The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP)

A Research Evaluation of the Educational, Cultural, Social and Wellbeing Value for Primary School Children

Simone Krüger Bridge

Front Cover image credits: Final choir concert with children from primary schools participating in the Schools Singing Programme (Spring 2023) at Liverpool Cathedral on the theme of *Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing*. Photograph by author, taken on 4 July 2023.

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Contents

Abstract

This research explores the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing value of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP) for children aged 6 to 11 across the Liverpool City Region. Conducted during the Spring term of 2023, the SSP engaged approximately 1000 children from sixteen primary schools, offering a rare opportunity to examine the broader social value of choral music education within one of the UK's most socioeconomically deprived regions. Framed by interdisciplinary sociocultural theory on the value of music in contemporary society and informed by applied music scholarship that seeks to harness the benefits of music for improving children's lives – including the "power" of music in education and for enhanced wellbeing – this study investigates the extent to which structured, high-quality choral singing can enhance children's educational outcomes, social cohesion, cultural awareness and emotional wellbeing. It also reflects on the unique role played by Liverpool Cathedral in nurturing collective identity and cultural belonging. Drawing on children's own voices captured via 288 reflexive choir journals, as well as observational, questionnaire and interview data gathered with teachers, parents and cathedral ministry, this study illustrates the multifaceted value of choral participation for primary school children. This research is entirely novel, as cathedral choral singing programmes, typically structured within cathedral schools that maintain rigorous musical traditions while also engaging broader educational communities through outreach initiatives, have rarely been studied in this way. By focusing on the lived experiences of children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in the Liverpool City region participating in cathedral choral music, this research highlights the transformative potential of music outreach programmes, contributing to ongoing discussions about the role of choral singing in fostering musical excellence in education, cultural engagement, and social and emotional wellbeing.

Introduction and Context

For centuries, sacred choral music has occupied a revered place within the Anglican tradition, especially within the acoustically and architecturally resonant spaces of English cathedrals. While the liturgical roots of this tradition lie in the chant-based practices of medieval monasticism, the contemporary ideal of the English cathedral choir—characterised by its distinctive, ethereal blend of boy trebles and adult lay clerks—emerged more distinctly in the nineteenth century. As Timothy Day (2018) has compellingly argued, in *I Saw Eternity the Other Night*, the choral sound now considered quintessentially "cathedral" is a relatively recent construct, shaped by Victorian reforms, changing notions of musical purity, and the increasing professionalisation of liturgical music.[1] Nonetheless, this tradition has nurtured a rich and enduring repertoire—from Renaissance polyphony by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, through the Baroque counterpoint of J.S. Bach, to the modern Anglican soundworld of Herbert Howells and Benjamin Britten. Historically, these choirs have been tightly integrated with elite cathedral schools that functioned as exclusive institutions, accessible primarily to boys from privileged backgrounds and thereby excluding broader communities from direct participation. The rigorous musical training provided within these settings thus not only upheld high artistic standards but also reinforced social hierarchies, delineating clear boundaries between the ecclesiastical elite and the broader populace. This exclusivity, deeply entwined with ecclesiastical privilege, has defined cathedral choral music for much of its history, preserving its artistic standards but also limiting its social reach.

In recent decades, however, many English cathedrals have made deliberate efforts to democratise access to their musical traditions, challenging longstanding traditions of exclusivity. This shift can be traced back to the early 1990s when cathedrals like Salisbury and Wells established girls' choirs, breaking with centuries of male-only choral practice, while recognizing the need to reflect contemporary values of gender equality within ecclesiastical music making. These pioneering moves reflected broader societal changes towards gender equality and enriched the cathedral soundscape by broadening access to choral training and performance. While some musicians and scholars maintain that the timbre of pre-adolescent girls' voices differs subtly from that of boys, others argue that any perceptible difference is minimal, especially in carefully trained ensembles. As recent discussions within the profession suggest—including Tim Noon's considered response in the BBC Radio 3 broadcast *Cathedral Music in Crisis*—the question of vocal timbre remains a matter of ongoing debate, often shaped as much by tradition and perception as by empirical vocal analysis. Today, nearly all major English cathedrals have established girls' choirs, marking significant progress towards gender inclusivity and offering valuable musical training and performance opportunities. However, many institutions are still in the process of addressing structural inequalities between boys' and girls' choirs, including disparities in schedules, visibility and post-chorister educational pathways. As highlighted in the Cathedral Music Trust's recent literature review (2022), cathedrals are increasingly aware of these imbalances and are actively

[1] I am grateful to Christopher Deacon for highlighting more recent scholarship that interrogates the perceived continuity of the Anglican choral tradition. For example, Timothy Day's *I Saw Eternity the Other Night* challenges the common conception of a seamless, centuries-old tradition of cathedral music. He argues that the modern sound and institutionalisation of cathedral choirs—especially the emphasis on vocal homogeneity, blend and an idealised choral timbre—are products of late Victorian and Edwardian reforms, rather than a medieval legacy. This perspective encourages a more historically contingent view of what is often understood as the "cathedral tradition".

working to rectify them. Alongside these gender-inclusive reforms, cathedrals have also sought to extend their reach through ambitious music outreach programmes, aiming to engage broader communities beyond the privileged confines of cathedral schools. For instance, the Diocese of Leeds launched its National Schools Singing Programme (NSSP) in 2003, which now reaches over 7500 children weekly across Yorkshire, emphasizing inclusivity across socioeconomic, ethnic and ability spectrums (Welch *et al.,* 2009, 2010).

Liverpool Cathedral has been a prominent leader in this movement, reflecting its own history of progressive outreach and inclusivity. In 2003, it established a girls' choir, providing young women with opportunities previously reserved for their male counterparts. Building on this foundation, the cathedral has developed a comprehensive music outreach programme encompassing early-years music education, junior and youth choirs, and community singing initiatives. Central to this outreach is the Schools Singing Programme (SSP), launched in 2012, which partners with primary schools across the Liverpool City Region to deliver high-quality singing workshops. Unlike the Leeds NSSP model, Liverpool's SSP is independently designed and managed, reflecting the cathedral's unique commitment to local communities and its focus on harnessing the power of music for educational and social change. The SSP not only aims to cultivate musical skills but also seeks to address broader economic, educational and social objectives, such as enhancing children's confidence, fostering community cohesion and preserving the rich tradition of cathedral choral music.

Against this backdrop, the present research study was developed to examine the multifaceted value of the Liverpool Cathedral SSP, with a particular focus on its educational, social, cultural and wellbeing impacts on children, examining its role in promoting educational attainment, cultural engagement, and social and emotional wellbeing among participating children. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study illustrates how the SSP contributes to children's personal development, social cohesion, cultural literacy and emotional resilience, while also supporting the sustainability of cathedral choral music traditions in a rapidly changing music landscape. The findings contribute to a growing body of research on the social value of choral music education, providing insights into the transformative potential of choral singing within contemporary society. By situating the SSP within the broader context of cathedral outreach initiatives, the study also offers insights into the evolving communal role of ecclesiastical institutions in contemporary society.

This research focus is completely novel, given that cathedral choral singing programmes for school children, which are typically structured within cathedral schools that maintain rigorous musical traditions while also engaging broader educational communities through outreach initiatives, have rarely been studied. One significant study by Saunders et al. (2012) on the Chorister Outreach Programme (COP) in the UK found that the programme is designed to extend the benefits of traditional cathedral choir training to a broader range of children, often outside the direct reach of cathedral schools. These programmes aim to provide high-quality vocal training, musical literacy, and performance opportunities to children in mainstream primary schools, thus expanding access to a historically privileged form of music education. The COP, for example, focuses on training professional children's choirs to work creatively with primary school children, enhancing their musical and social skills through structured choral experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This approach has been shown to foster musical skills, enhance social integration and build a sense of belonging among participants. The study highlighted that such programmes not only improve vocal technique and musical literacy but also contribute to the emotional and cognitive development of children by creating a structured yet creative learning environment.

In a more recent analysis, Preece (2024) examined the cultural capital generated by choir schools through their outreach activities, among other issues. This study emphasised the role of choral training in developing cultural competence and social skills, noting that outreach programmes can bridge the gap between cathedral traditions and broader educational contexts. Additionally, Krüger Bridge (2022, 2023a, 2023b) provided a detailed case study of Liverpool Cathedral's music outreach, which shifted online during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach enabled the cathedral to reach a much wider and more diverse audience than previously possible, demonstrating the potential for digital platforms to support long-term outreach goals. Siôn and Edwards (2012) have also documented the significant impact of these outreach programmes in rural dioceses, where opportunities for high-quality music education may be limited. Their study found that such initiatives can help strengthen community bonds and enhance the cultural life of both children and their families. Meanwhile, McKenna et al. (2004) explored the broader educational and social impacts of cathedral outreach, finding that these programmes often act as a vital cultural resource for schools, enhancing students' confidence, self-discipline and musical skills. Another study by Welch (2010) examines the cultural and gender dynamics within cathedral music programmes, including outreach efforts aimed at young singers. The paper provides insights into how these programmes navigate traditional gender roles while promoting broader cultural engagement. Relevant to research on choral music more generally is MacDonald's *Cathedrals, Chapels, Organs, Choirs: A Personal View* (2022), which offers a compelling insider's perspective on the British choral tradition, including the workings of cathedral and collegiate choirs, the training of choristers and the broader cultural context of Anglican church music. Her discussions on chorister training, the integration of girls into cathedral choirs and the challenges of maintaining musical excellence within evolving social structures offer valuable context. While the book doesn't focus exclusively on outreach initiatives, MacDonald's emphasis on inclusivity and her candid observations about the joys and trials of choral leadership provide a nuanced understanding of the transformative potential of choral music in contemporary society.

The 2022 report *A Review of the Cathedral Music Landscape in the United Kingdom* by Louise Ashley, Nik Miller and Isobel Pinder offers a comprehensive analysis of the current state of cathedral music across the UK. It highlights the challenges faced by cathedral music institutions, including financial pressures, changing demographics, and the need for greater inclusivity and outreach. This context underscores the significance of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP) as examined in this research. The SSP exemplifies proactive engagement with these challenges by fostering musical education and participation among primary school children, particularly in socioeconomically deprived areas. By doing so, it not only preserves the rich tradition of cathedral music but also democratizes access to it, aligning with the report's recommendations for sustainability and broader community involvement. This research thus contributes valuable insights into how cathedral music can evolve to remain relevant and impactful in contemporary society.

Choral Participation for Children's Educational Outcomes and Wellbeing

Framed by interdisciplinary sociocultural theory on music's value in contemporary society, the study documents, analyses and compares the perceived value, benefits and impacts of children's participation in choral singing. Central to this is the concept of "human flourishing",[2] which

[2] The concept of *eudaimonia*, often translated as *human flourishing* or *living well*, lies at the heart of Aristotle's moral philosophy, articulated most fully in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (4th century BCE). For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is not merely a state of happiness or pleasure, but a lifelong process of virtuous activity aligned with reason—the distinctive capacity

contemporary scholars such as David Hesmondhalgh (2013) draw upon to account for the ethical and social significance of music. Hesmondhalgh extends the concept beyond the classical framework, arguing that music—especially participatory forms like choral singing—can contribute to flourishing by enriching emotional life, supporting the formation of personal and social identities, and fostering collective solidarity. Applied to the context of The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme, this interdisciplinary sociocultural framework on music's value in contemporary society allows the study to move beyond purely instrumental or utilitarian accounts of choral music education, and towards understanding its deeper role in enabling young people to live well—emotionally, socially and culturally. It foregrounds how communal musical practices such as choral singing can nurture the capacities and conditions that underpin *eudaimonia*: empathy, connection, joy, agency and belonging. In this context, choral singing is seen as a culturally meaningful practice that affords children opportunities for emotional expression, identity formation and the cultivation of interpersonal connection. Through the embodied, affective and communal dimensions of choral singing, children may come to experience a deeper sense of belonging, self-worth and mutual recognition—core elements of flourishing as conceptualized by Hesmondhalgh. Accordingly, this study critically examines how the Schools Singing Programme mediates these possibilities in the lived experiences of participating children—particularly within the diverse sociocultural realities of the Liverpool City Region.

Specifically, the research is informed by applied music scholarship that aims to harness the benefits of music for improving children's lives, including the "power" of music in education (DfE, 2022) and for enhanced wellbeing. In education, research has shown the multifaceted benefits of music for children. Susan Hallam's extensive research (Hallam, 2015; Hallam and Himonides, 2022) underscores the profound impact of active musical engagement on children's intellectual, social and personal development. Her findings indicate that participation in music enhances language acquisition, literacy and numeracy skills, as well as overall academic achievement. Moreover, engaging in musical activities fosters creativity, fine motor coordination, concentration, self-confidence, emotional sensitivity, and social skills, including teamwork and cooperation. Hallam emphasizes that these benefits are most pronounced when musical experiences are enjoyable and rewarding, highlighting the importance of high-quality teaching in music education.

Singing, specifically, has been extensively studied by Graham Welch, who highlights a wide range of physical, psychological, social and cognitive benefits (2017). Singing can support cognitive development, particularly in children, by enhancing linguistic skills and memory (Welch, 2011, 2016). Welch's work also emphasizes the role of singing in educational contexts, where it has been found to positively impact academic performance and social skills (Welch, 2020; Welch et al., 2014). Clearly, choral singing contributes to children's musical development and wider educational outcomes. It provides children with opportunities for ensemble experiences, sight-reading and music theory training, enhancing vocal skills (e.g. vocal technique, pitch accuracy), musical literacy (e.g. rhythm), overall musicality (e.g. musical expression, diverse musical genres) and social

of the human soul. Flourishing involves the cultivation of moral and intellectual virtues, such as courage, justice, wisdom and temperance, and is always situated within a polis—that is, the social and political community. It is not a private or inward state but a socially embedded and ethical mode of being. While Aristotle did not conceptualise music as central to *eudaimonia*, he did accord it a role in education (*paideia*) and moral development, especially through its capacity to habituate the emotions and contribute to leisure in its highest, contemplative sense (*Politics*, Book VIII). The connection between music and *eudaimonia* was reanimated in modern cultural and philosophical theory, notably within humanist and communitarian critiques of late capitalism. It is in this context that contemporary scholars such as David Hesmondhalgh (2013) have drawn upon Aristotelian notions of *human flourishing* to account for the ethical and social significance of music.

ensemble skills. Beyond musical outcomes, choral singing benefits educational attainment and outcomes, as singing engages multiple cognitive processes, including memory and concentration, attention and discipline, language skills and self-confidence, which can positively transfer to other academic areas. With a specific research focus on the *Sing Up* National Singing Programme, launched in 2007 as part of the UK government's Music Manifesto, which aimed to integrate high-quality vocal music into primary education across England, Welch *et al.* (2009) established a foundational understanding of variations across children's singing abilities and the impact of singing on educational outcomes. Expanding this analysis, Welch *et al.* (2010) also focused on the social and psychological impacts of the Sing Up initiative, demonstrating that structured singing programmes significantly enhance children's vocal ability, self-concept and sense of social belonging, including confidence and self-esteem. Importantly, the study also highlighted the critical role of skilled vocal leadership and consistent singing opportunities in fostering these positive outcomes, suggesting that well-implemented singing programmes can contribute not only to musical skill development but also to broader social cohesion within schools. These findings provide robust evidence of the transformative potential of structured singing initiatives. They illustrate how sustained, high-quality choral engagement can foster both musical excellence and social inclusion, creating supportive, identity-affirming environments for children. In this context, the Sing Up evaluations offer valuable parallels to cathedral-based programmes like The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme, which similarly seek to democratise access to high-quality music education while promoting personal growth and community connection.

Besides cognitive and educational benefits, music, including group singing, brings numerous wellbeing benefits, (Clift and Hancox, 2010; Clift et al., 2010; Kirsh *et al.,* 2013; Linneman *et al.,* 2017; Moss *et al.,* 2018; Robens *et al.,* 2022; Theorell, 2018; Welch, 2016, 2017, 2020). Singing has been shown to enhance physical health by improving respiratory function and cardiovascular health, largely due to the controlled breathing required during vocalization. It also triggers the release of endorphins, reducing stress and promoting overall wellbeing. Psychologically, singing can boost self-esteem and confidence, as it provides a powerful means of emotional expression (Welch, 2011). Socially, singing fosters a sense of community and belonging, creating strong social bonds among participants (Welch *et al.* 2014). For example, MacDonald et al. (2012) present a comprehensive, interdisciplinary exploration of music's capacity to enhance human wellbeing. The book synthesizes findings from psychology, neuroscience, sociology and musicology to reveal how active engagement with music can engender significant physical, emotional and social benefits. Central to the volume is an examination of the physiological mechanisms underlying music's therapeutic effects, such as stress reduction via modulated breathing patterns and increased oxytocin release, which in turn promote relaxation and mitigate anxiety. Moreover, the work elucidates how music facilitates emotional expression and resilience, acting as a conduit for personal transformation and communal bonding. Group music-making—especially through activities like choral singing—is highlighted for its role in fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion, effectively bridging individual experiences with broader cultural narratives. By integrating empirical evidence with theoretical insights, MacDonald *et al.* (2012) not only underscore the intrinsic value of music as a health-promoting agent but also advocate for its strategic incorporation into educational and public health initiatives, thereby affirming music's enduring power to transform lives.

The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme

Established in 2012, The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme is a curriculum-based model that has engaged over 8,000 children from more than 40 primary schools across the Diocese

of Liverpool by complementing and/or delivering music provision in primary schools to meet their developmental targets for Key Stages 1 and 2 set out in the National Plan for Music Education (2022) and/or requirements by SIAMS (Strategic Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) and the Catholic Schools Inspectorate. To achieve this, the SSP offers two primary packages: "Singing, Musicianship and Performance" and "Singing and Musicianship with RE [Religious Education] and SIAMS [Strategic Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools] Focus", both designed to support schools in meeting the developmental targets outlined in the National Plan for Music Education (2022) and, where applicable, the SIAMS guidelines, boosting leadership and vision of Christian education and the effect of Religious Studies in schools through enhancing the impact of collective worship, using music to promote character development, teaching dignity and respect through music, widening Christian knowledge, wisdom and skills through music, and encouraging good team-work and harmonious living through music. For joint-denominational schools, the SSP also meets the guidelines set out in the Catholic Schools Inspectorate, specifically with access to liturgical music to aid collective worship. Both packages are structured around five key Learning Outcomes (LOs) that underpin its pedagogical approach and intended educational impact (Figure 1). Teachers at participating schools receive a full curriculum plan at the start of term and access to the cathedral's music school digital resources.

Liverpool Cathedral
Schools Singing Programme

Curriculum Sheet – Term One

This crib sheet is designed to allow you to cross match the Model Music Curriculum with the curriculum of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme. You may notice that we are incorporating ideas from years above the children's age group. We believe that the MMC is a base line of musical learning and that with our curriculum of interactive learning we are able to communicate more complex musical ideas and language more quickly. Across the year we will cover all of the important words and concepts for each year group and this is matched in the latter stages of the document.

Curriculum Learning Objectives

LO1	**To copy and identify rhythmic and melodic patterns**	Learning songs, following patterns
LO2	**To describe subject specific skills and techniques**	To include articulation, dynamics, vocal health, as necessary for the year group
LO3	**To implement subject specific skills and techniques**	Implementation of the techniques from LO2
LO4	**To adapt and devise rhythmic and melodic patterns**	Ability to improvise or write music, based on a given theme.
LO5	**To examine and compare pieces of music**	This will include being able to use those ideas to compare and contrast pieces of music

Figure 1: Five Curriculum Learning Outcomes from Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme's Curriculum Sheet – Term One (2023).

Figure 2: End-of-term performance by children participating in the Liverpool Cathedral SSP, Emmaus Primary School, 6 December 2023 (Image source: https://x.com/Emmaus_School/status/1732332659597013393, with permission to reproduce)

The SSP is explicitly pedagogical in nature, fostering vocal training, musical literacy and collaborative engagement by providing weekly, curriculum-aligned singing workshops for pupils in Years 2 through 6, while following a progressive music curriculum. The Spring 2023 term of the SSP involved 16 primary schools from across the Liverpool City region (Table 1). In each partner school, cathedral music staff delivered three 10-week terms of half-hour choral workshops to two classes/year groups, utilizing warm-ups, singing games, new repertoire/songs and musicianship skills, including improvisation and music notation reading, culminating in a termly whole-School singing assembly (Figure 2) and the annual *Big Sing* performance at Liverpool Cathedral in July and September 2023.

In recognition of two significant cultural and historical events in 2023—the coronation of King Charles III and Liverpool's hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest on behalf of Ukraine—the music staff designing the Spring 2023 Schools Singing Programme (April – July 2023) devised a balanced and thematically rich musical selection, titled *Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing*. The repertoire combined traditional choral and patriotic works with popular Eurovision-winning songs, ensuring both a sense of occasion and broad appeal to the participating children. The selection included classical and ceremonial choral pieces, Eurovision classics and a tribute to Ukraine as follows:

1. National Anthem ('God Save the King'), an essential element of British ceremonial life, evoking a sense of unity and tradition.
2. 'The Old Hundredth', a choral hymn often associated with royal occasions, famously performed at British coronations, including those of Queen Elizabeth II and King Charles III.
3. 'Waterloo', ABBA's legendary 1974 winning song, is widely regarded as one of Eurovision's greatest hits, bringing an infectious energy and singalong quality.

4. ‘Puppet on a String’, the UK’s first Eurovision victory in 1967, performed by Sandie Shaw, is a lively and recognizable tune.
5. ‘Save Your Kisses for Me’, another UK winner from 1976 by Brotherhood of Man, is a charming and upbeat track, beloved for its catchy melody and playful lyrics.
6. The inclusion of ‘Space Man’, the UK’s 2022 Eurovision entry by Sam Ryder, represents a more contemporary addition, introducing children to modern Eurovision music while maintaining a high vocal standard.
7. In recognition of Ukraine’s presence in Eurovision 2024, the programme featured ‘Ukrainian Prayer’, a solemn and moving piece that honours Ukraine’s resilience and cultural identity. This inclusion was especially significant, given Liverpool’s role in hosting Eurovision on behalf of Ukraine, providing an opportunity for children to engage with international music in a meaningful and empathetic way.
8. The programme then featured ‘Patriotic Melody’, a collection of well-known nationalistic and celebratory themes that further tied the performance to the coronation.
9. ‘Love Shine a Light’, Katrina and the Waves’ 1997 Eurovision-winning anthem, a song that encapsulates Eurovision’s spirit of unity, hope and collective joy.
10. This message of togetherness led into the final reprise of the ‘National Anthem’ (verse 1) with a reaffirmation of national pride.

By incorporating both formal choral repertoire and accessible popular music, *Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing* effectively bridged the gap between tradition and contemporary culture, ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds can find familiarity and inspiration in their musical participation, who were also looking forward to performing in Liverpool Cathedral, reinforcing a sense of pride and accomplishment.

The Schools Singing Programme: A Summary of the Research Evaluation Methodology

The research asked whether, why and how participation in the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP) has social value to children in the Liverpool City Region. The study focuses specifically on the Spring term (April – July) 2023, during which the SSP was delivered across sixteen schools, engaging approximately 1000 children aged 6–11 years. The research questions asked about the perceived benefits – educational, social, cultural and wellbeing – of choral singing for participating children, and whether these benefits are perceived differently across the participating schools across the Liverpool City Region, and if so, why and how. To address these questions, the research employed a mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the complex, context-dependent value of the SSP. Four primary methods were used to gather data:

- Ethnographic Participant Observations – Direct observation of choral workshops and final performances, capturing the spontaneous, embodied and affective dimensions of children's musical participation.
- Online Questionnaire – Distributed to parents, guardians and teachers, designed to capture a broad range of perceptions regarding the educational, social, cultural and wellbeing value of the SSP.
- Choir Journal Writing – Weekly reflexive journals completed by participating children, providing insights into their personal experiences, reflections and emotional responses to choral singing.
- Interviewing – In-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including music leaders and cathedral clergy, offering rich, contextual insights into the programme's broader cultural and educational significance.

Together, these methods provided a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of how the Schools Singing Programme shapes the musical, social and emotional lives of participating children within the diverse sociocultural context of the Liverpool City Region.

Ethnographic participant observations

The research was informed by ethnographic participant-observations of school workshops (Figure 3) as well as during the final concert at the cathedral, which provided direct insider insight into the curriculum and delivery of the SSP (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2020). The researcher observed and documented these music activities (Curran and Radhakrishnan 2021: 104), captured in the form of fieldnotes and audiovisual data, with specific focus on the perceived benefits, impacts and value of primary school children's participation in the SSP, and whether, why and how these benefits may be perceived differently across the participating schools. The analysis of ethnographic participant-observations employed a reflexive, interpretative approach, drawing on fieldnotes that captured the researcher's reflexive experiences of children's choral participation. Through iterative thematic coding, the research examined how the social and musical interactions within the workshops and performances contributed to musical education and learning, social wellbeing, and awe and wonder. While the ethnographic research approach has, over the last few decades, become

commonplace in music studies, employing ethnographic participant observations enabled a more holistic and inclusive focus on the social value of choral participation for children, and due contextualization into a hitherto unfamiliar field of music study.

Figure 3: Liverpool Cathedral's Choral Outreach Lead, Mitch Holland, delivering a choral workshop in a primary school during the Spring 2023 Schools Singing Programme. Image by author.

Online questionnaire

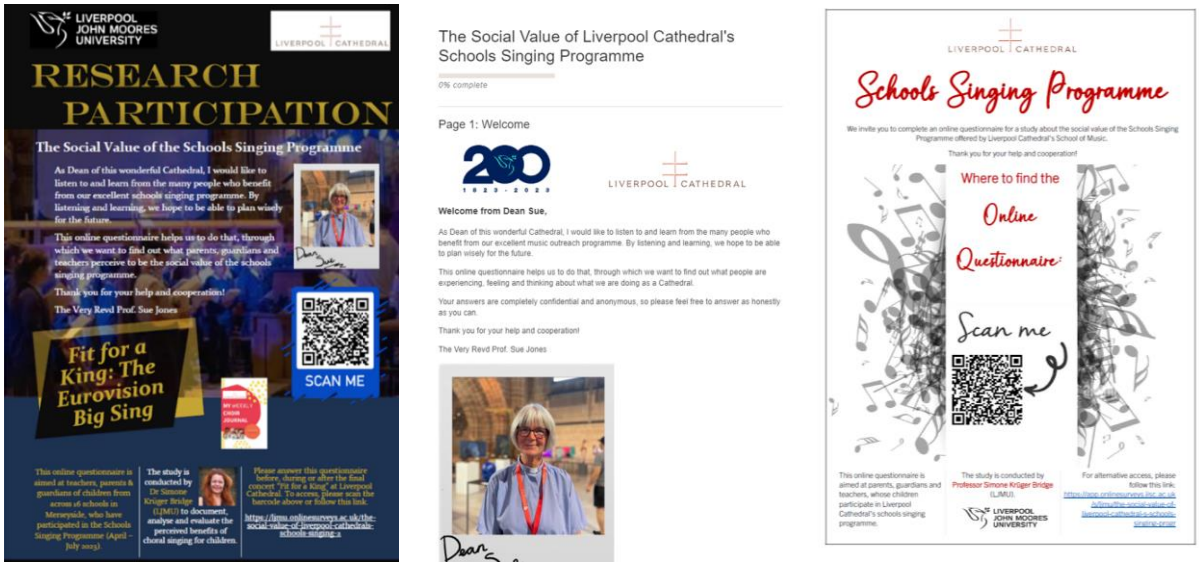
Teachers and parents were asked to complete an anonymous online questionnaire, which was designed in the University-approved OnlineSurveys software. The questionnaire contained one opening sections, asking (1) sociodemographic information (location, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexuality, religion, occupation, education, qualification); and (2) about participation at Liverpool Cathedral (choirs/groups involved in, relationship with the cathedral, attendance at cathedral music events, general experiences/perceptions, barriers to participation). This was then followed by questions providing qualitative data groups of answer choices describing qualities or characteristics relevant to the SSP, which engaged deeper-level cognitive reflections from participants (Allanson and Notar, 2019), followed by open-ended question prompts for explanations of their answers and further comments. Below listed are the themes around which the qualitative data groups of answer choices were grouped:

- about your attendance at the SSP final concert;
- barriers to attending the SSP final concert;
- the educational benefits of the Schools Singing Programme;
- the social benefits of your child's participation in the Schools Singing Programme;

- the cultural value of the Schools Singing Programme;
- the health and wellbeing benefits of the Schools Singing Programme;
- how participation in SSP can help children overcome the negative consequences of the pandemic;
- anything else about your perceptions and opinions of The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme.

Questionnaire participants were recruited using convenience sampling through callouts by cathedral leaders, emails by music ministry, and cards and flyers handed out by the researcher as follows. The QU was announced and distributed via email by Stephen Mannings (Director of Music) to Headteachers in sixteen participating primary schools, complemented by a callout by Canon Philip Anderson during the final *Big Sing* concerts in July 2023 and December 2023, along with a flyer handed out to attendees at Liverpool Cathedral with a request to complete the questionnaire during and/or after the concert (Figures 4a, b, c).

Collectively, the questionnaire returned a total of 24 responses, including statistics based on the qualitative data group of answer choices, and ca. 10000 words text-based qualitative responses. Informed by an interpretative framework and grounded theory, the analytical approach for the online questionnaire integrated both quantitative and qualitative methods, employing a mixed-methods framework to capture the breadth and depth of participants' experiences and perceptions of the Liverpool Cathedral SSP. More specifically, the sociodemographic and participation-related data (Parts 1 and 2) were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends in the respondent profile, enabling an understanding of how different social groups engage with the cathedral's music outreach. For the qualitative responses (Parts 3 ff.), a thematic analysis was conducted, using an inductive, data-driven coding process to identify recurring themes across the structured answer choices and open-ended explanations.



Figures 4a, b, c: Flyers inviting parents/carers and teachers to complete the online questionnaire during the Schools Singing Programme's final *Big Sing* concerts on 3, 4 and 5 July 2023 and 7 September 2023 at Liverpool Cathedral.

Choir journal writing

Journal writing was used as an elicitation technique with primary school children via an anonymous weekly reflective Choir Journal (Figure 5; Table 5). This approach employed child-centred reflexive journaling as a participatory elicitation method, enabling children to express their musical experiences through written responses, visual imagery and structured prompts. Such methods are increasingly used in educational ethnography to foreground children's voices and accommodate varying levels of literacy and confidence. Journal writing is thus a well-established elicitation technique in educational research with primary school children and deemed conducive for their own development and learning (Jones and East, 2010). Allowing children to express their own experiences, feelings and perceptions is empowering by acknowledging their own voices and promoting inclusion. Designed by the researcher herself, the journal prompted school children to answer sociodemographic and musical preference questions, and 10 weekly reflective questions, followed by a mini questionnaire, drawing prompt and space for reflections on the final concert. Importantly, educational differences between younger and older children were acknowledged, along with low levels of literacy in areas of high level of underachievement. The journal therefore included prompts for drawing, tick box answers and short answer boxes. The journal's back pages included a brief child-appropriate questionnaire "About the music" to ascertain the educational, social, cultural and wellbeing benefits of choral singing, for a drawing about "My Choir", and for reflections/drawings about the final concert at the cathedral. Children were helped by their class teacher(s) during a regular weekly timeslot with no "right" or "wrong" for teachers to guide children with their answers. It was also anticipated that some children would be helped by their parents at home.

Figure 5: Reflexive choir journal used with primary-aged school children from 16 schools participating in Liverpool Cathedral's Spring 2023 Schools Singing Programme. The Choir Journal template can be obtained by following the link in Table 5.

1000 choir journals were distributed by the researcher across 16 participating schools during the first week of choral workshops, while 9 primary schools completed 288 journals, which were collected and scanned for subsequent capture of the hand-written responses in a JISC Online Survey that mirrored the journal categories (Table 1). The quantitative data was analysed through the in-built statistical tool, which provided tables of numbered data, pie and bar charts, while enabling cross-variable analysis and interpretation, and subsequent corroboration and triangulation with relevant academic literatures. Meanwhile, grounded theory analysis of the open-ended text-based responses involved an inductive approach, whereby emergent themes were identified through iterative coding, allowing patterns of meaning to surface organically from the children's own responses. This method prioritized the subjective articulations of participants, facilitating a nuanced understanding of how engagement in the choral outreach programme shaped their social, emotional and musical identities. Reflexive journal writing as an elicitation technique helped to gain an understanding of their experiences and perceptions of participating in weekly high-quality choral workshops, what they value about these experiences, and what difference it made in some

children's lives who may not have opportunities to obtain high-quality musical education and learning.

Table 1: Schedule of weekly choral workshops during spring 2023 Schools Singing Programme, involving 16 participating primary schools, of which 9 schools completed 288 reflexive choir journals.

Monday	Time (35-40 mins)	Workshop leader	Completed journals
St Mary & St Paul's Primary	9am	S Mannings	28
Christchurch CE Primary	9.10am	C Newton	36
Bedford Primary	10.15am	C Newton	27
Evelyn Primary	10.30am	S Mannings	25
Northwood Primary	11.30am	S Mannings	52
Huyton with Roby CE	2.15pm	S Mannings	
Tuesday			
Woolton Primary	9.30am	S Mannings	49
Mosspits Primary	10.30am	S Mannings	
Gilmour Primary	11.30am	S Mannings	
LIPA Primary	1.30pm	S Mannings	26
Wednesday			
Northway Primary	11.30am	Staff member	
Norman Pannell Primary	12.30pm	Staff member	
Childwall CE Primary	2pm	Staff member	21
Thursday			
Emmaus RC & CE Primary	10.30am	Staff member	
Liverpool College Primary	1.30am	Staff member	
Greenbank Primary	2.30pm	Staff member	24

Use of Children's Quotes in the Report

This research report draws directly on children's written reflections as captured through the reflexive choir journals. The children's responses were recorded verbatim in the platform Jisc OnlineSoftware, and subsequently downloaded into Excel format for analysis. To preserve the authenticity of children's voices while ensuring readability and coherence, all quotes included in the report were carefully verified and handled according to the following principles:

- Exact matches: Wherever possible, quotes included in the report are presented in the children's own words, exactly as written. These direct excerpts preserve the authenticity of the original voice and provide valuable insight into children's self-expression.
- Close matches (corrected for clarity): In many instances, quotes in the report represent close matches to the original submissions (Table 2), where children's intent was clear but their spelling, grammar or syntax made the meaning difficult to follow. These quotes were corrected minimally, preserving meaning and tone while improving readability and academic flow. Importantly, the intended meaning of each quote was preserved with care, and no interpretive alterations were made.

Table 2: Examples of corrected children's quotes used in the report. All quotes were originally written by pupils in their choir journals and have been carefully verified. Minor corrections were made to spelling, grammar and syntax to aid clarity and readability while preserving the original meaning and sentiment.

Original Quote	**Corrected Quote**	**Context of Use in Report**
"how to sing beatifoly"	"how to sing beautifully"	Used in discussions of musical learning in early weeks.
"i learnt all the songs we sang without the words"	"I learnt how to remember songs without words"	Used in Week 9 to reflect memorisation of the repertoire.
"singing is calm and makes me happy"	"Singing makes me feel calm and happy"	Featured in the Wellbeing Value section to illustrate emotional regulation.
"Yes, because I sung in a huge bilding"	"Yes, because I sung in a huge building"	Included in the Cultural Value section referencing Liverpool Cathedral.
"if you lisen to others you sing beter togever"	"If you listen to others, you sing better together"	Featured in the Social Value section to demonstrate teamwork and empathy.
"it was a bit scairy last lesson I was nurvis"	"It was a bit scary; last lesson I was nervous"	Used in Week 10 to convey emotional growth and performance anxiety.
"we are in harmony wen we sing togever we all have diffrent personalitys"	"We are in harmony when we sing together… we all have different personalities"	Included in reflections on group identity and emotional cohesion.

The decision to correct spelling, grammar and syntax—while preserving the integrity of the children's voices—was made for several reasons:

1. Clarity and Readability: Many quotes, if left in their raw form, contained errors that could obscure their meaning or hinder smooth reading. Minor corrections ensured that the report maintained a clear and coherent narrative for both academic and public audiences.
2. Good Research Practice: Presenting corrected quotes—while being transparent about their original form—aligns with qualitative research conventions, especially in educational settings where participants are children. This balance respects the voice of the child while meeting the standards of scholarly communication.
3. Maintaining Anonymity: In a few cases, specific names or identifying details (e.g. choral leaders' names or school names) were anonymised or omitted. This was done to protect children's identities, particularly in sensitive or evaluative reflections.
4. Preserving Flow: The report is designed to synthesise individual voices into broader thematic findings. As such, cleaned and corrected quotes help ensure that the themes are communicated clearly without distracting typographic or linguistic issues.

In all cases, the corrections made were minimal and transparent. They reflect the children's authentic experiences, language use and emotional expressions, while ensuring that these valuable insights are accessible to a wide readership. Where appropriate, original phrasing and expressive idiosyncrasies (e.g. exclamation marks, emphasis, repetition) were retained to convey the tone and enthusiasm typical of many children's entries.

Finally, all quotes, whether exact or corrected, were thoroughly checked and verified against the original data exported from the reflexive journal tool. This dataset reflected children's unedited writing, including all original spelling, punctuation and grammatical forms. The verification process was rigorous and systematic, involving exact string-matching, fuzzy matching (for near-identical phrasing with minor errors) and manual thematic review where necessary. Ultimately, the use of children's quotes in this report aims to foreground their perspectives with integrity, while maintaining the highest standards of ethical and communicative research practice. These reflections offer a rich, qualitative window into pupils' musical, emotional and social experiences during the ten-week choral programme.

Interviewing

Prior to and during the delivery of the 2023 Schools Singing Programme, six interviews of ca. 60 minutes each were conducted with selected senior clergy and music ministry to obtain a foundational understanding of the cathedral's choral outreach programme, its strategic alignment with broader institutional objectives, and its historical and theological underpinnings, thereby ensuring that the inquiries were situated within a well-contextualized framework of policy, tradition and ecclesiastical vision (Table 3).[3] Interviewing key institutional stakeholders, including senior clergy members, ensured that the research was contextually grounded in the cathedral's broader ecclesiastical, historical and strategic framework. Meanwhile, music ministry staff—including the Director of Music, Choral Outreach Lead and Schools Singing Programme facilitators—offered perspectives on the practical delivery of the SSP. A focus group discussion with music staff (Mannings, Newton, Holland) following the Spring 2023 Schools Singing Programme *Big Sing* concert provided rich insights into the educational, social and cultural value of the programme on children's development, which revolved around the following emergent themes:

- Children who participate in the SSP benefit in terms of educational attainment through enhanced reading ability and concentration
- The Schools Singing Programme is breaking down barriers of social mobility: combining musical excellence and music education
- The spring SSP enhanced British identity through the coronation theme and patriotic songs
- The SSP enhanced spiritual awareness through choral music repertoire
- The Eurovision theme resembled fun and enjoyment for most children
- Cultural differences among children across different ethnicities and backgrounds pose challenges
- New SSP curriculum rollout from September 2023 under M Holland (new Director of Music Outreach).

[3] The data collection phase was interrupted due to the terminal cancer diagnosis of the researcher's mother, while the British Academy granted project pauses and a 6-month extension.

These foundational interviews established a contextual understanding of choral outreach within the cathedral's institutional structures, forming a critical background for later ethnographic and participant-focused analyses.

Table 3: Schedule of interviews with cathedral senior clergy and music ministry.

Interview date	Interviewee(s)	Role(s)
30 January 2023	The Revd Myles Davies	Senior clergy
24 February 2023	The Very Revd Dr Sue Jones	Dean of Liverpool
11 March 2023	Stephen Mannings	Director of Music
7 September 2023	Stephen Mannings, Dr Chris Newton, Mitch Holland, with Patricia Hayes	Music ministry
17 October 2023	Stephen Mannings	Director of Music
27 October 2023	Mitch Holland	Choral Outreach Lead

The interviews were recorded via voice recorder on the researcher's mobile phone, and subsequently transcribed for analysis, which employed a rigorous interpretative framework, integrating analytical induction and thematic analysis to systematically examine text-based data. Using an iterative coding process, the researcher developed a structured coding framework, deriving key concepts from the interview topics and organizing these into overarching themes that underpin the results section of this report. Analytical induction facilitated the refinement of conceptual categories through continuous comparison, allowing for the identification of patterns and variations in participants' perspectives. The thematic analysis approach ensured that emergent themes were deeply grounded in the data, capturing the nuanced ways in which clergy, music ministry, adult participants and parents articulated the social, cultural and ecclesiastical dimensions of Liverpool Cathedral's choral outreach. This methodological approach not only enabled a comprehensive synthesis of participant experiences but also ensured that findings were contextually embedded within the broader institutional and historical framework of cathedral music practice.

Liverpool Cathedral's Musical Mission

The interviews with senior clergy offer a compelling insight into Liverpool Cathedral's long-standing and evolving relationship with music as a central feature of its liturgical, cultural and civic identity. Dean Sue Jones and Canon Myles Davies shed light on the ethos, values and ambitions of the cathedral's wider Music Outreach Programme, of which the Schools Singing Programme is a vital component. Their reflections allow us to situate the programme within a broader vision of inclusivity, community engagement, spiritual encounter and cultural vitality. Both Davies and Jones articulate a deep appreciation for the transformative power of music, especially in the context of Liverpool Cathedral's uniquely conceived services such as the Holly Bough, Darkness to Light and family nativity celebrations. Davies traces a history of musical innovation rooted in Dean Dwelly's pioneering liturgical designs, while Jones emphasises how the musical experience "takes people back to past generations" and helps set a context for "the world we live in today." Music here is never merely decorative or ceremonial—it is an embodied vehicle of theological reflection, emotional resonance and communal memory. In particular, Jones argues that Christmas at the cathedral is a "journey" through music and liturgy that fosters a sense of belonging—i.e. people "feel they belong" even if they do not regularly attend—and "connection with something bigger than yourself." Such statements are especially significant for the Schools Singing Programme, whose primary aim is to widen access to that very experience of sacred space, choral music and spiritual identity. Even for those unfamiliar with Christian doctrine or uninterested in formal worship, the cathedral becomes—through music—a place of comfort, welcome and encounter (Evans, 2006).

A key theme is the deliberate challenge to elitist or exclusionary perceptions of cathedral music. As Davies notes, Liverpool Cathedral has "never had a choir school," unlike many historic Anglican institutions. Instead, the cathedral deliberately recruits from a wide range of schools—public and state, urban and suburban—and actively seeks both boys and girls. In his words, this approach is "much more helpful," as it embodies a shift from a heritage-based model of choral music towards a socially inclusive, community-rooted paradigm. Dean Jones develops this further, candidly acknowledging public perceptions of the cathedral as "middle-class" or "for others," and affirming the cathedral's commitment to dismantling those assumptions. She applauds the work of the music department in bringing people from non-traditional backgrounds into the cathedral's orbit, noting that for many families, participation in the Schools Singing Programme marks their first engagement with a space they had previously assumed "wasn't for them." She speaks movingly about how this experience can be formative, identity-affirming and socially transformative, especially for children from underserved communities.

Underlying is a shared conviction that musical participation contributes to civic identity, spiritual growth and moral responsibility. Davies emphasises how the beauty of the space and sound fosters "a sense of awe" and "emotional resonance," while Jones underscores music's role in moral instruction—helping young people to ask questions about justice, peace, community and their role in the world. For Jones, Christmas music in particular is "a message of light overcoming darkness," not merely in a theological sense, but as a cultural and ethical imperative for our time. This vision casts the Schools Singing Programme not only as an educational initiative, but as a form of civic pedagogy—one that teaches children how to live well with others, how to appreciate beauty, and

how to take part in something larger than themselves. In this way, the programme participates in what Jones describes as the cathedral's essential ministry: "offering a space" where people "can feel changed," even if not entirely transformed, by music, story and community.

Finally, both senior clergy stress that Liverpool Cathedral's identity is shaped by a creative balance between tradition and innovation. Davies details how services like the Holly Bough have evolved over decades while remaining faithful to their liturgical roots, and Jones speaks about the need to review and adapt events annually, such as through her "Christmas Reveal" sessions with staff. This willingness to reflect and refine—to "build apart what we can't," as Jones puts it—is emblematic of a dynamic, evolving institution. It is also mirrored in the Schools Singing Programme's adaptive outreach to schools across the region, many of which serve highly diverse or economically challenged populations. Clearly, Liverpool Cathedral's senior leaders position the cathedral's Music Outreach Programme as an embodiment of its broader values of inclusivity, compassion and cultural relevance. Though not discussed in name, the Schools Singing Programme is deeply resonant with these themes. It opens doors—literally and metaphorically—to children and families who may never have imagined themselves inside a cathedral, let alone singing within it. And in doing so, it brings to life the cathedral's vision of music as a shared inheritance, a sacred tradition and a living source of transformation for all.

The Schools Singing Programme

The Schools Singing Programme emerges as a strategically articulated and deeply value-driven outreach initiative that seeks to extend the cathedral's musical, educational and spiritual heritage beyond its immediate ecclesiastical setting into the wider Liverpool City region. The SSP, underpinned by a robust pedagogical framework and informed by both theological principles and contemporary commitments to inclusivity and community engagement, exemplifies an imaginative rethinking of cathedral music as a vehicle of social good, educational equity and cultural participation. At the heart of the programme lies an underpinning vision shaped by a commitment to accessibility, musical excellence and holistic child development. A core value is diversity and pluralism, both musically and socially. There is a clear commitment to negotiating and respecting religious difference, such as adapting repertoire for children whose families have specific faith-based objections. Teachers and musicians spoke of careful, respectful conversations around lyrics invoking God or monarchy, and of celebrating pupils' agency in navigating these choices—ensuring that no child feels alienated in the space. The goal is an *inclusive sacred space*, one that acknowledges difference while fostering shared musical experience.

Stephen Mannings, Director of Music, articulates the initial impetus behind the project as a reaction to the limited scope of music engagement when he first assumed his role in 2012:

> "When I started in 2012, there was just a cathedral choir, there was nothing else. Everything has been organic and it is good… it was a good time for me to almost take stock of what we've done".

The expansion into the Schools Singing Programme was therefore conceived not as a detached educational initiative but as a natural extension of a broader vision of "lifelong music engagement" that spans the age continuum from early childhood (Teeny Maestros) through to adult amateur participation (e.g. the L64 choir). Stephen Mannings' ambition since 2012 has been to extend the reach of the cathedral's music tradition "beyond the choir stalls," developing what he characterises as an "organic" expansion that deliberately moves away from exclusionary models rooted in boarding choir schools and elite classical training. Instead, the programme strives to democratise

access to choral music, offering high-quality musical experiences to children from a wide variety of socio-economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

As another music leader noted, the programme's pedagogical design "does a really effective job of introducing both or different styles of music in different ways and I think it helps make all of it a little more accessible than what it would have been otherwise." In this view, accessibility is not merely logistical, but aesthetic and cultural—lowering perceived barriers to traditions of sacred music that might otherwise appear alien or elitist. This ethos is guided by Manning's belief that "music is a universal language"—a medium that binds communities, nurtures individual expression and acts as a gateway to deeper spiritual and emotional experiences. As one music staff member observed, music allows children to "feel connected with something deeper than what they see"—whether or not that is framed explicitly in religious terms. The vision also reflects a civic commitment to the broader community, positioning the cathedral as a hub not only of worship, but of education, musical excellence and community engagement.

The Operational Strategy and Delivery of the Schools Singing Programme

The operational model of the Schools Singing Programme is robust, progressive and strategically adaptive. It is shaped by three key elements: Curriculum Integration; Creative Pedagogy and Musical Innovation; and Strategic Expansion and Institutional Integration.

First, recent developments show a conscious move from event-led models (e.g., 10-week projects leading to a single *Big Sing* performance) toward a curriculum-led model, responding to the National Plan for Music Education and the Model Music Curriculum (DfE, 2022). As one staff member noted, "The programme is curriculum driven to help schools box off those points basically." This includes core components such as voice development, musicianship, improvisation, composition and intercultural awareness. With an emphasis on progression across the academic year, with clearly defined Learning Outcomes (LO) and thematic foci for each term, musical learning is scaffolded and progressive, with differentiated delivery across Key Stages 1 and 2, allowing for vertical alignment (e.g., Year 3 pupils progressing through a consistent learning model into upper years). As Stephen Mannings explained,

> "the past *Big Sings* we did were all thematic... these are curriculum based, using repertoire as a means to do the curriculum."
>
> Mitch Holland further adds, "We've created five Learning Objectives (LO) to be delivered across the whole year alongside those eight points… [including] copy and identify melodic and rhythmic patterns, describe subject-specific techniques, perform, adapt and devise patterns, and examine and compare music."

Second, musical content is increasingly bespoke. The team creates arrangements (e.g., partner songs for 'Away in a Manger'), commissions new works (e.g., a centenary piece by female composer Annabelle Lee Revak inspired by Tracey Emin's installation), and fosters cross-genre fluency, blending traditional coronation repertoire with Eurovision favourites to maintain relevance and excitement. Moreover, the team practices adaptive pedagogy, tailoring content and delivery to the specific demographic and logistical realities of each school. Sessions are typically 40 minutes per week per school, with teaching styles adjusted depending on school culture, group dynamics, and levels of prior musical engagement. In practice, this design allows for bespoke adaptation to different school contexts while maintaining a shared pedagogical framework. This is seen in how repertoire is selected and tailored: "We had a really good session on Monday just talking about different ideas we had… what kind of category they fitted into." Such collaborative

planning ensures musical content is pedagogically robust and culturally sensitive. In one notable example, the music team referenced the challenge of teaching songs with references to monarchy or God, particularly in settings with high numbers of Muslim pupils. However, through sensitive discussions and inclusive interpretations of lyrics, participation was not only sustained but significantly increased. As one leader noted,

> "they enjoyed both [coronation and Eurovision songs] and it was nice to see that. It was lovely to see, week to week the improvements, especially in some of the schools where it was clear they hadn't really tackled some of the kind of music we had been doing."

Third, the SSP is expanding across the Diocese of Liverpool—with ambitions for outreach hubs in Wigan, St Helens and beyond. New roles are planned to support these expansions, with a preference for recruiting local talent to foster regional ownership. Further, spiritual elements are subtly integrated through metaphor-rich themes (e.g., light, journeying, mystery) rather than overt evangelism. This reflects a "soft spiritual pedagogy", allowing children of all faiths and none to engage meaningfully without alienation.

The Values and Impacts of the Schools Singing Programme

Reflecting on the value of the SSP, staff reveal a profound awareness of the layered significance of choral participation—far surpassing musical instruction alone. The Schools Singing Programme is perceived to offer an extensive range of benefits, spanning musical and cultural, educational, and social and wellbeing domains.

Musically, the programme fosters vocal technique—particularly the cultivation of the head voice, which is characteristic of the English cathedral choral tradition and contrasts with the chest-dominant, pop-inflected styles that many children initially adopt—while also providing exposure to a diverse repertoire, ensemble skills, musical literacy and composition. Although this technique reflects the aesthetic ideals of Anglican liturgical music, it is one among various valid vocal approaches used across different musical and educational contexts. Importantly, it introduces children to the classical choral tradition—not as an inaccessible elite form, but as a living cultural heritage they can embody. It provides structured pathways into the cathedral's choral life, enabling a broader range of children to engage with classical choral repertoire. One music staff observed: "Every single child who came was offered a place in one of the youth choirs… that just hasn't happened before." The significance of this pipeline is magnified by the diversity of the intake. Unlike traditional cathedral schools that draw from fee-paying institutions, Liverpool's model is localised, non-selective and deeply embedded in community engagement: "We don't have a cathedral school and take our singers from 20 different schools… this pattern, getting the widest net possible and gradually getting them interested in music has got legs way beyond the traditional method." Culturally, the programme enables encounters with both British choral traditions and a broader spectrum of musical styles. The deliberate juxtaposition of coronation anthems with Eurovision hits in one term encapsulates this hybridity. In doing so, children gain exposure to musical forms they might never encounter otherwise. Performing in the cathedral—"a building robed in prayer"—offers an intense, awe-inspiring cultural encounter. As one staff member observed, simply standing in the space can be transformative, particularly for children from deprived or non-Christian backgrounds. The programme is also a counterweight to cultural elitism, offering access to classical repertoire without demanding private education or ecclesiastical conformity. As a result, the cathedral is not positioning this solely as cultural capital in the Bourdieuian sense (Bourdieu, 2010) but rather a democratic expansion of what constitutes valued musical knowledge. As a music staff member noted, musical education does not need to be

preserved to places that have chapels, such as in his own education, but "it could be spread anywhere," so that everybody should have access to music education.

From a curricular perspective, music staff are acutely aware of the mounting pressures schools face and the precarious place of music within the wider educational landscape: "Music is not the priority. It never is, no matter how supportive some of your staff might be, over things will take over music when need be," recounting how a long-planned concert was derailed by a last-minute athletics tournament. Nevertheless, the educational value of the programme is widely affirmed across cognitive, affective and linguistic domains. The curriculum deliberately fosters cross-curricular literacy, with staff commenting that regular music reading enhances children's broader academic skills: "If you've got your reading improved you're going to see all the other curriculum areas enhanced by the ability to read and also the ability to listen carefully and respond." Indeed, staff articulated a belief that singing enhances literacy (through lyric reading and repetition), numeracy and cognitive sequencing (via rhythm and form), listening and memory skills, language development (particularly through learning in other languages and musical terminology). A strong case is made for the link between music and general academic attainment, echoing arguments made in educational scholarship that link music participation to enhanced academic outcomes (Hallam, 2010). This mirrors wider research into the benefits of music education on literacy and numeracy (Hallam, 2010; Welch, 2017).

The social benefits of the programme are equally palpable. Music staff frequently spoke about the capacity of music to foster teamwork, self-confidence and cross-cultural bonding. They frequently mentioned the programme's power to build friendships across class, ethnicity and interest groups; enhance teamwork, cooperation and social confidence; and soften peer hierarchies through shared artistic achievement. Singing here acts as social glue, bonding disparate children in a common project, even those initially reticent or culturally hesitant. As a music staff member expressed, "I just like watching kids in synergy working together… sharing a bond… singing with somebody they don't know." In another instance, staff noticed how previously hesitant children began to flourish: "A kid would get sent out, towards the start… they came back 10 minutes later, at the end of the session they're singing with totally full voice." Staff expressed a strong belief in the social-emotional impact of choir membership, with particular emphasis on children's enjoyment, personal confidence and social development: "There are many times where I've been watching some of Mitch's rehearsals in junior choir and I've seen some of the older girls down one of the back rows just start making up dance moves to all of the songs," a moment both humorous and emblematic of the relaxed yet meaningful engagement fostered within sessions. Such glimpses attest to what Small (1998) might describe as "musicking": the active process by which music-making builds social meaning and community. These anecdotal insights echo the social psychology of group music-making, which links choral singing to increased pro-social behaviour and emotional resilience (Bailey and Davidson, 2005; Dingle *et al.*, 2013).

Perhaps most powerfully, staff narratives revealed a deep appreciation for the affective and embodied benefits of participation, noting marked improvements in confidence, emotional regulation and mental wellbeing. The therapeutic dimension of singing is well-established in scholarship on music and wellbeing (MacDonald *et al.* 2012), and staff accounts strongly support this. Singing brings physiological benefits (deeper breathing, endorphin release), while creating a space for spiritual connection—whether framed religiously or as a sense of wonder, beauty and belonging. Choral singing was also described as offering relief from the pressures of academic life and daily stressors, functioning as a "bit of relief in a day that's filled with lots of difficult lessons". Spiritual and wellbeing dimensions are thus subtly embedded throughout the project. While

explicit proselytising is absent, the cathedral setting offers space for contemplative experience and what one staff member termed "connection": "Music is inherently spiritual… it connects us with something deeper than what we see." Another elaborated: "To be content in that [cathedral] space… that is really something." The significance of the architectural and symbolic environment is thus not incidental but a deliberate part of the programme's affective landscape. For some children, particularly those from Muslim or non-religious families, singing in the cathedral was a significant rite of passage. One commented that participation offers young people the chance to experience "being a cog in a beautiful turning wheel"—a poetic metaphor that speaks to the communal synchrony and self-transcendence frequently associated with ensemble music-making.

In sum, the views of the music staff reveal a multi-faceted pedagogical philosophy: one that values musical excellence alongside social cohesion, inclusivity and holistic development. Their insights foreground the broader cultural and social ecology in which choral singing takes place, revealing the choral programme not simply as a musical enterprise but as a locus of belonging, aspiration and joy. The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme is a strategically sophisticated, pedagogically rigorous, and ethically compelling model of musical outreach. It exemplifies how a historically sacred institution can reinvigorate tradition through pluralism, and how music can become a portal for educational excellence, social integration, community access and spiritual exploration. Through its thoughtful design and expansive reach, the programme not only enriches the lives of thousands of children, but also redefines what cathedral music—and cathedral mission—can mean in the twenty-first century. Thus, the Schools Singing Programme represents a forward-thinking model of musical outreach grounded in pedagogical integrity, institutional ambition and a holistic vision of human development. It demonstrates how cathedral music can transcend its traditional confines and become a catalyst for educational, social and spiritual flourishing in contemporary society.

The children participants ranged in age from 7 to 10 years old, with the majority (56%) being 8 years old. Smaller proportions of participants were aged 7 (19%), 9 (17%) and 10 (8%), with no responses from children younger than 7 or older than 10. Regarding gender identity, 47% of participants identified as girls, 45% as boys and 8% selected "Other", providing a range of self-descriptions. Those in the "Other" category expressed their identities in diverse ways, including familial roles such as "brother", "sister" and "son", as well as personal expressions like "happy person" and "good at art". These responses reflect the children's varied ways of understanding and articulating their identities within the context of the Schools Singing Programme. When asked about their enjoyment of school, the majority of children expressed a positive attitude, with 42% strongly agreeing and 29% agreeing that they liked school. A smaller proportion remained neutral (17%), while 7% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that most children had a generally positive relationship with their primary school environment, which may have positively influenced their engagement with the singing programme.

Children Experiencing Poverty

Given Liverpool's well-documented disparities in socioeconomic conditions, the location of the participating schools within the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 framework provides essential context for understanding the lived experiences of participating children (Table 4, Figure 6). This is because the Liverpool City region faces significant levels of deprivation, with several of its local authority districts ranking among the most deprived areas in the UK (Liverpool City Council, 2020). Within the LC region, Knowsley ranks 2nd and Liverpool ranks 3rd on the IMD2019 index, indicating high levels of deprivation compared to other districts. Liverpool itself is the third most deprived local authority area in the country, with high levels of income, employment, health and housing deprivation. For example, 33.6% of children in Liverpool live in poverty, significantly impacting their life chances. Regions like Sefton and Wirral show more mixed levels of deprivation, with some areas faring better, though pockets of deprivation remain. Compared to other parts of the country, the Liverpool City Region, as a whole, struggles with higher-than-average levels of economic hardship and social inequality, with consequences for educational achievement and music learning opportunities.

Table 4: Participating primary schools and their ranking according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019.

Primary School	Local Authority	Neighbourhood LSOA data
St Mary's and St Paul's Primary School	Knowsley	Amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Northwood Primary School	Knowsley	Amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Christ Church CE Primary School	Sefton	Amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Norman Pannell Primary	Liverpool Belle Vale	Amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country

Bedford Primary School	Sefton	Amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Northway Primary	Liverpool Wavertree	Amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Liverpool College Primary School	Liverpool Greenbank	Amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Greenbank Primary School	Liverpool Greenbank	Amongst the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
LIPA Primary School	Liverpool Riverside	Amongst the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Huyton with Roby CE	Knowsley	Amongst the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Evelyn Community Primary School	Knowsley	Amongst the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Emmaus RC & CE Primary School	Liverpool Croxteth	Amongst the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Woolton Primary School	Liverpool Woolton	Amongst the 40% *least* deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Mosspits Primary School	Liverpool Wavertree	Amongst the 40% *least* deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Gilmour Primary School	Liverpool Garston	Amongst the 40% *least* deprived neighbourhoods in the country
Childwall CoE Primary School	Liverpool Childwall	Amongst the 10% *least* deprived neighbourhoods in the country

From an early stage, children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds encounter systemic barriers, inhibiting their ability to flourish within the educational system (Barnard and Goulden 2009; HM Government Child Poverty Unit, 2009). The effects of an inequitable start in life mean that children living in poverty frequently lag behind their more affluent peers throughout each phase of schooling (Child Poverty Action Group 2020). Educational trajectories are profoundly shaped by familial circumstances and the broader socio-geographic context. As Horgan (2007: 56) observes, children growing up in poverty come to internalise their social status from a young age, developing an expectation that their educational experience and outcomes will be inferior to those of more privileged children. This diminished sense of agency results in lower confidence in navigating the path to and through higher education (Horgan, 2007; Dweck, 2006). Moreover, such children often adopt negative attitudes toward education, shaped by frequent disappointment and a sense of alienation (Sutton *et al.* 2007: 35–36). Consequently, educational underachievement remains closely correlated with social and economic disadvantage (Hirsh, 2008; Barnard and Goulden, 2009). Chowdry, Crawford and Goodman (2011) identify several factors contributing to children's educational disadvantage, including parental and child aspirations, attitudes, behaviours and the broader home learning environment. Educational outcomes are shaped by a complex interplay of psychosocial attributes—such as self-esteem and confidence (Jessor and Jessor, 1977; Steinberg, 1996)—as well as institutional influences like teacher expectations, curriculum content and policy frameworks (Harris and Ranson, 2005). Cultural context, particularly parental educational background and values, also plays a crucial role (Croll 2002; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Parental support is widely recognized as central to pupil attainment, with family background and involvement emerging as key determinants of educational success (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002; Gutman and Akerman 2008; Department for Children, Schools

and Families, 2008; Castro *et al.*, 2015). However, the nature and extent of such involvement are shaped by structural inequalities, including social class, maternal education, financial hardship and single parenthood (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). For families living in poverty, the hidden costs of schooling can be prohibitive, and parental concern alone cannot offset the lived realities of deprivation. In such contexts, schools are often viewed with mistrust (Chapman and Harris, 2004), leading to low engagement among children.

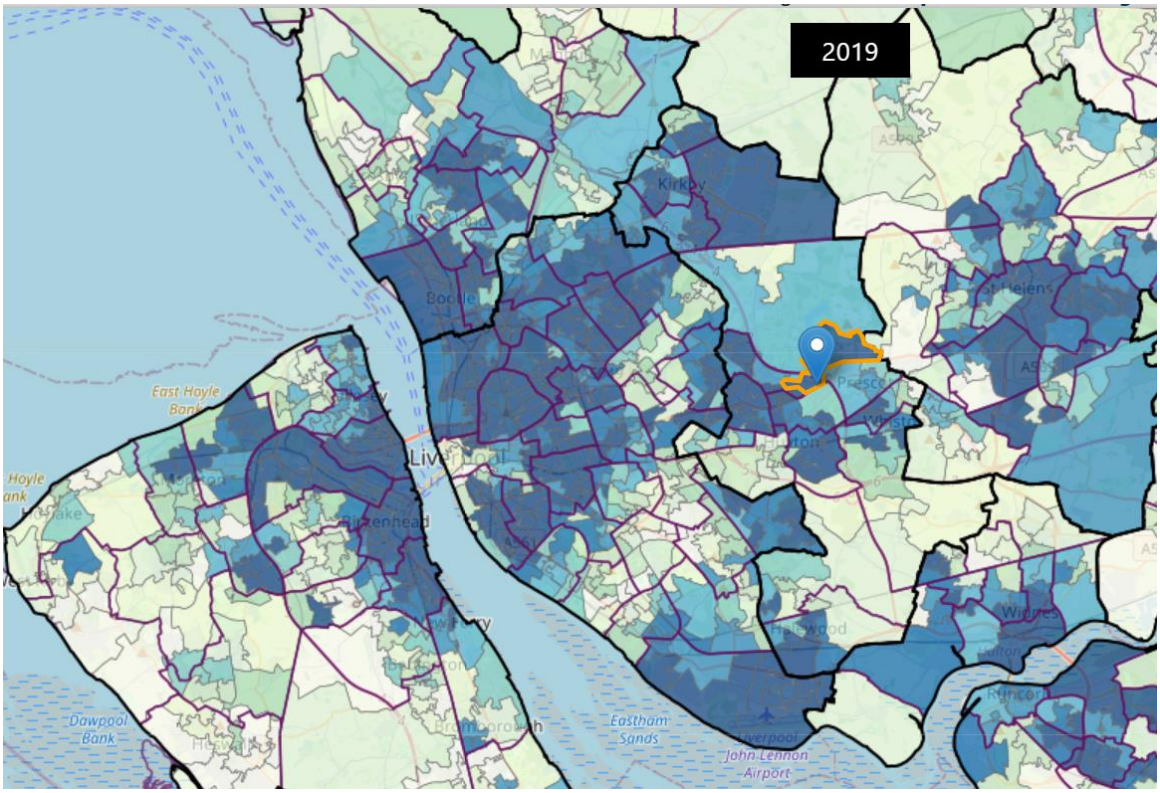


Figure 6: Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). For example, this map shows the location of St Mary's and St Paul's Primary School in Knowsley Local Authority, which is amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (Source: https://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html; reproduced with permission). The above Table 4 lists the location of all participating primary schools and their ranking in the Neighbourhood LSOA data.

Ultimately, the interplay of familial, cultural, institutional and material factors underscores the persistent link between poverty and educational inequality, with profound impacts on children's opportunities for meaningful music education (Hallam, 2015; Henley and Barton, 2022; Ofsted, 2023). Moreover, poorer families in the UK are at risk of their children being priced out of learning to play musical instruments (Musicians Union, 2018), which continue to impact pupil success (Abril and Bannerman, 2014). This exclusion not only limits children's creative and expressive potential but also diminishes their future career prospects in a sector that increasingly demands early, sustained musical training (Bull, 2019). Moreover, the loss of musical opportunities risks compounding the cultural capital deficit experienced by children from lower-income families, thereby reinforcing broader social inequalities (Bourdieu, 2010). As a result, the musical and cultural diversity of the UK's creative industries may suffer, becoming progressively less representative of the society it seeks to reflect and engage (Brook *et al.* 2020).

Against this backdrop, Liverpool Cathedral plays a pivotal role by engaging children from across the Liverpool City Region and offering an inclusive approach to choral music education. The socioeconomic context underscores the societal impact of Liverpool Cathedral's choral music outreach, which facilitates musical and educational opportunities, and raises aspirations,

confidence and hope among disadvantaged children. Bringing educational, social, cultural and wellbeing benefits to children and families facing social and economic challenges, the cathedral's Schools Singing Programme also counteracts the negative impacts of low socioeconomic status. In such a deprived environment, the cathedral's SSP plays an essential role in enriching the lives of poorer children by raising their aspirations, developing skills to thrive in education and fostering social wellbeing.

Children's Prior Musical Experiences

The vast majority of participating children enjoy music, with 80% expressing agreement or strong agreement. Specifically, 57% strongly agreed, 23% agreed, while only 6% disagreed and 15% remained neutral. While enjoyment alone does not necessarily indicate deeper meaning, such consistently high levels of positive response suggest that music holds an important and valued place in the everyday lives of these young people—contributing not only to pleasure, but also to their sense of identity, engagement and emotional wellbeing. In terms of musical preferences, the responses reveal a strong inclination towards pop music, which was mentioned repeatedly and often in combination with other genres. Other popular genres include rock, dance, rap and techno, with occasional mentions of jazz, classical and heavy metal. Some children referenced specific artists or songs, including Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, Lady Gaga, The Beatles and ABBA, as well as K-pop and even the national anthem. These preferences align with patterns of cultural capital and class distinctions. Given that these children predominantly come from economically disadvantaged areas in the Liverpool City Region, their tastes gravitate towards commercial, mainstream genres rather than forms of music traditionally associated with elite cultural capital. The findings suggest that engagement with cathedral choral music, which is traditionally rooted in classical and liturgical traditions, may present a cultural disconnect for many school children participating in the Schools Singing Programme.

The data on children's engagement with singing and their awareness of Liverpool Cathedral provides valuable insights into potential challenges and opportunities for choral outreach initiatives. While a significant proportion of children enjoy singing, with 66% either agreeing (19%) or strongly agreeing (47%), a notable 23% remain neutral and 12% actively dislike singing. This suggests that while a majority find singing enjoyable, a substantial minority may not yet see it as a meaningful or pleasurable activity. Encouragingly, all children (100%) reported learning about music in school, which provides a solid foundation for engaging them in structured choral programmes. However, the quality and content of this musical education are not specified, meaning there may be significant variation in how children perceive and engage with music within their school settings. The data also reveals that 34% of respondents do not know Liverpool Cathedral, which may limit initial interest or participation. These findings underscore the importance of community engagement efforts that introduce the cathedral as an inclusive and accessible venue, particularly in areas where cultural participation is lower.

Children's Musical Expectations for the Schools Singing Programme

When asked about their expectations and anticipation, the data reveal a generally positive attitude towards participating in the Schools Singing Programme itself, with 65% of children expressing excitement (37% strongly agree, 28% agree) about taking part in the choral workshops. However, 22% remain neutral, and 13% (7% disagree, 6% strongly disagree) express reluctance or disinterest. However, 22% remain neutral, and 13% (7% disagree, 6% strongly disagree) express reluctance or disinterest. While a significant proportion of children are looking forward to the experience, this level of uncertainty or disengagement suggests that some may feel apprehensive, possibly due to a

lack of prior experience, low confidence or unfamiliarity with structured choral activities. One child expresses this hesitancy, stating that they want "to not be nervous", while another writes that they hope to "build my confidence". The repeated mention of confidence-building suggests that, for many, singing is both an exciting and daunting prospect, with emotional barriers that need to be overcome before they can fully enjoy the experience.

When asked what they hope to learn, many children focus on the idea of vocal improvement. Responses such as "how to sing beautifully", "to sing better", and "better singing" demonstrate a clear desire for technical vocal development. Others are more specific in their ambitions, with one child expressing curiosity about "how people do high music and low music", while another hopes to learn "how to sing long without always taking breaths". The importance of high and low notes emerges frequently in the responses, with several children explicitly stating their intention to "learn high notes" or "how high the high notes can go". Alongside these aspirations for vocal skill development, there is also a strong emphasis on personal growth. Several children indicate that they see the choir as an opportunity to develop self-assurance, repeatedly mentioning a desire to "be more confident" or to "build my confidence". These statements suggest that, beyond singing itself, children view the experience as one that might empower them socially and emotionally.

The enthusiasm for learning new songs is striking. Many children simply mentioned "new songs" or variations of "lots of songs", while others cite specific pieces such as 'Spaceman' by Sam Ryder or 'Puppet on a String'. One child enthusiastically states they want to learn "everything in the world", while another writes that they hope to learn "every single song". The emphasis on pop music is also clear, with Eurovision emerging as another notable reference, with one child even hoping to "learn the history about Eurovision", suggesting that for some, the choir is also an opportunity to engage with broader cultural phenomena. The responses indicate that the children's musical expectations are shaped by contemporary and mainstream influences, and their engagement with the programme may be strengthened if they see these preferences reflected in the repertoire.

The question of what children are most looking forward to reveals three dominant themes: the opportunity to perform in Liverpool Cathedral, the social aspect of singing, and the excitement of being out of school for the day. The cathedral is referenced frequently, often in enthusiastic but phonetically creative spellings such as "cofeadrel", "caredral", and "cathebdpal". Many children simply write "the Cathedral" or "singing in the Cathedral", while others expand on their excitement, saying they are looking forward to "performing in the choir" and "singing in front of lots of people". For some, the anticipation is tied to their sense of family and external validation, as one child states they are most excited "for my parents to see me sing". The grandeur of the cathedral and the act of performing in such a space clearly hold symbolic significance for many children, reinforcing the idea that singing in such a setting is an aspirational and memorable experience.

Alongside this, many children are eager for the social elements of participation, often citing "singing with my friends" as their main source of anticipation. Others highlight the enjoyment factor, with responses such as "having fun and performing" and "to have an amazing day". However, a notable subset of responses focuses less on the choir itself and more on the opportunity to miss school, with statements like "to get out of school today!!!" and "having more fun getting out of school". While this does not necessarily indicate disinterest in singing, it suggests that, for some children, their engagement with the programme may initially be framed more as an exciting school trip than a long-term musical commitment.

Not all children display enthusiasm, however. Some express uncertainty, writing "I don't know" or "I'm not sure". A small number are explicitly unengaged, with one child stating that they are looking forward to "nothing", while another simply responds, "to finish". These responses, while in the minority, indicate that not all participants enter the programme with a strong sense of excitement or motivation. This highlights the importance of fostering a welcoming and engaging atmosphere that can help convert initial neutrality or reluctance into active enjoyment. The data suggests strong potential for engagement, but also highlights the need for thoughtful and tailored approaches to ensure all children feel included and excited about their participation. Since many children want to learn new songs and build confidence, the selection of choral repertoire should strike a balance between familiar, accessible pieces and the more traditional choral material that may initially feel more foreign to them.

Music, Taste and Class

An analysis of what children valued most musically, as evinced in their self-reported musical preferences in their choir journals, reveals clear trends, shaped not only by the repertoire presented but also by broader cultural, social and economic factors. The 96 responses in the final section, "About the Music", show a marked preference for contemporary popular music, particularly 'Space Man' by Sam Ryder, alongside notable mentions of 'Waterloo' by ABBA and 'Love Shine a Light' by Katrina and the Waves. Traditional and classical pieces, including patriotic or liturgical works, received significantly fewer mentions. These preferences reflect broader trends in contemporary youth culture, where the valorisation of "cool" and accessible music aligns with neoliberal cultural narratives that prioritize individual taste, globalized pop culture and media visibility. Importantly, the socioeconomic context of these children—many of whom come from some of the most deprived areas in the Liverpool City Region—may further inform their musical tastes. In such contexts, access to classical or "high art" music may be limited, while popular music serves as both an accessible cultural resource and a form of social capital.

Specifically, the overwhelming popularity of 'Space Man'—cited by over half of the respondents—highlights the appeal of contemporary pop music with mainstream media exposure. Sam Ryder's song, as the UK's Eurovision entry, was heavily promoted and reached broad audiences through television and online platforms. Comments like "I loved Space Man", "Space Man is the best", and "singing Space Man was fun" underscore how familiarity and media presence influence preference. From a cultural capital perspective, Pierre Bourdieu's (2010) notion of "legitimate" culture traditionally privileges classical and art music. However, in today's neoliberal context, the prominence of global pop, especially through platforms like TikTok, YouTube and Spotify, has reframed cultural legitimacy. Children from working-class backgrounds, whose homes may not cultivate traditional "highbrow" cultural exposure, instead draw on widely accessible pop culture as their cultural capital. Meanwhile, 'Waterloo' and 'Love Shine a Light' were frequently mentioned, with comments such as "I liked Waterloo", "Waterloo and Space Man were my favourites", and "Love Shine a Light was fun to sing". Both songs are upbeat, rhythmic and associated with celebratory contexts—Eurovision, in particular, fosters a sense of festivity and togetherness. Their accessibility lies in catchy melodies and danceable rhythms, aligning with young people's preference for energetic, feel-good music. In economically deprived areas, communal celebrations and popular media events may offer welcome opportunities for collective joy and escapism. These songs, saturated with Eurovision's spectacle and optimism hosted by Liverpool in 2024, resonate with children seeking uplifting experiences.

By contrast, traditional repertoire such as the 'National Anthem', 'Patriotic Melody', and 'Ukrainian Prayer' received minimal mentions, with only isolated comments like "the song I liked most was 'Patriotic Melody'" or "God Save the King". This echoes a general declining trend in young people's engagement with classical or ceremonial music, particularly among working-class youth who may not perceive such genres as relevant to their lived experiences. From a cultural standpoint, neoliberal values have shifted cultural capital away from classical or "elite" forms of music toward more omnivorous tastes—yet this omnivorousness still privileges popular genres. While middle-class children might embrace classical music as a form of distinction, working-class children, like those in this project, may resist or show indifference toward music associated with national institutions or historical traditions that feel distant from their realities. Meanwhile, children's preference for songs like 'Space Man' also reflects the strong influence of global media and contemporary pop culture. The concept of "cool", which has become central to youth identity formation, often marginalizes classical or traditional music. As one child wrote, "Space Man is cool, like space and fun", underscoring how themes of "hip" and "cool" appeal to young listeners. Additionally, neoliberal cultural narratives valorize personal choice and consumer identity. By preferring globally recognized pop songs, children align themselves with broader cultural trends, enhancing social belonging and peer validation. Conversely, the absence of references to liturgical or classical pieces suggests that these genres lack the same cultural currency among peers.

Overall, children's musical tastes and preferences reflect a strong alignment with contemporary popular music, particularly globalized pop culture disseminated through media channels. Preferences for upbeat Eurovision entries and Sam Ryder's 'Space Man' indicate a desire for familiarity, fun, and peer-approved content. Conversely, the minimal engagement with classical, patriotic, or liturgical repertoire suggests that such genres hold little cultural capital in these children's social worlds. These findings highlight how class, cultural capital and neoliberal cultural narratives intersect to shape young people's musical tastes. In contexts of economic deprivation, accessible pop music not only entertains but also serves as a vital resource for identity, belonging and cultural participation.

The Demographic Backgrounds of Adult Participants

This section introduces the adult participants associated with the Schools Singing Programme—primarily school staff, parents and carers—providing an overview of their diverse sociodemographic backgrounds and the varied ways in which they connect with Liverpool Cathedral. While children are the primary participants in the programme, these adults play a vital role in its delivery, support and reception, offering valuable insights into its educational and cultural impact. Understanding these aspects thus offers important context for interpreting their experiences and the broader impact of the programme. The questionnaire captured a mostly local demographic from the Liverpool City region (86%), reflecting the SSP's reach in 2023 prior to its strategic expansion across the wider Diocese of Liverpool. In terms of ethnic representation, the questionnaire results reflect a predominantly White British demographic (73%) alongside some representation from White other, Asian and mixed-ethnicity backgrounds (27%). Occupationally, the questionnaire highlights a fairly balanced representation across different socioeconomic groups, whereby the largest group of respondents identified as working in "Professional/Traditional" occupations (41%) and "Other" (27%), including retired individuals and those without an occupation. A further 14% of respondents worked in managerial or administrative roles, while 5% identified as working in clerical or intermediate roles, and 9% in technical or craft-based occupations. The educational background of respondents reflects a high level of formal education, with 77% holding university-level qualifications, while the vast majority

of respondents (82%) had attended public or state-run schools, while only 9% had attended independent or private schools. Considering the small sample size, these findings nevertheless suggest that the Schools Singing Programme broadens access to cathedral music, reaching parents and teachers from a range of professional and educational backgrounds, while overcoming certain structural barriers, such as economic constraints and class-based cultural capital.

The questionnaire reveals a clear trend in participation in Liverpool Cathedral, with participants engaging primarily due to its educational outreach. This questionnaire demonstrates a balanced demographic of participants aged 25–44 (45%) and 45 or older (56%), reflecting the younger age range of parents of young children or their teachers, alongside the older age range of grandparents or headteachers. This group is also less religiously affiliated. Only 59% identified as Christian, while 36% reported no religious affiliation at all. This indicates that the value of the Schools Singing Programme is determined by the perceived educational benefits of music, rather than by religious identity, and thereby has the potential to reach participants who might not otherwise engage with cathedral-based activities—a younger, more secular and diverse audience, including religiously unaffiliated families.

A consistent trend in the questionnaire is the balanced gender ratio, with 52% of respondents identifying as women and 48% as men. This near-equal representation suggests that both men and women take an active role in their children's musical education at the primary school level, reflexive of the generational turn in parental engagement, where fathers and male teachers are increasingly involved in their children's schooling, extracurricular activities and musical development. The questionnaire also reveals a strong dominance of heterosexual participation, with 95% of respondents identifying as heterosexual and only 5% identifying as bisexual. Notably, no respondents identified as gay, lesbian or another orientation, which suggests that structural biases in school settings reinforce traditional nuclear family models and, with it, heteronormative social structures.

The representation of individuals with disabilities or long-term health conditions influences the accessibility and sustainability of participation in cathedral music. The Schools Singing Programme questionnaire records a 24% proportion of respondents with disabilities, resonating with the proportionally higher school-age population in the Liverpool City region that receive Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support. This suggests that some school children with disabilities, including neurodivergent children, may experience sensory sensitivities that can affect their comfort or engagement during large-scale events. While Liverpool Cathedral's spacious architecture may diffuse rather than intensify sound, the unfamiliarity of the environment, the presence of large crowds, and the scale of the occasion itself may still pose challenges for children with heightened sensory needs.

Some respondents also noted that transport limitations and scheduling conflicts disproportionately impact disabled individuals and those with caregiving responsibilities, further restricting participation among families navigating both disability and childcare. One parent reflected, "The young children I care for are Autistic and it is hard sometimes to attend an event that may last longer than an hour," highlighting how sensory sensitivities and attention span must be carefully managed. Another shared, "Kids finish [school] 3:15, home 3:40, changed and snack. Very difficult to get to the Cathedral for 4pm practice," pointing to the often-invisible labour of post-school routines. Others commented on mobility difficulties and the strain of long travel times: "It's a 50-minute drive and quite a walk from the train station. This will put me off," and "Parking and steps are difficult. The concert is too late for younger kids". Such responses make visible the compound

barriers faced by families, whose ability to engage is mediated by access, time and caregiving complexity—factors that must be considered in making cathedral music education genuinely inclusive.

Adults' Relationship with Liverpool Cathedral

The Schools Singing Programme (SSP) participants displayed a relationship with Liverpool Cathedral that was primarily educational rather than religious. The SSP serves as an entry point for families and teachers to engage with cathedral music, fostering a connection through primary school children's participation in choral activities. It is therefore not surprising that none of the Qu respondents considered themselves regular members of the congregation, while only 9% reported some attendance at religious services. Additionally, 34% of respondents attended non-religious events at the cathedral, reflecting a broader, community-based engagement beyond liturgical activities. Interestingly, 23% had no prior experience of Liverpool Cathedral (18% said they never/rarely attended anything and 5% have never been to the cathedral), underscoring the ways that the final *Big Sing* concert draws in entirely new, predominantly secular audiences. The qualitative responses confirmed the respondents' secular orientations:

> "I enjoy the cathedral for cultural, educational and historical visits/events but am not interested in religious events. (I am *interested* in religion as a concept but consider it an outdated construct, while at the same time recognizing that as a society we do need moral guidance and community as much as ever and much of this positive influence is of course to be found in abundance within organized religion… it is the "wrapper" of unscientific and often discriminatory beliefs and ceremony that I personally find unacceptable. I do sometimes consider joining the local Unitarians."

Some respondents are connected to the cathedral through family ties—9% of respondents had a direct relationship with a singer, while 5% are related to a staff or volunteer at the cathedral. Qualitative responses reinforce this theme, with one parent stating, "My daughter is a member of the Junior Choir, and my niece is a member of the Gilbert Scott Singers". Another participant highlighted the multigenerational nature of their connection, explaining, "My husband is an ex-lay clerk, our two sons were choristers, and my sister-in-law is a volunteer. We were married at the cathedral and have many friends in the music department". These responses suggest that while some participants' engagement is recent and linked to their children's participation, others maintain a deeper historical connection to the cathedral and its choral traditions.

Clearly, the Schools Singing Programme engages parents, teachers and young children in structured educational activities, particularly as parents and teachers supporting children's choral development. The majority of respondents (67%) had attended the Schools Singing Programme Final Concert, either on their own (10%) or with family and/or children (57%). The nature of this participation is partially relational, with 19% of respondents stating they attended because their child sings in the choir. Parental and familial engagement appears to be more linked to children's structured involvement in musical education rather than broader faith or cultural traditions. This is reflected in various parents' and grandparents' comments: "My child was singing so of course I wanted to attend to support him and his school" and "Invited by my son's family to watch my granddaughter participate". Additionally, the role of teachers and school staff is evident in Qu, specifically in the qualitative comments. One teacher explained, "I was accompanying/supervising our school children", while another noted: "The Schools Singing Programme is an incredible opportunity for our students to experience choral singing at a high level, in a space that inspires them". This highlights the educational value of cathedral music outreach, extending beyond

familial connections to institutional and pedagogical engagement. The Qu skews towards first-time engagement, with 43% of respondents attending the programme's final concert for the first time. This suggests that school outreach initiatives are particularly effective at introducing new participants to cathedral music, even if they do not necessarily continue their engagement beyond their child's involvement.

Participants attended primarily to support the children performing in the Schools Singing Programme final concert, many of whom saying that they enjoyed watching their child(ren) performing (48%), while sharing the experience with family and/or friends (52%). Their motivations were largely framed around parental pride and the transformative role of music in children's lives, including the positive impact of the experience on them (52%). One parent wrote, "I'm proud to watch my son and other children", while another said, "wonderful experience on many levels". The musical element of the concert was valued by 90% of respondents, but rather than focusing on musical excellence (as seen in Qu1), attendees described it as a learning opportunity for the children. A Headteacher noted, "The whole experience is fantastic for our children's sense of pride, belonging and musical development. As a school HT, it is great pleasure to watch them, along with other schools, and the joy they bring". Social and community aspects were highlighted by 52% of respondents, while also referencing the collective experience of seeing schools come together. One parent commented, "Good experience for team participation and meeting pupils from other schools". Finally, the impact of the cathedral space was mentioned by 48% of participants, often in relation to how it enhanced children's sense of occasion, one noting, "The project in itself is rich in scope [and] engages young children in an experience that is unique to the city of Liverpool".

The Educational, Cultural, Social and Wellbeing Value of the Schools Singing Programme

This section examines the multifaceted value of the Schools Singing Programme (SSP), capturing the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing dimensions of children's choral participation. Grounded in a mixed-methods research approach, including children's reflexive journal entries, parent and teacher questionnaire, and ethnographic observations, this part of the report explores how the SSP shapes children's musical skills, cultural understanding, social relationships and emotional health. The analysis is divided into four interrelated sub-sections: the educational value of choral participation, which highlights cognitive and musical learning; the cultural value, reflecting children's growing musical identity and cultural capital; the social value, capturing the relational dynamics fostered through group singing; and the wellbeing value, documenting the positive psychological and emotional outcomes for participating children. Together, these sections provide a comprehensive view of the transformative potential of the SSP, situating it within broader discussions about the power of music to enhance children's lives and educational trajectories.

The Educational Value of Children's Choral Participation

The Schools Singing Programme (SSP) demonstrates significant educational value, primarily serving as an entry-level choral education initiative, introducing children to the fundamentals of music and singing within a structured school setting. One key distinction is that the SSP's educational value is closely tied to school-based Learning Outcomes, with the primary focus on foundational learning. The Qu data reveals the holistic educational development fostered by the Schools Singing Programme. Respondents, which included parents and teachers, overwhelmingly highlighted the broad developmental benefits of structured singing education, particularly in terms of building confidence (79%), fostering happiness and wellbeing (79%), and exposing children to high-quality and unfamiliar music (68%). The data suggests that the programme successfully introduces children to new musical experiences while reinforcing cognitive and emotional growth, with 58% of respondents noting improvements in concentration and memory through regular singing. One parent described how the programme had been "really good for my (very shy and with low self-esteem) child's confidence. I doubt whether he sang during the concert, but we heard him singing some of the songs in the car—he never sings—and he was smiling and waving during the concert." This response underscores the transformative impact of the programme in creating a safe space for self-expression and musical participation, even for children who might initially struggle with confidence. Similarly, another parent noted, "Gaining in confidence all the time," reinforcing the programme's effectiveness in empowering children to engage with music in a way that extends beyond the classroom.

Moreover, while only a small proportion of respondents referenced the weekly journal writing (11%) as a useful exercise, it is noteworthy that the perceived educational benefits of singing itself were overwhelmingly valued. The qualitative responses emphasised themes of pride, teamwork, and social engagement, with one respondent stating, "Good experience for team participation and meeting pupils from other schools." Another parent noted that "Music is a wonderful way to join

in with others, and it can focus the mind really well." These comments underscore the social and collaborative dimension of choral singing, reinforcing its role as a powerful educational tool that extends beyond musical skill acquisition to include social bonding and collective achievement. Additionally, the responses suggest that the exposure to structured musical learning environments enhances both musical literacy and broader cognitive engagement, aligning with national educational priorities that advocate for music as a vital component of child development. One parent highlighted how their child's participation had fostered a sense of personal accomplishment, stating, "My son loves music and singing. He felt proud to be taking part in this event. He has been very excited as we got closer to the date." In summary, the data underscores that the Schools Singing Programme is not just about learning music—it serves as a catalyst for confidence, cognitive growth and emotional wellbeing, positioning it as an invaluable component of the cathedral's wider music outreach strategy.

Children's Perspectives on Educational Value

The analysis of the Schools Singing Programme (SSP) revealed that parents and adult participants overwhelmingly value the programme for its confidence-building, exposure to high-quality and unfamiliar music, cognitive benefits (such as improved concentration and memory) and overall personal development. The SSP, embedded within the National Curriculum and SIAMS requirements, has been particularly effective in introducing structured choral learning to children in school settings. However, while these perspectives offer a rich understanding of the external educational impact of the programme, they do not fully capture how children themselves perceive their learning and musical experiences. This section explores the children's self-reported learning from their participation in the choral programme, with a focus on cognitive and intellectual benefits. The analysis draws on children's reflections gathered in response to the question "What did you learn?" (n=95) and identifies key themes that align with the project's five overarching Learning Outcomes (LOs): (1) Vocal Technique, (2) Musical Understanding, (3) Performance Skills, (4) Collaborative Skills, and (5) Repertoire Knowledge. These reflections reveal how children perceived their educational gains and resonate with broader research on the cognitive benefits of music education (Hallam 2015). While the analysis centres on intellectual development, it acknowledges the interconnectedness of cognitive, social and emotional learning, particularly as children occasionally referenced increased confidence and teamwork—areas that will be further explored in subsequent sections.

A dominant theme emerging from the children's reflections was the development of vocal technique and musical skill. Many comments referenced improved control over pitch, volume and the ability to sing high notes. Children repeatedly mentioned practical strategies they believed they had acquired, notably the idea that lifting their eyebrows helped them to sing higher or louder. Comments such as "we learned if you are doing a high note to lift your eyebrows" and "To sing louder lift your eyebrows" suggest that some children interpreted physical gestures—perhaps intended for expressive engagement or posture—as vocal technique. While this specific method is not typically advocated in formal vocal pedagogy – and may reflect a misunderstanding – it nevertheless reveals children's developing awareness of the bodily dimension of singing and their attempts to embody vocal learning in tangible ways. These responses thus indicate not only the acquisition of singing skills but also a developing metacognitive understanding of how their bodies function as instruments. This kind of bodily awareness aligns with Hallam's (2015) findings that musical participation enhances fine motor skills and coordination. Beyond techniques for high notes, children also reported learning broader singing skills related to tone quality, breath control and vocal projection. Comments like "we learned singing techniques" and "I learnt how to sing

[better]" demonstrate engagement with abstract musical concepts, such as pitch accuracy and dynamic control. Such learning requires cognitive processing beyond mere rote repetition, highlighting children's ability to link physical sensations with auditory outcomes and to adapt their vocal delivery accordingly. These technical gains support the development of attention control, auditory discrimination and working memory—cognitive abilities that extend beyond music into broader educational contexts.

Another prominent theme was the acquisition of musical knowledge, particularly through learning new songs. Many children cited "learning new songs" or "learning the words to Spaceman", reflecting their engagement with the repertoire. This exposure to diverse musical genres—from popular Eurovision hits like 'Space Man' to patriotic and traditional songs such as 'Rule Britannia' and 'God Save the King'—not only broadened their cultural horizons but also required significant cognitive effort in terms of lyric retention, melodic recall and rhythmic accuracy. Some children noted that they had learned about Eurovision and its cultural context, with comments such as we "learn the history about Eurovision," indicating an understanding of how music can connect to wider cultural narratives. Relevant in this context is repertoire familiarity. The process of learning and internalising songs fosters auditory memory, sequencing skills and linguistic awareness, as children must remember lyrics, melodies and musical structures. Hallam (2015) highlights how such repertoire-based learning strengthens verbal recall and auditory processing—skills that are foundational to literacy development. By engaging with both contemporary and historical musical traditions, children also expanded their cultural literacy, learning to appreciate the diverse origins and functions of different musical styles.

Children's comments also revealed significant learning related to performance and presentation skills, particularly in memorisation, focus and audience awareness. Many noted the challenge of singing without lyric sheets, with remarks such as "I learnt all the songs we sang without the words" and "I learnt to sing in front of [an] audience". These reflections suggest the development of cognitive abilities such as working memory and attention control, as children had to retain and recall information under the pressure of public performance. Performing without visual prompts required mental rehearsal, highlighting their ability to plan, monitor and execute complex cognitive tasks—hallmarks of executive functioning. The emphasis on performance also provided opportunities for children to build cognitive stamina and manage performance-related anxiety. Comments like "I learnt how to perform in front of an audience," while remaining calm under this pressure, illustrate how the rehearsal process helped them develop strategies to stay focused and calm under pressure. These skills are transferable to other academic and life situations where concentration and confidence are essential.

While less frequently mentioned, several children demonstrated an emerging understanding of musical concepts and theory, particularly related to pitch, dynamics and rhythm. Statements such as "how people do high music and low music," "the high and low notes" and "I heave learnt how to sing deep [low] or pitch [high]" reflect the development of auditory discrimination and cognitive pattern recognition. Learning to navigate these elements requires children to analyze sounds critically, anticipate musical changes and adjust their vocal delivery accordingly—processes that engage both analytical and creative thinking. Hallam (2015) argues that such musical engagement can improve spatial-temporal reasoning, an essential cognitive skill linked to mathematics and logical problem-solving.

Although the focus of this analysis is on cognitive learning, an important emerging theme related to teamwork, listening and cognitive collaboration. Children's responses frequently highlighted the

cognitive demands of ensemble singing, particularly in terms of listening and collaboration. Children often described that working together leads to improvements and expressed ensemble awareness and timing, which underscore the cognitive complexity of singing in a group. Ensemble singing requires children to divide their attention between their own performance, the conductor's cues and the voices of their peers. This process involves simultaneous auditory processing, adaptive thinking and real-time decision-making—skills that are critical for effective communication and problem-solving in broader educational contexts. Hallam (2015) notes that these collaborative aspects of music-making promote cognitive empathy and enhance multi-tasking abilities.

Overall, the children's responses reveal that their choral participation yielded substantial cognitive and intellectual benefits. They developed not only practical singing skills but also deeper musical understanding, improved memory and enhanced cognitive coordination. Their learning extended beyond technical proficiency, encompassing cultural knowledge, collaborative abilities and executive functioning—all of which are crucial for academic success and personal development. These findings align with Hallam's (2015) research on the power of music in education, which highlights music's capacity to improve attention, memory and problem-solving skills. For children from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, such cognitive benefits are particularly significant. Participation in the choir provided an enriching educational experience that may not have been otherwise accessible, supporting the development of cultural capital and fostering a sense of intellectual achievement. As the children's reflections demonstrate, learning through music can be both deeply engaging and profoundly educational, offering cognitive tools that extend far beyond the rehearsal room.

Children's Weekly Reflections on Choral Singing

This section will explore children's reflections on their choral singing through an analysis of ten weekly entries recorded in their reflexive choir journals. Each week, children were asked to respond to three prompts: "What I learnt this week," "My favourite moment was," and "My overall score this week is [1-5] because." While the responses are often brief, sometimes one-word answers, they nevertheless provide valuable insights into the educational value of choral participation from the children's perspectives. The weekly analysis will reveal how children's reflections align with the five Learning Outcomes (LOs) of The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme Curriculum for Key Stage 2 (Figure 7). By comparing children's journal entries to the week-by-week structure of the curriculum, this section will provide a detailed, child-centred perspective on how the Schools Singing Programme fosters educational value, among other benefits. It will demonstrate that children's weekly reflections align closely with the project's five Learning Outcomes. Learning Outcome 1 (Vocal Technique) was evident in the development of singing strategies such as breath control and high-note execution. Learning Outcome 2 (Musical Understanding) was reflected in their grasp of pitch, dynamics and rhythmic structure, while Learning Outcome 3 (Performance Skills) emerged through their growing confidence and ability to memorize repertoire. Learning Outcome 4 (Collaborative Skills) was apparent in their references to teamwork and listening, and Learning Outcome 5 (Repertoire Knowledge) was fulfilled through their exposure to a wide range of songs spanning different genres and cultural contexts.

Learning Objectives – Term One

Below are the learning objectives for term one. As said above, there is a design to bring Key Stage Two to a level of parity in term one. This will be developed by staff as we become increasingly aware of the children's ability within that group. For schools that have done a lot of singing we may be able to move more quickly, for schools where this is their first engagement with the programme, we may need to move slightly slower, and work to the base line of the MMC.

Week	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	Year Five	Year Six
1	LO1 – Explore rhythms LO2 – Discover dynamics and how to use them LO3 – Expand and explore melodic range	LO1 – Explore rhythms LO2 – Discover dynamics and how to use them LO3 – Expand and explore melodic range	LO1 – To explore dotted rhythms LO2 – To discover and implement dynamics LO3 – To expand and explore melodic range		
2	LO1 – To explore more dynamics LO2 – To use call and response to create a song LO3 – To begin to explore articulation	LO1 – To explore more dynamics LO2 – To use call and response to create a song LO3 – To begin to explore articulation		LO1 – To explore more dynamics LO2 – To use call and response to create a song LO3 – To explore and implement articulation	
3	LO1 – Navigate changing time signatures LO2 – Co-ordination of voice and movement LO3 – Develop complexity of rhythms	LO1 – Navigate changing time signatures LO2 – Co-ordination of voice and movement LO3 – Develop complexity of rhythms			
4	LO1 – Exploring smooth and bouncy rhythms LO2 – Identify sequences and implement them with confidence.	LO1 – Exploring smooth and bouncy rhythms LO2 – Identify sequences and implement them with confidence.		LO1 – Exploring smooth and bouncy rhythms LO2 – Identify sequences and implement them with confidence. LO3 – To explore further dynamic range	

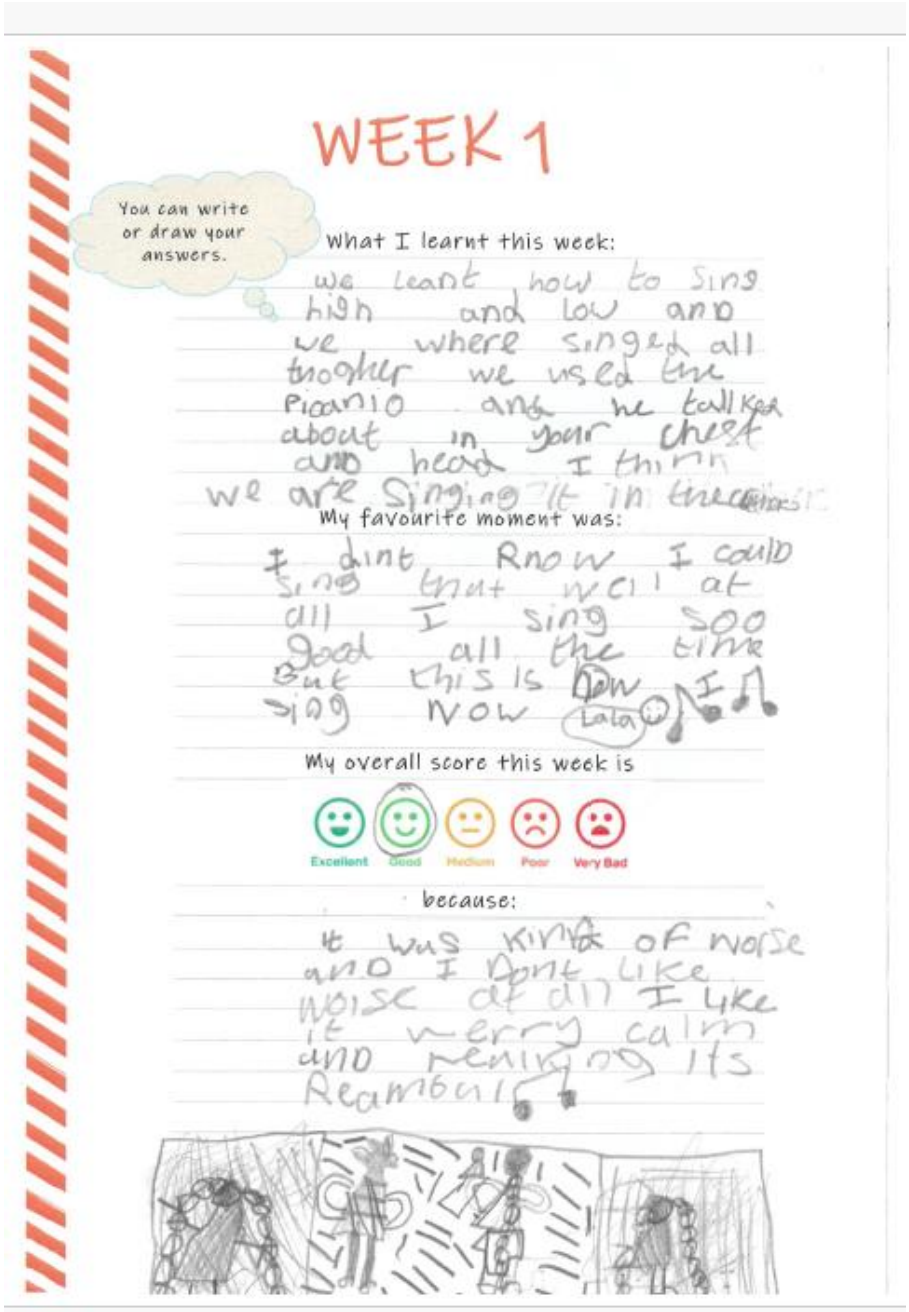
Week	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	Year Five	Year Six
5	LO1 – To use others ideas to create new sections of music LO2 – To explore movement patterns of music	LO1 – To begin to improvise around a known melody LO2 – To begin to develop an understanding of notation		LO1 – To begin to improvise around a known melody LO2 – To develop an understanding of western notation, including pitch	
6	LO1 – To use others ideas to develop music LO2 – To sing songs with regular third intervals with increasing precision	LO1 – To develop improvisational ideas LO2 – To sing songs with large intervals with increasing precision			
7	LO1 – To explore partner songs LO2 – To ensure melody independence	LO1 – To explore harmony through partner songs LO2 – To ensure melody independence			
8	LO1 – To learn a historical piece of music in another language LO2 – To explore changing rhythms	LO1 – To learn a historical piece of music in another language LO2 – To explore changing time signatures and rhythms			
9	LO1 – To develop a recognition of pulse LO2 – To explore syncopated rhythms	LO1 – To develop a recognition of pulse LO2 – To explore syncopated rhythms in rounds			
10	LO1 – To perform with energy and accuracy				

Figure 7: Detailed Learning Outcomes from Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme's Curriculum Sheet – Term One (2023), written and provided to author by Mitch Holland. The Curriculum also has a "Important Word & Skills Matrix", which specifies musical words or phrases that will be developed in children's choral education. For faith schools, the curriculum sheet also contains relevant SM & RE learning outcomes.

Week One

In Week 1, the Schools Singing Programme's intended Learning Outcomes were: LO1 To explore dotted rhythms; LO2 To discover and implement dynamics; and LO3 To expand and explore melodic range. Children's journal responses, however, reveal a different emphasis on their own learning experiences, with most reflections focusing on meeting the singer [choral leader], learning warm-ups and being introduced to songs. Repeated mentions of "we met the singer/teacher" and "we did a vocal warm-up" suggest that for many children, the most memorable aspect of their first session was the introduction to the structure of the programme rather than specific musical

concepts. However, some indirect references to dynamics and melody emerge in a number of responses. A few children noted learning about "crescendo," defined by some as "quiet to loud," indicating some engagement with LO2 (dynamics). Additionally, phrases such as "we did high and low voices" and "we learnt to sing high and low" suggest some alignment with LO3 (exploring melodic range), though these were less frequently mentioned. However, dotted rhythms (LO1) were almost entirely absent from the children's reflections, suggesting that either they were not introduced in a way that made a lasting impression or that children lacked the vocabulary to articulate this aspect of their learning. There are a number of key themes emerging in children's learning perceptions.



- *Focus on song repertoire over musical technique*: Rather than reflecting on specific musical skills, most children emphasized the songs they learned, with 'Waterloo', 'Puppet on a String',

and the 'National Anthem' receiving the most mentions.[4] Children expressed enthusiasm for these pieces, especially 'Waterloo', which was frequently described as "fun," "fast," and "exciting." The Eurovision theme of the programme (*Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing*) appears to have been engaging for many, as evidenced by comments such as "learning what Eurovision is" and "singing songs from Eurovision was fun." This suggests that the programme's repertoire-based approach effectively engaged children, even if specific learning outcomes were not always explicitly noted.

- *Enjoyment of group singing and social aspects*: Another dominant theme in the responses was the enjoyment of singing together. Phrases such as, "Singing with everyone was fun", "We all sang together, and it made me feel good", "I loved that all the voices mixed together", and "Listening to everyone sing was beautiful", demonstrate that for many children, the choral experience itself was a major highlight. Interestingly, some children specifically referenced the emotional or sensory aspects of ensemble singing, with one stating, "It was lovely to sing with others because all the voices going up and down together was so nice," while another mentioned, "I didn't know I could sing that well." This highlights the confidence-building and collective enjoyment that the programme fosters.
- *Initial hesitation and mixed reactions to choir participation*: While many children reported enthusiasm and excitement, a subset of responses indicated nervousness or uncertainty. Comments, such as "I was really scared, then I left confident.", "I was nervous at the beginning.", "I don't like singing with others.", and "It was my first time, and I wasn't sure if I did well." suggest that, for some children, starting the programme was daunting. However, several of these comments also point to a positive transformation, with some children moving from nervousness to enjoyment by the end of the session. This highlights the potential of the programme to foster personal growth and confidence, even among those initially hesitant about participation.
- *The role of warm-ups and vocal exercises*: Another frequent reference in the responses was to vocal warm-ups, which were mentioned nearly as often as the songs themselves. Many children noted learning the 'Hello' and 'Goodbye' songs, with some describing them as "funny" or "silly"—suggesting they were enjoyable and engaging but perhaps not perceived as serious learning experiences. While warm-ups are an essential preparatory tool for singers, children did not explicitly link them to the development of vocal technique. This raises an important pedagogical question: how can warm-up exercises be framed to reinforce explicit musical Learning Outcomes?
- *Mixed engagement with musical concepts*: Although dynamics (LO2) appeared in some responses (particularly references to crescendo), rhythmic elements (LO1) were largely absent from children's reflections. This suggests that dotted rhythms may not have been strongly emphasised in verbal or conceptual terms, or at least not communicated in ways that children could retain and articulate. However, from classroom observations, it was evident that many children were able to perform these rhythms accurately within the context of songs. This highlights a common phenomenon in early music learning, where practical execution often precedes formal terminology; children may embody rhythmic concepts musically without yet possessing the vocabulary to describe them. In this sense, the absence

[4] This emphasis mirrors established pedagogical practice in vocal tuition, where technique is often embedded within the rehearsal and performance of repertoire. In this sense, children's focus on songs may not indicate a lack of technical learning, but rather reflects a musically authentic way of experiencing and articulating skill acquisition—suggesting that the programme prepares children in ways consistent with more advanced choral instruction. (I am grateful to Christopher Deacon for this observation.)

of verbal references to "dotted rhythms" in children's journals does not necessarily reflect a lack of understanding or skill. Another possible explanation is that children, especially younger ones, may require more active, embodied learning experiences (e.g., clapping games, movement activities) to reinforce rhythmic concepts before they become memorable.

- *High enjoyment but varying confidence levels.* In the final self-assessment scores, 43% of children rated their experience as "Excellent" and 33% as "Good", indicating that most children enjoyed their first session. However, 19% gave a "Medium" rating, while a small minority (6%) rated their experience as "Poor" or "Very Bad." Negative responses were often linked to discomfort with group singing, difficulty remembering songs or sensory overload from loud music. One child remarked, "I don't like loud music," while others stated, "it was too hot" and "it was to long." This suggests that while most children enjoyed the experience, some required more time to adjust to the choral setting.

In summary, children engaged most with the song repertoire rather than technical musical skills. Songs from Eurovision and the 'National Anthem' were particularly well received, reinforcing the effectiveness of repertoire-based learning in capturing children's enthusiasm. The social and emotional aspects of choral participation were particularly meaningful. Many children highlighted the joy of singing together, reinforcing choral singing's community-building role. While some musical concepts (dynamics) were noted, others (dotted rhythms) were absent, which suggests that more explicit or interactive reinforcement of musical techniques may be needed. Nervousness was a common theme for first-time participants, but many children transitioned to enjoyment and confidence by the end. This underscores the confidence-building potential of the Schools Singing Programme. A small but notable group of children struggled with the experience. Sensory sensitivities, discomfort with group singing, or unfamiliarity with choral participation may need to be addressed through more differentiated or supportive approaches in future sessions. Overall, Week 1 demonstrates that children's perceptions of their learning are often different from intended learning outcomes, but the choral experience itself—learning songs, singing together and feeling part of a musical community—was the most valued aspect.

Week Two

For Week 2, the Schools Singing Programme's intended Learning Outcomes were: LO1 To explore more dynamics, LO2 To use call and response to create a song, and LO3 To begin to explore articulation. An analysis of the children's reflexive journal responses suggests that while certain aspects of these Learning Outcomes were engaged with, children's reflections once again centred more on song repertoire and social enjoyment rather than technical musical learning. Many children did not explicitly reference dynamics (LO1) or articulation (LO3) in their journal entries, but several responses suggest indirect engagement with these concepts. For example, multiple children noted learning about using their eyebrows to help reach high notes—an interpretation that, while not a formal vocal technique, may reflect a common teaching strategy in which physical gestures such as eyebrow-raising are used to encourage brightness or lift in the sound, particularly when addressing tuning issues like singing flat. Though not directly linked to articulation or precise vocal placement in pedagogical terms, such gestures can help singers—especially children—engage kinaesthetically with vocal outcomes and build intuitive links between physicality and pitch accuracy. Similarly, some children referred to the piece titled "Patriotic Melody", referring specifically to a medley of traditional British patriotic songs—'Jerusalem', 'Rule, Britannia!', and 'Land of Hope and Glory', which formed part of the coronation-themed repertoire in the Schools Singing Programme, indicating an awareness of the repertoire's ceremonial and national character.

While this term was likely adopted from how the piece was introduced in the programme, its use suggests that children were beginning to associate particular musical works with themes of national identity and occasion—even if their understanding was framed more by naming than by formal musical analysis. However, call and response (LO2) was almost entirely absent from reflections, suggesting that if this learning objective was covered, it did not leave a significant impression. As above, a number of key themes emerged in children's responses.

- *Focus on repertoire and familiarity with songs*: One of the most prominent themes was children's focus on reviewing and rehearsing previously introduced songs. A large proportion of responses simply stated that they "went over" 'God Save the King', 'Puppet on a String', 'Waterloo' and 'Save All Your Kisses for Me'. This repetition was met with mixed reactions—while some children enjoyed the familiarity, others expressed boredom or frustration with going over the same material. For instance, "We went over the same songs it was good.", "We kept doing the same stuff.", "We learnt loads of new songs!", "I mastered one of the songs!". These comments suggest that while repetition helped reinforce learning, it also raised engagement challenges for some children, particularly those who were eager for novelty.
- *Emotional and physical engagement with singing*: Several children highlighted physical sensations and techniques associated with singing. Many children referenced the use of their eyebrows to help reach high notes, offering comments such as "Our eyebrows go up wen [sic] they sing high notes," "Rolling our eyebrows for lauder [sic]," and "To sing louder lift your eyebrows." While these observations do not relate directly to articulation in the formal sense (e.g., staccato or legato phrasing), they reveal children's embodied strategies for pitch control and dynamic expression—suggesting that they were actively experimenting with physical cues to support their vocal performance. While articulation concepts were engaged with, children may not have had the technical vocabulary to fully articulate what they were learning beyond basic physical descriptions. Similarly, some children referenced breathing techniques, which aligns with exploring dynamics (LO1): "How to sing long without always taking breaths" and "Relaxing, breathing + singing high..." Others commented on rhythm and timing, writing, "We sang one of the Eurovision winners. 'Let the Love Shine a Light'. Keeping in time with the beat," and "I learnt keeping in time with the beats, learning new beats and long and short rhythms with others. I loved that people were taping their feet on the beats." While terms like "short rhythms" may suggest rhythmic duration, they may also reflect early understandings of articulation—especially features like *staccato*—which are not yet verbally distinct for young learners. This blurring of rhythmic and articulatory language is pedagogically significant, highlighting the need for more explicit framing if technical concepts are to be retained and named. At the same time, children's practical engagement with beat and phrasing was evident across many responses, indicating that musical technique was being absorbed intuitively, even when not overtly verbalised. This pattern—where repertoire dominates reflections and technique remains tacit—may also be shaped by differences in session leadership or delivery styles, a potential area for further exploration in evaluating pedagogical consistency across the programme.
- *Enjoyment of specific songs and emotional connection to music*: As in Week 1, children's enjoyment of specific songs played a major role in shaping their perception of what was valuable about the session. 'Waterloo', 'Puppet on a String', and 'Save Your Kisses for Me' were the most frequently mentioned. Many children expressed enthusiasm for these pieces, with some indicating personal or emotional connections: "Save all your kisses for me because it is really caring for me.", "I love this song (singing)", and "Learning all the songs was so fun!".

Some children expressed strong preferences and dislikes, which shows that children engaged with the repertoire on an emotional level: "the hello song [drawing of a smiley face]", "Spaceman it was really Fun" and "I learnt the song spaceman and it's a nice song.", or "The old hundreth a very good song." This suggests that while the repertoire was successful in engaging most children, individual musical tastes played a significant role in their overall enjoyment of the programme.

- *Performance confidence and social engagement*: Several children noted moments where they gained confidence in their singing: "I went in scared and left way more confident", "I got chosen to sing, and I was confident", and "I felt less nervous than in Week 1." This supports the idea that the Schools Singing Programme fosters self-assurance through performance, even for children who may initially be hesitant. The group singing aspect was also frequently mentioned as a highlight: "Singing with my friends", "Singing with others was my favourite part!", and "We got to sing all together as our whole year." The fact that social aspects were repeatedly identified as key moments of enjoyment reinforces the idea that choir participation provides not only musical education but also a valuable community-building experience.
- *Mixed engagement with dynamics and call-and-response*: While some engagement with dynamics (LO1) was observed (through references to breathing, high notes and articulation), call-and-response (LO2) was largely absent from reflections. This could mean that either this concept was not introduced in a memorable way, or that children were not able to identify it as a distinct learning outcome. One notable exception to this was observations of differences in pitch and articulation, with children noting how the teacher used higher notes compared to them: "Mr Sadler [countertenor in the cathedral choir] was singing funny", and "He did high voices then us." These observations suggest that children were noticing vocal contrast, which could be linked to call-and-response techniques, but they did not explicitly articulate this concept.
- *High enjoyment but a small percentage of disengagement*: Children's self-assessed scores for Week 2 were generally positive: 46% rated their experience as "Excellent", 34% rated it "Good", 13% rated it "Medium", 6% rated it "Poor" or "Very Bad". Negative responses were less common, but they often related to discomfort with group singing ("I don't like singing together."), lack of personal interest in certain songs ("Space Man wasn't my type of music.") and sensory issues ("It was too loud."). One response also indicated religious concerns, with one student writing, "It was Ramadan, and I do not like singing anyway—it is bad in my religion." This highlights an important consideration for inclusivity: while the majority of children enjoy and benefit from choir participation, there are some who may require alternative engagement methods or accommodations to feel fully included in the experience. Although cathedral outreach programmes are not expected to replicate the tailored support of specialist education settings, their publicly stated commitment to inclusion—particularly when working with diverse state schools—suggests a responsibility to remain attentive to varying needs. This might involve modest adaptations in delivery, closer collaboration with school staff, or simply greater awareness of how musical participation is differently experienced by children with additional needs.

In conclusion, children engaged most vividly with the songs themselves, with repertoire consistently emerging as the focal point of their reflections. While only occasional references were made to dynamics, breathing or rhythmic contrasts, these comments suggest that technical concepts such as articulation may have been absorbed kinaesthetically rather than named explicitly. This reflects the common pedagogical pattern in which vocal skills are developed through

repertoire rather than through isolated technical language—particularly at early stages of musical learning. Choral reinforcement of previous material was beneficial and enjoyable for some, but repetitive for a subset of children, who found it boring or frustrating. Some engagement with dynamics and kinaesthetic strategies—such as lifting eyebrows to assist with high notes—was observed, though these gestures reflect pitch awareness rather than articulation in the formal sense. As noted earlier, articulation itself, in terms of phrasing or contrasts such as staccato and legato, was rarely mentioned explicitly, and call-and-response activities were also not strongly noted in children's reflections. Children derived great enjoyment from singing together and felt more confident as they progressed, which reinforces the social and emotional value of the programme. A small but notable percentage of children did not enjoy the experience—likely overlapping with the 13% who had earlier expressed reluctance or disinterest in participating in the programme—with concerns ranging from personal discomfort with singing to a preference for other musical styles. Overall, week 2 demonstrated continuity from Week 1, reinforcing that song engagement, confidence-building and group participation remain the most impactful aspects of the programme for children.

Week Three

In Week 3 of children's reflexive journal responses, there is a strong continuity in the way children describe their learning experiences, with song recognition remaining the dominant mode of reflection. Additionally, children continued to highlight their enjoyment of group singing, social interaction and emotional engagement with songs, reinforcing the idea that the communal and expressive aspects of choral participation are as significant as the educational aspects. However, Week 3 also introduced a new dimension of mixed engagement, with a higher proportion of children expressing boredom or dissatisfaction compared to previous weeks. The repetition of previously learned songs appeared to have been more polarizing, with some children enjoying the reinforcement, while others found it less stimulating. The Week 3 Learning Outcomes included: LO1: Navigate changing time signatures; LO2: Co-ordination of voice and movement; LO3: Develop complexity of rhythms. Unlike previous weeks, Week 3 does contain a handful of responses that hint at engagement with rhythm and time coordination, but once again, most children describe their learning in terms of songs rather than technical concepts. While changing time signatures (LO1) and rhythmic complexity (LO3) were not explicitly mentioned, there is some evidence of engagement with voice and movement coordination (LO2). Several children mentioned high and low notes, breathing techniques and articulation exercises, which are indirectly linked to rhythmic control and musical phrasing. However, these elements do not appear to have been the primary focus of children's reflections, with the following key themes emerging in children's learning perceptions:

- *Song repertoire continues to dominate learning reflections*: As in Weeks 1 and 2, children overwhelmingly focused on the songs they learned or revisited, rather than specific musical techniques. Some of the most frequently cited pieces included 'Waterloo', 'Puppet on a String', 'Love Shine a Light', 'Save Your Kisses for Me', 'Spaceman', 'The Old Hundredth'. Many responses simply listed songs, such as "We learnt Puppet on a String and Spaceman.", "We went over Waterloo and Love Shine a Light.", and "I learnt the song Spaceman by Sam Ryder." This continues the trend from previous weeks, reinforcing that children are engaging with music primarily through song recognition rather than explicit musical skills.
- *Emerging awareness of musical coordination and articulation.* Although changing time signatures (LO1) and rhythmic complexity (LO3) were rarely mentioned, a few responses suggest

engagement with articulation and vocal coordination (LO2). Some children referenced elements of pitch and breathing techniques, such as "We learnt about high and low notes.", "We use our eyebrows to help with high notes.", and "Learning how to breathe properly when singing high notes." Additionally, a few children noted movement elements related to singing, which align with co-ordination of voice and movement (LO2): "Moving with the music helped us keep in time.", "We had to step to the beat of the song.", and "We worked at singing some of the intervals smoothly." This suggests that certain technical aspects of singing were being internalised, even if they were not always explicitly framed as musical learning outcomes in children's reflections.

- *Social enjoyment and group singing as core motivators*: As seen in previous weeks, children highly valued the social and collective elements of choir participation. Many children expressed enthusiasm for singing together, reinforcing that choral singing is perceived as a communal rather than individual activity: "Singing with my friends was my favourite moment.", "Singing with lots of people was fun!", and "I love singing together with the whole year group." This pattern highlights that children's engagement is not only musical but also social, making choir participation a key tool for confidence-building, teamwork, and shared musical experience.
- *Mixed reactions to song repetition and lesson structure*: While some children found comfort in revisiting previous songs, others expressed boredom or frustration with repetition. This is particularly evident in responses such as, "We already knew the songs.", "We kept going over the same stuff.", and "It got quite boring after a while." Compared to previous weeks, there is a slightly higher level of disengagement among some children, particularly those who may have been expecting new material each session. However, others embraced the familiarity, as seen in "We know the tune now.", and "We sang two of my favourite songs: Waterloo and Love Shine a Light." This suggests that while song reinforcement is a key pedagogical tool, it may need to be balanced with new learning challenges to maintain engagement for all participants.
- *Increased confidence and engagement with performance:* Several children continued to express growing confidence in their singing, reinforcing the programme's role in building self-assurance. Some noted, "I wasn't nervous this week!", "I felt much better about my singing.", and "I got chosen to sing a solo!". Others expressed pride in their progress, with reflections such as "I am improving a lot.", "I sang well!", and "I was proud of myself." These responses highlight that for many children, choir participation is becoming an increasingly comfortable and rewarding experience.
- *More mixed reactions and engagement levels*: Compared to previous weeks, Week 3 had a slightly larger proportion of disengaged or negative responses. Some children mentioned, "It was boring.", "I didn't really know the song.", "I was quite nervous.", and "I didn't like standing up so much." Additionally, sensory concerns and physical discomfort were raised by some children, saying, "My throat hurt from all the singing.", "It was too hot.", and "Standing up was hurting my legs.". These responses suggest that while the majority of children remain engaged, a small group experiences barriers to full participation, whether due to fatigue, discomfort or personal musical preferences. The weekly self-valuation showed, 44% rated their experience as "Excellent", 25% rated it "Good", 20% rated it "Medium", and 10% rated it "Poor" or "Very Bad". Compared to previous weeks, Week 3 thus showed a slight decline in the percentage of "Excellent" ratings and a small increase in "Medium" and "Poor" ratings, reinforcing the idea that engagement levels varied depending on individual experiences with song choice, repetition and lesson structure.

Overall, children continued to engage most with song learning, with limited explicit discussion of technical musical skills. Some references to voice and movement coordination (LO2) were observed, but rhythm and time signatures (LO1, LO3) were rarely mentioned. Confidence-building remained a key outcome, with more children reporting comfort in singing aloud. A small but persistent group of children struggled with fatigue, sensory sensitivities or even disengagement.

Week Four

By Week 4, clear patterns have solidified in how children interpreted their learning experiences. Song recognition and enjoyment remained the dominant themes, while explicit references to technical musical skills are still relatively sparse. However, this week sees a greater focus on pitch and vocal technique, particularly in terms of tuning and vocal control. Additionally, engagement levels appear to be increasingly polarized. While many children continued to enjoy the experience, a small but vocal subset expresses boredom, fatigue or frustration with repetition. This is an important consideration for the programme's structure, as it suggests that balancing reinforcement with new material is key to maintaining engagement across diverse learners. The Learning Outcomes (LOs) for week 4 included LO1: Exploring smooth and bouncy rhythms,[5] and LO2: Identifying sequences and implementing them with confidence. Unlike previous weeks, where references to musical skills were largely absent, Week 4 contained a much stronger focus on vocal precision and pitch awareness. However, there were few explicit mentions of rhythm (LO1) or identifying and implementing a musical sequence, such as a melodic or harmonic phrase repeated at a higher or lower pitch. (LO2), suggesting that while children engaged with aspects of musical structure, they did not always internalise them in a way that made them central to their reflections. Their responses in the reflexive journals revealed the following key themes:

- *Pitch awareness becomes a central focus*: Unlike previous weeks, where responses mostly revolved around song titles, Week 4 saw a strong focus on pitch control and vocal accuracy. Many children specifically mentioned working on tuning and vocal placement, demonstrating a growing awareness of their own vocal production: "We focused on pitch.", "We learnt how to perfect our pitch.", "We made sure the notes we sang were in tune.", and "We focused on our pitch on some songs we were too high with the pitch." Some children even connected pitch control to vocal technique, noting, "We use our head voice to create high pitch.", and "We can raise our eyebrows to help the head voice, as well as taking a deep breath." This represents a noticeable shift in focus compared to earlier weeks, where technical vocal elements were rarely mentioned. It suggests that children became more attuned to vocal technique and tuning, even if they still lacked the technical vocabulary to fully articulate these concepts.
- *Limited references to rhythm and sequence*: Despite the intended focus on rhythm (LO1) and sequence (LO2), very few children explicitly referenced these concepts. There were some mentions of beat and timing, such as, "How to keep in time with the beats" and "We learnt how to keep in time with the music." However, no direct references to bouncy or smooth rhythms were made, and sequencing was not a significant theme in children's reflections.

[5] The terminology "smooth and bouncy rhythms" in LO1 appears to prioritise child-friendly language over formal musical vocabulary. While this may help younger pupils engage experientially with contrasting rhythmic styles, it introduces conceptual ambiguity—particularly in how these descriptors overlap with articulation (e.g. legato and staccato) rather than rhythm *per se*. The phrase does not correspond to standard terminology in Western classical, popular or global musical traditions, and its pedagogical utility would benefit from clearer alignment with established concepts as children progress in their musical learning.

This suggests that either these concepts were not clearly emphasized in the session or that they were not framed in a way that children found memorable.

- *Continued engagement with songs as the primary learning takeaway*: As in previous weeks, children primarily described their learning in terms of the songs they worked on. Frequently mentioned pieces included: 'Waterloo', 'Puppet on a String', 'Love Shine a Light', 'Save Your Kisses for Me', 'Spaceman', 'The Old Hundredth', and 'Patriotic Melody'. Many children simply listed the songs they learned, reinforcing that song recognition remained their primary metric of musical learning: "We learnt a new song called Love Shine a Light.", "We sang Space Man and Puppet on a String.", or "My favourite song was Waterloo." While song-based engagement is valuable for motivation and enjoyment, it continued to suggest that musical concepts (such as rhythm and sequencing) may need to be more explicitly reinforced.
- *Confidence-building and enjoyment continued to be key outcomes*: Despite some disengagement, many children remained highly enthusiastic about their participation, particularly regarding group singing and confidence-building. Some noted, "I learnt to have fun and enjoy singing. I learnt to love myself and my voice.", "My favourite moment was when the teacher told me to sing independently because I was so good.", or "I sang louder than Week 3 and I was very clear." This reinforces the idea that the Schools Singing Programme serves not just as a musical education initiative, but also as an important tool for self-expression and confidence development.
- *A small but consistent group of disengaged children*. Children's self-evaluation of enjoyment levels for Week 4 indicated that 45% rated their experience as "Excellent", 30% rated it "Good", 13% rated it "Medium", and 12% rated it "Poor" or "Very Bad". Compared to previous weeks, Week 4 had a slightly lower percentage of "Excellent" ratings and a slightly higher proportion of "Poor" ratings, reinforcing the polarization in engagement levels. As in previous weeks, there remained a small but vocal group of children who expressed disinterest or frustration. Some comments include, "I don't like singing.", "It was boring.", "I hate love songs.", or "I wish it would end!". Interestingly, some children's dislike appeared to be related to external factors rather than the choir itself. For example, "It was hot.", "Standing up was hurting my legs.", or "My vocal chords were burning." These responses highlight that while the programme is highly successful for many, some children may require different forms of engagement or accommodations to ensure they feel included.

Overall, Week 4 saw the strongest engagement with pitch awareness and tuning, suggesting an increasing focus on vocal control. Rhythm (LO1) and musical sequence (LO2) were not explicitly referenced by most children, whereby song recognition continued to be the dominant form of learning reflection. While a small but persistent group of children continued to express disengagement, confidence-building and enjoyment remained key motivators for many children, particularly those who are growing in vocal ability.

Week Five

By Week 5, the children's engagement with specific musical techniques became more apparent, particularly in relation to learning songs without booklets, memorisation and vocal control. However, Week 5 also introduced the first references to improvisation, suggesting that some children began to engage more creatively with their musical knowledge. Despite this progress, notation (LO2) was almost entirely absent from reflections, suggesting that while children are

developing practical musicianship, their awareness of music literacy remained limited. Additionally, engagement with the programme remained divided, with a majority of children reporting enjoyment, but a smaller group expressing disengagement, fatigue or frustration. Week 5's Learning Outcomes included LO1: To begin to improvise around a known melody, and LO2: To begin to develop an understanding of notation. There was some evidence that children engaged in improvisation (LO1), particularly through references to singing without booklets, memorisation and creative adjustments to melodies. However, notation (LO2) was not explicitly mentioned by any children, suggesting that this aspect of the lesson may not have been introduced in a way that made it memorable or accessible to them. The data indicated the following key themes in children's learning perceptions:

- *Memorisation and singing without booklets*: One of the most significant developments in Week 5 was the removal of booklets, which many children noted as a key challenge: "That I have to know the song without the books. Today we didn't use the books. I found it not that hard.", "It was a bit hard to sing Save Your Kisses for Me without the booklet.", and "When we was singing Waterloo, I don't need the book anymore!" This suggests that children began to internalise melodies and lyrics, which is a key step toward musical independence and creative engagement with the material.
- *First signs of improvisation and adaptation*: Although most children did not explicitly mention improvisation (LO1), some reflections suggest that they were experimenting with the music in their own way: "I made a rhyme of Rule Britannia.", "I learnt how to sing Space Man differently." These responses indicate early stages of improvisation, as some children are beginning to adapt melodies and interpret songs in a more personal way.
- *Limited engagement with notation* (LO2): Unlike previous weeks, which saw some engagement with musical terms like "pitch" and "high and low notes", notation was almost entirely

absent from reflections in Week 5. The closest references to music literacy were "Music grammar and punctuation." and "Notes". This suggests that if notation was introduced in Week 5, it may not have been presented in a way that resonated with children or left a lasting impression.

- *Continued focus on song recognition and repertoire*: As in previous weeks, children primarily reflected on which songs they had sung, reinforcing that song familiarity remained the dominant learning outcome in their minds. Some of the most frequently mentioned songs included 'Space Man', 'Love Shine a Light', 'Save Your Kisses for Me', 'Rule Britannia', 'Puppet on a String', 'The Old Hundredth'. Some children also expressed specific emotional connections to certain songs, writing that "I love Shine a Light, it's my favourite.", or "Space Man is my favourite song!", or "Love Shine a Light is my 2nd favourite and I remember the lyrics easily <3." This demonstrates that while technical skills like improvisation and notation may not yet be fully absorbed, emotional engagement with repertoire remained strong.
- *The Ukrainian prayer and learning a new language*: A new theme emerging in Week 5 is children's engagement with the Ukrainian Prayer, which many described as a memorable or unusual experience: "We sang a Ukrainian song called Ukrainian Prayer.", "I learnt how to sing in Ukrainian.", or "It was fun speaking Ukrainian.", or "We were speaking Ukrainian, and I wanted to learn more!" This suggests that language learning through music was an engaging and meaningful experience for some children, though others struggled to connect with it: "I didn't like Ukrainian Prayer.", "I never sang a Ukrainian song before." This divide highlights that while multilingual singing can be enriching, it may require additional contextualization to help all children engage with it positively.
- *Mixed engagement and growing fatigue*. Children's self-evaluation of their enjoyment levels for Week 5 indicated, 50% rated their experience as "Excellent", 30% rated it "Good", 16% rated it "Medium", and 4% rated it "Poor" or "Very Bad". Compared to previous weeks, Week 5 saw the highest proportion of "Excellent" ratings (50%), indicating that many children were highly engaged and remained enthusiastic about singing. However, a consistent group of disengaged children remained, showing increasing signs of disengagement, fatigue or frustration. Some common complaints included: "It was too hot.", "Standing up was hurting my legs.", "I was tired." These responses suggest that classroom management and environmental factors may be influencing engagement levels.

In general, there was a clear trend toward greater independence in singing, with memorisation and vocal adaptation becoming more prominent in children's perceptions. Song recognition and enjoyment continued to outweigh explicit engagement with musical technique, while confidence in singing continued to grow for most children. A core group of children remained disengaged, requiring differentiated engagement strategies, whereby environmental factors (heat, standing, noise) also began to impact engagement levels.

Week Six

By Week 6, children's reflections show a growing emphasis on memorisation, independence in singing and vocal control. The removal of booklets appears to have been a significant pedagogical shift, prompting both enthusiasm and apprehension among participants. While many children expressed excitement at the challenge, others found memorizing lyrics and melodies difficult. However, a small but consistent group of disengaged children remained evident, as in previous weeks. This group expressed disinterest, frustration or discomfort with aspects of choral

participation, underscoring the challenge of engaging all learners in a collective musical setting. This week sought to address LO1 To develop improvisational ideas, LO2: To sing songs with large intervals with increasing precision. Although improvisation (LO1) was an intended focus, direct references to improvisational activities were scarce. Indeed, children's responses showed limited direct references to improvisation as a formal learning objective. However, a few comments suggest moments of divergence from fixed material, such as learning "a new verse in a song," and "I loved the challenge in our lesson." While these statements may reflect individual variation or adaptation—possibly prompted by memorisation tasks or uncertainty in recall—it is unclear whether such moments constitute intentional creative engagement or emergent improvisation. Rather than evidencing structured improvisatory learning, these responses more plausibly suggest that opportunities for interpretive flexibility arose incidentally, as children navigated repertoire without visual aids or with partial recall. Singing without booklets likely required on-the-spot problem-solving and recall strategies, both of which are foundational to improvisation, albeit not recognized by children as such.

Similarly, while singing songs with large intervals (LO2) was a key objective, most children's comments centred around pitch control and vocal range, rather than specifically acknowledging intervallic leaps. While large interval leaps were not explicitly mentioned in the journals, several children reflected on pitch challenges and vocal control, which are indirectly related to this learning outcome: "It takes so much high pitches and it's good.", "If I put pressure on my high note it will make a speck.", and "We learnt how to follow on and enjoy ourselves while singing." These comments suggest that children were becoming more aware of pitch variation and vocal demands, especially in songs like 'Space Man' and 'Rule Britannia', which likely contain challenging intervallic movement. However, no children used terms like "intervals" or "leaps", indicating a gap in conceptual understanding even if practical engagement was taking place. As in previous weeks, a number of key themes emerged in children's learning perceptions:

- *Memorisation and singing without booklets*: The removal of songbooks was a defining feature of Week 6, with many children noting the challenge of memorizing lyrics and melodies: "That I have to sing without the songbook. Today we tried to memorize the songs. I found this a bit hard."; and "I learnt some of the songs by memory." This shift suggests that children are developing musical independence, an essential skill for both improvisation and long-term retention.
- *Engagement with vocal technique and pitch control*: While specific references to large intervals were limited, many children described challenges with vocal range and pitch: "which tune [to sing] high and low", "If I put pressure on my high note it will make a squeak"; "it takes so much high pitches", and "I sang better than ever." These reflections indicate growing awareness of vocal precision and the physical demands of singing across a wide range.
- *Emotional connections to repertoire*: As in previous weeks, emotional attachment to certain songs remained strong: "Space Man is my favourite song!"; "I love Shine a Light."; and "I love to sing the song 'Waterloo' with the year group." Songs with personal resonance often became motivating factors, encouraging children to engage more fully with challenging vocal material.
- *Peer interaction and social dynamics*: Some children noted the social aspects of singing together: "I liked singing with my friends.", "everyone was happy" and "when we had a laugh." These comments highlight the communal nature of choral singing, which supports emotional well-being and fosters a sense of belonging.

- *Mixed reactions to challenge and fatigue*: While many children welcomed the challenge of singing from memory, others struggled with fatigue or frustration: Some children got easily tired; others commented, "It was hot, and I was tired."; and "I didn't really like singing today." Environmental factors like heat, tiredness and physical discomfort continued to influence some children's engagement.
- *Persistent disengagement among a small group of children*. Children's self-evaluation of their enjoyment levels for Week 6 indicated, 39% rated their experience as "Excellent", 29% rated it "Good", 21% rated it "Medium", and 12% rated it "Poor" or "Very Bad". Compared to previous weeks, Week 6 saw a slight drop in "Excellent" ratings, possibly reflecting the increased cognitive demands of memorisation and pitch work. Throughout the programme, a small but noticeable group of children consistently expressed disengagement, while Week 6 responses indicated that this group continued to struggle with enjoyment, motivation or comfort in the choral setting. These children's comments typically expressed disinterest in singing or repertoire, such as "I don't really like singing.", "The song isn't that good.", alongside boredom and lack of engagement, such as "It was boring." or "I wasn't really interested this week.". Some children expressed their fatigue and physical discomfort with comments like "It was hot", "I was tired.", "Standing up hurt my legs.", as well as social distraction and environmental factors: "Someone was talking and distracting me.", "I got disturbed a lot.", and "People were too loud behind me." Some children also expressed anxiety or self-consciousness: "I felt uncomfortable singing in front of everyone.", or "I was a bit worried about the concert." These comments underscore that choral singing, while widely enjoyable for many children, did not equally engage all participants. Some children clearly felt less comfortable with public singing, preferred different musical styles or felt overwhelmed by the social and performance aspects of the programme.

Overall, the Week 6 data showed that memorisation was a significant focus, encouraging musical independence but posing challenges for some, while improvisation was indirectly engaged through song adaptation and on-the-spot recall, though children did not explicitly recognize it as improvisation. Meanwhile, pitch awareness improved, with many children noting the difficulty of high notes and vocal control. Many children evinced emotional connections to songs like 'Space Man' and 'Love Shine a Light', which fuelled their motivation and engagement, yet environmental factors (heat, fatigue), dislike and social distractions impacted the experience for a subset of children. While the majority of children reported increased confidence and enjoyment, the persistence of this group highlights the challenge of ensuring inclusive participation in large-scale choral outreach initiatives.

Week Seven

By Week 7, the Schools Singing Programme introduced harmony work through partner songs and encouraged melody independence via the following intended Learning Outcomes: LO1: To explore harmony through partner songs, and LO2: To ensure melody independence. The week also focused on memorizing lyrics, with a continued emphasis on singing without booklets. While few children directly mentioned "harmony" or "partner songs", several comments imply awareness of singing with others simultaneously: "Singing with my year group.", "When we were all singing together.", or "singing with class and friends." Children's emphasis on singing together and references to blending voices suggest that they were experiencing harmony as a communal activity, even if they did not use technical vocabulary like "harmony" or "partner songs". Meanwhile, the ability to sing melodic lines confidently from memory (melody independence)

emerged as a clear theme—particularly evident in children's reflections on performing without booklets: "singing without the sheets.", "I remembered the songs.", "I remembered the lyrics without looking", "we did it without the words and it was hard", or "i remembered most songs." Children's reflections indicate increasing confidence in melodic recall, though some still found the task challenging. Notably, this week's session was joined by a visiting Director of Music from Tennessee, whose presence brought novelty and excitement for many children. In general, children's comments revealed an increased awareness of melody independence and challenges associated with singing without lyrics sheets, along with positive reactions to working in harmony, although explicit mentions of "harmony" were limited. Many children evinced strong emotional engagement with favourite repertoire, while a persistent subgroup of disengaged children expressing boredom, dislike of certain songs or physical discomfort. As in previous weeks, a number of key themes emerged in children's learning perceptions:

- *Developing melody independence through memorisation*: Many children focused on singing without lyrics as a key challenge, noting, "That I have to sing without the sheets.", "We had to memorize the songs. It was hard but good.". This reflects significant progress in melodic independence, supporting the intended learning outcome.
- *Experiences of harmony and singing together*: Children's references to singing as a group highlight the communal nature of the harmonic work: "Singing with everyone was fun.", "I liked singing with 3K and 3W [referring to two different Year 3 classes].", or "everyone sang together and it sounded good.". These comments suggest that children were attuned to the collective sound, a key aspect of harmony.
- *Embodied musical experiences and emotions:* Some children mentioned physical sensations related to singing, such as "Standing up makes the organs looser and the voice better.", "lifting eyebrows helps with high notes", or "my legs hurt from standing." Others described emotional responses, stating, "It made me cooler, and I like to sing.", "no lyrics felt weird.", or "I felt good singing with my friends." These reflections show growing body awareness in singing and mixed emotional reactions.
- *Emotional connections to favourite repertoire*: Children's favourite songs continued to dominate their reflections in this week, such as, "Space Man is my favourite song!", "I love Shine a Light. It's so good.", or "Singing Waterloo is the best part." These strong emotional connections to specific pieces significantly influence motivation and engagement, while certain musical preferences clearly emerged between the Eurovision-themed songs and the coronation-related material. The following list ranks songs by frequency of mentions, highlighting prominence and preference:

    1. 'Space Man' (Eurovision 2022 entry, Sam Ryder) – by far the most frequently mentioned song
    2. 'Love Shine a Light' (Eurovision 1997 winner, Katrina and the Waves)
    3. 'Waterloo' (Eurovision 1974 winner, ABBA)
    4. 'Save Your Kisses for Me' (Eurovision 1976 winner, Brotherhood of Man)
    5. 'Puppet on a String' (Eurovision 1967 winner, Sandie Shaw)
    6. 'National Anthem' ('God Save the King') – coronation repertoire
    7. 'Patriotic Melody' (a medley including 'Jerusalem', 'Rule, Britannia!', and 'Land of Hope and Glory') – coronation repertoire
    8. 'Ukrainian Prayer' (reflecting solidarity with Ukraine)
    9. 'The Old Hundreth' (traditional hymn tune)

Eurovision-themed songs overwhelmingly dominated children's favourites, with 'Space Man' receiving the most mentions by a significant margin, followed by 'Love Shine a Light' and 'Waterloo'. While children frequently described these songs as "fun", "my favourite song", "good to sing", and "easy to remember", this repertoire was probably more appealing due its catchy, upbeat melodies, pop culture relevance, energetic performance styles, clear child-friendly narrative and emotional appeal. By contrast, liturgical and coronation repertoire, while essential to the programme's theme, was less popular overall. Children cited 'God Save the King' and the 'Patriotic Melody' less frequently, and some expressed boredom or dislike, stating, "The National Anthem was boring"., or "I don't like the Patriotic Melody.". By contrast, 'Ukrainian Prayer' and 'The Old Hundreth' received minimal mentions, with no strong positive or negative sentiments. This repertoire was clearly less appealing, likely due to its more formal tone and complex language, cultural distance and less energetic arrangements.

- *Impact of the visiting Music Director from Tennessee*: The guest musician from Tennessee was a highlight for many children: "A man from America came to warm us up.", "The visitor was nice and fun.", "When the American guy did stretches with us, it was funny.", or "I liked speaking to the visitor. He talked different but nice." The visitor's presence introduced novelty and inspired curiosity, making the week particularly memorable.
- *Persistent disengagement among a small group of children*: Children's self-evaluation of their enjoyment levels indicated, 49% rated the week "Excellent", 23% rated it "Good", 17% rated it "Medium", and 10% rated it "Poor" or "Very Bad". This marks a slight increase in "Excellent" ratings compared to earlier weeks, possibly due to the novelty of the visiting musician and familiarity with the repertoire. As in previous weeks, a small subgroup remained disengaged, saying, "It was boring.", "I don't like singing that much.", "I hate singing, help us.", "I didn't like the Patriotic Melody with the actions.", or "The National Anthem was boring." Some disengagement stemmed from repertoire preferences, while others cited fatigue, discomfort or general disinterest.

Overall, children's melody independence improved, with children increasingly confident singing from memory, while experiences of harmony were subtly present, with children valuing collective singing even if they did not recognize it as harmonic work. Clearly, emotional connections to favourite songs remained a key motivator for engagement, while physical awareness in singing grew, with children noting posture, breath and vocal placement. While the visiting Director of Music had a positive impact, clearly generating excitement and broadening children's cultural awareness among many children, a small group of children remained disengaged, continuing to cite boredom or dislike of certain repertoire.

Week Eight

By Week 8, the Schools Singing Programme focused on broadening children's musical experiences by introducing a historical piece of music in another language (LO1 To learn a historical piece of music in another language) and encouraging them to explore changing time signatures and rhythms (LO2 To explore changing time signatures and rhythms). The workshop included learning and rehearsing 'Jerusalem' and the 'Ukrainian Prayer', alongside familiar repertoire such as 'Space Man' and 'Love Shine a Light'. There was a noticeable decrease in the number of journal responses (127 for "What I learnt this week" and 113 for "My favourite moment was") compared to earlier weeks, possibly reflecting factors such as teacher fatigue, children absenteeism or a diminishing novelty of journaling as the programme approached its conclusion. Even so, children's reflections during

this week revealed diverse perspectives. While many expressed enjoyment in learning new songs and noted improvements in technique and memorisation, others reported boredom or disengagement, particularly when revisiting familiar pieces or tackling the challenges of foreign-language repertoire. These reflections shed light on both the educational value and the emotional journey of the children as they moved towards their final performance. As in previous weeks, a number of themes and issues emerged in children's responses:

- *Engaging with historical and foreign-language repertoire* (LO1): One of the primary Learning Outcomes this week was to expose children to music in another language through the 'Ukrainian Prayer'. A number of children recognised the novelty of this experience, with comments such as "I learnt Ukrainian prayer" and "We sang Ukrainian Prayer [underlined]." There was clear pride among some participants, exemplified by one child who wrote: "I love Ukrainian prayer! [drawings of hearts and musical notes]". However, this enthusiasm was not universal. Some found the linguistic challenge daunting or unengaging, reflected in remarks like "It was hard to remember the words". This theme highlights the importance of cultural exposure in choral education, while also underscoring the need for careful repertoire selection to maintain engagement.
- *Engagement with liturgical repertoire*: A significant new theme emerging from Week 8 is the children's encounter with liturgical music, particularly through singing 'Jerusalem' and practicing the "Amen" ending. Although references to this aspect were less frequent than mentions of popular or secular repertoire, they reveal noteworthy reflections on the liturgical dimensions of the Schools Singing Programme. For some children, singing 'Jerusalem' seemed to evoke a sense of formality or special occasion, with one pupil noting that they "sang Jerusalem" as part of learning to "sing properly" and "use [their] head voice", suggesting an awareness of the song's solemnity and cultural significance. While the repeated mention of "Amen" across children's journal reflections highlights the musical exercise of stretching sounds (one child wrote that they were "practicing sounds to sing Amen", while another described how they "practised stretching sounds to sing Amen" and "thought about [their] head voice"), there was a sense that children's engagement with liturgical traditions involved an *implicit* connection to religion. In other words, while the "Amen" was primarily referenced by children in terms of vocal technique—such as pitch, timing, or how it sounded when sung in the cathedral—their participation in this liturgical act, especially within the resonant and awe-inspiring space of Liverpool Cathedral, may have subtly evoked a sense of being part of something larger than themselves. Though few children explicitly employed spiritual or theological language, their responses often hinted at feelings of emotional uplift, collective joy and reverence. One child wrote simply, "I felt very proud in the cathedral," while another described "singing with everyone in the big place" as "a special moment." Another remarked, "It was really emotional when we all sang the same song." These comments, while not doctrinal, suggest an affective response that resonates with notions of transcendence, unity and significance, while adult reflections further support this interpretation.[6] Such responses suggest that the Schools Singing Programme, especially in its more liturgically inflected

[6] One cathedral leader commented: "Whether they believe it or not actually doesn't matter, but to have 75 kids singing an act of worship and having their parents want to engage… it creates that sense that there are opportunities, there are possibilities." Another described the impact of sacred music in the cathedral as "a spiritual thing… it's put me back on my spiritual journey." This view was echoed by another participant, who remarked on the transformative nature of the choral experience: "It's hard not to feel something when you hear that sound in this space. Even if you're not religious, it does something to you."

moments, offers not just musical engagement but also access to shared experiences of awe, emotional resonance and spiritual possibility.[7] These experiences may not be consciously articulated by children in formal religious terms, but they nonetheless gesture towards a nascent sense of participation in something meaningful and enduring—what might be understood as the sacred, the communal or simply the extraordinary. This engagement with liturgical repertoire, even if not explicitly articulated by the children, adds another dimension to the educational value of the programme—namely, the exposure to and appreciation of English choral music's role in religious contexts.

- *Exploring changing rhythms and time signatures* (LO2): The second learning focus this week involved rhythm and meter. Children's comments reflected awareness of the rhythmic challenges embedded in their repertoire, with some noting the complexity of songs like 'Patriotic Melody' and 'Jerusalem': "It was hard to keep the beat in 'Jerusalem'—the rhythm kept changing.", and "We had to count carefully in 'Patriotic Melody.'" For some children, this challenge was enjoyable: "I liked figuring out the beats—it was like a game!", while others found it frustrating: "I got mixed up with the timing, and it was confusing." Interestingly, warm-up exercises focusing on rhythm appeared to be popular, with several students citing "the warm-up song" or "clapping games" as their favourite moments. This emphasis on rhythm not only supports musical development but also contributes to cognitive growth, requiring children to focus, listen carefully and coordinate physically with their peers.
- *Developing vocal techniques and physical awareness*: Many children commented on the vocal techniques explored this week, particularly the physical aspects of singing. Techniques such as raising eyebrows to reach higher notes and engaging the head voice were mentioned repeatedly: "We used our eyebrows to sing high notes—it works!", and "I learnt how to use my head voice today." Warm-up activities also received positive feedback: "The warm-up song was fun!" and "Stretching sounds helped me sing better." These physical strategies not only aided children's technical singing abilities but also made abstract concepts more tangible and accessible. This theme highlights the value of kinaesthetic learning in music education, helping children connect bodily awareness with vocal production.
- *Balancing familiarity and rehearsal fatigue*: By Week 8, most children were highly familiar with the programme's core repertoire. For some, this familiarity brought comfort and confidence: "We sang all the songs—I know them now!", "It was easy today because I didn't need the words." However, others expressed fatigue and boredom from repeated rehearsals of the same repertoire. This mixed response suggests that while repetition is essential for skill development, varying the structure or introducing new interpretative elements could help sustain engagement over extended rehearsal periods.
- *Social cohesion and performance preparation*: Children's comments this week increasingly reflected performance readiness and the social aspects of singing together: "We sang with Year 1 and Year 2—it was fun!", and "I liked singing with everyone—it sounded big.", or "It makes me happy to sing with my friends." The collaborative nature of choir provided social motivation, with many students enjoying the shared experience of preparing for the final performance. This aspect of choral participation appears to be emotionally rewarding, fostering a sense of community and collective achievement.

[7] Boyce-Tillman (2009) explores how collective musical experiences—particularly in sacred or ceremonial settings—can evoke a sense of transcendence, belonging and ethical awareness in children. See also Sloboda (2004), who highlights the emotional and psychological dimensions of group singing in liturgical contexts, noting its capacity to generate feelings of connection, awe and emotional catharsis, even among non-religious participants.

- *Positive perceptions despite persistent disengagement among a minority*. Despite the more demanding focus on singing in another language and navigating changing time signatures, the majority of children reported positive enjoyment levels in Week 8. Out of 106 responses, 56% rated the session as "Excellent", 22% as "Good", and only a minority rated it as "Medium" (15%), "Poor" (3%), or "Very Bad" (5%). These high enjoyment rates suggest that, even in the later stages of the programme when rehearsals intensified and repertoire grew more challenging, most pupils maintained enthusiasm and engagement. As one child simply noted, "It was fun!", while another wrote, "I love singing—it makes me happy." However, a small group of children continued to express fatigue or disinterest, with comments like "My throat started to hurt", "Boring.", "I don't like singing.", or "It was too hard and I didn't like it.", reflecting ongoing variation in personal engagement. While this group remains relatively small, their comments highlight the challenge of engaging every participant in a compulsory singing programme. Nonetheless, the overall positive self-assessments underscore the programme's success in sustaining enjoyment while fostering musical and educational development.

Overall, Week 8 revealed a complex interplay between technical skill development, cultural education and emotional engagement. Children demonstrated improved memorisation, heightened awareness of vocal techniques and social enjoyment in collective singing. However, rehearsal fatigue and varying preferences for repertoire became more pronounced, with upbeat Eurovision songs continuing to outshine the traditional pieces in popularity. While the majority of children found joy and learning in their choral participation, a minority remained disengaged, underscoring the importance of inclusive strategies to cater to diverse interests and learning needs. Moving into the final weeks, maintaining motivation through varied activities and performance-driven excitement will be crucial for sustaining engagement.

Week Nine

As the penultimate week of the ten-week Spring 2023 programme (April – June 2023), Week 9 functioned as a crucial rehearsal for the impending grand performance, *Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing*, at Liverpool Cathedral in July 2023. By now, the children were expected to know the full repertoire, enabling focused work on polishing pieces, refining musicality and developing performance readiness. The Learning Outcomes for Week 9 centred on (LO1) developing recognition of pulse and (LO2) exploring syncopated rhythms in rounds—elements essential for ensuring cohesion and rhythmic accuracy during ensemble singing. The children's reflections indicate a significant sense of culmination, with the majority demonstrating familiarity with the songs, increased musical confidence and excitement for the upcoming concert. As previously, a range of interesting themes emerged in children's responses:

- *Mastery of the repertoire and collective preparation*: A striking theme this week was the children's acknowledgment of having reached a point where they could perform the entire set list. Numerous entries echoed phrases like "all the songs", "we revised all the songs", and "practising all the songs". The repetition of comments such as "we went over the songs" and "loads of practice" reflects the intensive nature of the final rehearsal. Notably, many pupils mentioned singing without lyric sheets, highlighting the progress made in memorisation: "I learnt all the songs we sang without the words". This emphasis on internalising the repertoire suggests that the children had developed not only musical memory but also the independence necessary for confident performance.

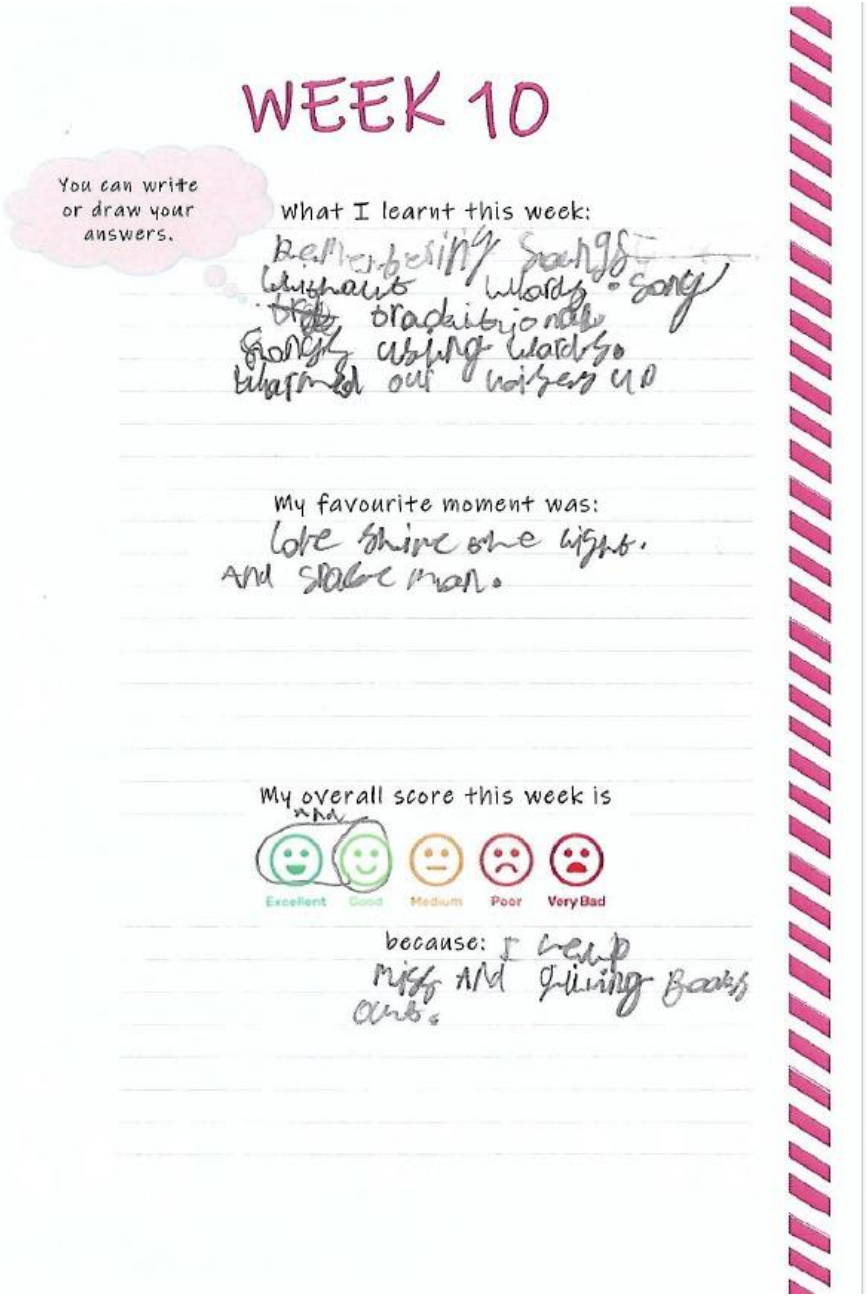
- *Popularity of specific songs and emotional connection*: Consistent with earlier weeks, children frequently cited particular songs as favourites. 'Space Man' still emerged as the most mentioned, with comments like "singing space man was so fun", "I love singing Space Man", and "We sang SPACE MAN!!!", reflecting genuine enthusiasm. Similarly, 'Waterloo', 'Love Shine a Light' and 'Puppet on a String' remained popular. In contrast, references to liturgical or ceremonial pieces like the 'National Anthem' or 'Ukrainian Prayer' were fewer but still present, with some children noting the experience of singing in another language as "fun" and "nice to hear a guitar" during certain pieces. These preferences suggest that children connected most deeply with lively, contemporary selections—particularly those with catchy melodies or associated with popular culture (e.g., Eurovision-themed songs).
- *Anticipation and excitement for performance*: A palpable sense of excitement for the imminent performance emerged. Some children explicitly acknowledged the approaching concert: "We are doing the concert next week", while others focused on the emotional experience, with comments like "getting excited for the concert" and "We are nearly at the end now!!!" Despite the pressure of final preparations, many expressed positivity and confidence: "I felt more confident with myself" and "I loved every song and love Space Man". This growing anticipation underscores the transformative power of a culminating event, which can motivate participants and heighten emotional investment.
- *Recognition of pulse and rhythm in ensemble singing*: Although fewer children commented directly on pulse or syncopated rhythms, some reflections revealed an awareness of these musical elements. For instance, children noted learning "to sing with no words" and "singing all the songs together with the teachers", both of which require precise rhythmic coordination. One pupil noted practising pauses, illustrating attention to timing and ensemble awareness—both crucial for maintaining pulse. Another commented on "singing the chorus" and "standing up to do the history book on the shelf" (in 'Waterloo'), referencing rhythmic cues integral to these sections.
- *Continued engagement and disengagement spectrum*: Most children continued to display high levels of engagement, with entries like "It was fun", "I loved singing", and "It makes me happy". Yet, a small cohort of disengaged pupils persisted, as seen in comments such as "none", "I don't like singing", or "it was annoying". These responses mirror earlier weeks, indicating that while the majority found joy in choral participation, a minority maintained ambivalence or disinterest. Notably, however, negative comments were less prominent this week, possibly reflecting a collective sense of accomplishment as the final performance neared.

Children's self-evaluations in Week 9 were overwhelmingly positive. Of the 122 responses, 59% rated the session as "Excellent" and 25% as "Good", with only a small fraction selecting "Medium" (11%), "Poor" (2%), or "Very Bad" (3%). These figures represent one of the highest satisfaction rates of the term, suggesting that the combination of familiar repertoire, performance readiness and anticipation of the final event fostered a strong sense of achievement and enjoyment. One child wrote simply, "I loved this week", while another shared, "singing all together in Year 3 was fun". The shared experience of collective preparation and the knowledge that they were "nearly at the end" appeared to boost morale, even for pupils who had previously shown less enthusiasm. Overall, Week 9's reflections convey a clear narrative of culmination and readiness. The children demonstrated notable progress in musical independence, rhythmic accuracy and ensemble coordination—hallmarks of the Schools Singing Programme's Learning Outcomes. The

excitement surrounding the forthcoming *Big Sing* event at the cathedral suggests that, beyond technical skill, the programme successfully cultivated emotional investment and collective pride. While a small subset of pupils remained disengaged, the overall atmosphere was one of accomplishment, anticipation and musical growth.

Week Ten

The culmination of the programme was reached in Week 10, where the primary focus was on LO1: To perform with energy and accuracy during the end-of-term school concert and, later on, highly anticipated *Big Sing* at Liverpool Cathedral (Figure 8). After ten weeks of rehearsals, song-learning and vocal development, this week presented the children with an opportunity to showcase their hard work to an audience. Their reflections indicate a mix of pride, excitement and nervousness, capturing the emotional significance of performing live. For many, this marked not only the climax of the musical journey but also a moment of personal achievement and shared celebration. A range of emerging themes came out in children's choir journal reflections:



- *Mastery and memorisation of the repertoire*: A significant number of children highlighted their ability to sing the entire repertoire, often without lyric sheets. Phrases such as “"my favourite moment was remembering the song.”, "remembering the song of Ukrainian Prayer.”, “we sang all of the songs”, and “singing with no book” reflect their improved memorisation and musical independence. Many referred to revising familiar pieces, with mentions of ‘Waterloo’, ‘Space Man’, ‘Love Shine a Light’, and ‘Puppet on a String’ being particularly prevalent. One pupil wrote, “I know all of the songs”, signalling a strong sense of accomplishment, while another stated, “we practised Ukrainian prayer, patriotic melody and the songs for the concert” and “we practiced all the songs”, underscoring the preparation leading to the performance.
- *Emotional engagement: excitement, pride and nervousness*: Performing in front of peers, teachers and families elicited a variety of emotions. Many children expressed excitement and joy: “I'm excited for the concert”, “everyone was smiling”, and “it was just fun” were common sentiments. Others displayed pride in their participation: “I loved singing”, “I sang all the songs and liked it”, and “it was amazing”. However, nerves also surfaced. One pupil shared, “it was a bit scary, last lesson I was nervous”, while another reflected, “performing in front of the school was exciting but made me feel shy”. This emotional range highlights the significance of the concert as both a musical and personal milestone.
- *Popular songs and personal favourites*: Consistent with previous weeks, ‘Space Man’ emerged as the most frequently mentioned favourite, with comments like “Space Man is the best”, “I loved singing Space Man”, and “when we sang Space Man!!!” reflecting its continued popularity. ‘Waterloo’ and ‘Love Shine a Light’ also maintained high levels of engagement. Some children expressed newfound appreciation for certain pieces, with one noting, “I like these songs even Waterloo”, suggesting that repeated exposure during rehearsals may have deepened their connection to the repertoire.
- *Performance with an audience*: For many, performing live was a novel experience. Comments like “singing for the school”, “performing with the band from the cathedral”, and “singing for all the kids in week 10” underscore the significance of singing to an audience. The involvement of external musicians, particularly the band from the cathedral, added to the excitement, with pupils noting, “performing with the band was amazing”. These collaborations likely heightened the sense of occasion, offering the children a more professional and immersive concert experience.
- *Fatigue and repetition*: While most children expressed positive sentiments, a few reflected on the challenges of sustained rehearsal. Comments such as “it’s getting more boring because we have done it a lot” suggest that some pupils felt the repetition was tiring. Yet, even among these reflections, there was recognition of the progress made: “Even though we've sung these a lot, it's fun to perform for everyone.” This balance of fatigue and achievement is common in the lead-up to major performances.

Overall, children’s self-evaluation of their enjoyment revealed, 60% rated the week as “Excellent”, with a further 20% selecting “Good”. Only 12% chose “Medium”, while 4% each marked “Poor” or “Very Bad”. This high level of positive feedback indicates that, despite the intensity of rehearsals, the final performance was a rewarding and memorable experience for most children. One child reflected, “I loved every song and loved performing”, while another wrote, “it was brilliant; I felt proud singing in front of everyone.” The chance to share their efforts with an audience—particularly at a prestigious venue like Liverpool Cathedral—appears to have left a lasting impression. Children’s reflections encapsulated the culmination of ten weeks of hard work,

teamwork and musical growth. While nerves and fatigue were present, the overarching themes of excitement, pride and achievement shone through. Performing a comprehensive repertoire to an audience—many for the first time—was a significant milestone, allowing the children to apply their learning in a real-world context. As one pupil aptly described, singing for the school was scary but it made then happy in the end. Ultimately, Week 10 not only showcased the children's musical progress but also celebrated their perseverance, collaboration and joy during their choral participation.

The Cultural Value of Children's Choral Participation

Beyond its educational benefits, the Schools Singing Programme also reveals important insights into the cultural value of children's choral participation—particularly in terms of widening cultural access, appreciation and expressive confidence among children from some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the Liverpool City Region. The question "Are you proud to sing in this choir?" prompted 95 responses and opens a window into how children perceive the meaning of their participation—not just as performers, but as cultural actors, contributors and recipients. The overwhelming majority of children responded affirmatively, with comments that pointed to a profound sense of achievement, personal growth and cultural esteem. Many linked their pride directly to the location and significance of the performance: "Yes, because we got to sing in the fifth biggest cathedral in the world", "Yes, because I sung in a huge building", and "Yes, because it's a once in a lifetime opportunity." These expressions point not only to the aesthetic and emotional impact of singing in a grand architectural space, but also to the symbolic cultural capital associated with such venues—spaces traditionally coded as elite or exclusive, but now temporarily reimagined as accessible, communal and celebratory. Others spoke of being "chosen", or described it as a "major step up" and "a big achievement", reflecting the extent to which participation offered an elevated sense of self-worth and accomplishment.

A small number of children also reflected on the final concert at Liverpool Cathedral (Figure 8), reflexive of the emotional intensity, excitement and sense of achievement that this culminating event evoked. A recurring theme was the transition from nervousness to pride. One child wrote, "In the final concert I was nervous at first, then I started to be confident," while another explained, "It was very scary but I was very proud of myself." These reflections suggest that the experience provided a valuable moment of personal growth, where the challenge of performing in a grand and formal setting was met with resilience and courage. Many children spoke enthusiastically about singing collaboratively with peers from other schools. "I enjoyed singing with all the other schools," one noted simply, while another child wrote that they "even got to make friends," describing the aftermath of the concert as "amazing." Such comments suggest that the performance was not only a musical high point, but also a socially enriching experience that forged new connections across school communities. The setting of the cathedral itself seemed to inspire awe and enthusiasm, with one child describing the day as "it was so exciting and the best day". Others mentioned their enjoyment of "lunch and practising" or "lunch and warm up" and conveyed positive affect through joyful drawings of musical notes, smiling figures, and expressive speech bubbles declaring the day "amazing," "fun," and "happy." Together, these brief yet vivid accounts attest to the powerful experiential and emotional impact of the final concert, underscoring its significance not just as a performance milestone, but as a memorable and affirming rite of passage for the children involved.

Significantly, the children's reflections also suggest that cultural value was not conferred solely through engagement with classical or liturgical music—though these certainly formed part of the

repertoire—but through the entire act of singing learning, and performing music that spanned stylistic boundaries. Songs like 'Space Man' and 'Waterloo' were frequently named in earlier reflections as favourites, but they sat alongside traditional hymns, patriotic melodies and sacred repertoire such as 'The Old Hundredth' and the 'Ukrainian Prayer'. This eclecticism mirrors what cultural sociologists describe as omnivorousness—a post-neoliberal shift in taste formation in which young people, increasingly, do not view classical or pop music in mutually exclusive terms, but rather build layered, pluralistic aesthetic preferences.

However, it is also essential to situate this within broader debates about access to cultural capital. For children growing up in communities marked by systemic deprivation, there are fewer opportunities to participate in formal arts education or to experience music in traditional high-culture settings. The SSP, in this context, functioned not only as a musical intervention but as a form of cultural enfranchisement. The exposure to historic architecture, multilingual repertoire, musical notation and ensemble discipline—all scaffolded by specialist musicians—provided experiences that many children might not otherwise encounter. One child reflected: "Yes, because we don't normally get an opportunity like this"—a quiet but poignant reminder of structural inequality and the power of public education initiatives to mitigate its effects.

Interestingly, for a smaller minority of pupils, choral participation did not produce this sense of cultural excitement or belonging. A few children reported feeling bored, anxious, or disconnected: "because it made me nervous", "I think it was boring", and "I did this last time so I didn't like it". These comments suggest that cultural value is not uniformly experienced. Factors such as self-confidence, previous exposure or perceptions of relevance and "coolness" may temper the affective resonance of such programmes. In Hallam's (2015) terms, children must not only access musical experiences, but also feel a sense of ownership and belonging within them. Nevertheless, the dominant impression from the journal responses is one of transformation: children feeling "proud," "excited," "happy" and "mature" because of their choral experience. Some cited a growing ability to express themselves: "Yes, to express myself and my singing"; others linked their pride to the joy of shared effort: "Yes, because we all put effort into it." These sentiments suggest a growing cultural confidence, not only in relation to music, but in navigating the public sphere—standing on stage, being heard, being applauded. In this way, the cultural value of the programme cannot be disentangled from its social and emotional dimensions. Music, as Hallam (2015) argues, is not just an aesthetic object—it is a medium of identity, affiliation and aspiration.

While much of the evidence for the cultural value of children's choral participation is drawn from the young singers themselves, adult respondents—including parents, carers and teachers—also offered valuable insights through the online questionnaire. Their responses enrich our understanding by articulating not only how children's experiences are perceived within the family and wider school community, but also how the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme mediates wider relationships with place, heritage, prestige and tradition. Quantitatively, the responses to the question "What is the cultural value of participating in The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme?" (n = 19) suggest a strong perception that the programme carries symbolic status and educational distinction. A majority of adults (63%) agreed that participation is "prestigious", both in terms of being part of the cathedral's choir and attending its concerts. This suggests that the programme carries a form of institutional cultural capital—to draw from Bourdieu's sociological lexicon—bestowed not only by the sacred space of the cathedral but also by the perceived excellence of its musical leadership and tradition. This sense of prestige is not imagined in isolation: over half of adults (58%) reported that their child was proud to sing in the

cathedral choir, indicating that the cultural status of the programme resonates meaningfully at the level of the individual family.

In addition, 63% affirmed the quality of the Schools Singing Programme as "excellent", and 47% expressed great respect for the cathedral's music staff. While a smaller proportion reported personal religious affiliation or involvement with cathedral events (16% and 11% respectively), the programme was nonetheless seen as a meaningful bridge between families and the institution: 42% reported feeling more connected to the cathedral as a result of the singing, and 68% agreed that "The cathedral is a special place to people in Liverpool." These responses suggest that even in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society, the cultural value of the cathedral—as a civic and historic space—is strongly felt. Through choral participation, children and their families were invited not only into a musical tradition but into a broader cultural narrative of place.

The qualitative comments echo these themes, albeit with more emotional and subjective nuance. One parent shared: "We feel honoured that he was chosen to take part", indicating that selection into the programme was experienced as a mark of distinction and pride. Another noted, "The cathedral is a wonderful building," a concise but telling reflection on the affective power of space and architecture in shaping cultural value. There is a suggestion here of what Susan Hallam (2015) describes as "spiritual" or "aesthetic" experiences, whereby engagement with music in powerful spaces elicits feelings of wonder, reverence, and belonging. Other comments pointed to the outward-looking ethos of the cathedral's music staff and their efforts to engage with the wider community—factors that subtly reframed the cathedral from being a bastion of ecclesiastical exclusivity to a more accessible and socially embedded cultural institution. These perceptions reinforce the idea that the programme is not only about music education, but about cultural participation, inclusion and representation. For children from communities with limited access to "high" culture, such participation opens the door to previously unfamiliar cultural worlds—not only in terms of repertoire, but in how they see themselves as part of a city's cultural life.

Figure 8: *Big Sing* performance on the theme of *Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing* held at Liverpool Cathedral for participating primary schools in July and September 2023. Photograph by author.

In conclusion, the Schools Singing Programme offered participating children a vital form of cultural enrichment—through access to new musical forms, new cultural spaces and new forms of

expressive confidence. For many, this was not only their first encounter with classical choral traditions but also their first time seeing themselves as cultural performers. In the process, they gained not just songs, but stories, symbols and status. The adults' responses confirm that the cultural value of the Schools Singing Programme is both symbolic and affective. It represents inclusion in a historic institution, access to professional musical training, and a meaningful connection to place and tradition. Most importantly, it positions children as bearers of culture: not merely as recipients of musical instruction, but as performers in a city-wide, intergenerational story that places their voices at the heart of communal celebration.

The Social Value of Children's Choral Participation

This section examines the social benefits of children's participation in the Schools Singing Programme, focusing on the ways singing fostered friendship-making, social cohesion and pro-social behaviour. The analysis draws on children's responses to the direct question "Does singing help you to make friends?" (n=94), while also considering insights from weekly reflections gathered across the ten-week programme. Although the question explicitly focused on friendships, the analysis adopts a broader lens informed by Hallam's (2015) research on the social benefits of music-making, which highlights the importance of teamwork, empathy, emotional intelligence and social inclusion. While some children focused narrowly on friendships, their broader experiences indicate that singing together facilitated social bonds, strengthened collaborative skills and enhanced group cohesion—even when new friendships were not explicitly formed.

Children's responses to the direct question about friendship-making were varied, with roughly half indicating that singing helped them make friends, while others either expressed uncertainty or stated that it did not. Positive responses reflected an understanding of singing as a social activity that enables connection, with comments such as "yes because I meet a lot of people", and "yes, because you sing with others". Singing together was described as a shared experience that creates opportunities for interaction, particularly through joint rehearsals and performances. One child remarked, "singing helps me make friends because we can sing together", suggesting that the collaborative nature of choral singing provided a context in which social bonds could form naturally. This resonates with Hallam's (2015) assertion that shared musical experiences promote social integration and foster a sense of belonging.

Notably, several children associated friendship-making with singing clubs or external musical activities beyond the school choir. Comments such as "yes because you go to clubs and make friends" and "if you join the cathedral... there will be lots of new people to meet" indicate that the programme may have encouraged children to engage with wider musical communities. This suggests that choral participation can serve as a gateway to broader social networks, extending children's circles beyond their immediate classmates. For children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, these expanded networks are particularly significant, as they may offer access to new cultural experiences and social capital otherwise unavailable in their local contexts.

Even when children did not explicitly report making new friends, many reflected on the importance of teamwork and collaboration in the choir. Across the ten-week programme, numerous comments highlighted how singing together required listening to others, working as a team, and supporting one another. Statements like "we learned that if we work as a group, we can become better at singing" demonstrate that children recognized the collective nature of choral singing. These reflections align with Hallam's (2015) research, which emphasizes that ensemble music-making promotes cooperation, mutual respect and shared responsibility. Moreover, singing in a choir necessitates coordinated effort, requiring children to synchronize their timing, pitch, and

dynamics with others. This form of collaboration fosters social awareness, as children must be attuned to their peers' contributions while maintaining their own part. One child observed that listening to others in the choir helps them sing better together, highlighting the development of cognitive empathy through ensemble singing. Such experiences cultivate an understanding of interdependence, reinforcing the idea that individual success in music is closely linked to group cohesion—a valuable lesson with broader social applications.

While fewer children directly referenced empathy or emotional understanding, several responses suggested that singing together fostered positive emotions and strengthened emotional bonds within the group. Comments like "yes, because it's fun and it makes me and my friends smile" and "because [of] the joy in singing" reflect an awareness of how shared musical experiences can uplift moods and enhance group morale. Hallam (2015) argues that singing together can increase empathy by encouraging participants to attune to the emotional content of songs and the feelings of those around them. This was evident when children described how singing with others made them feel connected or comforted, even if they did not form new friendships per se.

Social inclusion emerged as another important theme, with the choir providing an environment in which children could participate regardless of prior musical experience or ability. Some children who expressed nervousness or self-consciousness early in the programme reported feeling more comfortable singing alongside their peers. Comments such as "I feel more confident when singing with my friends," while singing with everyone led some children to feel "less scared", illustrate how choral participation can reduce social anxieties and promote a sense of acceptance within the group. This inclusive atmosphere is particularly significant for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may face social exclusion in other contexts.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all children experienced the choir as socially beneficial. Some responses reflected ambivalence or negativity, with comments like "no, I already have friends", "singing didn't make me friends", also since children were not supposed to talk during rehearsals. These remarks highlight that the structured nature of rehearsals—focused on singing rather than conversation—may have limited opportunities for informal socializing. Additionally, a few children expressed concerns about being judged or teased for their singing abilities, with one child noting, "no because my voice is horrible and no one wants to be friends with me". Such comments underscore the importance of creating supportive environments that encourage positive peer interactions and build self-esteem.

Beyond individual friendships, many children's reflections suggested that participating in the choir fostered a sense of collective identity and shared achievement. Performing together—particularly in the final *Big Sing* event at the cathedral—appeared to strengthen bonds among the group, as children united around a common goal. Comments about learning "how to work in a team" and to sing "all together" reflect the role of performance in consolidating social cohesion. Hallam (2015) notes that collective musical experiences can foster a sense of community, providing participants with a shared sense of purpose and belonging. For children from deprived areas, these feelings of inclusion and accomplishment are especially valuable, offering positive social experiences that may counteract exclusionary dynamics elsewhere in their lives. While few children explicitly articulated the concept of collective identity, their comments implied an emerging awareness of being part of something larger than themselves. Phrases like "singing with my year group" was fun and "when we were singing all together" for everyone reveal how group performances cultivated pride and solidarity. These shared experiences can contribute to long-

term social benefits, reinforcing positive peer relationships and promoting prosocial behaviours such as cooperation, encouragement, and mutual support.

The reflexive journal page titled "About my Choir" yielded further valuable insight into children's own perceptions of their group membership and the social nature of choral participation. While many responses were brief or descriptive, the overwhelming emphasis on class-based singing—"I sang with my class", "I sang with my class [and] I am 9 years old", "we sang with different people… we are 8 and 9 years old.", "I thought the [choir] was just amazing so were other schools"—points to a collective identity anchored in familiarity, belonging and shared experience. Children spoke repeatedly of singing with their friends, often referring to the choir as "my class", "my classmates" or "my friends in school". For some, the choir was "like a family", and others described how "we are in harmony when we sing together… we all have different personalities", suggesting an awareness of both unity and individuality within the ensemble. This language of closeness and collaboration reveals the strong peer bonds formed or reinforced through musical participation, affirming the findings of Hallam (2015), who highlights that ensemble music-making promotes empathy, pro-social behaviour, and mutual support. Despite the relatively localised structure of the choirs (i.e., class-based rather than cross-school integration), a number of children still noted *"singing with other schools"* as a meaningful dimension of their experience. This broadened social horizon, albeit modest, reflects a nascent capacity for community beyond one's immediate peer group, suggesting that even limited interschool contact through music can nurture a sense of civic connectedness. While not every child elaborated emotionally, a number did express pride and joy in the collective experience—"I loved singing", "it was fun singing with my friends", and "my class just surprised me a lot. My friends made me so happy." Taken together, these comments underscore that for many children, the choir was not merely a musical activity but a socially affirming space where they could feel known, supported, and uplifted by those around them.

Despite the generally positive social outcomes, some children reported limited social gains from choir participation. In addition to the comments about restricted conversation during rehearsals, several children mentioned that they already had established friendship groups and did not seek new connections. Comments like "no because me and my friends don't want any more friends" and "no, I already have lots of friends" suggest that for some children, choir participation maintained their existing social circles rather than expanding them. In these cases, the choir may not have actively reshaped peer relationships, but instead provided a space in which pre-existing friendships remained central to their experience. This reflects Hallam's (2015) observation that while music can promote social inclusion, the extent of its impact may vary depending on individual motivations and social dynamics within the group. A few children expressed feelings of exclusion or discomfort, noting that nervousness or perceived lack of singing ability hindered their social interactions. Such barriers highlight the importance of fostering an environment where all children feel valued and supported, regardless of skill level. Encouraging peer encouragement and normalizing varied levels of confidence can help mitigate these challenges, ensuring that the choir remains a socially inclusive space.

The social benefits of children's choral participation, already richly described in children's own words throughout the journal responses, were powerfully corroborated by the perspectives of parents and teachers. These adult observations offer a valuable complementary viewpoint, particularly in helping to confirm and expand upon the themes of connectedness, confidence, and emotional wellbeing that emerged from the pupil data. A total of 19 respondents—primarily parents, but including at least one teacher who had observed the choirs—completed a questionnaire on the social value of the Schools Singing Programme. The statistical outcomes

provide clear evidence of perceived social benefit. The most frequently selected responses included: "My child enjoys the experience of singing together" (79%), "My child seems happy when singing in the choir" (79%), "The group singing is good for my child" (74%), and "My child feels good when around the other children in the choir" (74%). These high levels of agreement affirm the choir's positive emotional and social impact, reinforcing the child-centred findings that emphasised enjoyment, comfort, and shared joy through musical participation.

The statement "My child feels more connected to other children as a result of the choir" was selected by 68% of parents, further suggesting that choral singing has helped to strengthen peer relationships and foster social bonds. While only 42% indicated that their child had made new friends, this distinction between deepening existing relationships versus forging entirely new ones is crucial. Many children may have already been embedded in social groups prior to joining the choir, but the act of singing together nonetheless enhanced feelings of interpersonal connection—a theme mirrored in the children's own mixed reflections on friendship. Notably, several parents drew attention to how singing with others helped their children recover socially and emotionally from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although selected by a smaller proportion of respondents (26%), the statements "My child was quite lonely during the pandemic, so the choir helps to get back to normal" and "The choir helps my child overcome the negative consequences of the pandemic" capture a latent theme with significant depth. These comments suggest that for some children, choir participation served as a reintegration experience—rebuilding confidence, routine, and interpersonal comfort in the wake of social isolation. One parent described a visible transformation in their child, who had previously withdrawn during school performances but was now "happy sitting on a public stage", and even began to sing independently at home. Such testimonies resonate with Hallam's (2015) findings on the role of music-making in promoting mental health and emotional expression.

The qualitative comments provided further insight into the subtle but profound effects of singing together. One parent wrote: "He loves to share experiences with his friends", echoing the broader idea that music acts as a vehicle for collective joy and mutual understanding. Another participant, who identified as a teacher rather than a parent, reflected on the programme from a group observation perspective: *"Answered from my observation of the children in the choirs – not on a child of my own"*. This suggests that even from a more external vantage point, the social benefits of group singing were plainly visible in the children's interactions, behaviours, and expressions. While only 16% of parents selected the statement "My child feels a deeper connection to God during/after participating in the schools singing programme", this likely reflects the increasingly secularised religious orientations of many families in the region rather than the absence of spiritual or reflective value. For those who did feel this connection, it would add a further layer to the social and emotional resonance of choral singing—aligning with Hallam's (2015) insights into the capacity of music to evoke transcendence, meaning-making, and shared rituals of belonging.

Overall, the children's reflections reveal that choral participation provided significant social benefits, even if the development of new friendships was not universally experienced. Singing together fostered teamwork, collaboration, and a sense of collective achievement, aligning with Hallam's (2015) findings on the social cohesion promoted by group music-making. While some children highlighted the joy of singing with existing friends, others noted increased confidence and comfort when performing alongside their peers. The programme's emphasis on ensemble singing encouraged cognitive empathy, active listening, and shared responsibility—key components of emotional intelligence and social development. For children from some of the most deprived areas in the Liverpool City Region, these social benefits are particularly valuable, offering opportunities

for positive peer engagement and experiences of inclusion that may not be readily available elsewhere. Although not all children reported making new friends through the choir, the collective nature of rehearsals and performances fostered a supportive environment that enhanced group cohesion and social connection. As Hallam (2015) asserts, the power of music lies not only in individual growth but in its capacity to bring people together—an outcome clearly reflected in the children's experiences of this choral programme.

Meanwhile, the parent and teacher responses reinforce the conclusion that children's participation in the Schools Singing Programme has delivered significant social value. Beyond the acquisition of musical skills, singing together has helped children to feel good in the presence of others, deepen their sense of group belonging, and develop emotional confidence through public performance. These findings, aligned with Hallam's framework, highlight choral singing as a powerful medium for social inclusion and cohesion—an outcome of particular importance in the post-pandemic recovery period and within the socially complex contexts of the Liverpool City Region.

The Wellbeing Value of Children's Choral Participation

The wellbeing benefits of children's choral participation emerge with clarity in their own words. In response to the question "How does singing make you feel?", the majority of pupils expressed overwhelmingly positive emotions: happiness, joy, calm, pride and excitement featured prominently. As one child wrote simply yet evocatively, "Happy, proud, confident, good, kind of nervous". One child wrote, "Singing makes me feel very happy & peaceful," while another noted, it makes them "proud and really good about by achievements." These responses are consistent with a wide body of literature attesting to the transformative impact of singing on emotional, psychological and physiological wellbeing (MacDonald et al., 2012; Clift and Hancox, 2010; Theorell, 2018). Singing is not only emotionally rewarding; it has measurable physiological benefits. As Theorell (2018) explains, singing synchronizes breathing and heart rate variability, releases endorphins and elevates levels of oxytocin—a hormone that reduces anxiety and fosters trust and connection. These soothing bodily effects help to explain why so many children described themselves as feeling "calm", "relaxed" or "at peace" when singing. Several pupils mentioned the relaxing effects explicitly: "Singing makes me calm,", "I felt a bit better,", and "Singing keeps me calm and focussed on what I am doing." Such responses offer anecdotal affirmation of scientific findings which show that music, and particularly choral singing, promotes mental and physical equilibrium. In physiological terms, the act of singing requires deep, regulated breathing and sustained breath support—skills that can enhance respiratory health and improve lung capacity. Children were taught how to lift their eyebrows to access high notes, how to control their breath, and how to pay attention to posture and body alignment—elements that not only support vocal production but also foster greater body awareness and physical self-care (Welch et al., 2010, 2014). These embodied practices reinforce the idea that singing is a holistic, full-body activity that supports both mental clarity and physical health.

Beyond the individual benefits, the communal nature of singing should not be underestimated. Singing in a choir is inherently relational. It demands listening, cooperation, mutual timing and shared effort. Many children described feeling happy not just because of the act of singing, but because they were doing it "with friends," or "as a team." The sociality of song engenders a sense of cohesion and belonging, a phenomenon widely documented (Clift and Hancox, 2010; Kirsh et al. 2013). MacDonald et al. (2012) affirm that group music-making—especially through choral singing—facilitates emotional expression, resilience and social bonding, bridging personal experience with collective identity. For children in the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing

Programme, this bonding may be particularly meaningful, given the context of economic deprivation in which many live. Singing may offer not only joy, but also an experience of emotional safety, self-expression and social connection.

Of course, not all responses were unreservedly positive. A small number of children expressed discomfort, nervousness, or a lack of enjoyment. "Uncomfortable,", "scared,", or "angry", were outliers that remind us of the vulnerability some children feel when asked to perform publicly or sing in front of peers. This affirms Susan Hallam's (2015) view that wellbeing benefits are most likely to occur when participation is voluntary and well-supported. Where children feel shy, uncertain or excluded, the choral space must remain sensitive, inclusive and adaptive.

Parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire offered strong affirmation of the wellbeing value of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme, echoing and validating the voices of the majority of children themselves. While the young participants expressed their emotions in the moment—reporting feelings of happiness, calmness and pride—adults provided a broader view, observing sustained emotional and psychological benefits over time. A significant majority (79%) of adult respondents reported that "my child was looking forward to attending the singing programme", suggesting that the choral workshops became a consistent source of positive anticipation and motivation for the children. This emotional uplift is vital, particularly for pupils from communities facing socio-economic challenges, where access to extracurricular enrichment is often limited. Just over half (53%) of adults said their child "felt more positive" after the sessions, and nearly half (47%) noted that their child "felt good" or "felt happy" during or after the weekly workshops.

Parents also recognised the calming and stress-relieving effects of singing. Nearly half (47%) indicated that their child "felt less stressed", while over a quarter (26%) observed that their child was "less anxious and more content" as a result of the programme. These effects align with the research of MacDonald et al. (2012), Theorell (2018) and Welch et al. (2014), which underscore the physiological and psychological benefits of singing: modulated breathing, endorphin release and increased oxytocin levels all contribute to reduced anxiety and enhanced emotional resilience.

Furthermore, 58% of adults agreed that the programme helped their child "feel connected with other children or adults", pointing to the social embeddedness of wellbeing in musical contexts. Singing in a choir fosters social cohesion and mutual empathy, as highlighted by Susan Hallam (2015), creating a sense of shared purpose and interdependence. For children recovering from the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, this reconnection has particular salience. Although only 16% selected the specific option that "the singing programme helps my child overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic", the more general responses suggest that many children experienced reconnection, revitalisation and emotional renewal. Qualitative comments further illustrate these points. One adult observed that "working with other children through music is very positive," while another remarked that the experience had been transformative for their child's confidence, even if the child had initially been reluctant. As one respondent wrote, "choir singing is such a good way to teach good personal discipline and community building. These are desperately needed as our children… begin to recover from the pandemic." Another noted that choral singing helps children "feel less anxious about being in a space with lots of people"—an especially meaningful comment in light of extended social distancing and isolation that disrupted children's confidence in group settings. Others highlighted the power of group singing to restore joy and cohesion: "anything which enables children to mix, learn and have fun must be seen as a positive step", and "being part of a group" was cited as a healing process in itself. Collectively,

these observations reinforce the idea that choir participation acts as a vehicle not only for artistic expression, but for psychosocial reparation, rebuilding children's trust in others, and reinstating the rhythm and structure of communal life after profound disruption. This chimes with findings in the wellbeing literature that note how arts participation can lead to subtle but profound shifts in self-perception, especially when children are given the opportunity to succeed, be heard and feel valued.

In sum, the wellbeing value of the Schools Singing Programme is both diverse and profound. It encompasses emotional uplift, reduced anxiety, physical regulation and embodied self-awareness, while also enabling personal pride and collective joy. These findings align persuasively with current interdisciplinary research in music psychology, education and health. For the children who participated in this programme, singing was not merely an activity; it was a source of calm, confidence and connection. It is through such experiences that music's power to promote lifelong wellbeing becomes tangible and transformative. Meanwhile, the adult perspectives add vital depth and credibility to the evidence base surrounding the wellbeing impact of choral singing. They affirm that the Schools Singing Programme not only brings joy and calm to individual children but also contributes to their social integration, emotional resilience, and recovery from wider societal disruptions. These findings support ongoing calls (MacDonald et al., 2012; Hallam, 2015) for the integration of high-quality music education into the fabric of school and public health provision, particularly in regions of socio-economic disadvantage.

Final (Critical) Reflections

The reflections provided by parents, carers and teachers offer an ideal vantage point from which to summarise the broader significance of The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme, affirming the programme's considerable impact across musical, educational, cultural, social and wellbeing domains. Adults expressed widespread admiration for the quality of the programme and the dedication of its leaders, who were variously described as "positive and superb role models… dedicated, passionate, skilful and fun." The weekly workshops were eagerly anticipated, with children reportedly gaining in confidence and enthusiasm as the sessions progressed. One adult observed that "staff and children were excited each week for Stephen Mannings to come in and sing with them," and that the promise of a final performance lent a sense of purpose and focus. Above all, the programme was consistently recognised as a transformative and joyful experience. Adults praised it as "brilliant," noting that "the children learn so much, musically, learn so many transferable skills and have fun." The grandeur and symbolism of the cathedral itself also contributed to the programme's perceived value, as one respondent highlighted: "the organ and all the other instruments gave children a fantastic experience." The partnership between schools and the cathedral was described as both enriching and exemplary, fostering a positive environment that linked the sacred and the educational, the civic and the creative. Several comments expressed a hope for further opportunities for children to continue singing beyond the end of the programme, reflecting the depth of engagement it had inspired.

While the overall perception of the Schools Singing Programme was overwhelmingly positive, several respondents also raised thoughtful critiques and reflections that highlight areas for further consideration and inclusivity. For instance, one adult expressed concern about the cultural appropriateness of certain repertoire choices, particularly "Rule Britannia," noting its controversial message within the context of contemporary multicultural Britain. Another shared a child's feeling that a soloist had "hogged the stage," prompting reflection on the equitable distribution of performance opportunities within collective music-making. These observations are not framed as

rejections of the programme, but rather as constructive feedback which points towards ongoing efforts to ensure the experience is fully inclusive and empowering for all participants.

Such comments dovetail with broader concerns about barriers to access and participation—particularly in relation to the final concert at Liverpool Cathedral. While this culminating event was perceived by many as both prestigious and transformative, adults identified several logistical and perceptual challenges that may hinder attendance. The most commonly cited barrier was lack of awareness, with 53% of respondents noting that "people don't know about Liverpool Cathedral's events." Transport and mobility issues were identified by 42%, compounded in some instances by industrial strike action, while work commitments also prevented some families from being able to attend. Others acknowledged that some individuals may feel culturally or religiously alienated from the cathedral, with 32% stating that "people may feel that Liverpool Cathedral isn't 'their' church" and 26% pointing to non-religious identities as a potential obstacle.

These findings suggest that, while the programme has been successful in creating joyful and meaningful cultural experiences for many, continued attention must be given to questions of representation, equity and accessibility—both in the design of the programme and in its presentation to wider school communities. The desire to "keep on keeping on" must be met with a commitment to ensure that every child and family, regardless of background or circumstance, is able to access, enjoy, and feel fully at home in the artistic and spiritual spaces that this programme so powerfully opens up. In what follows, this conclusion draws together the educational, social, cultural and wellbeing values of the programme to reflect on the significance of children's choral participation in contemporary primary education.

Conclusions

This concluding chapter draws together the key findings and insights from the comprehensive research evaluation of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP), reflecting on the programme's educational, cultural, social and wellbeing value for primary school children. This study, conducted during the Spring term of 2023, represents a significant undertaking in the context of humanities research, involving the voices of nearly 300 children from 9 primary schools across the Liverpool City Region. The scale and depth of this data collection, including reflexive journal writing, ethnographic participant observations, online questionnaire and interviews with key stakeholders, make this project an impressive contribution to the fields of cultural musicology, music education and the sociology of music. This concluding chapter will reflect on the research scope and aims, the methodological approaches adopted, the main findings and their broader implications, and the unique contributions of this study to academic debates across several disciplines, including cultural musicology (DeNora, 2000), sacred music studies (Thomas, 2016), sociology of religion (Guest, 2022) and cathedral science (Francis, 2015). It will also outline the potential real-world impacts of this research and offer forward-looking reflections on the future trajectory of this work.

The primary aim of this research was to investigate whether, why and how participation in the Liverpool Cathedral SSP has social value to children in the Liverpool City Region. The study sought to capture the educational, social, cultural and wellbeing benefits of structured, high-quality choral singing for children aged 6 to 11, with particular attention to how these benefits are perceived differently across the participating schools. The project focused on the Spring term (April – July) 2023, during which the SSP engaged approximately 1000 children across 16 primary schools (Figure X), offering a rare opportunity to explore the broader social value of cathedral choral music education within one of the UK's most socioeconomically deprived regions. The research questions were designed to probe the perceived value of choral singing on children's educational outcomes, social cohesion, cultural awareness and emotional wellbeing, while also considering the potential barriers and challenges to accessing such programmes in diverse educational contexts.

Finding out about the perceptions and experiences of children, teachers and parents involved in The Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme offered the opportunity to evaluate the "power" of music for harnessing educational, social, cultural and wellbeing benefits. The study also aimed to identify, from information gathered from teachers and parents, what the barriers are to offering choral and musical learning experiences to children in socioeconomically deprived areas of Liverpool. Exploring children's perceptions and attitudes to high-quality choral singing, coupled with a unique concert experience in the marvellous interior of the city's greatest cathedral for both children and parents, who'd normally not participate in or listen to classical choral music, helped to understand how schools, children and parents actually view such opportunities, and whether, why and how these are valued and considered important. Carrying out research about children's perceptions and experiences of the impacts and value of choral singing and participation offered by Liverpool Cathedral enabled unique insight into a hitherto under-researched field of study.

From a methodological perspective, this study stands out for its scale and depth within the context of humanities and research in music education. The inclusion of nearly 300 children's voices from across 9 primary schools represented a substantial undertaking, both logistically and analytically. The grounded theory analysis of nearly 300 reflexive choir journals, complemented by ethnographic participant observations, online questionnaire and in-depth interviews, provided a rich, multi-layered dataset that captures the lived experiences of participating children. This approach aligns closely with emerging best practices in music education research, where the integration of children's own voices and perspectives is increasingly valued. Similar studies, such as those by Saunders *et al.* (2012) on the Chorister Outreach Programme and Welch *et al.* (2010) on the *Sing Up* National Singing Programme, have demonstrated the importance of capturing children's self-reported experiences to understand the broader social value of choral singing. However, this study uniquely extended this approach by incorporating a reflexive journal method, allowing children to document their own musical journeys in a way that foregrounds their personal, social and emotional reflections. This emphasis on child-centred data collection sets this research apart as a significant contribution to the field.

Choral Participation for Human Flourishing: Key Findings and Contributions

The research findings provide compelling evidence of the multifaceted benefits of the cathedral's Schools Singing Programme (SSP) for participating children, aligning closely with the broader theoretical context of this study. Drawing on interdisciplinary sociocultural theory, particularly the work of Hesmondhalgh (2013) on music's role in supporting *human flourishing*, the study situates the SSP as a powerful means of promoting children's social, cultural, educational and emotional development. This approach reflects the applied music scholarship that seeks to harness the benefits of music for enhancing children's lives, including the educational and wellbeing impacts highlighted by Hallam (2015) and Welch et al. (2014). Central to this framing is the concept of "human flourishing," which captures the ethical, social and developmental potential of music, positioning it as a critical tool for supporting children's holistic growth.

Key findings include:

1. *Educational Value*: The SSP significantly enhances children's musical skills, including vocal technique, pitch accuracy, musical literacy and ensemble singing. It also supports broader cognitive development, including attention, memory, concentration and linguistic skills. These outcomes align with the findings of Hallam (2015) and Welch et al. (2014) on the educational value of music and singing, which emphasize the cognitive, linguistic and neurological benefits of sustained musical engagement. In this context, the SSP not only promotes musical competence but also fosters broader intellectual growth, contributing to children's overall academic attainment and cognitive resilience.

2. *Cultural Value*: The SSP offers children from diverse backgrounds access to cultural capital traditionally associated with elite musical traditions, broadening their cultural horizons and providing a sense of belonging within a historic, architecturally significant space like Liverpool Cathedral. This aligns with the work of Bourdieu (2010) on cultural capital and social stratification, illustrating how music education can democratize cultural access and reduce social inequality. By exposing children to a rich choral tradition within a prestigious cultural setting, the SSP helps bridge cultural divides, offering children transformative cultural experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible to many from deprived backgrounds (cf. Arnold, 2016). Such cultural encounters are critical in fostering a sense of identity and belonging, supporting the broader goals of social inclusion and cultural preservation.

3. *Social Value*: The programme fosters social cohesion, teamwork and cross-cultural understanding, providing children with opportunities to build friendships, develop social confidence and overcome social anxieties. This social dimension is particularly significant in the context of post-pandemic recovery, where children's social skills and peer relationships have been disrupted. These findings resonate with the broader sociocultural theories on the power of music to enhance social connection and reduce social isolation (DeNora, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). In the context of the SSP, music serves as a powerful medium for overcoming social barriers, creating shared experiences and promoting mutual support, thus contributing to children's social wellbeing.

4. *Wellbeing Value*: The programme contributes to children's emotional resilience, self-esteem and mental health, offering a therapeutic and confidence-building space for emotional expression and personal growth. This echoes findings by MacDonald et al. (2012) and Clift and Hancox (2010) on the psychological benefits of group singing, including music for spiritual wellbeing (Boyce-Tillman, 2016). As Theorell (2018) and Welch et al. (2014) highlight, singing is associated with numerous physical and psychological benefits, including stress reduction, emotional regulation and enhanced self-awareness. The SSP thus provides a critical platform for promoting children's psychological wellbeing, supporting their overall mental health and emotional development.

This study makes a unique and novel contribution to existing debates in several academic disciplines, including cultural musicology, sacred music studies, music education, sociology of religion and cathedral science. It challenges traditional assumptions about the exclusivity of cathedral music, demonstrating the potential for choral outreach programmes to democratize access to high-quality music education and foster broader cultural engagement. The research also highlights the potential of cathedral choral singing as a vehicle for social inclusion, cultural preservation and community building, contributing to a growing body of literature on the social value of music in contemporary society (DeNora, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). In doing so, it affirms the critical role of music in promoting human flourishing and social cohesion in contemporary society.

Future Research Directions

Looking ahead, future research could explore the long-term value of the Schools Singing Programme on children's educational attainment, social mobility and cultural engagement. Comparative studies with other cathedral outreach programmes, such as the National Schools Singing Programme, could provide valuable insights into best practices for inclusive music education. Given the diversity of approaches to choral outreach, a broader comparative study involving multiple cathedrals in the UK could provide deeper insights into the various pedagogical, cultural and operational strategies employed to engage children from different social backgrounds. A comparative research study across several cathedrals in the UK would provide a richer understanding of the diverse approaches to choral outreach and their respective impacts. For instance, in London, St Paul's Cathedral stands out for its prestigious choir school and close ties to the monarchy, positioning it within a more "elite" cultural context. This association reflects its long-standing tradition of providing high-calibre musical training, yet also highlights the potential social barriers that may exist for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. By comparison, Southwark Cathedral offers a contrasting model, reflecting the diverse, urban context of its surrounding communities. It has developed outreach programmes that explicitly aim to connect

with different cultural groups, integrating the cathedral more deeply into the social fabric of its locality.

Durham Cathedral, by contrast, maintains a strong historical choral tradition while also expanding its educational outreach to include young people from various backgrounds, blending heritage with contemporary educational initiatives. Birmingham Cathedral, located in a highly multicultural city, provides another important perspective. Its choral programmes aim to reflect the diverse cultural landscape of Birmingham, ensuring that cathedral music is accessible to a broad demographic. This approach presents a valuable case study in how cathedrals can adapt to the changing demographics of their local communities, fostering inclusion while maintaining musical excellence. Similarly, Blackburn Cathedral has developed innovative outreach programmes aimed at engaging local communities, including partnerships with schools and baby music sessions funded by the Cathedral Music Trust. This early intervention approach highlights the potential for cathedrals to support musical development from the earliest stages of childhood, fostering a lifelong connection to choral singing. Sheffield Cathedral, which has also received support from the Cathedral Music Trust, has taken significant steps to broaden its community engagement, including efforts to reach young people who might not otherwise have access to music education. Finally, St Albans Cathedral, with its balanced approach to heritage and community engagement, offers another instructive example. It combines a commitment to traditional choral excellence with programmes that actively involve local schools and community groups, demonstrating how cathedrals can bridge the gap between historic liturgical practices and contemporary community needs. This comparative perspective would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to successful outreach, potentially revealing best practices that could be adopted more widely across the UK and beyond.

Additionally, expanding this comparative research to include international perspectives would provide further valuable insights. For instance, English choral traditions have a notable presence in the Netherlands, where the work of scholars such as Hanna Rijken highlights the ongoing influence of the Anglican choral model (Rijken, 2017). Similarly, a comparative study could examine Cologne Cathedral's "Sing Mit!" choral outreach programme (Kölner Dommusik, 2025), which provides a valuable European parallel to the work being done at Liverpool Cathedral, potentially offering new perspectives on how different cultural and religious contexts shape choral outreach strategies.

Furthermore, the potential health and wellbeing benefits of choral singing could also be a productive area for future research. Given the growing recognition of singing's positive effects on mental health and social wellbeing (MacDonald et al., 2012; Clift and Hancox, 2010), future studies could examine the specific contributions that cathedral outreach programmes can make in this area, providing high-quality choral music education for all ages and abilities, informed by novel insights into the emotional wellbeing benefits of participation in Evensong (King, 2022). This approach would align closely with the goals of lifelong musical engagement and human flourishing (Hesmondhalgh, 2013), as emphasized in the foundational theoretical frameworks guiding this research.

Research Impact

The findings of this study have significant real-world implications for a wide range of stakeholders, including cathedral leaders, policy makers, music teachers, choral leaders, headteachers, parents and the general public. The potential impacts can be broadly categorised into three key areas, each of which offers concrete pathways for applying the research insights in practice:

1. *Cultural Preservation*

The SSP plays a critical role in sustaining the endangered tradition of cathedral choral music (BBC Radio 3, 2024), ensuring its continued relevance in contemporary society and preserving a vital aspect of cultural heritage for future generations. For cathedral leaders and policymakers, this research demonstrates the importance of investing in outreach programmes like the SSP as a means of safeguarding this unique musical heritage. By engaging children from diverse backgrounds, the programme helps to bridge the gap between elite choral traditions and broader community participation, making cathedral music more inclusive and accessible, while also opening pathways into professional cathedral music making. This is particularly important for the long-term survival of this endangered art form, as it builds a future audience and cultivates the next generation of choristers. For the general public and cultural advocates, this research underscores the role of cathedrals as living cultural institutions that continue to shape local identities and foster a sense of collective heritage (cf. Platten, 2017).

2. *Music Education*

For music teachers, headteachers and educational policymakers, the SSP provides a compelling model for how cathedral outreach can enhance musical literacy and performance skills in primary school children. The research highlights the positive impact of the SSP on children's musical development, including improved vocal technique, pitch accuracy, musical literacy and ensemble singing. It also demonstrates the cognitive benefits associated with choral singing, such as enhanced memory, concentration and linguistic skills. These findings provide a strong case for integrating structured choral training into mainstream music education, supporting calls for a more music-rich curriculum in schools. Additionally, the SSP's emphasis on inclusivity and community engagement offers a blueprint for expanding access to high-quality music education beyond traditional cathedral settings, potentially influencing national education policies.

3. *Social and Emotional Wellbeing*

The SSP supports children's mental health and emotional resilience, promoting social cohesion and personal growth through collective musical experiences. For headteachers, parents and mental health professionals, this research provides concrete evidence of the psychological benefits of group singing, including increased self-esteem, emotional resilience and social confidence. It also highlights the role of music in fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity, which can be particularly valuable in socioeconomically deprived areas where children may face significant social and emotional challenges. The findings also align with broader educational and public health goals to foster social inclusion and community wellbeing, offering practical insights for policymakers seeking to promote mental health through the arts.

Overall, this research provides a detailed, multi-dimensional understanding and comprehensive blueprint for understanding and maximising the real-world impact of cathedral choral music programmes. By documenting the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing benefits of the SSP, it highlights the transformative potential of choral singing for children from diverse backgrounds, affirming the value of music as a powerful force for personal growth, social cohesion and cultural enrichment. It also offers practical guidance for a wide range of stakeholders, from cathedral leaders and music educators to policymakers and community advocates. The research highlights the critical role of music in shaping the emotional, social and cultural lives of children, reinforcing the value of investment in arts education and community outreach.

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Appendix

Table 5: This research draws on three primary data sets: (1) online questionnaire responses from parents, teachers and adults associated with the Schools Singing Programme; (2) interviews with key programme stakeholders, including senior clergy, music staff and choir leaders; and (3) children's reflexive journals completed throughout the ten-week programme in spring 2023. All data were collected in accordance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) requirements to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Full data sets, anonymised to protect participant identities, can be accessed at the below data repository URLs.

Data set	Description	Data Repository URL
Online Questionnaire	24 anonymous responses by parents, guardians and teachers	https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.d.00000233 and LJMU Data Repository
Interviews	Six in-depth interviews (ca. 60 mins) with key stakeholders, including senior clergy and music leaders insights into the programme's broader cultural and educational significance.	N/A
Choir Journals	Reflexive choir journal completed by 288 participating children from across 9 primary schools, providing insights into their personal experiences, reflections and emotional responses to choral singing.	https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.d.00000233 and LJMU Data Repository
Choir Journal template	The Choir Journal template was distributed in print format to 1000 children who participated in the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (2023).	https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.d.00000233 and LJMU Data Repository