

**“English schools aren’t providing pupils with a decent education in music”,** so say the Inspectors of Ofsted.

We’re joined by the composer Howard Goodall who is the National Singing Ambassador working with the Sing Up Campaign, a government backed body which is trying to encourage singing in Primary Schools.

Good morning

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Have the Inspectors broadly got it right do you think?

This is a very good report because it identifies what works in music teaching in school and what doesn’t work. And it identifies it with great scrutiny and I think, I hope, I would wish, that every head teacher and every head of department in the country could read this ‘cause it is a brilliant summation of what works, what best practice is and when things are failing, how they fail and what they fail on.

Do you care to give us that summation in a couple of sentences?

Well, it says that at the extremes some of the schools, and I’ve visited them myself, the schools that have specialism in music or second specialism in music are providing in terms of quality and the number of children involved and number of young people involved, really superb standards... outstanding, probably amongst the best schools for music in the world. At the other extreme you’ve got a persistent minority of schools where they are, let’s say, somewhat resistant to improvement. In the middle, what it says here, is that over half of all schools the music teaching is pretty good. But what the report also says is that, you know, not all schools and this is other people, other than music teachers, appreciate what music can do for the whole school, right across the curriculum for the self esteem of all the pupils in the school, for the general feeling of the school, for the well-being of the pupils and for improvements across the board. I mean, one of the things we find in our Sing Up programme is that if you go and improve the singing in Primary Schools, in fact, all the other things improve as well and there’s a very pernicious myth that in order to, for example, concentrate on your Maths, or your English you’ve got to not concentrate on singing. In fact it is the other way round.

Well, that’s a very interesting idea, before you explore it and I’d like to explore it a bit further, let’s have a musical interlude ‘cause I think we have got the children of New Earswick School in York who are indeed part of the national Sing Up campaign.

Earswick School sings:

I’m being swallowed by a boa constrictor,  
A boa constrictor,  
A boa constrictor,  
Oh, I’m being swallowed by a boa constrictor,  
And I don’t like it one little bit

That's all very clear. Review? Marks out of ten?

Very jolly! One of the nice things is, we're trying to get all children to have a good group singing experience and we want them to enjoy it as well. It's not something they have to do, a bit like eating greens, they'd rather be doing something else. And you know, we've got over half of all Primary Schools now being given Sing Up resources and training.

Just take us through the logic of what you were saying before we heard that clip. In what sense does music being taught well and to a large number of pupils improve the performance of the school as a whole. What's the evidence for that and how does it work?

Well, there's actually a huge amount now of evidence from all over the world that singing improves the well-being of children. It actually helps your brain work better. A lot of cognitive science books that have come out in recent years have shown that the brain is much more complex than we thought it was and that particularly for young children when they are developing the... actually music... singing in particular when you are very young... actually helps your brain wire better. It helps your memory work better, makes you feel good and we know that as adults that singing makes you feel good. But in a more practical sense as well, you know, in our campaign we give resources to schools where they can sing songs in every other subject, not just music. They can be singing in French and literacy and numeracy and they can be of an enormous help in these areas and you know, as I was saying, there's a myth that some head teachers will say: "Oh, well, I've got to concentrate on my literacy and numeracy therefore I can't be dealing with choirs and things like that"

You do meet with some resistance do you?

Yes and the thing is that actually the opposite is true. The schools that thrive, that do best at literacy and numeracy and all these things, you go and find out what are they doing well, they've often got lots of singing going on and lots of musical activity.

Could be just 'cause they're good schools couldn't it? I mean rather than a link between the two things.

Well, I think one of the things this report, you know, brings up is that all schools improve when music thrives in a school because whilst you might have a very good physics teacher that does really well for the physics students in that school say, if music is done well it actually effects pupils right across the curriculum and right across the school and it actually lifts the whole school and this report is very clear on that and it says that often music teachers feel rather isolated and there are lots of things they can draw on, lots of support they can draw on from outside the school from local authority music services etc etc. But they are often quite confused how to draw in that support and help them raise the level of music in the school as a whole