

Singing Strategy

2021-2022

Context

“Singing is one of the most positive forms of human activity, supporting physical, mental, emotional and social health, as well as individual development in the same areas. Successful singing is important because it builds self-confidence, promotes self-esteem, always engages emotion, promotes social inclusion, supports social skill development, and enables young people of different ages and abilities to come together successfully to create something special in the arts.”¹

Professor Graham Welch, UCL

The National Plan for Music Education sets out core roles for Music Education Hubs and one of these is to:

Develop a singing strategy to ensure that every pupil is singing regularly and that choirs and other vocal ensembles are available in the area.²

A central role for MEHs, therefore, is to support schools in the delivery of singing, both as part of the music curriculum and as an extra-curricular activity, and to ensure that, beyond school, young singers have access to further progression routes into choirs and other opportunities for vocal learning and performance.

The Department for Education’s recently published *Model Music Curriculum*³ emphasises the importance of singing in music provision, and sets benchmarks for progress in singing year by year in primary schools, culminating with:

Through good vocal production, careful listening and well-developed sense of pitch, pupils should be able to sing in harmony and with musical delivery by the end of Year 6.

and in secondary schools at Key Stage 3:

Building on the inheritance from the excellent practice in many primary schools, the MMC promotes progression in group singing by strengthening pupils’ ability to sing in harmony, while further developing sound production and expressive performance.

At the time of writing, singing in schools has suffered profoundly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Singing itself is in urgent need of recovery, as childhood and early adulthood are crucial stages for laying the foundations for lifelong singing. Furthermore, singing can support schools in addressing broader losses and inequalities, as it is a powerful tool that can support not only social and emotional recovery and well-being in our school communities, but also learning and recovery across the curriculum.

¹ This excellent summary is taken from a more detailed article by Professor Welch on the benefits of singing, which can be found here <https://www.singup.org/blog/article/1390-the-benefits-of-singing/>

² Detailed guidance on this core role from Arts Council England is reproduced at the end of this document.

³ The Model Music Curriculum guidance was published by the DfE on 26th March 2021 and can be found here https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973431/Model_Music_Curriculum_Full.pdf

BEAT's Vision for singing:

Singing is a powerful form of self-expression, communication and performance, through which we can connect with music makers across every culture and throughout history – and it is free and accessible to all. Singing is therefore an end in itself, but it is also foundational to musical learning, as well as bringing many other social, emotional and educational benefits.

BEAT wants every child in Barnet to be able to unlock the potential of their voice and to be given a foundation for a positive lifelong singing and musical identity.

BEAT's Mission for singing:

To support and value singing at every level across Barnet's schools and our Music Academies by working to achieve:

- **Access** to singing for all young people – from the early years and through all phases of their education;
- **Quality** of provision – by supporting school staff and those teaching directly for BEAT with training, high quality resources and performance opportunities;
- **Progression** in singing – by providing clear progression routes for students from beginners to advanced performers.

BEAT's Strategy for singing:

To achieve **access**, **quality** and **progression** in singing through:

- **Our festival offer** – CPD, teaching, resources and enrichment events that are exciting opportunities to perform and to watch other schools perform;
- **Our offer to schools** – CPD, teaching, consultation and resources provided for school music leaders through the Music Network, and supported by engagement with national profile organisations eg. Creative Futures, Friday Afternoons, Voices Foundation, London Youth Choirs;
- **Our Academy offer** – opportunities to sing in choirs at each level and to progress into our flagship singing group One Voice Choir, and including singing as part of a general musicianship training across our Music Academies.

The BEAT festival offer

The BEAT festival offer currently comprises the **BEAT Infant Music Festivals** (annually each autumn, Y1/2) and the **Barnet Schools Music Festivals** (annually each summer, Y4/5/6).

This offer should:

- 1) place singing resources in schools that
 - a) contain good quality, age-appropriate repertoire, selected for its potential to engage students and enable them to progress as young singers and musicians;
 - b) are supported by high quality materials including tips for teaching, recordings, whiteboard resources, and ideas for creative work and other extension activities that link to the requirements of the music curriculum;
 - c) enable schools over time to build up a library of singing resources covering a diversity of musical genres and representing music from different times, places and cultures;
- 2) include CPD in singing leadership;
- 3) provide opportunities for schools to perform for, and see the performances of, other schools;
- 4) expose teachers and children to high quality singing leadership at the festivals themselves;
- 5) provide light-touch CPD for school staff, through supportive school visits to help with teaching the materials, and through exposure to ideas and good practice when they see other schools rehearse and perform;
- 6) enable BEAT to identify schools that can benefit from further support in their singing provision.

Next steps

- *Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMF ran online in 2020, reaching 24 schools. We plan a return to live Infant Music Festivals in Autumn 2021, but we expect buy-in to be hampered by hesitance caused by the continued effects of the pandemic. We aim to increase the number of schools participating by 50% (36 schools).*
- *Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the BSMF was cancelled in 2020 and is taking place online in 2021. The online BSMF offer for summer 2021 should nevertheless enable us to meet the above criteria for participating schools. 58 schools had booked to take part in the 2020 festivals. We aim for 40% of this uptake for the online offer in 2021 (24 schools).*
- *We plan a return to live festivals in summer 2022, and aim to increase the number of schools taking part to better than the projected numbers for 2020 (more than 58 schools).*

The BEAT offer to schools

- 1) **Music Network:** All primary music colleagues in our network are invited to regular Music Network Meetings and receive several email bulletins each term. We are building a similar network for secondary music colleagues. Meetings should where appropriate include a singing activity as a warm up or takeaway. Bulletins should include appropriate signposting to singing organisations with high quality training and resources eg. Voices Foundation, Friday Afternoons, National Youth Choir of Scotland. We communicate with our music network to collect data on singing activities in school.
- 2) **Free resources:** *Song of the Week* – originally developed as a lockdown resource for schools – is now available on our website as a free library of songs (for KS1 and KS2) with engaging teaching videos and supporting resources. We are currently planning further free resources to support and complement the new Model Music Curriculum.
- 3) **CPD:** BEAT offers a variety of CPD for music teachers across the year. We should aim to provide CPD not only specifically on singing, but also that which models good practice in integrating singing activities into all kinds of musical learning.
- 4) **Consultation:** BEAT currently offers a free consultation for schools regarding their music provision. Encouraging schools to have a singing strategy at the heart of their plan for music should be central to our advice. Schools can also access in-depth consultation via BPSI, and we should ensure that expert help with improving singing continues to be available through this service.
- 5) **Whole Class Ensemble Tuition:** As part of our expectation of good practice, WCET sessions in school should include at least some singing, for general musicianship and to facilitate instrumental learning.

Next steps:

- *Monitor and develop the effectiveness of the Music Network by engaging with more primary and secondary colleagues from across the borough.*
- *Develop free, flexible, accessible resources in early years/KS1 singing for the 2021/22 academic year, informed by the new Model Music Curriculum and accompanied with free CPD. Live natural singing in the early years is crucial to singing development and these cohorts have lost a lot of school – and singing – during the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- *Develop a framework to help schools write a singing strategy.*
- *Ros Savournin to be set up as a BPSI consultant offering consultation on whole school singing.*
- *Training to be offered to BEAT WCET tutors on vocal health and integrating singing into instrumental teaching.*

The BEAT Academy offer

The BEAT Academy offer is currently undergoing a period of consultation prior to a re-structure in autumn 2021. Our Academy offer should offer a clear progression in singing.

- 1) Saturday Music Academy Students should be able to join a choir led by a singing specialist, teaching across a range of repertoire and developing singing and musicianship skills age-appropriately.
- 2) Progression from Saturday Music Academy choirs to One Voice Choir should be analogous to progression through BEAT's instrumental ensembles.
- 3) One Voice Choir – our flagship singing group – should:
 - a) be a purposeful choral rehearsal with a sense of group enterprise for Years 6-13;
 - b) create an environment where polished choral behaviour is expected and valued;
 - c) develop technical skills for singing (alignment and its effect on resonance, understanding of and efficient use of vocal apparatus);
 - d) rehearse repertoire with an attention to musical and technical detail (vowel sounds, vocal blend, vocal colour, interpretation and communication);
 - e) build on aural and musicianship skills and develop score reading and navigation (through teaching that supports all prior levels of music literacy);
 - f) enable singing homophonic and contrapuntal musical textures in 4 part harmony;
 - g) include a broad variety of repertoire: introducing the classical choral canon, gospel music, a cappella, pop, jazz and music from other traditions from around the world;
 - h) offer opportunities to sing solos and in small groups;
 - i) lead to regular performances in a variety of venues and to diverse audiences.
- 4) Going forward, our Academies should build in singing across the breadth of our offer, by using it to support all kinds of musical learning, and dedicating structured time to it.
- 5) All Academy provision is underpinned with subsidies to help families on low incomes. This should continue, with consideration of a range of circumstances, to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation for any student.

Next steps:

- *Re-build OVC provision, which was highly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, from when we are able to sing live together, currently expected to be summer 2021.*
- *Aim to increase the membership of OVC to greater than pre-pandemic levels.*
- *Ensure that singing plays a central role in the re-structuring of the BEAT Academies.*
- *Training to be offered to BEAT Academy tutors on vocal health and on integrating singing into instrumental teaching.*

Relevant ACE guidance

This strategy should be regularly reviewed to ensure that we are delivering on the relevant Core Role for Music Education Hubs, as specified by Arts Council England.

Develop a singing strategy to ensure that every pupil is singing regularly and that choirs and other vocal ensembles are available in the area.

Music Education Hubs should:

- provide CPD for school staff so that they can:
 - a) be aware and take account of vocal health, vocal range and changing voices
 - b) use creative approaches to teach pupils to sing in classroom lessons
 - c) lead singing in school choirs and assemblies
- 2) advise schools on high quality singing resources
- 3) provide opportunities for children and young people to sing in a wide range of styles
- 4) subsidise access to out-of-school singing activities so that they are affordable or free to those on low incomes
- 5) ensure that children and young people who are part of choirs and other vocal groups have regular opportunities to perform to others
- 6) collect data on the number/type of singing activities and number of children and young people taking part