

A Review of Sistema Scotland Big Noise Programme in Raploch, Govanhill and Torry

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1. Context

Sistema Scotland is a charity committed to effecting permanent transformation in the lives of some of the most disadvantaged children and their communities in Scotland. They aim to address long-entrenched and complex social challenges through the delivery of a high quality, immersive and inclusive music education and social programme. Founded in 2007, and drawing its original inspiration from the El Sistema programme in Venezuela, Sistema Scotland uses the orchestra as a tool for effecting change. They are currently working in three communities in Scotland: Raploch in Stirling (established in 2008), Govanhill in Glasgow (established 2013) and Torry in Aberdeen (established 2015). Sistema Scotland is in the process of opening a fourth centre in the Douglas community of Dundee. These communities are all within areas of multiple deprivation.

Education Scotland carried out an initial review of Big Noise in Raploch in autumn 2014 and published a report in January 2015¹. The review looked at how well participants were learning and achieving, supported to improve their life chances and the contribution of Big Noise to the community of Raploch. The review formed part of a long-term study led by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) with the support of a national advisory group. This long-term study will soon include a review of Sistema Scotland across the three Big Noise programmes in Raploch, Govanhill and Torry. Education Scotland agreed to undertake a further review to contribute to the ongoing evaluation in partnership with Sistema Scotland and GCPH.

The review team visited Torry, Raploch and Govanhill in April 2017. We looked at the effectiveness of Big Noise in helping learners achieve and progress, engagement with participants, families and communities and improving outcomes through partnership working. The review was carried out in line with the current and evolving policy context around closing the poverty-related attainment gap, prevention, reducing social isolation, tackling health inequalities and empowering communities.

2. How effective is the relationship between Sistema Scotland staff and participants at helping learners achieve and progress?

Sistema Scotland musicians are highly-skilled practitioners who are passionate about securing the achievement of high quality learning outcomes in a nurturing environment. There are examples of outstanding teaching where children get regular opportunities to perform in public and develop strong technique on their chosen instrument. In the early years, staff provide mainly practical and experiential music experiences based on memorising well-chosen simple songs and rhymes. Learners exhibit strong discipline from a young age in how they respect and look after their instruments. Children and young people are encouraged to do their best. There is a strong emphasis amongst staff to create a safe environment for children with positive relationships and role models. This includes promoting healthy eating and drinking habits. Relationships are informal, supportive and appropriate to the learning environment. This is

¹ <https://www.education.gov.scot/assets/contactorganisationinspectionreports/bignoiserev270115.pdf>

helping to build trust and increase self-esteem and confidence. Learners receive high quality verbal feedback. Staff and volunteers use specific and focused praise and also encourage children and young people to praise one another constructively. In addition, a mixture of different reward systems are in place at each of the Big Noise centres to encourage and motivate children. For example, *Star of the Week Awards* and *Big Noise Heroes* each recognise and help to celebrate personal qualities such as effort and concentration. Further work is now needed to recognise and celebrate the achievements of all learners appropriate to their age and stage of development. This should include well-considered use of external accreditation such as youth awards and music examinations where appropriate.

Big Noise is helping to improve the life chances for children living in areas of multiple deprivation through the provision of free music instruction on a scale that would not normally be affordable to most families. This is opening up new inclusive opportunities and extending the range of experiences available to children in Torry, Raploch and Govanhill. A variety of additional learning opportunities are available beyond the catchment areas including educational visits, residential music trips, masterclasses, opportunities to play alongside professional musicians and visits to concerts. Some children and young people have also been supported to access additional opportunities with national music organisations. The experiences at Big Noise are also contributing to the choices young people are making in Raploch as they prepare to leave school. However, the Raploch programme is in its first year of working with school leavers so it is too early to show how much Big Noise is influencing career choices and ambitions for the majority.

There is a strong child-centred focus and staff are helping individuals and their families to overcome barriers to participation. Children experience a well-organised and well-supported range of activities including regular group work and individual tuition. Instrumental learning and singing are well-planned and Sistema Scotland has prepared well-considered music resources with helpful differentiated parts at appropriate levels to support learner progression. More able learners and those with additional needs are supported well to achieve at their level through participating in small learning breakaway groups. Additional differentiated tasks stretch their understanding and skills development. Overall, there is a need to strengthen the range and quality of assessment, monitoring and tracking procedures. This will help to ensure that the pace of learning is appropriate for all with the right level of challenge for individual learners.

Support staff make a valuable contribution to Big Noise. In each of the centres, some of the support staff work at both Sistema Scotland and the partner schools. As a result they know the children well. This is a particular strength and helps with managing behaviour to support learning. Support staff help to ensure that children stay focused, providing emotional support out with the sessions where necessary. However, support staff and volunteers are not always clear of their role at first. Further development of robust induction processes will help to strengthen this. There are a significant number of children in Govanhill and a high number in Torry for whom English is an additional language. The musical activities offered by Big Noise are helping to include and support these children and build their confidence. A high ratio of adults to children, including support staff and volunteers, also strengthens the ability of Big Noise to focus on individual needs. Each of the Big Noise centres make adjustments to the after-school programme to allow children the flexibility to participate in other activities such as sport and also make allowances for religious observance. The children we spoke with who no longer attend Big Noise either wanted more time to pursue other interests or were not engaged by the style of learning or the choice of instrument.

Children and young people are developing a variety of skills and attributes through attendance at Big Noise. Confidence and concentration were highlighted most often during this review. The in-school sessions in the early years are also contributing to children's early language development and listening skills particularly through nursery rhymes and songs. A clear structure, routine and repetition is also helping children with their self-control in managing their own behaviour. Children and young people are extending their friendship groups as a result of mixing with others from different schools and backgrounds in the after-school programme and during holiday programmes. Almost all children demonstrate a resilient mindset, most are well motivated and most can demonstrate high quality outcomes in their music performances. A significant number of children benefit from the after-school programme increasing their music skills through playing in a variety of orchestral groupings. This is also helping them learn how to work together effectively as a team. Sistema Scotland and their partner schools do not yet have a full understanding of how Big Noise is contributing to the whole learning offer in and out of school, including raising attainment. Further monitoring of the short and medium term impact on individuals and groups of children would add to knowledge of what success looks like. Analysis of these impacts should be used by Sistema Scotland as part of their improvement planning processes. The recent creation of a new post within Sistema Scotland to further develop internal evaluation is helpful.

There is a strong learning culture within Sistema Scotland and across the three Big Noise centres. Staff benefit from a wide variety of career long professional learning opportunities including an induction programme, regular training and supervision and an annual review. Protected time for this allows staff to develop their own skills and opportunities to learn together and from each other. Musicians are benefiting from specialist training around understanding and managing behaviour, attachment theory, brain development, supporting those with additional needs and mindfulness. This is helping enhance the child-centred focus of staff and their skills to support and engage individuals. Commendably staff converse together very regularly both formally and informally, sharing learning successes and helping each other to develop strong teaching methodology. For example, how children can develop strong string technique and strategies to help address the needs of individual learners. Staff also make effective use of an intranet site to share resources including learning plans, films and audio. Staff appreciate the leadership in place and recognise that this is supporting them to improve as practitioners. Sistema Scotland now needs to increase their use of quality assurance within and across Big Noise centres to ensure greater consistency of teaching and learning.

3. How effective is Sistema Scotland at engaging with participants and families and building more resilient communities?

Sistema Scotland continues to place significant emphasis on their communication and engagement with families. Events and performances in the community are helping to raise the profile of Big Noise and increase engagement with the programme. Sharing sessions help to involve parents in supporting their children's learning. In Govanhill the use of translators is helping ensure that these sessions are inclusive. Translator days and regular use of a telephone translator service are also being used effectively to communicate with families for whom English is an additional language. Baby Noise is providing an opportunity for Sistema Scotland to work with children and families from a very young age. Babies, toddlers, mothers and a few fathers are enjoying the shared experience of early music making through song,

percussion, nursery rhymes and movement. The children respond well to the stimulus and parents are repeating some of the activities at home. Adults value the opportunity to develop their own music skills, knowledge and achievement through activities such as the parent orchestra and choirs in the three Big Noise centres. The social aspect of these experiences is important. People are making new friends and mixing with different cultures, particularly in Govanhill. Families respond positively to *Take a Musician Home for Tea*. They especially value the focus on the individual child. These sessions also help the musicians to understand and empathise first-hand with children's home circumstances. Sistema Scotland now needs to make more regular and consistent use of parental views and other stakeholders to inform further development of the programme and maintain quality.

Sistema Scotland has made some progress in extending the opportunities for children and young people's views to inform the development of the Big Noise programme. For example, the recently formed *Youth Board* in Raploch consult with nominated representatives from the junior sections and advise Big Noise on changes they would like to see. These young people are taking on the role of ambassadors at events and working towards a Dynamic Youth Award. In Torry, staff have worked with children to develop a set of child led rules. Sistema Scotland should now continue to develop further opportunities for children and young people to lead their learning. They should also explore more ways for younger children to influence the content and quality of the programme.

Parents and carers are proud of their child's achievements at Big Noise. Sharing sessions, concerts and events all help to generate pride amongst families and the local community. Large scale events such as Big Noise centre launches and birthday concerts are particularly memorable. The walking lines from school to the after-school programme in Govanhill and Torry are also highly visible and help to raise the profile of Big Noise locally. There are some positive examples of Big Noise reporting progress to parents by contributing to school reports. Sistema Scotland and schools should work together to ensure that this is used more consistently across the Big Noise centres.

The Big Noise holiday programmes have been strengthened by extending the activities offered beyond music. As a result more children are engaged in the holiday programmes and are enjoying the wider range of activities. In Raploch, the recent involvement of Active Stirling in the Easter holiday programme led to a greater level of physical activity and sport delivered by qualified coaches. This is helping to support positive habits around regular physical activity. The holiday programme in Raploch has also been opened up beyond the immediate community. This gives a wider group of young people opportunities to work with Big Noise musicians.

Sistema Scotland works closely with the local community when they set up a new Big Noise centre. The setting up of Big Noise Torry included a greater focus on early community engagement and co-production building on previous approaches in Raploch and Govanhill. For example, by engaging with a wide range of community representatives and partners in the pre-launch *Operations Group*. As a result, several members of the group continue to be strong advocates for the programme. A few others have become volunteers. Staff from Big Noise now regularly attend other groups such as the Torry Community Council. This is maintaining positive relationships with community representatives and demonstrating a long term commitment to the area.

Sistema Scotland is committed to increasing the number of volunteers from the local community. They are building their capacity to address this through a new post, a volunteering

reference group and the development of a volunteering strategy. This work, and wider family and community engagement, could be further enhanced through an increased use of grassroots community development. Sistema Scotland may wish to consider how best to build their capacity to do this more effectively. For example, by drawing in outside expertise. Across each of the Big Noise centres there is scope to work with partners to develop and extend family learning. In Govanhill there is an opportunity to do this in partnership with Glasgow Life who is delivering family learning locally as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

4. How effective is Sistema Scotland at improving outcomes through partnership working?

Sistema Scotland and Big Noise benefit greatly from a wide range of supporters who proudly advocate on their behalf. For example, the strategic partners in Govanhill meet quarterly to review plans, look at financial data and provide support and advice moving forward. Partners recognise the professionalism of staff and the open, responsive and solution-focused approach they adopt, always looking for ways to improve. This is helping to overcome challenges such as the range of cultural differences in Govanhill. The strong partnership between Big Noise Torry and Aberdeen City Council is supported by a clear vision for social change and commitment from elected members. This is also reflected in the funding being sourced from a central budget and reporting to full council meetings.

Sistema Scotland continues to develop and foster positive relationships with children, families and communities. Almost all educational establishments across the three Big Noise communities have very strong and productive relationships with Sistema Scotland. Schools recognise and appreciate the positive contribution of Big Noise to the lives of children, families and communities. Big Noise together with schools and other partners work effectively to overcome practical challenges such as finding enough space for a programme on this scale. There is a real willingness to succeed and to realise the potential long-term benefits for learners. Sistema Scotland should build on this to engage more fully and formally with schools in joint planning and evaluation. There is scope to capitalise on the current policy focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. It is important that schools work closely in partnership with Sistema Scotland to recognise and realise their combined strengths. *Curriculum for Excellence*, the *Scottish Attainment Challenge* and the *National Improvement Framework* together provide a helpful backdrop to support a shared endeavour. There may also be opportunities to link more closely with the *Developing the Young Workforce* agenda and employability partners to further support young people in being able to pursue a wider variety of careers.

A range of partners are sharing their skills, knowledge and expertise with Sistema Scotland. In some instances, such as with national music organisations, this is a two-way exchange of professional learning and support. Children have benefited from working with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra where they experience playing alongside professional players and being inspired through hearing them perform in concert. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is providing valuable work experience opportunities where children learn about careers in music and other associated careers. When some children have displayed challenging behaviour at Big Noise, staff have liaised effectively with teaching staff from the primary schools to share strategies that work with individual children to help them focus on their learning. Across the three centres the work of Big Noise is also well-supported by social workers, health professionals and educational psychologists as appropriate. In Raploch, Sistema Scotland has

recently begun to strengthen its partnership working with local organisations through the *Community Team Network* and regular attendance at *Community Campus Providers* meetings. In Govanhill, Sistema Scotland has worked with the Instrumental Music Service to ensure that they offer a complementary programme to schools. Outreach music sessions at a local community café are also helping to build relationships with other community organisations and this is extending local knowledge of Big Noise opportunities. There is a willingness from community organisations to work with Big Noise to further develop their work with adults and their involvement in musical opportunities. Sistema Scotland should continue to develop and foster its partnership working at a local level. This should include closer collaboration with other organisations working towards similar outcomes. Where appropriate this should also include joint decision-making.

During this review we found the following key strengths.

- The quality and commitment of staff to providing child-centred experiences that have the potential to transform lives.
- Strong and effective learning in the early years.
- Immersive and inclusive music-based opportunities and experiences.
- The sense of pride shown by children, young people, parents, families and other stakeholders.

As part of this review we discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to implement the key recommendations in the 2015 report with an increased focus on:
 - tracking and monitoring progress;
 - community development; and
 - joint planning and evaluation.

5. What happens at the end of the review?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that Sistema Scotland and partners can build on and take forward the key recommendations of this report. We will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this review.

Simon Ross
HM Inspector
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Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330
E enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk

www.education.gov.scot

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