

# Mini Musicians

The impact of an innovative music programme for four- to seven-year-olds in the London Borough of Merton, 2023–2025



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Thank you to the music specialists, education practitioners and children from the London Borough of Merton involved in this evaluation study.

# Executive Summary

Mini Musicians was a borough-wide early years music education programme delivered across ten primary and special schools in the London Borough of Merton between 2023 and 2025. Independently evaluated by the University of Roehampton, the programme reached approximately 650 pupils aged four to seven and provides robust evidence that sustained, specialist-led music education in the early years can deliver significant musical, educational and social benefits, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The evaluation found that pupils participating in Mini Musicians made **substantially greater progress in musical development** than pupils in matched comparison schools, as measured on the Sounds of Intent framework. By the end of the programme, pupils, both with and without SEND, were typically able to sing whole songs accurately in time and in tune and participate confidently in ensemble music-making.

The programme's **innovative, integrated approach to singing and instrumental learning** enabled a large majority of pupils to acquire early instrumental competence in Key Stage 1. Nearly four out of five pupils demonstrated internal pitch awareness, and many were able to play familiar repertoire accurately on the melodica, challenging prevailing assumptions that whole-class instrumental learning should begin later in primary school (at Key Stage 2).

Participation in Mini Musicians was also associated with **gains in wider learning**, particularly in mathematics and oracy. Strong relationships were identified between rhythmic development and mathematical attainment, with especially pronounced benefits for pupils with SEND. Practitioners reported improvements in vocabulary, sentence structure, confidence in speaking, attention and self-regulation, alongside increased engagement in learning more broadly.

In addition to pupil outcomes, the programme delivered **significant professional development benefits**, strengthening teachers' and teaching assistants' confidence and their capacity to deliver inclusive, high-quality music education. This transfer of skills supports long-term sustainability beyond the life of the funded programme.

Overall, the findings indicate that Mini Musicians is a **scalable, inclusive and cost-effective model** of early music education that addresses inequalities in access while supporting wider educational priorities. The programme provides compelling evidence for continued investment and for re-positioning music as a core component of early childhood education rather than an optional enrichment activity.

# Key Findings at a Glance

## Mini Musicians (2023–2025) | Independent Evaluation: University of Roehampton

### Accelerated musical progress

- Pupils made substantially greater musical progress than those in matched comparison schools
- By the end of the programme, most pupils could sing whole songs accurately in time and in tune

### Strong impact for pupils with SEND

- There were particularly pronounced gains for pupils with SEND in musical skills, confidence and engagement
- Having SEND was not itself a barrier to attainment, with many pupils accessing classroom instrumental learning successfully

### Early instrumental learning works in KS1

- 78% of pupils demonstrated internal pitch awareness
- As a result, a high proportion learned to play familiar repertoire on the melodica
- Findings challenge assumptions that class instrumental learning must begin later in primary school

### Wider learning benefits

- Participation was associated with improvements in mathematics and oracy
- Additionally, children with SEND saw stronger relationships between their musical development and their reading and writing than those who were developing ‘typically’
- A statistically significant link was identified between rhythmic development and mathematical attainment
- Practitioners reported pupil gains in vocabulary, their ability to structure sentences, attention and self-regulation

### Social communication and wellbeing

- Pupils showed improved listening, confidence, collaboration and social communication
- Music provided an inclusive communication route for non-speaking and minimally verbal pupils
- Improved engagement and behaviour were reported across all settings

### Sustainable benefits for schools

- There were increased confidence and skills among teachers and teaching assistants to deliver a music programme
- Effective skills transfer from specialists supported long-term capacity for inclusive music provision

# Background

The Mini Musicians project was a borough-wide education and cultural initiative delivered between 2023 and 2025 across the London Borough of Merton. The project was funded by Merton Council and delivered by the Merton Music Foundation (MMF) in partnership with Sing Up Music. The project was supported in its conception and design by a team from the School of Education at the University of Roehampton, who also conducted a rigorous research study into the efficacy of the initiative, in terms of promoting musical progression across the ability range, music's capacity to support wider learning and development, and school staff's competence and confidence to deliver early childhood music sessions. The programme was implemented in 10 Merton primary and special schools, reaching approximately 650 pupils, primarily aged 4–7 (Reception to Year 2).

## Rationale and Evidence Base

The project was informed by a substantial body of research demonstrating a positive relationship between early musical engagement and children's wider cognitive, linguistic and social development. Research has consistently shown that participation in music education is associated with enhanced speech and language processing, auditory discrimination, rhythm perception and fine motor skills (Miendlarzewska & Trost, 2014). Studies further indicate that early musical training supports improved speech recognition in noisy environments and strengthens the neural mechanisms linked to language processing (Parbery-Clark et al., 2009, 2011; Strait et al., 2012).

The theoretical underpinning of the project drew on the OPERA hypothesis (Patel 2011, 2013), which suggests that the cognitive and emotional skills developed through musical training, such as focused attention, emotional engagement, and auditory precision could positively influence speech development and language processing. On this basis, it was hypothesised that sustained exposure to high-quality general musicianship teaching in the early years would have a positive impact on oracy, literacy and numeracy, as well as broader educational outcomes.

In addition to academic development, music education has been shown to support the formation of personal identity, self-awareness and social understanding during early childhood (Koelsch, 2010; Trevarthen, 2002). Group music-making is understood to promote communication, empathy, collaboration and emotional expression, particularly significant for children in a period of rapid cognitive and social development, such as 4- to 7-year-olds.

## Local Need and Context

A needs analysis carried out by Merton Music Foundation identified significant inconsistencies in music provision across Merton primary schools. Most schools relied on non-specialist teachers to deliver music, often without adequate training, time, space or resources. Only 27% of Merton primary schools had a music specialist delivering school-led music provision.

These local findings reflected national concerns outlined in Ofsted's 2023 music subject report, which highlighted limited access to specialist staff, insufficient resources and a lack of sustained practical music-making opportunities. Financial pressures on schools have further exacerbated these challenges in the last two years, with music and the arts often among the first areas to be reduced.

## Project Delivery

Mini Musicians was delivered in ten primary schools (including one special school and one Additionally Resourced Provision [ARP]): Benedict Primary, Bond Primary, Garfield Primary, Hillcross Primary, Merton Abbey Primary, Perseid Lower School, SS Peter & Paul's Primary, St Matthew's Primary, West Wimbledon Primary and William Morris Primary.

Each school received one full day of specialist music provision per week. Pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 received a minimum of 1 hour and 15 minutes of weekly music education, comprising:

- 45-minute general musicianship lessons (half-class or whole-class),
- A 30-minute whole-year group singing session, and
- A rotating programme of small-group intervention, catch-up and extension sessions.

As pupils progressed, they were introduced to increasingly complex musical activities, including age-appropriate instrumental learning on the melodica in Year 2. The curriculum and resources were developed by Merton Music Foundation, in collaboration with Professor Adam Ockelford, and were underpinned by the Sounds of Intent framework of musical development ([www.soundsofintent.org](http://www.soundsofintent.org)).

In Spring/Summer 2025, pupils participated in 'Sing Out Your Story', a storytelling and composition project designed to integrate music with developing speech and language skills. The project culminated in a Key Stage 1 Music Festival, celebrating pupil achievement and creativity. All Year 2 pupils taking part in the programme also completed Trinity Awards and Certificates in Musical Development (<https://www.trinitycollege.com/qualifications/music/awards-and-certificates-in-musical-development>), resulting in a nationally recognised music qualification.

## Governance, Funding and Evaluation

Merton Council provided £250,000 in funding and maintained oversight of delivery, governance and monitoring of outcomes. Merton Music Foundation led programme delivery, staffing, recruitment, quality assurance, and partnership management, while [Sing Up Music](#) supported curriculum planning, resource provision, and professional development.

An independent evaluation led by Roehampton University was embedded in the project. Data collection included interviews, class consultations, observations, audio and video recordings, and comparative analysis of standardised school data in academic development, including literacy and numeracy, benchmarked against comparable schools within the borough. This approach enabled an assessment of the project's impact and its wider implications for educational development in Merton.

## The Current Study

The Education Research Centre at Roehampton University was tasked with evaluating the impact of the Mini Musicians project on children who had participated in the programme. The research questions posed were:

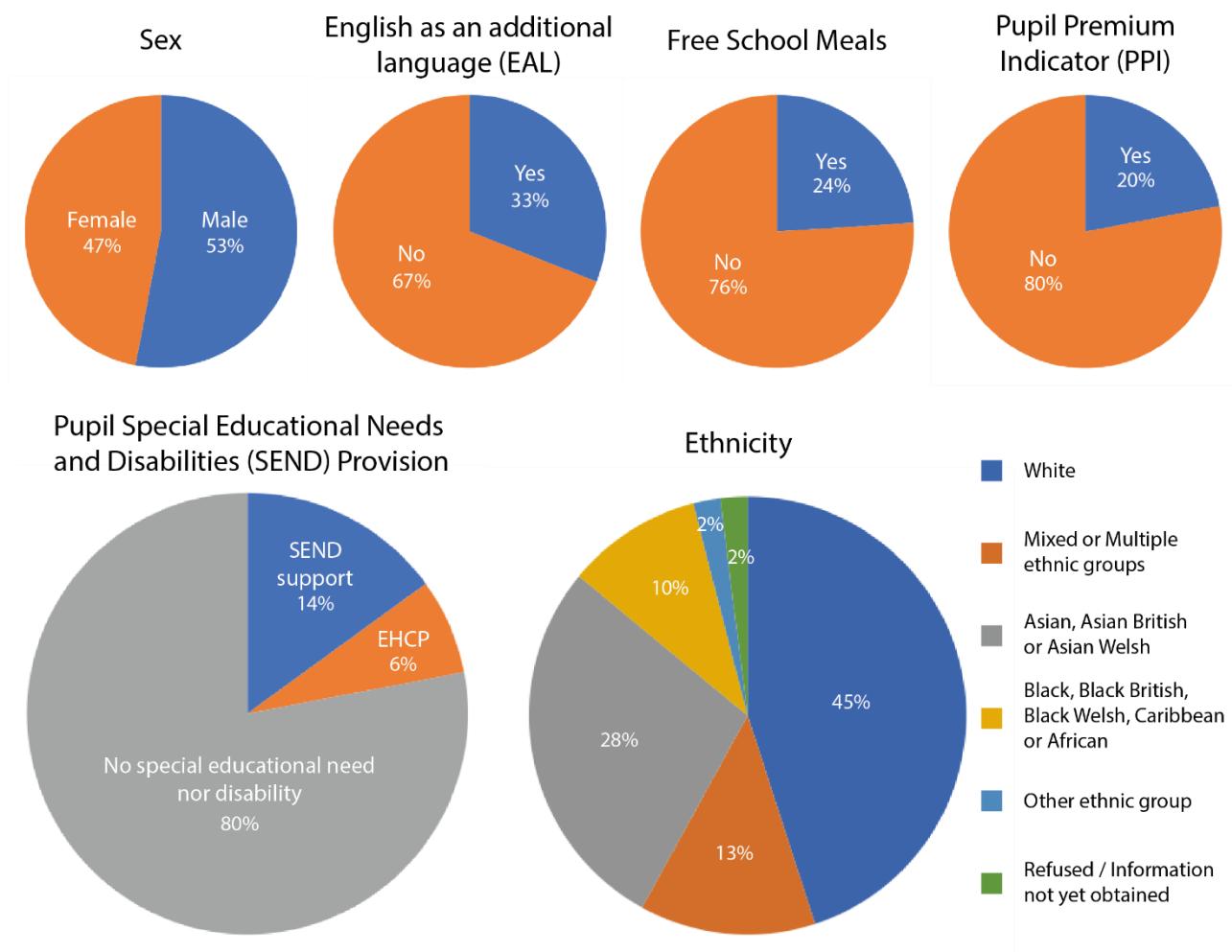
1. How does participation in a structured early-years musicianship programme, aligned with children's levels of musical engagement, influence musical learning and progression in Reception to Year 2 pupils?
2. To what extent does learning fixed-key vocal and instrumental repertoire (including melodica) support the development of aural skills, playing by ear, and early pitch awareness in young children?
3. What impact does sustained early music education have on pupils' wider educational outcomes, particularly oracy, literacy, and numeracy, compared with pupils in demographically similar non-participating schools?
4. How does participation in collaborative music-making and creative projects (such as 'Sing Out Your Story') affect children's social development, confidence, creativity, and ability to work as part of a group?

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to address the research questions. A quantitative study collected data throughout the two-year Mini Musicians programme for the children taking part and from children attending other schools, who did not participate in the programme. A qualitative study was conducted in the last month of the project to explore the views of the participants and practitioners involved.

# Methodology

Participants were a sample of music specialists, education practitioners and pupils who had participated in the Mini Musicians project. The quantitative study included 303 children (Intervention Group,  $N = 230$  [including 51 pupils with SEND support, EHCP, or being monitored], Comparison Group,  $N = 73$ ) with an average age of 5 years, 6 months at the start of the programme (September 2023). See below for a summary of participant characteristics. Qualitative data were collected from 10 education practitioners (EPs), three specialist music practitioners (MPs), two programme leads and pupils from three schools who participated in the programme.

## Participant characteristics in the quantitative study ( $N = 303$ )



Characteristic	Mini Musicians (Intervention Group)			Comparison Group	OVERALL
	No SEND	SEND	Overall		
Sex					
<i>Male</i>	48%	75%	53%	51%	53%
<i>Female</i>	52%	25%	47%	49%	47%
English as an additional language (EAL)					
<i>Yes</i>	32%	28%	31%	40%	33%
<i>No</i>	68%	72%	69%	60%	67%
Free School Meal					
<i>Yes</i>	20%	35%	24%	26%	24%
<i>No</i>	80%	65%	76%	74%	76%
Pupil Premium Indicator (PPI)					
<i>Yes</i>	18%	35%	22%	12%	20%
<i>No</i>	82%	65%	78%	88%	80%
Pupil SEND Provision					
<i>SEND Support</i>	0%	67%	15%	12%	14%
<i>Education, Health and Care Plan</i>	0%	29%	7%	4%	6%
<i>Monitoring</i>	0%	4%	1%	0%	1%
<i>No special educational need nor disability</i>	100%	0%	77%	84%	79%
Ethnicity					
<i>White</i>	44%	42%	44%	52%	45%
<i>Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups</i>	13%	16%	14%	13%	13%
<i>Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh</i>	30%	22%	28%	26%	28%
<i>Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African</i>	10%	18%	11%	7%	10%
<i>Other ethnic group</i>	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%
<i>Refused / Information not yet obtained</i>	2%	0%	1%	0%	2%

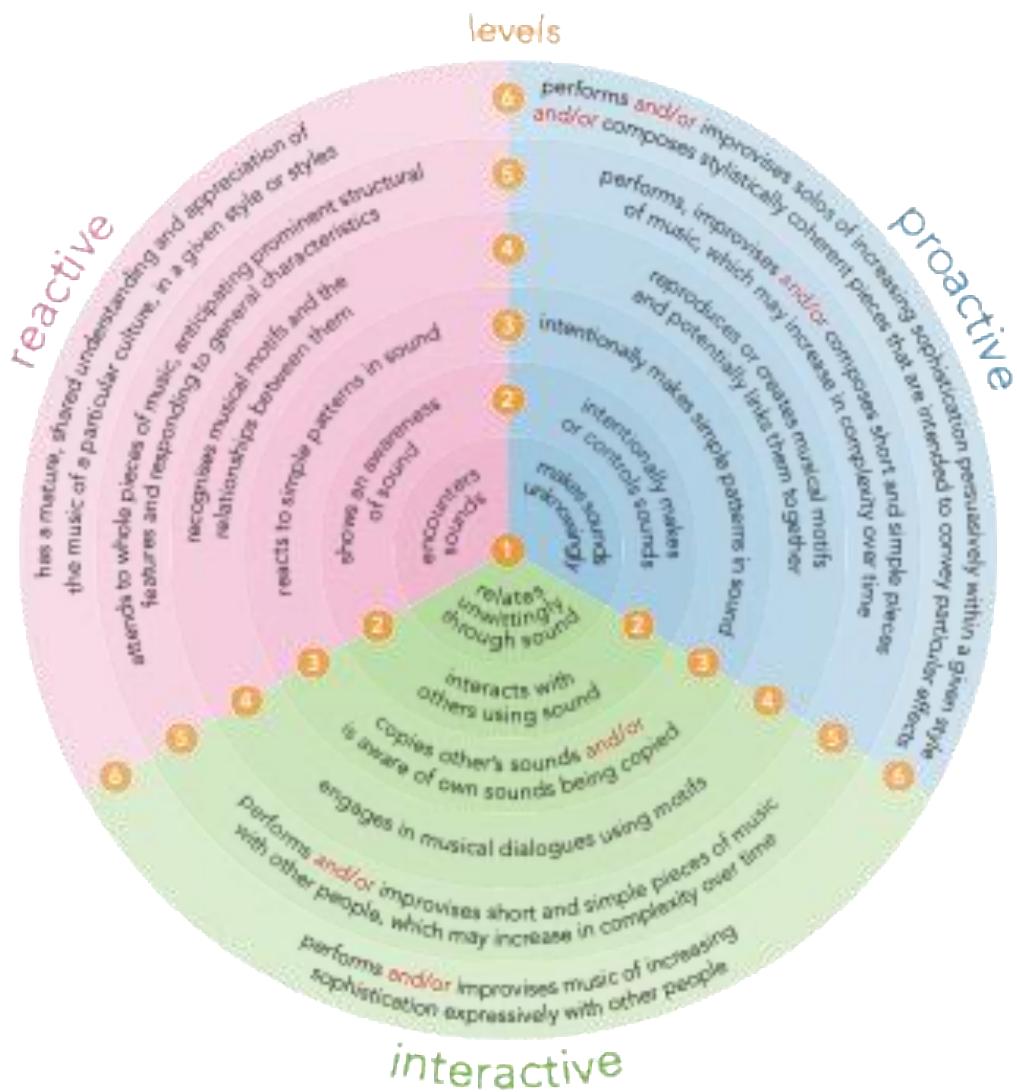
NB: The table displays percentages of valid data.

# Key Findings

## 1. Mini Musicians enhanced pupils' musical skills and engagement

Assessments were undertaken at the beginning and end of the project using the Sounds of Intent framework of musical development (available at [www.soundsofintent.org](http://www.soundsofintent.org)).

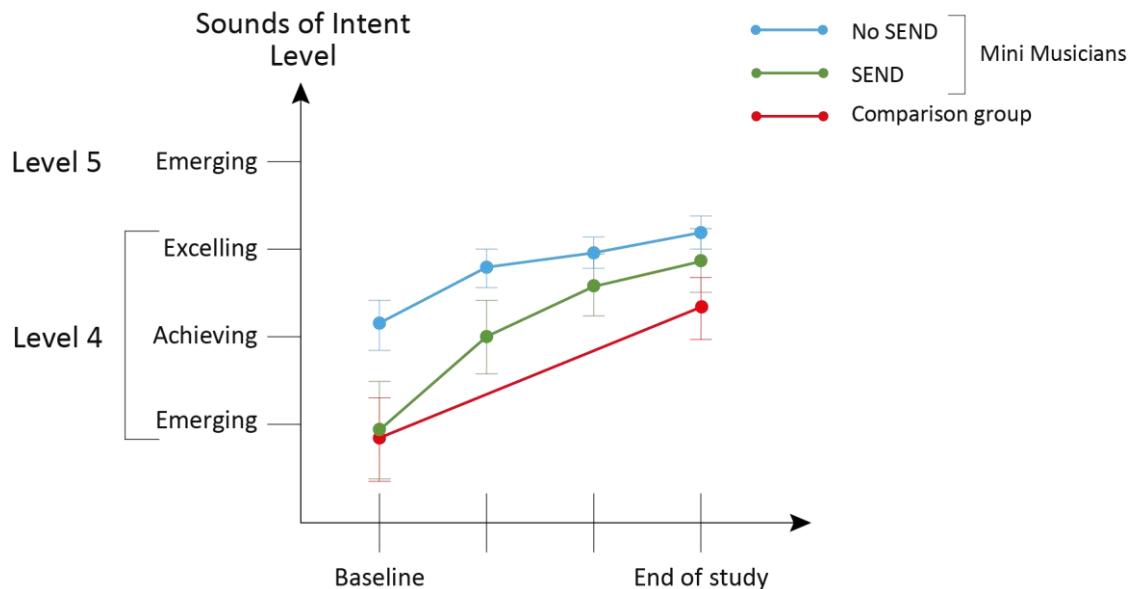
### The Sounds of Intent Framework of Musical Development



The framework identifies six phases of musical development across these domains of engagement (reactive, proactive and interactive). In neurotypical development, the framework extends from birth to the teenage years. The criteria are recognised in England's Regulated Qualifications Framework through Awards and Certificates in Musical Development offered by Trinity College London.

The results were as follows. At the beginning of the project, the ‘comparison group’ of children ( $N = 73$ ) and the ‘intervention group’ ( $N = 230$  [ $179 = \text{No SEND}$ ,  $51 = \text{SEND}$ ]) were assessed as being at different stages of the Sounds of Intent Framework. Children in the comparison group and children with SEND in the intervention group were, on average, at the ‘emerging’ stage of Sounds of Intent Level 4. This means that most of the children were starting to engage in simple call-and-response activities, for example, had a sense of a regular beat, but could not yet sing in tune. Children without SEND in the intervention group were on average at the ‘achieving’ stage of Level 4 of the Sounds of Intent framework. This means that most of the children could engage in call-and-response activities, for example, had a firm sense of the beat, but could still not sing accurately in tune. By the end of the project, the children (with and without SEND) undertaking the Mini Musicians sessions had, on average, moved up to or towards Sounds of Intent Level 4 (excelling). This meant they could reliably sing whole songs in time and in tune, on their own and with others. The comparison group had also improved, but on average did not achieve the same levels as children in the intervention group. Their ability to take part in call-and-response activities had progressed somewhat, but their ability to sing in time and in tune was not as advanced as in the intervention group. The Mini Musicians programme added significant value for all children, **but particularly those children with SEND**.

#### Musical development of Mini Musicians pupils compared to the comparison group



*NB: SEND pupils include those with SEND support and EHCP. The comparison group and intervention group had different starting points; this is an artefact of the two populations of children; the groups were matched on demographics but not on other factors. The comparison group had two assessment points, pre- and post- the intervention programme, the intervention group’s musical skills were assessed four times in the course of the programme.*

Music practitioners observed that the programme was “extremely effective in the musical development of children in early years and KS1 [key stage 1]” (MP3). In addition to improvements in pupils’ singing and instrument playing, the programme provided the

opportunity for technical skills development: “Pupils were starting to hear direction of pitch, dynamic and tempo changes” (MP1) and “Pupils … started to use notation and recognise different notes” (EP4). Pupils recognised their own musical development: “I like Mini Musicians because when we keep trying to sing, we get better and better” (Pupil).

Practitioners highlighted that children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and special education needs and disabilities (SEND), as well as those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, were all able to develop within the programme. “EAL children saw no struggle in lessons” (EP3). “Seeing children who might not usually get a music education seeing the benefits of this [programme]” (MP3). “Our semi/pre formal learners have been able to sing all or part of the Mini Musicians songs” (EP1).

In addition to musical development, the programme sparked a wider engagement in music for pupils. Practitioners reported that pupil engagement with music extended into other times in the school day and to enthusiasm for music at home. “I know a few of the parents and they tell me about their children singing at home. I was also surprised at how many children told me they’d asked Santa for a melodica!” (MP2). Pupils also perceived themselves as musicians: “We are Mini Musicians”, “I like being a musician” (Pupils).

**All Year 2 pupils taking part in the programme received an Award in Musical Development offered by Trinity College London.**

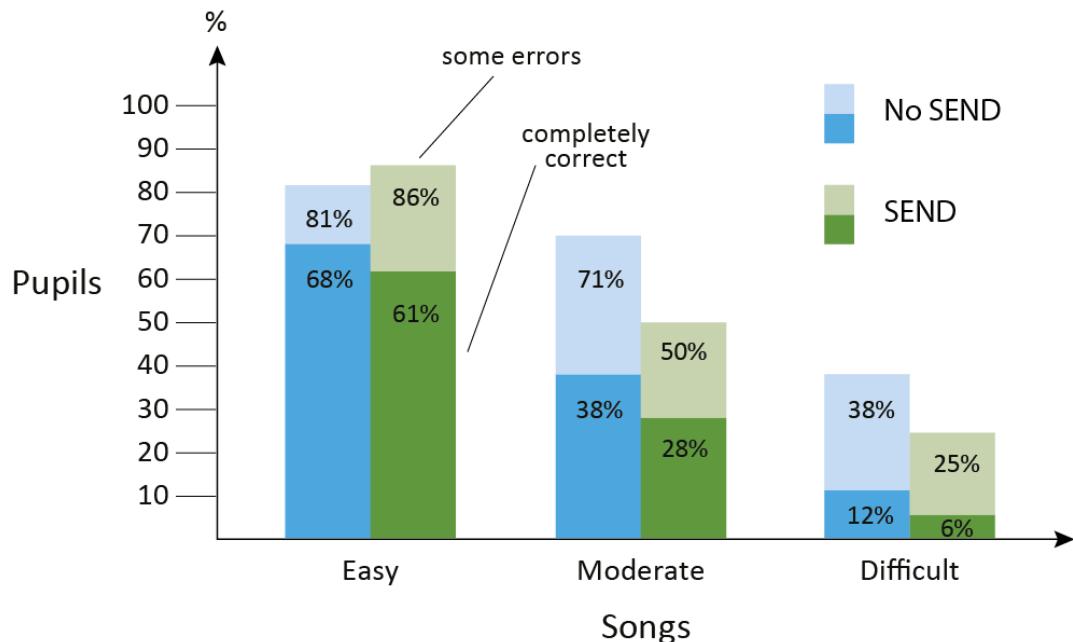
## 2. Innovative programme design enabled rapid melodica learning

The Mini Musicians programme used a novel design, in which singing and playing activities were fully integrated. Among the repertoire of songs that the children learnt were those that could be transferred directly onto glockenspiels and the melodica. These foundational songs were always presented to the children and were subsequently sung in the same key (C major). This represents an important departure from traditional early years practice that uses a ‘movable do’ in the solfège system. Our ‘fixed do’ approach meant that children developed memories of *the notes themselves* rather than just the intervals between them. This gave them a form of ‘absolute pitch’, conferring a huge advantage as they started to learn to play the melodica. Assessments showed that **78%** of the children were able to hear the notes of the songs in their heads **before they played them**. In turn, this meant that the simple forms of notation that were introduced were truly meaningful in putting ‘sound before sign’.

The children’s ability to play the three test songs on the melodica were assessed as follows: 68% of the children without SEND were able to play the ‘easy’ song correctly by the end of the programme; this rose to 81% allowing for some errors; 38% managed to play the ‘moderately easy’ song correctly, rising to 71% allowing for some errors; and 12% performed the ‘difficult’ song with no mistakes, rising to 38% allowing for some errors. While fewer of the children with SEND performed at the same level as those who were ‘developing typically’, the results

indicate that **SEND need not be a barrier to musical attainment**, with a high proportion of this group being able to play easy songs and some of them being able to correctly play both moderate and difficult level songs.

Percentage of Mini Musicians pupils able to play songs of different complexities on the melodica



*NB: Data were drawn from the end of the two-year programme*

Song 1 – ‘easy’

Song 2 – ‘moderate’

Song 3 – ‘difficult’

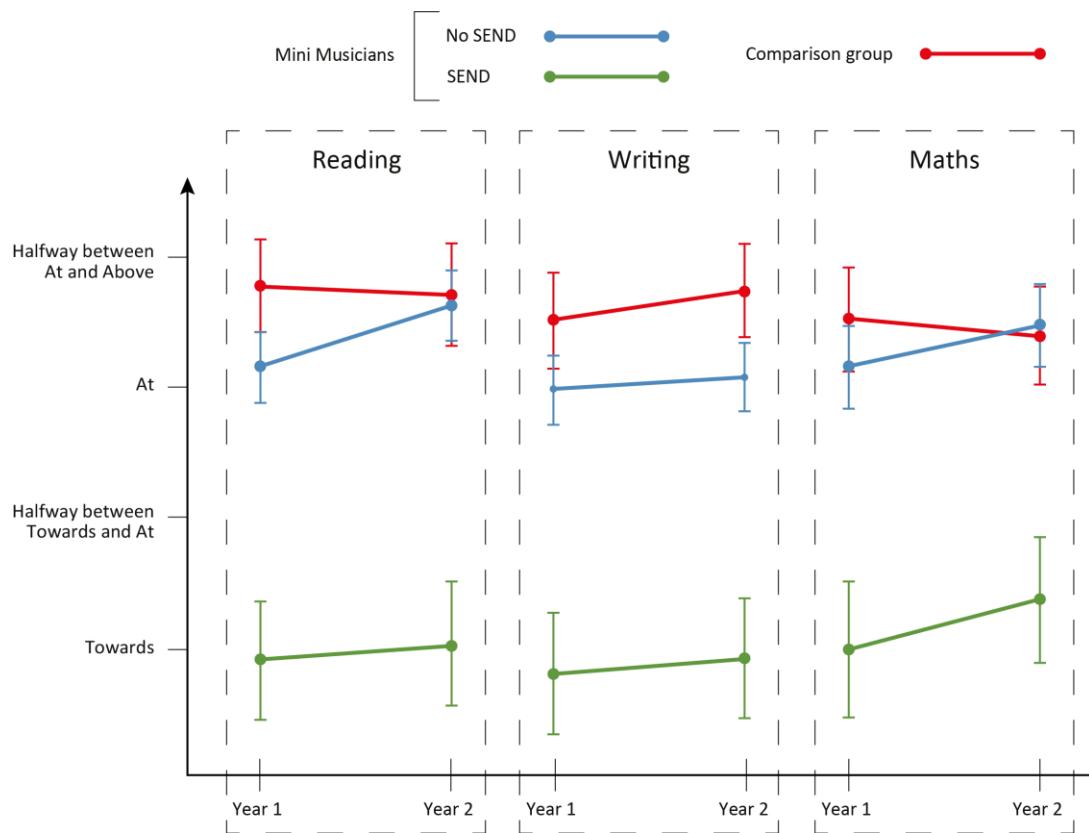
This finding has important implications for the way that ‘Classroom Instrumental Learning’ (‘CIL’) is approached, not only in the London Borough of Merton, but by music services across the country. Typically, CIL is introduced at Key Stage 2. However, the approach adopted in the Mini Musicians programme suggests that gains would be made by introducing CIL in Key Stage 1, giving children more time to develop the musical and technical expertise required to play an instrument.

The quantitative data are supported by the Music Practitioners’ observations: “Lots of pupils [now] have a great ability for pitching and recalling tunes and their rhythm is excellent” (MP3) and “I have really heard an improvement in their sense of pitch” (EP1). The Mini Musicians Concert, an ensemble performance at the end of the two-year programme, allowed pupils from all the schools, including specialist settings, to showcase their musical development and to deliver a group performance demonstrating their musical skills.

### **3. Music learning was associated with wider academic development**

When comparing changes in expected academic attainment levels in Year 1 and Year 2, there is evidence to show that children in the intervention group without SEND made improvements in reading and maths, whilst children with SEND made significant improvements in maths only. However, the same improvement was not observed when looking at children in the comparison group.

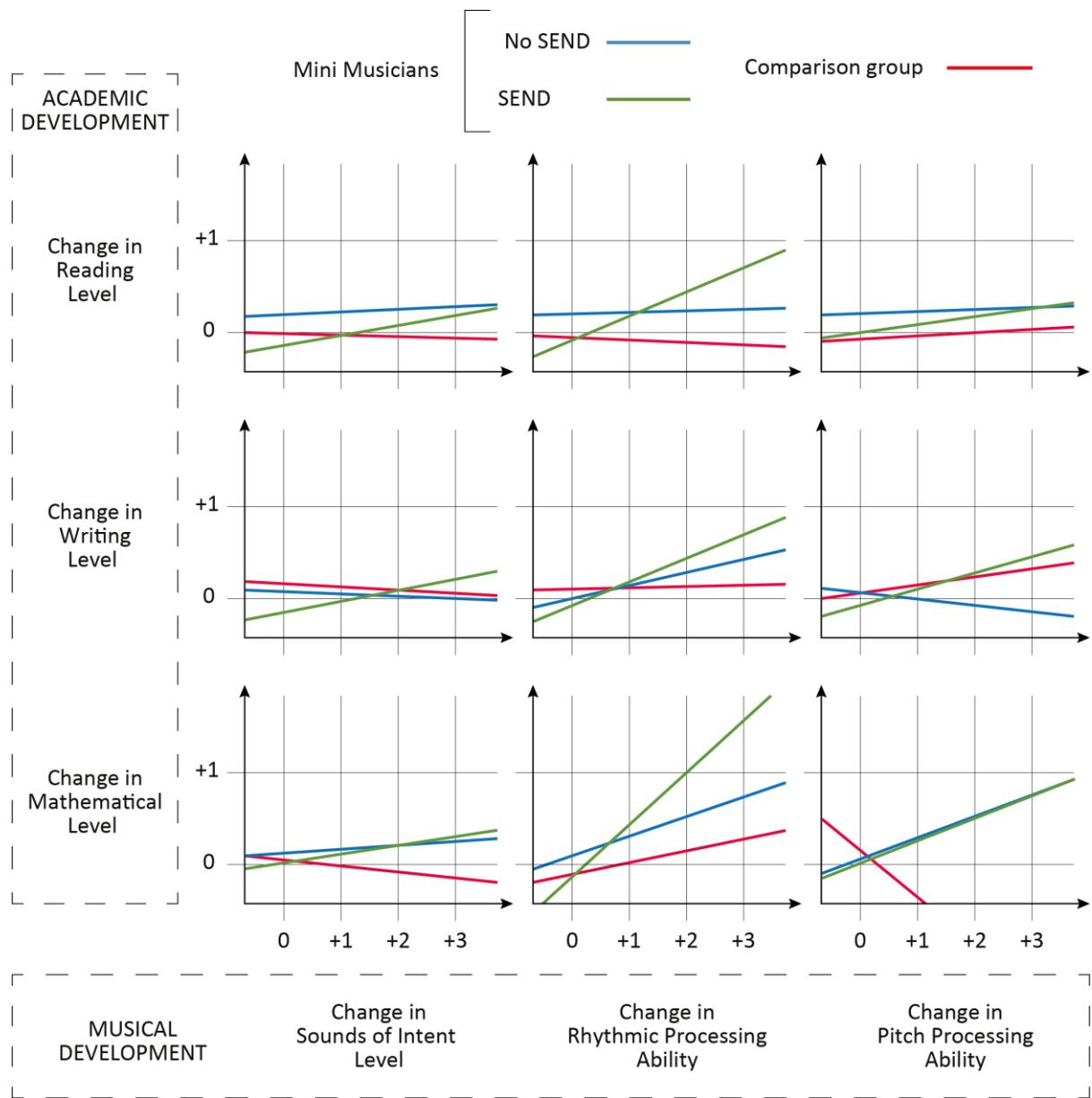
## Academic Attainment Development of Mini Musicians pupils compared to the comparison group



When looking at how academic development was associated with musical development, there is evidence of a connection between rhythmic abilities and mathematical abilities that is statistically significant. When looking at the intervention group, changes in children's musical abilities at the baseline assessment point and at the end of the study ('musical development'), and comparing that with changes in academic attainment levels at Y1 and Y2 ('academic development'), there is a strong relationship between 'rhythmic development' and 'mathematical development': positive 'rhythmic development' predicted positive 'mathematical development'. This association was even stronger for children with SEND. Additionally, children with SEND also had positive relationships between their musical development, as measured by their Sounds of Intent level, and their writing and reading skills. However, the same relationship is not observed in the comparison group – i.e. there was no association between the comparison group children's 'rhythmic development' and 'mathematical development' or Sounds of Intent level and reading or writing development. One explanation for this difference could be the amount of visuo-spatial content used in the Mini Musicians programme. Children were exposed to pattern recognition in both listening to music and then applying this to visuo-spatial patterns when using the melodicas (such as colour-coding the notes). Prior evidence suggests there is a link between how children with SEND process patterns that they can hear and patterns they can see (McCarthy et al., in

review). Furthermore, children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds have been found to benefit more from strong spatial skills for supporting their mathematics achievement than other parts of the socioeconomic spectrum (McCarthy et al., in prep). This may be the same for children with SEND; they may use visuo-spatial strategies in wider academic development and therefore benefit more than children without SEND from programmes such as Mini Musicians. It is important to note that evidence of the association between academic development and musical development is *correlational* rather than *causal*. Several other factors could be related to the differences in academic performance.

#### Associations between pupil's musical development and academic development



*NB: Change in academic development levels: 0=no change, +1 = improvement by one level (which could be moving from 'below' to 'towards', or 'towards' to 'at' or 'at' to 'above'); Change in musical development levels: 0=no change, +1 = improvement by one level (which could be moving from 'Sol Level 4 Emerging' to 'Sol Level 4 Achieving', or 'Sol Level 4 Achieving' to 'Sol Level 4 Excelling', etc ), +2 = improvement by two levels, and so on*

Education practitioners across the schools included in the qualitative study also commented on the impact of the Mini Musicians programme on children's wider academic development. One school reported that pupils had attained their strongest Year 2 data for several years: "This is the best Year 2 data, and a lot of credit has to go to music – listening, taking turns, being brave, the accessibility [have all helped]" (EP7).

### **Mathematics**

Practitioners commented on the impact they felt the Mini Musicians programme had on children's mathematics outcomes. "[Mini Musicians] might have helped support children's counting – reinforced by tempo work" (EP8). "Maths this year has been really impressive." (EP4). "Music has definitely improved outcomes such as maths results in Y1 and Y2" (EP7).

### **Oracy**

Qualitative data were consistent in identifying improved oracy skills for all children via the Mini Musicians programme. Learning song lyrics, experiencing songs from different genres and integration of oracy activities in sessions provided opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy skills. Education practitioners observed a transfer to oracy sessions "Pupils are a lot better with sentence stems and using complex words" (EP4) and "sentences and speaking is better this year" (EP6). Benefits to oracy and speaking were also reported for children with SEND. Practitioners reported that children who did not use language to communicate in class were able to sing all or part of the songs included in the Mini Musicians programme.

"Especially helpful for SEND children – they remember the lyrics and sing more than 2–3 words." (EP8) "One pupil who only communicates with one word ... is able to sing "I Can Sing" in tune and in time." (EP1) "I have a pupil who is non-speaking who sings with all her heart. Now started to talk with friends ..." (EP5).

## **4. Pupils' social communication skills improved**

The inclusive nature of the Mini Musicians sessions allowed all children to engage in the programme, supporting social inclusion. This resulted in social communication improvements, particularly for those pupils with SEND. "They [SEND pupils] have used the music as a way of communicating with each other and staff" (EP1) "In mainstream classes, anyone walking into a session would often struggle to know who those children [with SEND] are" (MP2). "Pupils who were fairly disruptive ... were actually very good at accessing the music curriculum and very able musicians" (MP1). "The sessions build a sense of community" (MP2). Practitioners also reported other beneficial impacts on pupil behaviour, attention and self-regulation, which they attributed to the Mini Musicians programme. The consistent structure of the sessions and the demands of group music making appears to have supported pupils' listening skills, which impacted on their wider engagement. The programme had a "positive impact on the students with their confidence, self-esteem, team

works skills" (MP3). "Behaviour has been better" (EP8). "A huge improvement in listening, attention and engagement" (EP6). "Children ... are listening to each other now" (EP8).

All practitioners interviewed reported observing an increased confidence with music and self-confidence amongst pupils who had taken part in the programme. "Pupils' confidence [has increased] - they are really enjoying coming up to the front [in other lessons]" (EP4). "Overall kids are more confident" (EP5). "[Mini Musicians] builds their confidence, songs all in the same key, the repetition, they recognise they can do it and sing proudly" (EP2).

## 5. Practitioner knowledge, skills and confidence were enhanced

In addition to positive impacts on pupil development, the Mini Musicians programme has provided opportunities for specialist music practitioners and education practitioners to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence in delivering inclusive early years music education. "Overall, it's been brilliant and I feel very lucky to have been a part of it and have learnt a huge amount" (MP2). "I feel like I developed my own teaching as well as (hopefully) sparking a joy of music in all the pupils" (MP1). "It's been great to sit in on music sessions and see the way to introduce the concepts" (EP4).

Skills transfer has occurred between specialist practitioners and classroom-based practitioners, boosting confidence in teaching music and equipping schools with a sustainable programme. Practitioners report "it has been a highlight of the last two years, having someone show us what to do and be a role model" (EP7) and "we will be able to use many aspects of the project going forward" (EP1).

Music practitioners highlighted many aspects of the programme that they will continue to use in their practice, including elements of the programme that support development of academic skills such as oracy. "I will continue to include sentence stems and activities that support oracy" (MP2). "I will continue to use the rhythm teaching and lots of the songs." (MP1) "I will use all the elements of the programme in my teaching" (MP3).

Education practitioners were looking forward to future opportunities for professional development via participating in the Mini Musicians 2 project and to continue to support pupils working at early levels of musical development. "We are looking forward to participating in the legacy Mini Musicians project next year, we see it as an opportunity to transfer skills to teachers." (EP7). "Continued opportunities to work with Sounds of Intent would be of real value" (EP1).

## Conclusions

The Mini Musicians project demonstrates that sustained, specialist-led music education in the early years can make a significant contribution to children's musical, cognitive and social development. Over the two-year period, participating pupils showed accelerated progress in core musical skills, alongside notable improvements in oracy, numeracy, confidence, behaviour and social communication. These benefits were evident across diverse groups of learners, including pupils with special educational needs, children with English as an additional language and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, underlining the programme's inclusive design.

The findings also challenge prevailing assumptions about the appropriate age for instrumental learning. The successful introduction of melodica tuition in Key Stage 1 suggests that younger children can develop reliable pitch awareness, aural memory and basic instrumental technique when these skills are embedded within an integrated musicianship curriculum. This has important implications for future models of class instrumental learning, both locally and nationally.

Equally significant are the impacts on practitioner development. The programme fostered meaningful skills transfer between music specialists and classroom teachers and teaching assistants, enhancing confidence, pedagogical knowledge and long-term capacity for high-quality music provision within schools. Such professional learning is essential if improvements in music education are to be sustained beyond the lifespan of externally funded projects.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that Mini Musicians represents a scalable and cost-effective approach to early years music education, capable of addressing inequalities in access while supporting wider educational priorities. Continued investment, longitudinal follow-up and expansion through initiatives such as "Mini Musicians 2" would allow the long-term academic and social benefits to be further examined and consolidated. The project therefore provides a compelling case for positioning music not as an optional enrichment activity, but as a foundational component of early childhood education policy and practice.

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