



Make Your Mark: Notes on Music Education

Series 2 Episode 2: Creative Curriculums and Classrooms

[Intro music]

Yusef Sacoor: Hello, and welcome to Make Your Mar: Notes on Music Education. In this episode, we look at creative approaches to the curriculum and how to deliver music best in the classroom. Let's hear more from our guests, and more on their innovative approaches to Primary and Secondary learning.

Louisa Roberts: I'm Louisa Roberts. I'm from Being Musical. It's my consultancy. I also work for Triborough Music Service as the Schools and Curriculum Lead. My role is really about supporting educators, whether they be musicians or Primary teachers, in their practice in whole-class teaching.

Kirsten Cunningham: Hello, I'm Kirsten Cunningham. I'm Assistant Head Teacher at Horfield Primary in Bristol. That's a part-time role. I also support Bristol Beacon Music Hub in schools across Bristol, and I have recently been working as a creator for the Oak Primary Curriculum.

Nicky Clapson: Hi, I'm Nikki Clapson. I'm head of music at a lovely Secondary school in Devon, Plimpton Academy. And I've been teaching for 23 years, and I'm loving it.

Abi Marrison: So before we come to our first question, I'm just going to do a little bit of context setting. I'm really excited about today's podcast because it's about a creative curriculum. And at the moment, we are in a period where the Curriculum and Assessment Review final report has landed. The government have made their response, and now we're in the period where things have got to happen. So, we know that the curriculum has got to be written, revised, and the expectation is that that will be published from spring 2027 with the hope that teachers can then begin teaching it from September 2028.

And the reason that I'm excited about having this conversation now is we can really talk about before everything's written down on paper, what does it feel like in the classroom? How is it when it's exciting and creative?

So with all that in mind, my first question is directed to just to Kirsten to begin with, because I know that your school are a three-times Artsmark platinum setting. I used to work for an

organisation supporting Artsmark training, so I know how hard that is. And I'd love you to tell everyone a little bit more about how music was a significant part of that cultural development journey.

Kirsten Cunningham: Thank you. Yes, Artsmark is really special to us really. I think what Artsmark has done for our school is it's really created the creative heart of the school. It's allowed us to kind of really think about why are we doing it, why are we doing things and how are we doing things within the school. It's really made us think about how do we extend beyond just the children into the community because that really makes a difference. And it's really made us think about what could we do next? Staying at platinum level is really hard. So when you apply for your next one, you've got to really, really dig down deep into thinking, how can I try and justify and stay there?

So in terms of the creativity, we've been really thinking about the extra and the co-curricular activities that we're asking our children to do. We really, really believe that making music and the doing of the music is really, really super important. And so one of the things that I think we've done across our Artsmark journey is think really carefully about how we're going to inspire those children to work together as musicians, and something that's truly inclusive. We've worked on composition. So every year the school work on a song, that is something that's really special to us. The one that we've been working on at the moment, is called 'Standing Strong', it's really reflecting our school's values.

We've also then thought about how could we extend that a little bit further? So a couple of years ago, the children were super inspired about plastic in the ocean. And so we worked with a composer to create a song of the sea. The children were very keen to put it on YouTube. And at the moment it's got 24K hits, I think. So that idea that music is a message and it can go far beyond one tiny school within Bristol and properly travel worldwide.

We're very passionate about looking at these different genres as well. We're really lucky as music makers in schools that when children get home they put music on, as soon as they get home they explore music in so many different settings and so we've already got that connection with them. Through our Artsmark journey we've really thought about how can we make it at the heart of the school and for that I'm really lucky as a senior leader there I know that you've got to really persuade your senior leaders that it's important.

Without that real belief that it really makes a change to all children. I think it's really, really tricky to get it to the heart of the school.

Abi Marrison: And I think that you're completely right in saying that what makes it creative is the fact that you're trying to connect everything together. You're saying, okay, let's really look at how we can be creative across our curriculum and make sure that we're embedding the learning in lots of different ways.

Kirsten Cunningham: We so are. So for our last Artsmark, we worked on Hans Krása's 'Brundibár', the opera. So the children, all of Year 5 took part in this. They performed at St George's in Bristol. So for a lot of them, it was the first time they'd walked through that international concert venue, which was super exciting. I had the privilege of being at the front of the line after you go off the coach and actually just watching those faces as they walk into an international concert hall and thinking, you know, this is your city. This is your space, was really, really important.

But also thinking about those messages that opera brings. That idea of resilience, I think is really, important. That idea of empathy, again, really, really important. And empowering the children to think that this is theirs. And thinking about bullying, that again is really, really relevant to all of our children today. And also opera. Lots and lots of children would think, you know, is it for me? Of course it is. Every genre is for every child. And as educators, what we should be doing is opening doors to every possible genre and letting those children really explore them.

And to be in that auditorium, in that venue and to be able to see them taking part in that was absolutely magic. But again, thinking about cross-curricular, the children did some incredible artwork which was then displayed in the foyer, and also worked with the poet and writer Claire Williamson to really explore those different feelings within the opera. So I felt when they got up on stage and actually performed that music, they were truly living it.

And I think again, as music educators, that what we're trying to do, we're trying to create a lived experience for those children because it truly does change lives.

Abi Marrison: Yeah, it feels really alive, doesn't it, rather than on paper.

Yusef Sacoor: Yeah, definitely. it's, that sort of holistic approach at Primary is really important. So going, going over from Primary to Secondary and to you, Nikki, you have a really interesting way of teaching in your classrooms, specifically at your Secondary school. So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that.

Nicky Clapson: Yeah, so a couple of years ago, I decided to rip my curriculum apart over the summer holidays because I felt it was a little bit of a pick and mix style curriculum and the new model curriculum had come into place and I was like, I like some elements of this. So what I decided to do is I've created it now so that it's an instrumental-based. So the students start in year seven learning an instrument, and then by the time they get to year nine, they're about Grade 2 or 3 on their chosen instrument. So the ones that they can, the main instruments that they can choose from are bass guitar, lead guitar, drum kit, ukulele, vocals and piano.

However, this year I've had quite a lot in Year 8 and 9 that are cellists, violinists, saxophonists. So I've stylised it to whoever's in front of me. I'll create resources for all of them. Year 7 starts with vocal work because I think that's fundamental, as a musician really

to be singing as soon as you get into school. So at the moment they're just rehearsing for the carol service, and we're going to try and get as many year sevens there as possible in the church singing together. They're all singing the Polar Express song, so we're all excited about that. And then after Christmas, they start on music notation. So they're looking at crotchets, quavers, pitch, et cetera, but they'll do it via their instrument.

And then they'll move on to Year 8, which has got things like blues, reggae. So we do do genres of music, but we do it all through instrumental studies. We might have warmups that are vocal, or they might be oral perception, music theory. We try and get them to understand what the chord progressions are. We get them to work on scales. We get them to understand where the chords come from, how chords are built in Year 8.

And then by Year 9, it's all about independence. So, okay, you've got some of these skills now. They're quite foundational. Actually, where you gonna go with it? You are the musician in the classroom. I want you to work together as a team.

Yusef Sacoor: And do you find that your new approach to the curriculum has meant a higher sort of percentage of engaged musicians or people going on to GCSE and A Level, et cetera?

Nicky Clapson: Yeah, hugely. So our uptake for Year 10 this year is 44, which is the highest we've had in a long time. And I've been here, this is my now ninth year of being at Plimpton. And that's one of the highest numbers I've had. So I'm super excited that we had so many choose Year 10, Level 2 music.

Also it's the clubs and just the environment - we are so busy before school, break one, break two, after school, it gets to 5 o'clock, and I'm like 'Okay, you do really need to go home now because I would like to go home really'. They all just want to be down here, which is great. you know, they're not, they're coming down as groups as well. They're coming down as bands. So they're coming down with their friends, with their classmates and going, let's rehearse. And I wish I had 10 more practice rooms now because like we are so, so busy, which is fantastic. So I can see it happening and see what it's doing to the departments. Great.

Abi Marrison: Are they are also composing on those instruments, Nicky?

Nicky Clapson: Yeah, so Year 9 is great. What we do in Year 9 is we sort of rip music apart, we break it down, and we look at all the different elements. So they're having a little look at riffs now in Year 9 and how riffs derive from chords and the notes of the chord. And then what they do is when we get to after February half term, they start composing their own piece. So we'll look at melody development after Christmas and then they're to start putting all the things together.

So they'll have the chords, they'll have the bass line, and they'll have the melodic development and they create their own piece. We've got our studio, so we record in the studio. They create an album cover, they create their album as such. And so each class has

their own album. Yeah, photos, the school photographer comes down, she takes photos of them all. And yeah, so they have like a final polished product, which is great, really, really good.

Abi Marrison: Nice, and I think that Kirsten can relate to that whole element of bringing those bits together.

Kirsten Cunningham: I so can. Most definitely. I think one of the things I was just thinking, listening to you talk there, Nicky, and I'm thinking, what we try to do in the Primary school is it's kind of not altogether different in terms of we've got a programme called 'Earth Song' that we run within the school. So all our Year 2s do a programme called 'Start With Singing' for most of the year because for all children, every person everywhere, that voice is in us. We don't need anything else. We can sing wherever we are.

What we have found as a school is quite often when we are singing together as a group as teachers sometimes we forget to listen to the individual voice and actually really building that confidence in terms of pitch and really trying to help and support children who haven't yet found those pitches to be able to develop that as a first stepping block within music. So that's really really made us focus on the individual and their internal kind of finding their own voice.

But from that in Year 3, we go on to start with playing, and then we move on to both untuned and then tuned percussion. Again, using really simple songs, but with ostinati that children are able to kind of create their own classroom ensemble. And then in Year 4, we're able to offer children instrumental lessons for eight from each class. And at Hawthorne, we offer bassoon, oboe and clarinet. So that's exciting.

Mainly because I'm really passionate about those endangered species. So as part of this programme, they learn those instruments, but they also do start with composition because as a music lead, I'm thinking composition is really tricky to teach. And so we have composers that come in to work on those units with the children and the children have a 10 week block. So our Year 5s every year completely inspired. They read Morpurgo's version of 'Beowulf'. And then they create an opera of Beowulf, which is wonderful. In Year 6, they study the 'Lost Words', their Macfarlane, beautiful, beautiful book. And then they use those as an inspiration for song. And again, I think it's that, just like you've got there, actual doing, that musicality, that performing and playing and working together and that formative assessment of how do we get better and which bits do we tweak? And how can we, as we move forward from lesson to lesson, how can we make this more musical? Has had an amazing impact on our children.

Nicky Clapson: Yeah, I think if the perception in the classroom is that you are a musician from the moment you walk in the door, it's a completely different feeling. It's interesting because our first unit in Year 7 is called 'Finding Your Voice', and it's not just about singing, it's about you as a person and what you've got to say. So about the value of your opinion in

the classroom, the value of your feedback, the value of your decision making, and that everybody should be able to answer a question, not because they know the answer, but because they're important, and I feel like that's the best unit to start them all on because they've all come from lots of different places.

And it's interesting about the composition. So we're working with a company at the moment that's got composers that are coming in and you're right, composition is really tricky and it's really personalised. So you have to be quite open to a lot of ideas, but then also help them structure and put those ideas into place. So my Year 10s are working with two composers and songwriters that are coming in and we're doing like a three month project, which will, we'll have a performance at the end with two other schools locally. And it's brilliant. Watching them doing the workshop the other day was amazing. It was so inspiring for me as well to try and, you know, take ideas from it.

Abi Marrison: So we've heard from two very experienced teachers here and what I'd like to do now is ask Louisa to bring in the element of support that you give to teachers, because I know that you work with teachers and some of them will be experienced and some of them perhaps not. So Louisa, what approaches are you seeing from the work that you're doing?

Louisa Roberts: Thank you, Abi. I mean, first of all, I'd like to say what Kirsten and Nicky are doing in that whole performance-led experiential learning is absolutely fantastic. And the effective practice that I see when I go around schools is to see everybody music-ing. This is what it is music-ing is a verb. And if they're participating, they're learning.

I always say, I like to tell people about how terrible I am at football. And the reason why I'm terrible at football is because I don't play football. You can't be good at music unless you music. And the way that I support people, it depends purely on where that practitioner is coming from. And you'd be surprised the number of musicians, professional musicians who actually tell me about some negative experiences in their childhood about how they were taught. And to be able to actually unpick that and say to them, you know, what kind of teacher do you want to be and allow them to actually be that nuanced teacher, the teacher that is really interested in the students and interesting as a practitioner. No minute is wasted in the lesson.

So, me going into a class, first of all, I always have a conversation first. I just don't show up without knowing anything about that person. And that mentoring process where they tell me the things that are going well and the things that maybe could be better. And we always frame it like that, as we would with children. Many of my practitioners are musicians. And some of the things they struggle with is just tapping into children and young people with different previous experiences who maybe haven't had music in their home life and haven't had a lot of music before they've come to them. And it's really hard sometimes for us as musicians to imagine what it's like to not be able to do it, because it's something that we always found really easy. So with musicians, sometimes it's also about the pedagogy and the

developmental stages of childhood as well. For example, clapping on the beat is really difficult when you think about what actually has to happen. Now this is a podcast, if you're seeing this visually, you've got two hands.

Yusef Sacoor: Impossible to clap on a podcast in time.

Louisa Roberts: And it's like on the radio, isn't it? It's like two hands coming together, pre-empting where you want that sound to be, okay? And just flipping one hand so it's facing upright and having two fingers of your dominant hand tapping where that would be or pulsing on the knees with alternate hands is a much easier way to show it.

But the other danger, of course, I think, and what some people don't realise or have never considered, is that just because you can clap on the beat, if we're doing it as a whole class, sometimes we're actually just following the momentum of what everyone else is doing. And we know that because sometimes we might go to a show, musical in the West End, and the audience starts clapping on one and three and then they get out of sync with the band because they're not actually listening and responding to the music. So I do a lot of work with developing that inner hearing and the inner voice and that thinking voice so that students can really feel it. Pulse is a feeling rather than a sound. So that's one of the things we do.

But also with the Primary practitioners who don't have a musical background, I say, actually, let me reframe that. They perceive themselves as not having a musical background. I work with them a lot with their confidence in music itself. And that might come from, you I do a lot of voice work. I lead really simple songs and I don't like to use the word game because it implies there's no learning in it, but musical activities that are fun using the voice and gradually getting that practitioner, that teacher to take the lead.

Often I will actually ask the pupils to lead first and then that actually gives them confidence too. But, know, in the same way, they might bring hang-ups from previous musical experiences from childhood. And some of that comes from not very inspirational musical teaching in the past, which might not have been about music-ing. Music-ing is so important for everybody to engage and enjoy performance-led learning.

Yusef Sacoor: And I can tell you from a gig that I went to a couple of months ago where the musician tried to get the audience to do polyrhythms that some people have not been doing their clapping practice since, since Primary school. But that point about confidence is really interesting. And particularly for sort of non-specialists at Primary level. How do you manage to instill that? And actually Kirsten, how do you manage to install that across a school?

Kirsten Cunningham: I think it's that doing, isn't it? It's that doing, but also that checking for understanding and that picking up those little details.

I'm always really passionate in my school about when children walk out of a music lesson, I'm there at the door saying, 'What did you learn?' If they say I learned a song, I'm like, that's not really learning, is it? If you just say you've learned a song, that's not the learning. I want

to know what about the song have you been working on? Maybe it's about working back, listen to the pitch. Maybe it was your diction. Maybe you're thinking about rhythm, I want to actually get the children to begin to unpick what was the learning.

And actually going back to your point Louise as well, another thing that I'm really, really keen on at Horfield is sometimes children will come to music and they'll think, great, it's music, we don't have to do any learning. And absolutely not. Music is very, very, very much learning. And so whatever context we're in, whether I've got the whole school singing or whether I've got some children working on an ensemble or something after school or choir, is very very much musical learning, so I think it's really important to work with teachers to really think about what these small steps learning.

Whenever you're watching a professional ensemble rehearse whether it's a band or whether it's orchestra, whether it's a company working towards a production, it's that in the moment correction which is really really going to make the difference and so I think that's what's really important for our teachers as well it's those little tiny in the moment corrections. That they can begin either as an individual or as a class to really make the music better. So when you're learning a song for the first time, you're probably going to get it wrong. And you know what? That's absolutely fine. And you're going to need to pull it apart, but also teach children what practice is because practice itself is quite complicated.

And when you really pull it apart, it's actually making that sort of invisible visible for the children that, you know, practice is about taking a tiny, tiny little chunk and doing it again and again and again. Or practice is getting that peer review and listening to what somebody else thinks, but actually teaching those children the skills of practicing, I think is really important as well.

Yusef Sacoor: Does that resonate on a Secondary level as well then, Nicky?

Nicky Clapson: Yeah, it's interesting because I have a little technique that I call 'Getting Unstuck', so that they have ways of working out what it is that's gone wrong. So I'm the last resort in the classroom. They need to find other ways to try and work out how to help themselves. So I had this amazing Year 8 class that were playing Mozart's 'Eine kleine' on the keyboard to start with. And then we started going off into different instrument types.

They were prepped like full-on machines, they were, as to what they needed to do if something was really tricky. So, slow it down, practice the certain part that's not working. It was great, it was really, good. And then an observation came around and they were all putting their hands up going, 'We need to slow it down, miss', 'we need to make sure we're playing the right notes', 'we need to check our fingers', so, we have a whole getting stuck regime, if you like, that the students follow. And it is about the musicianship skills that we would follow as a musician, when we're practicing as adults. And that's the challenge for the students. It's knowing what to do if you get stuck.

So as I say, we have a whole policy on it that they all, and that's for every year group, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, and then into Sixth Form as well. What do you need to do with this piece? What is it that's going wrong? Let's focus on what's going wrong, and we'll look at it together as well with the class. You know, okay, 'so is it right? Isn't it right?', 'Let's pick out what is going wrong', 'can you identify what's going wrong?'. So everybody's listening, everybody's thinking about what the musicality is of that piece and what they need to do to get it right, yeah.

Yusef Sacoor: And it's interesting, isn't it, that as Kirsten alluded to as well, that fun seems to imply no learning. But obviously it does. And I wonder, particularly coming back to the curriculum, instilling that sense of fun must be really, really key. I was wondering how you managed to do that.

Abi Marrison: I was going to come in on that as well, Yusef, just to say that I wonder whether, and this is another podcast topic completely, but I wonder whether some of that's tied into the fact that they don't see the assessment happening.

Kirsten Cunningham: They can work as teams, they're working as groups, they're working as a class. So often we're asking them to work individually and actually we all learn best when we're working with other people often, getting, soaking up other people's ideas or helping them to improve what we're doing and I think again that idea of that working as a bigger group has a really big impact.

Nicky Clapson: Also, it's when you mention that formal word of assessment, isn't it? And suddenly everyone's going, 'it's assessment time!' And actually, you don't necessarily need that. What you need is a comprehensive monitoring system where you're checking what the students are doing anyway, all the time. They all have instant feedback and I'm always going around all the bands and they know they're getting better because they can play stuff that they couldn't play two weeks ago. So there's no need. I'll go and record them anyway in their practice rooms, in their bands, in their groups. I don't need to drag them all back to the main classroom and go, right, we're now going to formally assess stuff. And I have done that previously, don't get me wrong. And you can see those students that are like, gosh, it's assessment day. And I'm like, but you don't need to panic about it because making mistakes is part of learning, and that's okay. And if you do make a mistake, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to penalise you for it. Actually, I've been watching you progress over the last six weeks. So assessment is very different in our classroom, very, very different.

Kirsten Cunningham: I think as well in terms of skills-based, what's really, important is that as music teachers we're not sort of turning the page of a lesson one, and then lesson two, and then lesson three, where we learn one song one week, and then we learn another song the next week, and then a third song on the third week. I think for children it's so crucial, isn't it, that we teach them that as a skills-based we will be returning to the same song, and probably we're going to be working on it for three or four weeks and looking at different

elements of it to make it better, and then deepening our learning. Rather than doing something entirely different, which we might possibly do with some of the subjects.

Yusef Sacoor: So with that kind of diversity of student and people at different levels of progression, how do you support those that maybe aren't as engaged because they haven't, they're taking longer to be engaged with the instrument they're playing or the songs they're learning or the skills that they're learning or aren't engaged behaviorally, et cetera. And how do you do that on a whole sort of whole classroom level? I used to work for young people. I could never get my head around how people did it for 30 children in a classroom. So, Louisa, what do you say to the people that you work with?

Louisa Roberts: It's something that comes up all the time actually, and that's the challenge and actually the beauty of whole class teaching because your impact is huge. So the first thing is it's integrating the relational and from hearing Kirsten and Nikki talking, their music teaching is highly relational and it has to be to be successful. And when you know your students, you can see whether they're engaging or not.

One of the big lessons, I think, and something that more experienced teachers are able to do, is to facilitate rather than teach. And once you can actually make that jump into designing activities in your preparedness, I don't like to use the word planning, actually, it sounds like a paper exercise and very boring, in the preparedness of your lesson, is that, you really consider, you know, who's in the room, what you know switches them on. And then thinking about where, and then you're thinking about the experiences. I don't like to use the word ability either because it implies that there's no potential in everything that it's fixed. But where the children are coming from in their prior experiences. And we can use the word differentiation, that actually thinking about how you're going to frame that and how you're going to explain to children, right, giving them choices.

And it's really important that first of all, they're heard, as Nicky had said before, that they, you may design the curriculum because you know that it's really going to switch some of those kids on. So, thinking about that, but also thinking about the different activities within ensemble learning and giving them choices. Now, you might want to do this. And if you don't feel you can do this yet, why don't you try this? Has anyone else got any ideas on what you could do? And if you're finding this really easy and you want a bit more of a challenge, try this. And when they have choices like that, the whole lesson does become fun. Because they're in control of what they're doing.

Yusef Sacoor: For sure. And I know, Nikki, you must have people at varying levels, all playing instruments in a group setting. So how do you deal with that discrepancy?

Nicky Clapson: Well, knowing my students really really well and knowing so for example in Year 9, I've got this amazing drummer who is Grade 6, but has started learning some Grade 8 repertoire and he's in year nine. So he's my lead learner for the drum group. So obviously when they all go off, I'll let him lead that group and go right, okay, this is what they need to

be learning. I would like you to work with that group. I'd like all of the people in that group to be able to get to a level where they can all go from a four beat to an eight beat, they can do a fill, they can do paradiddles, they can do technical exercises, because we include that as well within the curriculum. So they've got to be able to do a warm up, they've got to be able to do technical exercises as well as the pieces that we're working on. So I use a lot of lead learners in that concept, but also we've got iPads. So I do a lot of prep onto the iPads and I've got lots of videos that can stretch people that need stretching.

But also for students that have got varying learning needs. There's actually me doing demos and chunked right down for them to learn from, so for example, if it's a guitarist I'll literally be going okay, so we need to count to the third fret, I'd like you to count with me one two three, and it's really instructional. So it's like I call it the Mini Miss Clapson, and you take it off with you to the practice room, but we do things like sectionals as well, so some lessons we start that all the guitarists go together, all the basses go together, all the drummers go together and they come back in 10 minutes and we see what everyone's done. They'll play it and then we'll try and put sections together, see if we can get the piece going.

But it takes, I mean, it's a heavily resourced curriculum, but I think it's worth the resourcing because it's working so, so well. And the students absolutely love it because, as you say, Louisa, they're in control. They do get to a point where they have personal projects that they all create themselves. They decide on the piece of music. They let me know what it is, and I find all the resources for them. And then that's it after Easter. It's their work. It's their piece. It's their project.

Abi Marrison; We've spent quite a bit of time talking about curriculum already. And one thought that's come to my mind is that the curriculum is really the Bucklands with the senior leadership of the school. And sometimes that curriculum is set by a multi-academy trust. And at that level, we also have Kirsten here with us, who has been contributing to Oak Resources. And we know that Oak is also there as another resource for you to look at curriculum development.

So when we're really thinking about the people who make the curriculum and how you decide on how you're going to do that, what I'm really interested in hearing about is what do you do when you really need to advocate for music? So imagine that you don't have a co-head like Kirsten in your school, and you're thinking, 'How are we going to really make sure that music can sit across the curriculum and come in in all these powerful ways?'

We've done a few sessions at Music Mark on this so far. We've had a T- time, so that's our termly session for teachers on this. We actually did an advocacy session with two multi-academy trust leaders in the summer, I think it was last year. And yeah, I'd just be really interested in what are your top tips for advocating or ways that you've seen that done successfully.

Kirsten Cunningham: For me, I think the key is to really look at progression. I think historically in Primary schools, we've been quite guilty of getting enthusiastic that they were teaching the Tudors and adding a couple of Tudor songs in, or we might be working on a science topic with rocks and soils, and so we get out all the claves and things, and that really is not a music curriculum. That potentially can add maybe atmosphere to a science lesson.

Abi Marrison: I can see some heads shaking. There are heads shaking.

Kirsten Cunningham: But it's not a music lesson. So I think something that is really super important when you're thinking about your curriculum with your school and with your head is really looking at that really secure progression, and also making sure you're not dipping and diving between lots and lots of different things. Because again, that's not a secure progression.

And I think our children deserve really to make sure you've got that real thread of learning that runs right the way through the school. And that you've got something that's really, really solid that you can work with. Starting with your children for me as they walk through the door as four year olds, rising five in our early years curriculum, and then moving all the way through to my Year 6. And what I want to be able to see is I move through the school is what are they doing? Why this and why now? And why are they making the next step? And can I really see if I'm, for example, looking at singing across the school, I want to be really, really clear in terms of those steps and progression. Why is that Year 1 class, where has that song come from in year one, and what are those children able to do? And then when I move up to Year 5 and 6, how can I really clearly see the progression? And I think that's something we've got a lot better with.

Abi Marrison: Allow me to ask a sub-question to that. If you were in subjects such as modern foreign languages and you were learning 'Silent Night' in German, 'Stille Nacht', or you were doing a festive song in Spanish, you were doing 'Feliz Navidad', because it's not part of your progression, would you err against doing that? What's your feeling?

Kirsten Cunningham: Absolutely not. No, my feeling is that it's enriching those curricula, and I think that is absolutely amazing. What I'm against is the teacher telling me that was their music lesson. So I think enriching the curriculum, I'm all for that. And I think, you know, for all of us and all children, what a wonderful opportunity to be able to see those links because that's so important, isn't it, in schools for those children to begin to make those connections. Connections are everything. Connections within school, within subjects and then between school and home as well. That's really, really important. But just ticking off and thinking, right, I've sung 'Stille Nacht', and that's my music for this term. For me, that wouldn't get the tick in the box.

Abi Marrison: So, Nicky, how do you do that? Because of course, it's Secondary. You're much more siloed because you're in your subject. So how does that compare with you?

Nicky Clapson: It's funny because as I was listening to Kirsten, I was thinking through it. And I think for us, it's much about the visibility of our subject. Obviously, and that feeds into the curriculum. We are involved in everything. Anything that's community-based, we are there at the forefront when there's open evenings all the time. Christmas events, we're always there. And I think also I'm always onto my head all the time.

So there's no reprieve from me. I'm sure he's sick of me, but I'm always emailing, can we do this? Can we do that? We need to be doing this. We need to be doing that. And I think that constant throb of my voice in his ear helps because I won't let it not work, if that makes sense. Do you know what mean? I'm solution-based. I'll find a way to do it. And I think the fact that I'm so passionate and I'm so forthright about music and about the value of it, I think that's what does it. I'm pushing all the time to get more things in, more workshops, more events, more what else can we do? How can we better ourselves? So visibility is huge. I think that's a huge buy-in.

Abi Marrison: I really like that because rather than seeing the curriculum written down, what you're doing is you're setting a culture of music in your school. Louisa, have you seen that as well?

Louisa Roberts: I can tell the moment I walk into a school how embedded music is in the life of that school. From the staffing board and the website, are there named members of staff that are responsible for music? Because sometimes the instrumental tutors get left off these things. I can tell from going around the classrooms because there'll be instruments and there'll be photographs and evidence of work that's been done.

I love going into a nursery or reception class and there's a sound area to explore sounds and they refer to the whole curriculum as well that they're doing. And going to a singing assembly where it's not just the music teacher at the front, you know, there's co-facilitation, there's students that are involved in leading, being singing leaders, and all the staff are in. It's not PPA time; everybody is enjoying the thrill of that vocal work, part singing, and just loving that celebration of music. I love it when head teachers say to me, 'Help me to understand what I'm looking for in a music lesson.' A lot of head teachers haven't got that background, Nicky's smiling here, but I can give them a prompt sheet to look at all of those things, but actually, the most effective way is to do, I don't like to use the word observation, it sounds like a medical term, is to do a dual class visit with the permission of the facilitator, know, where we can look at a lesson together and then they know what they're looking for, the music-ing, the engagement, the choices and the enjoyment and fun.

Abi Marrison: I'll just round that point off with, because you were talking, Louisa, there about confidence and there's something definitely when we talk about creative curriculum around if a teacher is not confident delivering their music, they perhaps will take a curriculum that is set, that is already written, they won't play with it, they won't touch it because they simply do not have that confidence of don't actually know what I'm looking for.

I don't know how to, so I just want something that's created for me to build that confidence up.

Louisa Roberts: Yeah, and there's a danger in that because what we don't want is resource-led learning, because then we're not really tapping into the students and what they need to make progress and to enjoy music. I mean, when I was a Primary practitioner, I dipped into loads of different resources, and I used them in the right term for the right classes. And it's that skill. Think investing in the non-specialist teacher and in helping them to understand what musical learning looks like is the best use of resources of all, really. And so they can make those judgments rather than just following a scheme. I think also the difficulty is if they lack confidence, we'll start to get into that lesson about music rather than the lesson that's music-ing. We're just talking about the music and the students aren't actually doing it.

So coming back to advocacy and all of those things, if leadership teams understand what fantastic musical learning looks like, we're sorted. But I do believe that having a strong Primary subject leader in music, and they can be developed, is not somebody that played the cello when they were in Year 3 themselves. It's somebody who is absolutely committed and can be developed and wants to be developed in musical leadership.

Yusef Sacoor: And that passion thing seems like a huge, huge deal. But for schools where perhaps you haven't got as forthright an advocate, I know, Nicky, you've got this amazing, probably through your own work ability, to give every child an instrument to work on. For schools that aren't as well-resourced as that, I know my Secondary school wasn't that well-resourced. Do you have any ideas or tips for people who were put in that position where they couldn't provide that for their students?

Kirsten Cunningham: Start with singing, start with singing. We've all got a voice. You don't need a piano. You can have a backing track or sing with none at all. We're really lucky, I think, today. We can access all these wonderful recordings, which we can use if we want to or not. But I think every child has a voice, and the inclusivity of that is immensely powerful. But also is that when you're leading singing assembly and, Louise, you referred to having all the staff with you on the same page and joining in.

But actually the power that that has spiritually as well, I think is really quite effective, that awe and wonder that you can get either to celebrate and be really very excited with the children or simultaneously something that's really, really calm and thoughtful and possibly in parts. And actually children also can be participating if they're listening. Not all children are necessarily going to want to be singing, but actually to me, they're actively listening, they are participating and being part of that experience. And to me, that is immensely powerful.

And also, think joy, joy is really important, isn't it? And actually, music brings joy into schools, and all children should have access to joy and all teachers. And when you have that incredible singing assembly or workshop and it's gone really, really well and the children are going back to their classroom singing whatever you've been working on, actually that is real

tangible joy. And I think that is something that other subjects possibly don't find as easy to weave through their curricula, that we're very lucky that we can.

Nicky Clapson: I think also thinking outside the box, I think so, one of the first steps that I did was put out a post onto our social media saying that we were looking for donations for instruments. anybody, because lots of people start, don't they? And then, you know, after they get to 30 or so stop. So we were just like, like, you know, this is the curriculum we're designing. We'd like more instruments if you've got anything. And we had loads of people, lots of brass stuff. I don't know what's wrong with brass instruments, but we had loads of trombones and trumpets. But we got a drum kit, got a piano, we got violins, we got loads of stuff and that really helped us get a kickstart with our instruments. But also progressively every year I've bought something else. I've bought another couple of lead guitars, another couple of amps, another couple of basses. We do get a healthy budget, I've got to say, but I think, think outside the box and actually think what else could we do? Go to your local hub, see what they can give you. We've got double basses this year and saxophones that we borrowed, which is great. You know, just ask other schools, see what they can do as well. I'm always happy to help out with, you know, local schools and see what we can help them with.

But yeah, just thinking out the box, thinking of other ideas that you could do, like for example, chair drumming. You if you want to get them doing rhythmical work, get them all with their chairs in front of them, all you need is sticks, you can make that a dowling, off they go. They're all working together as an ensemble. So yeah, definitely thinking outside the box.

Kirsten Cunningham: I think we've sometimes thought about that less is more as well. You when we thought about what instruments do we want to buy, let's get a few class sets and so children can truly all play together. So claves, just amazing, because actually that rhythmic work when they're playing through something else rather than just clapping, they're using an instrument and how to play the claves properly and how they can listen for those different timbres within the claves. Those shaky eggs, they're great as well, for again, know, children, fit in their hand, and they feel they're making music.

But again, class sets of glockenspiels and then not worry too much about all the other things as well. So they can all be using, there you go, you see Nicky, you have a shaky egg in your hand. And there's class sets of glockenspiels as well, I think, you know, so they can all be doing that tuned ostinati all together, which is really, really powerful. So we've certainly think, I have a very, very small music budget. It sort of disappeared before I even arrived in September. So I have to think really super creatively.

We're in a reasonably challenging area of Bristol, and there just is no money anywhere and certainly not for music. So most of the music funding I get is by writing lots and lots of application letters for various things. But actually, at every child with a pair of claves, there's something really powerful about that.

Abi Marrison: It feels like one of those party games where when anyone mentions a particular instrument, we're all going to have to run and grab one. I think Nikki is winning on that. So let's just wait and see what other instruments come up. I'm looking around and thinking what I've got nearby.

Yusef Sacoor: I said, Kirsten's got a great background. She's got two, although I don't think you can pick up a piano or a cello for that matter.

Abi Marrison: She has, hasn't she?

Yusef Sacoor: I was going to talk about collaboration. Nikki mentioned earlier about working with your music service or music hub. And when you've got less resources, that being a really useful thing, how do you sort of collaborations with your local music organisations, youth organisations into your curriculum work and can it be done?

Nicky Clapson: That's interesting. do, so we're a lead school for the local hub, and we do lots of collaboration with them all the time. If the head emails me about it, I'm like, yeah, we'll do that. We'll do that. We'll be involved. So we have workshops that come in and we set with different students that they might work with, Year 10 and 11.

It's tricky. Like, we get people in as well to do like whole year group stuff as well, like vocal work. We've had the local vocal lead for the music hub to come in and do some workshops with our Year 7. It's about having the time in the curriculum. I think getting the SLT involved to let you have time in the curriculum as well.

I think trying to hit every single year group every single year is quite tricky because most of the workshops are things like we've had the Bournemouth Symphony and we had the National Youth Orchestra down. That was amazing because that was whole school. So we hit about 400 students in the performance. But then they went round the whole school. They took over for the whole day. So they went into maths lessons and played. They went into science lessons and played. And we're talking like little brass quartets. We're talking about string groups going around. And that was beautiful. One of the deputy heads said it was the best day he's ever had at this school so far, and he's been here a couple of years. So it was just so magical, was so, magical.

I do take up any opportunities that I can with the hub so that the students are experiencing more. Because when you also, some departments are only one person, so you've got that one person who's working super hard. But if you can get other people in, the workshop that we had this week with the two composers, they were so enthusiastic and so full of energy and so full of vibrance and the class just lit up with them working with this and I was just like this is amazing and you know I feel really good from it as well so yeah I just take any opportunity that's going really for that will help and support our students.

Kirsten Cunningham: I think collaboration is absolutely crucial. think, like Nicky said, it's a case of just saying yes, yes please, we would love to have that. Really, really important for

schools to really reach out and work with their music hub, because music hubs are there to open doors for you. They're there for things that you didn't know were there, and with different opportunities and different skills that they can share with you as well. But I think also for music for me, it's that diversity as well.

I've got that real sense of responsibility of, you there's my amazing school in front of me and I want to expose them to as many different kinds of music as possible. So last year we had an incredible Senegalese jazz musician, Irutol, come in to work with us and he ended up kind of just playing at the front, was improvising, he had piano. I'm lucky that I sometimes have a parent who has helped with me before playing piano too, and the two of them just sort of played together. That sort of musical fire and connection between them just was incredible to see the reaction from children. So I think we should always be seeking to collaborate. I don't think we should be worried that we can't mirror the same collaboration each year because that's never going to happen. So I think we should be saying yes to everything that we possibly have.

And then I do try and look and see who's had different opportunities who might not have done. So a child doesn't move right the way through the school with not having some of them. But think actually, to a degree, that ad hoc version is amazing because actually they are all getting to listen to live music when they're working often in these things. And that is a tick, a great big tick. A bit like you said, with working with the National Youth Orchestra. I mean how amazing is that? And aspirational too. I think it's really, really important for our students that we are looking for opportunities that are truly aspirational - that they're thinking, do you know what, that could be me. It could be me in a few years time. So I think, again, trying to expose them as to as many different genre and styles of music and opportunities is really very much one of our responsibilities.

Nicky Clapson: The drummer that I mentioned earlier, ironically, and one of my bass players actually went and did the workshop with the National Youth Orchestra after having them in. The CEO came down and she was like, wow, they're really fab, get them to apply. And they did. And now the drummer's going on to the second round of workshops in Brighton. So he's super excited. And how amazing is that? Because the level of musicianship that they're working with is just awesome. And it's all from that one day that the music hub said, do you want to host this? And I was like, yes, please get them in. Yeah. So many students were just enriched on that one day of music, musical making. was fabulous. So, so fabulous.

Kirsten Cunningham: I think music hubs are there as well, aren't they, to wait for questions. They are there for schools to email them and say, give me a bit of help. I'd quite like to start a choir. I'd really love to have an orchestra. How do I have violin lessons? And so I think, you know, that they are there and they are very enthusiastic about being asked about all these things.

Abi Marrison: And I'm just going to throw into the mix that Kirsten was talking about collaboration lots and use the words partnerships. So just to put it out there again, that the reason a hub is such a wonderful thing is because the hub is the concept. The hub isn't an organisation. The music service is the organisation. The hub is actually school settings and music services and everyone working together and it's so powerful and that's exactly what you've just said. So thank you.

Yusef Sacoor: So we have to sort of wrap up and round off now, but before we go, I wanted to ask you guys around examples of the outcomes of your great work around creative classroom tuition, using the curriculum, et cetera, et cetera. But yeah, the great work that you're doing and what amazing outcomes have come from that. So yeah, inspiring stories, Louisa, have you got any?

Louisa Roberts: A lovely story, something that happened this year, which was almost a non-event. One of the musicians that I'm working with had some very embedded ideas about controlling classrooms. And actually they came to me to ask for help with behaviour. And it was such an incredible shift. I introduced them to relational practice and it completely turning on its head, know, it's about, yes, you can still have structures, you can still have routines, but it's fundamentally about your relationship with the students and how you get to know them and reframing. So instead of telling children, giving orders, it's thanking them, and it's the meet and greet. It's the work of Paul Dix, actually, 'When the adults change'.

And this musician became so interested in transactional analysis and within two terms completely shifted his approach and saw the difference in everything that was happening, and is now enrolled on a PGCE next year. He's totally committed to teaching and to lifelong learning.

But what meant a lot to me was that he was just nearby and popped in to see me and said, it's because of what you've told me and all of your work and now I just want to be a music teacher. And I just feel like, right, OK, so I just need a few more hundred of those.

Abi Marrison: That's beautiful. That's really beautiful.

Yusef Sacoor: Thank you so much, Kirsten.

Kirsten Cunningham: I think for me it was a composition project that we did last year with all of our Year 3s, so we had two form entry, 60 year 3s, and we knew that there was Gaia, one of Luke Jerram's installations that was going to be arriving in Bristol Cathedral, that enormous Earth. And we were lucky enough to work with the composer Richard Barnard and our commission was for the children to write a song cycle around that.

So the children created ideas of words and phrases that linked to earth and water, and they crafted together with the amazing skill and talent of Richard, and for me, really, I think the real power of that was the children really felt that song was theirs, they really felt it belonged to them, they had created it, they were the composers.

And I think that's, you know, as practitioners, I think that's always what we're trying to hand over. We talked about it earlier. The children are the musicians. They are making the music. So they saw that piece of music right from the very, very outset where they were just throwing words around to where children were just confident enough to sing a tiny snippet of what could become a phrase. And then the children rehearsed that together and we took it down to the cathedral and it was October and sort of 6.30. So it was quite dark, but it was lit. And they sat underneath and sang their song cycle underneath Gaia. And it was that real spine tingling magical moment where you just think, wow, wow, this is what musical education can do for us. Something so, so powerful.

So, for me, I think it's that sense that music belongs to all of us and that empowering children to feel that it is theirs and handing over that creativity to them, that they very much saw themselves as the composers, and when they performed it, they performed it with such confidence and sincerity because it was their song. So, for me, I think that's the moment that will stay in my mind for quite a long time.

Yusef Sacoor: God, that ownership of music thing is so important. That's where it's most empowering. Nicky, finally, would you like to give us a few examples?

Nicky Clapson: I was just thinking as Louisa and Kirsten were talking, but I think for me, it's the moment where those disengaged students or school refusers have suddenly this change, this light bulb moment, which is so magical to watch because you know, know they don't want to come in, you know their background, you've got all of that context inside your brain, but you know, they want to be there, they want to be in the music lesson, they want to be learning that instrument, they want to go to the practice room, they want to work with their band.

It's just beautiful to see so many students want to engage with how we're working here. Heads of years will come and talk to me or pastoral mentors will come and see me and they'll go, they are a changed person. We have a lovely bass player in Year 10, who in year seven was on the danger cusp of becoming a school refuser, not liking school, not wanting to be here. Now she's absolutely integral to the band because she just, she loves it. And she works so hard to learn her bass parts.

It's just beautiful. It's so nice to see so many students have such magical moments from music and from musical learning. So I think for me, it's just the amount of students that we're managing to capture by the curriculum that we're delivering.

Abi Marrison: And that's what a curriculum can achieve, isn't it? It's absolutely what you'd want to set out to achieve.

Yusef Sacoor: Well, thank you so much, everyone. It's a testimony to all your commitment to music with young people that you're all here recording. We're recording this on a Friday night.

Nicky Clapson: I've just been told off by the caretaker as well. He says I have to leave. And he is the boss.

Yusef Sacoor: Well, without further ado, it's time to finish up. Thank you so much, everyone, and to everyone listening, hear you on the next episode. Cheers. And a reminder that you can find show notes, guest bios and more on our Podcast webpage: musicmark.org.uk/podcast. Cheers for listening.