I'M IN Queen Elizabeth Hall on London’s South Bank lost in a splendid performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade complete with colourfully costumed dancers and a dramatic line up of percussion. The playing is astoundingly energetic but, as this was an opera oratorio and performed in the round, I can only hope that the playing would have been even more so in a more traditional setting.

Almost unbelievably, I'm listening to a school orchestra on the second floor and almost all players are under 18, including the remarkable Joe Youn Sir who is leading the orchestra and the operatic soloists. Joe has also won a competition and we've been envied the world premiere of her compelling piece in the concert.

Purcell School, at Blaisey in Herefordshire, is one of nine schools which operate under the Government's Music and Dance Scheme (MDE). The scheme pays, or top up, the fees for outstandingly talented youngsters needing a music-driven school with high level teaching – a form of SEN in my view.

And Purcell does a wonderful all round job. Last year 100 per cent of its pupils got five or more A*-C at GCSE, and it also has five section finalists (a record apparently) in the forthcoming BBC Young Musician of the Year competition. When it's – no good pretending otherwise – clawing down the numbers, the school has decided to make a virtue of the fact, and – notwithstanding, it's heaven to find a school in which excellence and talent is uncongressingly at the forefront. How much do your young treasurers know about money – apart from how to spend it? Probably not much given the alarming number of most people need to know so far是什么hoing or spending or saving or understanding or making a plan for their future. Even if they do, they lack the ability to do so. The sooner they learn this the better.

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Fulston Manor's deputy headteacher, Nigel Tiller, said: "The kids like it. The assessments are all multiple choice and they take the exams when we think they are ready throughout the course." All the teaching material is available online so students can access it at home as well as in school.

I rather wish someone had taught me this stuff when I was 15 instead of forcing me to learn it as I went along – which has taken decades. The nearest we ever got was those incomprehensible stacks and shares problems in maths. How many times a day do you snap – don't top that chair please? Not only does it cause disciplinary problems but this is a real fire risk. Half the school has had to be re-worked for children.

The cohesive plastic seats minimise the sticking to the backs of your legs if you're wearing anything short. If I were in charge of a school's budget, I'd have these at the top of my shopping list.

You can wait for years for a really good children's version of A Midsummer Night's Dream in London then they come along in a posse like number 11 bases. A good one has just finished at Unicorn Theatre in London. The National Theatre is currently touring an abridged version of the play in London schools. The summer concert for the Open Air Theatre Regents Park has A Midsummer Night's Dream re-worked for children. Or, if you want the full version of this deliciously sexy play, it's in the summer repertoire at Shakespeare's Globe too.

• Susan Elkin is an education journalist and former teacher.

Fulston Manor, James Allen's Girls' School in London.

IT WAS a chilly Friday night in February; a husk descended on the school theatre; two 6th formers moved to centre stage to welcome the audience; the music started and before too long a tear escaped and in the darkness trickled down my cheek. They had done it again!

Done what? Brought shame to the school community? Wrecked the theatre? No, far from it; as they had shown that young people today are capable of great things, can work together and display real enthusiasm as well as amazing talents. Each spring our 12 students take it upon themselves to produce a wonderful evening of entertainment and food. Reflecting and celebrating some of the many diverse cultures within our school. In March 2007, they staged an event entitled Dishawo and this February the current generation of 12 students produced an evening called Uni. It began with the rhythms of Africa and some stunning dances choreographed and performed by a group of pupils of all ages.

The Asian sub-continent was well represented too our woody Bollywood club members danced in samba style, wearing traditional Indian costumes, although they were from many different backgrounds, including American, English, Japanese and Afro-Caribbean. They were followed by aisonigmatic group of Bhangra performers, whose aggression contrasted strongly with that of our Indian Classical dancers delicately portraying the complex opening of a flower. Flamenco and Rock 'n Roll were interrupted by witty commentary and an audience participation "learn Japanese in five minutes" session, introduced by girls wearing full Japanese costume (inverte of their own nationality). A Russian folk song group moved the audience and added to the variety. The complex harmonies sung unaccompanied by our Gospel choir were another high point of the evening.

Just before the interval a visiting representative from an African charity, the girls' chosen recipient of their fund-raising, spoke about what a difference their contribution would make and how stunned she had been by their performances. We retired to the main school hall, to be entertained by our jazz band and an African drum group. We were entertained by the blissfully melodious Gu Zhang (a traditional Chinese harp) skilfully played by a year 11 pupil and ex-exotic fool tunes played by a 6th former on a more traditional harp. All that was followed by an entrancing solo by a young American-English style dancing. A wonderful time was had by all and more than £1,400 was raised for the charity.

Just another school evening? Perhaps, but what is so heart-warming is the way in which girls of all ethnic backgrounds joined in and made a real effort to ensure the evening was a success. It was the music, songs and dances from different cultures, not to mention the almost totally hearing-impaired student who made her first stage appearance.

Schools now have a duty to promote "community cohesion", but our evenings have been staged for many years, as I am sure are they in many other schools.

Recently, I attended a workshop at a prestigious education conference where the head of a state school made a presentation on the concept of equality and coping with the diversity of London's pupil population. She spoke of how inclusive her school had become and made a number of quite disparaging remarks about how much easier it was for independent schools to be successful. They are a monochromatically, she said, describing the "kilt girls" who attended the school. I was shocked and appalled. I think the well-dressed long blonde hair. Uncharacteristically, I felt quite intruded by this presentation. I wanted to point out some of the excellent ideas (although I do threaten to introduce kilts occasionally when I'm out on a school visit). I wish some of us have pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. I wish we had a rank of uniform. I wish we had a rank of a rank of kilts. - or even the following Friday when our annual