‘PRELUDES’
A BRISTOL BASED PRIMARY SCHOOL MUSIC PARTICIPATION AND EDUCATION PROJECT

Preliminary Monitoring and Evaluation Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ‘Preludes’ project is a Bristol based primary school music education project delivered by the Emerald Ensemble with the intention of ‘Putting classical music at the heart of every child’s education.’

This report summarises the results of a monitoring and evaluation process undertaken by Professors Leslie Bunt and Norma Daykin between September 2009 and September 2010 at one of the two schools where the project is based (Gay Elms Primary School).

2. EVALUATION AIMS

The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation process was to explore participants’ early expectations and experiences of the project in order to identify evaluation priorities and explore feasibility of evaluation approaches in order to inform further development and fundraising.

This stage sought to:

- identify key issues for the next evaluation stage
- identify stakeholders’ perceptions of the impacts of the project as well as outcomes to be included in evaluation
- identify appropriate research methodologies and methods
- place the emphasis on feasibility, planning and development.

3. EVALUATION APPROACH

This initial phase of evaluation involved informal meetings with key personnel at the School as well as observation of music sessions. The report is based on information gathered during the following evaluation activities:

- Pre and post project meetings held between school staff and researchers in September 2009 and June 2010 (see appendices 1 and 2 for summaries)
- Observations of two music sessions by Professor Bunt in June 2010 (see appendix 2 for a summary)

Analysis and synthesis of this information by the researchers identified key themes; highlighting likely outcomes for the purposes of evaluation; exploring suitable evaluation methodologies; and considering future options including funding sources for further research and evaluation.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

A summary of findings is presented in Table 1 (pages 5-8).
5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This initial phase of evaluation has identified key issues of sustainability and impact. Staff reports and researcher observations concur that the project is successful in engaging children in music and facilitating development in a number of areas including speech and language, self esteem, confidence, expression and social skills. The project also seems to be having a positive impact on the school, with staff highly motivated to take part. Parents’ reported perceptions of the project are very favourable and children clearly enjoy the activities. There is sufficient descriptive evidence within this successful first stage of the project to indicate the need for further evaluation. Further research is needed to examine these impacts, as well as challenges and priorities for project development.

The key recommendation from this phase is to develop a mixed methods study to encompass a broader sample of schools and an extended group of stakeholders, including children and parents, school staff, musicians, local authority representatives and charitable organizations. This could be achieved by developing a series of linked projects, for example, a mixture of funded research and PhD research.

More detailed recommendations concerning suitable research strategies and methodologies for further work are presented in Figure 1. below.

**Figure 1. Detailed research and evaluation recommendations**

- Quantitative assessment should focus on speech and language development and should seek to generate data from pre and post-project SLT assessments.
- The impact of the project on self-esteem and confidence could also be measured quantitatively using validated tools: this aspect of the project should involve a health psychologist.
- Qualitative assessment should focus on children’s experiences of the project as well as staff motivation, job satisfaction and skills. Future evaluation needs to draw on the skills of an experienced qualitative researcher.
- Structured observation should assess participation issues and impacts such as self-esteem and confidence. Observation using music focused tools could be developed by a musicologist or music specialist.
- Evaluation should include a particular focus onquieter children and children with special needs, such as children on the autistic spectrum, as well as barriers to participation and the experiences of children who do not appear to be benefiting fully from the project.
- Process evaluation should include all stakeholders including musicians, staff and parents. Process evaluation should assess the impact of the project on the school including curriculum, integration of music, staff awareness, skills, learning and development needs. Process evaluation should also assess sustainability and inclusion, examining barriers and challenges as well as opportunities such as funding and policy environment. Hence future evaluation needs to draw on the skills of an experienced process/policy analyst.
- Evaluation could usefully be extended to include other schools involved in the project.
- If the project is to be continued then research funding could be sought from a variety of sources including the Arts and Humanities Research Council; Big Lottery; Economic and Social Science Research Council; Charitable trusts connected with music and children, such as The Paul Hamlyn Foundation; and local charitable trusts such as The Andrew Fletcher Charitable Trust.
Table 1. Summary of evaluation findings; future evaluation priorities and methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original project objectives as identified by the school</th>
<th>Stakeholders’ perceptions of impacts and outcomes as identified in interview data</th>
<th>Researcher observations</th>
<th>Key issues for future evaluation: priorities and research questions</th>
<th>Future research approaches and methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable provision</td>
<td>Regular weekly slots, two groups, group size = 14.</td>
<td>Children know what to expect from sessions, are able to take part and demonstrate familiarity with musical techniques, activities and facilitators. Sequencing of sessions was child-centred and the children clearly responded to this safe approach.</td>
<td>To what extent does the project rely on the skills of external musicians? Could the project be sustained by staff working on their own? What other models exist that might promote sustainability? Cost issues might affect sustainability, e.g. affordability of instruments.</td>
<td>Process evaluation, interviews with school staff, musicians, external funders, music service and other stakeholders. School based evaluation: to explore extent to which regular music activities outside of sessions are sustained e.g. singing in assembly; instrumental lessons; playing and performing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The children have become familiar with the routines, knowing what to expect, a sense of stability is noted. End-of-term concert was well-attended by parents, children and staff. The musicians have got to know the children. They are aware of behaviour management including the use of rewards and positive reinforcement. Staff leave the children to work with the musicians. Reception class children now sing during school assembly: normally it takes about two years for the children to feel comfortable in joining in. The children understand that singing is something in which everyone participates. Children have been facilitated by the musicians to participate in music making and observe professional performances outside the school. Some parents/carers are thrilled that their children are getting this opportunity. A couple of the parents have bought instruments for the children.</td>
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| **Children’s enjoyment** | The children are reported to be thoroughly enjoying the experience.  
Each session includes something that each child looks forward to. | The observed activities were clearly enjoyed by all the children. | Qualitative assessment |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| **Strengthening music provision and staff skills** | Staffing changes have delayed some aspects, e.g. the introduction of singing.  
The children are seeing a higher standard of musicianship than usual. Staff feel that children’s heightened musical awareness will continue as they move through the school and the level of teaching will need to be raised accordingly. Hence the profile and standard of music in the school have been raised.  
One of the musicians organised a social event, inviting project staff. This was felt to be a very positive experience enabling staff and musicians to share and discuss ideas.  
Apart from this, staff from the two schools did not tend to meet. The staff would have welcomed more opportunities to share with colleagues from the other school including training events. | Heightened musical awareness and skill, see below. | It has been noted that staff want to teach in Reception next year and this is because of ‘Preludes.’  
Staff have expressed a desire to learn from the experiences of staff in other schools. | The impact of the project on staff motivation, job satisfaction and skills could be assessed using interviews and focus groups. Further learning and training needs could be identified.  
Learning and collaboration across schools could be facilitated by including additional schools in the sample and adopting an action research approach. |
| **Speaking and listening** | A range of ability is observed.  
One child on the autistic spectrum was reported as ‘coming alive’ in the music sessions, becoming very mobile and vocal, a contrast with their usual behaviour in the classroom. This child ‘shone’ in performance.  
Staff observed development of gross | When asked ‘Which instruments can you hear?’ The children were able to identify violin, piano, xylophone, clarinet.  
During the ‘Fish Song,’ devised to encourage children to recognise different rhythmic patterns, there was much attentive listening and a sense of cooperation, working | The project has been observed to have had a positive effect on speaking and listening.  
The project has been observed to have had a positive impact on confidence. | Pre and post test using assessment by a Speech and Language Therapist.  
The impact of the project on self-esteem and confidence could be measured quantitatively using validated tools as well as qualitatively |
movements, e.g. skipping, jumping.

Staff observed development of communication and listening skills.

Staff noted development in language (e.g. use of descriptive words relating to the different instruments) and numeracy skills (e.g. counting beats).

Staff noted improved social interaction, group cohesion and working together. Children watch each other during the sessions and demonstrate turn taking. The degree of cooperation and confidence shown by the children had surprised staff.

There was very positive feedback from parents and staff. For example, the confidence demonstrated by the children at the concert was noted. Children who are usually quite withdrawn enjoyed performing to an audience of 60 plus. It was felt that this experience might have longer term impact.

Speaking and listening needs to be broken down: the following elements emerged as key:

- Use of terminology
- Musical awareness and recognition of pitch, rhythm, dynamics, quality of sound etc.
- Participation, singing and playing singly and in groups
- Behaviour, e.g. calm, focused attention
- Co-operation and empathy

through interviews and observations.

Evaluation should include a particular focus on quieter children and children with special needs.

Observation of speaking and listening skills, possibly using music focused structured tools.
| Inclusion | There is no specific target group - all 30 Reception class children have taken part.

Musicians are skilled at including children, eliciting trust and managing behaviour.

Children are using instruments to which they would normally not have access.

Some children are getting more out of the project than others. | All the children took part in a group music making session at their own pace and level, exploring the different movements evoked by the tempo, loudness and mood of the music.

The musicians modelled inclusion with a non-judgemental approach. | Identify facilitation skills that promote inclusion.

Identify barriers to inclusion e.g. affordability.

Identify those children who do not seem to be benefiting from the project. | Interviews with musicians, children and parents/carers. Observation. |
APPENDIX 1

Summary of a meeting held at Gay Elms Primary School on September 8th 2009

Present:
Head teacher, Reception class teacher, UWE researchers (2)

Purpose:
This was an introductory informal meeting to explore initial expectations of the ‘Preludes’ project that was scheduled to start in a few weeks. The ‘Preludes’ project would involve all 30 children starting in the Reception class this September. The meeting discussed the background and context of the project as well as the current range of musical activities available to the children at the school.

Key themes

The school and the local environment

The school is one of a number of primary schools serving a large residential area a few miles from the City Centre. It is an urban area recognised as one of the lowest of the City based on indices of multiple deprivation.

The school also has a high proportion of children with special needs, e.g. visual and hearing impairments, and has a high level of staff expertise to support the needs of these children. The school also provides specialist equipment – lifts, mini-bus etc. – to facilitate access for children with physical disabilities. Part of the school’s provision is an Autism Resource Base (ARB) which accommodates up to 28 children aged 5-11 in four classes.

Historically, the school was included within an Education Action Zone (EAZ), and is now part of the Extended School Partnerships (ESP) scheme. Although staff are reluctant to stigmatise the children and their parents the impact of deprivation, for example on language development and access to creative resources and experiences, is apparent. However, the parents are described as having high aspirations in relation to their children’s education, despite or perhaps because of their own sometimes negative educational experiences. This is reflected in parents’ responses to children’s music activity. Parents tend to be loyal supporters of their children at performances, with ‘standing room’ only at school concerts. However, beyond this it is difficult to engage parents in singing, playing or participating in creative activity.

Within the community many barriers have been identified that can prevent children accessing cultural and leisure activities. These include costs, transport difficulties and the relatively long distances that children need to travel in order to access arts and cultural resources in the city. Parents and teachers have expressed concerns that local public spaces are not safe for unaccompanied children. Hence children’s leisure time tends to be spent in the home with the focus on TV and computer games.
The range of musical activities within the school

A specialist music therapist is employed once a week at the ARB. The nursery teacher is the subject leader for music and some school staff are talented musicians, including a singer and a former children’s entertainer. However there are no qualified music teaching specialists on the staff.

Nevertheless school staff are enthusiastic and committed to providing a broad range of musical opportunities and experiences for pupils. All children in the school are introduced to music through a published scheme ‘Music Express’, with class teachers teaching a half-hour music session, on average once or twice a week. Children also sing in class and there is a weekly singing session for the whole school, supported by CDs. Music activity is sometimes difficult to fit in alongside competing priorities such as maths and literacy.

Some other challenges were identified. For example, recorded music is played every week in assembly and this has exposed the fact that some children have poorly developed listening skills. Likewise, speaking skills have been identified as an issue. A number of arts and play therapy staff are employed at the school including a speech and language therapist who visits once a week.

The school works in partnership with local organisations and high calibre visiting specialists to deliver its music programme. As well as music and arts organisations, there has been input by University Academics through a research programme focused on encouraging boys to sing.

An example of a regular activity is the weekly after-school choir organised by a leading local musician with support from an enthusiastic school staff member. External funding has been obtained for the choir, which is open to children in the 7-11 age range from across the wider area, although in reality the majority of the attendees are from this school. Entry is voluntary and by audition with around 30 children being part of the choir. The choir is also involved with projects supported by a local Choral Society. The choir has performed at several major concert venues in the City. It was noted that for many parents in the audience, attending these concerts would have been their first visit to such venues.

The school also accesses music provision through the local Arts and Music Service. Activities include African drumming with Year 4 children. There is also a band, which uses instruments that were purchased with EAZ funding that are shared across a number of schools. These are transported to the school by the band leader. The school does not own any of these instruments.

Most of these opportunities are for older children. There are fewer opportunities for children in the reception class although there is regular singing and occasional activity such as instrument making. Regular music activity is provided by the nursery teacher however not all children joining the reception class have attended nursery and these children are unlikely to have experienced formal music activity prior to school.
Expectations of the ‘Preludes’ project

Sustainability
Sustainability was raised as a key issue during the discussion. Music provision in the form of short term schemes that allow ‘taster’ sessions can only briefly expose children to visiting artists and projects. These schemes may allow insufficient time for children to build the confidence and rapport with artists needed for successful longer term outcomes. The Head teacher also felt that they can sometimes raise expectations, with children ultimately let down when resources are withdrawn at the end of some projects.

In contrast, the ‘Preludes’ project is proposed to be relatively long term and seeks to build children’s experiences and learning with continued musical activities as they progress through school. Hence the project offers the potential of a sustainable approach.

Enjoyment
It was agreed that it was important that the children enjoyed the activity. Staff are looking forward to providing a fun experience that was beyond what they themselves can offer.

Strengthening music provision and skills
A further key aspiration is the strengthening of school music provision through transfer of skills and knowledge between staff and participants. Further spin-offs form the project may involve CPD for staff, or learning from observing music sessions. To date the key staff involved in ‘Preludes’ have been released to attend a training day and it is anticipated that the impact of this will be felt across the school through word-of-mouth, discussions and meetings.

Speaking and listening
The development of speaking and listening skills is an identified need for many children at the school. The children tend not to report much listening to music at home and the project may help them to listen in a more focused manner. It was anticipated that the project could deliver measurable improvements in these areas and there was some discussion about the availability of routinely collected outcomes data. For example, every child is screened by a speech and language therapist upon entering the Reception class and again at the end of the first year. This might be important to include in research design if funding can be obtained to support a larger study or possibly a PhD student.

Inclusivity
The inclusive nature of the project, which will involve all the children in the Reception class, was also identified as important. It was felt that the project has the potential to enable all children to participate, including the children attending the ARB and the relatively large number of children at the school with special needs and disabilities.
APPENDIX 2

Summary of a meeting held at Gay Elms Primary School on Friday 18th June 2010

Present:

Head teacher, Reception class teacher, UWE researcher (1)

Purpose:

The meeting provided opportunities for staff to report on the running and impact of the first year of the project. The teachers agreed for the meeting to be recorded and this summary is a result of repeated listening to the recording and identification of essential background material and key themes. Some of the words and phrases recorded during the meeting are included in the summary alongside specific quotes.

To prepare for the meeting the following questions were sent to the school to serve as a focus for the discussion:

How often do the groups meet?
What is the target group?
How many children attend?
What do the staff think is going on?
What are staff perceptions of the impact on the children?
What is the impact on the staff?
Are staff able to report any comments from parents?
What are staff perceptions of the impact on the musicians?
If we were able to carry out some more evaluative research what would the top 2/3 priorities be in relation to outcome, impact or process?

Practicalities (questions 1-3)

The musicians offer two one-hour time slots: Wednesday morning (11-12) and Thursday afternoon (1.30 -2.30). All 30 children in the Reception class have access to two of these half-hour sessions per week, the class divided into two stable groups of 14.

As itemised as one of the expectations in the earlier meeting inclusivity is recognised as an important theme. There is no specific target group with all children in the Reception class having the experience of access to the instruments, the musicians and the sessions. This makes the project ‘special’ irrespective of who the children are and any specific needs.

It was noted that some children are getting more from the project than others.

What’s going on? (question 4)

There had been a change of staff since the start of the project and the initial meeting. It was noted that one of the strengths of the project was that it continued during this
difficult period of transition for both staff and children. One flip side of the staff change was that the introduction of more singing was rather delayed.

When invited to describe what they considered was going on comments included:

- the children are using instruments to which they would normally not have access
- the children are seeing a higher standard of music-making and musicians than usual
- the children are thoroughly enjoying the whole experience (see earlier expectation)
- the inclusive approach shown by the musicians (see earlier expectation)
- staff feel comfortable to leave the children to work with the musicians, enabling other activities to take place with the remaining group
- the children trust the musicians
- the children are being very compliant, the musicians seem knowledgeable of appropriate behaviour strategies

Perceived impact on children (question 5)

It was emphasised that every child enjoys the experience with ‘fabulous’ feedback from the children. Given the age of the children a range of ability is to be expected. The staff commented on one child on the autistic spectrum who had a Statement of Educational Needs. She was reported as ‘coming alive’ in the music sessions, becoming very mobile and vocal in the sessions which was a different picture from behaviour in the classroom. Like all the children she thoroughly enjoyed the music sessions.

It was noted that the music sessions helped the whole child’s development with particular areas of perceived impact including:

- social interaction
- group cohesion and working together
- development of gross movements, e.g. skipping, jumping
- development of listening ability, stopping and speaking to each other (see earlier expectation)
- the children watching each other during the sessions
- turn-taking
- the children becoming familiar with the routines and anticipating the activities and the times and days for the music sessions, knowing what to expect
- every session including something that each child looks forward to
- a sense of stability

The children put on an end-of-term concert which was well-attended by parents, by children in Years 1 and 2 and by staff. There was very positive feedback from parents and staff. One observed impact here was the remarkable display of confidence demonstrated by the children who performed not just in front of their parents and carers but 60 children and other staff. Children at this very young age were not expected to demonstrate such confidence, examples of which included
one child whose self esteem is normally not that high standing up and singing; and
children standing up and playing instruments, such as one child who is usually quite
withdrawn standing up and playing violin to staff, 60 children and parents/carers

It was felt that standing up and singing and playing in front of others would not have
occurred without the ‘Preludes’ project. The staff at the meeting speculated about
what might be the impact of this experience on the children in two to three years
time, given the confidence demonstrated here.

Staff had commented that the general impact has been not just on the children’s
musical ability but also on all areas of the curriculum. The impact on confidence and
self-esteem has been noted. Socially the project has contributed to greater class
unity both in and out of music sessions with the children bonding together more
closely. The sessions have contributed to development in language (e.g. increase in
descriptive words when talking about the different instruments) and numeracy skills
(e.g. counting beats).

Many staff had commented on how the autistic child ‘shines’ and were astounded by
her ability in the concert. The degree of cooperation and confidence shown by the
children had surprised the Reception class teacher and other staff.

The Head commented that in the end of week Achievement Assembly the Reception
class children are starting to join in the ending song. Normally it takes about two
years for the children to feel comfortable in joining in. They are now all singing,
confidently sitting in front of school of 300. The children understand that singing is
something in which everyone participates.

To this end ‘the side effects [from the project are] almost as good as the actual thing
that is happening.’

Perceived impact on staff (question 6)

There was a general level of excitement about the project amongst the staff. They
are excited by the potential of the project, observing that if the children have this kind
of musical input whilst at the school ‘the potential for what could come out when they
leave the school is phenomenal.’ As mentioned in the earlier meeting the project
was always planned to be sustainable and not another short-term one. There is a
level of anticipation of the project developing through the school, staff commenting,
for example, that in two years time they will be ‘working with me.’ The head teacher
had observed significant improvements in staff planning for class music which was
previously ‘one of the worst subjects delivered in the school.’

The staff know that children will be more advanced in their music as they move
through the school and need to be aware of increased level in what is taught. This
has raised the whole profile of music in the school, viewed as ‘fantastic.’

Further off-shoots of the project have included:
members of the Ensemble working with children in the ARB
children in Year 6 visiting other schools with members of the Ensemble to
experience different musical activities and events, e.g. to listen to Flamenco dance
and music (a Year 6 boy commenting to the Head that the event was ‘beyond my wildest dreams’)
the Ensemble giving two concerts around themes for Remembrance Day (2009)
including one for the ARB with a considerable impact
through an invitation of a member of the Ensemble the school choir gave a lunchtime concert at one of the City’s most prestigious concert halls

It was felt that these further off-shoots, which would not have been possible without the ‘Preludes’ project and went beyond what was originally intended.

Perceived impact on musicians (question 7)

As the project progressed the musicians got to know the children better. They are able to engage with the children at their level, sitting on the floor with the children. The musicians are very involved. They know all the names of the children and their level of engagement. They are aware of the use of rewards and positive reinforcement.

One of the musicians organised a social event inviting staff from both this school and the other one in the project. This was felt to be a very positive experience enabling school staff and musicians to share and discuss ideas.

The staff would have welcomed more opportunities to share with colleagues from the other school including training events, e.g. Kodaly training. With hindsight more mixing with colleagues from the other school could have taken place from the start of the project. This is an area for future development and exchange.

Perceived impact on parents/carers (question 8)

The parents/carers are thrilled that their children are getting such an opportunity. The staff had been made aware that the parents had not had such musical opportunities or this kind of level of interaction with musicians and music during their entire education. A couple of the parents had bought instruments for the children, one child, for example, now owning a cello, the strings being fitted by one of the musicians and music found.

In addition to the end-of-term concert a tea party before one of the weekly sessions was arranged for the parents/carers. This second opportunity enabled progress to be observed. They could witness the impact and sustainability of the project. The children are proud to talk to their parents/carers about their music sessions and about what they have been playing. The staff are delighted that the children are using the correct names for the instruments when talking to their parents/carers, for example when a child is asked ‘Can you play an instrument?’ the reply is ‘Yes’ plus a listing of the names of the instruments and demonstration of how they are played.

Priorities for further evaluation – outcomes/impact/process (question 9)

Listening and speaking are key factors with the children coming in with relatively low levels in these areas (compared city-wide). A speech and language therapist assesses every child entering the Reception class and again at the end of the first
year. There is normally a low level of language development overall on entry with the need to teach linguistic skills. The staff are interested to discover if the project might have impacted on the children. It would be interesting to include data from the SLT assessments in future evaluations, given that the project is a sustained new input for all the children in the Reception class above and beyond normal classroom work. The Head stressed the importance of early years’ intervention with any additional input having potential impact.

Areas for further evaluation and development include:

Assessing the impact of the project on the quieter children in particular in relation to increasing self-esteem and confidence, with assessments (albeit hard to measure) at the beginning and end of the year.
Assessing the impact on the children with special needs, either on a class of children or an individual within one class (next year the Reception class will include a child on the autistic spectrum).
A further impact that could be assessed is on the staff. It has been noticed that staff want to teach in Reception next year and this is because of ‘Preludes.’
Enabling staff to work through the project with other schools in order to share experiences and learning.

Additional comments

This first year of the project has been considered by all staff to be a success. The children in the Reception class have been very able this year to make the transition from Foundation to Key Stage 1. Staff have fewer reservations about this class who are viewed as a mature group of children. The staff attribute this development to the intervention of the ‘Preludes’ project.

The project fosters creativity and staff expect more talents to emerge if the project is able to continue to develop throughout the whole school.

The impact the project has made on the staff is also a measurement of success witnessed, for example by a very experienced nursery nurse of long-standing service never been observed to be so engaged and enthusiastic about a project. The Reception class teacher commented that the project had been beneficial personally as well as to the children. A comment was made that the project had given ‘new life to staff.’

Photographs and pictures have been collected to illustrate the on-going progress. There has been further documentation in learning journals. The children and parents/carers have added spontaneous comments to the photographs and presentations. A book of photographs and comments has been prepared for promotional purposes.

All staff were hoping very much that the project could continue with huge aspirations for the future. In the future it would be hoped that this could be an entitlement for the children. The first year’s experience had been ‘fabulous.’
APPENDIX 3

Notes from researcher observations of two music sessions, June 2010

Two half hour observation sessions were undertaken by Professor Bunt for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation. In both the half-hour sessions it was immediately apparent how enthusiastic the children were to enter the room and to begin the music sessions. In both sessions there was a very clear order and shape to the planned activities. These included: listening to some recorded music while sitting together in a circle to encourage a range of different gross and fine movements.

Reflection: All the children took part at their own pace and level exploring the different movements evoked by the tempo, loudness and mood of the music. ‘Which instruments can you hear?’ The children were able to identify violin, piano, xylophone, clarinet

Reflection: This was a clear example of the inclusive approach adopted by the session leaders, value being attached to all the answers given by the children with no feeling of a right of wrong answer.

Use of homemade drums and ‘tappers’ for the ‘Fish Song’ collecting different cardboard fish labelled with different rhythmic patterns, e.g. Saturday (triplet); Coca cola (4 semiquavers); ‘sh’ for rests. Individual children/small groups of children invited to find the correct fish.

Reflection: There was much attentive listening, a sense of cooperation, working together with the children encouraging each other. The activity was clearly enjoyed by all the children.

Exploration of high and low sounds. A line was ‘drawn’ across the room which became the stable middle-range pitch played on the violin, small groups of children encouraged to jump forward towards a red chair when a second sounded note was higher and backwards to a yellow chair when the second sound was lower.

Reflection: This was a difficult activity and some children had more acute sense of hearing and listening ability than others. It was a very useful exercise to assess this. There was much sustained attention and quiet concentration. Once again there was much encouragement from the musicians and sense of group cooperation with no sense of getting it wrong. The children quietly waited their turn. The activity was repeated with eyes closed with some children not feeling too comfortable with this which was totally accepted by the group leaders. The children also enjoyed it when one of the musicians took part in the activity and deliberately got it ‘wrong,’ being corrected very keenly by the children.

Song: this was a fun song for the first group about the contents of a sandwich with the children creating new contents in the different verses. For the second group the children really seemed to like singing the old-time favourite ‘Daisy Daisy.’

Reflection: All the children were encouraged to sing and to be as creative as they could in giving new ideas, all being valued and accepted. It was a surprise that ‘Daisy Daisy’ was so popular.
Live music played by both musicians (violin and supportive keyboard) to provide music of contrasting nature: sleepy music (the theme from the last movement of Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ symphony); music for jumping, flying, riding on a horse etc. Reflection: The children were very adept at recognising the different tempi, rhythmic patterns and moods, adapting their behaviour accordingly. This was a fun activity for all with good learning outcomes.

The ‘Good Bye’ Song (again the theme from the ‘Pastoral’) which created a beautiful quiet mood, the children singing together, in small groups, twos and also some by themselves.

Reflection: Once again all musical contributions were valued equally. Three of the more boisterous boys in one of the groups sang the song together very gently and quietly.

The sessions ended with a request for a leader to lead the group back to their classroom.

Further reflections

There was a child in the second group who did not talk but noticeably took part in the singing and all the group activities.
There was not only very observable group cooperation but also a sense of empathy developing.
The sessions were beautifully modelled by the musicians (one providing most group facilitation with the other supporting ) with a non-judgemental and totally inclusive approach.
It was clear to see how the session could feed into other areas of the curriculum: numeracy, reading, movement skills etc..
There were examples of ‘musical intelligence’ being demonstrated by the children the children all appeared to enjoy the sessions and were keen to give out the instruments, tidy up etc…
The chance to observe these two sessions confirmed the points raised in the evaluation meeting. There was nothing elitist about this way of working musically.