries or challenges for you, in embedding inclusion in your music service and hub?

Knowing where to start. And also, it can be quite easy to say 'we've done inclusion' after a bit of CPD and a strategy. But that's not enough. In my first conversation with Phil Mullen who was commissioned to help us

create our strategy, I said that what I wanted from working with him and MAC Makes Music was two things. Firstly, it should not just be about writing a document. We needed actions. And secondly, it's got to be really difficult. We've got to challenge ourselves. Selling to staff this idea that, we're doing something that you can never quite achieve, is tricky. That's particularly true in this sector, where people pride themselves on being considered successful, by creating 'award-winning' musicians and ensembles. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I struggled at first when we'd agreed our strategic priorities because I needed to see tangible actions. Luckily Claire came in with much better knowledge and said we can do this, this and this ...Claire now has the role of Inclusion Lead, so it means we have someone who will make things happen.

What were the biggest incentives/drivers, or sources of inspiration, for embedding inclusion?

We need to raise the profile of inclusion work and change people's perception of what makes a high quality music tutor or music tutor career.

It was the business case as well as the moral case.

Personally, I'm really against any elitist view of music. To me, music is about access and engagement. I used to work with students who may have come from three generations of families who had never had a job, they had low self-belief, but they loved music. And to get a Level 1 qualification, because music was the hook, means that they were able to go on and get a job. That's life-changing music – it can't just be about selling the dream of becoming an elite musician.

And if you allow music to have a purpose that's beyond that, then it opens up conversations with other people and organisations who are helping and supporting young people in all sorts of ways. So then there can be a business case, because there may be new forms of funding and partnerships.

Music services used to audition children and young people for their groups and ensembles. Some of that attitude still remains. What's difficult with open access is that it is much harder to staff. Being able

to say that you ran a county ensemble is still seen in music education circles as somehow 'better' than saying you've run an open access group. We need to raise the profile of inclusion work and change people's perception of what makes a high quality music tutor or music tutor career.

What impact have you seen on your service, from working with Mac Makes Music?

Our tutors have responded really well. I explained that we need to get this right, if we're going to survive and expand as a service. And I offered it as a new way for them to grow their skills and knowledge to improve their teaching and make their jobs easier. For example, attachment training will fundamentally help you to manage a large class of children. Many of our tutors recognised that there was a lot about their approach that already was inclusive. Many of them have kids, some may have their own experiences of exclusion.

Now, they're not afraid to talk about inclusion, and to ask for help when they find something challenging.

Some have picked it up enthusiastically and really grown with it, and it's starting to rub off on others. It can be difficult work but really rewarding.

How have you embedded inclusion more deeply and across all the hub's functions? i.e. the move from inclusion being a group of projects, to being embedded across the core roles and in your organisation's strategies, policies and practices?

We never wanted any young person to be given the triangle and sent to the back of the room because they weren't seen as capable, or musical, or worse still, not being allowed in the class at all.

It can be as simple as sending a form to the class teacher before we start a whole class programme so they can tell us about the needs of the children. We make it the responsibility of our whole class ensemble tutor to get that information and it's less about the form and more about opening up that level of conversation with the teacher. We never wanted any young person to be given the triangle and sent to the back



Creative Sounds

of the room because they weren't seen as capable, or musical, or worse still, not being allowed in the class at all.

We also know we need to look at genres, because although we seem diverse in our whole class offer, we don't have any music tech tutors – and we've been asked for that by Alternative Provision Schools. A couple of things are holding us back: a staffing freeze, and also I want to make sure there are progression routes for pupils afterwards.

In terms of groups and ensembles, we're looking at how to make them more inclusive. We run Creative Sounds in partnership with MAC Makes Music – evening creative music making groups for young people aged seven and over, which is open to anyone but particularly those with additional needs and disabilities.

And creating your own music isn't part of the Core or Extension roles but it's fundamental to inclusion and appealing to young people so we're trying to get songwriting into our groups and ensembles. We're aware that some of our rock and pop groups are run using a 'classical' model focusing on technical progress on your instrument through lessons.

In terms of singing, we had a Hub partner for the singing strategy but we want to make our offer far more inclusive, so we're focusing our efforts on developing a Solihull branch of the [West Midlands Inclusive Choir](#), which is open to everyone but particularly those with severe and profound learning disabilities.

Importantly, we're now building inclusion firmly into the governance of the Hub, with the formation of an inclusion subgroup (see page 1-4 for more about this).

The challenge for hubs is progression. How do you track that? It's got to be a case study type approach. We have a student in one of our schools, where we were delivering brass whole class. I went in as the support tutor, and there was a pupil with additional needs who was clearly really committed. With a bit of encouragement from us, he went on to have lessons with a tutor and joined one of our ensembles. His Mum brought him to a ukulele group too. All it took was a bit of encouragement from the tutor – but he could easily not have been spotted.

My nephew is autistic and there's nothing like first hand experience to make you think, how would they be treated? How would they deal with this?

Finally, what would you say are the main factors that lead to success or are helpful in driving inclusion forward?

One thing that's really helped – in fact, it's made all the difference – is doing it alongside other hubs. Having a document is one thing. But that constant challenge has kept everyone on their toes. We've formed really supportive relationships too. I speak with other hub leads two or three times a week, specifically about inclusion matters. It can be something as practical as "I've got to write this policy, do you have one we can model it on?"

Our group is very trusting and open. It helps us practically, and it helps us to improve. We're not afraid to say, "we don't do this very well, how can we do it better?". It should always feel like we're at the start of the journey.

Further Reading & Resources

- Read these interviews and watch the tutor vlogs on our [website](#)
- Hear Solihull's music tutors give their perspectives on inclusion in these [three short vlogs](#)
- Find out how you're doing: download [Youth Music EDI audit and planning templates](#)
- Find inclusion resources for and by music services on the [Changing Tracks website](#)
- Find more inclusion resources on the [AMIE \(Alliance for a Musically Inclusive England\) inclusion content hub](#)
- Watch Toby Smith's interview about the Hub's [Wavelength mental health project](#), delivered by hub partner Quench Arts