

Music is at the very heart of one East End school.

Sheila Hancock

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Gallions primary school has successfully integrated music into the curriculum to help teach pupils life skills, imagination and perseverance, writes Sheila Hancock



Children attending a music education project in Stirling, Scotland. 'Performances give children a goal to work towards and great self-confidence, especially performing in front of proud parents,' writes Sheila Hancock. Photograph: Murdo Macleod for the Guardian.

Stephen Moss ([Why not put music at the heart of education?](#), 19 June) argues that music education should not be limited to private schools and children of "thrusting middle-class parents". He holds up Finland as an example. At Gallions primary school in Beckton, music is at the heart of the school. It is in a socially and economically deprived corner of east London, but the school is joyous and alive. Gallions is not a specialist music school but has successfully integrated music into the curriculum, both as a subject in its own right and as a medium through which to teach other subjects. For instance, singing supports the development of language, which is crucial, especially for our youngest pupils and the 67% of Gallions pupils for whom English is not their first language. Using number songs has proven a brilliant way to teach maths in the younger year groups.

Every child at Gallions learns an instrument – violin, viola, cello or double bass – free of charge, and many pupils take advantage of the opportunity to take an instrument home with them to practice. The school's choirs and orchestras are simply outstanding. Pupils have gone on to win places in the National Children's Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra's young talent schemes and other incredible opportunities. Learning a musical instrument is challenging, it demands fine motor skills and coordination. It develops children's listening, thinking skills, imagination and perseverance. It brings out the very best in the children as they work collaboratively with their peers and teachers.

Performances give children a goal to work towards and great self-confidence, especially performing in front of proud parents, and has taken them to the Barbican Centre, the Royal Festival Hall and Birmingham Symphony Hall. I am deeply proud to be associated with the music programme at Gallions. At a time of cutbacks in the arts, they provide a perfect example of the value of music in the curriculum and children's lives.

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