



musicfirst lighthouse

Real Stories of Success in Music Education

A Trust-wide Digital Learning Strategy for Music

David Ross Education Trust

Welcome to our MusicFirst Lighthouse series.
Inspiring stories capturing how institutions have implemented online learning into their curriculum using innovative technology and creative thinking.



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Broadening Horizons



An academy that embraces music is not just an academy with a good music department. It is one where the underlying principles of high-quality music-making; of listening, adapting, exploring, persevering, problem-solving, thinking laterally and performing without fear, are seen in every student and every teacher."

DRET statement

The Context

The David Ross Education Trust (DRET) is a network of 34 schools – 22 Primary Schools, 11 Secondary Schools and one Special School. This represents over 1,000 teachers and 13,500 students. Music Education and extracurricular enrichment activities are at the core of every school across the Trust.

With so many schools, diversity is both a strength and a challenge. DRET wanted to draw together the strengths from the 11 secondary music departments and bring a higher, more equal standard of music education to every school. To facilitate this, DRET recruited an Executive Director of Music – Simon Toyne. He was tasked to analyse each school and find the best ways for the Trust's schools to work together for mutual benefit. DRET has now established a reputation for its strategic development of the quality and scope of music-making for thousands of young people. Their strategy is designed to enable Music to be an integral part of the Trust's vision to transform young people's lives.



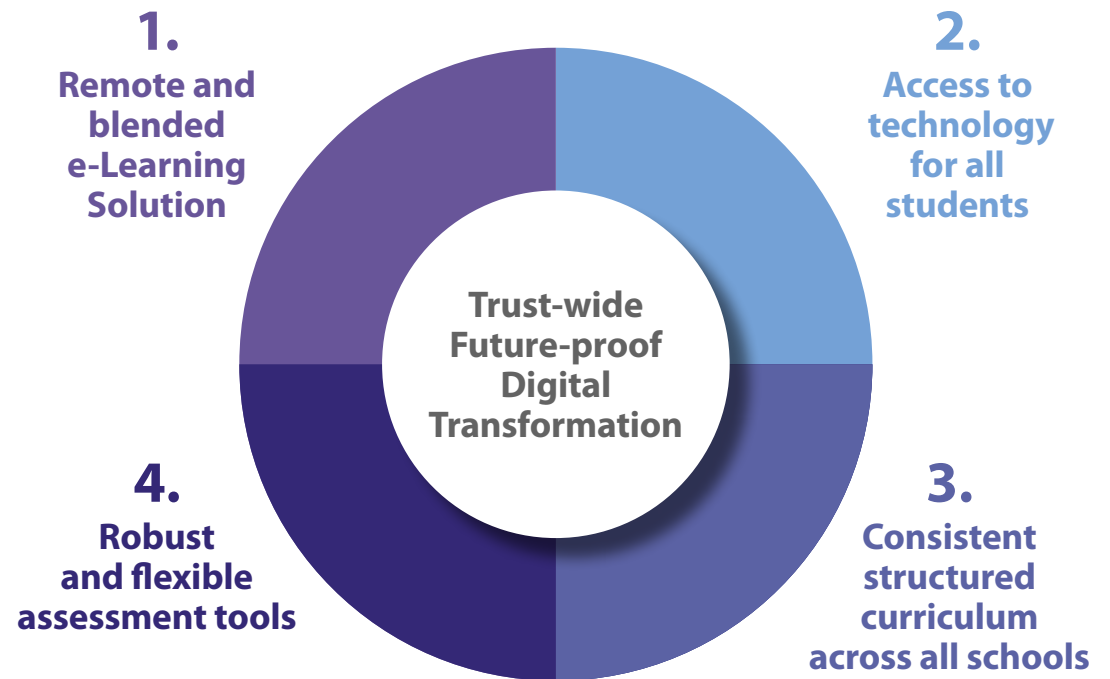
We don't believe it (music) should be an added extra. Every single child should be enriched by a Music, Arts and Cultural programme beyond our classrooms."

Megan Morris, Principal – Malcolm Arnold Academy

The Challenge

There was a strong drive to find ways for disparate schools to share similar experiences, to make sure the opportunities offered would be for all students across the Trust, no matter which school they attended. DRET wanted students in one school to make as much progress in music as those in another – not just in the variety of opportunities outside of the classroom, but within it to the same extent. The DRET team aimed to equip both teachers and students with the tools to make the most of every lesson – and beyond.

In 2018 DRET invested in MusicFirst on a medium-sized scale, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit it was soon clear that a remote learning solution across the board was essential to continue to deliver high quality teaching and a full timetable. Simon Toyne and his team, led by Alex Green (Secondary Lead for Music), needed to develop a strategy quickly, not only to fulfil this brief but as future-proofing for all the schools. With a year's experience using the MusicFirst Classroom on a smaller scale, it was clear that expanding this was the natural next step.



We used the free trial... and we signed up all our schools... Now we have every single one of our music students across the Trust with MusicFirst [Classroom] access that is monitored in each school... work is set on there... with access to Focus on Sound, Noteflight and Soundtrap."

Alex Green, Director of Music & Subject Lead for Music (DRET)

The Solution

In 2020 the MusicFirst Classroom including the software Soundtrap for Education, Noteflight Learn, and Focus on Sound was rolled out across Key Stage 3 and GCSE in all 11 secondary schools.

Alex Green has overseen the implementation of the MusicFirst Classroom across the Trust. He has had direct input in to organising the curriculum content, and along with Simon Toyne has supported the music teachers as they incorporated the software across their teaching of Music.

Alex describes MusicFirst as a “strategic investment” and underlines the importance of giving access to “high quality software, that is cloud-based, in each and every single classroom across the Trust”.

The classroom music teachers have met on several occasions to try out the software, learn how to use it, and share ideas. A balanced approach has been taken with schemes of work being shared so all schools could follow the same curriculum, providing the same opportunities to all DRET students.

DRET’s Solution for Creativity and Learning

Over 4,000 seats of:



MusicFirst Classroom



Soundtrap for Education



Focus on Sound

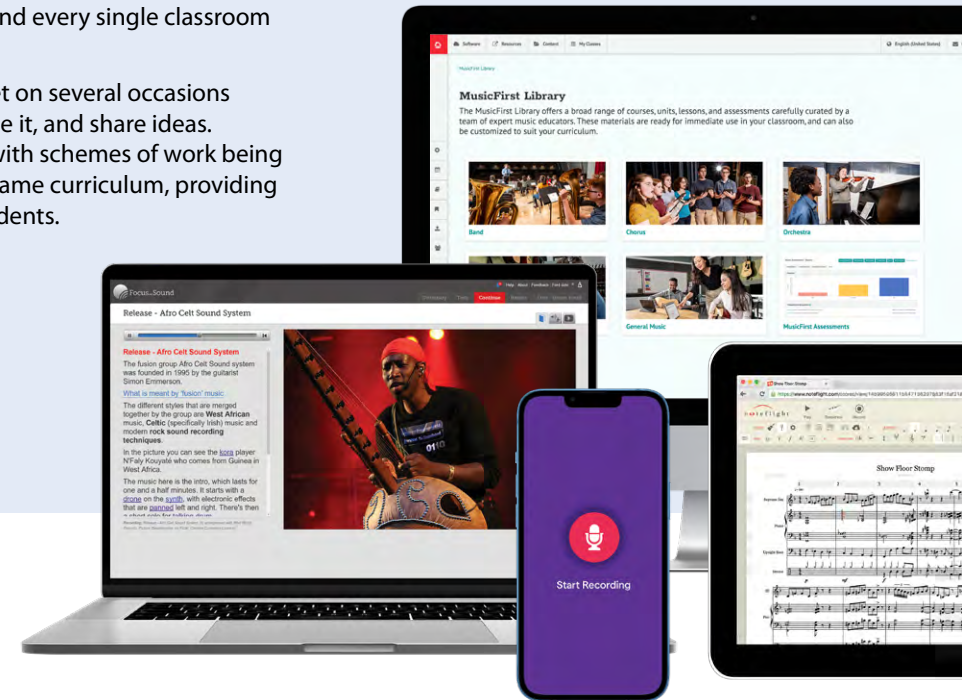


Noteflight Learn



Through the MusicFirst platform, we have been able to overcome the challenges of remote learning, and high quality learning is now accessible 24/7. Teachers are continually developing exciting learning opportunities through the seamless integration of the platform into our entire curriculum model.”

Alex Green, Director of Music & Subject Lead for Music (DRET)



The Impact

Lindsey Gardner, one of the music teachers at Malcolm Arnold Academy, now has MusicFirst embedded into all her teaching and the student learning.

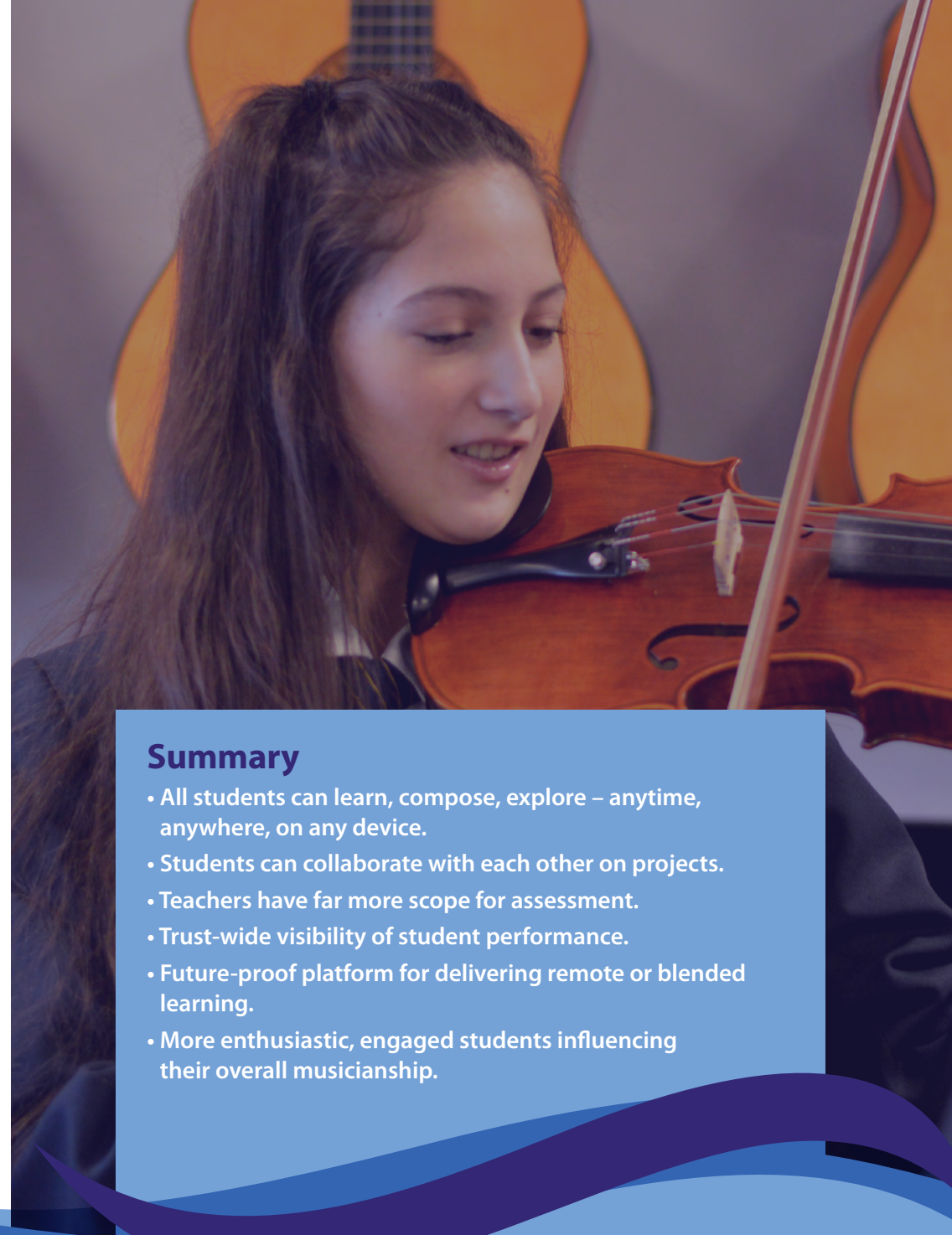
“MusicFirst is totally part of our curriculum now. We enable [students] to record their own music, to compose through it, to listen to examples via Focus on Sound... They have access at home and at school, so whatever they’ve started at school they can continue at home or create their own projects, separate to what has been done in school.”

It is clear that using the platform and software has had a big impact on the students at Malcolm Arnold Academy. They describe doing their homework with enthusiasm, and how using technology in music makes things so much easier including in situations where face-to-face teaching is impossible.

Alex Green describes some of the benefits that he has seen across the Trust:

“Our students are now able to compose at home, arrange their own work, record ideas, capture them and share them with each other using the collaboration element. The feedback element has been the most powerful for us. Students are now able to get very specific, really quick, short feedback from their teachers. The quizzes are all auto-marked... so we can very quickly see a snapshot of how students are progressing using MusicFirst.”

Seeing the students making music, it is clear that they enjoy participating and benefit from the positivity they experience. Students are using software to strengthen their collaborative, group-based experiences in music, not just enabling the individual to be involved in higher quality music. Choirs, Bands, and instrumental groups at Malcolm Arnold Academy are all well attended by enthusiastic, happy students and there is an air of collective positivity in the department.



Summary

- All students can learn, compose, explore – anytime, anywhere, on any device.
- Students can collaborate with each other on projects.
- Teachers have far more scope for assessment.
- Trust-wide visibility of student performance.
- Future-proof platform for delivering remote or blended learning.
- More enthusiastic, engaged students influencing their overall musicianship.



I can whole-heartedly recommend the MusicFirst program. I've seen the change that it's brought in our students. I've seen so much greater motivation as a result of being able to engage in music outside the classroom, at home, as independent students, as musicians. The fact that we're giving students now the tools to be musicians is such a powerful message that we can send them."



Simon Toyne, Executive Director of Music (DRET)

Contact Us

For further information about MusicFirst or on how your school can become a Lighthouse Institution contact us today.

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