

Case studies:

Instrumental Ensembles in Primary Schools

The National Plan for Music Education identifies having an instrumental ensemble as one of the seven key features of high-quality school music provision. While many primary schools have choirs, instrumental ensembles are less common.

This case study document highlights the different approaches of three Wiltshire schools that are successfully delivering instrumental ensembles.



Durrington Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

A local authority maintained junior school in the village of Durrington near Amesbury



Durrington Junior School has two instrumental ensembles: a ukulele club and a mixed instrumental ensemble, both of which provide pupils with the opportunity to continue the musical learning that they begin in First Access lessons and peripatetic lessons.

Pupils learn a variety of instruments in First Access lessons with the Music Subject Lead, Chantal Gooding, including recorder, ukulele, keyboard and percussion. The school also uses Wiltshire Music Connect Associate Tutors to provide lessons in brass, piano, woodwind, strings, guitar, plus an independent teacher for drums and two volunteers who teach recorder.

The headteacher, Karl Caslin, plays the ukulele himself and sometimes performs to pupils in assembly. Using the class set of ukuleles that the school was able to purchase with School Music Development Fund money from Wiltshire Music Connect, Karl decided to start an after-school ukulele club to give pupils the opportunity to continue with their ukulele playing outside of the First Access programme.

The mixed instrumental ensemble is run by a local volunteer, Peter Eve, who is an experienced musician and runs the village community band, Durrington Walls Wind Band. Having run a band at the school many years ago, in 2024 Peter heard that there were some instrumentalists having peripatetic lessons who were progressing well and so approached the school to see if he could restart an instrumental ensemble. The group rehearses after school and Peter arranges all the music himself to tailor it to the players he has.

What can other schools take away from this case study?

- Starting an ensemble is an excellent way of enabling pupils to continue their musical learning after First Access.
 - Volunteers from the local community can bring in a diverse range of skills and enable ensembles to run without impacting on staff time.
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St Sampson's Church of England Primary School



A local authority maintained primary school in the town of Cricklade

St Sampson's Church of England Primary School offers three instrumental ensembles: a recorder group, a handbell group, and a ukulele group.

The recorder group offers an opportunity for pupils to continue their recorder playing outside of First Access lessons, which are taught to every class from Year 2 upwards for one term per year by a Wiltshire Music Connect Associate Tutor. The ukulele and handbell groups offer an opportunity to experience different instruments. All three groups are led during lunchtimes by teachers at the school. There is no cost to parents, and instruments are supplied by the school.

The groups run throughout Terms 1 and 2, with pupils working towards a Christmas performance. For the remainder of the academic year, groups may continue or be paused depending on the teacher's capacity and other clubs that may be running; for example, sports clubs in the summer.

The ukulele group is run by the Music Subject Lead, Peter Harris, and the recorder and handbell groups are run by teachers who are not music specialists. They are supported by a wide range of resources that do not require specific musical experience or knowledge of notation, such as handbell repertoire that uses numbers.

What can other schools take away from this case study?

- If staff capacity is an issue, you could consider running ensembles for part of the academic year rather than all year round, fitting in with the overall extra-curricular calendar at your school.
- Not having a music specialist doesn't have to be a barrier to having ensembles. All teachers can be encouraged to enjoy leading music with children, with easy-to-use resources to support them.



Kiwi Primary School

A local authority maintained primary school in Bulford Camp near Tidworth



Kiwi Primary School has two instrumental ensembles: a ukulele club and an instrumental club.

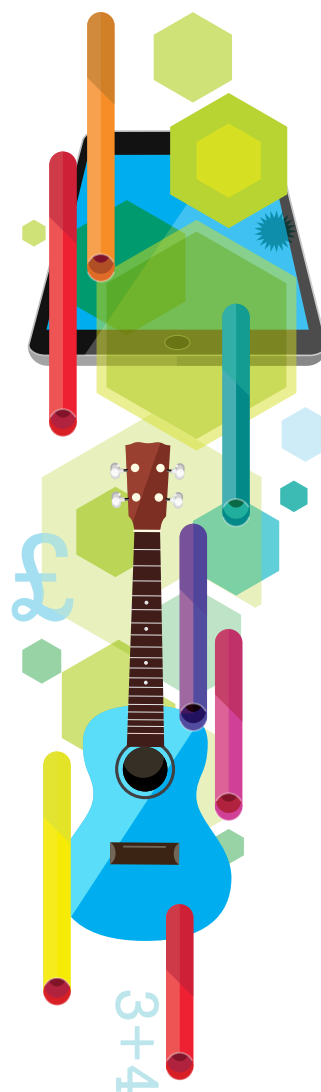
Prior to September 2023 there were no extra-curricular clubs at the school, but the new headteacher, Laura Eatherington, was keen to offer more enrichment opportunities. With pupils in Years 3 and 4 having First Access ukulele lessons with a Wiltshire Music Connect Associate, Gregory Cook, the school asked Gregory to deliver an after-school ukulele club as a way of enabling pupils to continue their learning beyond the classroom. The cost of this is covered by parents.

In addition, a new structure was initiated whereby all teachers run after-school clubs on a Thursday. The Music Subject Lead, Michelle Davies, used this opportunity to start an instrumental club. Focusing mainly on Boomwhackers and other classroom percussion, this club is open to all pupils, regardless of whether they are learning an instrument through First Access or other means.

Michelle has a specialism in music technology and has incorporated iPads into the club, with pupils creating music using GarageBand.

What can other schools take away from this case study?

- Wiltshire Music Connect Associate Tutors can run extra-curricular activities and ensembles in schools, with the cost passed on to parents.
- Providing opportunities for pupils to further explore instruments that they encounter in curriculum music lessons is a great way to make your ensemble offer inclusive, as it doesn't rely on pupils having First Access or extra-curricular instrumental lessons.



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