



The Indispensable Role of Soft Skills in the **Future of Education.**

A White Paper by SoMi

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Introduction.

In an era of rapid technological change and societal challenges, “soft skills” - the personal and interpersonal capabilities that enable people to collaborate, communicate, empathise, and adapt - are emerging as critical competencies for the future. These skills are not “nice-to-have” extras; they are fast becoming core drivers of employability, productivity, and wellbeing in modern society^{[1][2]}. As routine technical tasks are increasingly automated, uniquely human qualities such as empathy, creativity, leadership, and teamwork are growing in economic value^[3]. Education systems, however, have historically placed greater emphasis on academic knowledge and exam results than on deliberately cultivating these soft skills^{[4][5]}. This white paper makes the case that we must urgently rebalance this focus - starting in primary education - to ensure every child develops the soft skills needed to thrive in the future.

Thesis: Soft skills are indispensable to the future of society and the economy, and group music making is a proven, effective way to develop these skills in children. Through collaborative music activities, children can learn empathy, communication, collaboration and confidence in ways few other methods achieve.

We will examine the evidence for the importance of soft skills, the current gaps in UK primary education, and why group music making offers a uniquely powerful solution.

The aim is to inform and inspire educational leaders, policy makers, music educators and journalists to see soft skills development - particularly through group music making - as a core objective of primary education.



Soft Skills: Foundation for Future Employability, Productivity and Wellbeing.

Modern economies and workplaces are undergoing profound shifts that elevate the importance of soft skills. The World Economic Forum (WEF) projects that **roughly 44% of core skills needed in jobs will change by 2027**, driven by automation, AI and digital transformation^[6]. Technical abilities like data analysis and coding are in rising demand, but so are human-centric skills. In fact, employers rank **“leadership and social influence”** among the high-in-demand skills for the coming years^[6]. WEF’s “Future of Jobs” analysis of top skills for 2025 shows that alongside tech know-how, employers most value **analytical thinking, creativity, resilience, emotional intelligence, and the ability to work with people**^{[7][8]}. Crucially, these are all soft or non-technical skills. As one WEF report notes, *“Soft skills such as analytical thinking, resilience and flexibility are rising in demand as the labour market is shaped by technological change and uncertainty”*^{[1][9]}.

Why are these skills so essential? One reason is that **tasks requiring human interaction, empathy, creativity and complex problem-solving are the ones least likely to be automated**. Organisations increasingly recognise that while machines excel at routine functions, it is the human workforce’s creativity, collaboration, and emotional intelligence that drive innovation and adaptability^[3]. Another reason is that soft skills are linked to better outcomes for individuals and organisations. Research by McKinsey & Company identified 56 foundational skills (encompassing cognitive, interpersonal, self-leadership and digital skills); notably, **higher proficiency in these skills correlates with higher likelihood of employment, higher incomes, and greater job satisfaction**^[10]. In other words, people with strong soft skills are more employable and productive. A global survey of 18,000 people found that those who scored higher on interpersonal and self-management skills (like teamwork, communication, adaptability and resilience) tended to have better work and life outcomes^{[10][11]}.

From an economic perspective, the demand for soft skills is outpacing supply. McKinsey's workforce projections show that **between 2016 and 2030, demand for social and emotional skills will grow by 26% in the United States and 22% in Europe** across all industries^[12]. This surge reflects employers' need for workers who can collaborate effectively, lead teams, and adapt to change - capabilities that complement technological advancements^[12]. Similarly, demand for higher-order cognitive skills like creativity and critical thinking is forecast to rise ~19% in the US by 2030^[13]. Many of these soft skills are precisely those that **machines cannot replicate**: empathy, communication, leadership, and cultural awareness, among others^[3]. As the McKinsey study notes, even as AI spreads, the *“need for workers with finely tuned social and emotional skills - skills that machines are a long way from mastering - will rapidly grow”*^[14].

Beyond employability, soft skills contribute to **productivity and innovation** within organisations. Teams that communicate well, trust each other, and demonstrate empathy are more effective and creative. For example, problem-solving often requires diverse groups to combine knowledge and iterate on ideas - processes that rely on active listening, clear communication, and openness to others' perspectives. Leaders with emotional intelligence can motivate employees better and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, leading to higher performance. The WEF highlights that organisations now seek people who “elevate team members around them,” not just excel individually^[15]. In essence, soft skills amplify the impact of technical skills by enabling people to work together productively.

Equally important is the link between soft skills and **wellbeing**. Capabilities such as empathy, emotional regulation, and social skills are fundamental to forming positive relationships and maintaining good mental health. The World Economic Forum emphasises that children *“need to learn to collaborate, to have empathy and kindness... These skills are important for living fulfilled lives just as much as they*

are important to contribute to the labour market and society at large.^[16] Research supports that a breadth of social-emotional skills in youth correlates with better mental health outcomes and life satisfaction^[17]. Simply put, a child who learns how to understand others' feelings, manage their own emotions, communicate effectively and resolve conflicts is more likely to grow into a happier, more resilient adult. On a societal level, widespread soft skills like empathy and cooperation foster social cohesion and civic engagement, while deficits in these skills can contribute to discord.

It is for all these reasons that global bodies and thought leaders now call for **reimagining education to prioritise soft skills alongside academic knowledge.**

The World Economic Forum's Education 4.0 framework stresses empowering young learners with *“uniquely human qualities - those unlikely to ever be replaced by technology” as the future of education*^[18]. Likewise, the UK innovation foundation Nesta argues that *“education must support young people to acquire a broad set of skills, capabilities and attitudes to succeed in life and work,”* including independent thinking, resilience, teamwork, creativity and self-understanding^[19]. Soft skills are no longer peripheral; they are **foundational to preparing the next generation for the future of work and society.**

The Soft Skills Gap in Primary Education

Despite broad consensus on the importance of soft skills, there is a concerning gap in how well our education systems are cultivating these skills, especially at the primary level. Traditional education in the UK (and many countries) has centered on academic attainment in a narrow set of subjects. From an early age, pupils are funneled toward exam results in literacy, numeracy and other core knowledge areas - often at the expense of social-emotional development. As Nesta researchers Jed Cinnamon and Nancy Wilkinson observe, “*the UK school system has one of the most high-pressure accountability structures in the world... academic performance dominates inspection decisions*,” and broader skills are treated as add-ons^{[20][5]}. Even in primary schools, teachers face intense pressure to improve test scores in English and maths, meaning class time and resources for music, arts, and personal development are frequently squeezed out. Under such a system, soft skills are too often expected to emerge implicitly (or left to chance) rather than taught explicitly - an assumption that evidence shows is flawed^[21].

Education’s historic emphasis on knowledge over skills has created a misalignment with the needs of the 21st century. The World Economic Forum notes that historically “*education systems...de-prioritised interpersonal skills*” and that this “needs to change” to prepare young learners for the future^[4]. There is growing recognition that academic knowledge and soft skills are not an either/or proposition but rather complementary. In fact, research indicates that teaching a **breadth of skills can bolster academic performance** - for example, students with better self-regulation and collaboration skills tend to learn more effectively^[17]. Nonetheless, current curricula and assessments in primary education do not rigorously measure outcomes like teamwork, creativity or empathy, so they often receive minimal structured attention. Schools that do prioritise such enrichment often do so through extracurricular activities or the dedication of individual teachers, rather than as a systemic mandate. This means access to soft skills development can be **inconsistent and inequitable** across schools.

Teachers and school leaders largely agree on the need for change. Surveys in the UK show **broad support among educators and parents for a richer, skills-oriented curriculum**. As Nesta reports, *“there is broad acceptance amongst teachers and students that young people should be equipped with broader life skills before leaving education”*^[22]. Employers, too, have long lamented that school leavers and graduates may excel in exams but lack teamwork, communication or problem-solving abilities needed in the workplace^[23]. This aligns with findings from the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) and others that soft skills shortages are affecting productivity. Yet, despite this consensus, **the education system has been slow to adapt**. One reason is the lack of a shared language and framework for soft skills - variously termed “character education,” “21st century skills,” “social-emotional learning,” or “essential life skills” - making it harder to integrate them into standards and accountability measures^[24]. Recent efforts, like the Education Endowment Foundation’s SPECTRUM framework for skills such as resilience and motivation, are steps toward clearer definitions, but more work is needed to embed these into everyday teaching^[25].

A particularly urgent aspect of the soft skills gap is the **social and economic disparity in skills development**. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds often have far fewer opportunities to cultivate soft skills, both in and out of school. Research indicates it is the *“most disadvantaged young people that do not develop the broader skills and capabilities that they need - a significant barrier to social mobility.”*^[26] These students may attend schools in under-resourced areas where non-academic programs (like music, drama, or sports clubs) are limited. They are also less likely to afford private lessons or extracurricular activities that build confidence and teamwork - a gap only widened by cuts to youth services in many communities^[27]. By contrast, more affluent families often ensure their children join sports teams, orchestras, scouts/guides, coding camps, etc., which implicitly impart communication, leadership and resilience. **If we do nothing, this “skills gap” will compound existing inequalities**, leaving disadvantaged pupils behind not only academically but in the very capacities that predict long-term success in life.

Importantly, education policymakers in the UK are beginning to acknowledge these issues. Recent policy rhetoric has stressed “character and resilience” alongside academics. The former Education Secretary Damian Hinds stated “*you won’t crack social mobility by only focusing on exam results*” and launched initiatives to examine how extracurricular activities and soft skills influence life chances^[28]. Additionally, the Department for Education’s National Plan for Music Education (NPME) in 2022 explicitly recognises the value of music as part of a broad curriculum for all children^[29]. The NPME’s very title - “The Power of Music to Change Lives” - signals an understanding that music and arts education can support personal and social development, not just musical technique. It sets out a vision that **“all children and young people in England” should be able to learn to sing, play an instrument and create music together**, with pathways to progress their interests^[30]. Notably, “creating music together” highlights group music making as a universal entitlement, reflecting evidence that such collaborative experiences yield wide benefits. This policy momentum needs to be broadened and accelerated to truly embed soft skills as core outcomes in primary education. Every primary school should feel responsible for producing not only literate and numerate students, but **well-rounded individuals equipped with empathy, communication, collaboration, and confidence**. The next sections explore why group music making is an ideal vehicle to achieve that goal and how it can help close the soft skills gap.

Group Music Making as a Catalyst for Soft Skills Development

Among various pedagogical strategies to nurture soft skills, **group music making stands out as uniquely effective for children.** Making music in ensemble - whether singing in a choir, playing in a school orchestra or band, or collaborating in a drumming circle - is a holistic activity that inherently cultivates many soft skills simultaneously. As one Arts Council England summary puts it, musical experiences “build life skills such as teamwork, risk-taking, creativity, empathy, problem solving and communication, and a sense of responsibility and commitment.”^[31] In a group musical setting, children must listen to one another, coordinate their actions, and contribute to a collective outcome - all of which mirror and exercise key social-emotional abilities. Let us examine how group music making develops the four soft skills highlighted in this paper’s thesis: **empathy, communication, collaboration, and confidence.**

- **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** There is compelling evidence that **group music activities can significantly increase children’s empathy.** A landmark year-long study by researchers at the University of Cambridge found that **8- to 11-year-old children who engaged in weekly group music games showed substantially greater gains in empathy** (the ability to recognise and share others’ emotions) compared to control groups who did non-musical activities or no extra activities^[32]. At the end of the study, the music group scored higher on standard empathy measures, indicating that making music together “greatly improves a child’s ability to empathise with others”^{[33][32]}. The researchers attribute this to specific elements of group music-making: **imitation and synchrony.** In musical ensemble exercises, children often mirror each other’s rhythms or melodies and have to stay in synchrony (e.g. singing or clapping in time). This process fosters “shared intentionality” - a state of aligning with others’ actions and emotions towards a common goal^[34]. Essentially, making music together prompts children to attune to each other’s non-verbal cues and emotional expressions. Over time, this strengthens their capacity to understand others’ perspectives and feelings - the core of empathy. Tal-

Chen Rabinowitch, who led the Cambridge study, noted that music proved to be “extremely effective...‘empathy education’” and suggested it could be a powerful medium to teach emotional intelligence in schools^{[35][36]}. Indeed, unlike a typical classroom task, performing music as a group requires **emotional communication**; students must convey and respond to moods in the music (e.g. playing a passage “sadly” or “joyfully”), which practices identifying emotions. Other research reviews concur that music education, especially ensemble performance, contributes to improved emotional sensitivity and social empathy among children^{[37][38]}. By embedding group music making in primary education, we create regular, structured opportunities for children to practice empathy in an enjoyable context.

- **Communication and Social Skills:** Group music is fundamentally a form of communication without words. Whether in a choir or a drum circle, children learn to express themselves and to “read” others through musical interaction. This strengthens both non-verbal and verbal communication skills. For instance, ensemble players must maintain eye contact, interpret body language (such as a conductor’s signals or a peer’s breathing cues), and adjust their playing in real time to stay in harmony. These skills translate directly to better social awareness and conversational turn-taking. Furthermore, participating in music gives children confidence in their own voice, literally and metaphorically, which encourages them to communicate openly. A shy child who might not speak out in class may find that singing in a group or playing an instrument piece allows them to be “heard” in a supportive setting, gradually reducing anxiety about self-expression. According to Arts Council England, when music permeates a school, it positively impacts *“everything from academic attainment to student attendance and wellbeing... Taking part in musical activities, such as mass singing events, helps children to recognise their own skills and appreciate those of others.”*^[31] This recognition of one’s abilities and others’ contributions nurtures respectful communication and listening. Also, music can expand children’s vocabularies and cultural literacy (through song lyrics, discussing musical ideas), enhancing their verbal

communication in the process. In one primary school's experience, integrating music led to noticeable improvements in pupils' ability to articulate thoughts and engage socially - evidence echoed by many music educators anecdotally. **The social interaction inherent in ensemble music** - negotiating roles (who plays which part), giving and receiving feedback, jointly solving problems (e.g. how to end a song together) - all serve as practical training in communication and cooperation. Over time, children who regularly make music with peers tend to become more active listeners and more clear, poised communicators.

- **Collaboration and Teamwork:** Few activities illustrate "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" better than ensemble music. A band or choir only succeeds when everyone works together, each contributing their part in time and tune. **Thus, group music making is a natural teacher of teamwork.** Children learn the importance of each role - the drummer keeping steady time, the violinist playing melody, the singers harmonising - and that if even one part is missing or out of sync, the performance suffers. This instills a sense of responsibility and commitment to the group^[39]. In music, students must also sometimes lead and sometimes support, experiencing both roles within a team. For example, one student might have a brief solo or start the group off (leadership), but in other moments they accompany others (supportive teamwork). This dynamic builds adaptability and leadership skills in equal measure. There is also an element of collective problem-solving: ensembles often need to troubleshoot why a piece isn't sounding right - maybe the rhythm is off - and they figure it out together, reinforcing **collaborative problem-solving** skills. Evidence of music's impact on collaboration comes from educational research as well as teacher testimony. A review in the *Psychology of Music* journal noted that long-term group music participation improved children's social cohesion and willingness to cooperate with peers^{[40][41]}. Teachers frequently report that pupils who struggle to work together in academic settings will happily cooperate in a music activity, breaking down social barriers. It is not uncommon to see very diverse groups of children - across different backgrounds and abilities - find common

ground in a music ensemble. **By embedding group music in primary schools, we provide a structured way for children to practice teamwork regularly**, in a context where success is immediately heard and felt when they synchronise as a team. These teamwork experiences can then transfer to other school projects and eventually workplace settings.

- **Confidence and Self-Esteem:** Performing music, whether in the classroom or on stage, can be transformative for a child's confidence. It takes courage to sing a solo or play one's part in front of others, and successfully doing so often gives children a tremendous sense of achievement. Over time, the cycle of practice, overcoming nervousness, and performing builds self-efficacy - the understanding that "I can do this." According to the UK's National Plan for Music Education, a high-quality music education "increases children's self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement"^[42]. Unlike many academic subjects where only right or wrong answers exist, music allows children to explore and express themselves without fear of failing in the traditional sense, which is particularly empowering for those who may struggle elsewhere. Additionally, group music provides a supportive environment: each child's contribution is valued, which boosts their self-worth. As Arts Council England notes, *"taking part in musical activity and learning musical skills builds resilience, improves self-esteem, and can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing for life."*^[43] Performing together and applauding each other cultivates mutual respect and confidence. It is also worth noting that music can engage children who are otherwise disengaged from school. Success in music might be the spark that a child needs to feel confident in their ability to learn generally. Schools often observe improvements in classroom participation and even attendance when students are involved in music groups - confident, motivated learners attend and enjoy school more. In essence, group music gives children a safe space to take risks and conquer challenges, such as learning a difficult piece or playing in front of an audience, thereby steadily fortifying their confidence. This growing confidence carries over into other domains - a student who has performed in assembly might be

more willing to speak up during a class presentation, for example.

Beyond these four skills, group music making confers numerous other soft skill benefits: **creativity** (through improvising and composing), **discipline and focus** (practicing an instrument requires patience and concentration), and **cultural awareness** (exposure to music from different traditions). It also provides **joy and social connection**, which are vital for children's wellbeing. Music is a universal language that can bring together children who might not otherwise interact, helping forge friendships and understanding across divides. Given its multi-faceted impact, it is no surprise that advocates call music education a "catalyst that makes a good school exceptional"^[31]. When a school choir or orchestra is thriving, one often sees a ripple effect of positivity through the whole school community - from improved student morale to greater parental engagement at concerts.

Crucially, the benefits of group music are **supported by research** and not just wishful thinking. As discussed, scientific studies document gains in empathy, prosocial behavior, and academic performance linked to music programs^[29]. Neurological research also suggests that musical training can strengthen brain networks associated with executive function and emotional processing, which underlie many soft skills^[44]. While more longitudinal studies are needed, the existing evidence base is strong enough that many educational bodies recommend music and arts as key vehicles for developing the so-called "whole child." UNESCO's Seoul Agenda (2010) called on nations to promote arts education for its role in improving the quality of education, including teaching soft skills and supporting wellbeing^[45]. The UK's own Music Education hubs, funded by Arts Council England, often have stated objectives to use music to foster personal and social development outcomes in children, not solely musical attainment. And as mentioned earlier, the refreshed National Plan for Music Education 2022 explicitly ties music education to skills for the future workforce (e.g. creativity in an AI-driven world) and to social mobility aims^{[46][47]}. When **musical learning is positioned as a tool for soft skills and future readiness**, it gains even more

legitimacy in the eyes of educational decision-makers.

In summary, group music making hits the “sweet spot” for soft skills development: it is highly engaging for children, inherently collaborative, emotionally rich, and inclusively accessible (music can transcend language or academic ability barriers). It teaches kids to work together, express themselves, and trust in their own abilities. No single intervention is a panacea, but the breadth of skills nurtured by ensemble music - from empathy to resilience - makes it a particularly powerful and efficient strategy. The next question is how to ensure all children, especially in primary schools, can access these benefits. That brings us to the importance of making soft skills via music an intentional outcome of education, not an incidental one.

Embedding Soft Skills (and Music) into Primary Education: An Urgent Priority

Given the clear importance of soft skills for the future and the proven efficacy of group music in developing them, there is an **urgent need to embed soft skills learning into the core of primary education**. This is not a call to diminish academic learning, but to enrich it. In fact, as evidence shows, a curriculum that integrates soft skills and creative activities can enhance academic outcomes rather than detract from them^[17]. The urgency stems from multiple factors: the fast-changing skill demands of the economy, the widening social disparities in skill acquisition, and the opportunity cost of waiting (children only get one chance at their primary years).

To act on this urgency, education leaders and policymakers should consider the following imperatives:

- 1. Make Soft Skills an Explicit Goal of the Curriculum:** What gets measured gets valued. Governments and school boards should incorporate soft skills (communication, collaboration, creativity, self-management, etc.) into curriculum standards and assessment frameworks, starting at the primary level. The UK could, for example, expand on its Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education or character education guidance to include clear expectations for soft skill development by age 11. When teachers know that teamwork or empathy is a learning outcome - just as literacy and maths are - they are more likely to plan activities to cultivate it. Some pioneering primary schools already map soft skills progression alongside academic progress. This practice needs scaling.
- 2. Leverage Proven Methods like Group Music Making:** Schools do not need to invent entirely new programs to teach soft skills; they can integrate them through existing subjects and activities. **Music is an ideal “carrier” for soft skills**, and thus should be treated as a core component of a broad and balanced curriculum,

not a fringe extracurricular. The National Plan for Music Education's vision that "all children...learn to sing, play an instrument and create music together" by 2030 should be embraced and expedited^[30]. Concretely, this means providing every primary school student with the opportunity for sustained group music making - for instance, through weekly choir or ensemble sessions led by trained music educators. Where specialist teachers are not available, schools can partner with local Music Hubs or organisations to deliver programs. The key is that music (and other arts) are scheduled and resourced during the regular school day so that **every child participates**, not just those whose parents sign them up. By institutionalising group music, we ensure the soft skills benefits reach the many, not the few.

3. Address Barriers to Access - especially for disadvantaged pupils: To close the soft skills gap, we must close the music and arts access gap. This involves funding and policy support. The government's commitment of over £300 million for music and arts (announced in 2022) is a welcome step^[48], but it must be maintained and grown. Funding should be directed to equip schools in low-income areas with instruments, rehearsal spaces, and connections to music tutors. Programs like **Whole Class Ensemble Teaching** (WCET), where an entire class learns an instrument together for a year, have shown success in England by reaching children who wouldn't otherwise learn instruments. Additionally, after-school music clubs and regional ensembles should be free or heavily subsidised for pupils from disadvantaged families. The Music Hubs network (overseen by Arts Council England) has a mandate to ensure inclusivity - they should continue targeting support to "cold spots" where music participation is low, ensuring no school is left behind. It is important to track participation data (e.g. percentage of pupils on Free School Meals in school ensembles) to hold the system accountable for equitable access. By intentionally using group music as a tool for inclusion, we can help mitigate social and economic disparities in soft skill development.

4. Train and Support Teachers to Deliver Soft Skills Education: Teachers need the confidence and skills to nurture soft skills through their pedagogy. Professional development should be provided on methods like cooperative learning, project-based learning, and arts integration. For music specifically, primary teachers (who are often generalists) may need training to lead simple group singing or rhythm activities - or support in bringing in specialists. According to Nesta, “teachers are often not trained in how to support broader development, and their teaching is structured to fit the existing curriculum”, which is an obstacle^[21]. We must change teacher training and school culture to value and enable soft skill facilitation. This could involve updating initial teacher education to include modules on social-emotional learning and creative teaching techniques. School leaders should also encourage a shift in mindset: celebrating teamwork and empathy in assemblies and reports, not just academic merit. Essentially, educators at all levels should become champions of the idea that **developing character and capabilities is part of their mission**, not a distraction from it.

5. Create a Supportive Policy and Inspection Environment: Finally, systemic reinforcement is needed. Ofsted and other inspection bodies should explicitly look at how schools are developing pupils’ personal skills and wellbeing. The new Ofsted framework has moved slightly in this direction by considering “personal development” - this should be strengthened with clear indicators (for example, the presence of arts/musical opportunities, student feedback on confidence and teamwork, etc.). Likewise, policy documents like the National Plan for Music Education should be fully implemented and regularly reviewed. The NPME promises partnerships and hub support; schools must take up these offers and be encouraged to do so by local authorities or academy trusts. **Political will and consistency** are important - soft skills education is a long-term endeavor whose payoff (a more skilled, adaptable workforce and cohesive society) extends beyond electoral cycles. It requires sustained commitment.

We are already seeing positive movement. The WEF’s global “Reskilling Revolution” initiative aims to provide better education and skills to a billion people by 2030, with a focus on matching what businesses need^{[49][50]}. In the UK, organisations like Nesta and the Education Endowment Foundation are researching and piloting interventions to boost social-emotional learning. And many headteachers, recognising the post-pandemic needs of children, are prioritising wellbeing and re-integrating music and arts as a way to rebuild confidence and community in their schools. These efforts need to become the norm rather than the exception.

Conclusion.

The future of education - and by extension, the future of our society and economy - depends on how well we equip the next generation with **soft skills**. These are the skills that make us human: the ability to empathise with others, to communicate and collaborate across differences, to think creatively, and to adapt with resilience. They are indispensable in a world where knowledge is abundant and technology is pervasive. As this paper has argued, soft skills are not a “luxury” or a side activity; they are as fundamental as literacy and numeracy for success in the 21st century. The evidence is clear that industries will reward those who have these skills, and communities will thrive when their members possess social-emotional intelligence. We cannot afford to leave soft skills development to chance or confine it to the hidden curriculum. It must be deliberately integrated into education from the earliest years.

Group music making offers a **proven, powerful means** to develop soft skills in children, especially at the primary level. Through the joyful, collective act of making music, children practice empathy, refine their communication, learn teamwork, and build confidence. In doing so they also discover a sense of identity and belonging - a foundation for wellbeing and lifelong learning. The arts have always been a civilising force, and in our time, they also emerge as a practical solution to one of education’s biggest challenges: how to prepare well-rounded individuals for an uncertain future. We have seen that when music is given a central role in schools, it can transform the climate and outcomes of those schools. As one headteacher summed up, “*Music brings a school to life! Music has a positive impact socially and academically, as well as on mental health and wellbeing.*”^[51] That is the kind of holistic impact we seek - and it is within reach, if we commit to it.

The task now falls to educational leaders, policymakers, and influencers to act on this knowledge. This means advocating for curriculum changes that value soft skills, allocating resources to programs like primary music ensembles, and sharing

best practices on integrating skills education. It also means **engaging parents and communities** with the message that skills like empathy and collaboration are core outcomes of schooling, not incidental byproducts. When parents understand that group music or drama is not just “fun” but building their child’s future employability and happiness, they become allies in this mission.

In the UK, we have an opportunity to lead by example. With strong frameworks (like the NPME) and institutions (like Arts Council England and Nesta) already recognising the need, and with the legacy of esteemed music and arts programs to build upon, we can ensure **every primary-aged child has access to group music making and soft skills learning**. By embedding these experiences in the school day for all children, we address inequities and give every child - regardless of background - a chance to develop the soft skills that will carry them forward. The returns will manifest not only in the workforce of 10 or 20 years hence (with more creative, adaptable, empathetic employees) but also immediately in our schools (with more engaged, confident, and cooperative pupils).

In conclusion, soft skills are the currency of the future, and group music is an extremely valuable mint. The future of education must be one where a child is seen not just as an exam-taker, but as a whole person to be developed. By prioritising soft skills and harnessing the power of music to cultivate them, we can prepare children to succeed in work and in life - building a society that is as compassionate and collaborative as it is inventive and productive. The time to harmonise our education system with the needs of the future is now. Let us empower our children to strike the right notes for their future, together.

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- a focus on matching what businesses need[49][50]. In the UK, organisations like Nesta and the Education Endowment Foundation are researching and piloting interventions to boost social-emotional learning. And many headteachers, recognising the post-pandemic needs of children, are prioritising wellbeing and re-integrating music and arts as a way to rebuild confidence and community in their schools. These efforts need to become the norm rather than the exception.