

Drum Works: Warren School Autumn Evaluation December 2021

Introduction & context

This evaluation is based upon group discussions with participants in years 8-11 and interviews with teachers (Head of Music, Ms Briner and Head teacher, Ms Ashe) during a visit to Warren school in December 2021. Participants were also asked to complete a structured questionnaire, the results of which have also been used.

Whilst the discussions did not deliberately focus on a specific period of time, in practice they reflected the preceding 18 months, which had been turbulent. In summary:

- In spring 2020, Drum Works was forced to close operations in all schools: online sessions were delivered via Zoom for some participants (run independently by Drum Works, as Warren was not a school that delivered live online teaching during lockdown). Participants could only drum on tabletops using whatever replacements for sticks they could find.
- Autumn/winter 2020/21 saw a phased return to school. Drum Works recommenced with participants in school, but the Drum Works leaders joined via Zoom on a screen (as no visitors were allowed in school). Bubbles prevented Year groups from mixing (a typical feature of Drum Works sessions).
- In spring 2021, Drum Works leaders returned to Warren to deliver sessions – but bubbles still prevented mixing and forced the school to focus Drum Works on a single year group considered most likely to gain the most (Year 10).
- September 2021 saw a return to pre-pandemic delivery – allowing full face-to-face delivery and the mixing of year groups. This evaluation was completed 3 months into this new phase, assessing a diverse mix of experienced and very new members.

Key themes

1. It's fun

At its simplest, all participants found Drum Works fun (**average score of 4.8 out of 5** to the question '**How much to you enjoy taking part in Drum Works?**' from our questionnaire).

One year 9 participant commented that *"when I know I've got Drum Works at school, it makes the day much better"*. During lockdown, many participants commented that they found it hard being at home and missed all aspects of school – but especially Drum Works.

2. Engagement, commitment & focus

Linked to this enjoyment, the participants expressed a very strong sense of commitment. In response to the question **"How committed are you to Drum Works?"** the **average score was 4.7 out of 5** (including pupils who had only been introduced to Drum Works in the preceding weeks).

The Head of Music commented on the engagement and focus that Drum Works typically achieves. She recalled a recent situation in which an English teacher at the school had observed high levels of concentration and focus achieved by a small group of pupils in their first ever Drum Works session, that she had never seen achieved by any other school activity. It surprised her - and this led to a useful discussion about how some of the characteristics of Drum Works 'teaching' might be transferred to more traditional teaching in the school.

Whilst Drum Works returned to Warren in September 2021, Year 11 pupils are currently not allowed to take part during scheduled lesson time (due to the amount of learning missed). Despite this, Year 11 participation has been exceptionally high, joining sessions run in their lunchtimes and after school.

The Head of Music reflected that many pupils (of all Years) were willing to give their personal time to Drum Works for rehearsals and concerts and these were often pupils that had never previously committed to anything 'above and beyond' (whether academic or extra-curricular). This sometimes extended to their families also – with family members attending performances and events that had never previously engaged in school or community events.

All participants that had been involved in Drum Works before the pandemic commented on how much they missed it, with many feeling "sad". One boy commenting that "it was very much a part of me". When he could hear Year 10s drumming again in the school building but knew he couldn't take part, he was "proper moody about it". Participants expressed feeling an obligation to their Drum Works colleagues, creating a commitment to attendance which they didn't feel for normal school lessons.

3. Commitment leading to attendance

The most measurable outcome of Drum Works cited by the Head teacher at Warren was improved attendance. Participants are selected partly due to disaffection or disengagement with traditional school activities and low attendance records (or at risk of exclusion). School attendance rates of participants were seen to improve significantly on Thursdays – the day that Drum Works sessions are held at Warren. For some, this has fed into improved overall engagement and attendance.

Warren's involvement with Drum Works began back in 2014 and the impact upon participants was formally evaluated by Birmingham University in the first 4 years (see separate study). In this assessment, Drum Works was identified as a key factor in keeping some teenagers in school, who would otherwise have been excluded.

Drum Works allows the Head teacher to offer some of her most challenging students "a sense of achievement and unity...something to make them feel special, which feeds into their overall experience of school".

4. Collaborative, accessible & non-judgemental

Participants talked about some of the reasons why they found Drum Works fun and engaging. Some themes were mentioned consistently, often cited as a contrast to more traditional 'lessons.

Working together, collaboratively, to solve problems and compose new beats was regularly mentioned as an approach they didn't experience in 'normal' lessons. *"Because we all share the same passion..."* reflected one participant *"there's no type of discrimination...we're all equal"*. The head of music commented that students regularly talk about the collaborative approach and how they have successfully used this experience outside of Drum Works – especially in building resilience to overcome problems and obstacles by talking problems through and finding solutions as a team.

Drum Works was also appreciated as a place where participants were not marked or judged – with one participant describing it as a place where *"they don't put you down...and they're really supportive"*. A Year 11 participant reflected that in school *"our behaviour is regulated to how they want us to be"*, whereas Drum Works was *"how we feel comfortable....or how we are"*.

When asked in our questionnaire **"How welcome do you feel at Drum Works"**, the **average score was 4.1**, with only one pupil giving a score below 4 out of 5.

Whilst participants didn't use language such as 'accessible', they did refer to Drum Works as being *"easy to get into"*. New joiners to Drum Works are able to contribute almost immediately, avoiding lengthy periods of induction.

5. Head space & wellbeing

Many of the participants talked about Drum Works taking them away from their regular worries at school, giving them a complete mental break. Players need to focus on remembering their individual beats, but must also listen to others around them and to the session leader, to ensure they are working effectively as a team. This total focus forces other considerations to be left behind.

A Year 9 participant wrote in his questionnaire comments *"I want to say a big thanks to Sam and JT because I have been struggling at school a lot, but this puts my mind away from it, so big thanks"*

Another participant, self-declared as struggling with ADHD, explained that his mind is constantly wanting to run at a faster pace, but the total focus required by Drum Works allows him to *"slow down"* and *"keep pace"*. Another reflected that Drum Works allowed him to *"leave all the bad stuff that's happening behind"*. A year 11 drummer described Drum Works as a *"safe haven"* in which they can enjoy *"a sense of freedom"* which they don't experience in traditional lessons.

In our questionnaire, we asked participants **“To what extent has Drum Works had an impact on your self-confidence?”**. The **average score was only 3.4** – with a broad range of responses from 1 out of 5, to 5 out of 5. This reflected the group conversation where some participants identified with improved self-confidence, whilst others felt they brought plenty of confidence to Drum Works – but had gained in other areas, most notably around achieving a mental ‘break’.

6. Making connections, Community & Pride

One Year 9 participant commented that *“It’s like a family....a kind of Community”*. Most participants agreed that they had developed friendships via Drum Works that would not have happened otherwise – especially in encouraging pupils in different year groups to work together (which is a key part of all Drum Works sessions). Recognition by, and working with, older year groups was especially valued by the younger teenagers. The collaborative nature of Drum Works was seen as critical to building these connections, with one participant noting that there is *“no part of Drum Works where you can be on your own”*.

In our questionnaire, we asked **“How much do you feel a sense of belonging to the Drum Works community?”**. The **average score was 4** – with a few respondents giving scores of 2 and 3. Whilst this might at first appear concerning, it should be noted that a number of pupils in this sample had only begun working with Drum Works 2-3 weeks earlier (which is very soon to be expressing a full sense of community).

The head teacher reflected that the Drum Works community offers some of her pupils a unique sense of pride. Encouraged by successful playground performances to the whole school, pupils would start asking teachers if they could be picked for Drum Works. Membership is considered ‘cool’ – giving participants a sense of peer respect that they lack in other aspects of school life.

The head of music also noted the importance of teacher recognition. Participants often receive recognition and praise from teachers of more traditional academic subjects that have watched Drum Works performances and seen their pupils in a completely new and positive light. This can sometimes build bridges and improve ‘difficult’ pupil-teacher relationships.

7. Creative and Transferable skills

Participants were asked **“How much do you think your musical and creative skills have improved through Drum Works?”** with **4 out of 5** being the most popular score. The teaching staff interviewed endorsed the impact upon music creativity, but placed even greater emphasis on wider and transferable skills.

One participant explained how he regularly played the beats from Drum Works, simply using his fingers on a desk, as a way of concentrating *“in situations where you’re stressed out”* as a way of helping him to concentrate, adding that *“I do drift off quite a bit”*

The head of music commented that Drum Works requires participants to memorise a large number of complex beats – developing general memory and pattern-detection skills. Combined with the lessons of collaborative working (summarised above), she strongly believes Drum Works has delivered beyond music and created a useful set of transferable skills that have benefitted participants in their traditional school subjects and in life more broadly.

Warren has completed a number of staff training sessions with Drum Works, which have given staff an insight into the methodologies used and allowed teachers to consider how these skills might be transferred.

The head of music commented that Drum Works has created pathways and wider horizons for some pupils, who have continued to participate in Drum Works senior bands years after leaving school. These were not pupils who would otherwise have participated in group activities, or have travelled into central London on a regular basis.

Further observations from the teaching staff

The teaching staff interviewed commented that Drum Works had achieved the best possible outcomes within the constraints of national school lockdown restrictions. For some pupils, having Drum Works taken from them impacted their overall trust in school. However, the limitations were unavoidable, and the impact has been temporary in nature – with confidence being re-built in recent months.

The head of music reflected on the overall impact of Drum Works on Warren as a school. When the school first won its bid for Drum Works, with the benefit of professional musicians as tutors, it made the whole school *“feel special and created a sense of pride”*. The benefits of Drum Works have been *“far-reaching and well beyond music...”* extending to *“academic, social, mental health and well-being essential life-tools...that are all involved in learning through the Drum Works programme. It gives a boost to the staff. It gives a boost to the students, and it’s really good fun.”*

Andy Hawkins

December 2021

Appendix A

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire of 6 questions (see below) giving a score between 1 (not at all) to 5 (very). The table below shows

- The average score given
- The median – or most popular – score given
- The standard deviation of scores – showing the spread or ‘range’ of scores around the average. In general, this is very low (with all participants giving similar responses). Only in response to the question of self-confidence did participants show very differing opinions

Participant	How much do you enjoy taking part in Drum Works?	How welcome do you feel at Drum Works?	How much do you think your musical and creative skills have improved through Drum Works?	To what extent has Drum Works had an impact on your self-confidence?	How committed are you to Drum Works?	How much do you feel a sense of belonging to the Drum Works community?
Average	4.8125	4.125	4.25	3.375	4.6875	4.0625
Median	5	4	4	3	5	4
Std Deviation	0.4	0.5	0.8	1.3	0.5	0.9