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# UpRising360 Evaluation

Interim Report June 2026

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# Executive summary

This interim report presents emerging findings from the evaluation of UpRising360, a programme designed to strengthen inclusive music education for children and young people with SEND across the East Midlands. The evaluation focuses on three strands:

- Strand 1: The PMLD Musical Play Framework and the care-experienced strand;
- Strand 2: Musical Inclusion Specialist Training;
- Strand 3: Musician-in-Residence activity in special schools.

Across all strands, findings indicate that inclusive music practice is most effectively developed through sustained, practice-based, and relational approaches to professional learning. Teachers, musicians, and specialists reported increased confidence, shifts in pedagogical understanding, and expanded perceptions of what constitutes meaningful musical engagement.

The project is already demonstrating impact in two key areas: enabling more inclusive forms of musical participation for pupils, and supporting changes in school and teacher practice, including greater responsiveness, flexibility, and confidence in working with learners. Importantly, inclusion is increasingly understood not simply as access to provision, but as meaningful participation shaped by relationships, time, and context.

At the same time, the findings highlight a number of structural factors that shape the effectiveness of this work. These include time constraints, tensions between curriculum expectations and practice-based development, variability in school environments, and the emotional labour associated with inclusive practice. These conditions influence both practitioner experience and the sustainability of inclusive approaches.

As an interim report, these findings are indicative and focus primarily on professional learning processes and practitioner perspectives. The final report will build on this analysis, exploring in greater depth how these models of practice develop over time, how they can be sustained, and what this means for future programme design and inclusive music education more broadly.

# Section 1: Introduction

UpRising360 is a programme led by Music Education Hubs East Midlands (MEHEM) that aims to strengthen inclusive music education for children and young people with SEND. The programme brings together music hubs, schools, teachers, musicians and specialists to develop approaches that support meaningful musical participation for learners with diverse needs.

This report presents interim findings from an independent evaluation of three core strands of activity within UpRising360. The evaluation focuses on how different models of professional learning are being implemented and experienced, and how these models support the development of inclusive musical practice in SEND contexts.

The three strands included in this evaluation are:

- Strand 1: The PMLD Musical Play Framework and the care-experienced strand;
- Strand 2: Musical Inclusion Specialist Training;
- Strand 3: Musician-in-Residence activity in special schools.

The evaluation uses qualitative methods, drawing on focus groups and interviews with teachers, musicians, inclusion specialists and project leads involved across the three strands. The emphasis is on understanding professional learning processes, practitioner experiences, and emerging models of working, rather than measuring outcomes for children and young people at this stage.

It is important to note that while UpRising360 includes a wider set of activities and networks that support inclusive music education, these sit outside the formal scope of this evaluation. They are referenced where relevant to provide context but are not directly assessed in this report.

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the evaluation.
- Section 3 describes the methodology and analytical approach.
- Sections 4 - 6 present findings from each strand, followed by a cross-strand synthesis. The report concludes with reflections on key learning and implications for future delivery.

## Section 2: Theoretical framework

This evaluation is informed by a social theory of learning that understands musical and pedagogical development as emerging through participation in practice. This perspective aligns strongly with the relational, embodied and context-specific nature of inclusive music education, particularly within SEND settings where learning is multimodal, interdependent and situated within complex relational networks.

### 2.1 Learning as participation

Lave and Wenger's (1991) original theory of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation established the idea that individuals learn through meaningful engagement within a community of practice. Learning is not conceptualised as the transmission of knowledge but as a process of becoming a participant in shared activity.

Wenger's later theorisation of communities of practice (1998) develops this into a social theory of learning organised around four interrelated dimensions: meaning, practice, community and identity. This provides a powerful frame for music education and SEND contexts, where teachers, musicians, and support staff develop professional knowledge not only through training but by:

- taking part in musical activity together,
- co-constructing pedagogy,
- observing and modelling practice, and
- negotiating shared values around inclusion and learner needs.

These ideas align closely with the three strands of this project, all of which rely on collaborative, relational, and practice-based approaches to professional learning. In Strand 1, pedagogies for learners with PMLD are developed through CPD that explores an embodied, responsive Musical Play Framework, while care-experienced young people participate in choirs that bring them together in shared creative spaces. In Strand 2, inclusion specialists work dialogically with schools to co-shape curriculum and pedagogy. In Strand 3, musicians develop SEND expertise through residencies in special schools.

Although Wenger (1998) foregrounds the community of practice as the main way of understanding professional learning, his work also recognises that learning often takes place across connected groups of practitioners and professionals rather than within a single, closed community. For the purposes of this evaluation, the three strands of UpRising360 are therefore understood as operating within a wider professional context that supports inclusive music education for children and young people with SEND.

This wider context includes:

- wider music hub staff and leads
- special school teachers
- PMLD and SEND learning support assistants
- inclusion music specialists
- school leaders and support staff
- local education authorities
- music venues and community setting staff

## **2.2 Strand-specific models of professional learning**

Exploring the project through the idea of communities of practice helps understand each strand as a different way of supporting professional learning, shaped by its aims, relationships, and ways of working:

- Strand 1 focuses on embedding inclusive pedagogy through sustained, relationship-based support in both PMLD and care-experienced settings. Teachers develop their practice through modelling, coaching, and working with young people to shape activities and programmes.
- Strand 2 involves inclusion specialists working alongside schools and music hubs to support teachers. This strand centres on dialogue, joint planning, and practical problem-solving to help schools strengthen inclusive approaches within their music curriculum.
- Strand 3 supports musicians-in-residence to develop their practice within special schools. Learning happens through time spent in schools, working day-to-day with staff and pupils, reflecting on experiences and adapting approaches in response to learners' needs.

By describing each strand as a distinct model of professional learning, this approach allows the evaluation to explore how knowledge and confidence develop over time, and how inclusive musical practice becomes more embedded across different school and hub contexts.

## **2.3 The wider UpRising360 communities of practice**

Although this evaluation focuses on three core strands of activity, the MEHEM UpRising360 initiative sits within a wider set of activities that support inclusive music education across the region and nationally. These activities provide additional spaces, resources and opportunities for professional learning, even though they are not included within the formal evaluation.

This wider activity includes:

- The Resource Balloon, which provides curated materials to support inclusive music practice. Alongside training sessions, these resources offer shared tools, ideas and approaches that practitioners can draw on as they engage in the three strands.
- The Inclusive Choir, which models accessible and participatory music-making for learners with a wide range of needs.
- UpRising Hivemind, a series of free termly webinars that bring together practitioners from special schools, music hubs, care settings and mainstream contexts. These sessions allow participants to share experiences, discuss common challenges and learn from others working in different settings.
- The UpRising School Network, which supports staff in special schools, specialist provision and alternative provision to share practice, seek advice and connect with peers and specialists in SEND music education.

Together, these activities form a supporting professional context in which teachers, musicians and school staff can develop shared understanding and confidence in inclusive music practice. While they sit outside the scope of this evaluation, they are an important part of the environment in which the three evaluated strands are taking place.

As the evaluated strands operate within fixed project timescales, the wider UpRising360 activities help provide continuity and ongoing engagement. Practitioners take part in these activities in different ways and to different degrees. Some attend webinars, others join the choir or engage with the school network. This flexibility allows individuals to engage in ways that suit their role, capacity and interests.

Although these activities are not being evaluated directly, they contribute to the conditions that support learning and change. They help shape the shared resources practitioners draw upon, the relationships that support inclusive practice, and the longer-term sustainability of professional learning. Understanding the three strands within this wider context helps to show how they connect to a growing community of inclusive music practice rather than operating in isolation.

## **2.4 Practice-based professional learning and reflective dialogue**

This evaluation is guided by a view of music teacher learning as practice-based and relational. In this view, professional growth develops through participation in musical activity, collaboration with others, and reflection on practice, rather than through isolated or one-off CPD. Research in music education shows that teachers develop most meaningfully through making music together, shared enquiry, and opportunities to reflect on real teaching situations (Burnard and Murphy, 2013).

Within this approach, learning is supported by practical processes that allow teachers and musicians to explore, adapt, and refine their work, particularly in inclusive and SEND contexts. Across the three strands, the evaluation therefore focuses on the following professional learning approaches.

- **Modelling of musical and teaching practice**  
Teachers often learn by seeing and hearing how others shape musical interaction. Modelling provides concrete examples of how musical play, communication and responsiveness can be adapted for different learners.
- **Joint music-making and co-teaching**  
Making music together allows teachers, musicians and pupils to explore timing, gesture, communication and responsiveness in real situations. This shared activity supports both musical and pedagogical learning.
- **Reflective dialogue during and after practice**  
Teachers refine their practice by thinking about what is happening in the moment and by reflecting afterwards on musical choices and interactions. Conversations during planning, coaching and review sessions support this reflective process.
- **Coaching and mentoring**  
Coaching and mentoring provide structured support for trying new approaches, receiving feedback and developing confidence. In SEND contexts, this support helps practitioners respond to complexity and deepen their understanding of learners' needs.
- **Observation and feedback**  
Focused observation, followed by feedback, helps practitioners notice musical interaction, pupil engagement and adaptive techniques. These cycles support gradual improvement and the embedding of inclusive approaches.
- **Co-Construction of musical pedagogy**  
Inclusive music teaching is often developed collaboratively. Teachers, musicians and young people shape activities together, whether through musical play, curriculum planning or residency-based exploration.

Taken together, these approaches provide the basis for analysing how confidence, skills, inclusive musical practice and pedagogy develop over time within the project. Furthermore, across these approaches, time is understood as a critical dimension of professional learning. Repetition, sustained engagement, and opportunities to revisit and reflect on practice are particularly important in inclusive and SEND contexts, where subtle forms of musical interaction and engagement often emerge gradually. This positions time not simply as a logistical factor, but as a pedagogical and ethical condition of inclusive practice.

## 2.5 Why this theoretical frame matters for the evaluation

Bringing these ideas together allows the evaluation to understand the project not as a set of separate activities, but as connected ways of supporting inclusive musical practice across different schools, hubs and practitioner groups.

This approach helps the evaluation to explore:

- How professional learning is supported and sustained through the different CPD models used across the three strands;
- How these models help build confidence, skills and shared understanding among teachers and musicians working with children and young people with SEND;
- How learning in one part of the project connects with and strengthens learning elsewhere, contributing to wider capacity for inclusive music education across the MEHEM.

Importantly, these professional learning processes do not occur in isolation. The evaluation also attends to the conditions that enable or constrain them, including time, clarity of roles, working environments, and access to appropriate support. Across complex and varied school contexts, these structural factors play a significant role in shaping both practitioner experience and the effectiveness of inclusive musical practice. Attending to these conditions allows the evaluation to move beyond description of activity to a more complete understanding of how and why practice develops over time.



# Section 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Evaluation design

This evaluation adopted a qualitative approach to explore how the three strands of the UpRising360 project are being experienced by the music teachers, and how professional learning is developing through the different models of support. A qualitative design was considered appropriate given the developmental nature of the project and its focus on professional learning, pedagogy, and inclusive musical practice, rather than on measuring predefined outcomes.

The evaluation is primarily concerned with understanding processes of learning and change, including how practitioners describe shifts in confidence, understanding, and practice when working with children and young people with SEND.

## 3.2 Participants

Data were generated through focus groups and interviews with participants involved across the three strands. Participants included:

- teachers working in special school and SEND contexts,
- music teachers and musicians involved in residency work,
- inclusion specialists and project leads.

Participation was voluntary, and all contributors were informed about the purpose of the evaluation and how their contributions would be used.

## 3.3 Data generation

Data were collected through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, organised to reflect the structure of the three strands.

Focus groups were used to support shared reflection and dialogue between participants, enabling discussion of collective experiences, similarities and differences in practice, and perceptions of professional learning. Interviews were used to explore strand-specific experiences in more depth and to capture individual perspectives on the models of working, challenges, and emerging learning.

Discussion prompts focused on participants' experiences of the support provided, how they described their learning, what they felt was working well, and where they experienced challenges or areas for development. The emphasis was on reflective accounts of practice rather than on evaluation of individual performance.

### 3.4 Analytical approach

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). Thematic analysis was selected as it offers a flexible and accessible approach for identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative data, while remaining compatible with a practice-based and sociocultural view of professional learning.

Analysis involved familiarisation with the data, initial coding, and the development of themes that captured recurring patterns across participants' accounts. The analytical process was guided by the project's theoretical framework, with particular attention to:

- practice-based professional learning,
- modelling, coaching, and mentoring,
- reflective dialogue during and after practice,
- joint working and collaboration, and
- the development of confidence and inclusive pedagogical approaches.

This theoretically informed thematic approach enabled analysis to remain grounded in participants' experiences while maintaining coherence across the three strands.

### 3.5 Scope and limitations

This evaluation focuses on professional learning processes and models of working across the three strands. It does not seek to measure long-term outcomes for children and young people, nor does it attempt to quantify impact. Findings reflect participant perspectives at this stage of project delivery and should be understood as indicative rather than definitive.



## Section 4: Strand one - PMLD and care experienced

### PMLD group strand

The PMLD group strand is grounded in the Musical Play Framework (Rushton, 2024) and draws on wider practice-based literature that positions musical play as a relational, interactive, and responsive mode of engagement for children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. This body of work challenges deficit-based and outcomes-driven models of music education, instead foregrounding shared attention, imitation, turn-taking, and affective exchange as meaningful forms of musical learning.

The framework itself was “developed with teaching staff, families and people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD/PIMD)” and combines “Intensive interaction, responsive environments and adult interactive style with playful instrumental music and musical instruments... Its eight principles are designed to be used by non-music specialists to support opportunities for playfulness for, and with, people with PMLD/PIMD.” (Rushton 2024).

The PMLD strand was therefore designed as a combined training and delivery programme, supporting teachers to develop confidence in recognising, facilitating, and valuing musical play within their everyday practice. The programme began with in-person CPD, introducing teachers to the principles of the Musical Play framework and to ways of noticing musical engagement beyond conventional performance or skill acquisition.

This was followed by in-school modelling and reflection, where Musical Play approaches were demonstrated in practice with pupils, allowing teachers to observe how principles such as responsiveness, imitation, pacing, and shared control could be enacted in real classroom contexts. Teachers were then supported to try out Musical Play approaches themselves, with space for reflection, adaptation, and discussion in response to their pupils and school environments.

As the programme developed, lead teachers were encouraged to support wider staff teams, sharing Musical Play principles and practices across their schools. This was reinforced through lead teacher reflection sessions, which functioned as structured opportunities for collective sense-making, professional dialogue, and the sharing of emerging insights.

To understand how the project was experienced across contexts and roles, a series of focus groups were conducted with participating teachers. Below are the interim findings from these focus groups with the cohort.

## 1. Engaging in Musical Play

From a practice-based perspective, the Musical Play framework supported teachers to re-situate learning within interaction, presence, and responsiveness, rather than predefined outcomes or targets. Practitioners valued the way musical play created space to attend to pupils' responses without the pressure of evidencing progress in conventional ways:

"I really like that while I'm in that session I'm not thinking, 'what does this child need to do?'... it's just about seeing how they respond and engage."

Several teachers noted that relocating musical play outside formal curriculum structures, such as through lunchtime clubs or short sessions embedded across the school day helped to reduce performative pressure and enabled more playful engagement:

"It doesn't replace music lessons... it takes away the expectation, and that changes everything."

"We took that curriculum pressure away, and we are able to be more playful and then get more playful responses from the young people."

The Musical Play framework often operated as a programme of work that sat outside performative pressures and re-centred learning around musical interaction, presence, and responsiveness.

## 2. Learning through participation, modelling, and shared practice

Teachers consistently described professional learning as occurring through doing, observing, and reflecting together, rather than through formal instruction alone. This strongly aligns with the strand's emphasis on practice-based professional learning as situated and relational. As part of this, observation and modelling were identified as particularly important in building staff confidence:

"All of the teachers observed Rosie, that's how we managed to get it rolling."

"People have come to see how I do it in my class... I think a lot of it is just confidence and giving it a go."

Seeing musical play enacted with their own pupils was described as especially powerful in shifting perceptions and encouraging uptake:

"Seeing a stranger come in and get those reactions, the smiles, that's what makes staff want to do it."

Peer discussion and cross-school dialogue also created opportunities for collective sense-making:

“When you’re doing it by yourself in your school, it really helps to know what’s going on in other settings.”

What we can see from these examples is that professional learning emerged through participation in shared practice via formal and informal training and the transmission of knowledge. Modelling, observation, and peer dialogue function as key mechanisms through which confidence, pedagogical judgement, and shared understanding were developed.

### 3. Developing pedagogical practice in PMLD contexts

A key dimension of professional learning involved developing sensitivity to subtle, non-verbal, and fleeting forms of engagement, characteristic of PMLD learners but often undervalued within outcome-focused systems. Teachers reflected on the human tendency to privilege visible or reciprocal responses:

“We naturally gravitate to the ones that give us more back, that’s just being human.”

However, engagement with the framework supported practitioners to recognise that learning and communication may not always be immediately observable:

“Even if you don’t see a visible response, that doesn’t mean nothing is happening.”

Teachers described learning to slow down, wait, and notice small moments of interaction:

“Quick, grab an iPad, because there’s something happening over there that you’d miss if you weren’t right in that moment.”

“When nobody’s talking, it’s actually easier to observe.”

“You can’t do it wrong; it’s about giving time and processing space.”

This pedagogical attunement was a core dimension of professional learning in the PMLD settings. Teachers developed increased sensitivity to subtle, non-verbal, and fleeting forms of engagement, reframing what counts as participation, communication, and musical learning.

## 4. Teacher identity, confidence, and the legitimacy of play

Teachers frequently linked confidence to questions of professional identity, particularly whether play, humour, and embodied interaction are seen as legitimate forms of teaching. Some participants highlighted widespread anxiety about “doing it right”:

“A lot of staff just don’t have the confidence; they’re worried they’re not doing it right.”

Others noted that playfulness itself could feel uncomfortable within traditional conceptions of teaching:

“Some adults have forgotten how to be playful... it doesn’t look like a lesson, and that can feel uncomfortable.”

For teachers without formal musical training, musical play was described as enabling rather than exposing, reframing what it means to be competent in music education:

“I don’t have a musical bone in my body... but this is about interaction, not pitch and tone.”

Moments of shared joy were also identified as particularly important in sustaining confidence and commitment:

“He just laughs the whole time and that actually makes me feel more confident.”

Engagement with the Musical Play framework was supporting a reconfiguration of some of the teachers’ musical identities, particularly in relation to confidence, authority, and expertise. By legitimising playfulness, humour, and interaction as pedagogical strengths, the framework validates forms of professional knowledge often marginalised within formal education.

## Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that the PMLD strand supported a shift in how teachers understood both musical learning and their own professional practice. Across the school contexts, Musical Play enabled practitioners to move away from outcome-driven models towards more relational, responsive, and interaction-led approaches. This shift was not achieved through training alone, but through sustained opportunities to observe, participate and reflect on practice.

However, the findings also highlight the ways in which existing school structures and expectations can both enable and constrain this work. In many cases, Musical Play was most successful when it was positioned alongside or outside formal curriculum structures, creating space where the pressures of assessment, coverage, and performance were reduced. This points to a tension between the time, pacing, and attentiveness required for relational musical engagement in PMLD contexts, and the more outcome-oriented logics that often shape school practice.

Professional learning in this strand was therefore deeply embedded in shared musical activity, where modelling, co-participation and dialogue supported the development of confidence, pedagogical judgement and attunement to pupils' modes of communication. Crucially, this learning required time and space to notice and value subtle, non-verbal forms of engagement, which are easily overlooked within more structured or time-limited approaches. Engagement with the framework also supported a reconfiguration of teacher identity, in which playfulness, responsiveness, and embodied interaction were recognised as legitimate and valuable forms of expertise. In this sense, Musical Play does not sit neatly within existing curricular models but instead invites a reconsideration of what counts as music teaching and learning in special school contexts.

Overall, the strand highlights the importance of creating the conditions for practice-based, relational learning in PMLD settings. This includes not only access to high-quality modelling and collaborative reflection, but also the allocation of time, flexibility, and institutional support needed to sustain these approaches within, alongside, or at times beyond the formal curriculum.

## **Care-experienced strand**

The care-experienced strand was developed in response to the specific structural, relational, and emotional barriers that care-experienced children and young people often face in accessing sustained, meaningful musical and creative opportunities. This strand recognises that care-experienced learners are not a homogeneous group, and that their engagement with education, arts provision, and enrichment activities is shaped by experiences of instability, disrupted relationships, and systems that have not always worked in their favour.

Rather than positioning creative engagement as an intervention to address perceived deficits, the care-experienced strand was underpinned by a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach. Its central aim was to create conditions in which care-experienced children and young people could engage creatively in ways that prioritised safety, agency, and choice. In doing so, the strand sought to resist high-expectation or compliance-driven models, instead valuing creativity as a space for expression, belonging, and self-determination.

The strand was intentionally designed to proceed slowly and relationally. Early phases focused on listening to existing practice, engaging with sector partners, and developing shared language around care experience, vulnerability, and creative participation. This groundwork was seen as essential to ensuring that any subsequent delivery was ethically grounded and responsive to the lived realities of care-experienced young people.

To understand how the work was progressing, a series of focus groups were conducted with the lead specialists from the participating music hubs. Below are the interim findings from these focus groups.

## 1. Working and planning slowly

Across the care-experienced strand, practitioners repeatedly emphasised that progress was intentionally slow. This was not experienced as a failure of momentum, but as an ethical requirement when working with children and young people in care.

“It is going quite slowly, but I think that’s revealing why it’s going slowly and I think that’s the right thing.”

Participants described a growing awareness that rushing to deliver a programme risked reproducing patterns of instability already present in young people’s lives:

“I was really hoping it would be up and running by September... but I don’t feel frustrated about that now.”

The decision to pause, reflect, and redesign was framed as a form of care in itself:

“It’s got to be treated really, really carefully.”

## 2. Consultation, listening, and relationship-building

Practitioners consistently described extensive relational labour before any intervention was confirmed. This included conversations with virtual school leaders, foster care forums, community music organisations, and young people themselves.

“I really had to think through what I’d done so far... what’s happened, what conversations I’ve had.”

Rather than imposing a pre-defined model, multiple possible formats were explored and narrowed collaboratively:

“We couldn’t just have a blank canvas and talk round the houses... we needed something concrete enough to talk about, but flexible enough to change.”

Young people's voices were intentionally gathered early through surveys and informal consultation:

“August felt like a really good time to hear their voice, they're not at school, there's less distraction.”

This emphasis on listening foregrounded participation as something co-designed, rather than offered, with practitioners acknowledging that trust had to be built before engagement could even be invited.

### 3. Language

A significant strand of reflection centred on language, particularly the implications of labels such as “care-experienced” versus “looked-after children”.

“Even the language matters... who is this actually for?”

Engagement with sector conferences and virtual school colleagues heightened awareness of the need for strength-based framing:

“We needed to set this up thoughtfully and appropriately, not just name it and go.”

Practitioners described becoming increasingly cautious about how the project was communicated, especially given young people's prior experiences of stigma and deficit narratives. This resulted in careful attention to how invitations were framed, how surveys were worded, and how the project's purpose was explained.

### 4. Trauma-informed musical spaces

When discussion turned to the form the project might eventually take, practitioners consistently rejected high-pressure, performance-led models. Instead, they described an environment designed to feel informal, flexible, and emotionally safe.

“It's not going to be ‘everyone sit down and sing’... it has to be low demand, low expectation.”

Music-making was described as something that should emerge, rather than be imposed:

“It just sort of morphs into singing.”

Attention given to physical space, sensory regulation, and the availability of quiet breakout areas:

“That breakout **space** is essential - that's not negotiable.”

This approach reflects a trauma-informed pedagogy in which participation is optional, agency is prioritised, and emotional safety precedes musical outcomes.

## 5. Workforce preparation and shared responsibility

Practitioners highlighted the importance of ensuring that all adults involved were adequately prepared to work within a trauma-informed framework. Dedicated training was positioned as essential, not supplementary.

| “That awareness of trauma is vital... we need to start on the same page.”

There was also recognition of the emotional labour involved for facilitators, particularly where creative activities might surface personal stories:

| “They might hear things... that’s why we need that wider team there.”

The presence of multiple adults, facilitators, virtual school staff, and managers, was seen as critical in avoiding isolated practice and ensuring shared responsibility.

## 6. Location and cost

A further insight concerned the material and financial conditions required to make the project viable. Practitioners spoke openly about the costs associated with venues, staffing, and transport.

| “Six rehearsals can cost four and a half thousand pounds... because of venues, staffing, and the kind of space we need.”

Rather than minimising these realities, participants framed them as important evidence:

| “That’s part of the work - understanding why it costs that much.”

This strand therefore challenges assumptions that inclusive provision can be delivered cheaply or efficiently, positioning cost transparency as a necessary step toward sustainable funding models.

## 7. Rethinking outcomes and impact

Finally, practitioners consistently resisted the idea of a fixed end point or final performance. While celebratory moments such as awards evenings were acknowledged.

| “Endings are really difficult... we want them to know this is about sustaining something.”

Concerns about young people being moved, relocated, or withdrawn reinforced the need to value participation in the moment:

| “The important bit is the participation, not the performance.”

Impact, therefore, was understood as relational and ongoing, rather than tied to attendance numbers or outputs.

## 8. The pre-delivery model steps

Step 1. Sector listening: Learning from existing projects

Step 2. Scoping: mapping options and feasibility

Step 3. Partnership: Building shared understanding

Step 4. Young people's voice: Consultation and Input

Step 5. Building a shared language: Strength-based framing

Step 6. Care: Prioritising safety, trust and knowledge

Step 7. Programme design: Low-demand model

Step 8. Infrastructure and costing: Venues and budgeting

Step 9. Workforce preparation: Trauma informed training

Step 10. Sustainability thinking: Planning for the future

Step 11. Ready for delivery

The above steps illustrate the staged process through which the care-experienced strand was developed from initial conception to the point at which delivery could responsibly begin. The model makes visible the relational, ethical, strategic and infrastructural work required before any formal music-making activity could take place.

In work involving care-experienced children and young people, beginning delivery too quickly can create harm. Many young people have experienced instability, disrupted trust and short-term interventions that start and stop. Inclusion cannot be assumed through access alone. It must be carefully prepared. The pre-delivery model therefore positions preparation as a core element of the work.

The process began with 'Sector listening: Learning from existing projects'. This stage drew on practice across education, youth work and arts settings to understand what has worked well and where challenges have emerged. It allowed the project to identify common ethical risks, including over-promising and short-term provision that is not sustained.

The next stage, 'Scoping: Mapping options and feasibility', focused on practical and strategic decision-making. This included questions of cohort size, referral routes, transport, staffing and scheduling. In this context, feasibility extends beyond logistics. It includes safeguarding complexity, emotional demands on staff, and coordination across music education and care systems. Through 'Partnership: Building shared understanding', relationships with the virtual school and Music Service were clarified and strengthened. Clear agreements about roles, responsibilities, communication and accountability were established before recruitment of the young people began.

Next, 'Shared language: Strength-based framing' marked an important shift in the development of the project. The language used to describe young people shapes expectations and attitudes. Moving away from deficit-based narratives towards strengths-based framing influenced recruitment materials, internal discussions and practitioner mindset. This was closely linked to 'Care: Prioritising safety, trust and knowledge'. This step centred safeguarding procedures, data protection, trauma-informed thinking and contextual knowledge about the realities of care experience. The decision to proceed carefully at this stage was intentional. Time was taken to ensure that information-sharing processes, referral clarity and safeguarding pathways were secure before any musical offer was introduced.

The strand then moved into 'Young people's voice: Consultation and input'. Consultation took place before the programme design was finalised. Young people contributed to decisions about repertoire, expectations and delivery. 'Programme design: A low-demand model' responded directly to these discussions. The low-demand model prioritises flexibility, relational continuity and choice. The emphasis is on engagement and experience rather than output.

The stage of 'Infrastructure and costing: Venues and budgeting' recognised that inclusion depends on practical conditions. Venue familiarity, transport arrangements, staffing ratios and budget stability all affect whether participation is viable. Attention to these details reduces risk and increases consistency. 'Workforce preparation: Trauma-informed training' ensured that practitioners were prepared for the context in which they would be working.

Finally, 'Sustainability thinking: Planning for the future' considered how the strand could continue beyond an initial delivery phase. This included alignment with existing services, funding continuity and realistic progression pathways. Planning for sustainability at this early stage reduces the likelihood of abrupt endings.

## **9. The delivery model (early phase analysis)**

While the pre-delivery model outlines the preparatory conditions required for ethical engagement, the initial delivery phase demonstrates how these principles are enacted in practice. The first sessions of the care-experienced strand did not represent a transition into a fixed programme, but rather the continuation of a relational and responsive process. Delivery remained deliberately low-demand, with structure emerging gradually through interaction rather than being imposed in advance.

Insights from the first delivery phase highlight that inclusive practice in this context depends on how sessions are held, adapted and reflected upon in real time. The following steps extend the pre-delivery model, making visible the pedagogical, relational and organisational work required during delivery itself.

Each session required careful preparation immediately prior to young people's arrival. This included both practical organisation and alignment within the team. Practitioners arrived in advance to set up the space, ensuring that the environment was welcoming, low-pressure and appropriately structured, while also attending to safeguarding requirements such as sign-in procedures. As one practitioner described, this involved attending to "little things like... writing risk assessments... who was going to staff it... setting up the room".

Equally important was the need for adult alignment. Although not always fully realised due to early arrivals, practitioners identified the importance of protected time for team check-in before sessions, allowing for shared awareness of young people's circumstances, roles within the session, and any emerging concerns. This reflects the ongoing need for coherence and shared responsibility within a multi-agency team.

### **Step 12. Arrival, orientation and low-pressure entry**

Arrival was treated as a critical moment in establishing safety and belonging. Young people were welcomed into a space that offered multiple points of entry, including informal activities such as badge-making, drawing and sensory exploration. One practitioner reflected that young people were "just sitting around chatting and colouring in badges... involved in their own little world, but there was opportunity for conversation".

Rather than beginning with structured musical activity, sessions allowed for gradual engagement through conversation, play and observation. Orientation to the physical environment, including breakout spaces and facilities, was embedded within this process. This approach reduced pressure and supported young people to enter the space on their own terms.

### **Step 13. Establishing safety through activity**

Relational safety was not established through verbal reassurance alone, but through shared activity. Early interactions were characterised by informal conversation, humour, and parallel participation, allowing young people to engage without direct demand.

Attention to small details, such as offering refreshments or responding to individual preferences, contributed to a sense of care and attentiveness. As one practitioner noted, "even little things like that are just about creating connection and creating a sense of safety". These moments, while seemingly minor, were central to building trust and connection.

### **Step 14. Emergent musical practice**

Music-making emerged gradually from within the session rather than being pre-structured. Practitioners described how activity "just sort of morphs into singing", often initiated through young people's interests and contributions.

Repertoire was not pre-determined, but developed through conversation and shared musical knowledge. Young people's suggestions shaped the direction of activity, supporting a sense of ownership and agency. This resulted in moments of collective engagement described by practitioners as significant. One reflection captured this succinctly as "we did a thing", signalling a shared sense of achievement without the need for formal outcome or performance.

### **Step 15. Flexible participation**

Participation took multiple forms, including singing, instrumental playing, listening, or simply being present. Some young people required proximity to familiar adults, while others contributed musically through instruments they had brought with them.

These varied modes of engagement were not positioned as barriers, but as valid and meaningful forms of participation. Practitioners adapted responsively, allowing young people to move between forms of engagement without pressure.

### **Step 16. Adult roles and shared facilitation**

Delivery relied on a highly responsive team dynamic, in which adults adapted roles in real time. Practitioners described the need for "tag teaming", shifting between leading, supporting and observing depending on the needs of the moment.

This required ongoing awareness of both young people and colleagues, as well as sensitivity to existing relationships. Where young people gravitated toward familiar adults, this was recognised as a source of safety, while also prompting reflection on how relationships could be broadened across the team.

### **Step 17. Holding structure lightly**

Although sessions were intentionally low-demand, light structures were introduced to support predictability and regulation. This included shared transitions such as refreshments and a planned closing period for tidying the space. As described by practitioners, "the last 10 to 15 minutes of the session would be about packing away... and that seemed to work really well".

These transitions provided a sense of containment without imposing rigid expectations. Practitioners noted the potential for further development of gentle routines over time, while maintaining flexibility in response to the group.

### **Step 18. Sustaining connection beyond the session**

Communication with carers and key adults was embedded within the delivery process. Follow-up emails and pre-session contact were used to maintain continuity, share positive experiences, and respond to any changes in young people's circumstances.

This ongoing communication was recognised as central to sustaining engagement, particularly given the instability that can characterise care-experienced contexts. Practitioners described the importance of checking in regularly, noting that “who knows what might have happened over the weekend” when preparing for each session.

### **Step 19. Reflection, regulation and professional learning**

Each session concluded with structured reflection among the adult team. This included moments of collective regulation, followed by discussion of positives, questions and next steps. One practitioner described beginning this process by “just breathing... so we could just regulate ourselves and come back into the space”.

These reflective practices supported both immediate adaptation and longer-term professional learning. Practitioners used this time to consider group dynamics, facilitation approaches, and emerging challenges, reinforcing delivery as an ongoing process of enquiry rather than fixed implementation.

## **Conclusion**

The pre-delivery model shows that inclusion is not achieved through delivery alone. It depends on careful preparation, shared responsibility and attention to conditions that support trust and continuity. In the care-experienced strand, preparation was a substantive part of the work. It created the foundation for participation to be safe, consistent and grounded in young people’s perceptions.

The delivery model remains provisional and will continue to be developed as the strand progresses. Further iterations will be informed by ongoing sessions with practitioners. The model will therefore be extended and refined at the end of the project year, forming part of the final reporting and offering a more complete account of sustained delivery over time.



## Section 5: Strand two - Music inclusion specialist/ school music culture

The inclusion specialist strand of UpRising360° was underpinned by a developmental approach to change special school music provision. From the outset, the strand was designed to move beyond questions of what music is delivered or why music matters, towards a sustained focus on how inclusive musical practice is enacted, supported, and embedded within school contexts.

Rather than operating as a delivery model, the strand was conceived as a capacity-building intervention, working alongside schools to strengthen musical cultures over time. Inclusion specialists were positioned not as replacements for existing teaching, but as working to upskill and empower a small number of key staff, supporting sustainability beyond the life of the project.

A core principle of the strand was an explicit shift away from generic models of curriculum delivery towards an exploration of the conditions that enable inclusive music-making to flourish. The emphasis was on pedagogical process, relational work, and structural support, foregrounding the skills required to deliver high-quality music education in special school contexts and how these skills are developed in practice. This was reflected in the structure of the work. Inclusion specialists were encouraged to engage in co-delivery, observation, and off-timetable discussion with staff, supported by regular opportunities for reflection. Rather than beginning with a fully articulated curriculum, the strand promoted starting with practice, allowing schemes of work and curriculum documentation to emerge over time, shaped by what was learned in classrooms.

Teacher development was identified as a central mechanism for change within this strand. Particular emphasis was placed on self-efficacy, teachers' belief in their ability to teach music confidently and inclusively and this was positioned as being as important as musical knowledge or technical skill. In practical terms, this translated into an approach that prioritised modelling, repetition, co-teaching, and reflection. Inclusion specialists were asked to consider creating supported "mastery moments" for teachers, such as leading a song, facilitating instrumental activity, or adapting a resource for different learners. These experiences could then be scaffolded over time, recognising that confidence develops through supported practice rather than observation alone.

The strand explicitly acknowledged the complexity and variability of special school contexts and emphasised the need for flexibility and responsiveness. Rather than prescribing a fixed model, inclusion specialists were asked to adapt their work to existing school structures, curricula, and priorities, while maintaining a clear focus on long-term development.

Indicative models of engagement included short cycles of observation and co-delivery, ensemble development, support for cross-curricular music, and the use of reflective diaries to capture learning over time. The work was designed to operate across multiple levels simultaneously, classroom practice, teacher development, curriculum thinking, and strategic conversations with school leadership, reflecting an understanding of musical culture as something that is produced relationally and structurally rather than through isolated interventions.

### **Focus group findings with inclusion leads**

Against this backdrop, the focus group data provides an opportunity to examine how the inclusion specialist strand was understood, enacted, and experienced in practice. The perspectives shared by inclusion specialists and school-based leads offer insight into how the intended capacity-building approach played out within the realities of special school contexts, including the opportunities it created and the tensions it surfaced.

The following section draws on focus group data to explore how inclusion specialists navigated their roles, worked alongside teachers, and responded to the structural and affective conditions of their work. In doing so, it illuminates the ways in which the strand's emphasis on co-teaching, emergent curriculum, self-efficacy, and relational support was enacted on the ground, and how this shaped professional learning, musical practice, and perceptions of children's musical capabilities over time.

### **Capacity building**

Across the interviews, inclusion leads consistently position their work not as specialist delivery, but as capacity-building within schools. Rather than "doing music for" staff or pupils, inclusion leads describe working alongside teachers to develop confidence, shared understanding, and sustainable inclusive practice.

One inclusion lead explicitly reframed the purpose of the work in these terms, explaining that the focus was "more about upskilling" rather than producing immediate curriculum outputs. This orientation was echoed elsewhere, with leads emphasising that inclusion was not about taking over responsibility for music, but about enabling others to feel able to continue the work independently. As one practitioner reflected, "we're part of the fabric of the school a bit more now", highlighting how inclusion was understood as embedded work rather than external intervention.

Across the focus group, inclusion specialists consistently positioned themselves as embedded practitioners rather than curriculum writers. One participant stated plainly: “Curriculum wise, I’m not doing anything... I feel like I’m very much sort of practitioner role in the school.”

This framing signals a clear distinction between the relational, in-class work of modelling and co-teaching and the more formal expectation of producing curriculum documentation. Suggesting that in practice, the strand is experienced primarily as situated professional learning rather than curriculum production.

This identity position was reinforced in how inclusion specialists resisted being framed as “deliverers” of content. As one practitioner explained, “I’m not the deliverer. I don’t see myself as a deliverer.” Here, the emphasis shifts from providing activities to enabling others to teach, suggesting that the role is understood as mentorship, capacity-building, and co-practice rather than specialist substitution.

Several practitioners described deliberately adapting their practice so that it remained replicable by non-specialist staff. One inclusion lead noted: “What I’m really aware of... is I’m trying to only do things that I think a teacher could replicate... I can go in and I can do all sorts of activities and songs and games... but actually, I’ve got to pick things that this teacher can do.” This highlights a purposeful “scaling down” of specialist repertoire in order to prioritise sustainability, teacher confidence, and the likelihood of continuation beyond the specialist’s presence.

At the same time, the data reflects an internal tension within this approach. While practitioners emphasised replicability, they also expressed concern that limiting activity to what teachers can currently do may constrain ambition or momentum. One participant reflected: “I feel like it’s not enough... I feel like I am treading water a little bit... I feel like these are teachers who can be pushed a little bit more and used more.” This illustrates the ongoing balancing act between offering rich musical experiences and not overwhelming staff who may have low confidence or limited subject knowledge.

## **Co-teaching, modelling, and gradual transfer of responsibility**

A central feature of this strand is a co-teaching and modelling approach, where inclusion leads work alongside teachers in the classroom, gradually shifting responsibility as confidence develops. Rather than delivering standalone sessions, practitioners describe intentionally repeating activities and lessons so that staff can observe, rehearse, and eventually lead.

One inclusion lead described how repeating the same session over several weeks was crucial, noting that “we’ve literally repeated the same session for about three weeks in a row”, and that this repetition enabled teachers to feel confident enough to continue independently. Another reflected that this process led to a noticeable shift in teacher confidence: “she wrote me a lovely email saying how much better she feels... she feels she can now run this and she’s done it really successfully.”

Importantly, inclusion leads emphasise that what is being shared is not simply content, but ways of working. As one practitioner articulated, “it’s almost about the way you approach a session rather than what you do.” This included modelling warm-ups, how to distribute instruments, and how to structure sessions so that teachers could see how inclusive musical engagement is enacted moment by moment.

Practitioners described explicit strategies of handover and scaffolded leadership, often involving direct invitation (or insistence) that teachers lead aspects of the session. One inclusion lead described this moment of transfer: “Right, here you go, ukulele... You’re going to lead the rhythm activity... I’ll do the first one and then it’s yours.”

Such approaches were closely tied to building self-efficacy through mastery experiences and visible progress. As one practitioner described, teacher development was reinforced by naming what staff had achieved: “You’ve done all of that in three weeks... you are now playing a C chord... you’ve just led the hello song on your own... I didn’t play with you because I stopped and you didn’t notice.” This indicates that confidence was developed not only through doing, but through reflection and affirmation, helping teachers recognise their own growth.

The data also reveals that handover is emotionally demanding for staff. Teachers voiced concerns about what would happen once specialists were not present. One inclusion lead reported: “One of the teachers this week said, ‘Have we got to think up all these ideas when you go?’ And I was like, no, it’s OK.” This highlights a fear of independence and a perception that music teaching requires constant invention, reinforcing the importance of modelling “how to build” lessons rather than only “what to do”.

Teachers’ readiness for handover varied, and practitioners described moments of hesitation. One inclusion lead noted: “She kept coming and going, ‘I just want to make some more notes. I don’t feel ready.’” This suggests that teacher development requires pacing and that confidence does not always align with musical competence.

Evidence of embedded change was strongest where teachers began to reproduce and extend practice independently. One practitioner described a teacher taking ownership beyond a single class: “She’s decided to repeat everything that I’ve done... cycle it around the other classes on the pathway... she’s kind of taking charge of that.”

## Curriculum tension

A central theme across the discussion was the tension between what schools often request a curriculum product and what inclusion specialists perceive as the mechanism of lasting change: teacher development. This was articulated directly “We know that the biggest change we can make is changing practitioners... But the schools think that the best change we can make is to write a curriculum. And that is the tension.” This statement captures a structural misalignment between school accountability expectations.

This tension was sharpened by feedback from schools about what makes participation justifiable. As reported schools stated that if the offer had been positioned as teacher development alone, they would not have participated: “They categorically said that if that had been the case, they wouldn’t have signed up. They also needed a curriculum.”

This suggests that curriculum functions as an institutional “permission structure” for engagement, even when the core benefit is professional learning. However, inclusion specialists were clear that curriculum documentation without practice-based development risks becoming inert. One participant expressed this strongly: “Just doing a curriculum without any upskilling is totally useless... They’re going to look at that and go, what do we do with that?” Such accounts reinforce the strand’s emphasis on enacted curriculum, where teachers learn how to structure and adapt musical learning in real time, rather than simply receiving documentation.

Time constraints were also repeatedly referenced as a practical barrier to curriculum production alongside modelling and mentoring. One inclusion specialist stated: “I have not got time to do all of this and write a curriculum for this school in two hours. I just don’t.”

This provides clear evidence that curriculum development cannot be treated as a parallel expectation without protected time, sequencing, and realistic scope.

## Positioning of music

Several discussions highlighted how school music culture is shaped by entrenched perceptions of what music “is”, particularly for older pupils. One practitioner reported a persistent message from pupils: “Music is babyish... that’s what I keep getting told by some of my older pupils.”

This indicates that, in some contexts, music has been associated with overly simplistic activities, which can generate resistance rather than engagement. The same practitioner traced this perception to inappropriate repertoire and task design for older learners, noting: “The last thing he did with the Key Stage 3 was Twinkle Twinkle Little Star on the glockenspiel... I was thinking, well, you know, that’s not going to cut the mustard.”

## Professional vulnerability

Inclusion leads speak openly about anxiety, self-doubt, and the pressure of being positioned as the “expert”, particularly in contexts where expectations are unclear or unrealistic.

These experiences are closely tied to structural constraints. Inclusion leads repeatedly describe being asked to deliver teaching, curriculum development, and staff training within minimal time allocations. As one participant put it bluntly, “you’re going to plan the whole year, the whole curriculum, every pathway... in two hours a week.”

Peer dialogue within the project appears to play a vital role in sustaining inclusion leads, offering spaces where vulnerability can be voiced and recalibrated collectively. The sharing of expertise is also crucial in the peer dialogue, sharing best practice, knowledge as well as similar experiences.

The interview data also surfaced important reflections about how the Inclusion Specialist strand was framed and understood at the outset. In particular, one practitioner questioned whether expectations, both institutional and self-imposed, had become misaligned with what was realistically achievable within the time available.

The practitioner reflected that there may have been a lack of clarity early on about priorities and sequencing, noting that the project may not have been sufficiently narrowed at the beginning. This uncertainty appeared to contribute to a sense that “they are asking a huge amount from me,” particularly given the limited time allocation of approximately two hours per week.

Importantly, this was not described simply as an external pressure, but as something that became internalised. The practitioner explained how expectations interacted with professional identity, describing a felt obligation to meet all requests, which led to taking on additional pressure and responding affirmatively even when outcomes were uncertain. This culminated in moments of stress, echoing similar accounts elsewhere in the data around emotional labour and professional vulnerability.

These reflections highlight a critical learning point for the strand: while the Inclusion Specialist model is intentionally relational and responsive, clearer framing and expectation-setting at the outset may be necessary to protect practitioner wellbeing and to align ambitions with capacity. The data suggests that without this, inclusion specialists may feel an implicit responsibility to “do everything,” even when the project is explicitly designed to prioritise depth over breadth and sustainability over rapid delivery.

Rather than indicating a failure of the model, these accounts underline the importance of explicit communication about scope, limits, and phased development, both with schools and within the project team. They also reinforce the need to recognise inclusion work as emotionally demanding, requiring not only structural support but ongoing opportunities for reflection, recalibration, and collective sense-making.

## Reframing children's musical capacities

Further to this, inclusion leads consistently describe moments where teachers' assumptions about children's musical abilities are disrupted. Practitioners recount specific instances where children with complex needs demonstrate agency, leadership, and musical understanding in ways that surprise staff.

One inclusion lead described a moment in a PMLD class where "it was very clear that it was him that was keeping the beat," noting the significance of recognising intentional rhythmic control. Another recalled teachers' reactions when children successfully engaged with more formal musical material: "the teacher just stood there with their mouth open... this shows you what these guys are capable of."

These moments are repeatedly described as eye-opening. As one practitioner reflected, "it absolutely opened the class teachers' eyes to possibilities for those young people." Inclusion work here functions not only as provision for pupils, but as a re-education of adult perception, challenging deficit narratives and expanding understandings of musicality and participation.

## The emerging model

Taken together, the interviews articulate a coherent, if implicit, model of inclusive practice. This model is characterised by:

- Inclusion leads working as capacity-builders, rather than replacement specialists
- Co-teaching and modelling, with intentional repetition and gradual handover
- Emergent curriculum, documented retrospectively rather than prescribed in advance
- Explicit recognition of vulnerability within inclusion work
- Ongoing reframing of children's musical capacities through shared witnessing

As one inclusion lead summarised, the most significant impact was not a set of resources or schemes of work, but a shift in how staff understand music, learning, and children themselves; "they're now saying, 'I'd never thought of doing music this way.'"

## Findings from representatives from the schools

Discussions with school representatives offered valuable insight into how the Inclusion Lead model was experienced within day-to-day school contexts. Schools highlighted clear benefits associated with sustained engagement, particularly the opportunity for staff upskilling through observation of specialist music practitioners. Teachers described learning through watching inclusive strategies enacted in practice, rather than through formal training alone, and valued this approach to professional learning.

However, schools also articulated a number of structural and contextual challenges that shaped how inclusion work could be realised in practice. One recurring issue related to the realities of school life, including competing activities and interventions that resulted in pupils being withdrawn from music sessions. This had implications for continuity, with some sessions disrupted and raised questions about how inclusive music provision can be protected within complex school timetables.

Schools also emphasised that, for many pupils, particularly those experiencing anxiety or requiring significant relational support, time is a critical factor. Representatives noted that pupils often require several weeks to settle into music sessions, to become familiar with the practitioner, and to develop a sense of safety and predictability. For this reason, schools strongly advocated for working with the same class group over an extended period, rather than short-term or rotating models that move rapidly between classes.

Alongside these pedagogical considerations, curriculum development emerged as a key priority for schools when discussing future phases of the project. Schools expressed a strong desire for support focused explicitly on curriculum planning, positioning this as more pressing than alternative models such as mentoring a small number of staff. In one case, the school had recently invested in a commercial music resource and was attempting to roll it out across the teaching staff but found that significant adaptation was required to make the materials appropriate for pupils with PMLD. This prompted discussion about the potential role of Inclusion Leads in shaping or contributing to SEND-accessible resources.

While curriculum support was strongly requested by schools, it was less clear how much time Inclusion Leads were able to spend observing existing practice, working collaboratively with staff to reflect on musical learning over time, or co-constructing curriculum. This was particularly evident where curriculum planning was scheduled to take place towards the end of the Inclusion Lead's involvement, with implementation deferred to the following academic year when specialist support would no longer be present. This raises important questions about sustainability and whether curriculum development can be meaningfully separated from ongoing practice, observation, and iterative refinement. It also suggests that a more integrated structural approach may be needed, in which curriculum development is embedded throughout the Inclusion Lead's engagement, rather than positioned as a discrete or final phase.

## Conclusion

School and inclusion lead discussions surfaced several strategic questions about the relationship between delivery, curriculum development, and professional learning within the Inclusion Lead model.

A central tension concerns the balance between direct musical delivery and curriculum development. Inclusion Leads are highly skilled practitioners, and schools reported significant value in the quality of the sessions delivered. However, this raises a structural question: to what extent has the model enabled Inclusion Leads to move beyond delivering what they already do well, towards sustained curriculum co-development with schools? Where delivery becomes the dominant mode of engagement, there is a risk that the original remit of curriculum development becomes secondary to maintaining provision.

Relatedly, it remains important to examine how resources and learning from earlier phases of the project have been mobilised. While UpRising! Generated materials, pedagogical insights, and examples of inclusive practice, it is not yet clear how systematically these resources have informed curriculum development conversations in UpRising360 in so far as these then being put into practice in curriculum development. Greater clarity may be needed around how prior project learning is translated into school-facing curriculum frameworks.

There were also questions regarding the initial strategic positioning of the Inclusion Leads when entering schools. Early project framing emphasised curriculum development and capacity building. However, in practice, the demands of school timetables, pupil need, and expectations around session delivery may have shaped the work differently. This suggests a potential drift from strategic curriculum co-design towards more reactive forms of provision. Such drift is understandable within complex school environments, but it underscores the importance of revisiting the intended outcomes ensuring alignment between stated aims and enacted practice.

Clearer agreements regarding remit may strengthen this alignment in future phases. Formalised expectations for example, specifying proportions of time allocated to observation, co-planning, delivery, and curriculum documentation could support shared understanding between hubs and schools about the purpose of the work. Without this clarity, schools may understandably default to valuing immediate delivery, particularly where internal capacity is stretched.

Finally, questions emerged around the distribution of expertise between hub-based Inclusion Specialists and school staff. While Inclusion Leads bring deep musical and inclusive pedagogical expertise, school teachers often hold stronger experience in whole-school curriculum planning, sequencing, and accountability frameworks. This suggests that curriculum development should be conceptualised as a genuinely collaborative process, rather than something delivered to schools by specialists. Greater attention may be needed to where and how shared knowledge is made visible for example through structured co-planning sessions, joint curriculum mapping workshops, or collaborative review meetings. Clarifying which elements of curriculum work are school-led, hub-led, or jointly owned could strengthen sustainability beyond the project's duration.

Taken together, these reflections could point to the need for a more explicit articulation of the Inclusion Lead model as a co-development partnership, rather than a specialist-delivery intervention. Ensuring that curriculum development is embedded, shared, and strategically planned from the outset may enhance long-term impact across participating schools.



## Section 6: Strand three – Musician-in-residence

The musician-in-residence strand was designed as a practice-based professional learning model, aiming to strengthen inclusive music education by supporting musicians to develop the knowledge, confidence, and pedagogical knowledge required to work effectively with children and young people with SEND. Rather than positioning musicians as short-term deliverers of activity, the strand sought to embed them within school contexts over time, enabling learning to emerge through sustained engagement, observation, reflection, and collaboration with school staff.

Central to this strand was the aspiration to move beyond one-off training or workshops towards a model of situated professional learning. Musicians were supported to develop inclusive practice in context, through direct experience of diverse school environments, close work with pupils, and ongoing dialogue with each other through shared reflection sessions.

### Focus group findings

The focus group data provides an opportunity to examine how the musician-in-residence strand was understood, enacted, and experienced in practice. The perspectives shared by participating music staff offer insight into how the strand's practice-based professional learning model operated within the realities of school contexts, including the conditions that enabled learning and the challenges that shaped it.

### Situated knowledge

Across the strand, musicians repeatedly emphasised that effective inclusive practice is contingent on time spent understanding context, including pupils, staff, rhythms of the school day, and available resources. Where this time was absent, musicians described feeling reactive rather than responsive, limiting their ability to make ethically informed pedagogical decisions.

“I was straight in... running from one session to the next... not really knowing the setting.”

This lack of initial orientation constrained musicians' capacity to adapt their practice, particularly in specialist settings where pupils' responses could not be anticipated through prior experience alone.

“You don't really know how the children are going to be... and that makes a big difference.”

Where time was deliberately protected for observation, reflection, or informal dialogue with staff, musicians reported increased confidence, stronger attunement to pupils, and more responsive pedagogical decision-making.

“Having even fifteen minutes at the end to reflect makes such a difference... otherwise you’re missing key things.”

This reinforces the project’s emphasis on situated knowledge as foundational to inclusive practice.

## The role of teaching assistants

Teaching assistants were consistently positioned as critical mediators of musical engagement, particularly for pupils with SEND. When teaching assistants were actively involved, musicians described sessions as calmer, more fluid, and more musically productive.

“They were fantastic... anticipating what the children needed... passing instruments, helping with resonance boards.”

However, musicians also noted that teaching assistants often felt hesitant to contribute, frequently positioning musicians as the sole experts and underestimating their own detailed knowledge of pupils.

“They feel like they’re not as good as us musically... so they don’t like to say things.”

This hesitation sometimes resulted in missed opportunities to recognise pupils’ existing musical identities and capabilities.

“He played six songs from memory... and I had no idea that skill was there because no one felt able to say it.”

Musicians consistently advocated for clearer communication about the project’s collaborative ethos, suggesting that explicit framing could legitimise teaching assistant input and strengthen co-delivery.

“We really welcome any input from teaching assistants or people that know the students. They know them better than us.”

## Progression

A recurring tension concerned how musicians understood and justified progression. Particularly in one-to-one and SEND contexts, musicians expressed anxiety that their work did not resemble conventional educational activity or linear models of progress.

“I don’t feel like I’ve planned anything.”

Through collective reflection, these concerns were reframed, with progression understood as relational, affective, and often slow. Musicians shared examples of development unfolding over extended periods.

“It’s taken twelve weeks to get from him just making sounds to him tolerating me playing.”

Small, easily overlooked moments, such as remaining in the room, tolerating shared sound, or passing an instrument, were recognised as meaningful indicators of learning.

“The fact that he stayed in the room with you, that could be a really big win.”

This reframing aligns closely with the project’s commitment to broadening what counts as musical progress and valuing learning trajectories that do not conform to outcomes-driven or linear models.

## School conditions

Musicians’ accounts made clear that pedagogy alone cannot overcome unsuitable material and organisational conditions. In several settings, shared or unstable spaces actively undermined musical engagement.

“The room has about fifteen different functions... instruments blocked in... cleaning chemicals in there.”

These conditions were not neutral but shaped pupils’ emotional regulation, behaviour, and capacity to engage musically.

“We didn’t do any playing at all... he was so distraught about something else that nothing was going to happen.”

Musicians expressed frustration that such constraints were often beyond their control, despite having a significant impact on delivery.

“You’re paying for me to do something that I physically cannot deliver in that environment.”

## Depth versus breadth

A clear tension emerged between schools’ desire to maximise pupil reach and musicians’ desire to support meaningful, sustained musical development.

“They’ve seen it as ticking boxes, as many kids as possible.”

Short rotations were widely viewed as insufficient, particularly for pupils requiring time to build trust and musical agency.

“Five or six weeks just isn’t enough.”

Musicians proposed alternative models that prioritised fewer pupils and longer engagement as more consistent with the project’s inclusive values.

“We’d see much more progression if we worked with fewer classes for longer.”

This raises important questions about how inclusion is operationalised across the school year and positioned within the wider curriculum. It also draws attention to the variability in how the programme has been enacted across different musician residencies. In practice, approaches have ranged from short-term, rotational models across multiple schools to longer-term, embedded residencies within a single setting.

Each model offers distinct affordances and limitations.

Short-term engagements can extend reach and visibility, enabling more pupils to encounter musical activity. However, without sufficient time, these encounters risk remaining superficial, limiting opportunities for relationship-building, responsive pedagogy, and the development of pupil agency particularly in specialist settings where trust, familiarity, and consistency are central to participation.

In contrast, longer-term residencies enable deeper pedagogical engagement, allowing musicians to develop contextual understanding of the school, its staff, and its pupils. This can support more nuanced, adaptive approaches that align with inclusive values and facilitate progression over time. However, this model necessarily reduces the number of pupils and settings reached within a given timeframe, raising questions about equity of access at a system level.

Across both approaches, a key issue concerns the extent to which there is a clearly articulated programme of work. Where musicians engage on a short-term basis, there is a need for a structured yet flexible framework that can be meaningfully enacted within limited timeframes. This includes clarity around intended outcomes, pedagogical approaches, and how progression might be supported beyond the residency period.

Similarly, longer-term placements require clearer articulation of the musician's role. This extends beyond delivery to include questions of professional learning, relational practice, and engagement with the wider ecology of the school. For example, is the musician positioned primarily as a visiting practitioner delivering sessions, or as a co-learner embedded within the school community, developing understanding of specialist pedagogies, policies, and practices over time?

These distinctions are not merely logistical. They shape how inclusion is understood and enacted whether as broad access to experiences or as sustained, relational engagement that enables meaningful participation and progression. As such, greater clarity in onboarding processes, role definition, and programme design is needed to ensure alignment between the project's inclusive intentions and its delivery models across different contexts.

## Professional vulnerability

The focus groups revealed high levels of professional vulnerability, particularly among musicians working outside familiar pedagogical frames.

| “I basically feel like I don’t have a clue what I’m doing.”

Rather than being positioned as failure, these moments were reframed as productive sites of learning, supported through peer dialogue and mentoring.

| “It’s taken much longer than I thought... but it does get there.”

| “It’s taken twelve weeks to get to that point.”

Emotional labour and professional strain were also evident, particularly in challenging school contexts. However, peer support enabled musicians to sustain engagement and reflect critically rather than withdraw.

| “It’s very draining... but even those moments might be the best thing in their week.”

## Musical belonging and sustained engagement

Alongside challenge and professional uncertainty, the focus groups revealed strong evidence of musical belonging, enjoyment, and sustained engagement among young people. Musicians described moments where pupils demonstrated pride, excitement, and a desire to continue musical activity beyond the session itself.

| “He was so proud of it... showing me how many subscribers and likes he had.”

These moments were frequently framed as affirmations of impact, even where formal progress indicators were difficult to articulate.

| “I felt like, I’ve done my job now. I’ve made a difference.”

Musicians also noted that pupils returned week after week with anticipation, even in contexts where engagement initially appeared fragile.

| “It’s all he talks about on a Tuesday.”

Importantly, musical enjoyment was not always expressed through conventional participation. For some pupils, success was evident in remaining present, tolerating shared sound, or choosing to return.

| “The fact that he stayed in the room... that could be a really big win.”

## Working conditions, safety and role clarity

Alongside material conditions, musicians' accounts also drew attention to the relational and organisational dimensions of their working environments. In some settings, musicians described situations in which unclear expectations, limited staffing, and unsuitable spaces combined to create working conditions that felt professionally and, at times, physically unsafe.

In one account, a musician reflected on working over an extended period with a young person whose behaviour escalated across sessions. What began as manageable dysregulation developed into incidents that placed both the pupil and the practitioner at risk. The musician described feeling caught between a commitment to sustaining engagement and an absence of clear guidance regarding behavioural escalation, support, or withdrawal. Crucially, responsibility for managing risk appeared to sit implicitly with the musician, despite this falling outside their professional remit.

This account prompted wider discussion among musicians about the importance of clear role definition and shared responsibility. Musicians emphasised the need for agreed expectations around the environments they are asked to work in, including visibility within teaching spaces, proximity to other staff, and access to teaching assistant support in line with wider school practice. Where musicians were positioned to work alone, in isolated rooms, or without support routinely provided in other lessons, this was experienced as a significant source of stress and vulnerability.

Concerns were also raised about basic working conditions, including the suitability and comfort of teaching spaces. In some cases, musicians described environments that were physically uncomfortable or poorly resourced, which compounded fatigue and limited their capacity to respond sensitively to pupils' needs. These conditions were not experienced as incidental, but as shaping the quality, safety, and sustainability of inclusive practice.

Taken together, these accounts highlight that the conditions under which musicians work, including clarity of role, access to support, and safe, appropriate environments are fundamental to ethical and effective practice. Without attention to these structural factors, musicians are placed in positions of disproportionate responsibility, absorbing risk and emotional labour.

## Conclusion

Overall, the musician-in-residence strand reveals inclusive music education as complex, relational, and often slow work. Musicians' accounts highlight both the uncertainty and emotional labour involved in working beyond familiar pedagogical frames, and the meaningful moments of connection, belonging, and musical engagement that emerge through sustained practice. Rather than offering quick solutions, this strand shows how inclusive capacity develops through situated knowledge, shared reflection, and collaboration with schools.

# Section 7: Conclusion

## cross-strand synthesis

Across all strands of the project, participants' accounts demonstrate a rich and evolving landscape of inclusive music practice that is already generating meaningful impact across diverse educational contexts. The findings point not only to what has been delivered, but to how inclusive musical engagement is being understood, enacted, and sustained in practice.

### Impact

The project has enabled forms of musical participation that extend beyond traditional measures of attainment or product. Across strands, practitioners described moments where pupils engaged in ways that are often overlooked within more conventional frameworks. These included remaining present within sessions, tolerating shared sound, initiating interaction, sustaining attention, and returning over time. While subtle, these shifts represent significant forms of musical and relational engagement, particularly for pupils working within PMLD and care-experienced contexts.

In addition to pupil outcomes, there is clear evidence of impact on adult practice. Teachers, teaching assistants, and practitioners reported increased confidence in working with exploratory and non-linear approaches to music-making. Many described changes in their own expectations of what pupils are capable of, alongside a greater willingness to recognise and value forms of musical expression that are embodied, affective, and relational. These shifts suggest that the project is contributing to longer-term changes in pedagogical thinking, rather than short-term intervention alone.

At a wider level, the project is beginning to influence how inclusion is understood within participating schools and hubs. Inclusion is being reframed not simply as access to activity, but as meaningful participation supported through relationships, responsiveness, and time. This represents a significant cultural contribution that extends beyond individual sessions or settings.

### Values

A consistent strength across all strands is the project's commitment to relational and context-responsive practice. Practitioners demonstrated a strong orientation towards meeting pupils where they are, adapting approaches in response to need, and prioritising trust, safety, and connection as central to musical engagement.

In strands such as PMLD and care-experienced contexts, this was particularly evident in the emphasis placed on pacing, repetition, and attunement. Slowness was not positioned as a limitation, but as an ethical and pedagogical necessity. Across other strands, similar values were reflected in the importance placed on building relationships over time, working with uncertainty, and allowing musical activity to emerge through interaction rather than being tightly predetermined.

These shared values underpin a model of inclusive music practice that is flexible, responsive, and grounded in the realities of each setting. They also align strongly with the project's wider aims around inclusion, participation, and equity.

## **Strengths of the programme design**

The multi-strand structure of the programme has enabled a breadth of approaches to develop, providing valuable insight into how inclusive practice operates across different contexts. Variations in delivery models, including both shorter-term engagements and longer-term residencies, have created opportunities to explore how time, relationships, and context shape musical outcomes.

This diversity has been productive. It has allowed practitioners to experiment with different pedagogical approaches, supported learning across strands, and surfaced important questions about what conditions are most conducive to meaningful engagement. The presence of both specialist roles and embedded practitioners has also strengthened the programme's capacity to respond to a wide range of needs across schools.

The role of teaching assistants (TAs) has emerged as a particular strength within this ecosystem. Where actively engaged, TAs have acted as key mediators of participation, supporting communication, regulation, and continuity. Their involvement highlights the importance of distributed expertise within inclusive practice and the potential for longer-term embedding beyond the duration of specialist input.

Taken together, these elements position the programme as a significant site of practice-based learning. The project is not only delivering activity, but generating insight into inclusive pedagogies, professional learning, and the conditions required to sustain them.

At the same time, participants' accounts highlight the importance of attending not only to pedagogical approaches, but to the conditions under which inclusive music practice is taking place. While roles differed across strands, a consistent pattern emerged in which unclear expectations, variable school environments, and uneven access to support shaped both practitioner experience and the effectiveness of delivery. These issues were not strand-specific, but structural, and therefore require project-level responses.

Following this discussion and analysis, we propose the following recommendations for inclusive musical practices in schools:

## 7.1 Time

Across strands, time emerged as central to inclusive practice.

In the PMLD strand, teachers required repetition, pacing, and sustained observation to notice subtle engagement. In the care-experienced strand, slowness was positioned as an ethical necessity rather than a logistical delay. Within the inclusion specialist and musician-in-residence strands, practitioners consistently highlighted the limitations of short engagement cycles, particularly for pupils requiring relational trust and emotional safety.

### Recommendations

- Establish minimum engagement expectations across strands, particularly where relational trust-building is central.
- Clarify at programme level the intended balance between depth and breadth of engagement.
- Where possible, prioritise sustained cohort models over short-term reach-based rotation.
- Articulate time as a protected design principle within future phases of the project.
- Positioning time explicitly as a condition of inclusion strengthens alignment between programme values and delivery structures.

## 7.2 Clarifying strategic intent

A recurring tension emerged between schools' understandable desire to maximise pupil reach and practitioners' experience that meaningful progression often required longer-term engagement with fewer pupils. Without explicit framing, this tension risks drifting toward models that prioritise visibility and numbers over depth and sustainability.

### Recommendations

- Clarify the programme's strategic position regarding reach versus depth.
- Develop guidance for hubs to support negotiation with schools where competing priorities arise.
- Consider differentiating between development partnerships (deeper engagement) and lighter-touch models where appropriate. Making this distinction explicit will help protect inclusive values from dilution through operational pressures.

### 7.3 Reframing musical progression and impact

Across strands, practitioners consistently expanded what counted as musical progress. Progression was described not only in terms of musical products, but through:

- remaining in the room,
- tolerating shared sound,
- initiating interaction,
- subtle rhythmic control,
- returning week after week,
- and shifts in adult perception of children's capabilities.

Similarly, teacher development often manifested as increased confidence, altered pedagogical judgement, and reframed expectations, rather than immediately visible curriculum outputs.

#### Recommendations

- Develop shared cross-strand language around expanded notions of musical progression.
- Consider producing guidance for hubs and schools on evidencing relational and non-linear musical development.
- Support schools in articulating inclusive musical impact

### 7.4 Emotional labour, professional vulnerability, and wellbeing

Across all strands, participants spoke openly about professional vulnerability. Inclusion Leads described internalised pressure and blurred expectations. Musicians articulated uncertainty and, in some cases, exposure to risk within unsuitable environments. Practitioners in the care-experienced strand reflected on the emotional demands of trauma-informed work. These accounts do not indicate weakness or failure. Rather, they highlight inclusive music practice as emotionally demanding.

#### Recommendations

- Recognise practitioner wellbeing as a structural consideration within programme design.
- Embed regular reflective spaces not only for pedagogical review but also for boundary-setting.
- Strengthen clarity around role limits and escalation routes to reduce the absorption of disproportionate responsibility by individual practitioners.
- Consider light-touch peer supervision or facilitated reflective dialogue models where appropriate.

## 7.5 Role clarity, shared responsibility, and working conditions

A consistent cross-strand theme concerned the need for clearer shared agreements with schools regarding roles, behaviour management, safeguarding escalation, staffing support, and teaching environments. While schools retain statutory responsibility, participants reported uncertainty in moments of risk or escalation. In some cases, unsuitable spaces, lack of support staff, or ambiguous boundaries compromised delivery.

### Recommendations

Develop a cross-strand terms of reference framework for future phases, outlining:

- Clear role definitions across inclusion leads and musicians-in-residence.
- Safeguarding induction processes, including named contacts and site-specific procedures.
- Behaviour support expectations and escalation routes.
- Minimum conditions for delivery, including appropriate space and access to support staff.
- Shared responsibility principles between hubs and schools.

## 7.6 Teaching assistants as co-practitioners

Across strands, teaching assistants emerged as crucial mediators of musical engagement. Where TAs were confident and actively involved, sessions were calmer, more responsive, and more musically productive. However, some TAs positioned themselves as musically inferior and hesitated to contribute knowledge about pupils' capacities.

### Recommendations

- Explicitly frame TAs as co-practitioners within project induction.
- Offer light-touch CPD or guidance focused on co-delivery and musical facilitation.
- Encourage structured moments of shared planning or reflection that include TAs. Elevating TA expertise supports long-term embedding beyond specialist involvement.

## 7.7 Curriculum development as collaborative activity

The inclusion specialist strand highlighted tension between emergent, practice-led curriculum development and schools' desire for formalised curriculum development. Findings suggest that curriculum in SEND contexts is most meaningfully developed through co-construction grounded in classroom practice, rather than delivered as a fixed product.

### Recommendations

- Clarify that curriculum development within the programme may be retrospective, iterative, and practice-informed.
- Embed curriculum thinking throughout engagement cycles rather than positioning it as a final phase.
- Develop collaborative curriculum mapping models that make shared ownership visible between hubs and schools.

## 7.8 Sustainability

The most significant impacts described were not always tangible resources or outputs, but changes in:

- adult perception of children's capacities,
- legitimacy of play and interaction,
- confidence in non-linear progression,
- understanding of inclusion as relational rather than technical.
- These shifts indicate that UpRising360 is contributing to a broader reframing of inclusive musical culture across the region.

### Recommendation

Future phases of the programme may benefit from:

- Making these contributions explicit within external communications.

## Final reflection

The interim findings demonstrate that UpRising360's strength lies in its commitment to practice-based, relational, and context-responsive professional learning. However, sustaining this work requires equal attention to structural clarity, shared accountability, appropriate working conditions, and the wellbeing of those enacting inclusion on the ground.

By formalising agreements, protecting time, reframing progression, and strengthening collaborative ownership across hubs and schools, the programme can deepen its inclusive ambitions while safeguarding the practitioners who make them possible.

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