

School Feedback

Nov 2024

Michael Bradley, Headteacher (Merton Abbey Primary School)

The children love their Mini Musicians sessions. The teachers can see how the children's musical skills are building over time. The children are singing tunefully(!) and are confident to participate in all the musical activities in the lessons. They all take part – even two of our children with autism (who were expected to go to specialist settings). The programme has already had a significant positive impact on how the children are able to perform to their parents. The fact that the children love the sessions contributes to their enjoyment of school and their general wellbeing. One teacher mentioned how clapping syllables has helped the children when segmenting words for spelling in their phonics lessons

Susie Mooney, Music Coordinator (Garfield Primary School)

*Mini Musicians is a valuable addition to the music teaching and learning at Garfield. Miss Jen teaches well planned and resourced lessons that have shown to make a huge impact in many ways on the EYFS and KS1 cohort. **One area is oracy** - the MM lessons use sentence stems that encourage children to speak full sentences during music appreciation and then they use this skill further into other curriculum areas. **Another impact is in word reading** - MM lessons use Widgit to support phonics and SEN children.*

The Year 2 children have started to play their melodicas confidently and use the taught musical vocabulary fluently both in MM lessons and in their curriculum music lessons. We love MM here at Garfield and it has made a big impact.

Jane Buckett, Music Coordinator (Hillcross Primary School)

*Year 1 and 2 are invested in this project wholeheartedly. They love their music session and cannot wait until it is their turn. They always return to the classroom, keen to share what they have just been learning and bursting with confidence to take on the next challenge. The 'Big Sing' is a wonderful way to close the week - the feeling of community and collaboration is overwhelming. Even the children who may find some areas of learning more challenging receive a monumental boost during all these sessions - giving them a sense of worth and helping them to identify a passion in the school environment that can extend to their home life. I cannot express enough how very privileged I feel that Hillcross Primary have been given this amazing opportunity and I know that the children are eternally gratefully and fully aware of how lucky they are! This is a project that **MUST** continue - it would be madness if it doesn't!*

Pupil Voice (Hillcross Primary School)

Hillcross pupils talk about Mini Musicians: <https://youtu.be/EJMDayPD9MA>

Year 1 Class Teacher (Hillcross Primary School)

The children in Year 1 could not love mini musicians more and I would have to agree. Each week, the children eagerly wait until Friday as they know it's music and it's the highlight of their week. The knowledge Jen has inspires the children and makes simple things exciting. The children have learnt a range of songs and skills that will stay with them for life. Could not recommend this scheme of work more!

Kelly Bennett, Year 1 Teacher (St Matthew's Primary School)

I noticed that several children applied what they had learned during their independent play. For example, some showed great curiosity towards the musical patterns they had been introduced to. They would often write notes in a booklet and experiment with composing their own music. Others shared what they had learned during our sessions. Some children who already had experience with music through playing an instrument would talk to their peers about what they knew. Together they would discuss various elements of music.

Overall, I believe the Mini Musician sessions have been beneficial for the children in many ways. Those who were initially hesitant to participate have gradually become more engaged and have even volunteered to perform in front of their peers. It's also been encouraging to see children who are usually quieter in class confidently join in with singing and other activities.

Shelley Rainey, Reception Class Teacher (St Matthew's Primary School)

Mini Musicians has proven to be an invaluable resource for our Reception class. The children have developed a deep affection for Jen and eagerly anticipate their weekly sessions. These activities have had a significant positive impact on their turn-taking, listening skills, and overall confidence, while fostering a genuine love for singing and playing instruments.

The consistent, structured format of the sessions ensures accessibility for all children, and it is truly rewarding to see every child engaged. It is not uncommon to hear groups of children spontaneously singing the songs during transitions, whether on the way to lunch or while playing in the playground. Additionally, the teaching staff have benefited from the opportunity to observe their own class being taught, providing valuable insights into how children engage with the activities from a different perspective.

Mini Musicians

The benefits of Mini Musicians extend far beyond music education. Smaller class groups have enabled the children to more actively participate in Art and Design activities, including craft and food technology. The music sessions offer all children a chance to succeed, boosting their self-esteem and enthusiasm for school. Even those who may initially feel a bit uncertain in the mornings often experience a noticeable change in attitude when reminded, "It's Mini Musicians today!"

The program has served as excellent professional development for staff, and personally, I now feel much more confident in teaching music moving forward.

Helen Teasdale, Music Teacher (Perseid Lower School)

The pupils at Perseid are thoroughly enjoying the project and have made excellent progress. In terms of me as a teacher, I have been able to team teach/observe Julie and then apply her strategies to the other groups across the school, meaning all our primary children are gaining some access to Mini Musicians .

We have a range of abilities taking part in the project and they have all benefited in different ways. Our formal learners have learned how to follow rhythm notation , play a simple tune on chimebars, keyboards and melodicas. I have really heard an improvement in their sense of pitch, for example one pupil who struggled with this before the project is able to confidently sing in tune even singing a solo in our Nativity this year. The pupils need no prompting to play a tune on a keyboard and some will walk in the room , approach the piano and start playing their mini musicians songs independently.

Our semi/pre formal learners many of whom are pre-verbal have been able to sing all or part of the mini musicians songs - one pupils who only communicates with one word for example is able to sing "I can Sing" in tune and in time, this very empowering for him . He will often still be singing on his way back to class from the lesson! These pupils have benefited from using the colour coding to play simple tunes of the chime bars. They have used the music as a way of communicating with each other and staff.

Our pre-formal learners have explore the mini musicians songs through playing instruments, explored a range of music using the stretchy band, scarves and had the opportunity to express themselves playing the chime bars and mini keyboards which have proved really popular! Whilst these children are early stage and not at the level of playing the songs, we have created our own pieces - for example we made "up and down" music on our chime bars with lots of copying and call and response. We explore the rain is falling down song with water sprays, parachute and then used our instruments to create a version of the song using the mini keyboards. This is really supporting their language development and communication.

I hope this gives a glimpse into the benefit! Many thanks for including us in the project

Early Data Analysis

Research Study

Our lead researcher, Prof. Adam Ockelford (University of Roehampton), has analysed data from a random sample of pupils collected during the first two assessments (Spring and Summer Terms 2023-24).

The summary of his initial findings is as follows:

- there was a highly statistically significant improvement in the level of musical achievement of the children sampled at random – an improvement of 10% over the first term (in due course I can explain what that means in terms of musical development)
- half the children acquired a basic form of Absolute Pitch. This is important as it underpins their capacity to play the melodica (or indeed any instrument), and was certainly in evidence with the children I saw playing last week. It arises from the approach that our practitioners are using, whereby all the songs are learnt at a consistent ('correct') pitch – which is very much antithetical to the 'conventional' early years approach, which holds that pitch doesn't really matter. NB 1 in 10,000 adults have AP.

Compiled by: David Rees, Merton Music Foundation (Dec 2024)