

Evaluation by Nell Farrally (Evaluation and Research Consultant)

Report completed April 2025

## Evaluating Aurora Classroom

Aurora Orchestra is a professional UK-based chamber orchestra with a reputation for innovation in orchestral music performance. In addition to the orchestra's live programme, a Creative Learning Programme provides concerts and workshops for families, schools and young people; CPD for teachers; and Aurora Classroom – an online learning platform for schools, launched in 2022. In 2024, Aurora Orchestra commissioned an evaluation of Aurora Classroom to deepen their understanding of how teachers were using the



resources and the impact on their teaching and children's learning. The evaluation methods were interviews with seven selected educators who had used Aurora Classroom in their work, which were used to create case studies. Each case study explored educators' perspectives on the intended outcomes of Aurora Classroom for children, schools and the school workforce; how Aurora Classroom is used in practice; what is valuable or important to educators about the resources; and what key learning points the Aurora team should consider in further developing the programme. The intended outcomes of Aurora Classroom were articulated as part of the evaluation process:

### Outcomes for children

- 1) Greater engagement in music lessons due to Aurora Classroom.
- 2) Strengthened musical understanding and confidence in areas such as singing, reading music notation (e.g. graphic score, rhythm, pitch), composing and/or improvising, listening and communicating about music.

### Outcomes for schools and school workforce

- 1) Increased access to high-quality music education resources.
- 2) Strengthened pedagogy in music for teachers (with particular focus on generalist teachers improving their confidence in teaching music).

This document is a short summary of a longer evaluation report which the Aurora Classroom creative team are using to develop the resources further.

*"When I first saw the website, I was like, oh my... why do teachers not know [about this resource]? Why is this not in every mainstream school? This is the quality stuff that's needed."*  
(Case Study 5 – SEND music educator)

## Findings of the evaluation

Amongst the case studies, there were two primary reasons why schools chose to use Aurora Classroom initially: firstly, to specifically improve the quality of music teaching in their school; and secondly, because it was offered at no cost and educators were keen to explore an additional resource. After their first encounter, all those who contributed to a case study were convinced of Aurora Classroom's value from their direct experience of utilising it in their work.

### The difference Aurora Classroom makes

Regarding the intended outcomes, all those who contributed to the case studies were unequivocal that Aurora Classroom affected greater engagement in music lessons for children.

#### Greater engagement for children:

*"Greater engagement, 100% I'd say. I think the way they [Aurora] present the videos makes the children really excited and want to join in, because they make it really fun and really interactive, and they really think about the song choices they use and (...) the engagement with the instruments."*

(Case Study 3 – music subject lead)

*"You can see that they are more engaged in it [the music lesson], because they're actually wanting to share their ideas and explain what it is that they've learnt."*

(Case Study 4 – Year 4 teacher)

Similarly, Aurora Classroom strengthened children's musical understanding and confidence, although there were some differences between the case studies regarding which areas of musical understanding were developed. There was less impact on singing for students in a special school due to students' communication differences and less impact on notation learning due to their challenges with recall. One primary school reported less impact on singing as singing was already strong in the school and they used Aurora Classroom less for composing than other areas of music making. However, across all the case studies, there was a strong sense that Aurora Classroom benefited children's learning.

#### Strengthening children's musical understanding and confidence:

*"We have a big push on musical dimensions, making sure that when our children leave in Year 6, they've got quite a good knowledge ready for secondary. I think we can confidently say that Aurora (...) definitely strengthens musical understanding. Because we wouldn't use a scheme if it didn't."*

(Case Study 3 – music subject lead)

*"Singing – would absolutely say that it's strengthened their confidence in it, and hopefully their understanding, because trying to get them to sing on beat was quite hard, and then they all of a sudden – got it, and it was, oh, you're not singing too quickly anymore."*

(Case Study 6 – Year 5 teacher)

*“We were using graphic scores just before half term and getting the children to understand different ways that they could replicate the dynamics within the music. And all of the children were able to achieve that because I think it was something that they could see happening within the video first, and then they knew how to replicate that for themselves when we completed the activity using a slightly different piece of music. I thought it was brilliant and really stood out for me.”*

(Case Study 2 – music subject lead and Year 2 teacher)

All those who contributed to the case studies were of the view that increased access to high-quality music education resources was achieved by Aurora Classroom, and specifically that the resources were high-quality. The quality of Aurora Classroom was compared favourably to other digital video-based music education schemes of work educators had experience of, with other resources described as outdated, arbitrary, repetitive and too simple for music specialists. Aurora Classroom offered an alternative to these well-established resources which were used in some of the case study schools, thereby increasing access to high-quality music education resources.

Increased access to high-quality music education resources:

*“With the Aurora scheme, it's much more centred around the music and built out from there. (...) The quality... it felt like depth of thought and intention had gone behind what was produced, rather than, ‘oh my goodness, we've got so many of these to make, let's just get them out as quickly as possible’, which felt a bit more how [name of other resource] was aimed.”*

(Case Study 7 – music charity learning and participation manager)

*“Definitely, the teachers that have used it have loved it. They've said how useful is, how much it saves their time. Yeah, they've really liked it.”*

(Case Study 1 – special school KS4 teacher and music subject specialist)

The fourth outcome of strengthened pedagogy in music for teachers was also achieved for the case study educators, with most also observing increased pedagogical knowledge amongst colleagues. Music subject specialists and generalist teachers alike spoke of Aurora Classroom helping to develop pedagogical knowledge.

Strengthened pedagogy in music for teachers:

*“I think we feel more confident teaching those lessons now because we have more of an understanding as to what the children need to gain from it. (...) Because I think of a lot of teachers that teach music in this school probably haven't got a music background, and they haven't taught music before. So having Aurora has just been really helpful because it just gives them a bit of structure on how the lessons should go and what the outcomes should be.”*

(Case Study 4 – Year 4 teacher)

*“And the pedagogy, I'd say, is massive (...) even though we've got quite a good confidence and knowledge behind us. But also, we would push our generalists to use Aurora, knowing that actually it would boost the music in school.”*

(Case Study 3 – music subject lead)

Factors that the case study contributors identified that indicate the high-quality of the resources and why Aurora Classroom achieves the intended outcomes are:

- The comprehensiveness of the resources and the wealth of content.
- The clear structuring of the schemes of work.
- How the content is differentiated for children.
- An inherent flexibility that makes it easy to use the videos or to teach the content in teachers' own way.
- Relevant to both music specialists and generalist classroom teachers.
- A high level of care and thought in the creation of the resources.
- A focus on learning musical skills, with clear intentions about what was to be learnt and why.

### Flexibility in how teachers use Aurora Classroom

Amongst those who contributed to the case studies, there was very little need for teachers to adapt the resources, except for the usual differentiation teachers make for their students to accommodate different learning levels and additional educational needs. Even within a special school, the addition of sensory learning aids did not appear to be anything beyond the usual accommodations teachers make to tailor their teaching to individual needs.



The greatest difference in how music specialist and generalist classroom teachers use Aurora Classroom is that music specialists appear to use the resources more flexibly, picking and choosing which of the resources they use – described as “dipping in and out” – whereas generalist teachers more closely follow the schemes of work and lesson plans.

### What teachers value about Aurora Classroom

There were several aspects of Aurora Classroom that educators valued:

- The availability of a resource that focuses on orchestral instruments, as other resources on offer often tend to be focused on singing.
- Some also valued having a resource that focuses on teaching about classical music, which they felt was engaging for children when done with high-quality resources.
- Raising the quality of music resources and music teaching in a way that aligned to the music curriculum.
- Meeting the needs of both music specialist and generalist teachers.

## Key learning and how Aurora Classroom could develop

Learners in special schools are often working at national curriculum levels significantly below their chronological age. An educator working in a secondary-age special school felt that the content and structure of Aurora Classroom units intended for Key Stage 1 were appropriate for their students' learning levels, however the themes of some Key Stage 1 units (specifically The Magical Toy Box) were not age-appropriate for secondary-age students. This teacher's view reflects feedback the Aurora Classroom team received prior to the evaluation, and a subsequent unit, Discover Beethoven, was developed with this in mind. The evaluation suggested that when creating new units, how the content fits with young people's cultural interests common for their age is considered, in addition to how it aligns to their learning levels. Additionally, how information about the suitability of units for students with additional learning needs is presented within the Aurora Classroom resources could be reviewed and given ongoing consideration.

Many of those who contributed to the case studies wished for more units so that Aurora Classroom could be used throughout the school in each year group. There is an understanding that as a resource created by an orchestra, it is natural that there is a focus on orchestral instruments and Western classical music. However, the high regard teachers have for Aurora Classroom means they would like Aurora Classroom to branch out into other styles of music and expand provision to include schemes of work for Whole Class Instrumental Tuition. The Aurora Classroom team could consider expanding the resources in these ways, or there could remain a focus on the current format of units and capitalising on Aurora Orchestra's specialisms.

## Conclusions of the evaluation

The evaluation concludes that Aurora Classroom is a highly valued resource that significantly helps educators in teaching music and raises the quality of music teaching and learning. All the intended outcomes for children, schools and educators were strongly achieved for those who contributed to the case studies. The comprehensiveness and flexibility of Aurora Classroom, and its utility for both music specialist and generalist classroom teachers, are reasons why educators value the resources.



## Contact

Evaluation commissioned by Aurora Orchestra [www.auroraorchestra.com](http://www.auroraorchestra.com) regarding their Creative Learning programme, Aurora Classroom [www.auroraclassroom.co.uk](http://www.auroraclassroom.co.uk)  
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