**School C teacher interview transcript – Mr Holmes (MH)**

Researcher (R) – Right, so do you want to talk me through your map then, please?

MH – Yep. Well I’ve done it more as a chronology. So my journey with Musical Futures (MF) started when my former Head of Department, XX, had heard of… I still don’t know, I should ask him really, but he’d heard of MF and it was all the original literature. There was like the green book and the red book that David Price had written. So he said ‘do you want to have a look at that?’ So we clogged the printer for about… rather than asking for them to be sent off. I can’t remember whether you had to pay or not. But we clogged the printer for a day, and printed all of the stuff and I started looking at extra-curricular as I remember, but then started looking more into classroom pedagogy. And at that time, we were just going from three tier to two tier, so from just a middle high to a secondary school. And so the junior learning village was just about to be built, and we changed the structure of options. So, music was only going to be part of the core offer in Years 7 and 8, and then it was going to become optional in Year 9. So as a starting point, I thought well I’ll try doing the band model stuff in Year 9. That was really successful, and we had another member of staff join us in that year, as we’d got bigger, called XX, who was my old music teacher. So she came to work with us. And she did a great job with Year 9s, of doing the band-based stuff, and really doing it properly. And so that was really successful. And then XX came in and approved us as a CS at the end of that year. So she saw the work that the Year 9s had been doing, and then approved that. And then as part of that, I think it was XX who recommended that I go and see XX at XX. And that, I think that was the first time that I really got what MF was, and could be. Because I hadn’t been to any discreet training sessions by that point. The first formal training I got was when I attended the first champion day. But going in and seeing XX was when I realised that it could be used for any aspect of the curriculum. So I saw a KS4 lesson where they were doing minimalist music, and then a KS5 lesson when they were working with voicing of chords. And then another KS5 lesson, I think that was a BTEC, but they were looking at Steve Reich’s hand clapping music. Yeah, it was brill. And then I really understood, and then had a model for getting MF approaches into Year 7. So, XX left us, and XX left us. And it ended up being… because at that time, music wasn’t a particularly popular subject, I think that I’d just taken 11 students through GCSE, out of 320. It wasn’t very good. And they got good results, but it was pretty much the kids… the best players in the school were the only people who were really choosing it, because they knew they’d be successful. And so, XX left, XX left, and we only appointed XX, but XX was an NQT, and she’d come from a traditional background. She was a flautist, and was a bit dubious of MF to start with. But that was one of the… because XX, the Head at the time, could see what was happening with the Year 9s, and could see what I was trying to do, that was one of the things of the appointment - was somebody who was going to be open towards that. And she was quite candid in the interview and was a bit unsure about it, but then I spent the best part of a year indoctrinating her. She became really evangelical about it. And so, we we were doing the training sessions at XX. And it really started to snowball. So we went from having 11 kids choose music at GCSE, to needing two classes. And then XX came in, who was the third music teacher, because we needed another music teacher to cope with the demand. So, at that point, we looked at… Well, kind of at the same time, because MF had been successful at XX at the time, was kind of a forward-thinking school, and things were going well, Learning Futures asked us if we wanted to be part of the school for that, which was where David Price had taken on board the success of MF and was trying to see if he could replicate that across education as a whole. So as part of that we visited XX [in America], and that’s where I also became enthused by project-based learning. So we started looking at the Year 7 and 8 curriculum, and making sure that they were authentic outcomes, and that we were doing real projects. So, we had an opportunity to trial that in ‘project fortnight’. So we did things like, we built marching bands from scratch, which the kids had never heard before, we did an ambient album based on bird song. And then, the drive then was to get MF into 7 and 8, and 10 and 11. So we swapped from AQA to Edexcel. Because I’d previously detested the set works, but then realised that set works were a vehicle… well, you could use classroom workshops as a vehicle to explore the set works, and you could use set works as a vehicle to explore how classroom workshops could work. So, we basically re-wrote the GCSE with that like dialogue between using set works as a stimulus to help them with their performing and the composing and the listening, and using performing and composing and listening as a way to understand set works. And that was great. I loved teaching lessons that way. And then… well, what helped with that was, there was a MF conference in Leeds - I think it was that one - and XX came up and did some classroom workshop stuff with us. And again, that was another model for me to use. And then the following year there was the Find Your Voice stuff with… oh no, it might have been the same year - yeah, it was the same year. And so we brought that back in and, so, vocals really took off, and we had far more singers, and by that point, as I’d said, we had kind of like our best ever results at GCSE, we’d had 60 students in there. And I was writing a lot, I was tweeting a lot, I was blogging a lot, often on like MUFU chats. And since being appointed here, I’ve had that many other things to do, I don’t… I’m not as vocal as I used to be. And that’s not because of any lack of enthusiasm, it’s just because of a time thing. But, I mean even here, since… well, we’ve been doing MF since we started. But in the very first year - and I’ll be honest - I had a bit more time to keep an eye on music, we had 50% of kids doing peripatetic lessons. Now we’ve still got over a third, which is far more than in most schools that aren’t grammar schools. So of the 150 students, 50, I think 49 are getting them on school, and then we’ve got a number who are getting them out of school. So I think, off the top of my head, 57 students are accessing additional music provision, either inside of school or outside of school. Yeah, and so what we do here is what I’d always been trying to do with creating music with Year 7 and 8 in KS3 is use predominantly classroom workshops, but some band-based stuff as well, to help the kids learn to listen and to compose and to play with each other, and to see themselves as being musical. But then to make sure that it’s always either thematically linked, or a discreet project in and of itself. But always with an authentic outcome and a real purpose and for a real audience.

R – Can I ask you a couple of questions? I didn’t want to interrupt at the time, but what year did you start at XX, and where does this all begin?

MH – That would have been… so I would have started looking at the literature in 2008, I think, 2008, yeah. And the junior learning village… no, it would have been later than that… yeah 2008, 2008, and I started putting it into sessions in 2009, with Year 9, and we then became a CS at the end of that academic year, in 2010.

R – Why did you start with year 9?

MH – Because, XX had already had a bit of a hand in Year 7 and 8, and there was a lot… partly pragmatic. A lot of Year 7 and 8 had already been planned. We’d been given dedicated time, because Year 7 and 8 were going to be new year groups for us, and a lot of that was already planned. And also because… well, I don’t think I really understood it at the time, but I knew that the kids who were opting for music in Year 9 were going to be players. And so they’d have the capacity to cope with it, and it was a new thing, and there were going to be new members of staff.

R – When you say they were players, do you mean they had lessons outside of school?

MH – Well, they could all play a bit, so, in terms of choosing their… the block in the timetable was called ‘secure’, and so some students were told in that block that ‘you need additional literacy’ or ‘you need additional numeracy’. And then other students who weren’t part of either of those groups could have chose to do extra Spanish, so they could do a Spanish GCSE as well as French, and some of them would have opted for music. But in making their choices - a bit similar to the GCSE choices - making the choices, but there was a… like a, I don’t know how to describe it… like a quality control in terms of choices. So the head would speak to senior members of staff and said ‘you can’t do music because…’ and part of it was ‘well can you play an instrument?’ And it had to be ‘yes’. Which, increasingly, the answer was then ‘well it doesn’t matter if you play an instrument now or not’. As senior… well, I guess that’s missing from there, increasingly, over time, I guess mostly through osmosis more than anything else, that senior management began to understand what MF was, and… well maybe I should have put that in… We had like a mock Ofsted, where an inspector came in prior to the last inspection that I went through, and it was a MF band lesson, and it was Year 9, and they were doing live lounge projects, so they were doing cover versions of songs, and XX, the Head at the time came in, and saw the start of the lesson were kids were like writing their own targets for end… and like (laughs), her jaw was just (opens mouth wide), not in amazement of what was going on, but just like ‘I can’t… you’re doing…’ and I was just like ‘well, yeah, this is what we do, we’re not going to do anything different’, and she was like ‘well nout like taking a risk’, and I was like ‘well, no’. And then, so, like it is, it was like a bombsite, kids all over the place, lying down in corridors, showing each other stuff. And then she came back. And I always found it difficult to read XX. And she came back, (laughs)… She was always animated, and you could never tell whether she was upset of whether she was really pleased. But she came back about 20 minutes later and she was like ‘XX!’ (laughs) And I was like ‘what?’ She either hates it, or I don’t know what’s coming. ‘It’s brilliant, isn’t it’. And I was like ‘well, yeah’. She was like ‘they’re in control of their own learning and der der der der’. And the inspector here was a music specialist actually, XX, he came back and he was saying ‘well, they’re not where they ought to be for Year 9’, and I was saying ‘well yeah, they’re not, because they get…’ they were still on a carousel for music in Year 7 and 8, so we get the equivalent of 45 minutes if you add it up over the year. So they’re not, most of them. But I’m not turning kids away now, and saying ‘you can’t come and do music in Year 9, because you…’ shall we say that, you know, ‘in terms of grading the lesson, I can’t say too many’, well, no… ‘I can’t…’. Well, it was in the days when people used to ask ‘have you seen…’ - ‘I can’t grade it outstanding because the kids aren’t where they’re meant to be’, but then he was saying moments that he really liked, and he’d come from a traditional music background, and was an inspector, and he’d seen like there was a moment where I was sat cross-legged with the kids. I was sat with them in the corridor, with a guitar, and they were left-handed so it was kind of like a mirror image, he said ‘that was my favourite part of the lesson, where you were just singing to each other and der der der der’, and I was like ‘well yeah, that’s what it looks like’. What was the question? (both laugh).

R – I asked you about the timeline, and I think it was about…

MH – Ah, it was senior management. Yeah. I don’t know… Well, I used to write and bang on a lot about, not just MF, but senior management understanding music. And my senior management were really good, but they just need to be shown, and they were willing to be shown. But at a similar time, it was when the Wider Still and Wider came out, the Mark Phillips report. And that was brilliant. And it had materials with it on how to help senior management understand what effective music teaching looks like, and soundship and the dominant language, and it’s maybe not a brilliant idea if kids spend 20 minutes copying out the learning objectives for the lesson. Yeah, that took some time in terms of helping senior management. But they all came on board over time once they came and got into lessons and saw what was happening, saw what was happening with the music department in terms of the uptake. And the fact that it brought money in when we were doing training days as well. And that always helps, so…

R – Was it important that they were on board, do you think it matters?

MH – Ah yeah, absolutely. Because the reality on the ground is when you’re doing things like… well when your deputy’s blocking things out options for GCSE, and you’re asking for it to be in two places, it… You’ve got to have evidence to back it up. So I was saying ‘there are 60 kids who’ve opted for music here, and we do need another member of staff’. But in each instance, I got a third member of staff, and we got two places on the option block. Well, actually no, we didn’t. We got two classes on the same spot on the option block. But because often music teachers don’t have that wider responsibility of looking after the timetable or blocking… And, it means that music becomes more than a shop window. So, you get asked ‘can you… oh, we’ve got some visitors coming in on Tuesday, can the kids do a 30 minute overture as they’re sitting down’, and like ‘well not really, no’. But yeah, really in terms of not just logistics, but in terms of value in music, I think it’s really important, yeah.

R – Okay. Over what time period did you go from 11 pupils to two classes, how long did that take?

MH – Four years I think. Inclusive. So there would have been one class with 11, and then I think there was 20 odd, and then knocking on 30, and then 60.

R – Okay. When you said you’d ‘got it’ when you went to visit XX, what do you mean? What do you understand of MF?

MH – So, I got aural stuff really. Because of my own kind of self-taught popular musician, I got, from reading the literature, and then from putting kids in practice rooms together, and monitoring that, and looking after that, but, I got the way the working in the way that popular musicians do by learning from each other and starting from your own musical experience. That part I got, but I didn’t get the aural stuff, and what that looked like, and what it sounded like to repeat a phrase back to a kid four, five times until they got it. And like I say, it was at a similar time to when the Ofsted Wider Still and Wider thing came out, and the two things just sort of… And for the first time, I saw what people were saying in Ofsted, and that what people were saying in MF were one of the same thing. So, what you’re after all the time from your students is a deepening of their… a deepening in the quality of, and the thoughtfulness of their response, whatever those responses might be, whether it’s playing a phrase back to you, or them responding to some listening, or writing what they think about music, or composing. So, and I saw that with XX, it was every second. Everything she did was geared towards… through… especially aural stuff of singing phrases to kids, using hands and using gestures, and using the body, and warmups linking to the lesson. But everything that she did was geared towards increasing the depth of student response. And I hadn’t really thought about it in that way before. I just thought ‘well, I’ll get them playing songs they like and they’ll really love music and they’ll be engaged’, but the aural stuff underpinning everything, that was the first time I saw that. AND, then how you could use MF approaches to teach any aspect of music.

R – Okay. So that’s possible?

MH – Yeah, I think so.

R – How?

MH – You need to… it’s hard! It’s hard, and that’s why I guess lots of people don’t do it because it is hard, but you just need to think. So, it helps having lots of models, it helps being able to see other people do it, and it helps going to training sessions…. I’m trying to think of a complete example of a lesson, where… When I came back from XX’s session, and we were going to try out this stuff in project fortnight, with the birdsong. What I wanted the kids to get with ambient music, is often there’s a lot of… kind of organic changes in harmonic progressions, and often chords will blend from one into another. So, I was thinking ‘well how can I teach the kids that’. And previously what I would have done is I would have made a model and then notated it and shown them, and would have even said ‘well look, it does this’ instead of listen, and ‘look it does this’. And so I just wrote a classroom workshop where I got the kids… What I learned, in terms of your planning, when you think you need to be clear and what your outcomes are, what you want the kids to understand, and there might be some unintended outcomes and that’s fine. But where you need to tight and where you can afford to be loose. And, because I believe that creativity comes from constraint. So in that specific lesson, I just restricted it, from the very start, so ‘chord one. Chord four. Choose some notes from chord one. Choose a note from chord four. And then as a class, you choose when you want to change from your chord one note to your chord four note.’ So some kids, because they’d opted to do this project, some of them didn’t have any music at all. Some of the kids were just staying on a C, because we did it C to F, and the kids were just staying on a C, and that was fine. Some of the kids were playing an E, and then changing to an F. Some of the kids were on G and changing it. But the key thing was that they… I set up the rules, and then they did it, and they listened and said ‘oh, that’s… well…’ And then you can have a conversation about what’s going on there. And so, because some of them were changing, we had just like the 16 beats backing track to play along with, and some of them were changing on beats 13 and couldn’t help but change on strong beats in a bar. Some of them were changing off the beat completely, some of them were changing really early, and so we did that, and then we listened. And then we listened to things like In C by Terry Riley, a minimalist piece, to say ‘look what other people are doing’. And then we played some Brian Eno, and then they were able to go ‘ah, it’s doing exactly what we were doing right then’, and then hang the language off it. But it’s just… you just have to… and that took me I think probably… Once I had the idea to write down what the classroom workshop was going to be, was 15, 20 minutes, but I was sat flummoxed for about two or three hours, thinking how the hell do I do this. And that’s the hard part, is the… But once I could picture it in my mind, the workshop, then it was easy. So I think you can, but it’s hard, it takes a lot of thought. But the more you do it, the more you realise that all you need… all you need to do really is play about with sound. Play about with sound in either increasingly large or more diverse ways. And as the kids get better, you can become lose on more things in the workshop, to the point where you can get to the Guild Hall Connect model where it’s just you rock up, and you play, and you see what happens. But I’ve never done that yet. Promise. I’d love to.

R – That all makes sense. What does MF mean to you?

MH – The concept of MF, or from a personal perspective and impact on me, or both?

R – Both, maybe.

MH – Right. So the really dry answer is, MF is about building engagement and participation in music through using student’s own innate… and I’ve never met a student who doesn’t really, when you get to the bottom of it, have an innate passion for music. Using that as a starting point. Building from their own experience of music, getting them playing early and teaching them that you can play, and you can play things that are as complex or as simple as you want, but you can still contribute to an ensemble. That they start to learn using sound before syllable, and that mainly it’s an aural tradition, in the way that pop musicians would learn by copying from each other, and internalising sound, and that it’s an informal method. So, I’ll listen to things and suggest things, and spot nuggets of good ideas, but the idea that students learn that they have control over music, and, not just control in terms of the sound that they make physically when performing or whatever, but that they have control over the way they choose to combine sounds, and that they can be composers and performers, and that in many ways, listening and composing and performing are the same thing. Personally, without going overboard or anything like that, it did, it changed me professionally, and in some ways it did change the path that my life took, because without MF, I wouldn’t have come across Learning Futures, without Learning Futures I wouldn’t have seen project-based learning, I wouldn’t have been… I knew XX here probably wouldn’t have gone… There might not even have been this school. But if this school existed, I don’t think I would have even been considered for it because I hadn’t been doing project-based learning for the previous couple of years. So, if we hadn’t have clogged up the printer for that day, then I probably wouldn’t have been sat here today, which is strange to think. But, I look back at the… - I might have said this before - but I look back at the lessons that I planned in my very first year for Year 9, and it just… there were some lessons where I was teaching… I remember a lesson I taught - well, planned and taught, I’ll take the can for planning it as well. But it was teaching them about different textures, and there was some listening in there, and it was… they were from a wide range of cultures, and we had some calls of prayer for monophony, and we had all sorts. But the way that the kids learned it was when… back when it was all the rage, like visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and so instead of the kids playing, I had the kids standing in the middle of the room with some green pieces of paper, and yellow and red, and they made the pattern… so when it was polyphony, the green kids went in one path and the red… and it helped them know what the words mean, but they had no idea what the sound was. And so when they got a test on it at the end, it was like well, some of them got it, and some of them just didn’t have a clue. I feel embarrassed that that was the music lesson where the kids didn’t play a note. So it completely changed my practice, but my context has changed completely because of it, through a series of… well not coincidences, but things that were incidental to discovering MF in the first place.

R – You mentioned informal learning in the first part of your answer. What do you think of informal learning?

MH – Informal learning is where my role is not formalised, so I don’t have a set list of things that I want all children to get out of the session, by the end of the session. It’s not formalised in terms of who can determine the path that the lesson takes, so for example, this morning, XX was meant to be practicing the descending part that XX had been doing, but he just took him… XX’s working really hard at the moment, and hasn’t been recently, and so I still… So XX was playing Seven Years, and that… I’m more than happy to say ‘that’s not what you’re meant to be doing’, unless he’s using that to work something out… but XX started just playing his own thing, and in an informal setting that would have been… ‘well no, I’ve asked you to… but we’ll explore it’, and then that become something that I think will really work, if we can get the class to play in time! (laughs) Which we will. But that idea that it’s not… the path of the lesson’s not really set by me, and that it’s not… the timings of the lesson aren’t formalised, and we’re not going to spend 20 minutes on this and 30 minutes on that, and we’re not going to spend 20 minutes on this… We’ll play, and we’ll see what comes as a result of that. And so it’s… classroom workshopping is an example of non-formal teaching, but kids in practice rooms, working things out together, is an example of informal composing. So, yeah, I guess that’s what it means really.

R – You mentioned about band work in your earlier school. Is that different to informal learning?

MH – No. But it is… in the first instance it was… well, no. The modus opperandi isn’t informal, because students were given, with ‘in at the deep end’ for example, students were given CDs to go away, but it’s more structured in terms of the support available for students because there are backing tracks, and we did a ‘in at the shallow end’ for Year 7 as well, where we had some slightly easier tracks for them to work with. So we had things like… well, you’re always on the hunt for great nuggets from the current zeitgeist, but I think it was ‘Ting Tings, that’s not by name’, was only two chords. And the jump part was nice as well, it was really interesting drum part that got kids past rock beat one really quickly. And so, whilst the set-up still wasn’t formal, and I still expect the kids to learn from it and listen to each other, and for maybe one or two weeks to go ‘well I don’t think I want to do drums anymore, I want to do bass now’. And that’s fine, so long as he’s made a decision with time to make good music together by the time we’ve finished. But it’s more structured I would say than most informal, the band-based stuff, because they’ve got models to work from. And so what we did with that was simplify the materials, I think it was ‘Kings of Leon’, wasn’t it, ‘use somebody’, was developed and pulled apart, and there were individual parts where kids could listen to the track on their own. It’s more structured, but it’s still informal, I think.

R – Are you familiar with Lucy Green’s work?

MH – I’ve not read papers, but I know of what she has studied, yeah.

R – What do you know about her?

MH – So I know that she looked at the way that popular musicians learn, professionally, and discovered that it wasn’t mainly from notation, that popular musicians… and also that it’s not an innate thing, that popular musicians can learn by listening to each other, and by watching each other, and they’ve internalised sounds over years and years and years, and that they’ll be able to hear a phrase and their fingers and hands will seemingly know what to do, from the perspective of kids. But when you give kids that opportunity and put them in the practice room with someone like XX, and give them enough time, they’ll start to have ‘aha’ moments and ‘ah, so it’s…’. And also I know she did a bit of work, which I’m not as familiar with, in terms of linking the practice room to the classroom. I don’t know if she wrote any papers on that. But the last time Lucy was at one of the MF conferences, that’s what she was talking about. The idea of ‘how do you make peripatetic sessions Musical Futuresy’. And that was really interesting, but I don’t know where she got with that. I know originally there was some stuff in the literature about extra-curricular stuff, but basically, wherever possible, I keep going through peripatetic teachers until I find someone who understands. And kids still do grades and things, but I ask them to do lots of aural stuff, lots of copying. And that really jars with some teachers who come in and just don’t want to do that. And that’s fine. But I want kids here experiences in the practice room to be similar to the… But no, I’ve not read any papers on… Well I read the original literature, and I think Lucy had written some of the original MF pamphlets. Is that right?

R – I think she co-wrote some stuff with XX.

MH – Yeah, she did, yeah.

R – So do you use MF in general, or do you kind of pick out different things, or do you think it’s like a holistic approach where you adopt the ethos?

MH – I think some people do both. I think some people… and I think had we not have become a XX School and had the opportunity to see what other schools did and be part of the network, I think I probably would have did the latter and just picked out bits and bobs and said ‘oh, that’s the band stuff, and that’s… oh, band carousel works really well, because you get to see whether or not kids are good at bass or drums’, and then you put them on those instruments for the next five years. Whereas now, I guess it’s a tacit knowledge that I don’t… it’s unthinking now, that’s just how I plan and that’s how I work. And so the kids who are doing… who hopefully we’ll get some kids opting for GCSE music in our context, that’s how we’ll be encouraging them to work as well.

R – What do you value in music education?

MH – Trust. From all stakeholders. As a teacher, yeah, trust. And not being told how to teach. But I don’t think that MF as an organisation does that. It presents a way of doing things. Personally, I value being able to get a guitar out and play at the same time with the kids. Which didn’t used to happen previously, being the way that I taught. So I think as an educator, I value making music with young people. I think that’s ace. And, for children, I… the biggest thing of… well, the biggest thing of value that I think in music education can give to them is no matter whether or not they, when they’re 18, 19, 20 or older, say that ‘I’m a guitarist’. At least they know that they are musical. I think that’s really important, and that hopefully, you know, a good proportion of them come away with the curse of listening to music completely differently, because they’re habitually used to stripping things down and wondering how they work. And I think most students who, especially in a MF school, if they go on past KS3, they’ll tend to do that because you can’t help but do it in terms of the way that you approach the set works and the areas of study.

R – In general, what do you think are the problems of school music, and how does MF overcome these, if at all?

MH – Resources, funding, national narratives, I think they’re external factors. I think that many music departments are kind of forgotten about, and are shop windows where they’re rolled out five or six times a year, so everybody can pat themselves on the back, but behind the scenes, you’ve got a music teacher who’s busting their guts. Nobody ever visits them until it’s Christmas. But yeah, you know, a lot of music departments I’ve seen are under resourced and tired. Often there are those that I, as a XX and as a SLE I went into work with schools, you had tired music departments with tired members of staff who hadn’t had any training for years and years and years, and were doing things the way that they’ve always done. And some of them were resistant to change because they were doing things the way they’d always done. But the way that they’d always done things wasn’t working. And I think the training offered by MF does really help with that. It opens up people’s eyes. I’ve never come away from a course and had any people - and even those who come with cynicism - who don’t come away saying ‘well I really enjoyed that’, at least. Some people I think still go away from some of those sessions and say ‘well I really enjoyed that, but I can’t do that because of this this this’. And MF can’t sort that out. They can’t give schools more budgets, or they can’t give schools more room. But they can suggest to people that using your voice and that using your body are just as valuable ways of making music as if we’ve got a load of guitars and drum kits. I think it… it seems… I don’t know if was just because I was a more vocal and involved member of the community, but it seems like music was on the agenda. Especially when Michael Gove came in in the first instance, because of the National Plan and he’d said some, on the face of it, promising things about music, that every kid should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. But that just all seems to have disappeared into the background in the massive changes that schools are undergoing. And again, I’m not sure that MF can do anything about that, other than help teachers to get the best possible results for the kids so that more kids are choosing music, and so that more students are succeeding in music. But yeah, I think nationally, education’s in a very turbulent place. And I think that’s especially true for music departments, because amongst all the turbulence, I think they’re getting forgotten about. Anecdotally. And from what I’ve seen going on in places.

R – What difference has MF made to your pupils and your school?

MH – It’s hard to say in this context, because this is the way that we’ve just always done things. And the kids are engaged and enthused and want to do well generally across all of their studies. But, I’ve got kids itching to get in the practice rooms all of the times, more of them play in lessons, they’re willing to show things off now, they’re more willing to challenge each other when they disagree with ideas. So, I don’t know, for this school, because it’s just the way that we’ve always done things. But, a third of kids doing peripatetic lessons is a measure, and it’s a good measure. I think I did, well yeah, I did. The very first year we had, because I had a bit more time and we were slightly over staffed in that year, just because it was our first year, but I think my music lessons were better in that year, because I had more time to think, but those students in those lessons, I remember, they were really learning… I got a sense really that they’d grasped the discipline of music, and so when we were doing composing music to represent the different types of formations of rock, so like metamorphic rock, and so for that whole project it felt like working with an orchestra, and it felt like I was the conductor and I was able to talk to the kids on similar terms to… well on equal terms in terms of where the ideas could come from, but in terms of the relationship between us, it was like being a conductor, and asking for things, and then really trying hard to get those things. And I’ve not really had that before until I worked here, where it felt like I was a professional working with young professional musicians. And that was huge. And so then, on the night when we performed, it wasn’t just an immaculate performance, it was like… I think XX came from the music service and he was like ‘I can’t believe what those kids are doing’. Yeah, does that answer that question?

R – Yeah. What’s your ultimate ideal vision for the future of secondary school music lessons? What would it look like?

MH – Well I, it’s presumptuous of me to say ‘all schools doing MF and doing it really well’ because there’d be some grammar schools, for example, where kids come in already doing loads of music theory, and that the way they’re teaching kids, they’re getting really good results, and those kids are musical, and if that works for certain people… Because we’re talking about this school. How do we make something similar to El Sistema. And I’ve got some issues with El Sistema in the way that they present themselves as being like the only saviours for some of these poor children. And that worries me a little bit. But we do want there to be lots of ensembles at this school. Especially as we grow and we’ve got two sites. And so, for me, all kids ought to play an instrument, and it’s not… there’s all sorts of research that you can chuck at people in terms of what areas of the brain light up when you’re playing or listening to music, and that’s great, and sometimes, because it’s a social science it’s difficult to separate out. Kids who do music tend to do better elsewhere. Or is that not just because academic kids tend to do music? But at the same time, I’m sure there is some truth in the fact that doing music helps you to develop in terms of your academic development. But all of those arguments are great, but for me, XX said to me - he might have said it to me personally, or might have said it online - but he said ‘it’s not about an entitlement to be able to play a musical instrument. Playing a musical instrument and making music and knowing how to make music well, it’s not an entitlement, it’s a fulfilment. It’s part of human nature, and some kids are being denied that fulfilment of themselves. It’s not…’ So, that for me is why I want all students in secondary education to be playing musical instruments. Not necessarily being stood playing music at GCSE, because that’s their choice. I’d like for more students to be choosing GCSE, but I would like the GCSE curriculum to reflect more what is actually happening, and what the real demands for students are in terms of music. I still don’t understand to this day why 40% of the grade needs to come from how well they can sit for an hour and listen to tracks and write about that. I just don’t see where or when that helps any music professionals at all, other than critics. And even then, they wouldn’t sit for an hour and a half without a break. But yeah. All students ought to play, regardless of their financial status, or what school they’re at, because it’s part of being human.

R – How does MF fit in with the philosophy of this school?

MH – Really well, because the school is a XX learning, it’s an XX learning school. So, we encourage students to be leaders of their own learning and it sounds a bit of a buzz-word phrase, but it’s because it’s one of the books we’ve all read as staff that’s come from the XX learning movement. So when I was out last week, XX covered - I think it was the group that you saw yesterday. So the Head teacher covered the group and he said ‘it was great, because it was like…’ So XX covered them last week. XX covered this group this morning. I think he just, to be safe, stuck with getting them to think. So, XX had them last week, and because of the way that we’ve done things, and that they know that they can just… So XX said ‘well I’ve got this idea for a heartbeat’ and he was like ‘go and get the bass XX’. So XX went and got the bass and he said ‘well try playing it like this and like…’ And then XX was like ‘so I just asked the kids’ like ‘what do you think…?’ And then he said ‘ah’, and then ‘ah, we could have…’ so he was like ‘it was great! And then we were playing, and all of a sudden we were all playing! And then…’ And I was like ‘well yeah, because they’re used to doing things that way’. So I’ve been teasing him saying that he’s invoking the spirit of John Paynter. But in our school, that felt the natural thing for XX to do, and it felt the natural thing for the kids to do. And although it was a cover lesson, because XX’s the Head teacher, he doesn’t mind if the kids make a racket, or so… I think he felt confident enough to just to say ‘well, I’ll give it a go. They want to get the instruments out. Let’s just see what happens’. And so yeah, that happened organically because I think it’s just part of the way that we do things.

MH is thanked for his time, and the interview comes to a close.

43.45