

Services For Education

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, MEMORY, LISTENING AND ATTENTION SKILLS.

Ruth Roberts
Soundtots Project Lead

July 2019

Soundtots, is a musical intervention helping children reach a progressive level of development during their time in the early years foundation stage (EYFS).

It was May 2018 when Services For Education began the activities of the Soundtots project; an exciting programme of music-making and singing activities, tailored specifically to early years children (4-5 years old), supporting the development of key life skills. In this report we share our journey of the process, successes and the positive impact that Soundtots has created just one year on. Join us, as we reflect on the positive impact Soundtots has had on these young people and how it has helped to reshape positive change in their lives.

The programme was led by Vocal/Music Specialists from Services For Education (SFE) Music Service and targeted 300 pupils from Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) settings in four of the most disadvantaged wards of central Birmingham:

- Soho
- East Handsworth
- Lozells
- Shard End

These areas with a below average number of pupils achieving school readiness goals and below average language development.



'It has really impacted on confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Anecdotally, I watched one boy who was reluctant to join in and for several weeks would refuse to sit down. One week he went to sit down 4 to 5 times and stopped himself each time but became so involved he forgot himself and sat down, fully engaged in that session and from then on. It really helps break down the barriers. This level of enjoyment spreads across all of the children's learning and outcomes'. Anglesey Nursery

The Importance of Soundtots

13-year-old children from disadvantaged backgrounds will have heard on average 30 million fewer words than children from affluent backgrounds and also possess half the vocabulary. However, the right environmental support has the potential to make a real difference in children's language learning, and consequently, to their later academic success / life chances.

¹ Fernald, A., V.A. Marchman, & A. Weisleder. 2013. "SES Differences in Language Processing Skill and Vocabulary Are Evident at 18 Months." *Developmental Science* 16 (2): 234–48

Sessions were structured around the three “characteristics of effective learning” (playing and exploring, active learning and creative and thinking critically) so that children learn to explore, to be engaged and motivated to develop their thinking skills by making links in their learning through music.

We used the quality framework to focus on two areas of assessment, which proved very effective:

- 1) Speech and language goals from the nationally recognised ²'Development Matters'; and
- 2) Progression in music making assessed through ³'Sounds of Intent' measuring pupils' interactive, proactive and reactive engagement.

The 20-week programme has been based on research led by Professor Adam Ockelford and responds to Public Health England’s suggestion for evidence-based activity that promotes the most effective types of language- boosting interactions. Interestingly, pupils took many different routes in their music making journey, but all embedded the layered skills shown on the wheel Sounds of Intent assessment.

Sounds of Intent measures engagement of music-making and this linked with Speech & Language development.



The children’s emotional and well-being and levels of involvement have improved since the start of the project. Those especially who came in with low levels of well-being and involvement have grown and settle well into the environment. They are more resilient and not so shy now, as they are more willing to take part in independent activities and during the Soundtots programme.” Sameeah Bhatti, EY Lead, Westminster Primary

The Impact of Soundtots

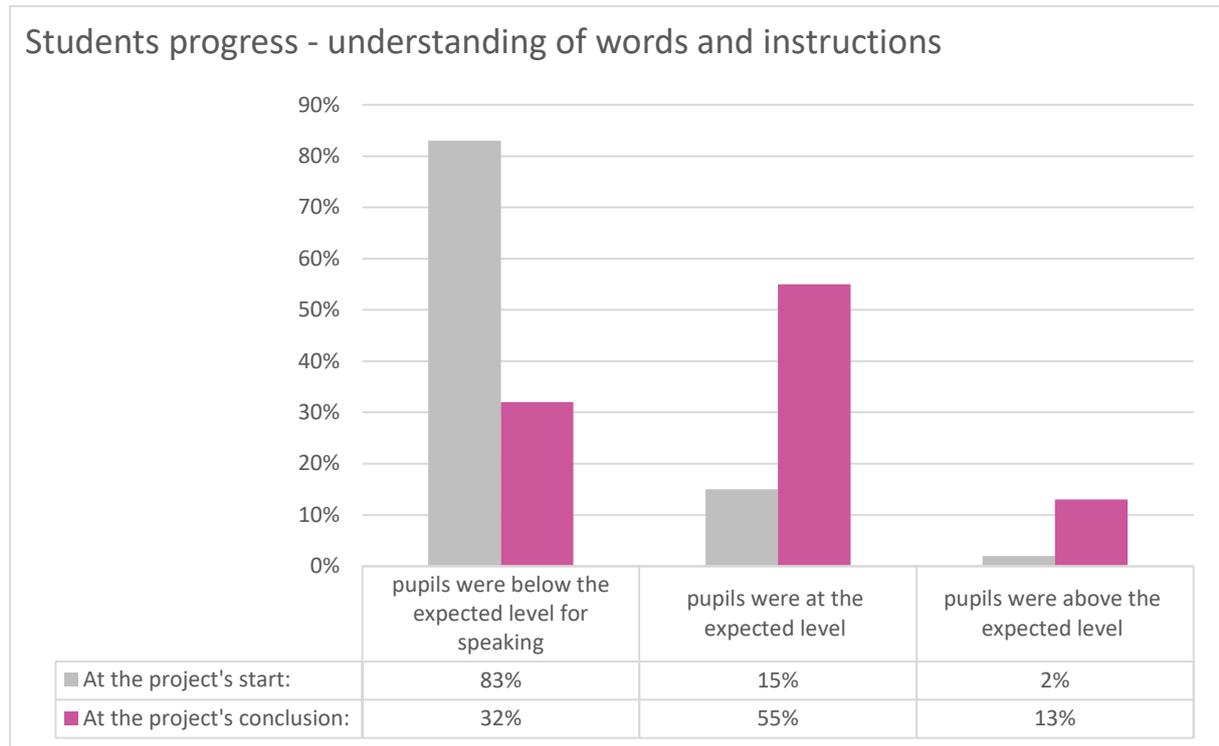
Schools were asked to complete a baseline and final data sheet with reference to the Early Year Outcomes age bands for the three aspects of:

- Understanding of words and instructions
- Communication and language
- listening and attention and speaking.

² <https://www.early-education.org.uk/development-matters-early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs-download>

³ <http://www.soundsofintent.org/about-soi>

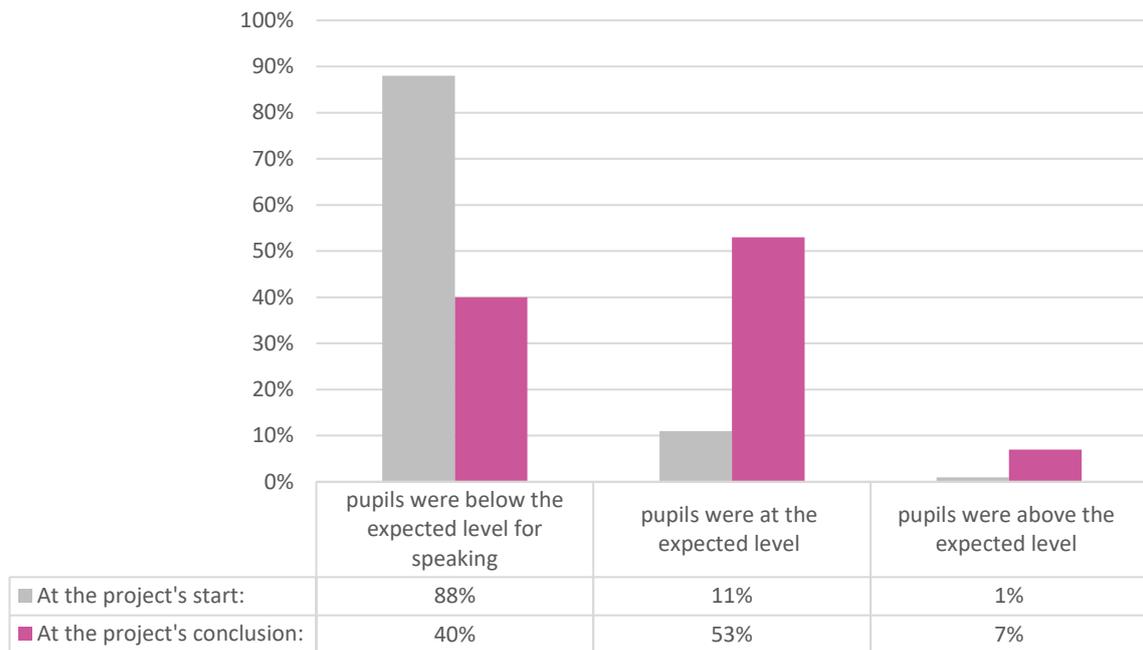
The following data demonstrates the potential impact of our work on the 300 pupils involved in the project:



The impact of the programme has had a positive effect on the children’s communication and language skills. The children have grown in confidence whilst sharing their ideas and answer questions more confidently. Also, those of a lower ability listen more attentively and speak more clearly using full sentences, rather than a 2 or 3-word level. The SEND children have begun to become more focused and demonstrate a passion for music as they really enjoy taking part in the sessions’. Westminster Primary

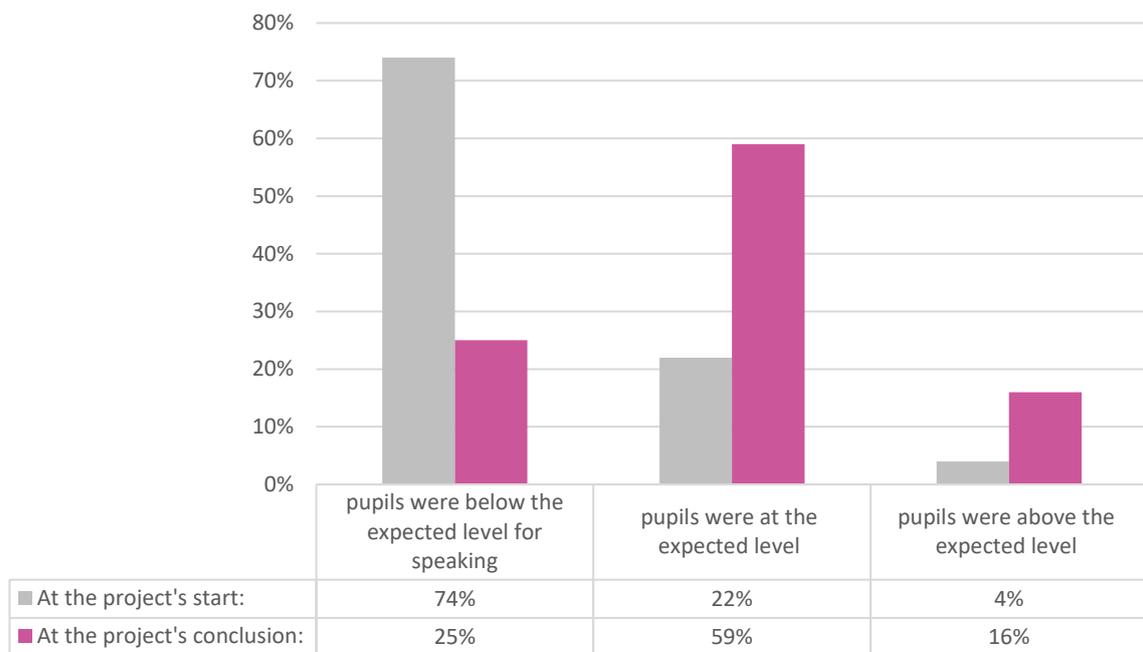
Delivery staff recorded observations regarding pupils' spoken contribution in any session - including how often they spoke and the level of the language used. Anecdotally Speech & Language development increased in all areas. The Soundtots Team's observation and recording showed increased confidence in improvisation, engagement and verbal interaction as weeks progressed:

Students progress - communication and language



Sessions were documented through video and photos, enabling the delivery team to observe and record pupils engagement with and reaction to activities. Anecdotally listening and attention skills developed in all areas. Pupil listening and language engagement was markedly higher in extending vocabulary and with pupils with English as an additional language:

Students progress - listening and attention



Soundtots Success:



The children have displayed high levels of engagement and creativity during their play in our provision. EY Team, Lozells Primary

Utilising a Soundtots Team, rich in classroom experience and musicianship, was another fundamental factor to our success. Teachers were skilled in extending the music to include children's responses, incorporate movement, visual cues and sound to include all levels of listening and interaction. Instruments, toys, puppets, backing tracks, soundtracks were all incorporated into sessions. Once the musical theme had been introduced, pupils were encouraged to express their preference and take the lead. Each step forward was celebrated with affirmation and visualisation.

The knowledge of the Speech & Language development age bands and Word Gap vocabulary extension enabled the Soundtots session planning to be really bespoke to each setting.

Soundtots has allowed us to create a positive impact and make a real difference.



The children have developed more confidence with unfamiliar adults and beginning to build up and form new relationships with the adults of Soundtots. Children who have little English and understanding of English have been expressing themselves through actions and gestures through music. Welford Primary School, Reception Staff

For more information email Stuart Bernie, Head of Music Service
stuart.birnie@servicesforeducation.co.uk