

## The Gamelan at King Edward's Junior School

### Background and context

At King Edward's Junior School the music curriculum is driven by the philosophy 'Performance is at the heart of what we do and how we learn' There are 178 children in the school in Years 3 – 6 and of these over 120 children learn instruments either through the team of specialist staff that we have at the school or with private teachers out of school.

### Acquiring the Gamelan

During the Autumn Term of 2009, staff were asked to submit bids to the Ladies Committee who fundraise for the school throughout the year. In previous years I had been successful with bids for African Drums and last year received enough funds to purchase a full set of professionally mastered steel pans.

The logical next step for me was ask for funding to purchase one of your Gamelan sets – now made financially reachable with your work, and with the research and knowledge of Andy Gleadhill. Needless to say, with the arrival of the Gamelan from 'Drums for Schools' in the Spring Term of 2010, my bid for this academic year was also successful and we now have all three Year 5 classes learning about music through Gamelan.

### What we do

The teaching and learning of music at King Edward's Junior school is structured through whole class performance with a different instrumental focus for each of the four year groups:-

Year 3 - Whole class strings using #1 sized violins, #1 sized 'cellos, and mini basses

Year 4 - Whole class recorder

Year 6 - Whole Class Steel Pans

The Year 5 focus was called 'Whole Class Band' in which those children who learned orchestral/band instrument were joined by the other members of the class on pitched percussion performing a range of repertoire and pieces that could incorporate all levels of playing as well as those children who were not receiving individual instrumental tuition.

Clearly, the children of the school now experience a variety and diversity of musical opportunities. The focus on strings in year 3 and recorder in Year 4 leads them into the ability to learn how music works through traditional and Western routes – e.g. developing the skill to perform from traditional musical notation on what are perceived as more conventional instruments, as well as giving every child a taster experience for a year on a string instrument followed by a year on a wind instrument.

### The Gamelan

The addition of the Gamelan in year 5 (and the Steel Pans in year 6) has now broadened the childrens' musical awareness of how music works and is experienced in and through 'non-western' cultures and especially through the more aural traditions that exist within these musical genres.

The colourful and visually spectacular Gamelan has added another dimension of music making to the curriculum at King Edward's Junior School and below are some of the thoughts from our Year 5 children who have been the first year group to play our newly acquired Gamelan:-

- Unique and fun and decorative
- Great for learning how to multitask
- Fun, different and interesting
- A great new experience
- A patience exercise
- It stands out from other instruments that we play in school
- Enjoyable to play
- It's got a nice sound and I love the colourful instruments
- It's really fun and it's good for organisation and it's good for organisation, listening and multi -tasking
- It's good because you get to experience what people play in other countries
- Worth the wait
- It's a very interesting instrument to learn
- It's fun once you've learned to do it and got to grips with it.
- It's challenging doing the damping
- I feel special when I do it
- It calms we down in a way, makes me feel happy and special and I like doing it
- It makes you forget everything and concentrate on the sound
- It's really cool and weird why you don't step over the instruments
- I think it's great that we're playing something from a different country
- It's a great feeling that we are sharing a different county's musical culture

Mary Edwards

Director of Music – King Edward's Junior School – April 2010