

INSPIRING SOUNDS 2018–2019

Report on Birmingham
Services for Education
Music in Special
Schools Project

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FOYLE FOUNDATION

Key Findings

The 'Inspiring Sounds' music project, funded by the Foyle Foundation, was an initiative of Services for Education in Birmingham in the academic year 2018–2019. It was intended to raise the standard of music education in six special schools by providing sessions led by music service staff who had been trained to use the Sounds of Intent framework of musical development and its associated resources. Inspiring Sounds served both as a research and development study that tested the potential impact of a novel, collaborative model of music education for children with learning difficulties, and as a vehicle for service delivery: 120 pupils and 70 staff participated in the course of the year. The aim was to give pupils rich, interactive musical experiences that would enhance their capacity to engage with music, and to nurture the skills and confidence of the non-music-specialist school staff who worked with them, subsequently enabling them to run music sessions themselves. Both these aims were achieved. The levels of musical engagement of children with severe or profound learning difficulties rose by around a third of one Sounds of Intent level, which is considerably more than previous research has indicated would occur through natural maturation alone (around one Sounds of Intent level during their whole time at school), and is in line with other types of musical intervention for young people with learning difficulties that have been tried in the past. That is to say, we can be confident that Inspiring Sounds really did make a difference. This may in part be attributable increased number of school staff who reported using music in the course of their general teaching (which rose from 40% to 90%), and their self-reported growth in confidence to deliver music lessons, based on an improved understanding of how their pupils were developing musically. The Inspiring Sounds strategies and resources that were created and tested in the course of the project are due to be published in 2020, to enable other schools and music services to benefit from the lessons learned.

Table of Contents

1. Background.....	3
2. Aims and Objectives	3
3. Project Delivery.....	4
4. Methods of Evaluation	5
4.1 Staff Feedback	5
4.2 Journals and Observations.....	5
4.3 Using the Sounds of Intent Framework of Musical Development	5
5. Outcomes	8
5.1 Staff experience	8
5.2 Staff Impact.....	11
5.3 Impact on Students	12
5.4 Sounds of Intent.....	14
5.5 Widening Reach	18
6. Summary and Conclusion.....	19

1. Background

The Inspiring Sounds project was developed by Services for Education ('S4E') in response to the identified dearth of high-quality music provision and resources available to special schools in Birmingham. While previous research (Welch, Zimmermann and Ockelford, 2001; Welch *et al.*, 2016) indicated that many special schools believe in the importance and the value of music for their pupils, increasingly they lack the funding to employ music specialists. This is despite the fact that music is of key importance for those with special educational needs and disabilities, opening up routes to communication, promoting wider learning and development and nurturing a sense of wellbeing (Ockelford, 2013). S4E have invested substantially in the professional development of their workforce in recent years in relation to SEND, with a number of staff undertaking the PGCert in Music and Special Needs (Sounds of Intent), and 'Inspiring Sounds' sought to use their newly acquired knowledge and skills to take the first steps in providing new musical opportunities and raising the standard of musical attainment among pupils with special needs in Birmingham through an innovative partnership model involving six schools and the Sounds of Intent Charity.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aims of 'Inspiring Sounds' were to build confidence among non-music-specialist school staff in using music both within music sessions and in their classroom teaching more generally, to embed a framework for music assessment and evaluation using the Sounds of Intent ('Sol' framework), and to deliver weekly music-making activities for young people being educated in special schools. The objectives were to address four of the six areas of need identified in an audit of music provision in special schools undertaken by S4E in 2017. These were:

1. To give class teachers the skills and confidence to deliver music sessions themselves, and to use music within the curriculum more generally.

2. To provide a model of the music service working in partnership with other organisations, including the voluntary sector.
3. To raise the standard of music assessments undertaken in schools.
4. To provide performance opportunities for pupils outside school, both as audience members and performers.

3. Project Delivery

The main delivery elements of the Inspiring Sounds project were:

- Two hours of bespoke group music lessons per week in each of six special schools over a 30-week period, at which class teachers were present and increasingly proactive over the course of the academic year.
- One-hour preparation, discussion and debrief time with S4E staff and class teachers to facilitate planning and reflection.
- Professional development sessions for school staff in the Sounds of Intent framework, with an explanation of how to use this tool to assess the progress of pupils through the project, and how to embed a notion of musical development in pupils' wider learning goals.
- Training sessions for school staff to develop their confidence to use music in whole class settings between sessions.

Where appropriate, regular performance opportunities were introduced in the schools and beyond, for example, at the special school cluster concert, and at the annual Youth Proms (a five-night series of concerts at the Symphony Hall, Birmingham). This gave parents, carers and family members the opportunity to see, and students the opportunity to celebrate, their achievements.

In partnership with Sounds of Intent Charity, S4E aimed to develop resources and strategies for inclusive music making – specifically for non-music specialists. These were intended to create a legacy for the individual participants, special schools and their staff, as well as strengthening networks between special schools and S4E.

4. Methods of Evaluation

Multiple evaluation tools (providing both quantitative and qualitative data) were used to monitor progress and to demonstrate the impact of the 30-week programme of activity. These were as follows.

4.1 Staff Feedback

Teachers and support staff in the schools provided responses to a survey issued at the start and end of the project, as well as written feedback detailing the impact of the project on them and on their students.

4.2 Journals and Observations

Alongside the weekly debrief and completion of the Sol pro-forma, both S4E tutors and school staff kept a journal of their experiences. Sophie Gray, the project manager, also conducted observations on session delivery throughout the project and Adam Ockelford undertook visits in the role of mentor.

4.3 Using the Sounds of Intent Framework of Musical Development

Sol is a rigorously researched developmental framework and assessment tool for music. It can be used for music-specific activities as well as having the capacity to be embedded across the curriculum. Sol focuses on how music is created and perceived, and how children and young people can interact through musical activities (Vogiatzoglou, *et al.*, 2011; Welch *et al.*, 2009). The Sol framework identifies six levels of musical development, ranging from seemingly no response to sound or music to an advanced level of musical engagement and understanding. In summary these levels are:

- Level 1: No awareness of sound
- Level 2: An emerging awareness of sound and of the variety that is possible within it
- Level 3: A growing awareness of the possibility and significance of relationships between musical events – notes and chords
- Level 4: An evolving perception of *groups* of sounds and of the relationships that may exist between them
- Level 5: A growing recognition of whole pieces, and of the *frameworks* of pitch and perceived time that lie behind them
- Level 6: A developing awareness of the culturally determined ‘emotional syntax’ of performance that articulates the ‘narrative metaphor’ of pieces

Across these levels, Sol identifies three domains of musical engagement:

- Reactive (listening and responding to music)
- Proactive (making music alone)
- Interactive (engaging in music-making with others)

The six levels and three domains can be represented visually as a set of concentric circles (see Figure 1).

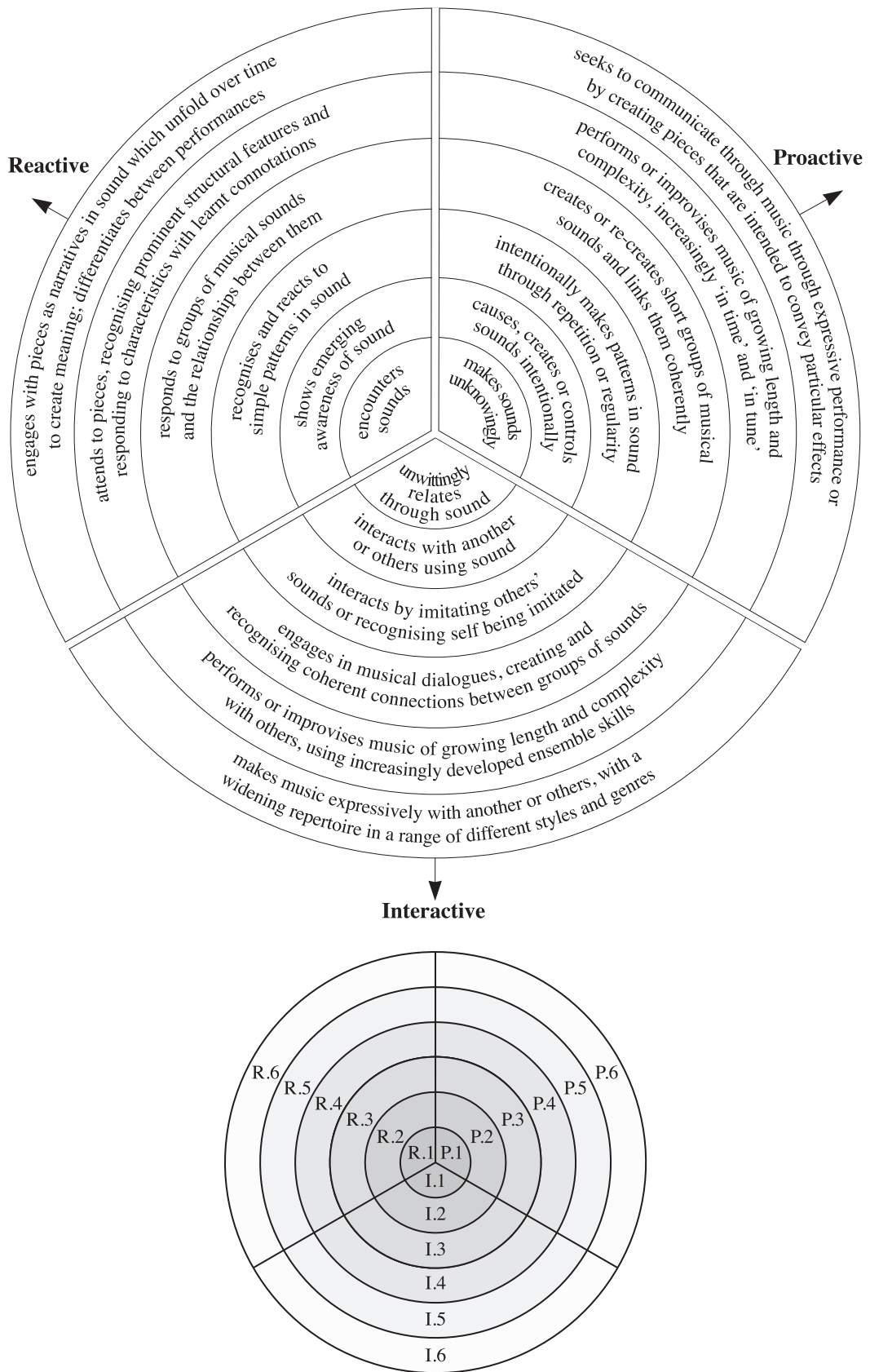


Figure 1 The Sounds of Intent framework of musical development

5. Outcomes

In summary, the following activity occurred in the course of the Inspiring Sounds project:

- 6 special schools participated
- 70 teachers and support staff received professional development in the theory and practice of the Sol framework
- 120 children engaged in the programme
- 360 hours of group music lessons were provided
- New resources were created and trialled (that are to form the basis of a book: *Inspiring Sounds: Inclusive Music Making with Children and Young People who have Learning Difficulties: Strategies for Specialist Musicians and Staff in Special Schools*, to be completed and published in 2020 – see Appendix 1).

The impact of the project on staff was judged through questionnaires and written feedback, and an analysis and review of these findings is presented below. This is followed by an analysis of the impact of the project on pupils' musical and wider development, which is based on staff's written observations. Children's musical development is then illustrated through the case study of one school within the project.

5.1 Staff experience

The survey presented key questions to staff relating to their experience and confidence levels in their use of music with their pupils at the beginning and end of the project, as well as their understanding of their pupils' levels of musical development and their awareness of Sounds of Intent as a resource. Thirteen teaching assistants and teachers responded to the survey.

5.1.1 Music delivery and level of confidence

Staff were asked whether they used music in general in their teaching, and their level of confidence in doing so. There was a marked difference pre-project and post-project, with an increase of 50% of staff using music across the curriculum to facilitate wider learning.

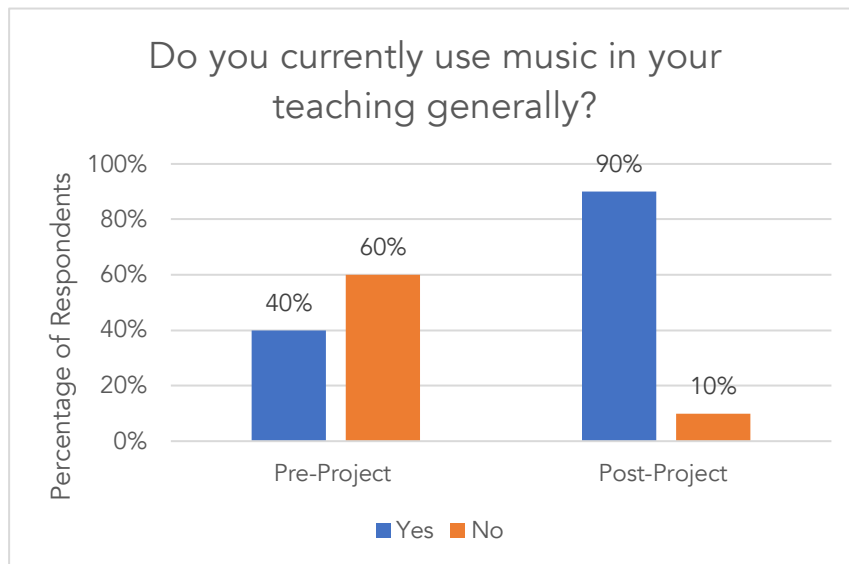


Figure 2 Number of staff using music in their general teaching

This increase was matched with higher levels of confidence in using music as a permeating strand in other subject areas.

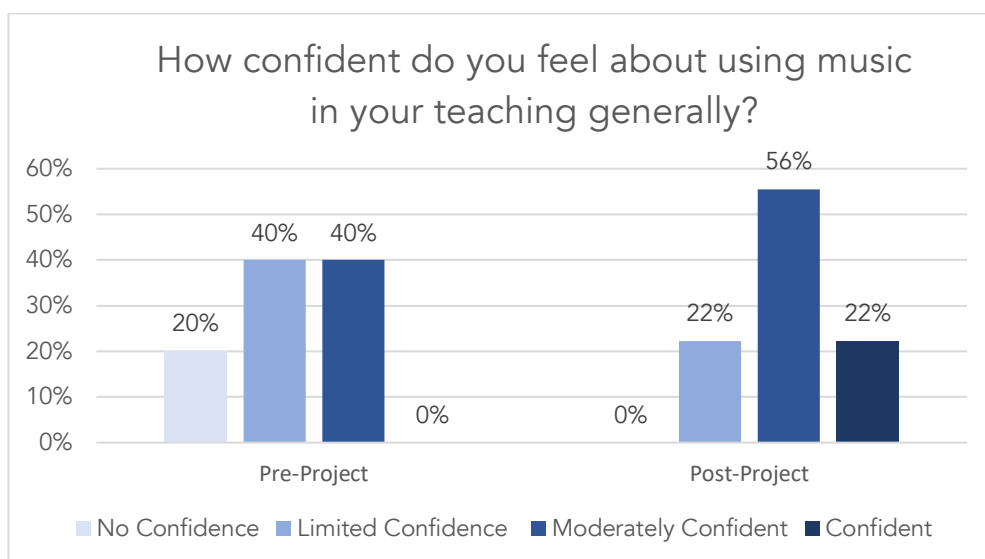


Figure 3 Staff levels of confidence in using music in their general teaching

There was a comparable increase in levels of confidence among staff to deliver music sessions themselves.

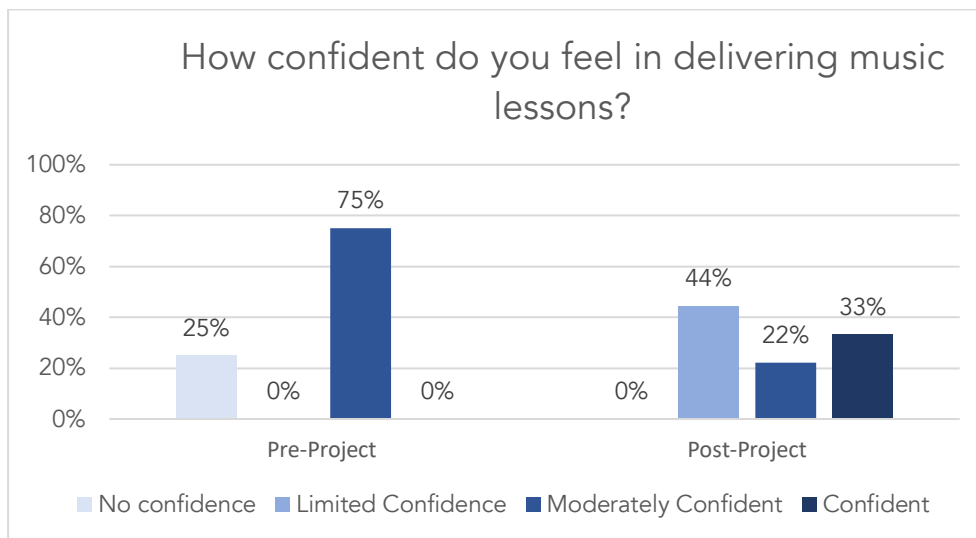


Figure 4 Staff levels of confidence in delivering music lessons

5.1.2 Staff understanding of musical development and Sol

The next two questions focused on staff’s understanding of pupils’ musical development and awareness of Sol. In response to the question concerning their understanding of the musical development of their students, there was a marked improvement pre- and post-project, from none to a third of staff feeling they had this knowledge. Clearly, further training would be needed to achieve this goal fully.

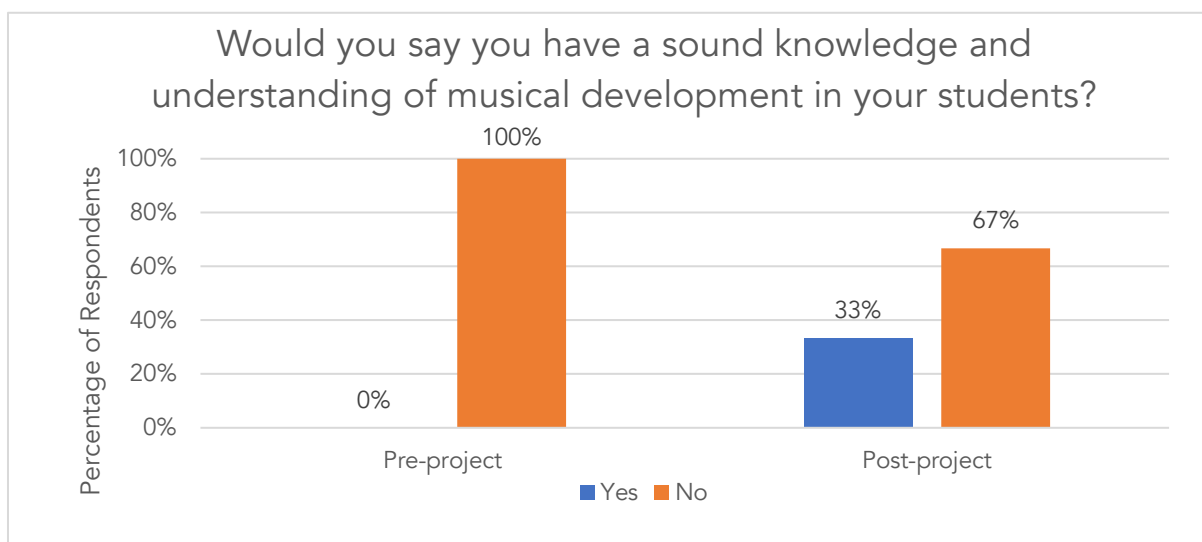


Figure 5 Staff’s reported knowledge and understanding of the musical development of their pupils

As one would expect, their awareness of the Sol framework increased markedly.

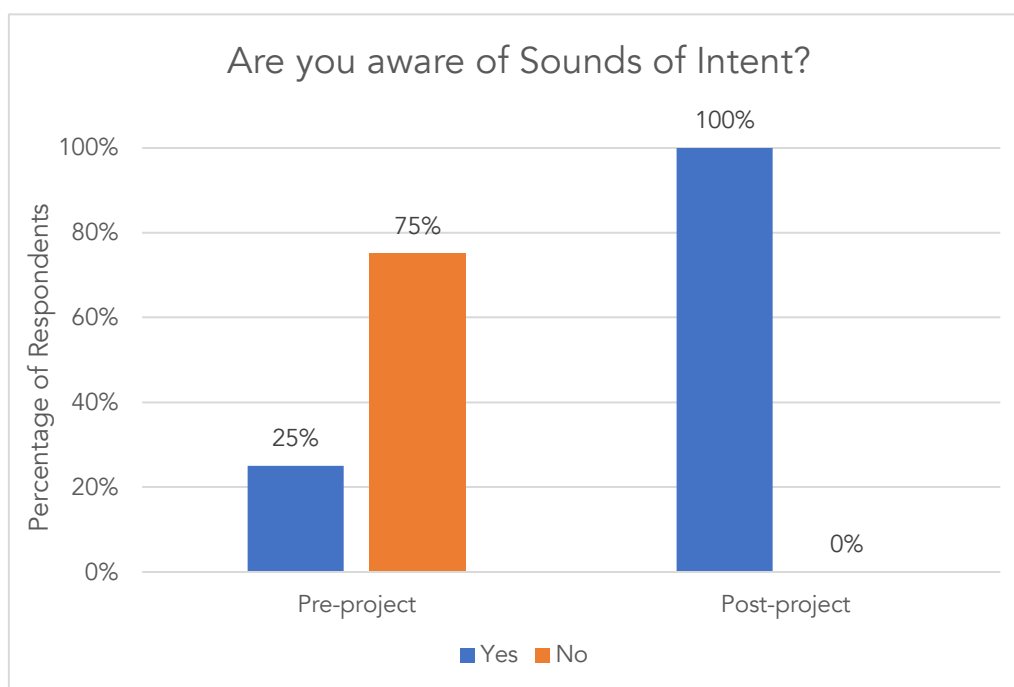


Figure 6 Staff's reported awareness of the Sol framework

5.2 Staff Impact

School staff also provided written feedback on the project and their responses highlight the impact of the project on both the staff themselves and their students. A number of staff felt the project helped to update their existing skill set as well as enabling them to practise new approaches to teaching and ideas for using music with their students.

Inspiring Sounds has been brilliant this year. From a teacher's perspective, it's great as I don't have much experience with music and wouldn't know where to start teaching it. It's given me lots of ideas and the confidence to teach composition etc.

It's been a great refresher of skills for me as class teacher. Music has previously been in my PPA time and I have really enjoyed seeing a music specialist work. I've learned some new skills and some new songs.

I can definitely state that the staff involved have been particularly impressed with the Sounds of Intent programme. It has supported teachers, particularly a teacher young in her career to learn from and enhance her skills and experience in teaching music

to children. This has happened because of the opportunity to be present and learn from observing and taking part with the group sessions ...The staff have benefited from an introductory twilight training session, which was really relevant to the special educational needs of the children we have. It helped staff to understand the importance and significance of incorporating music into the curriculum, language and development and how it truly benefits social and emotional communication. However, there is more we could benefit from. It has helped to provide staff with more confidence in teaching what is a specialist subject and make the teaching of music less daunting.

5.3 Impact on Students

Many teachers highlighted the impact the sessions had on their students. For some children it took time to become used to the new activities and routine, but with time the benefits were clear. Indeed, this showed that providing sessions regularly over time was imperative and necessary to be able to take into account children's individual needs. The following highlights the musical and wider impact noted by the students' teachers.

5.3.1 Musical engagement

Teachers noted changes seen in their students over time, such as the development of musical engagement in areas including rhythm, engaging with and playing instruments, listening and responding, interacting with others through pattern and copying, and showing a general enjoyment of the sessions.

There has been a range of improvement for many children with regard to their rhythm. with some making what would seem significant improvement from the start of the year. Also, students have improved in their use of instruments and ability to clap in time, to a beat. Some students have particularly enjoyed being 'conductors' and shown competence at it.

The sessions have engaged some children who find it difficult to sit and focus. All the children love the sessions and have really shown an improvement in their rhythm.

RK was awarded Star of the Week for playing his chime in time to the music and at the different tempos as well!

It has been fascinating to see the Inspiring Sounds project with my class of Year 3 children. The children are consistently engaged with the musical activities and really enjoy the lesson. In the term that they have been following the programme it has been interesting to see the development of their listening skills in the lesson, and the development of their responses to the musical activities.

During our sessions children who were normally reserved and who struggle to pay attention during work time, got involved, playing instruments, imitating noises and copying actions in songs. It was amazing to see!

We have worked with K on a weekly basis for music throughout this academic year. At the start of the music sessions, only a few of the children would interact and join in. Now the majority of the children will anticipate a certain song or musical instrument and show enjoyment for K playing to them in their own way. The children are also becoming more aware of patterns being made in music and will copy a small section. Some children are also making their own patterns and repeating them back to K. Overall, we have had an amazing year with K and can see lots of improvement in all of the children! Thank you so much!

Inspiring Sounds has been a helpful addition to the music curriculum. The sessions were able access musical instruments that they would not normally have a chance to explore. The sensory lessons in the blue room were particularly effective as the children with lower abilities were able to access the lesson on a more sensory level. The higher ability children were very engaged in the singing sessions. They often requested songs to sing and perform. All in all, an effective initiative that has enhanced the curriculum.

5.3.2 Wider Development and Learning

As well as having an impact on musical development, staffs' comments illustrate the impact the music sessions have had on children's wider learning and development including an increase in attention and focus, language development, confidence and engagement with others. The feedback also shows that children were able to engage within sessions at all levels of ability.

Class 3 have thoroughly enjoyed their music lessons this year with Inspiring Sounds. Particular positives have been ... how well the lessons have engaged their attention.

The children have short attention spans, but the music sessions have really engaged them, and they have been able to maintain their focus for the majority of the session. An ASD child has particularly benefitted from the lessons. At the start of the year he was reluctant to answer any requests or take part when asked to demonstrate. He can now respond verbally to the teacher and can demonstrate an action or sound for the class to copy. Another ASD child has been very motivated to speak in the sessions and they have helped with her spoken language development

The children have loved the sessions; they look forward to them every week. It is accessible for them all and can easily be differentiated to stretch them. We have particularly enjoyed seeing all of them take part in the conducting aspect of the lesson because it has enabled them all to stand in front of their class and conduct. This has been great for their confidence. We would love to have the same for music next year if possible!

Two of our children that usually find it hard to engage with their learning or with new people have really engaged well with P both through the drums and through dance! The sessions have engaged some children who find it difficult to sit and focus.

For pupils with a diagnosis of autism the work that Inspiring Sounds have done through K has presented an amazing opportunity. K's specialised focus on pupils with SEN has really meant that her practice is fine-tuned and bespoke for our pupils, particularly class 4: a very complex class with pupils with profound learning difficulties.

5.4 Sounds of Intent

The impact of the project on children's musical development was also gauged quantitatively using the Sol framework of musical development. School staff and the S4E music practitioners debriefed after each session to talk about the activities and progress every week. During this time, they recorded progress independently on an evaluation pro-forma linked to the Sol framework. The data they produced have been used to calculate the mean Sol score for students within individual classes over time.

It is evident that the music practitioners and school staff involved in the project grounded their practice in relation to Sol thinking. Detailed notes and reflections supplementing the Sol scores for each group of pupils provided insight into changes in engagement that were seen. Sessions were carefully planned with activities relating to individual pupil's level of musical engagement based on observations from session to session as well as responses within the moment.

Figures 7–10 depict the mean Sol score over time for each class group of pupils within one, case-study school. As one would expect, the results illustrate that the most notable change occurs over a longer period – see, for example, Figure 10, in which pupils were observed over nine months. The graphs demonstrate a fluctuation in musical engagement over time, which is to be expected and may be related to many factors including how the children were feeling that day, what activities were being presented, what time of day the sessions were held and so on.

Overall, musical engagement was observed to be at Sol Level 2, in which children and young people are observed to have a sense of agency and purpose in creating sound, Sol Level 3, in which children demonstrate an understanding of pattern and the ability to create and imitate pattern and sound, and Sol Level 4, in which children and young people begin to respond to, create and interact with others using groups of sound, for example distinct fragments of melody or rhythm heard in familiar songs.

These results are comparable with those found in previous studies. For example Welch *et al.* (2009), in analysing the musical development of 68 pupils with complex needs over time using the Sol framework, also found that most observations lay within Levels 2–3, with a small percentage engaging at Sol Level 4 (seen here in Figure 10). The authors also found that, over a 10-week period, while progress had been observed in some children, others showed no change, and some showed a decrease in engagement. Another project, which followed children with profound

and multiple learning difficulties over a six-month period using the Sol framework, noted the importance of tracking change of engagement within levels. The results showed that for children and young people with PMLD change from one Sol level to the next is a gradual process, and for some may take years to occur (Ockelford et al., 2011). In the current project, on average, the levels of musical engagement rose by around a third of one Sol level, which is quicker than through natural maturation alone, and is in line with other types of musical intervention for young people with severe and profound learning difficulties that have been tried in the past. Hence, we can be confident that Inspiring Sounds really did make a difference.

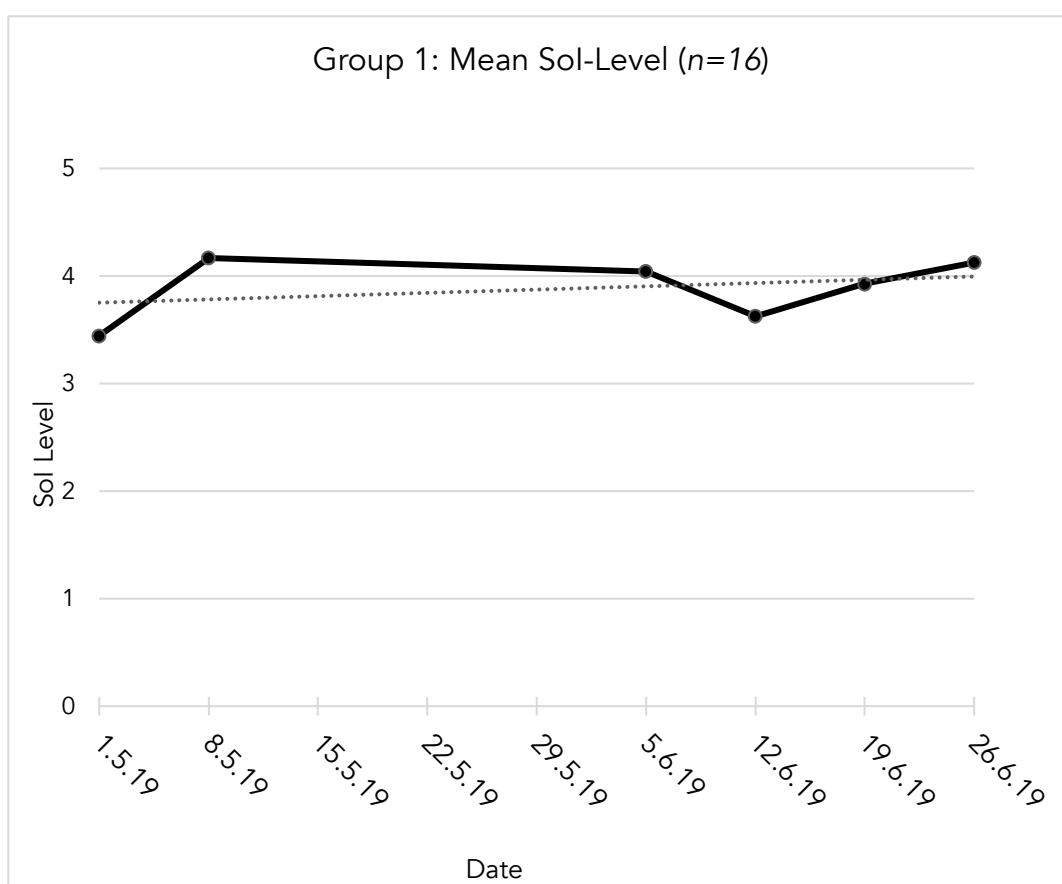


Figure 7 Sol mean level over time for pupils in Group 1 (n=16)

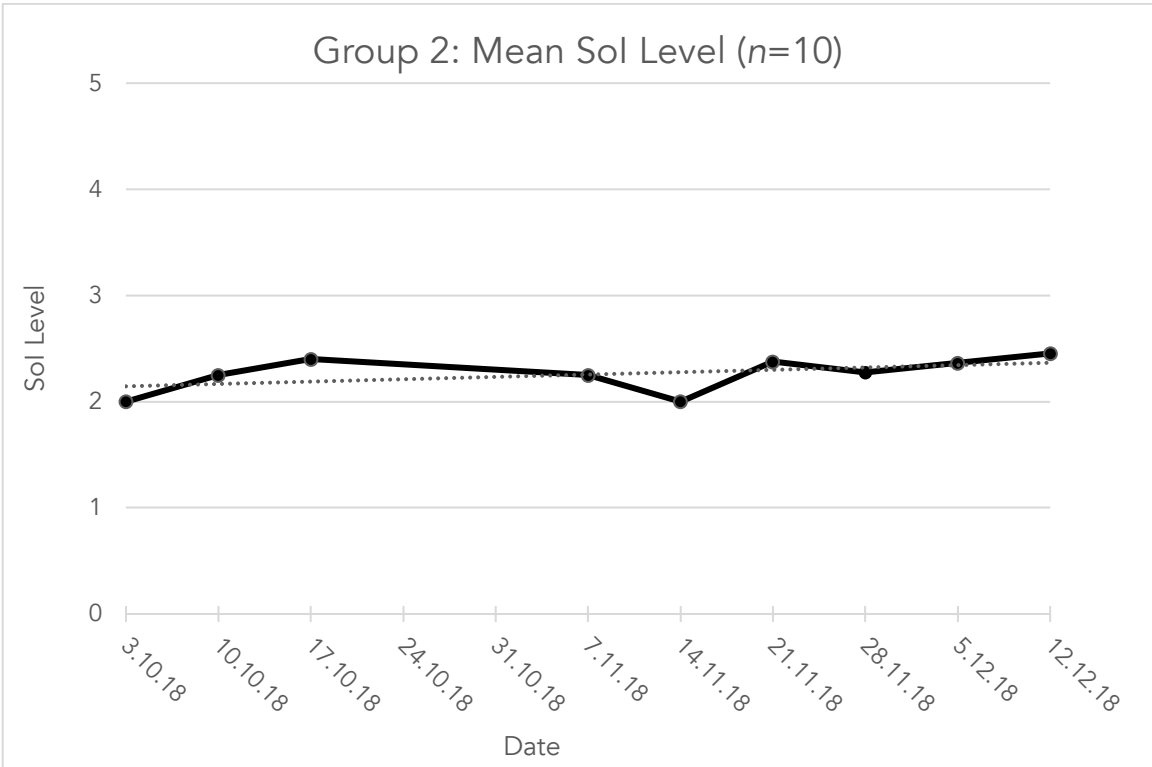


Figure 8 Mean Sol level over time for pupils in Group 2 (n=10)

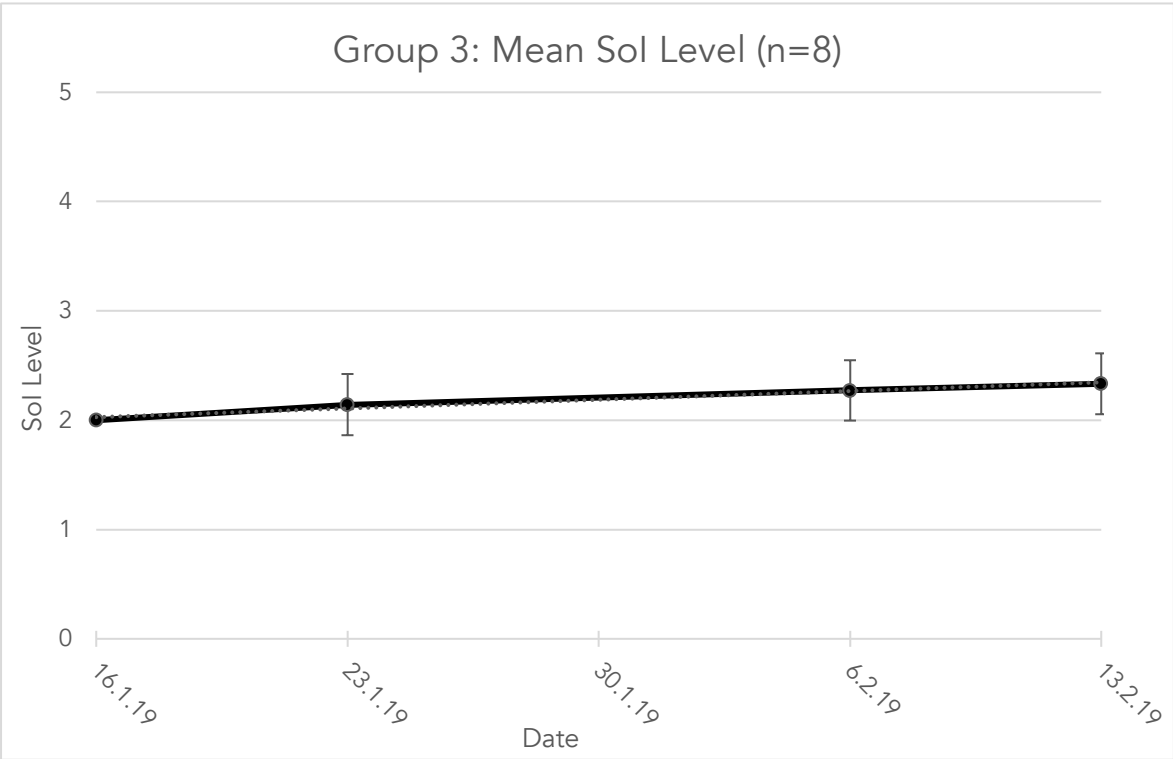


Figure 9 Mean Sol level for pupils in Group 3 (n=8)

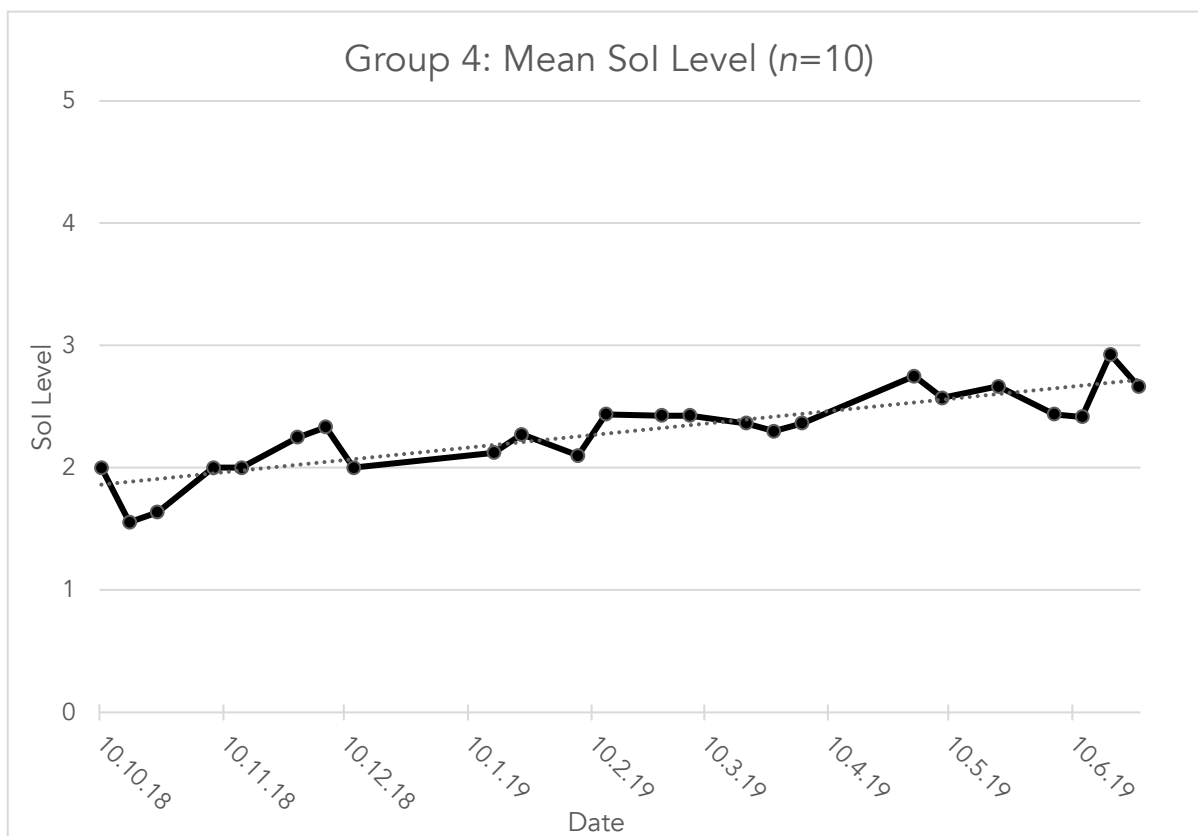


Figure 10 Mean Sol Level for pupils in Group 4 (n=10)

5.5 Widening Reach

5.5.1 Schools

As a result of the success in this initial Inspiring Sounds project, the schools involved are continuing for another year. Following on from this, the project is extending its reach by collaborating with a new set of six schools for a further two years.

5.5.2 Written Resources

Discussion is currently underway with Taylor and Francis to publish the resources that were developed in the course of the project for school staff and specialist music teachers (see Appendix 1).

6. Summary and Conclusion

The aim of the Inspiring Sounds project was to pilot a new model of high-quality music provision and resources as a collaboration between S4E and six special schools in Birmingham. While music is a vital aspect of education for children and young people with additional needs many special schools do not have the funding or resources to offer the necessary provision and source music practitioners with specialist training and experience. The outcomes of the project demonstrate that school staff were provided with new or refreshed knowledge and skills in using music in their teaching as well as in observing and assessing their students musical engagement and development. The use of the Sol framework provided an informed approach based on pupils' engagement with music, showing a child-centred and reflective approach. Observations by S4E and school staff indicate that the intervention had a positive impact on pupils' musical and wider development.

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Appendix 1

Indicative design of the new Inspiring Sounds resource, to be published in 2020.

