



# USING ASSEMBLIES TO BUILD SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Janella Ajeigbe is  
Principal of  
Mossbourne  
Parkside Academy



On a wet Tuesday last November, the year 6 helpers put the afternoon's music on the visualiser ready for the after-school choir club to start. After explaining how to pronounce the words, the children began to learn the first parts of *Et in terra pax hominibus*. I happened to walk through the hall and sat down with our sixth form helpers (who attend a local independent school) and listened as they helped to build the harmonies and guide the children through the piece.

As the music swelled, I knew that I was listening to a piece of music that would change me. I (not coming from a choral background) had never heard the piece before and like the children from my school (55% qualifying for free school meals, 79% speaking English as a second language and 94% of pupils coming from ethnic minority backgrounds) I remain grateful that I popped into afternoon choir and that I was introduced to Vivaldi.

For many Head Teachers, the impact of the corona virus crisis means that stretched budgets now need to cover extra equipment and shifts for cleaners. It is difficult to see where we will find the funds for singing or guitar lessons but I have found that, with a few phonecalls, partnerships can significantly enrich the music offer for many primary schools. Assemblies are an easy way to start and so here are three tips for using assemblies to introduce partnerships between your secondary school music department and local primary schools.

## Assemblies

### Tip 1:

Offer your time to a local school and be the guest for an assembly. The format can be simple: introduce yourself, tell a short story which explains to the children why you started playing your instrument (or why you love to sing), play a few short but famous melodies, play your instrument's highest, lowest and loudest notes and then ask if the children have any questions.

Many children have never heard a trumpet or listened to someone sing an aria, and your passion for music will be infectious. It's usually important to maintain order by letting the school staff lead the assembly – let them introduce you and then let them pick the children who ask questions. It can also be useful if the children think of their questions in advance, otherwise you tend to get asked 'have you ever played with someone famous'.

### Tip 2:

Return once a term, bringing your Y10 or Y12 students. Remember, your assemblies don't have to just feature adult staff. Develop the partnership by thinking of ways that your pupils could share their passion for music with local primary schools. In the past I've had KS3 students singing Christmas carols to the children, the jazz band playing party songs at the end of the school year and A-level students giving a (short) violin recital to our reception class.

Many of these links are still possible despite the current lockdown as I have found my pupils (once the connection is good) will participate in a digital assembly and find it similar to watching TV rather than a lesser version of a live performance.

### Tip 3:

Plan a small-scale music project together. Why not choose a simple song or arrangement and work with a school, over a series of three or four rehearsals, to perform together. Use your rock bands, chamber groups or orchestras to give the children at a local school the chance to perform together with live instruments. If you work in a school with a strong musical programme then you may not realise how sparse musical provision is elsewhere. Many children go through primary school never having sung along with a piano; only ever having had a CD to accompany them.

Start simply by planning a song that you could learn together. If you have a school choir then many songs are surprisingly easy – intersperse the primary pupils (once it is safe to do so) amongst your sopranos, altos and (possibly, for some Year 6 boys) the tenors/basses and allow them to learn a part. Your older students will enjoy the energy of the primary pupils and the younger children will be excited by having older mentors.

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Dear Tom, Ben and Stuart,

Thank you for playing for us today. We learnt lots about brass instruments. I enjoyed the lovey music. My favourite instrument was the trumpet from Luan, class 1



Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Dear Katie and Angela,  
I was delighted to have you in our School Singing like Sweet birds living in harmony.

I wonder when you'll ever come back to our School and sing to us again. Having opera singers at our School is great, so you could help us tune up our voices which will help a lot. It was a pleasure to have you with us. You are our harmony heroes because when we have a bad day, you could help us feel good again with a melody in our minds. I adored listening to pieces from Mozart and an aria from Carmen.

In Sometime, I would hope you could come back and sing some more melodies. Because of your visits, I am back to singing just like you! When I went on holiday, I was singing in the car for about an hour. That is how much time I take for singing. I'd like to say another thank you. Don't forget to come again!

Best Wishes,  
Rajiah

Do consider the safeguarding requirements and go over these with both sets of pupils. Key things to remember are reminding your students not to exchange contact details with younger pupils and to consider their language. We also remind our pupils to respect other people's personal space and avoid spontaneous hugs!

Music departments are the custodians of our children's inheritance. You have possession of the pieces of music that have sustained us over the centuries and will guide us in the future. Many schools, particularly in deprived areas, do not have their own music department. Think of partnerships, even when they are as simple as offering to perform in an assembly, as a way to broaden the reach of your department and to share that inheritance with a wider group of children.