



# Anthem Aspire: Annual Review 2025-26

Confidence changes everything





# About Anthem Aspire

Anthem Aspire is a trust-wide commitment to ensuring that every young person across Anthem Schools Trust, regardless of background, need or circumstance, can access the kinds of opportunities that build confidence, broaden horizons and raise aspiration.

Anthem Schools Trust serves almost 8,000 children and young people across the East Midlands, London and the Thames Valley, including at least 2,500 from some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. Anthem Aspire exists to level the playing field for these students by providing experiences that many of their peers access naturally through family resources, networks and cultural capital.

The programme is rooted in a simple truth: potential is universal, but opportunity is not. For example, two Year 10 students from the same school and sitting together in class, may be equally bright and capable, yet their access to music, culture, outdoor learning, travel, networks and confidence building experiences can differ dramatically. For many Anthem students, barriers linked to disadvantage, SEND, EAL, family circumstances or limited access to wider experiences quietly shape what they believe is possible. Anthem Aspire was created to change that, to give underserved young people the courage, resilience and self-belief that help them step forward rather than step back.

Nationally, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to access music, sport, cultural venues, outdoor adventure or aspirational spaces. They are less likely to build the networks that open doors and less likely to progress to higher education or skilled employment. Anthem Aspire addresses this gap through three core strands designed to have maximum impact on confidence, identity and aspiration.

## Music Without Limits

Partnerships with Lincoln Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral, the London Symphony Orchestra, Garsington Opera and others give students access to world-class music and inspirational teaching. Experiences such as hearing the LSO at the Barbican have already transformed students' perceptions of themselves and their futures. Through projects like Anthem for Anthem with Gareth Malone, students learn that their voices matter and belong on the biggest stages.

## Exploring the Outdoors

In partnership with the Outward Bound Trust, students travel to the Scottish Highlands, Lake District and Snowdonia, discovering resilience, teamwork and courage. Younger children experience outdoor learning through Wild in the Woods, sparking curiosity and confidence. For many, these trips mark the first time they see themselves as leaders.

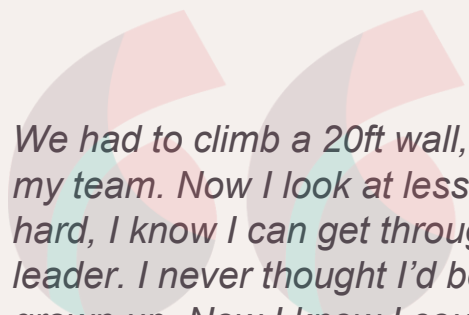
## Self-Expression and Voice

Through First Story and the English Speaking Union, students work with published authors, perform Shakespeare, develop oracy and spend time at Cambridge University. These opportunities build confidence, communication skills and a sense of belonging in academic and cultural spaces.



These experiences are not luxuries; they are foundations of identity, aspiration and self-belief. Early impact shows students developing confidence, stronger voice, resilience and a broader sense of what their futures might hold. Anthem Aspire is already connecting students across a geographically diverse Trust, creating shared experiences that strengthen collective identity.

The programme's purpose is clear, to ensure background does not determine access to life changing opportunities. With continued support, Anthem Aspire will keep opening doors many children have never walked through and may never walk through without it.



*We had to climb a 20ft wall, and the only way to do it was with my team. Now I look at lessons the same way. Even when it's hard, I know I can get through it. They told me I was a natural leader. I never thought I'd be someone like that. It made me feel grown up. Now I know I could lead a group in class.*

ELLIS, YEAR 9



# Programme overview and impact

## Music Without Limits

Music Without Limits is designed as an inclusive, skills-based strategy to overcome financial barriers to music education so that all young people, regardless of financial position, can experience high-quality music provision. This year's programme has included:

- ▶ The launch of an instrument donation scheme.
- ▶ Songwriting workshops and staff CPD with Gareth Malone OBE.
- ▶ The Anthem for Anthem songwriting competition.
- ▶ The Music Everywhere London Symphony Orchestra concert offer for secondary schools, and choral projects linked to St Paul's Cathedral and Lincoln Cathedral.

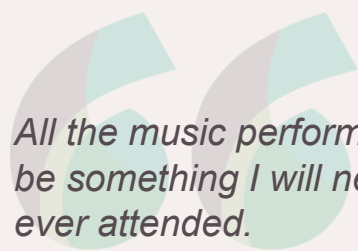
Through Music Without Limits, **120 Pupil Premium Key Stage 3 students** from all four Anthem secondary schools attended a live performance by the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) at the Barbican, where they were introduced to orchestral instruments and repertoire. Students also took part in a three-part canon, developed listening skills and engaged with musical terminology through an active learning approach led by LSO animator Rachel Leach.

The **Anthem for Anthem** songwriting work has brought students together across schools to collaborate, compose and perform, with workshops supported by Gareth Malone OBE. Students described the value of working with others, sharing ideas and seeing the talents of peers from different schools.

Staff also took part in **songwriting CPD**, with Gareth Malone working directly with teachers across Northern and Southern regions to build confidence, creativity and practical strategies for singing and songwriting in the classroom.



## Impact: Creativity, culture and aspiration



*All the music performed was stirring and phenomenal, and it will be something I will never forget. It is one of the best things I have ever attended.*

QUEENSBURY ACADEMY STUDENT, YEAR 7

Student feedback tells us that Music Without Limits has had an impact on their creativity, cultural awareness and aspirations. Students developed greater musical knowledge, vocabulary and listening skills through exposure to professional performance, while the London Symphony Orchestra visit also encouraged interest in classical music, future concerts and possible musical careers. This suggests that the programme is broadening students' cultural capital and helping them see music as something they can actively engage with beyond school.

The songwriting workshops also created strong outcomes in confidence, collaboration and self-expression. Students worked across schools, shared ideas, listened to others and created music collectively, helping them to recognise their own talents as well as the talents of their peers.

One student, Liam, said: "I've learnt how to write with other people and incorporate their ideas into my ideas as well." Another student, Lucas, said, "It was very impressive to work with other people as well and see other people's talents." These comments show that students were learning much more than songwriting; they were learning how to collaborate, listen, compromise, appreciate others and create something collectively.

For one student with additional needs and significant anxiety, engagement in music became transformational. What began as a small step, joining a school choir, quickly revealed a remarkable talent and a renewed sense of purpose. Attending school became something to look forward to, not a challenge to overcome. Music provided more than enjoyment; it created a space where this student felt safe, valued and proud of their strengths. They said: "You can feel power through singing and challenge yourself... when I have choir it makes me feel happy."

The impact is also becoming more sustainable through staff development and future access to tuition and instruments. Staff CPD with Gareth Malone OBE helped teachers build confidence and practical strategies for singing and songwriting, meaning the benefits can be carried back into classrooms. Feedback from staff has also been highly positive.

In 2026-27 Music Without Limits is moving towards an instrument loan scheme, with donated instruments including a French horn, tuba, violin, clarinet and oboe, and with plans for fully funded tuition in singing, drums, voice, guitar, piano and other instruments across secondary schools.



## Exploring the Outdoors with Outward Bound

Outward Bound is an outdoor learning experience designed to take young people beyond the classroom and into challenging natural environments where they can discover what they are capable of. The Outward Bound Trust uses outdoor adventure to help young people realise their potential through learning, challenge and discovery, with residential experiences designed to build confidence, courage and connection.

Across the Outward Bound residential, 151 students from nine Anthem schools took part. Of these, 90 students were eligible for Pupil Premium, meaning that 60% of those attending were Pupil Premium students. For some, this was the first time they had stayed away from home or travelled outside their local area.

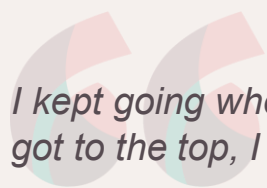
The residential gave students the chance to step away from familiar routines, spend time in a completely different environment and experience the outdoors in a way that may not otherwise have been available to them. Activities included gorge walking, canoeing, rowing, rock climbing and mountain climbing, giving students opportunities to test themselves physically, work alongside others and experience the pride that comes from persevering through something difficult.

The purpose of these residential was not only to provide adventure, but to create meaningful opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery. Students developed greater resilience, learned to trust and support others, discovered strengths they had not previously recognised, and began to see themselves as leaders.

Importantly, these are not just skills for the residential itself; they are skills that students take back into the classroom and wider school environment, helping them to approach learning with greater confidence, engage more positively with their peers, and contribute more effectively to school life.



## Impact: Resilience, independence and courage



*I kept going when it got difficult climbing the mountain. When I got to the top, I felt proud.*

**BOSTON WEST ACADEMY STUDENT, YEAR 6**

Outward Bound has had a particularly strong impact on resilience, courage and independence. Students were challenged to step outside their comfort zones, work through difficulty, trust others and manage unfamiliar environments.

This is particularly impactful when we consider the complexities of school cohorts. Of the 37 children who attended from Benjamin Adlard Primary School and Boston West Academy, for example:

- ▶ More than 21 were eligible for Pupil Premium.
- ▶ There were 15 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- ▶ There were five with English as an Additional Language.

Alongside these children, there was also a young carer, a student who had recovered from leukaemia, and a student with Type 1 diabetes.

Targeting students who face challenges, or have complex needs, matters. The programme is helping to remove barriers linked to cost, confidence, additional need, health, geography and previous experience.

Students from all schools that took part repeatedly described doing things they had not believed they could do. For many, that sense of 'I did it' is the outcome that stays. These experiences matter because they create physical, emotional and social reference points that students can carry back into school. When a student has climbed a mountain, walked up a gorge or tried an activity they were nervous about, they have a real example of perseverance to draw on when they face future challenges.

Boston West students described climbing mountains, gorge walking, canoeing and learning to persevere. One said: "My best achievement was climbing a mountain. I can't believe I did it!" Another said: "I kept going when it got difficult climbing the mountain. When I got to the top, I felt proud." A Year 10 student from The Deepings said: "This is the first in my life someone told me I could be a leader."

Students taking part in Outward Bound challenges also described feeling more able to speak to others, to persevere when things feel difficult, and to trust in their own resilience. As one student said: "I feel more comfortable to talk to other people which I didn't do before." Another child reflected: "I think I am a bit more resilient now... I am not as quick to give up."

These are not small changes, they are fundamental shifts in mindset that influence how students approach school, relationships and life beyond the classroom.



## Self-Expression and Voice: English Speaking Union

This year's English Speaking Union (ESU) workshops brought Anthem Aspire's oracy strand to life, giving students a meaningful opportunity to develop their confidence in speaking, listening, debating and presenting.

Held at Dartmouth House, the ESU's historic headquarters in Mayfair, London, the workshops involved students from Oxford Spires Academy, Queensbury Academy, The Deepings School, Lincoln Carlton Academy, Benjamin Adlard Primary School and Gladstone Park Primary Academy, placing them in an inspiring setting where their voices, views and ideas were encouraged and valued.

The ESU's funding of £2,500 towards travel for Lincolnshire schools was particularly important, as it helped remove a practical barrier that may otherwise have prevented some students from accessing the experience.

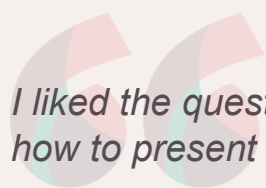
During the workshops, students developed key debating and public speaking skills, including how to structure an opinion, use gesture, project their voices and present their ideas with greater confidence.

Teachers reported that the sessions built effectively on the oracy curriculum already being delivered in school, while also giving students the chance to apply those skills in a new and memorable context.

*A Year 5 student from Benjamin Adlard Primary School demonstrated the immediate impact of the public speaking workshop by putting her learning into practice the very next day.*



## Impact: Realising that voice matters



*I liked the questions and I found it fun that people were choosing how to present their opinion.*

**QUEENSBURY ACADEMY STUDENT, YEAR 7**

Feedback from schools shows that students developed valuable communication and public speaking skills through the ESU workshops, including using gesture effectively and projecting their voices. Teachers also reported that the sessions complemented and reinforced the oracy curriculum delivered in school.

A Year 5 student from Benjamin Adlard Primary School demonstrated the immediate impact of the workshop by putting her learning into practice the very next day. After attending the session, she spoke in front of the whole school during assembly to share what she had learned. For many students, addressing such a large audience can feel daunting, but she delivered her presentation with confidence and clarity, drawing on techniques gained during the workshop. Her experience highlights how these sessions help students apply public speaking skills in real situations and recognise that their voice can be heard and valued.

Thirty Year 5 students from Lincoln Carlton Academy took part in an ESU debating workshop designed to strengthen public speaking, reasoning and self-confidence. Through a range of activities, students were encouraged to express their opinions, justify their views, use body language effectively and collaborate with their peers.

The impact was evident back in school, where staff observed students transferring these skills into the classroom by giving more developed answers, listening more attentively and challenging ideas with greater confidence. Student feedback also showed an understanding of how these skills could support them both academically and in later life, with one student reflecting that the workshop helped them ‘speak up and use our voice’.

Student feedback from Queensbury Academy further illustrates the confidence-building impact of the workshops. One Year 7 student said: “It was very interesting and it helped me to understand about key debating terms.” Another commented: “I liked the questions and I found it fun that people were choosing how to present their opinion.”

Students from The Deepings also reported feeling more confident, supported and willing to contribute in public settings. They valued learning about active listening and considering different perspectives, as well as the broader themes of equality, respect and ensuring every voice is heard.

This is the lasting impact of oracy enrichment. Students leave with more than a positive workshop experience; they return with greater confidence, stronger communication skills, greater understanding that opinions can be formed, shared, challenged and respected – and a belief that their own voice matters.



# Financing Anthem Aspire

The greatest challenge for Anthem Aspire is financial sustainability. The programme has already demonstrated the difference that can be made when financial barriers are removed – however, sustaining this work requires significant ongoing investment.

In the current climate, Anthem must raise the funds itself to ensure these opportunities can continue and remain accessible to the students who benefit from them most.

This is particularly important because many Anthem schools serve communities where contextual challenges are above national averages; the cost of participation cannot simply be passed on to families. Doing so would risk creating a divide between those who can afford to take part and those who cannot, which would undermine the central purpose of Anthem Aspire.

## Funds raised 2025-26

Anthem Aspire has received valuable support through donations, fundraising and supplier contributions, with recorded income of approximately **£35,000**. We are extremely grateful for the generous and ongoing support of Pearson Education, Zen Educate, Impact Food Group and the English Speaking Union.

Two trust-level fundraising events were launched this year, which have been very successful in increasing awareness of and engagement with Anthem Aspire:

- ▶ An evening on 2 June to shine a light on the difference Anthem Aspire is already making, and on what more could be possible with the backing of a committed community of supporters. The event was well received and created some useful networking opportunities with potential sponsors.
- ▶ *One Anthem, Many Stories* on 3 July. Children and adults across Anthem were encouraged to wear one item that reflects who they are – whether that's their heritage, hobbies, values, or personal identity. Alongside the celebration, we raised funds for the Anthem Aspire Fund by inviting voluntary donations from those who were able to contribute.

We have also benefitted from the efforts of these individual fundraisers, who collectively raised around £10,000:

- ▶ Elma Lawson, Executive Director of Education, who ran the Lake Annecy marathon in April.
- ▶ Kay Pluckwell, a colleague from Benjamin Adlard Primary School, who ran the Gainsborough marathon in May.
- ▶ Anthem Trustee Troels Henriksen, who cycled across South Africa on a Brompton bike in June.





## Why sponsorship matters now

Anthem Aspire has already changed the way students see themselves. It has helped students stand and speak, sing and perform, climb and persevere, collaborate and lead. It has given students memories that will last far beyond the school day and skills that will support them far beyond the classroom. But this work cannot be sustained by ambition alone. It requires sponsorship, partnership and financial backing from organisations and individuals who believe that opportunity should not depend on postcode, income, confidence, additional need or family circumstance.

The evidence from this year is clear. A funded concert visit can open a student's eyes to classical music and future cultural participation. A funded outdoor residential can help a student realise they are braver and more resilient than they thought. A funded music lesson can help a student with SEND feel calm, happy and successful. A funded public speaking workshop can help a student understand that their opinion matters and that their voice deserves to be heard. With the right sponsorship, Anthem Aspire can continue to remove barriers, reach the students who need it most and offer life-changing opportunities across all Anthem schools.

**We are now seeking partners who want to make a visible, measurable and lasting difference. The table below shows the funds we need to raise to fund Anthem Aspire programmes in 2026-27.**

| PROGRAMME              | COSTS                         | PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Music Without Limits   | Instrumental tuition: £65,000 | Help children have access to instrumental lessons.                                                                                                              |
| Music Everywhere       | Travel & tickets: £10,000     | Help children have cultural capital experiences through high-quality music performances.                                                                        |
| Anthem for Anthem      | Workshop fees: £4,000         | Help train the next generation of choral conductors by supporting staff training in partnership with Gareth Malone OBE, St Paul's Cathedral, Lincoln Cathedral. |
| Outward Bound          | Residential & travel: £30,000 | Help children access ambitious and challenging outdoor adventures.                                                                                              |
| English Speaking Union | Travel: £10,000               | Help children access high-quality oracy training.                                                                                                               |
| First Story            | Programme costs: £20,000      | Help children become published authors in partnership with Cambridge University.                                                                                |





Anthem Schools Trust is a charity and a company limited by guarantee.  
Registered in England & Wales. Company No. 7468210  
Registered Office: 8-10 Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria, London SW1W 0DH  
[anthemtrust.uk](http://anthemtrust.uk) • 0333 996 3030 • [enquiries@anthemtrust.uk](mailto:enquiries@anthemtrust.uk)