

Adam Ockelford explains how a research project has provided a more inclusive framework for teaching students with special educational needs at key stage 3

### Introduction

Surely, music should be at the vanguard of inclusion in schools. It engages us all, as we listen to, reproduce or create abstract patterns of organised sound in social contexts; it is a primal form of communication that starts to evolve three months before birth. And this timetable of musical development seems to hold true for many children with learning difficulties: research has shown that even severe intellectual impairment need be no barrier to the early acquisition of musical skills. Indeed, some students with cognitive disabilities are musically very able, and teachers need to be aware that special musical needs and abilities can interact in complex ways – altogether, a considerable challenge, but one that increasing numbers of teachers in mainstream schools are likely to have to address as the move to inclusion continues. Already, of the 40,000 children with severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties ('SLD' or 'PMLD') in England (about 0.5% of the school population), around 10,000 are educated in mainstream schools.

What are these young people like? Those with PMLD have global developmental delay, such that cognitive, sensory, physical, emotional and social abilities are in the very early stages (as in the first 12 months of usual development), while students with SLD function in general terms as children in their first 12 to 30 months. For us, the key thing is that they all have the same entitlement to music education as their non-disabled peers.

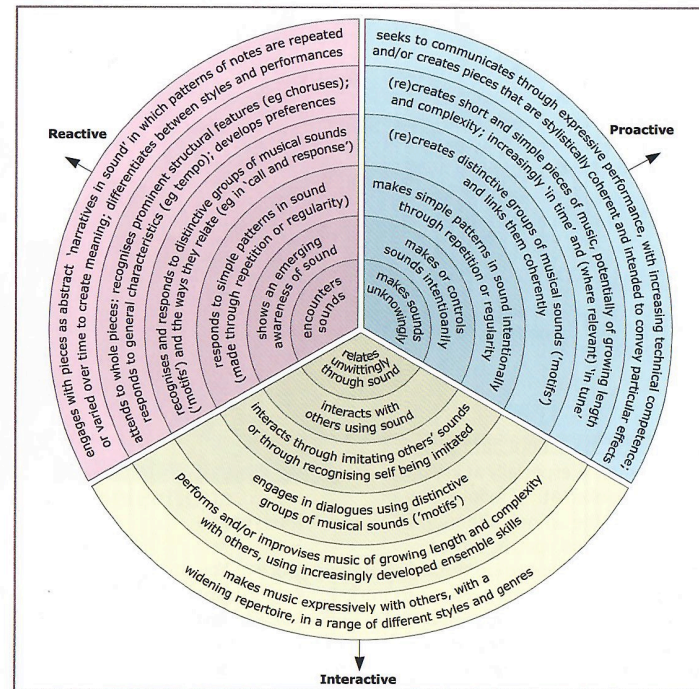
### QCA's guidelines

To assist teachers in devising, delivering and evaluating curricula appropriate to the needs of those with SLD and PMLD, in 2001 the QCA published a set of guidelines – 'Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for students with learning difficulties' – the so-called 'P levels'. In common with the others, the music document contains 'performance descriptions', which outline learning and attainment at a range of levels. It is claimed that teachers can use the 11 performance descriptions to decide which best fits a student over a period of time, and so track 'linear progress' towards attainment at level 1 of the National Curriculum. There are a number of issues with the P level for music, though: the descriptions feel anecdotal, and there are surprising omissions (there is no mention in the examples of vocal interaction, for example).

### The Sounds of Intent project

Shortly after the publication of the P levels, a group of researchers and practitioners from Roehampton University, the Institute of Education, London, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and a number of schools in the south east got together with the aim of coming up with something better: an evidence-based music-developmental framework for young people with learning difficulties that would be relevant and helpful to those working in the field and, ultimately, to their students. The research project became known as 'Sounds of Intent', whose starting point was teachers' observations of their students in action. Hundreds of individual examples of musical engagement were collected, and a selection can be viewed on the Rhinegold website (go to [www.rhinegold.co.uk](http://www.rhinegold.co.uk) and follow the links to the *Classroom Music* support material).

These observations were discussed at length, and the following headline framework emerged, with three domains of musical engagement (reactive, proactive and interactive), each extending over six levels. The concentric circles were intended to represent students' potential musical growth, from a small core of evolving self-awareness to the rich and diverse world of other musicians and other musical cultures.



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Each of these 18 segments was broken down into four elements, which, as well as clarifying the headline descriptors, were intended to help teachers identify the progression that was possible *within* levels. Levels 5 and 6 (the outer two rings) are shown in the table on the opposite page.

### The SOI framework applied at KS3

Some idea of how successful students with PMLD and SLD are likely to be, when included in active music-making in mainstream classrooms, can be gauged by cross-referencing these Sounds of Intent (SOI) descriptors with the rubric for music at key stage 3, as set out in the revised National Curriculum (2008). The SOI domains map onto 'Key Concept 1.1', which comprises two strands: (a) 'developing knowledge, skills and understanding through the integration of performing,



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composing [equivalent to the 'proactive' domain] and listening [which equates to the 'reactive' domain]; and (b) 'participating, collaborating and working with others as musicians [comparable to the 'interactive' domain]'. However, other National Curriculum concepts, such as 'cultural' and 'critical' understanding, which demand the capacity for abstract thought and/or metacognition (the ability to reflect on one's own mental processes) are not present within the SOI framework. This is because they are not *directly* related to active participation in music and they rarely (if ever) form part of the cognitive architecture of young people with PMLD or SLD. Nonetheless, there is plenty that does read across between the two taxonomies, as the cross-reference table on the Rhinegold website shows.

This analysis shows that those students working at levels 5 and 6 of the SOI music-developmental framework should be able to participate successfully in the practical aspects of the National Curriculum for music at KS3, although they may need particular support (or may need to be offered alternative strategies) in relation to the reflective aspects of programmes of study and the symbolic concepts underpinning music notation. It is highly unlikely that students with PMLD would have the capacity to function at this level, and there will be many with SLD who will also be music-developmentally less advanced. However, there is no reason why *all* students with PMLD and SLD should not be exposed to musical activities with other students functioning at KS3, since this may foster development in the reactive domain, and it is quite conceivable that, within practical music-making activities, differentiation may be possible, whereby students contribute material of differing complexity to a coherent musical whole.

This position is broadly congruent with the QCA's statement of 'opportunities and activities' in music at KS3 for those with learning difficulties, although some refinement is suggested. For example, the QCA documentation states: '*all* students with learning difficulties (including those with the most profound disabilities) listen to, experience and explore specific genres, styles and traditions from different times and cultures and develop their own musical preferences'. However, the SOI research shows that 'experiencing', 'exploring' and 'developing preferences' are not behaviours found at level 1, where systematic (though imaginative) *exposure* to a range of sound and music is the order of the day. Similarly, the QCA states that '*most* students with learning difficulties (including those with severe difficulties in learning) ... will ... perform simple patterns and accompaniments keeping to a steady pulse'. The findings from SOI indicate that this would be possible for the student who is functioning competently at level 3, though this need not, of course, be the case.

### Final thoughts

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the SOI research provides a useful tool for analysing the National Curriculum framework, as the cross-references in the table on the Rhinegold website show. For example, attainment target 4 indicates that students should 'identify and explore the relationship between sounds' (a level 3 activity in the reactive domain), while also composing 'by developing ideas within musical structures' (proactive, level 5). This suggests that either the listening target should be made more advanced, or the composing target less so. Similarly, there are a number of cases where the demands in a given domain seem to change little between attainment targets. For instance, what is the intended difference

<b>R.5</b> attends to whole pieces; recognises prominent structural features (eg choruses); responds to general characteristics (eg tempo); develops preferences	<b>P.5</b> (re)creates short and simple pieces of music, potentially of growing length and complexity; increasingly 'in time' and (where relevant) 'in tune'	<b>I.5</b> performs and/or improvises music of growing length and complexity with others, using increasingly developed ensemble skills	<b>R.6</b> engages with pieces as abstract 'narratives in sound' in which patterns of notes are repeated or varied over time to create meaning; differentiates between styles and performances	<b>P.6</b> seeks to communicate through expressive performance, with increasing technical competence; creates pieces that are intended to convey particular effects	<b>I.6</b> makes music expressively with others, with a widening repertoire, in a range of different styles and genres
<b>R.5.A</b> attends to whole pieces of music, becoming familiar with an increasing number and developing preferences	<b>P.5.A</b> performs short and simple pieces of music, potentially of growing length and complexity, and increasingly 'in time' and (where relevant) 'in tune'	<b>I.5.A</b> performs simple pieces simultaneously with others, sharing a common part	<b>R.6.A</b> develops a mature response to music, engaging with pieces as abstract 'narratives in sound'	<b>P.6.A</b> plays or sings expressively using familiar conventions of performance, at the highest level producing original interpretations	<b>I.6.A</b> is aware of, and emulates the expressivity of others' playing or singing in ensemble performance
<b>R.5.B</b> recognises prominent structural features (such as the choruses of songs)	<b>P.5.B</b> improvises on familiar pieces of music, varying the original material in simple ways	<b>I.5.B</b> performs with others, using increasingly developed ensemble skills and maintaining an independent part	<b>R.6.B</b> becomes familiar with an increasing number of styles and genres and develops preferences	<b>P.6.B</b> improvises on music in a familiar style or styles to convey desired effects, at the highest level producing original versions of existing pieces (as in jazz 'standards')	<b>I.6.B</b> contributes own expressivity in ensemble playing to influence co-performers
<b>R.5.C</b> responds to general characteristics of pieces (such as mode, tempo and texture)	<b>P.5.C</b> creates short and simple pieces of music, potentially of increasing length, complexity and coherence, whose general characteristics may be intended to convey particular moods or feelings, and which may be linked to external associations	<b>I.5.C</b> improvises with others, repeating, varying and/or building on the material that is offered in simple ways	<b>R.6.C</b> becomes familiar with different performances of pieces and styles of performance and develops preferences	<b>P.6.C</b> composes pieces in a familiar style or styles to convey desired effects, at the highest level producing original material judged to be of intrinsic musical value	<b>I.6.C</b> improvises with others with stylistic coherence, sharing and developing material in increasingly sophisticated ways
<b>R.5.D</b> responds to pieces through connotations brought about by their association with objects, people or events in the external world	<b>P.5.D</b> has the physical capacity to produce short and simple pieces of music, potentially evolving to meet the needs of material of growing complexity and length	<b>I.5.D</b> improvises with others, consciously offering material for them to use	<b>R.6.D</b> becomes aware of how music as an abstract narrative in sound relates to other media (words, movement, etc) to create multimodal meaning	<b>P.6.C</b> technical proficiency develops to meet the demands of a widening repertoire	<b>I.6.D</b> develops increasingly advanced ensemble skills, managing material of growing technical and musical complexity as part of a group

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between students who 'discriminate between selected musical resources, styles, genres and traditions', those who 'discriminate between and explore musical conventions in selected styles, genres and traditions' and those who 'identify and explore the different processes and contexts of selected musical styles, genres and traditions' (attainment targets 7, 6 and 5 respectively – all at level 6 in the SOI framework)? In the longer term, it may be, through sharing curricular concepts and ideas in this way, that inclusion will benefit 'those who include' as much as the 'included'.