

IDEA Case Study

Lancashire Music Service

Developing Engagement with Muslim Communities

Lancashire is a county with a significant South Asian population, making up 10.1% of the overall school population and this rises to around 33% in some districts.

Within our Muslim communities, there are some specific barriers to accessing music making and, while there is a diversity of attitudes, Islamic beliefs can complicate participation in musical activities for children and young people.

Musician and Educator, Hussnain Hanif, collected some views from the Muslim community in Pendle as part of a report commissioned by Lancashire Music Service:

"They don't seem to understand our culture and Islam. There's a fine line in what is allowed and what isn't when it comes to music, so I'm sure you can understand why we're scared for our kids to do this." Farzana (parent)

"If we are going to participate in music lessons, we should be clear as to what is being taught and why. The best way to learn music for our children would be through Nasheeds. This way we know our children's imaan (faith) is not being destroyed through this. They can learn all types of music through Nasheeds." Faith Leader

"Studying creative subjects (performing arts, music, drama, fine art) is hugely problematic for Pakistani Muslims purely for the reason that it doesn't align with the traditional views of many and isn't a money maker. South-Asian families want better for their children and therefore push them to study hard to become medical professionals, teachers, solicitors etc." Hussnain Hanif, 2023

How we explored the issues involved

We worked with a local Muslim Girls School who approached us following an Ofsted visit to help them find ways of creating a broad and balanced curriculum which included the arts and music but in an appropriate Islamic context. We spoke to teachers and the Senior Leadership Team to find out what had already taken place in school, where the areas for development might be and what was not going to be possible.

Separate to this work with the school, we commissioned Musician and Educator, Hussnain Hanif, as a consultant to conduct research, write a report and present to Music Service and Hub leadership on recommendations.

We looked at the work of other music services, schools, and hubs.

What we decided to do

Collaborating with the Muslim Girls School we designed units of work using music technology and recording which worked around the challenge of avoiding the use instruments. We also helped them

redefine the singing which was already taking place in assemblies and including acts of worship in their school music plan. One of our non-Muslim female vocal leaders ran a successful choir for a term.

We have designed a singing project in East Lancashire which will culminate in a large-scale singing event including Nasheeds. Learning one Nasheed which will be performed by all schools taking part. A Nasheed choral leader will also develop Nasheed choirs in two schools who will perform at this event in June 2024.

What has the impact been

At Preston Muslim Girls School, we provided a viable model to include Music in their curriculum. While this is not yet well established, it has provided a starting point and built a relationship between the Music Service and the school. We hope that we can share this approach with similar schools in Lancashire and the SLT at the school will also use it as a case study among their network of Islamic context schools.

The Singing project will provide over five hundred pupils from East Lancashire with the opportunity to sing together and, as one of these songs is a Nasheed, it will bring together communities and place a song from the Islamic tradition alongside more traditional primary singing repertoire. The Nasheed choir will celebrate this music in more depth and provide aspirational role models. As parents and carers will attend the final performance event, it will provide a positive, appropriate, and inclusive example of music education.

Who have we worked with

It's been essential to collaborate with members of the Muslim community at all stages of the project. The key partners have been:

- Preston Muslim Girls School – Arts Lead and SLT
- Hussnain Hanif – Nasheed Artist and Educator
- Sajda Majeed MBE – Community Engagement Consultant

We have included some key community partners in the Big Sing project including the community cohesion charity [Building Bridges Burnley](#) and Burnley Football Club who will host our large-scale singing performance.

Challenges

- We've had to start small and, although the singing event will engage larger numbers, it is still only one project.
- There are very few music leaders and teachers from the Muslim community and these pathways will take time to develop.
- There are children from Muslim Communities learning instruments in school as part of Whole Class Instrumental Tuition who face additional barriers to participation due to cultural attitudes to playing instruments. How can we make this more culturally appropriate and accessible for them?
- Identifying 'out of school' musical opportunities for children and young people from Muslim communities that respect their culture.

The Future

- We hope the large-scale singing project will inspire similar projects in other parts of the county.
- Establish a regular Nasheed choir in East Lancashire and break down some of the barriers to participation in music for Muslim pupils.
- Inspire and engage young people from Muslim communities to consider careers in Music and music education.
- A supported programme of Nasheed singing to support non-Muslim, non-specialist, and specialist music teachers across the county.