

ARTICLE

Music outreach, social inclusion and human flourishing: evaluating the Liverpool Cathedral schools' singing programme

Simone Krüger Bridge 

Humanities and Social Science, Liverpool John Moores University, UK

Email: s.kruegerbridge@ljmu.ac.uk

Abstract

This article evaluates the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing value of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP) as a catalyst for human flourishing among primary-aged children in one of the UK's most socioeconomically disadvantaged regions. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, including ethnographic observation, reflexive pupil choir journals, stakeholder interviews and parental questionnaires, the study examines the transformative potential of cathedral-based choral outreach for children from communities with limited access to high-quality music education. Theoretically anchored in the sociocultural framework of human flourishing and informed by music education and community music scholarship, the article argues that structured, inclusive choral participation can nurture children's musical development, cultural capital, emotional resilience and social cohesion, contributing meaningfully to their holistic development. The findings offer implications for music education policy and practice and for the evolving civic role of cathedral institutions as agents of cultural inclusion and community renewal.

Keywords: choral outreach; human flourishing; social inclusion; cultural capital; child wellbeing

Introduction

In recent decades, the role of cathedral choral music in contemporary society has undergone a quiet yet profound transformation. Once closely associated with elite education, ecclesiastical privilege and inherited musical traditions, cathedral-based choral practice is now increasingly reimagined as a tool for public engagement, inclusion and community renewal. This shift is exemplified by the emergence of music outreach initiatives that extend the pedagogical and aesthetic reach of cathedral choirs beyond the walls of liturgical institutions and into the diverse social fabric of the communities they inhabit. One such initiative is the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (SSP), a curriculum-aligned choral outreach project that has engaged over 8,000 children from more than 40 primary schools across the Diocese of Liverpool since its inception in 2012 (Krüger Bridge, 2025a). Designed to widen access to high-quality music education for children in some of the UK's most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020; Liverpool City Council, 2019), the SSP offers weekly, in-school singing workshops that culminate in performances at Liverpool Cathedral itself, one of the largest Anglican cathedrals in the world and a prominent civic landmark in the North West of England.

This article evaluates the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing value of the SSP, examining its broader impact on children's lives and learning. Anchored in interdisciplinary sociocultural

theory and drawing conceptually on the notion of *human flourishing*, it seeks to articulate how structured choral participation might support young people's development in holistic and ethically significant ways. Rather than treating music merely as a means to external outcomes, such as improved attainment scores or behavioural change, this study considers the more expansive question of how communal music-making can foster children's emotional resilience, cultural agency and social belonging. In doing so, it explores the proposition that choral singing, as a participatory and affective musical practice, can create the conditions in which children may come to live well – musically, socially and spiritually.

The context for this work is particularly pressing. Liverpool is a city marked by profound inequalities, with many of its children growing up in contexts of poverty, under-resourced schools and diminished access to cultural provision (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020; Henley & Barton, 2022; Liverpool City Council, 2019). Knowsley and Liverpool rank second and third respectively among the most deprived local authority areas in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, with 33.6% of children in Liverpool living in poverty (Liverpool City Council, 2019). In these conditions, the value of structured, inclusive and high-quality music education becomes not only pedagogically significant but also socially and ethically urgent. While government-backed initiatives such as *Sing Up* have demonstrated the benefits of national singing strategies for school-aged children (Welch et al., 2008, 2009, 2010), cathedral-based outreach remains a relatively underexplored area of research within UK music education. Existing evaluations, such as those by Saunders et al. (2012), Preece (2024) and Preece & Atkinson (2025), have begun to document the cultural and educational impact of choral outreach programmes, including their potential to build children's cultural capital and bridge the gap between sacred musical traditions and secular educational spaces. Yet, few studies have focused on the lived experiences of children themselves or addressed the complex intersection of musical, social and emotional value that such programmes can engender, particularly within the unique architectural, acoustic and symbolic environment of a cathedral.

Liverpool Cathedral offers a distinctive case study in this regard. Unlike many English cathedrals, it does not operate an associated choir school (Ashley et al., 2022) and has developed a wide-reaching outreach strategy that seeks to democratise access to the cathedral's musical life, comprising girls' and boys' choirs, junior and youth ensembles and community singing initiatives (Krüger Bridge, 2025b). A central pillar of this broader musical mission is the SSP, which delivers curriculum-aligned choral workshops to primary school children across the Diocese of Liverpool, drawing participants from state schools serving communities across a wide socioeconomic spectrum. In the Spring 2023 term evaluated in this article, sixteen primary schools participated, engaging approximately 1,000 children aged 6 to 11, of whom a significant proportion came from some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England (Liverpool City Council, 2019). The SSP enables children from diverse backgrounds to encounter and participate in a choral tradition that has historically been perceived as exclusive or inaccessible. The SSP offers children an opportunity to participate in structured, high-quality vocal training, to develop their musical literacy and expression and to experience the affective and communal dimensions of choral singing within the unique acoustics and symbolism of the cathedral. Through this programme, children not only develop vocal and musical skills but are also afforded the opportunity to perform in a grand and resonant sacred space, to experience awe and aesthetic pleasure and to contribute to communal acts of expression and celebration. Drawing on a mixed-methods evaluation of the SSP conducted during the Spring term of 2023, this article presents findings from four strands of empirical inquiry: (1) ethnographic participant observation of school workshops and performances; (2) an online questionnaire completed by teachers and parents; (3) weekly reflexive choir journals written by participating children; and (4) interviews with cathedral clergy and music ministry staff. Together, these methods provide a multi-dimensional account of the programme's value as perceived by its various stakeholders and, most centrally, the children themselves.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section elaborates on the theoretical framing of human flourishing, drawing on the work of Hesmondhalgh (2013) and others to consider how music and choral singing in particular might support children's development beyond instrumental metrics. It then outlines the methodological approach of the study before turning to a thematic analysis of the empirical findings, organised around the four core dimensions of value: educational, cultural, social and wellbeing. The final section offers a reflexive discussion of these findings in relation to contemporary debates in music education, with particular attention to the ethics of outreach, the politics of inclusion and the pedagogical affordances of collective singing. Throughout, the article maintains a commitment to child-centred inquiry and the importance of listening carefully to children's own articulations of meaning, belonging and joy.

Theoretical framing and literature review

Human flourishing and the social value of music

The concept of human flourishing has gained increasing traction in recent years as an ethical and theoretical lens through which to assess the value of the arts and education. Flourishing, as understood within sociocultural frameworks, encompasses not merely the absence of hardship but the presence of meaningful, agentic and relational experiences that support individuals in living well. Music, particularly in collective and participatory forms, has been increasingly recognised for its potential to foster such conditions (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; MacDonald et al., 2012).

David Hesmondhalgh (2013) provides a particularly compelling argument for why music matters, grounding its value in its capacity to support emotional depth, identity formation and social solidarity. Drawing on a sociologically informed reading of Aristotelian eudaimonia, Hesmondhalgh moves beyond classical philosophical models to argue that music's ethical significance lies in its capacity to enrich lived experience, sustain meaningful relationships and foster collective belonging. Central to his framework is the claim that music, when experienced in inclusive and participatory contexts, can cultivate the emotional and relational capacities that underpin a good life: empathy, agency, expressive freedom and mutual recognition. Crucially, Hesmondhalgh is attentive to the conditions under which these affordances are realised or denied, noting that access to high-quality musical participation is unevenly distributed along lines of class, geography and institutional privilege. This makes his framework particularly pertinent to the SSP, which operates explicitly in contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage and seeks to democratise access to a musical tradition historically associated with elite education. His interpretation of flourishing moves beyond classical philosophical models and into a more sociologically attuned perspective, one that emphasises lived experience, relationality and the ethical consequences of cultural practice. Choral singing, with its embodied, collective and expressive modalities, encompassing the physical coordination of breath and voice, the social negotiation of ensemble sound and the affective experience of shared musical expression (Theorell 2018; Welch 2016), offers a particularly rich terrain for investigating these ideas, especially when delivered in inclusive educational contexts such as the SSP.

The SSP's inclusive design is integral to its capacity to support flourishing. Unlike auditioned cathedral choir programmes, the SSP is non-selective and curriculum-aligned, delivered within state primary schools serving communities across a wide socioeconomic spectrum. It is structured to accommodate children of all abilities and prior musical experience, with differentiated delivery across Key Stage 1 (ages 5–7) and Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11) and a pedagogical approach that prioritises participation, enjoyment and progressive skill development. This design reflects what Higgins (2012) describes as a 'hospitality' ethic in community music practice: an orientation towards welcome, inclusion and the creation of conditions in which all participants can engage meaningfully, regardless of background or prior experience. Viewed through this lens, the SSP is

not merely an outreach programme but a deliberate act of musical and social hospitality, extending the cathedral's choral tradition to children who might otherwise never encounter it.

The notion of flourishing resonates strongly with the educational goals of the SSP. Far from being an extracurricular add-on, the programme seeks to support the holistic development of children – musically, cognitively, socially and emotionally – through structured, high-quality singing instruction. In doing so, it aligns with broader aims in music education literature to understand musical learning as a means of cultivating the capacities needed for participation, expression and mutual understanding in a pluralistic society (Hallam & Himonides, 2022).

Music education and cognitive, emotional and social development

Research across multiple disciplines has long identified the developmental benefits of music education. Hallam's (2015) influential synthesis underscores the cognitive, social and emotional advantages of sustained musical engagement, noting that children who participate in music demonstrate improvements in literacy, numeracy, memory, attention and self-confidence. These outcomes are particularly pronounced when music-making is regular, high-quality and perceived by children as enjoyable (Hallam & Himonides, 2022).

Singing, in particular, has been found to support not only vocal and musical skill development but also broader domains of learning. According to Welch (2016, 2020), group singing enhances linguistic processing, supports concentration and fosters social cohesion, especially when embedded in educational environments. Singing develops auditory discrimination, memory, pitch accuracy and musical expressivity, while also building self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Welch et al., 2008, 2009, 2010). These findings are mirrored in international studies exploring the physical, psychological and social benefits of communal singing for children and adults alike (Clift & Hancox, 2010; Linneman et al., 2017; Robens et al., 2022).

Moreover, recent work by MacDonald et al. (2012) highlights the health-promoting capacity of music, with particular emphasis on its ability to reduce stress, enhance mood and strengthen interpersonal connections. These wellbeing benefits emerge not only from the physiological aspects of singing, such as breath regulation and endorphin release, but also from the affective bonds and shared meaning that arise in group musical activity (Davidson & Faulkner, 2014). Davidson and Faulkner (2014) demonstrate that group singing fosters a distinctive form of social identity, one grounded in shared embodied experience and mutual attunement, which can strengthen participants' sense of belonging and collective efficacy. Within this framework, choral singing is positioned as both an artistic and a psychosocial practice, offering space for emotional expression, community formation and cultural participation.

Cathedral-based choral outreach and cultural capital

Although there is a growing literature on the social and educational value of choral singing, cathedral-based outreach initiatives remain underexplored. Historically, cathedral choirs have been viewed as bastions of elite musical training, closely linked to private education, ecclesiastical tradition and class privilege (MacDonald, 2022). Recent shifts toward community outreach and inclusivity have begun to challenge this perception, with several cathedrals, including Liverpool, seeking to expand access to their musical resources through engagement with state schools and diverse populations.

The *Chorister Outreach Programme*, evaluated by Saunders et al. (2012), represents one of the first attempts to document this shift. Their study found that outreach choral initiatives not only improved musical skills among participating children but also fostered positive social and emotional development, especially in areas with limited cultural infrastructure. More recently, Preece (2024) and Preece & Atkinson (2025) have explored the ways in which choir schools generate cultural capital through outreach, arguing that such programmes can act as bridges

between elite cultural forms and wider educational constituencies. In this way, outreach choral programmes are not merely pedagogical interventions but also vehicles for cultural inclusion and redistribution.

Liverpool Cathedral's Schools Singing Programme sits squarely within this evolving landscape. Its intentional engagement with primary schools in economically disadvantaged areas challenges the conventional alignment of cathedral music with exclusivity, instead framing it as a civic and educational resource. By offering children from diverse backgrounds access to sacred musical spaces and repertoires, the SSP creates opportunities for young people to acquire cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), defined here as familiarity with and competence within, culturally valued forms of knowledge and practice, including the aesthetic traditions associated with formal choral music and sacred architectural spaces. Access to such capital matters because its unequal distribution reproduces social hierarchies: children from economically disadvantaged communities are less likely to encounter classical or sacred musical traditions through family or school, and their exclusion from such experiences compounds broader patterns of cultural marginalisation (Bourdieu, 1984; Bull, 2019). The SSP directly addresses this inequity, not by requiring children to abandon their own cultural identities, but by inviting them into an expanded musical world while affirming the validity of their existing tastes and experiences. In doing so, it supports what ap Si  n & Edwards (2012) have called engagement with cathedral music as a form of active cultural participation, a condition in which individuals engage in musical life not merely as recipients but as active cultural agents. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the redistribution of cultural capital through outreach is not without tension. Cathedral music outreach programmes risk reproducing the very hierarchies they seek to challenge if participation is framed primarily as an opportunity for disadvantaged children to access 'high' culture, rather than as a mutual encounter in which the institution itself is also changed and enriched by the communities it engages. The question of bidirectionality, that is, of what the cathedral gains from working with these children, as well as what children gain from the cathedral, is therefore integral to a critical understanding of outreach as a practice of genuine inclusion rather than benevolent transmission.

Methodology

This article is based on a mixed-methods evaluation of the Liverpool Cathedral SSP, conducted during the Spring term (April–July) 2023. The research aimed to explore the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing value of the SSP for primary-aged children across the Liverpool City Region. Drawing on a reflexive, ethnographic approach, the study was informed by inclusive, child-centred research practices and grounded in interdisciplinary methodological frameworks from music education, sociology and applied research.

Research design

The study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the complex, context-dependent value of the SSP. Four complementary methods were employed: (1) ethnographic participant observation; (2) an online questionnaire; (3) reflexive choir journals written by children; and (4) semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. This triangulated design allowed for a multi-layered account of the SSP's value, ensuring that children's voices were foregrounded and meaningfully situated within institutional, pedagogical and familial contexts.

The Spring 2023 term of the SSP involved sixteen primary schools from across the Liverpool City Region, engaging approximately 1,000 children aged 6 to 11 across Key Stage 1 (ages 5–7) and Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11). In each participating school, cathedral music staff delivered a ten-week programme of weekly 35–40 minute choral workshops to two classes or year groups, culminating in a termly whole-school singing assembly and the annual *Big Sing* performance at Liverpool

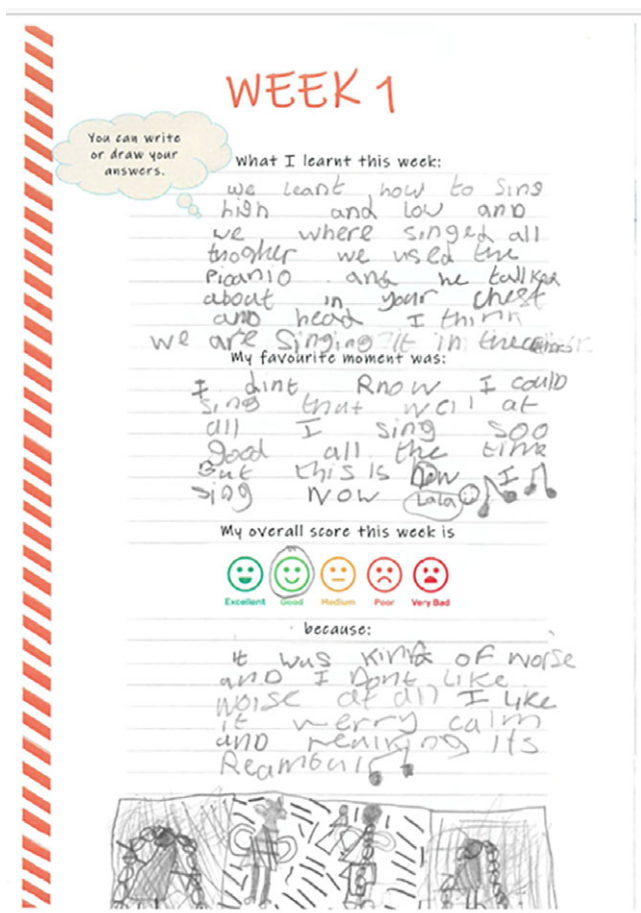


Figure 1. Liverpool Cathedral's Schools Singing Programme (Spring 2023) culminated in a final concert at Liverpool Cathedral for pupils from 16 participating primary schools from the Liverpool City region, titled 'Fit for a King: The Eurovision Big Sing', held in July 2023 and September 2023.

Cathedral (Figure 1). The SSP is structured as a curriculum-aligned, termly programme, with schools typically receiving one term of intensive provision per academic year, comprising ten weekly sessions of 35–40 minutes each. This model is designed to provide structured, high-quality choral education within the normal school week, without requiring additional parental commitment or out-of-hours attendance. Participating schools ranged from those located in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England to those in the 10% least deprived, providing a socioeconomically diverse sample (Liverpool City Council, 2019).

Ethnographic participant observation

Participant observations were conducted during school-based workshops and the final performance at Liverpool Cathedral. These observations provided insight into the relational, musical and affective dynamics of the SSP in situ. Following the tradition of reflexive ethnography, data were recorded through detailed fieldnotes and audiovisual documentation, with particular attention to embodied participation, musical interaction, classroom atmosphere and the aesthetic and emotional responses of children (Curran & Radhakrishnan, 2021). Analysis of the observational data



Figure 2. Excerpt from a primary pupil's choir journal reflecting on their choral workshop in Week 1 of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme (Spring 2023).

was guided by thematic coding, enabling the identification of recurring patterns related to musical learning, social engagement and collective joy.

Choir journal writing

To access children's perspectives in an ethically and developmentally appropriate manner, the study employed reflexive choir journal writing as an elicitation technique (Jones & East, 2010; see Figure 2). The journals were designed to be reflexive in the sense that they invited children to look back on each week's session and articulate, in their own words, what they had learned, what they had enjoyed and how singing had made them feel. Rather than measuring predefined outcomes, the journals were open-ended elicitation tools that foregrounded children's own meaning-making, allowing their subjective experiences and emotional responses to emerge organically across the ten-week programme (Jones & East, 2010). Each journal contained weekly prompts asking children to respond to three questions: 'What did I learn this week?', 'My favourite moment was ...' and 'My overall score this week is [1–5] because ...', alongside drawing prompts and tick-box questions designed to accommodate children's varying literacy levels.

A total of 1,000 journals were distributed across all 16 primary schools; 288 completed journals were returned from nine of the sixteen schools, representing a return rate of 56% at the school level. The journal design balanced open-ended prompts with drawing tasks and tick-box questions, acknowledging children's varying literacy levels and ensuring accessibility. It should be

noted that the nine schools that returned completed journals were drawn from across the socioeconomic range of participating schools, including both highly deprived and less deprived neighbourhoods, providing reasonable confidence in the representativeness of the child-centred data. Nonetheless, the findings from the journal analysis are treated as indicative rather than exhaustive and are triangulated with questionnaire and interview data throughout.

The completed journals were digitised by a research assistant, who transcribed children's handwritten responses verbatim into the JISC Online Surveys platform, mirroring the journal's original categories and question structure. The data were then transferred to and analysed through the JISC Online Surveys platform, allowing both descriptive statistical analysis and grounded qualitative interpretation. An inductive, data-driven approach was used to code children's narratives, enabling themes to emerge organically from their responses. Particular attention was given to reflections on enjoyment, confidence, identity and emotional or aesthetic experience. This method gave primacy to children's own meaning-making, aligning with research that emphasises empowerment and inclusion in music education research with young participants (Jones & East, 2010). Children's written responses are presented in this article largely as written, with only minor corrections to spelling and grammar where necessary for clarity and without alteration to meaning or intent.

Online questionnaire

An online questionnaire was designed and administered using the OnlineSurveys software platform to collect the views of parents, carers and teachers. A total of 24 responses were received, comprising parents, carers and school staff associated with the sixteen participating schools. The questionnaire gathered both demographic data and perceptions of the educational, social, cultural and wellbeing value of the SSP. Qualitative questions were designed to elicit deeper reflections and were analysed using an interpretative framework, while quantitative data were summarised using descriptive statistics. Given the small sample size, percentage figures derived from the questionnaire data are offered as indicative of participant perceptions rather than as statistically generalisable findings and are triangulated with children's journal responses and interview data throughout. This approach allowed for triangulation across participant groups and revealed insights into how the SSP was experienced by adults in both school and family contexts.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including the dean of Liverpool Cathedral, senior clergy, the director of music and choral outreach staff. In addition, a group interview was held with four members of the outreach team following the *Big Sing* concert in September 2023. The *Big Sing* was the culminating public performance of the Spring 2023 SSP, held at Liverpool Cathedral in July and September 2023, at which all sixteen participating schools performed together before an audience of families, teachers and members of the public. For many children and families, this was their first visit to Liverpool Cathedral and their first experience of formal choral performance. These interviews explored the SSP's institutional, theological and pedagogical underpinnings, its musical and cultural aims and perceptions of its impact on children.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by analytical induction and interpretive coding. This method allowed for the identification of patterns in how participants described the SSP's role in promoting cultural inclusion, musical excellence and spiritual reflection within a cathedral context. By situating the programme within the broader mission of the cathedral, these interviews added institutional depth to the child-centred data.

Ethical considerations

The research adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and received formal approval from the Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, and assent procedures were followed for child participants via parental permission and school agreements. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and all data were handled in accordance with GDPR regulations. All individuals named in visual materials associated with the research, including Figure 1, gave informed consent for the use of their image in academic publications. All school and participant names have been anonymised in the analysis and findings.

A note on the dataset: this article draws on the same empirical dataset as a companion article published in *Music Education Research* (Krüger Bridge, 2025a). That article focuses specifically on the 288 reflexive choir journals as a methodological and analytical object, examining how children reflect on their educational, cultural, social and emotional engagement with choral singing through tick-box responses, written prompts and drawings (Krüger Bridge, 2025a, pp. 3–22). The present article is analytically and theoretically distinct: it draws on all four strands of the mixed-methods design, namely observation, journals, questionnaires and interviews, and frames the findings within the sociocultural dimensions of human flourishing, social inclusion and cultural capital, integrating the community music hospitality framework of Higgins (2012) as a differentiating theoretical contribution.

Findings: the value of the Liverpool Cathedral Schools' singing programme

This section presents an integrated analysis of the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing value of the Liverpool Cathedral SSP, based on children's choir journals, adult questionnaires, interviews and ethnographic observations. These interwoven dimensions offer a holistic account of how choral participation can support children's human flourishing.

Educational value: cognitive and musical growth

The educational dimension of the SSP is underpinned by a curriculum-based structure that integrates vocal training with musicianship, musical literacy and performance. Each school received weekly 35–40 minute workshops delivered by cathedral music staff across a ten-week term, with sessions designed around five key learning outcomes: (1) understanding and applying vocal technique; (2) learning the foundations of musicianship (pulse, pitch and rhythm); (3) developing healthy vocal habits and head voice use; (4) singing with others in time and tune; and (5) gaining confidence through live performance. Key Stage 1 (ages 5–7) and Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11), making up the two phases of primary education in England and Wales, provided the curricular framework within which these learning outcomes were embedded, ensuring alignment with national statutory requirements for music education.

Children's reflexive choir journals provided strong evidence that these learning outcomes were widely achieved, particularly among the majority of participating children, though engagement and progress varied across individuals and schools, as discussed below. For example, in relation to vocal technique and musicianship, many children wrote about learning to 'sing high and low', to 'use my voice properly' and to 'keep in time with others'. One pupil reflected: 'I learnt how to keep the rhythm and do the signs with my hands', referencing the Kodály-inspired hand signs used in workshops to develop pitch awareness and solfège. In relation to vocal health and control, children frequently noted improvements in breathing, posture and projection. One journal entry stated, 'I can sing loud without shouting', while another observed, 'I learnt to breathe deep when we sing long notes'. These comments suggest embodied musical learning and growing metacognitive

awareness, what Hallam (2015) describes as children's capacity to monitor and reflect on their own learning processes.

Crucially, these learning processes were not abstracted from social context. The pedagogical delivery of the SSP was both musically rigorous and socially affirming. Workshops were led by trained music outreach staff, namely professional musicians, who combined choral warm-ups, call-and-response activities, solfège and part-singing with humour and accessible explanation. Each session followed a structured sequence, typically beginning with breathing and physical warm-ups, followed by short musical games to reinforce rhythmic patterns and intervals before introducing or revisiting repertoire. Rehearsals were adaptive and responsive to the needs of each school cohort, with a gradual build-up to full ensemble singing in two or more parts by mid-term. The culmination of the term, the live performance at Liverpool Cathedral, served as both a pedagogical goal and a symbolic milestone. In their final journal reflections, many children described this performance as a transformative moment. 'I felt brave', wrote one child, while another reflected, 'I was scared at first but then I sang and I was proud'. These expressions indicate the development not only of musical skill but also of performative resilience and emotional regulation, capacities that are increasingly recognised as vital in contemporary educational discourse (Welch et al., 2010).

Teachers corroborated these perceptions in the online questionnaire, with 79% of respondents ($n = 19$ of 24) identifying increased musical confidence, 63% of respondents ($n = 15$) noting improvements in concentration and memory and 58% of respondents ($n = 14$) observing stronger engagement with learning more generally. These figures, while derived from a small sample and therefore indicative rather than statistically generalisable, are consistent with findings from the broader music education literature on the cognitive and motivational benefits of structured singing programmes (Hallam, 2015; Welch et al., 2010). Many pupils described feeling 'proud', 'smarter' and more confident in their abilities to sing and learn musical notation. One child wrote, 'I learnt to sing with high and low voices', while another explained, 'It helps my brain think better'. These responses suggest not only musical but also metacognitive gains, with children becoming aware of their own learning processes. Several teachers praised the curriculum design itself, noting that it aligned well with national targets and provided high-quality enrichment otherwise unavailable in their schools. These findings echo Welch's (2017) observation that structured singing activities support children's developing understanding of pitch, rhythm and expression and reinforce Hallam's (2015) conclusion that musical learning, when embedded in an inclusive and well-sequenced curriculum, enhances broader cognitive and affective development. The SSP's pedagogical framework, grounded in voice-centred, curriculum-led delivery, thus appears to be a key factor in enabling these educational outcomes.

Educational value also manifested through ensemble experiences. Group singing was described as helping with 'timing', 'listening to others' and 'working together', all of which align with key curriculum goals around cooperation and communication. It is important to note, however, that educational benefits were not uniformly experienced across all participants. As Welch et al. (2014) have demonstrated in their research on singing and social inclusion, the sense of social and educational benefit in group singing tends to be most strongly felt by children who develop greater vocal competence over time. In the SSP, children entered with varying levels of prior musical experience and singing confidence, and journal data revealed a small but consistent minority (approximately 10–13% of journal respondents in any given week) who reported disengagement, discomfort or limited enjoyment. These children cited factors including nervousness, sensory sensitivity to loud sound, personal dislike of singing and fatigue from standing. While the programme's inclusive and adaptive design sought to accommodate a range of needs, the persistence of this disengaged minority underscores the importance of differentiated approaches in large-scale choral outreach and of careful attention to the conditions under which all children, not only the most musically confident, can experience genuine benefit.

The broader cognitive effects, including enhanced focus, memory and linguistic skills, are consistent with the conclusions of the *Sing Up* programme evaluation (Welch et al., 2010), which demonstrated that sustained choral participation can lead to measurable educational gains. The findings here affirm that, even when implemented outside elite institutions, structured choral education retains significant pedagogical power.

Cultural value: access, identity and prestige

Cultural value was most strongly articulated through children's expressions of pride in participating in a cathedral-based programme. Many wrote of the excitement of singing in 'the fifth biggest cathedral in the world', highlighting how architectural space itself contributed to a sense of occasion, aspiration and symbolic distinction. Children used terms such as 'important', 'special' and 'honoured' to describe their experience, underscoring the affective resonance of being welcomed into a space they perceived as elite or otherwise inaccessible.

For many children and families, participation in the SSP marked their first encounter with cathedral music. Among the 24 adult questionnaire respondents, 43% were attending the final *Big Sing* concert for the first time, and 23% had no prior experience of Liverpool Cathedral at all. Qualitative responses confirmed that for many families, the cathedral had previously felt like a place 'not for them', with one parent writing that participation had helped their child feel 'welcome in a place I didn't think we were allowed in'. This aligns with Preece's (2024) findings that cathedral outreach can act as a bridge between culturally privileged spaces and under-represented groups. Drawing on Bourdieu (1984), one can argue that the SSP functioned as a form of cultural enfranchisement, distributing musical capital and institutional prestige to children from communities typically excluded from such spaces. Adult responses affirmed this symbolic value. Sixty-three percent of respondents ($n = 15$) described participation in the SSP as 'prestigious', and 58% of respondents ($n = 14$) reported that their child felt proud to perform in the cathedral choir. Notably, these sentiments often emerged even in the absence of religious affiliation. As one parent wrote, 'The Cathedral is a wonderful building, and we feel honoured our child was chosen'. This suggests that the cultural value of the SSP transcends doctrinal identity, engaging participants through aesthetics, place and shared celebration. The programme's use of both sacred and secular repertoire, from 'The Old Hundredth' to ABBA's 'Waterloo', also reflected a culturally omnivorous ethos (Peterson, 1992). Children often named their favourite pieces from the Eurovision repertoire, such as 'Space Man' or 'Love Shine a Light', demonstrating the power of eclecticism to affirm musical identity while widening access to unfamiliar forms.

The cultural value of the SSP is thus best understood not as a one-way transfer of prestige from institution to child, but as a relational encounter in which children, families and the cathedral itself are all changed by the experience. The institutional dimensions of this encounter are considered in the following section.

Institutional value: sustainability, recruitment and civic engagement

It is also worth considering what the SSP offered to Liverpool Cathedral itself, since the benefits of the programme were emphatically not one-directional. The programme brought approximately 1,000 children, many from communities with no prior connection to the institution, into the cathedral's orbit each term, generating new and sustained relationships between the cathedral and the diverse schools and families of the Liverpool City Region. Music staff reflected in interviews on how working with children from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds had enriched their own practice, prompting them to reconsider repertoire choices, pedagogical approaches and the ways in which the cathedral's musical tradition could be made genuinely welcoming to all. As one music staff member observed, 'We've had to think carefully about what we do and why, and that's been good for us'.

Beyond the relational and pedagogical, the SSP also serves important institutional functions within a broader neoliberal context in which English cathedrals are under increasing pressure to achieve financial sustainability without recourse to statutory funding (Ashley et al., 2022). Participating schools pay a termly fee per ten-week programme, making the SSP a meaningful income stream for the cathedral's music department. This financial dimension is not incidental: it reflects the wider reality that cathedral music outreach, however socially motivated, operates within market conditions that shape its reach, design and sustainability. Notably, interview data with Cathedral music staff suggested that the uniform fee structure does not disadvantage the most deprived schools; on the contrary, schools serving higher proportions of Pupil Premium and SEND students receive additional per-pupil funding that can be directed towards buying in precisely the kind of curriculum-enriching provision that the SSP represents, making such schools in some cases better placed than their more affluent counterparts to sustain participation.

At the same time, the SSP functions as a pipeline for chorister recruitment. Some primary school children who participate in the programme go on to join one of the cathedral's three junior choirs, which are based at the cathedral, Sefton and Knowsley, respectively, and which offer weekly choral workshops and opportunities to sing termly evensongs and concerts at the cathedral. From these junior choirs, some children are in turn recruited into the professional cathedral choir as choristers. This pathway, from SSP participant to junior choir member to professional chorister, at least partially addresses what has been described as a sustainability crisis for English cathedral choral music (BBC Radio 3, 2024) by widening the pool from which future choristers are drawn beyond the traditional catchment of elite choir schools.

The SSP also generates broader institutional benefits through increased footfall. Families attending the *Big Sing* concert and other cathedral events bring with them not only parental pride but also economic activity, including event fees, donations and parking revenues. More significantly, the cathedral's engagement with families who had previously felt excluded from its spaces has in some cases catalysed deeper connections: qualitative responses suggested that for a small number of families, attending the cathedral for the first time through the SSP prompted renewed religious engagement, with some parents experiencing a rekindling of faith or a first step towards regular attendance or baptism. While such outcomes are neither the primary aim of the SSP nor universally experienced, they point to the cathedral's enduring role as a site of spiritual as well as cultural encounter. This bidirectional dimension of value, in which the cathedral is itself changed, financially sustained and spiritually enriched by its engagement with the community, is integral to a critical understanding of outreach as a practice of genuine inclusion rather than benevolent transmission (Higgins, 2012) and complicates any straightforward reading of the SSP as purely altruistic. The programme is simultaneously a social good, an educational service, an income generator and a site of spiritual encounter and potential religious engagement, and its integrity as an inclusive outreach initiative depends in part on the transparency with which these multiple functions are acknowledged.

Social value: belonging, friendship and ensemble work

The SSP provided a rich social context in which children developed relational competencies, including cooperation, empathy and group responsibility. Reflecting Susan Hallam's (2015) framework on the social benefits of music-making, children's journals frequently referenced teamwork, listening and the joy of singing together. One child noted, 'We all had to try together and help each other', while another observed, 'If you listen to others, you sing better'.

Friendship-making, while an emergent theme, was uneven in its distribution across the cohort. Approximately half of the children reported that singing had helped them to make new friends or feel more connected to peers, particularly during joint rehearsals and the *Big Sing* concert at the cathedral. Others described 'feeling safe' or 'happy' when singing with existing friends, suggesting that for many children the choir reinforced rather than expanded their social networks. A smaller

number reported that the structured nature of rehearsals, which prioritised singing over informal conversation, had limited opportunities for new friendships to form, with one child noting simply, 'You can't really talk in choir'. These varied responses are consistent with Welch et al.'s (2014) finding that the social benefits of group singing are mediated by individual levels of musical confidence and prior social experience and suggest that the social value of the SSP, while significant for many, was not uniformly experienced across all participants. For children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, such social inclusion may be particularly significant, offering access to wider peer networks beyond the immediate school environment.

Adults likewise attested to the programme's relational value. Parents described increased 'team spirit' and noted that their children were 'more confident in groups'. A teacher wrote, 'The experience is fantastic for our children's sense of pride, belonging and musical development', highlighting the relational as well as educational nature of the learning process. The social aspect was amplified by the performative finale, the *Big Sing* at Liverpool Cathedral, which brought together hundreds of children from across the city. In this collective act of performance, children experienced a powerful sense of unity. One child reflected, 'It felt amazing to sing with other schools', indicating how music can become a medium for civic cohesion and mutual recognition across institutional boundaries.

Wellbeing value: joy, calm and confidence

Perhaps the most striking findings emerged in relation to wellbeing. Children's responses to the question 'How does singing make you feel?' were overwhelmingly positive. Words such as 'happy', 'calm', 'relaxed' and 'proud' featured prominently across the data. One child wrote, 'Singing makes me feel very happy & peaceful', while another simply put, 'It makes me feel better when I'm sad'. These findings align with a growing body of research on the therapeutic effects of music. Studies have demonstrated that singing enhances respiratory regulation, reduces cortisol and increases endorphins and oxytocin levels, physiological changes that support mood regulation and emotional resilience (MacDonald et al., 2012; Theorell, 2018). Parents corroborated these effects: 47% of respondents ($n = 11$) observed that their child appeared 'less stressed', and 26% of respondents ($n = 6$) said their child was 'less anxious and more content' as a result of participation.

The wellbeing benefits were not merely individual. Parents noted the collective dimension of emotional uplift. One respondent wrote, 'It's not just music. It's joy, confidence, and healing after a difficult time'. In the context of post-COVID recovery, these comments take on particular significance. Several participants described how the SSP helped children regain social confidence and emotional equilibrium disrupted by pandemic-related isolation. One parent reflected, 'My child had withdrawn during lockdown. Now she sings in the kitchen, in the car, everywhere'. Although a minority of children reported feelings of nervousness or fear, e.g., 'I was scared' and 'I didn't want to be in front of people', these responses were more prevalent in the early weeks of the programme, with many children reporting growing confidence as the term progressed. As one child wrote in Week 9: 'I felt more confident with myself.' This trajectory from anxiety to confidence is itself a meaningful wellbeing outcome, reflecting the gradual, cumulative nature of choral participation as a context for emotional growth. As Hallam (2015) has noted, the wellbeing effects of singing are most likely when participation is voluntary, well-facilitated and emotionally safe. The SSP's sensitive and supportive delivery model appears to have created such an environment for the majority of participants, though the persistence of a small minority of disengaged or anxious children is a reminder that inclusive design requires ongoing attention to individual needs and experiences.

Discussion: choral participation and children's human flourishing

The findings presented across the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing dimensions of the SSP clearly illustrate its positive, multifaceted impact on the lives of participating children. When

considered through the theoretical lens of *human flourishing*, these outcomes reveal how cathedral-based choral outreach can contribute not only to musical development and school attainment but also to deeper forms of personal, social and ethical growth. As conceptualised by Hesmondhalgh (2013), flourishing involves the cultivation of conditions that allow individuals to live well in a broad sense – emotionally, socially, ethically and culturally. It encompasses capacities such as empathy, agency, expressive freedom, aesthetic experience and meaningful connection to others. Participatory music-making, particularly in structured and socially inclusive settings, is especially well-positioned to nurture such capacities. The SSP exemplifies this potential. It is important to acknowledge, however, that flourishing was not uniformly experienced across all participants. A small but consistent minority of children reported disengagement, anxiety or limited benefit, and the institutional dimensions of the programme, including its fee-based model and chorister recruitment function, complicate any straightforwardly celebratory reading. A rigorous account of the SSP's contribution to flourishing must therefore attend to both its achievements and its limitations.

Firstly, the educational benefits of the programme, notably enhanced confidence, vocal control, musical literacy and performance readiness, support children's cognitive flourishing. Children's journal entries revealed pride in learning musical notation, mastering challenging repertoire and singing in synchrony with others. These achievements reflect not only technical skill acquisition, but also the development of attentiveness, self-regulation and self-efficacy. They demonstrate what Hallam (2015) describes as the metacognitive and motivational affordances of music education: learning how to learn and finding joy in one's own progress. From the perspective of flourishing, such outcomes signal the expansion of children's agentic capacities, namely the ability to make choices, persevere in difficulty and take ownership of one's learning journey. These benefits were most clearly experienced by children who developed greater vocal confidence over the course of the programme, consistent with Welch et al.'s (2014) finding that the sense of social and educational benefit in group singing tends to be most strongly felt by the most musically engaged participants. This raises important questions for the design of future outreach initiatives about how to ensure that the conditions for flourishing are extended to all children, including those who are initially reluctant, anxious or less musically experienced.

Secondly, the cultural value of the SSP is integral to what Hesmondhalgh (2013) understands as the ethical significance of aesthetic experience. Singing in the architectural grandeur of Liverpool Cathedral and participating in a tradition once historically inaccessible to most children offered pupils a powerful form of symbolic inclusion. For many, this was their first experience of formal performance or choral singing. The cathedral setting endowed the occasion with gravitas and transcendence, fostering a sense of pride and cultural belonging. Children described feeling 'important', 'brave', 'honoured' and 'special', signalling an affective and imaginative engagement with the space. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, the SSP redistributed cultural capital, allowing children from under-represented communities to enter and inhabit elite cultural forms without surrendering their own identities. Such experiences contribute to children's flourishing by affirming that they are not marginal to the cultural life of the nation or the sacred traditions of the Church. Rather, they are full participants in a shared artistic and social world. This sense of cultural legitimacy, of being 'allowed in' to spaces of value and meaning, is vital in contexts of deprivation and marginalisation. It offers what Preece (2024) terms a 're-authoring' of musical and civic identity: children begin to see themselves as bearers of cultural knowledge, capable of expressing and embodying traditions that once seemed remote. It is important to note, however, that this redistribution of cultural capital is not without tension. As the institutional value section has demonstrated, the SSP simultaneously serves the cathedral's financial, recruitment and missionary interests. The risk, as critics of Bourdieuan cultural capital frameworks have noted (Bull, 2019), is that outreach programmes which frame participation in elite cultural spaces as intrinsically beneficial may inadvertently reproduce the very hierarchies they seek to challenge, positioning 'high' culture as the standard against which children's existing cultural identities are measured.

The SSP's inclusive design and eclectic repertoire, combining sacred choral works with Eurovision pop, go some way towards mitigating this risk, but the tension cannot be fully resolved and warrants ongoing critical reflection by programme designers and researchers alike.

Thirdly, the social value of the SSP speaks directly to the relational dimension of flourishing. Singing together requires trust, mutual listening, shared intention and collective responsibility. These capacities were frequently mentioned in children's journals: 'We help each other', 'You have to listen' and 'Everyone has to try their best'. Such expressions reveal not only the technical demands of ensemble singing, but also the ethical commitments it entails. The act of singing with others is fundamentally social, and in contexts where children may lack stable peer relationships, it offers a context for belonging and cooperation. Welch et al. (2010) and Hallam (2015) have argued that singing can scaffold social inclusion by building self-esteem and collective identity. The SSP affirms this claim. Its structure, while bringing together children from different schools and communities for a shared artistic purpose, generated a sense of civic togetherness. The *Big Sing* concert became a ritual of recognition: children seeing themselves as part of something larger and being seen by their peers, families and teachers as worthy of public celebration. The social dimension of flourishing is further illuminated by Higgins's (2012) concept of hospitality in community music practice. The SSP's non-selective, curriculum-aligned model creates what Higgins describes as a welcoming space, one in which all participants are invited to contribute regardless of prior experience or ability. This ethic of welcome is not merely logistical but relational: it shapes the affective atmosphere of the workshops, the pedagogical orientation of the music staff and the experience of children who might otherwise have remained outside the cathedral's cultural orbit. When the SSP works at its best, it enacts precisely the kind of hospitality that Higgins argues is central to community music's transformative potential.

Finally, the wellbeing value of the programme, expressed through feelings of joy, calm, pride and emotional release, touches the innermost dimensions of flourishing. Singing offered children a way to navigate emotional states, to feel present in their bodies and to share in experiences of transcendence. This was especially vital in the post-pandemic context, where children's mental health and social confidence had often been negatively affected. As one parent put it, 'Now she sings in the kitchen, in the car, everywhere.' The emotional literacy fostered by singing is not an ancillary benefit; it is central to what it means to flourish. Children who learn to express their feelings through music, to feel joy in shared experiences and to find confidence in voice and presence are better equipped to navigate the ethical and emotional terrain of their lives. These are not soft skills; they are vital capacities for life. The trajectory from anxiety to confidence observed across the ten-week programme, with many children moving from nervousness in Week 1 to pride and self-assurance by Weeks 9 or 10, suggests that the wellbeing benefits of choral participation are cumulative and developmental, rather than immediate or uniform. This has implications for how outreach programmes are designed and evaluated: a single-term intervention of ten weekly sessions may be sufficient to initiate this trajectory for many children, but longer-term or repeated engagement may be needed to consolidate these gains, particularly for those who begin with the highest levels of anxiety or disengagement.

The discussion has also revealed the importance of attending to the institutional context in which flourishing is pursued. The SSP does not operate in a vacuum: it is embedded in a cathedral institution with its own financial pressures, musical traditions and theological commitments. These institutional realities shape the programme in ways that are both enabling and constraining. They enable the SSP to offer children access to extraordinary spaces, professional musicians and a rich choral heritage; they also mean that the programme must balance social and educational goals against institutional interests. Acknowledging this complexity is not a criticism of the SSP, which, by the evidence of this study, achieves a remarkable degree of genuine inclusion and educational value, but a reminder that the conditions for flourishing are always socially and institutionally produced and that sustaining them requires ongoing critical reflection, equitable design and transparent governance.

Conclusion

This article has examined the multifaceted value of the Liverpool Cathedral SSP, an outreach initiative designed to provide primary-aged children from across the Liverpool City Region with sustained access to high-quality choral singing and music education. Situated within the broader Anglican choral tradition, yet reimagined through a socially inclusive and pedagogically progressive model, the SSP represents a compelling case of how cathedral music-making can support children's human flourishing in contemporary society.

Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, including participant observation, child-authored choir journals, adult questionnaires and stakeholder interviews, the study has illuminated the educational, cultural, social and wellbeing impacts of the SSP. These findings have been situated within the conceptual framework of *human flourishing*, as articulated by Hesmondhalgh (2013) and others, and show how participatory music-making in inclusive, relational and symbolically rich contexts can cultivate the capacities that support children in living well. The study has also demonstrated, however, that flourishing is not uniformly produced by participation alone: it depends on the quality and inclusivity of programme design, the relational skill of music educators and the transparency with which institutions acknowledge the multiple and sometimes competing interests that outreach programmes serve.

The findings demonstrate, first and foremost, that the SSP fosters significant educational value for the majority of participating children. Children developed enhanced musical literacy, vocal technique, rhythmic precision and ensemble skills through the structured weekly workshops. These learning outcomes were widely reported in children's reflexive journals, with many citing their ability to sing 'high and low', 'keep the rhythm' and 'breathe properly'. Teachers and parents corroborated these self-perceptions, reporting increased confidence, concentration and musical knowledge. The programme's alignment with national curriculum objectives, specifically the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 requirements of the National Plan for Music Education (DfE, 2022), further amplifies its value as a pedagogical tool, offering a model of how cathedral outreach can meaningfully contribute to statutory music education without sacrificing artistic integrity. A small but persistent minority of children, however, reported limited engagement or discomfort, underscoring the importance of differentiated approaches and the need for ongoing attention to the conditions under which all children, not only the most musically confident, can experience genuine educational benefit.

Secondly, the cultural value of the SSP lies in its capacity to confer symbolic inclusion. For many children, singing in the cathedral represented a profound encounter with beauty, tradition and place. Their reflections revealed feelings of pride, excitement and belonging, sentiments all the more powerful in light of the historical exclusivity associated with cathedral music. By combining sacred repertoire with popular Eurovision songs, the SSP bridged traditional and contemporary musical worlds, allowing children to encounter unfamiliar forms while affirming their own cultural tastes. This approach supports what Preece (2024) has called a re-authoring of cultural identity, in which children from diverse backgrounds come to see themselves as legitimate participants in the cultural and artistic life of their society. At the same time, the cultural value of the SSP cannot be separated from its institutional dimensions. As the findings have shown, the programme simultaneously serves the cathedral's financial sustainability, chorister recruitment and faith development goals. This does not diminish its social or educational value, but it does require that these multiple functions be acknowledged honestly, both in research accounts and in the design and governance of the programme itself.

Third, the programme's social value was evident in its emphasis on collaboration, mutual listening and collective expression. Children described the workshops as contexts in which they had to 'listen to others', 'help each other' and 'sing as one'. Friendships were formed, confidence in group settings was strengthened and children developed interpersonal skills that extended beyond music. Teachers highlighted the importance of these relational dynamics, describing how children

grew more empathetic and cooperative through the ensemble-based structure of the sessions. These findings affirm longstanding research on the role of singing in social cohesion (Hallam, 2015; Welch et al., 2010), while also pointing to the ethical dimension of choral practice as a form of social pedagogy. The SSP's alignment with Higgins's (2012) community music hospitality framework is particularly evident here: by creating a welcoming, non-selective and relationally attentive environment, the programme enacted the conditions under which children from diverse backgrounds could experience genuine social belonging, rather than merely nominal inclusion.

Most striking, however, were the findings related to wellbeing. Across hundreds of choir journals, children described singing as a source of joy, calm and emotional release. Words such as 'happy', 'proud', 'relaxed' and 'peaceful' appeared with great frequency, while others noted how singing helped them to 'feel better when sad' or to 'forget bad things'. Parents, too, remarked on the therapeutic effects of singing, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery. The cathedral's aesthetic environment, notably the resonant space, soaring architecture and communal atmosphere, amplified these effects, creating a setting in which children felt uplifted and valued. The trajectory from anxiety to confidence observed across the ten-week programme suggests that wellbeing benefits are cumulative and developmental, reinforcing the case for sustained and repeated engagement with choral outreach rather than one-off or episodic provision.

Taken together, these findings offer compelling evidence that the SSP supports children's human flourishing across multiple dimensions. It promotes cognitive and artistic development, fosters emotional and social resilience and cultivates a sense of cultural belonging and symbolic recognition. Through the act of singing, an embodied, expressive and communal practice, children learn not only musical skills but also the habits of attention, care, confidence and joy. These are not incidental outcomes; they are core to what it means to live well and to participate fully in one's community and culture.

The implications of these findings are significant for the fields of music education and cultural policy. At a time when access to the arts is being eroded in many state-funded schools and when cathedral music continues to wrestle with its elitist legacy, the SSP offers a model of how excellence and inclusion can be meaningfully combined. It demonstrates that sacred musical traditions, when imaginatively recontextualised, can serve the broader public good by expanding their reach. Moreover, it highlights the civic role of cathedral institutions as cultural stewards and educational partners in their regions. The fee-based model of the SSP also offers a replicable template for other cathedrals seeking to balance financial sustainability with genuine social mission, provided that pricing structures do not themselves become a barrier to participation for the most under-resourced schools.

There are also important methodological implications. By centring children's own voices through reflexive journalling, the study affirms the value of child-led, ethnographically informed research in music education. Such approaches are essential if we are to understand not only what children learn but also how they feel, perceive and make meaning of their musical experiences. The companion article in *Music Education Research* (Krüger Bridge, 2025a) develops the methodological dimensions of reflexive choir journalling in greater detail; the present article demonstrates its analytical potential when combined with observation, questionnaire and interview data within a broader mixed-methods design.

The study is not without limitations. It is based on a single case study of one cathedral's outreach programme during one term, and the findings cannot be straightforwardly generalised to other cathedral or community music contexts. The questionnaire sample was small ($n = 24$), and journal data were returned by nine of sixteen participating schools, meaning that some participant perspectives are inevitably under-represented. The absence of longitudinal data means that it is not possible to assess whether the educational, social or wellbeing benefits observed during the programme were sustained beyond the ten-week term. These limitations point to important directions for future research.

Future research could build on these insights by conducting longitudinal studies of former participants, exploring how early choral engagement shapes later musical trajectories, educational pathways or social confidence. Comparative studies across other cathedrals implementing outreach programmes, such as those in the Diocese of Leeds, Sheffield Cathedral or St Paul's Cathedral, London, would further enrich our understanding of best practice, transferability and contextual nuance. Such comparative work would be particularly valuable in examining how different institutional contexts, funding models and catchment demographics shape the conditions for flourishing in cathedral-based choral outreach. In addition, deeper engagement with questions of equity, disability, neurodiversity and gender in choral outreach contexts would contribute to an even more inclusive and critically informed field. The question of what constitutes 'sustained' engagement and how the benefits of choral participation can be deepened and extended beyond a single term is perhaps the most pressing agenda for future research in this area.

In conclusion, the Liverpool Cathedral Schools Singing Programme stands as a powerful case study in how choral participation can contribute to the flourishing of children in 21st-century Britain. Rooted in tradition yet forward-looking in design, it invites us to reimagine cathedral music not as the preserve of the few but as a gift to be shared. Its value, however, is not simply given: it is produced through deliberate institutional commitment, skilled pedagogical practice, inclusive design and honest acknowledgement of the complex interests that outreach programmes serve. Sustaining and extending that value to more children, schools and communities requires not only resources and vision but also the critical reflexivity to ask, continually, whose flourishing is being served and how. What the evidence presented here suggests, with appropriate caution, is that well-designed, inclusive choral outreach can create meaningful conditions for children's flourishing and that understanding both its possibilities and its limits is essential if that potential is to be realised equitably and sustainably.

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