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Loyal teaching team is key to a music specialist school's success

INTERVIEW

► Directors have pumped their own cash into classrooms after the funding began to dry up. It's a leap of faith that sums up their outlook, as **Caroline Butcher** has been finding out

EMMA Hutchinson always dreamed of living at the top of a house filled with music.

Now, after 16 years as director of Shepherds Bush music school The Music House for Children – next door to Bush Hall in Uxbridge Road – she has finally made her dream a reality.

"It's called the Music House because my dream was to have a house at the top and underneath would be all this music," she said.

"But at the time, the reality of the situation was that we found Bush Hall. We bought it out of our own pocket and then turned this neighbouring site into a music school."

This year, however, Emma and her husband Charlie Raworth – who is managing director of both Bush Hall and the Music House – decided to set up a new home in the top floor flat above the two music sites.

The eternally busy Emma, 47, is now dividing her time between the new flat and another new home in Devon, where their sons Louis, 13,

Oscar, 11 and Caspar, eight, are going to school.

"We moved into the flat about a month ago, so the dream has finally happened!" Emma laughed.

"We previously lived just nearby in Ingersoll Road for 13 years, so I have a huge emotional attachment to this area."

The energetic music teacher founded the Music House in 1994, having built up experience as a freelance piano teacher and nursery school music teacher for about eight years.

"I built up a small but loyal team of teachers to work with me and it grew from there," she said. "We were based in Notting Hill to start with, and we went into children's homes and into schools."

The Music House became a charitable organisation in 1996 and Charlie and Emma moved it into the Uxbridge Road site in 2002, having taken over the neighbouring Bush Hall two years earlier.

The Music House has since grown to encompass a huge spectrum of music tuition including in-house private and group lessons in a range of instruments, private lessons in children's homes, in-house baby and toddler music classes and nursery and primary school music lessons.

"We have about 60 freelance music teachers and we try to look after our teachers as best we can," Emma said. "When I was a freelance there were so many things that used to make me red in the face. But we make sure they get paid on time, and it's also a respect thing."

In return, Emma expects high standards from her



MUSIC MAKER: Emma Hutchinson

PICTURE BY JUSTIN THOMAS

teachers and said parents and schools had grown to trust the Music House as a reliable source of good quality teaching.

"Someone will approach us for a clarinet teacher and the teacher will go to their homes for 10 weeks, but will be expected to adhere to our code of conduct," she said.

"Before we came along, there were also a lot of schools who did not know who to approach to find a good music teacher, so we help with that."

Hundreds of local pupils have taken part in Music House lessons at their schools including St Stephens, Greenside, Brackenhurst, Wormholt and Wendell Park primary schools, as well as children with learning difficulties at Jack Tizard School.

"My ethos has been to provide a high standard of teachers and we do CRB checking and references. The same ethos is in practice today," Emma said.

In recent years the Music House has met the same squeezed budgets and funding challenges as many other charities, so much so that its owners have taken matters into their own hands to secure its future.

After several bids for project-based funding were turned down, Emma and Charlie have once again reached into their pockets to create two new classrooms at the centre, which were opened last month.

"It was a question of standing still and hoping things get

better, or taking a calculated risk and putting some of our own money into financing two new rooms and much-needed music tuition in the area," Emma said.

"It's a risk because if the rooms are not filled and the lessons are not taken up, we will have to rethink the whole thing. But I'm feeling very positive that it will be a success."

Other projects relying on funding, including music therapy sessions with children from West London Deaf Group, are still on the back burner and Emma said investment was crucial.

"The children we are teaching now are the ones who will be making music in the future," she said. "People must invest in organisations like us, otherwise we will end up like we were 15 years ago, when musical learning became an add-on in schools and a generation of musicians will be lost."

"It's not a quick fix. It's about spending money and then the benefits take time. "But you see each child's confidence building, and it gives them a love of music, excellent communication skills and a natural curiosity for learning – and that applies further afield than just music."

The Music House for Children is at 306-310 Uxbridge Road, Shepherds Bush. Call 020 8932 2652 or visit www.musichouseforchildren.co.uk

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The children we teach now will make music in the future”