

Singing case study:

St Mark's C of E Junior School



St Mark's C of E Junior School is a junior school in Salisbury that is part of the Brunel Academies Trust.

The school was awarded Sing Wiltshire status by Wiltshire Music Connect for 2024-25. Sing Wiltshire schools place value on singing and the many benefits it brings to children and young people, and offer a broad and high-quality provision that enables the whole school community to develop a love of singing together.

The curriculum

St Mark's is a three-form entry school where PPA time is covered by specialist teachers in music, ICT, and RE, with the classes rotating through the three subjects during the course of a morning each week. The music curriculum is taught to every class by the Music Subject Lead, Christine Shakespeare. Christine has developed a bespoke curriculum for music that fits into the topic-based school curriculum, and includes many songs that link to wider curriculum themes and support learning in other subjects. This collection of songs has been built up over several years from various publications, training sessions, and online resources.

Although the Music Subject Lead teaches curriculum music throughout the school, class teachers are encouraged to sing with their pupils outside of curriculum music lessons, and are provided with access to the online resource Sparkyard to support this.

Whole-school singing

Whole-school hymn practice takes place in assembly once per week and is led by the Music Subject Lead. These assemblies are used as another opportunity for specialist music teaching, with singing skills being developed and other aspects of musical learning woven in, such as the interrelated dimensions of music. Class teachers all attend these assemblies and see the Music Subject Lead modelling good practice in leading and teaching singing.

Choir

The Music Subject Lead runs two choirs: one for lower key stage 2 and the other for upper key stage 2. These choirs rehearse at lunchtimes once per week and run throughout the school year. Everyone is welcome to attend, including pupils from the Resource Base. At the start of Terms 1, 3 and 5, pupils can try out the choir and attend rehearsals without commitment, but once a date is set for a performance those who wish to continue to attend are expected to be at every rehearsal. This setup means that all pupils have



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regular opportunities to experience singing in a choir and decide whether it is something they want to pursue, whilst also learning that performing with others requires a level of effort and dedication.

The choir is involved in a range of performances both in school and within the local community. The choir leads the school's Christmas carol service and Christingle service at one of the school's linked churches within the diocese, St Mark's Church or St Francis Church, with the whole school community invited to attend and participate. They perform to the wider community at the St Thomas's Christmas Tree Festival.

Other performances and projects

In March 2024 the choir performed with Salisbury Community Choir at St Francis Church in a concert celebrating the RNLI's bicentenary. Prior to this the director of the community choir, Graham Coatman, came into school to lead composition workshops with Year 5 and 6 choir members. They wrote the chorus for a sea shanty together, and generated ideas for Graham to complete the verses, with the finished song being premiered at the concert. The choir has previously taken part in Voice in a Million at Wembley Arena. This drew many new pupils into the choir and increased the number of boys participating. The Music Subject Lead aims to provide this opportunity once every three years, so that every child will have the chance to take part once during their time at the school.

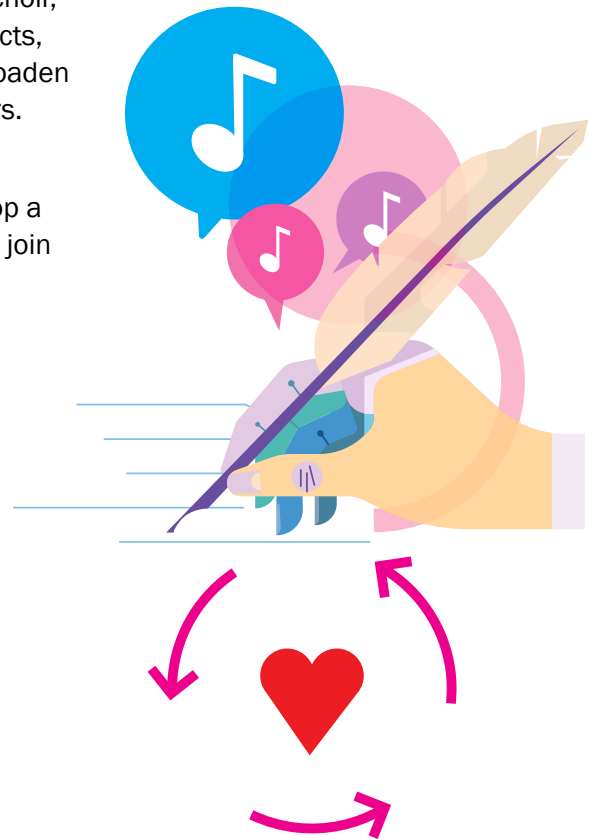
To support transition from infant to junior school, the Music Subject Lead organised a joint singing project with Wyndham Park Infant School in 2024. Year 2 pupils joined the lower key stage 2 choir for rehearsals at the junior school, and then the joint choir performed in an assembly at the infant school.

In addition to the choir performances, there are various events in the school calendar that involve performances by entire year groups at St Mark's Church and St Francis Church. Year 3 pupils perform a nativity to the rest of the school and parents at Christmas. Year 4 pupils perform a Harvest service. Year 5 pupils lead a service retelling the Easter story through songs, poems, artwork, and bible readings. Year 6 pupils lead the leavers' service in Term 6, and also perform an end-of-year musical. These opportunities ensure that all pupils have the experience of performing vocally throughout their time at St. Mark's.



What can other schools take away from this case study?

- Giving pupils multiple opportunities throughout the year to try out the choir, without having to make a commitment, is an inclusive way to encourage pupils to get involved in extra-curricular singing.
- Having a varied range of performance opportunities for the choir, such as the mixture of community events, composition projects, and large-scale arena concerts that St Mark's offers, can broaden the appeal of the choir to a wider range of potential members.
- Providing opportunities for every year group to put on a performance means that all pupils are encouraged to develop a love of singing and performing, not just those who choose to join the choir.



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