English Folk
DANCE & SONG SOCIETY



Figure 1: Inclusive Folk Festival, Cecil Sharp House. Photo: Roswitha Chesher

Inclusive Folk

Evaluation September 2025 - July 2026

Dr. Lizzie Fort - Independent Evaluator, with contributions from Lucy Stiles, Education Manager

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Figure 2: Students from Cambridge School with Music Leader Nick. Photo: Roswitha Chesher

Introduction

About Inclusive Folk

'Inclusive Folk' which started in 2020, is an English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) programme designed to provide creative, inclusive, multi-sensory folk music and dance sessions for learning disabled young people (up to the age of 30 years) at Cecil Sharp House and in schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEN/D) in various London boroughs. The programme has previously been in receipt of three-year funding from John Lyon's Charity (2020–2023). This new funding agreement is for a five-year period (September 2024–August 2029), subject to successful annual evaluation reporting. In this five-year project, additions / extensions to the programme are:

- Doubling the amount of activity delivered in schools and SEN/D settings (compared to the previous funded project)
- Folk Unlimited (FUN) giving one performance per year
- Two new pastoral support roles in Folk Unlimited sessions
- A new pastoral staff role for disabled and neurodivergent young people in London Youth Folk Ensemble (LYFE) which runs concurrently to Folk Unlimited in Cecil Sharp House.

Scope of evaluation report

This evaluation report for the second year of the funding period, 2025-2026, has been prepared jointly by EFDSS with Independent Evaluator Dr. Lizzie Fort[1]. This report focuses on the period September 2025 to June 2026, around the three programme outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Disabled young people show positive engagement in a music and dance environment – including exhibiting positive personal reception of the activities (enjoyment and engagement), social and emotional skills, confidence in sharing in the sessions.
- **Outcome 2:** Disabled young people are enabled to participate in meaningful experiences with an arts organisation (EFDSS), including its venue (Cecil Sharp House), via a supportive progression route.

[1] https://www.linkedin.com/in/lizzfort/

- **Outcome 3:** Increased numbers of school/college staff, folk music educators, performing arts tutors are enabled to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings.

This year's report includes four short case studies: two school case studies, FUN participant case study, and LYFE Pastoral Support Worker case study, followed by a summary of evidence for the three outcomes. The report concludes with some challenges and learnings, key findings and recommendations for the future of the programme.

Methodology

The mixed-mode evaluation methodology was co-designed and implemented between Independent Evaluator and EFDSS Education Manager and draws on a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools such as observation of classes and sharing events, one-to-one interviews, group interviews, surveys, and monitoring data. New this year, is the trial of an inclusive, arts-based evaluation tool was designed with Widgets/PECS symbols (Picture Exchange Communication System - visual images such as line drawings or actual photographs) to encourage more feedback from disabled young people. Also, one of the school deputy head teachers conducted interviews with this staff, with questions provided by the Independent Evaluator in advance. Survey questions for school staff and FUN parents and carers were updated to help generate more qualitative feedback on the program. A list of data collection tools and people that participated in evaluation activities is included in Appendix A. Data were triangulated and thematically analysed to identify evidence relating to the three programme outcomes, as well as emerging themes, looking at developments from the learning and recommendations last year.

Activity Overview

From September 2025 to June 2026, EFDSS have:

- Recruited and supported the Inclusive Folk Trainee Music Leader, Gráinne Lacy-Roberts.
- Employed previous Trainee Roary Neat (2023-2024) on a freelance basis to cover Tutors in schools and Folk Unlimited programmes.
- Delivered 18 face-to-face Folk Unlimited creative music making sessions fortnightly (six per term) on Sunday afternoons at Cecil Sharp House with a full group of ten young people with severe learning disabilities (SLD), profound and multiple disabilities (PMLD), and other complex needs[2], with parents and carers.
- Hosted the second joint FUN / LYFE sharing performance held in Kennedy Hall at Cecil Sharp House in March 2026, attended by friends and family.
- Fulfilled the delivery of 36 half days (88 workshops) in four education settings:
  a. Cambridge School, Hammersmith & Fulham (five full days with four groups in the Autumn Term)
  b. Phoenix Arch School, Brent (five full days with four groups in the Spring Term)
  c. St Ann's School, Ealing (five full days with four groups over the Autumn, Spring and Summer Terms)
  d. Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School, Westminster (three full days with four groups in the Autumn Term)
- Delivered one half-day Inclusive Folk Festival at Cecil Sharp House with 32 students and 13 staff from Cambridge School in June 2026 with music-making and dance activities.
- Created a new downloadable teaching resource focusing on how technology can be used to enhance the musical experience and development of young people and adults with a range of disabilities.
- Hosted two learning disabled students from Swiss Cottage School on work experience placements. Each student joined EFDSS at Cecil Sharp House for three consecutive days in separate weeks, along with a member of the school's support staff. This helped to further develop the relationship with the school.

[2] Disclosed disabilities include Sotos Syndrome, epilepsy, autism, Creatine Deficiency Syndrome, ADHD, global delay, learning delay, bilateral cerebral palsy, non-verbal, Down's Syndrome, intellectual disabilities, metachromatic Leukodystrophy.

Achievements

During the second year of the five-year funded programme, Inclusive Folk has made great headway.

- Folk Unlimited was at full capacity all year round. The group included one female and nine male participants aged 13-28. Most identify as White British or Any Other White Background, with one Chinese and one identifying as ‘from other Asian background’. There continues to be a waiting list.
- The schools programme has fulfilled its intended 36 half-day sessions (88 workshops) in four schools.
- 124 young disabled people with SLD and PMLD took part in the Inclusive Folk workshops across four schools.
- Ongoing relationships with St Ann’s School, Phoenix Arch School, and QE11 Jubilee School have been strengthened, and a new relationship with Cambridge School has been formed. All four schools this year provided positive feedback on planning, teaching and delivery, with aims and expectations met. They have all expressed a wish to work with EFDSS again in the next year.
- The reputation of the schools programme continues to spread, resulting in much higher demand for EDFSS delivery, and all schools have requested continuation next year
- Music Leaders Emmie and Nick joined the ‘Meet the Families’ event at the Royal Albert Hall on 3 July 2026, part of the West London Inclusive Arts Festival. They delivered an introduction to folk music, had round table discussions with families and hosted a stand providing information about the work of the Inclusive Folk programme.
- All Inclusive Folk Tutors, Support Workers and the Trainee report increasing their confidence and skills in working with young people with disabilities over the last year, and the ‘community of practice’ between these musicians identified in last year’s report is still thriving.
- The addition of two Support Workers to Folk Unlimited and one to LYFE has continued to have a demonstrable impact on the quality of work produced in sessions, as well as enhancing the Tutor team’s ability to respond to group and individual needs.
- The resource ‘Cut from the Same Cloth’ developed by Emmie Ward in 2024-2025 has had 2500 views on the webpage.

Case study: St Ann's School





Figure 3 (L): Music Leader Roary playing the guitar with a St Ann's Student. **Figure 4 (R):** St Ann's staff and student interacting with toy songbirds, while Music Leaders Nick and Emmie play the accordion and guitar. Photos: Lucy Stiles

"When I entered with some students, they were a bit in shock of what's going on…And after 10 minutes they were having so much fun and socialising with the staff and with the rest of the students."

Teacher, St Ann's School

"The engagement from the students, they socialise between all of us. It was beautiful."

Teacher, St Ann's School

"We had a lovely relationship with the school and staff, and the last session we were there, we had this lovely start where we were gathered around a parachute with a light underneath, and the lights were off, and it was very magical."

Emmie, Music Leader

St Ann's School[3] in Hanwell, West London is for pupils aged 11–19 with SLD, Profound and PMLD, and complex needs. Music Leaders delivered five days of workshops with four classes at St Ann's School from November 2025 to May 2026, following the theme of 'seasons' through the year. This is the second year that EFDSS has run a project at the school. Multiple data sources evidenced that this school partnership was a positive, meaningful and productive experience for everyone involved. School staff were

[3] https://www.stannsschool.co.uk/

impressed by planning, organisation, and communication with the EFDSS office, and music leaders during the sessions. Staff commented that in this second year the project has run more smoothly, and relationships have strengthened. Staff reported that students keenly anticipated the sessions saying, **"they were really motivated and they remembered, it's Friday today, we're going to have music in the hall. Some of the students could anticipate and they would remember from the previous session"** (Teacher).

A typical class in this setting included: a 'Hello Song' where all students names are sung with accompaniment; a folk song with signed actions; parachute activity with a light projector; students selecting percussion instruments, music technology tools (iPad, BIGmack, Odd Balls) or soft toy singing songbirds, to make sounds together; teaching a folk song using call and response with signed actions; and finishing with a dance and big elastic bungee activity. The Independent Evaluator observed that student engagement increased over the duration of a session, and Music Leaders and school staff report increased engagement over the arc of the project, as the students got to know the Music Leaders. School staff were impressed by the students' ability to concentrate and focus for longer than expected. Key outcomes noted by school staff and the Independent Evaluator's observation include:

- Strong outcomes in socialisation – one to one, and as a group.
- Playing different instruments with less adult support needed as learning progressed
- Students being reactive, proactive and interactive[4] in making different noises and sounds with instruments, music technology resources, songbirds, and with the microphone.
- Following instructions
- Sharing resources
- Learning songs that were repeated
- Remembering actions and words to sequences in call and response activities

For the students, this project enabled new experiences, such as attending sessions in the big school hall, sitting in a circle with others, playing new instruments, listening to, singing and playing along to folk songs, and learning dances. Students adapted well to the class routine and experience of being in a seated circle. EFDSS staff helped students use their communication devices, to choose answers to questions and make suggestions. Staff were impressed with the effective use of sensory resources that enhanced the music and dance content. For example, the songbirds were an impactful resource due to their soft texture and gentle bird song sounds, with students putting

[4] https://soundsofintent.org/en/sounds-of-intent-framework/circular-figure/index

them close to their cheeks and ears to feel/hear, increasing interaction between staff and students. Music Leaders also noticed the calming impact of the parachute and light projector on students with PMLD. Music Leaders noted a magical moment with the main room lights dimmed and a lighting device projecting colours under the parachute. One teacher tried this in his classroom. He noted, “the environment is so important to them, and when there is a change, in this case, with the light, you do get a reaction and response.”

For most staff this was their first experience of folk music and dance. Teachers reported developing their confidence and new skills, inspired to do more large group activities which helped develop social engagement. They said workshops complemented the school curriculum in terms of the development of social, physical, sensory and communication skills. Staff are keen to work with EFDSS again next year and look forward to continuing the relationship.

Case study: Cambridge School





Figure 5(L): Cambridge School student smiling and playing a drum. **Figure 6 (centre):** Cambridge school students and Music Leader jumping in the air with a white handkerchief during a morris dance workshop. **Figure 7(R):** Music Leader Nick playing the violin alongside a Cambridge School student playing the accordion. Photos: Roswitha Chesher

> "Some who were initially hesitant began to volunteer for leading parts in dances or playing instruments. The classes encouraged teamwork, communication, and a sense of achievement."
>
> (Teaching Assistant)

> "The project inspired more use of music and movement in class and encouraged collaborative learning and creativity across the school."
>
> (Teaching Assistant)

Music Leaders Emmie, Nick and trainee Gráinne delivered five folk music and dance workshop days with three Year 7-8 classes at the Cambridge School[5] in November and December 2025 exploring the lives and work of Victorian shopping and market traders, and folk songs from the streets of London[6]. The school also had the opportunity to attend an Inclusive Folk Festival Day at Cecil Sharp House on the 19 June 2026. Cambridge School supports a wide range of secondary-aged students, ranging from

[5] https://cambridge.lbhf.sch.uk/

[6] Markets songs included "Who will buy my sweet blooming lavender", "Fish alive. Goldfish, Goldfish.", "Come buy my feather brooms. All made to dust your rooms." And "Come on ladies come on ladies £1 fish"

autistic young people (ASC) through to those who are experiencing social, emotional and mental health conditions (SEMH). This is the first year that EFDSS has worked with the school. Staff reported that the planning and communication was clear and well organised and that project aims and objectives were achieved. They also commended the music leaders for being patient, interactive, engaging and adaptable to student needs. One staff member suggested **"I love how they got the children involved; it would be nice if they got the students to create their own song to have an even more impact"** (HLTA).

Classes included introductory name activities, music, dance and sensory activities, such as learning and singing folk songs and market caller songs (and actions), improvising and creating soundscapes, call and response, working in pairs with different resources to make sound, listening activities, group dance activities. The class delivery demonstrated clear learning progression, student choices, inclusive music making and appreciation activities. For example, the soundscape layered the market trader songs and a mixture of sounds made by the group. Music Leaders asked students what they might sell on their stall; three students chose vegetables, Stitch (Lilo and Stitch), and cake. The Music Leaders helped them create lyrics to add to the soundscape. One participant sat outside the circle playing with Blu Tack. Emmie engaged him in the music making by offering him the choice to sing as one note, or as a melody. He chose a melody. When the melody was sung, the student looked up briefly from his Blu Tack, evidencing that he was attending to what was happening.

Staff reported that sessions helped develop confidence, social skills, communication, and a sense of belonging. The Independent Evaluator observed that activities facilitated reactive, proactive and interactive[7] music participation and sociality in different ways. While making the soundscape, students and staff were interacting in the circle; some students were interested in what others were doing across the circle and paused to observe before returning to their own resources. Other students worked independently with their iPads, singing birds, ukulele, BIGmacks and chimes. When Music Leaders asked students to share their sounds for the group to listen to, this developed focus and appreciation of others' contributions.

There is clear evidence of new experiences and skills for students through the project, as one teacher observed, **"For many students, this was their first experience of participating in traditional folk music and dance. They enjoyed trying new instruments and performing as part of an ensemble"** (Teaching Assistant). Music leaders introduced students to new instruments including percussion and electronic tools such as the BIGmack and iPad. They improvised and played different rhythms and

[7] https://soundsofintent.org/en/sounds-of-intent-framework/circular-figure/index

timing, developing coordination in music and dance. They performed as part of an ensemble, with staff noting “they understood their part in the music making and mostly stuck to their part” (Teacher).

There was mixed feedback about the level of student engagement and enjoyment, with five staff stating strong student engagement and enjoyment in all sessions, and three staff noting how the majority was engaged, while a few did not like the style of music. The Independent Evaluator observed a range of engagements in activities, with students coming and going from the circle and the room, and Music Leaders being sensitive and responsive to these needs. On balance, the feedback on the project suggests that these classes add value to their school curriculum where music is currently absent. Other feedback indicated impact beyond the sessions, for example one student chose to buy a ukulele after exploring it in the sessions, and that others had expressed an interest in music lessons within the school.

Reflecting on how the music project had impacted staff development and the curriculum, one teaching assistant reported **“The project inspired more use of music and movement in class and encouraged collaborative learning and creativity across the school”.** Five of the nine survey respondents said it had increased their knowledge and confidence with music and dance for disabled young people; four out of the nine said ‘no or not sure’. Future work with this school could include working closely with staff to integrate music and dance into their classroom learning and wider school curriculum. The Music Leaders also commented that setting up a Google Classroom or other online platform to share resources with school staff would be helpful.

Case Study: Jiaming, from Folk Unlimited



Figure 8: Music Leader Nick playing the accordion and singings with Jiaming and Fiona. Photo: Rachel Elliott

"Jiaming loves singing! FUN is not only a music session but also a social gathering for Jiaming"

Fiona, Jiaming's mum

Folk Unlimited is a fortnightly series of creative, inclusive, multi-sensory music and dance workshops at Cecil Sharp House on Sunday afternoons for learning disabled young people with complex needs. The sessions are led by two Music Leaders, Emmie and Nick, and two pastoral support workers, Cori and Lucy. Jiaming has been attending FUN for three and a half years. His mum Fiona told us about what Jiaming values most about the classes, and why they keep coming back.

"I learned about FUN classes from Camden special parents' forum and have been coming for three and a half years. He always looks forward to it. FUN classes are an important part of Jiaming's routine, and it is one of the programs that he is willing to attend at this stage. Jiaming likes music and singing. FUN is not only a music session but also a social gathering for Jiaming. He can meet with peers on a regular basis. Through FUN Jiaming has learned about turn taking and how to participate in group activities. Jiaming always enjoys the music and singing folk songs and he has a relaxed Sunday afternoon."

Fiona, Jiaming's mum

Jiaming's participation and confidence in the class activities has improved over the last year. He can stay in the session for longer than he used to. Jiaming normally takes part in the classes by sitting outside the circle with his mum Fiona. The music leaders and pastoral support staff include him in all activities, walking over to him to play their instruments with him. He watches activities carefully and joins in by copying the songs he hears and singing along with the group. He collaborates well with other participants

when they improvise in pairs. Jiaming chooses instruments and music technology tools, such as odd balls, to make sound with. He also enjoys singing into the microphone. One of Jiaming's favourite songs is 'Wind the Bobbin Up', which he sings loudly and confidently when given the opportunity. During the sharing event with LYFE, Jiaming joined the circle with both groups and joined in while LYFE performed their song. He stayed in the circle to sing in the FUN performance. A great achievement for Jiaming.

Case Study: Pastoral Support, London Youth Folk Ensemble



Figure 9: Mía pictured on the top right, playing the banjo with LYFE. Photo: Roswitha Chesher

"The more fun the person has, the better the music sounds, but also the more motivated the individual becomes to continue learning and pushing themselves."

LYFE Pastoral Support Worker,
Mía Iles Pérez

"The ensemble is very special. I have loved being able to support the young people to enjoy folk music. They are such a lovely and talented bunch!"

LYFE Pastoral Support Worker,
Mía Iles Pérez

This case study focuses on the role and experiences of LYFE Pastoral Support Worker, Mía Iles Pérez. Mía is a banjo and mandolin player and used to be a member of the ensemble; she started her pastoral support role with LYFE in September 2025. LYFE is for young people aged 11 to 19 years old (up to 24 years old for D/deaf and disabled young people) who are confident musicians in any instrument. The Ensemble meets regularly from September to July and performs at events across London and beyond. Music is taught by ear, and no previous experience of folk music is needed.

The group is run by Music Leaders Maya McCourt and Aaron Horlock and supported by a Trainee Tutor and a Pastoral Support Worker.

The pastoral role has administrative, practical, artistic, and educational facets. She contributes to session planning and the selection of repertoire, helps organise and communicate with the group and parents in between sessions and develops supportive learning resources. During sessions, as well as playing with the ensemble, she leads physical warmups, teaches tunes, supervises break times. Mía is very skilled at ensuring individual needs are met, supporting the young musicians to have fun, feel safe and cared for, and seeing tensions before they escalate. In this last year, there have been very few behavioral issues to manage in contrast to the previous year, where more regular supportive interventions were required.

64% of the young people in LYFE are neurodivergent or disabled, including two members that are visually impaired. The Pastoral Support role is vital for ensuring these members have someone who understands how they access and participate in the sessions, rehearsals and performances, developing resources to support music practice in between sessions, and empowering their musical independence. As an example, 19-year-old Michael (Fig. 10) joined LYFE in September 2025. Michael plays the cello and is autistic with fairly significant communication challenges. Since joining LYFE Michael's confidence has increased, and he now dances at the ceilidhs.



Figure 10: Michael pictured on the bottom left, playing the cello with LYFE. Photo: Roswitha Chesher

Michael's mum Antonia said,

> **"LYFE has been a fantastic opportunity for Michael. I thought the sessions might be too long for him, but he has loved it from the start. It is tricky to find activities for him with both sufficient support and sufficient challenge, but this ticks all the boxes. For someone who is barely able to converse, being part of a musical group is a wonderful way to feel a sense of belonging. And since Michael is a "pattern thinker", folk music and dancing are very well suited to him."**

For Mía, confidence, personal expression, being a bit silly and having fun are priorities for creating a safe space, as well developing the ensembles' music and performance skills. They use games in the session to help develop personal and social skills, where the young people interact with one another in carefully selected small groups games, meaning "ensemble members having an even lower stakes environment to share ideas."

The Pastoral Support role has contributed to creating a clearly defined session structure, a predictable and reliable environment where all young people feel safe, supported, and comfortable sharing. This has been important for the neurodivergent individuals in the ensemble. Over the year, Mía has witnessed great transformation in confidence of all LYFE musicians.

> **"Recently we had a performance, and not only were the ensemble members playing wonderfully, but there was such a difference in the fun each of them was having. Smiling, playing loudly, and chatting to young people they had not met before in the breaks. I had parents coming to me after the performance to pass on their admiration for how much every single member of the ensemble had progressed, and how confident they were on stage."**

Mía's relationship with parents and carers is an important part of her role, particularly for those members who have access requirements. For example, Mía said "if one of the young people was going to need to use the bathroom more often or needed reminding of something, I would ensure this was taken care of." She speaks to them at drop off and pick up, and in between sessions, Mía ensures that parents are also updated as to what the ensemble has learnt (and should be practising). She uploads the repertoire on to Google Classroom, including audio files, written descriptions of the arrangements and chord progressions.

Thinking about the future developments of the role, Mía thinks there would be value in clarifying the different facets of the role, which require knowledge and understanding of folk music, neurodiversity and disability.

Programme Evaluation - Outcome 1

Disabled young people show positive engagement in a music and dance environment – including exhibiting positive personal reception of the activities (enjoyment and engagement), social and emotional skills, confidence in sharing in the sessions
1A. 90% of participants show positive engagement in music-making with others.
1B. 100% of participants increase their range of experiences.
1C. 90% of participants demonstrate personal and social skills, confidence, and well-being.
1D. Folk Unlimited at full capacity (10 places full).

"In whole class situations like this, children usually become impatient after a short while, but our children were engaged throughout. Where certain children did become impatient, the team had lovely ways of drawing them back, paying them attention and getting them to have a go"

Deputy Head Teacher, Phoenix Arch School

School settings praised the quality of the delivery, noting the inclusive, adaptive, and responsive teaching approach and the ability to motivate students. Session observations evidence that participants show positive engagement in music making with others. This includes: Choosing instruments and music technology tools; Swapping instruments with a partner; Making sounds with a partner; Listening to others when asked to do so; Singing enthusiastically into the microphone, while being accompanied by the group; Repeating the song lyrics, melody and rhythm in group call and response activities; Making eye contact with one another, and also with Music Leaders and school staff, parents/carers; Performing a dance routine and singing out loud.

Parents confirmed that all FUN participants enjoy the sessions. Eighty percent said the sessions challenged them as musicians and helped them make progress. Ninety percent know more about folk music. FUN participants fed back that they enjoy the familiar weekly songs, trying different instruments, singing as a group and with the microphone, making interesting music together. There is a powerful sense of community in the group, where participants and parents/support workers value the "welcoming atmosphere" and social aspects of the class. Examples of individual progress in FUN:

- One FUN participant has been coming to FUN since 2024. The music leaders have noticed an improvement in his participation; he has developed in confidence, joining in more with music and singing, increased interaction with others, and staying in the circle for longer. Trainee music leader Gráinne said, “we found out that he's a talented at piano, and we were able to work with that.” His Dad told the Independent Evaluator that he sings the songs from the sessions on the way home in the car, and the rest of the week.
- Another has been coming to FUN since 2022. He has now started private violin lessons and brings his violin to sessions, and Music Leaders signposted him to Soundabout’s Emerging Leaders programme. Pastoral Support Worker Lucy has noticed a big improvement with his listening skills and paying attention while others are sharing.
- A FUN participant who has been coming to FUN since 2021 continues to show great enthusiasm for music and different instruments. Support Worker Cori has observed that he is gradually taking on more responsibility and takes initiative, such as helping others and choosing instruments.



Figure 11(L): Participants of the FUN sessions playing the violin with Lucy R's support, making sounds on the iPad, and singing into a microphone and playing a drum, with his dad. Photos: Lucy Stiles

School staff confirmed that all students had new experiences that included: playing new instruments; using technology to make sounds; different rhythms, beats, timing and coordination; call and response; learning about the history of folk music and London songs; group singing; singing into a microphone; singing along to folk songs with accompaniment; improvising and making soundscapes.

"For many students, this was their first experience of participating in traditional folk music and dance. They enjoyed trying new instruments and performing as part of an ensemble"

Teaching Assistant, Cambridge School

"The children enjoyed the exposure to different instruments and singing. They also experienced different types of music they would not have experienced in their usual music lessons."

Deputy Head, Phoenix Arch School

School staff report that students had a positive impact on personal and social skills, and confidence (Fig. 14).

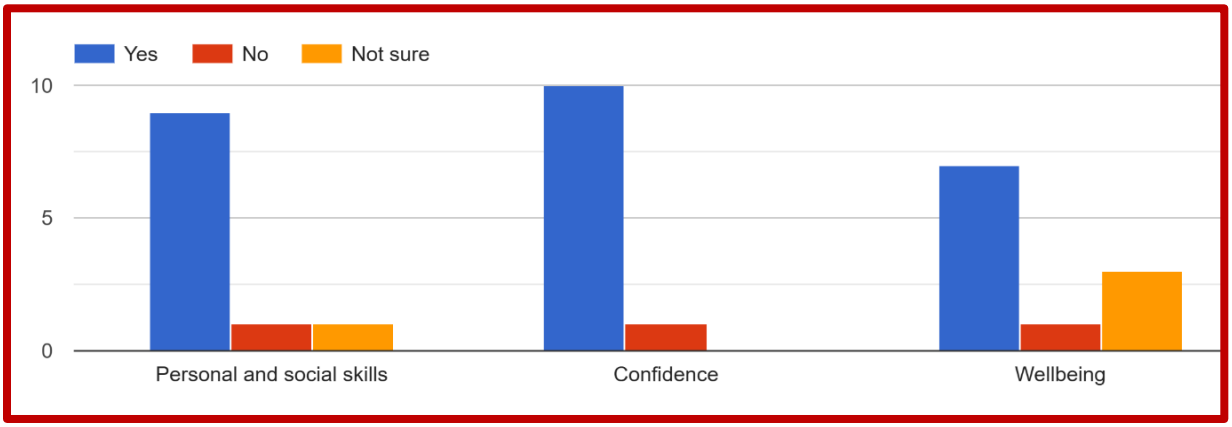


Figure 12: school staff feedback on the impact of classes on personal and social skills, confidence and wellbeing

Music Leader Emmie commented, "when you're working with students with complex needs, communication is probably the most important goal and way of evidencing impact. So, encouraging someone to make choices, express themselves, to use what communication they have through vocalising, singing, words, using signing." There are many examples of staff noticing non-verbal children singing and shy children taking part. School staff comments included:

- **"The students developed confidence, communication, and coordination skills, and they clearly enjoyed the sessions"** (Teaching Assistant, Cambridge School)
- **"We even had some non-verbal children singing!"** (Deputy Head, Phoenix Arch School)
- **"Definitely supported their turn taking development, which is a challenge in our setting."** (Deputy Head, Phoenix Arch School)

In terms of wellbeing, the music leaders noted clear examples of how students at the start of sessions were sometimes very dysregulated. They cited examples of activities that channeled this dysregulation, evidencing a strong ability to evaluate their delivery.

Music Leader Nick recalled, “At Phoenix arch, I remember one of the groups came in, and they were quite dysregulated, a lot of directionless energy. And we started drumming…channelling the energy and it gave it some focus.”

Folk Unlimited was at full capacity of 10 participants plus parents/carers all year.

Programme Evaluation - Outcome 2

Outcome 2. Disabled young people are enabled to participate in meaningful experiences with an arts organisation (EFDSS), including its venue (Cecil Sharp House), via a supportive progression route
2A. 95% of disabled young people are able to participate in a range of student-centred activities tailored to their needs in Folk Unlimited, school settings and work experience.
2B. Folk Unlimited Folk Band perform outside of the workshop setting at least once.
2C. Staff continue to review and develop approaches to making EFDSS programmes, activities and procedures more inclusive for disabled young people and adults; there is at least one development per year.

"Thank you for providing such a welcoming and enjoyable class. The teachers are fantastically dedicated and manage to skillfully tailor each song or piece of music to each individual student's learning and enjoyment."

FUN Parent

There is convincing evidence across different data sets of a student-centred approach to activities that meet individual needs in all settings.

- Feedback from two work experience students from Swiss Cottage School in 2026 evidences that both students enjoyed it and the experience was tailored to student needs and interests. Feedback stated, **"Type of work given met the needs of the students. Staff were available for support and environment was adapted to the needs of the students."** Tasks the students enjoyed were "typing up registers on the computer and being able to do shredding" and "maps to find locations for residential trip". Skills they developed included communication, appropriate behaviour in a work environment, time management, confidence in requesting help and support and becoming more confident in the workplace.
- There are clear examples of learning progression such as increased student attention through the class, students remembering song lyrics, students taking on more responsibility, students using their initiative. Music Leader and Pastoral Support staff work hard to understand individuals' access and participation needs. In team planning discussions they talk about how to best engage different students and afterwards reflect on how successful they were in the session. As per last year's report, there continued evidence of robust planning, delivery, and reflection.

- Pastoral Support roles are integral to ensure a bespoke, caring, and compassionate approach to individual needs and progress in music skills, confidence, and social relationships. FUN support workers report how pair work has developed closer social relationships, and being able to identify instruments that being both enjoyment and challenge in learning. Support Worker Cori noted, “We can have eyes all over the room and go to different pupils and give them lots of loads of mini one to ones within a group class. We can spot if someone's really enjoying a certain thing, or struggling with something, or just be there to help them. And not in the way that the carers help them, but to help them musically, to have a good time and to develop their skills.”



Figure 13: Music Leaders Roary and Nick and students and staff at St Ann’s School. Photo: Lucy Stiles

The Folk Unlimited Band performed to the London Youth Folk Ensemble and parents/carers in a shared event in March 2026 in the Kennedy Hall, evidencing how FUN members have improved their skills in playing together as an ensemble. Music Leader Emmie reflected, **“it was wonderful because LYFE had really thought about making what they did accessible to our students, and so there was much more connectedness between what we were both doing.”**

To begin, LYFE invited FUN participants to clap in the chorus during the performance of Espresso Bourrée (by Moore, Moss and Rutter). Some participants were moving their bodies to the rhythm, bobbing and swaying their torso in time to the music. During the FUN to performance of 'The Rambling Irishman' each participant had a moment to shine; one participant counted the group into the song, while others sang solos with the microphone. Another accompanied the others playing the glockenspiel enthusiastically. After the performance, the group moved into a circle and learned the folk dance, 'De Montford'. Both groups danced together with amazing energy. Afterwards, a FUN member asked LYFE Pastoral Support Worker Mía "what is the name of the song", and they chatted for a while as the sharing event closed.

In June 2026, there was second opportunity for FUN to perform, at the LYFE and Friends event. LYFE and Friends saw just under 90 young people come together to perform at an early evening concert in Cecil Sharp House. During the afternoon preceding the concert, all were led in a group ceilidh and several members of Folk Unlimited were due to join them (Music Leaders had worked with the ceilidh caller to adapt the dances to their needs) and to stay on for the concert. The FUN members had been rehearsing 'One More Day' to perform a short floor spot, but unfortunately the participation of FUN members had to be cancelled due to the extreme heat that week. Staff felt that the heat, along with various live changes to the timetable to mitigate against the temperature, would have made it an overwhelming experience for the FUN participants.

There have been several developments to the Inclusive Folk programme this year:

- Music Leaders have been given some extra paid planning time, enhancing delivery.
- Created a new downloadable teaching resource focusing on how technology can be used to enhance the musical experience and development of young people and adults with a range of disabilities. It demonstrates how EFDSS have used accessible technology and applications such as ThumbJam, Garageband and Samplebot to enhance the music making experience of the young people we work with.
- Following recommendations in last year's report, taking a theme-based approach in schools and providing them with a 'theme menu' has worked well. The themed lesson plans are saved in a shared space on Google drive for team to access.
- In FUN, Music Leaders note the positive impact of the song sheets and PECS symbols
- The FUN session timing and structure has changed, to include the ritual of group reflection at the end with a PECS symbol on the board as a focal point for evaluation.
- The use of Google Classroom for FUN is developing, and a songbook containing song words and PECS was shared with participants, parents and carers.

- The Music Leaders have increased their use of technology in classes this year. Independent Evaluator observations and Music Leaders reflections suggest it has been a mixed experience in terms of participant response. It's especially useful to have a range of traditional percussion and technology for the students to choose from. However, sometimes technology can cause individuals to disconnect from the rest of the group as they focus intently on the screen; this reduces group interaction, eye contact and communication across the circle. Although, this is not always the case when the devices play to the student's interest and strengths, increasing their interaction and music skills. Sometimes there were issues with devices losing their Bluetooth connection to the speaker. So, the beauty of having the traditional percussion on hand is that if technology fails, there are plenty of alternatives. Music Leaders noted that, at times, there has been more demand for iPads than we are currently able to meet, and the team reflected on how they are enjoying exploring how to manage the balance of technology with traditional instruments.

Programme Evaluation - Outcome 3

Increased numbers of school/college staff, folk music educators, performing arts tutors are enabled to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings
3A. 75% of all practitioners (Music Leaders, school staff such as Teachers and TAs and CPD attendees) report increased knowledge and/or confidence in working with folk music and dance with disabled young people.
3B. Trainee demonstrates increased skills in providing inclusive music learning for disabled young people.
3C. 75% of school/college teachers report benefits for inclusion of folk music and dance in their classroom practice.
3D. 80% of CPD attendees (both EFDSS and external practitioners) state that the training will enhance their own practice.

In 2025-2026, EFDSS have supported three Music Leaders (Nick, Emmie, Roary), one Trainee Tutor (Gráinne), three pastoral Support Workers (Lucy, Cori and Mía), and approximately 45 school staff (including teachers, teaching assistants and Support Workers), to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings. EFDSS also reached 60 families and school practitioners who attended the West London Inclusive Arts Festival 'Meet the Families' event, where Emmie and Nick demonstrated songs and tunes that they use in workshops, and shared with families the work of the Inclusive Folk programme. This year, we were not able to deliver public facing CPD due to a planned session being cancelled, but positive plans are already underway for next year.

All Music Leaders, pastoral support staff and the trainee reported an increase in knowledge, skills, and confidence in the last year. As in the previous year, they expressed appreciation for the breadth of skills on the team, from musicianship, to dance skills, teaching skills and the strong ability to be responsive and adaptive in different settings. There is a keen sense of learning from one another in their planning, delivery and session reflections, and an ability to team teach with great effect. Music Leaders all use Makaton and would like to enhance their knowledge in this area. They are all learning how to use new music technology resources in sessions this year, which is an area some would like to develop confidence in.

There continues to be a strong community of practice evident, where emerging music leaders Roary and Gráinne appreciate learning from more experienced leaders Emmie

and Nick. Reflection is a robust feature of delivery, with music leaders sharing planning and evaluation time. Roary (Trainee in 2023-2024) noted how having more consistent work in one setting this year has had a marked difference to their ability to develop student relationships over time and has been significant for professional development.

Gráinne joined EFDSS as a trainee music leader in September 2025. She has been working in school settings and with Folk Unlimited. She spoke about feeling very supported by the Music Leaders and the Education Manager in her learning and development over the year. She has valued being on a team that is open to ideas from everyone and enjoyed undertaking Makaton training.

> **"I feel like I've learned a lot, especially from Emmie and Nick, because they've been doing it for so long. And I feel like I have experience in teaching music, and I had experience working with people who have disabilities, but I never had experience in this working with music and in SEND settings. Everyone that you work with has a different skill set that they bring to it."**

62% of school staff reported that they had increased their knowledge and/or confidence in working with folk music and dance with disabled young people, and the rest said 'no' or 'not sure'. The music teacher at QEII Jubilee School said that the project helps staff to understand how **"folk music can be contemporary, vibrant and relevant."** The Deputy Head Teacher, Phoenix Arch School said that his staff had experienced some new approaches to "Managing challenges calmly" and "reading the room" - for example, letting children have short goes when it's not their turn because it was clear they were about to be dysregulated.

Two thirds of the school staff said that the project had an impact on the wider work of the class, group or school and just over 70% of school staff noted a positive impact on school curriculum and beyond. Comments included:

- **"One student chose to buy a ukulele after exploring it in the sessions"** (Teacher, Cambridge School)
- **"The project inspired more use of music and movement in class and encouraged collaborative learning and creativity across the school."** (Teaching Assistant, Cambridge School)
- **"We are working towards our Artsmark, and this helps. Our children love music and performing and we have termly shows. This was an invaluable experience to get them more practice and build confidence further"** (Deputy Head, Phoenix Arch School)

- **“Built class cohesion through shared experiences”** (Teacher, Cambridge School)
- **“Some students have expressed an interest in music and has requested music lessons within the school”** (Teacher, Cambridge School)
- **“The project has broadened all participants' musical horizons”** (Music Teacher, QEII Jubilee School)

Challenges, Learnings and Enhancements

Through the evaluation activities, feedback from the school's staff and EFDSS Tutor team, Education Director and Education Manager identified a few challenges and key learnings, with some thoughtful and practical enhancements to the Inclusive Folk programme.

School communication: Communication with schools has been good this year. During delivery at the schools, Music Leaders have fed back that sometimes the wider teaching team has been unsure what to expect. And so, there may be some work to do in providing materials to the school on a digital platform, so that teachers and teaching assistants are informed about session activities in advance.

Public facing CPD: Public facing CPD was not achieved this year, due to A New Direction postponing a joint initiative as a result of staffing changes. CPD is important for the Music Leaders (who lead the workshops) and is a great way to share the Inclusive Folk practice more widely. There is also an opportunity to connect the CPD to the Inclusive Folk schools programme, and offer CPD to school staff, thereby responding to the feedback that not all staff experienced professional development through their school workshop participation. This could help school staff to join the dots between school sessions, classroom practice and the wider school curriculum. Discussions about this for next year are underway with two schools.

Feedback from schools: This year there has been a mix of survey responses and school interviews. Some schools have been more forthcoming than others in their engagement with the evaluation activities. As the programme is offered to schools for free, it is incumbent on the schools to engage with the evaluation activities so that relationships, communication, and delivery can be assessed. This also impacts whether schools will be invited to participate in the programme the following year, as EFDSS must assess where it is adding the most value through its music programmes.

Key Findings and Recommendations

In this second phase of the five-year programme, there is continuing evidence that Inclusive Folk is making progress across the three outcomes, with some areas of development and enhancement for 2026-2027.

Key Findings

KF1: High quality provision. High quality provision continues to be a hallmark of Inclusive Folk. The programme is achieving across all three outcomes.

KF2: Use of technology. The increased use of technology in workshops is a key development, with music leaders recognising its value and the challenges. The team are developing their confidence in this area and look forward to expanding its use in the next year.

KF3: Work experience developments. Responding to last year's feedback, the work experience programme adjustments have worked well and led to two highly successful placements that evidence enjoyment, skill and confidence development.

KF4: Online platforms. The use of digital platforms such as Google Classroom as a way for Music Leaders to share lesson plans and resources with one another is working well. The team have recognised that this can add value to the schools programme, making resources available to school staff, and to FUN, making song sheets and audio available to members.

KF5: Folk Unlimited progression. FUN members show progression in their ensemble skills, social relationships, leadership skills, and confidence. Membership continues to be full, and no one from this year's cohort is ready to move into Folk Beyond**.** The Education Director has confirmed a positive outlook for funding Folk Beyond for another two years, with the need to cater for two groups in future.

KF6: School relationships. Three established school relationships have continued, and one new school relationship developed, with all schools requesting to work with EFDSS again next year. There is also a waiting list.

KF7: Community of Practice. The Music Leaders and Pastoral Support Workers continue to work together in their supportive 'community of practice', drawing on each other's skills and experience, and building in reflection and evaluation to their work.

KF8: Trainees. The traineeship continues to support excellent progression of the trainees, who often stay on to develop roles as Music Leaders, expanding the team's music repertoire, artistry and delivery approaches. The 2026-2027 trainee will be a National Youth Folk Ensemble alumnus, which enhances the connection of Inclusive Folk to national initiatives.

Recommendations

R1: FUN recording project. Music Leaders would like to draw on support staff's skills in music production, to record a track with FUN in 2026-2027.

R2: **FUN public performance**. By continuing the gentle building of the performing aspect of the group experience, the FUN group could develop towards performing two songs to a bigger audience at Cecil Sharp House. An alternative approach could be to make a music/dance film and then screen the film publicly. EFDSS Education Manager and Education Director and Music leader team to consider the process-product balance, and the group's readiness for this development.

R3: Independent participation for FUN members. Based on parent and Music Leader feedback, consider FUN members who can participate independently. Carry out consultation with FUN members and parents/carers and make a bespoke plan.

R4: Leadership opportunities for FUN members. Consider some support for one or two members to develop leadership skills, such as a bespoke pathway to becoming a peer mentor and/or workshop assistant.

R5: Selection of schools. For 2026-2027, the balance between schools to continue with and new schools requires careful thought that is based on where the most value can be added. Schools who wish to continue must commit to participating in the evaluation activities, since the programme is provided free of charge. As St Ann's is a school that has been observed in the last two years, there may be merit in keeping this school for the full five-year period as a way of evidencing relationship and provision development.

R6: Google classroom as a resource for schools and FUN: Develop Google Classroom (or equivalent) areas for FUN and Schools, so that participants, school staff, parents/carers can access resources (song sheets, audio, further learning activities) that support learning in between sessions. For schools, this development is likely to enhance the value that school staff notice in their own professional development.

R7: Develop public facing CPD. Consider the public offerings for CPD in the next year. One of these could be provision for school staff, thereby responding to the feedback that not all staff experienced professional development through their school workshop participation. This could include further developing relationships with the Federation of Westminster Special Schools and the Tri-borough Music Hub.

R8: Evaluation methodology and data collections tools. Based on the use of the new student feedback tools developed in 2026, expand their use in school settings and FUN, to ensure the participant voice is strengthened further in the data collection.

Appendix

Data collection Tools

Tool	Participants
Folk Unlimited	
Observation of class by Independent Evaluator (8 March 2026)	FUN members, Parents/carers, Music Leaders and Pastoral Support Staff
Observation of FUN and LYFE at the sharing event	FUN members, LYFE members, Parents/carers, 4 x Music Leaders and 3 x Pastoral Support Staff
FUN Feedback survey	10 x FUN parents/carers
FUN Parent interview – by email	1 x FUN parent
Schools projects	
Observation of two classes at The Cambridge School (28 November 2025) and St Ann's School (8 May 2026), drawing partly on Sounds of Intent domains of music engagement.	Students School staff: teachers and teaching assistants Music Leaders
School staff survey	Phoenix Arch School x 1 staff QEII Jubilee School x 1 staff Cambridge school x 11 staff
St Ann's School staff interviews conducted by deputy head teacher with questions provided by Independent Evaluator	2 x school teachers
Work experience	
Participant feedback survey	2 x work experience students
Overarching programme evaluation activities	
Group interview with five Tutor team members	Nick Goode, Emmie Ward, Roary Neat and Gráinne Lacy-Roberts
Group interview with 2 pastoral support staff	Lucy Rushton and Cori Smith
Email interview with LYFE Pastoral Support Worker	Mía Iles Pérez
Reflective meeting with EFDSS Education Director and Education Manager Facilitated by Independent Evaluator (11 May 2026)	Education Director, Rachel Elliott and Education Manager, Lucy Stiles