



## **One Voice & The Linking Network: A Powerful Partnership Bringing Sheffield's Children Together Through Music**

Rob Unwin from The Schools Linking Programme at DECSY first contacted Rory Evans at Sheffield Music Hub in the summer of 2024 with an idea: Could School Linking become part of the One Voice Festival - using music to help children build connections across Sheffield?

At Sheffield Music Hub we immediately saw the potential. One Voice has always celebrated belonging, community and shared identity through singing. Schools Linking helps children connect across different backgrounds. Bringing the two together felt like a natural step for the festival's progression.

### **About One Voice**

One Voice is Sheffield Music Hub's flagship massed-singing programme and bi-annual festival. Schools from across the city come together to perform songs as a huge, massed choir. Singing is a powerful way for children to grow musically, socially, and emotionally. It helps build confidence, encourages teamwork, and creates a sense of belonging. Singing also supports the development of musical skills and enhances learning across the curriculum. Through inclusive projects like One Voice, it brings children together from diverse backgrounds, fostering connection and understanding in a joyful and creative environment.

Gillian Hume, Music Hub Manager says One Voice is about "creating a city that sings!"

### **About Schools Linking and The Linking Network**

The Linking Network's Schools Linking Programme began in Bradford in 2001 when two headteachers wanted to bridge divides between segregated communities. From that single partnership, the programme has grown to operate in 25 local authority areas in England and is now expanding into Wales. It supports more than 24,000 pupils each year, helping them explore identity, build empathy, reduce misconceptions and form friendships across difference.

In Sheffield, the Schools Linking programme - led by DECSY - has been running since 2017 and is valued by schools for strengthening SMSC, Personal Development and Ofsted priorities. Ten Sheffield schools currently participate, with fourteen classes linking this year.

## **A New Partnership: Linking Meets One Voice**

The collaboration began formally with a pilot at the Christmas 2024 One Voice festival. After a successful pilot, we officially launched the project for the Summer 2025 One Voice! The Linking Network facilitated School Linking, in which schools took part in activities and were paired with partner schools with contrasting demographics. The Linking Network also offered support with travel costs to One Voice in exchange for active participation in the Linking Programme. This resulted in five new school links.

These links flourished in the weeks leading up to the One Voice Summer Festival (30 June–1 July 2025), with children:

- Exchanging greetings, artwork and postcards about their favourite songs
- Holding video calls and joint rehearsals
- Meeting in person on the day to take part in structured linking activities

The emotional impact is unmistakable. Children from different areas, cultures and lived experiences stood side by side singing about belonging and togetherness.

We asked the School Teachers what they thought:

“The children loved being given their postcards from Meersbrook Bank today. The Linking Network definitely added an extra element to the project for the children and made them more aware of other schools that were there rather than them being in their own bubble.” — Clifford Primary

“The invisible similarities activity worked so well.”

“The children loved being given their postcards.”

Other participating linked schools included Mosborough and Carfield; Oasis Watermead and Shooter’s Grove; Abbey Lane and Marcliffe; and Manor Lodge and Wybourn.

## **Continuing the Partnership: One Voice Christmas 2025**

The collaboration continued for the One Voice Christmas event (2 December 2025), involving:

Norton Free C of E Primary

Clifford C of E Primary

Stradbroke Primary

High Hazels Junior Academy

Schools exchanged bunting, videos, messages and class introductions. They also held ice-breaker games and spent time together during the performance day.

Teachers shared enthusiastic feedback:

“The children in both schools have made an individual piece of bunting all about themselves. David (teacher at Norton Free) kindly delivered theirs and picked up ours last week. The children have loved learning about each other and the bright bunting is now decorating the class. We have arranged to send a video of the classes introducing themselves and doing a vocal warm up the first week back after the holidays, then a zoom call mid-November. We are really enjoying

learning the songs for the concert, the children are excited to take part and really looking forward to meeting the children from Norton Free!”

And later: “The children loved watching the videos we received!” and “The children absolutely loved the event on Tuesday and collaborating with Norton Free made it even more special. Thank you!”

### **Why This Matters for Sheffield**

For pupils, Linking is instrumental in helping them make new friends, appreciate their own identities, and challenge misconceptions about others. Pupils develop resilience, perseverance, and confidence when meeting new people. Teachers report increased confidence in discussing sensitive topics like identity and diversity. Pupil testimonials consistently highlight making new friends and gaining understanding

The programme supports the Safer Sheffield Strategy, helping to reduce hate crime, promoting diversity and building a city where all children feel safe, welcome and valued.

External evaluations affirm its impact. Oxford University’s 2023 Social Integration Report described The Linking Network as having “robust evaluation showing positive impact”, particularly in respect for others, confidence mixing across groups and broadening social networks.

### **Why this partnership matters to Sheffield Music Hub**

“This partnership has really enhanced the experience of the children in our One Voice Festival. Linking has enhanced One Voice’s celebration of connection, empathy and belonging. We’ve seen children step outside their comfort zones, build friendships across the city and feel proud of their shared identity as Sheffield learners and Sheffield singers. We’re excited to keep developing this work.” - Rory Evans, Assistant Projects Officer, Sheffield Music Hub

### **Looking Ahead**

With One Voice Summer 2026 fast approaching on 7 July, we’re delighted to confirm participation from the following Sheffield primary schools:

Arbourthorne Community Primary School  
Beck Primary School  
Carfield Primary School  
Clifford All Saints  
High Hazels Academy  
Meersbrook Bank Primary School  
Mosborough Primary School  
Nether Edge Primary School  
Norton Free C of E Primary School  
St Wilfrid’s Primary  
Woodhouse West Primary School  
Wybourn Community Primary School

Strong links are already being established with participating schools. We will continue to use the transformational power music, combined with the relational impact of School Linking, to help Sheffield's children feel part of a kinder, safer and more united city. As more schools connect through the programme, we expect to see even deeper collaboration, more shared projects, and an even richer sense of belonging across our communities.