



Next steps – Developing YOUR school Singing Strategy

Schools in Sheffield are regularly using singing to enhance their pupils' learning in music and in the wider curriculum. Last year's Singing Support Pack (which is still available to EVERY primary and special school in Sheffield) gave you 6 songs to help with this. This year we want you to choose a new song from Out of the Ark to help you push singing to the next level.

What is the Next Level? And how do we do it?

There are so many different directions to develop singing in your school. You may now have children singing all the time, but wish you knew how to make it sound more beautiful. You may want to develop the characterisation and story telling the children use when singing. You may want ideas on how to make time for more singing in school. You may be looking forward to getting your children singing in harmony.

The information in this guide, written by Sheffield Music Hub's Singing Specialists, will help you find the best path to progression in singing for your school. When you've chosen what you want to focus on, visit the Primary School Singing Support Pack page on our website to choose a FREE song from our partners Out of the Ark which will help you do it!

Sounding Beautiful

The first step in helping a group of children sound beautiful when singing together is to make sure they're actually singing together!!

- Go back to basics with some playground singing games and songs that use very small numbers of notes, and make it clear to the children that the objective is that they match your pitch and sing together. It sounds obvious to us, but children need to be told that this is what is expected. Rain Rain Go Away or Hot Cross Buns are great examples of the sort of song to use, but there are many more you can find very easily with a quick google search. These songs will also develop children's sense of pulse and rhythm, which will help them keep in time with each other and develop their ability to sing together, as one unit. Keep an eye on the Sheffield Music Hub website's events page for information about when we have Kodaly based teacher training on offer, or talk to your school's Music Leader to find out what we can offer.
- Encourage your singers to play with their voices: Can they sing a song they know in different voices? Like a witch? A Disney princess? A bored teenager? An opera singer? Let them tell you what they liked most. Which felt easier? Which sounded better? Did the different voices make them feel different emotions? Strong / weak, confident / nervous, relaxed / tense? Singing well is all about using the sounds your children already use when they're playing. You've just got to help them see how to use those sounds in the setting of the song they're singing.
- Once pitch matching on a limited range is really solid, and your children are happy playing with their voices, you can push ahead with developing the quality of the sound in more complex songs. Gentle, flowing songs are more likely to help find a beautiful tone, but songs with clear and strong characters will help your children feel confident to experiment more.

I want to work on this in my school. What Support Pack song will most help me?

- **Key Stage 1: *The King's Feelings*.** This song has flowing and gentle lines associated with the feeling of sadness, and more detached and pointed rhythms associated with happiness. Repetitive words and melody and a clear story mean it's quick to learn, leaving you time to focus on the quality of sound your children make.
- **Key Stage 2: *I'll Sing This Song*.** Experimenting with different voice styles (Gentle, sneering, spiky, whispering and singing), this song gives you a chance to focus on quality of sound and togetherness of your group.

Finding more opportunities to sing in school

Singing is instantly available - your children are ready to sing at a second's notice! There's no need to get the instrument out of a case and tune it up, so there's no reason not to sing whenever you can.

- **Brain Breaks:** Halfway through a lesson, stand your class up and sing a song they know, or a song they can learn really quickly. If it's got movement or actions that's even better. This will re-energise your class and refocus them for the learning going on. (Activities that require rhythmic focus have been proven to have positive impacts on the brain's encoding for phonemic and spatial awareness, so this will also have a direct impact on literacy and numeracy.) [Read more about this in Susan Hallam's – The power of music](#)
- **Sing the register:** A perfect opportunity to use a simple 2 note pattern to help ensure everyone is pitch matching well.
- **Choose and regularly use a lining up song, or a getting changed for PE song:** You'll find you'll just have to start it off and they'll all sing! They'll probably be ready quicker too!
- **Teach some playground singing games to keen children and have them lead the games in the playground:** Maybe formalise them as "Singing leaders" to give them kudos for their role.
- **Ask each class to learn a song they love and perform it to the other classes in assembly, or to an audience of parents.** Use a topic based song for a great way to share your learning with others.

I want to work on this in my school. What Support Pack song will most help me?

- **Key Stage 1:**

- ***Line Up, Line Up.*** Use this lining up song to get your class into a line ready for whatever you need to do next. It helps them be quick, straight and smart when lining up, and they're singing all the time whilst they do it!
- ***That's the way we're put together.*** This modern take on a Heads, Shoulder, Knees and Toes type of song will have everyone moving, singing and laughing together, and create a really positive attitude to learning in your class.

- **Key Stage 2:**

- ***Lunchtime Queue.*** This is a funky song with a Latin feel that's perfect to round off a morning and send everyone into lunch in a good mood and looking forward to good food! The partner song section (where two earlier tunes come back over the top of each other) adds a musical challenge, and it's full of opportunities to write your own verses to suit your own school menu (and develop your children's writing).
- ***Crazy Clapping.*** This is an upbeat 12-beat blues song with a rhythmical challenge to work at and perfect. This serves as a fantastic brain-break, and we know that the rhythmic exercise has a profound impact on the way our brains process spatial and numerical data. And it's great fun!

Singing with more Character and Expression

When you're singing, there's loads of things you're thinking about at once - it's one of the reasons singing is so good for your brain!: Standing well, staying in time and in tune, making your nicest sound, remembering the words. So it's not surprising that singers don't always manage to put all the expression and character you might like them to into a song. Like many other skills, you'll have to work on this over time and keep reminding your singers what you expect, but here are some quick ideas to use straight away:

- Do they know what the song is really about? Help them understand the context and the story behind the song. Maybe they could research it themselves?
- Give them time to listen to the song and react to it personally. What does it make them feel? How do they show that feeling in their face and body language?
- Think about the language used. Are certain words more important? How do we stress these to help bring the character and story forwards? You could use the lyrics as a drama piece rather than a song or ask the children to read the lyrics out to each other. Can you condense the song lyrics into a shorter and more concise version? It's also good to go through each verse and chorus to identify a 'mood' you would like to create on each section.
- Use one, or a small group, of your singers as an audience: Ask them to watch and feed back to the rest about how they look and sound.

I want to work on this in my school. What Support Pack song will most help me?

- **Key Stage 1: *The King's Feelings*.** This song has flowing and gentle lines associated with the feeling of sadness, and more detached and pointed rhythms associated with happiness. Repetitive words and melody and a clear story mean it's quick to learn, leaving you time to focus on how the children portray the emotion in their physicality as well as in their voice.
- **Key Stage 2:**
 - ***Spring is in the air*.** This song celebrates the gentle, gradual decline of winter and the riotous bursting forth of spring, meaning it demands a real change in character from the singers. There's an optional harmony part too for an extra challenge when you're ready for it.
 - ***Newspaper Pictures*.** This is a haunting and beautiful song dealing with the issues of famine, war, homelessness and natural disaster. It's a great opportunity for your children to reflect on such real-world issues, and consider how to communicate these through the character of their singing.

Making the words clearer.

This can be a big challenge, but one it's really important to overcome. The patterns of singing are very different to speaking; we often hold onto vowel sounds for much longer than we do in speech, and this means we have to make the consonants much stronger if the meaning is to be clear.

- Make sure your singers are clear on what they're singing: if they don't understand the meaning it's even more likely to come out as a mumble!
- Speak the words through and be super picky about clear sounds. Maybe ask someone who doesn't know the song to listen and say the words back to you?
- Do a little phonics exercise: break some of the words down into phonemes and practice each sound in the word on its own and then together. E.g. "Today is a fantastic day!" becomes t-oo-d-ay i-z a f-a-n-t-a-s-t-i-c d-ay, so practice making clear, strong "t" "d" and "f" sounds, and then check whether they're still strong when you say the whole line. Then sing it with the same effort to make the consonants strong.
- Don't forget to keep reminding your singers of the importance of clear words in telling the story, and keep reinforcing how they need to treat the consonants to achieve this.

I want to work on this in my school. What Support Pack song will most help me?

- **Key Stage 1:**

- **Chalk and Cheese and Chatter.** This up tempo song focuses on 5 different two letter phonemes (ch, wh, sh, ph and th) and requires precise articulation to make the words clear. It's a great opportunity for your class to be creative and write many more verses to suit whatever other sounds you may be focusing on in phonics too.
- **Lov-er-ly Mud.** A squishy, squashy, bubbly, gluggy song all about mud! You need precise articulation and a real sense of the slimy, oozy character to sing this song well.

- **Key Stage 2:**

- **Doozle Dazzle.** This fun nonsense song really gets the tongue and lips working with lots of fast repeated nonsense words as well as a discussion about just how silly the song is! It'll really help your children think about how to produce a clear and precise sound and it'll definitely get everyone laughing hard too!
- **In the Jungle.** This is a tale of Tarquin Tiger's fleas and his interactions with hyenas, Garth Gorilla and a Scout! Lots of fast moving and tricky words, and a silly story to help you remember it!

Making your singing accessible to every child

Group singing is intrinsically very accessible as almost everyone has a voice. Even if a child has little or no verbal communication, they can benefit greatly from being part of a group singing situation.

- You can add percussion or other instrumental parts to accompany the singing.
- It is always possible to add movement or actions to any song that will help communicate the meaning.
- You may be able to introduce some Makaton or British Sign Language to songs. Out of the Ark have a growing range of Signing Videos available in their SingSign (TM) range.

I want to work on this in my school. What Support Pack song will most help me?

- Out of the Ark Music have worked closely with British Sign Language (BSL) specialists, teachers, deaf and hearing adults and children to produce instructional signing videos for 10 songs. They cover a range of topics and seasons of the year, and offer a route into singing for non-verbal students or those with limited verbal language.
- **This Day.** This is a thoughtful and uplifting ballad about making the most of every day, because every day has something to sing about! Choose this song and Out of the Ark Music will also email you the link to the BSL signing video.

Singing in parts

If you've got a group of singers who can already sing with beautiful voices, matching pitch and timing with each other, and portraying character and mood well (see above!) you may be ready to move on to singing in harmony. If you're not quite there yet, don't worry: The more solid these skills are, the quicker they'll pick up the harmony work when you get there. Suggestions for Support Pack songs to help you with each stage of the process are included below.

- The first step is to use a round song: This way everyone is singing the same stuff, but starting at different times. Encourage children to stick to their own part, but recognise what's going on around them, and hear how it creates harmonies. There are of course, hundreds of traditional songs that work brilliantly: London's Burning, Frère Jacques, Row row row your boat etc.

Support Pack Song

- **School is nearly over.** A lovely round song to finish the day. The Words on Screen (TM) software makes it really easy to keep everyone on the right part!
- Once round songs are solid and singers can pick new ones up quickly and well, you can move to partner songs. This is when two or more songs sit on top of each other so each group is singing a different tune and different words, but together they sound great. A classic is made up of *Oh When the Saints*, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, and *I'm gonna Sing*.

Support Pack Songs

- **Music Matters.** Particularly good for a KS1 group who are ready for the challenge of more complex partner songs. A positive message about how we all need songs to sing! The verse and chorus happen several times separately before you sing them together to create exciting harmonies.
 - **It's good to be me!** A slightly larger range means this is appropriate for KS2 groups. A positive message about how we are all different. The chorus sits on top of the verse to create exciting harmonies.
 - **Sing like never before.** An upbeat and exciting song about the joy of singing together. 3 different melodies, separated by a punchy chorus, eventually layer on top of each other beautifully.
- Harmony which is Homophonic (the different parts line up on top of each other so everyone sings chords together) is tricky! It's very easy for singers to be dragged onto a different part than their own, particularly if they're not singing the notes that everyone recognises as the tune. In this situation it's great to start with songs people don't already know, because you can teach everyone the less obvious note first, and only add the "tune" note on when the other part is solid. Find songs with occasional harmony moments in to start with and then, when your singers find that achievable, progress to songs with more lengthy harmony sections.

Support Pack Songs

- **Harmony.** This song will work well in KS1 but be equally effective at KS2. The song spells out the notes of a chord in a melody line, and then splits your singers into three groups to layer the notes up together into a harmony chord. Not only does it sound great, but gives you the opportunity to discuss notation and how harmony works!
 - **Ubuntu.** Suitable for any age group. This song repeats 3 times, and each time adds an extra layer in the harmony of the final line. A good early challenge for homophonic harmony. Ubuntu is a South African concept loosely meaning "humanity".
 - **Life is just like a song.** This is a challenging song which is part Partner Song and part homophonic harmony. The 3 sections of the partner song all have the same rhythm, so when you sing them together you end up with full homophonic harmony.
- If you have a child or two who find harmonies easy to sing, you might want to start off with only them singing the harmony part, against a much larger group on the tune. Separating into two (or more) even sized groups might sound tempting, but it makes it much easier for people to get confused. If your really strong harmony singers can hold their line well, others will gradually be able to join them.

Further Support for Singing in your School

Sheffield Music Hub is here to support every school to develop a Singing Strategy that gives your pupils every opportunity to progress.

Keep returning to www.sheffieldmusic hub.org/Singing-for-schools to find out how we can help you through

- Primary School Singing Festivals
- A Music Hub Singing Specialist for your school
- Our Partners
- Our choirs and out of school singing opportunities
- Our singing training for School Teachers

You can also always talk to your Music Hub Music Leader (every school has one!) to get bespoke guidance about what we can do to support you.