

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

Case Study – Aberdeenshire Inclusive Classroom



About this case study

This case study was developed as part of Creative Scotland's evaluation of the Youth Music Initiative in 2014/15. The Youth Music Initiative is a national programme which is in its 12th year of operation. These case studies demonstrate the approaches used by organisations funded by the Youth Music Initiative, and highlight the impacts of this work.

This case study is about the music provision in Aberdeenshire specifically for young people with additional support needs. As part of Aberdeenshire Council's Youth Music Initiative, Drake Music Scotland has been providing music classes and tuition to pupils with additional support needs in Aberdeenshire for three years. The classes run at four special schools one Primary School and one Secondary School. The programme is currently delivered by three Drake Music Scotland Associate Musicians.

This case study was developed through discussions with one Drake Music Scotland Associate Musician, one Drake Music Scotland programme manager, one council officer, one teacher and six pupils.

The approach

This project was created to ensure that pupils with additional support needs, including people with complex additional support needs, could take part in music activity. The main intended outcomes for pupils are to:

- develop music skills
- develop physical co-ordination and motor skills
- develop confidence and social skills.

"It's about allowing them to achieve their potential."

Drake Music Scotland provides music specialists to work with the young people. There is always at least one teacher or classroom assistant at the session to enable the pupils to participate fully.

The music programme links to Curriculum for Excellence – through the broad general strands of the Curriculum, and the outcomes and experiences for the

expressive arts. Associate Musicians are also able to link the music sessions with other class work, such as BBC Ten pieces; a BBC initiative to inspire creativity in young people through classical music and the Shakespeare Schools Festival.

In 2014/15, the programme received just over £46,000 of Youth Music Initiative funding, which covered the entire cost of the programme. Drake Music Scotland also provides some resources in the form of instruments, equipment and computer programmes. Aberdeenshire Council is also increasingly working towards building up its own bank of instruments and equipment for children with additional support needs to ensure sustainability out with YMI funding.

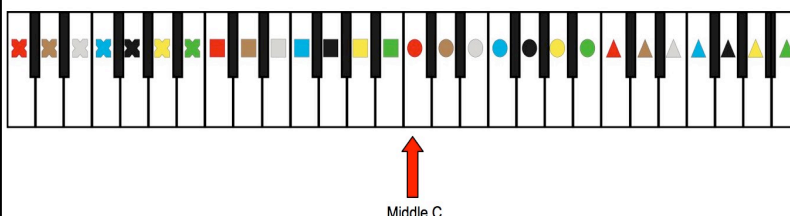
Activities

The programme began as a twelve week block of music but has now expanded to offer fifteen weeks of music teaching with an Associate Musician. All pupils in the schools receive this provision. The programme uses a variety of instruments, equipment and technology to suit different needs and capabilities. The Associate Musicians also offer blocks of individual music tuition for pupils who may need additional sessions as well as those who wish to progress their music skills.

The Associate Musicians work with pupils every week in one-hour sessions. The sessions introduce young people to a variety of instruments and equipment that is designed or adapted to their needs. For example, the sessions use 'soundbeam' technology. This is a sensory device that uses sensor technology to translate body movement into music and sound.

The sessions use teaching methods such as 'Figurenotes' which allow pupils to make and experience music in a way best suited to their skills. Figurenotes is a Finnish designed system for teaching young people to read music. Each note has a corresponding coloured symbol, which is matched on the sheet music and the instrument.

"Figurenotes is an intuitive way to play music, using colour and shape to denote pitch and rhythm. By matching shapes on the page to stickers on the instrument, and by following the literal way that rhythm is represented, a tune can be played almost immediately. This leads to increased confidence and, in turn, huge motivation to learn and achieve the next milestone. By moving through three stages of Figurenotes, the musician can develop their reading skills and move towards conventional notation, while still being able to play the same music as others on different stages. This is what makes Figurenotes truly inclusive. By removing the initial barriers that so many people experience, music notation becomes less abstract and more accessible. Figurenotes was created in Finland and has been developed by Drake Music Scotland to include many physical resources, as well as notation software to make sure teachers can tailor their work to each individual pupil's needs."



Drake Music Scotland

“Music is something they can really achieve at, rather than reading or writing or learning music under conventional methods. Our technology allows them to do that.”

After the fifteen week programme, pupils can also receive an additional ten weeks of individual music tuition on an instrument of their choice. This is taught using Figurenotes.

Last year, pupils worked towards a concert at Haddo House, a National Trust for Scotland property in Aberdeenshire. This brought all Schools together to perform to each other and will be repeated this summer with the theme ‘Bennachie – The Magical Mountain’. Where possible, participants in the project also give performances to their peers within their own schools at the end of the project. The pupils also work towards their annual summer show in school.

Pupils have a great deal of input into planning and delivering the lessons. During the sessions young people compose the music themselves, which can be included in their final performances. The young people decide which instruments and style of music they perform. They are also able to choose when to perform pieces as a group and when to include a solo performance. This year, pupils have taken inspiration from two pieces in the BBC Ten Pieces initiative by Edvard Greig and Modest Mussorgsky for their performance at Haddo House.

Support and training

The Associate Musicians all receive training from Drake Music Scotland before taking up positions. For example, one musician was trained by Drake Music Scotland through a paid internship programme. The internship was three months long with weekly training sessions on Soundbeam and Figurenotes. The internship also involved placements in the community and reflection time with a mentor.

“It was a very good training process and I had an amazing mentor.”

Drake Music Scotland runs continuing professional development days throughout the year and holds a summer event to which Associate Musicians are invited to come together and share good practice. Associate Musicians often take the opportunity to deliver training to one another during these sessions.

Associate Musicians also train class teachers and music teachers in the technology and techniques used with the pupils with additional support needs. This helps class teachers to incorporate the techniques in their own lessons. This joint working can forge links with music provision at local high schools and encourage young people to continue with music throughout their education.

Impact on children and young people

In early 2015, there were just over 180 pupils with additional support needs in Aberdeenshire who were receiving music education from Drake Music Scotland through this programme.

Feedback is gathered in a number of ways:

- the Associate Musician receives instant feedback from pupils through continuous interaction during the session;
- the Associate Musician makes notes at the end of each lesson to summarise the session and to highlight any individual progress; and
- a formal evaluation takes place at the end of the programme – involving feedback forms from class teachers and input from Associate Musicians.

The feedback and evaluation work is used to adapt future lessons to best suit the needs of the pupils. Feedback has always been very positive, with teachers appreciative of the quality of teaching provided and the enthusiasm with which the pupils participate.

Pupils enjoy the music and stated that they have become more interested in music now. Associate Musicians have found that pupils appear to be able to pick up Figurenotes easily and all the senior pupils are comfortable using this technique to play and compose music. For example, one pupil is non-verbal. By using Figurenotes, they are now able to play classical pieces of music at grade 4/5.

“I like the colours...the other way is hard.”

Tutors and teachers can see that pupils have become more creative and have put together their compositions on their own. Some of the younger pupils find maintaining their attention span for the full lesson a challenge. However, many pupils said that their listening skills were “much better” than before. Pupil also felt that they had developed their teamwork skills.

“I can hugely see the progression. I don’t need to bring in ideas for them...I love that it’s all them.”

“We do a lot of teamwork, I like it.”

The individual music lessons have been beneficial for pupils wishing to progress further. Changes to SQA qualifications now allow pupils to enter examinations using Figurenotes. Therefore, the project is now giving pupils the chance to achieve accredited qualifications. One pupil said that as a result of the project, she would consider a career in music.

“Without Drake Music, Pupil X would never have been able to know that he could play the piano.”

The programme also allows schools to come together. Young people can perform in front of peers, as well as learning to be part of an audience and appreciate each other's work. The end of term concerts are known to sell out quickly and pupils gained confidence from knowing that people wanted to come and see them perform. Some pupils said that they were more confident and happy now, as a result of taking part. However, some said that they were nervous when they first started, especially when first performing for an audience.

“We find it quite tear jerking and parents also get emotional hearing the music that their children have composed and performed.”

The pupils felt that they were more involved in their community now, and would like to perform at other schools.

Impact on deliverers and the youth music sector

Associate Musicians have found the project beneficial, particularly as they have the freedom to design and deliver the programme flexibly with pupils.

“It’s just what I love to do; it’s what I find most fulfilling.”

It is hoped that the work will have an impact on the wider community and youth music sector. There is growing acknowledgement that pupils with additional support needs can play in ensembles using Figurenotes alongside others using traditional notation. In the future, as pupils build their skills there will be scope for them to join one of three music centres across Aberdeenshire Council, which provides group music making for pupils in the local authority. This would provide the opportunity to play alongside pupils from across Aberdeenshire in a number of orchestras and ensembles, as well as being involved in the community performances that are held regularly.

In the future, there may also be opportunities for work experience and shadowing, both for pupils with additional support needs with an interest in music and for young people throughout the region with an interest in additional support needs music provision.

Successes

Key successes of this programme include:

- providing high quality specialist music activity;
- providing the opportunities for large scale performances;
- providing inclusive music education that is accessible to all pupils; and
- providing new ways for pupils to explore music and develop team work skills.

“(The success is....) finding something that anyone can do all together and can all contribute on an equal level.”

Everyone agreed that the one great thing about this project was its ability to engage with all pupils, regardless of their needs, and to allow them to succeed in music.

What's next?

To ensure that the programme is sustainable, Aberdeenshire Council has purchased some specialist equipment and instruments along with four iPads to be used exclusively for music. It is actively training teachers in the use of this technology so it can be used as widely as possible across the curriculum and is not dependent on the presence of an Associate Musician.

Aberdeenshire Council hopes to expand the programme to allow more pupils to take individual music lessons and also to develop the programme in mainstream schools. This will allow children who may not be identified as having an additional support need to benefit from Drake Music Scotland input as much as those within Special Schools.