


The Grumpy Sheep improves performance skills at Stannington First School

Caroline Hoile, a qualified music therapist and teacher, is now one of the foremost children's songwriters in the UK. Her company, [Grumpy Sheep](#) is based in Newcastle upon Tyne and began publishing in 2000. Her musicals, Christmasnativities and songbooks go off to primary schools and nurseries throughout the UK and abroad, as well as to music stores and bookshops, church groups and theatre groups, and are performed by thousands of children each year.

Over the years Caroline has noticed that her musicals give children the chance to develop and show a different side of their characters. They have to work individually and /or in a team. Taking part in a musical gives them an opportunity to dance, act, speak in public and sing,' said Caroline. 'Apart from the obvious musical skills children develop, good songs are a great teaching tool – and because they're having fun, children don't realise that they are learning!' 

Helen Stokoe is head teacher at Stannington First School in Morpeth, Northumberland. She is something of an expert as her children performed the world premiere of Squirrels! the Musical. This is entirely appropriate as she explained: 'We have red squirrels living in the churchyard which is opposite the school. The squirrels have also been seen in the playground and the children keep a tally chart recording squirrel sightings.' The school was working with Katy Cook of Red Squirrels North East, a conservation partnership, to increase their knowledge of all things squirrel just as Caroline Hoile decided that this would be an ideal subject for a Grumpy Sheep musical.

'We have used numerous Grumpy Sheep plays before, including 'The Most Disgruntled Snowman' and 'The Hoity-Toity Angel' and were very excited at the prospect of being the first school (in the world) to perform Squirrels! the Musical,' said Caroline. 'On looking at the script we soon had the parts allocated and set about learning the songs.'

What did the children at Stannington First School get out of it? 'Collaboration, confidence in performing, listening skills, learning things by rote, just having fun!'