



"So what happens next, then?"

Exploring learning and legacy in creative arts residencies
brokered by West of England Music and Arts' Cultural
Education Hub

Research report

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Through the Creative Residency Programme, West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub supported schools and creative practitioners to co-design programmes that addressed identified school priorities, embedded creativity across the curriculum, built staff confidence, and widened young people's access to high-quality arts experiences. This report provides detailed case studies of these residencies.

“

It is vital that schools and colleges are able to innovate and respond to local needs, and that teachers have the flexibility to extend the curriculum and draw out its relevance for the young people in their classrooms.”

”

- Professor Becky Francis CBE, Chair of the
Curriculum and Assessment Review
“Building a world-class curriculum for all” (DfE, 2025)

Department for Education. (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_final_report_-_Building_a_world-class_curriculum_for_all.pdf

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Executive Summary

West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub is uniquely positioned. Established in 2024, it is funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and Arts Council England through the Culture West programme.

Insightful findings shared through seven detailed case studies of creative residencies in primary, secondary and special schools, coupled with focussed research undertaken from the perspectives of creative practitioners working in and with schools, demonstrate the power of a Cultural Education Hub to establish models of working which bring together and capitalise on multidisciplinary perspectives and experiences of people and organisations, with practices that nurture and develop local and regional cultural education ecosystems.

The research illuminates the central role of the West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub in bringing about meaningful, impactful change for and with young people, schools, creative practitioners, cultural organisations and communities in inclusive and cost-effective ways, and the importance of strategically targeting limited resources and funding for maximum impact.

Case studies highlight the potential of embedding authentic, creative and cultural learning and engagement to tackle and support multiple local, regional and national

“ Opportunities for these sorts of things are really, really important in actually giving young people in this area, in such an area of disadvantage, an opportunity to express themselves through theatre, through drama, through the arts. ”

Marie Berry, Headteacher, Bourneville Primary School, Weston super Mare

priorities, many of which are highlighted in the UK Government's Curriculum and Assessment Review final report "Building a World-Class Curriculum for All" (DfE, 2025). These include:

- harnessing the power of creative and cultural education to improve school engagement;
- developing contextually aware curricula that is rich and broad, making education more motivating for young people and relevant to modern and evolving life and society;
- nurturing the development of habits, values, attitudes and behaviours that support personal and collective actions and thinking, enhance wellbeing, strengthen communication, develop resilience, promote community cohesion and engender belonging;
- increasing the visibility and accessibility of arts and creative subjects within and beyond the curriculum;
- supporting the vital regeneration of arts education and access to qualifications in a post-EBacc world;
- illuminating and embedding career opportunities that open up pathways to further study and future work.

Department for Education. (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report: Building a world-class curriculum for all https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_final_report_-_Building_a_world-class_curriculum_for_all.pdf

This work brings together education in and out of the classroom, crossing subject boundaries in authentic and meaningful ways and exploring the notion of 'enrichment' not just being something that happens outside of the timetabled curriculum. Each residency was built around local priorities and needs, and in doing so, supported young people's ambitions in the here and now as well as opening up opportunities to see new potential pathways for their future.

Giving schools the autonomy to choose for themselves what to work on, and in doing so, making them accountable for the outcomes, reaps rewards. For example, these schools chose to use drama, dance, music, creative writing and visual arts to ambitiously support aspects such as developing oracy and communication, tackle emotionally based school avoidance, embed more creativity throughout the curriculum and across primary teaching, explore multiculturalism and improve community cohesion alongside artform engagement, development and progression.

For the ambitions of the recent Education White Paper "Every Child Achieving and Thriving" (UK Government, 2026) to be realised, the power of arts and cultural education needs to not just be recognised but actively developed and integrated within and beyond the taught curriculum. This is complex; years of underfunding, lack of trained teachers and perverse accountability measures such as the EBacc have left universal arts access decimated in

“ This time last year we didn't have a cohort large enough to run a Performing Arts or Drama BTEC and just by running this one project we now have a class of 30. So yeah, I think what it does for us is it brings back the performing arts. So that's a huge win. ”

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement, Bridge Learning Campus, Bristol.

many schools, as the Curriculum and Assessment Review identifies. These residences have shown that children and staff are excited by arts and cultural education and this can also be a hook into education and engagement for pupils whomay struggle in other ways. In one of the schools the momentum and quality of the residency catalysed reintroduction of a drama qualification at Key Stage 4. If, as a nation, we are serious about changing education for the better, and making arts and cultural learning accessible for all, exploring the power of partnerships and successful delivery models, as evidenced in these residencies, would be useful.

And yet, this research doesn't shy away from the identification and exploration of challenges. Even the title of the report "What happens next, then?" - a question posed by a young person towards the end of a residency - serves as a provocation for all of us, locally and nationally. From supporting access to arts and cultural learning as a right of all young people in schools, regardless of their background and ability to pay or their location, to nurturing creative artists to be able to work effectively

UK Government (2026) Every child achieving and thriving

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version>

“

The vision is to enable the constraints of the National Curriculum to be taught in the most inclusive and creative way possible. I think for us it was a vision initially, and it's becoming more of a reality. I think there's obviously still room for growth... thinking what other things we can be taking outdoors and teaching in a creative way. It's given a really, really good basis for that progression.

”

Astral Blanchard, Head of School,
Twerton Nursery and Infant School

in partnerships with schools in formal education settings, and from models of funding to brokering sustained meaningful partnerships, 'what happens next, then?' is a crucial question.

This research demonstrates the important strategic and practical role of a Cultural Education Hub in connecting, supporting and nurturing the development of creative artists and teachers across all stages of their career and the power of professionals working and learning together in dedicated and authentic ways to bring about fundamental changes that positively impact young people, schools and communities now and in the future.

The success of this model of working is rooted in a Cultural Education Hub, led by an established and well-connected educational organisation with a breadth and depth of experience across the arts and wider learning and engagement, leveraging local expertise and regional connectivity through galvanising sector participation

around identified local and regional priorities and ambitions. This is central to supporting the development of confidence and expertise to collaboratively tackle priorities and overcome challenges in schools and communities in creative and innovative ways.

This model of working deserves recognition and further interrogation of the possibilities created by widening the network of Cultural Education Hubs to maximise potential for change. These recommendations offer insightful suggestions for policy makers, schools and educational institutions, cultural organisations, creative practitioners and all those that seek to champion creative and cultural education in harnessing the collaborative potential of artistic learning and practices. Together, we have the power to make the world a better place for everyone through broadening and deepening access to creative and cultural learning and engagement and proliferating inclusive, inspiring and ambitious opportunities for all to achieve and thrive, regardless of their background, circumstances and where they live, work and go to school.

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- Professor Becky Francis CBE, Chair of
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Department for Education. (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version>

Recommendations

1. The potential offered by establishing and funding a network of Cultural Education Hubs in other regions should be recognised and explored.
2. A regional network of Cultural Education Hubs should be central to supporting and developing local and regional infrastructure and ecosystems, proliferating opportunities for schools, young people, creative artists and cultural organisations to collaborate through fruitful partnership working.
3. Organisations leading Cultural Education Hubs should be well-placed to offer strategic and practical support across multiple domains and to target priority and need in the allocation and distribution of funding and resources.
4. Creative and cultural education should be recognised and embraced for its potential to catalyse development and change that capitalises and grows expertise and willingness to collaboratively identify and tackle local, regional and national challenges, ambitions and priorities.
5. Co-funded models should be explored to support broad access to limited resources and funding through targeted, needs-based allocations and supporting schools who are motivated to address needs and challenges in innovative ways.
6. Creative and cultural education programmes should promote agency and ownership, providing structures and support for schools, creative practitioners and cultural organisations to be fully accountable for their programmes, actions and outcomes.
7. Reflexivity and reflection should be central to all programmes so that activity and delivery is built upon and evaluated against bespoke focussed objectives.
8. Programmes should support the ambitions of creative artists and cultural organisations in co-developing their ideas and tools with and for young people and schools, drawing upon their own experiences and expertise.
9. Needs-led professional learning should be central to all creative and cultural arts programmes to support and develop creative practitioners at all stages of their career so that ambition and professional growth is nurtured.
10. Creative and cultural programmes should include opportunities to illuminate authentic ways of working and to expand young people's and teachers' knowledge of and exposure to the future potential of studying and working in the creative and cultural industries.
11. Creative and cultural residencies and other longer-term programmes should support a longitudinal approach to exploring legacy and sustainability.

Introduction

This publication shares case studies and resources from seven creative arts residences in schools that were developed as a strand of work within West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub.

Background to West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub

West of England Music and Arts (WEMA) is an education charity that aims to make music, arts and culture accessible, affordable and enjoyable for all. The Cultural Education Hub was established as a new strand of work for WEMA in 2024, funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and Arts Council England through the Culture West programme.

The West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub aims to give every child in the region the chance to engage with inspiring, high-quality cultural activities, supporting them to achieve their aspirations and experience a rich, creative curriculum. It does this by:

- Building partnerships between schools and the creative sector.
- Supporting professional development for teachers and creative practitioners.
- Creating opportunities for children and young people to engage with high-quality arts experiences.

Through targeted programmes such as the Creative Residency Programme, the WEMA's Cultural Education Hub responds to identified school priorities and local need, embedding creativity within

education settings and enabling meaningful, sustained cultural experiences for young people.

A brief overview of the work undertaken as part of WEMAs' Cultural Education Hub

From 2024-2026 the Cultural Education Hub delivered a variety of projects and programmes across the region, providing schools and students with opportunities to engage with inspiring high-quality arts activities. Key strands of work included:

- Creatives in Schools - a grant programme supporting creative freelancers to deliver inspiring arts activities in schools.
- Creative practitioner professional development - training and mentoring to support creatives to work in school and education settings.
- Teacher professional development - working with cultural organisation and creative freelancers to provide inspiring CPD opportunities in creative arts subjects.
- Creative Careers - events and activities raising awareness of creative career pathways for young people.
- Creative residencies - longer term artist projects in schools addressing school priorities.

The Creatives in Schools programme provided 24 creative freelancers with grants to develop and deliver inspiring workshops in school and education settings, giving students the opportunity to learn from practising artists. Workshops explored a

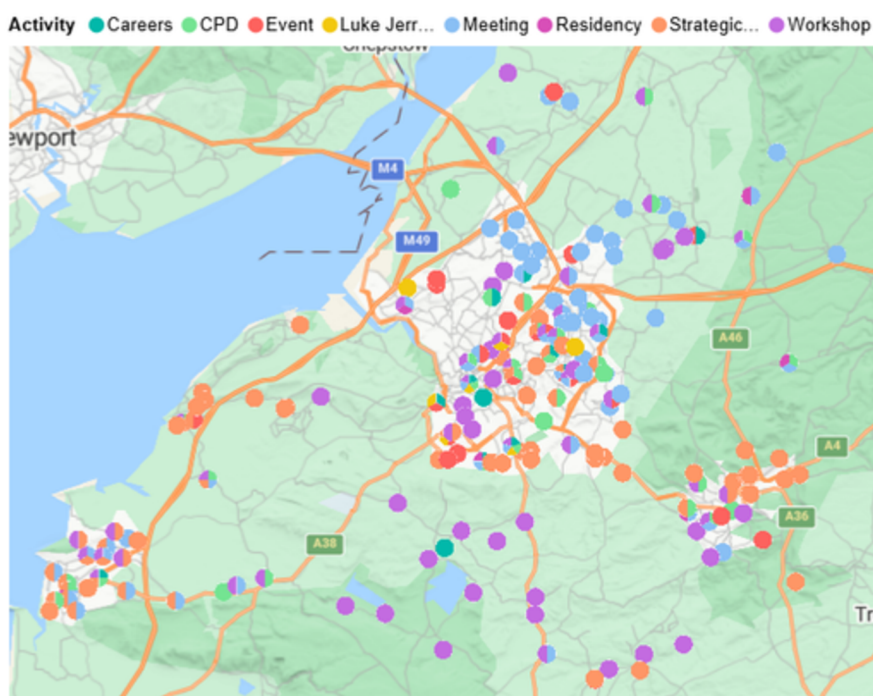
variety of artforms, including drama, dance, visual arts, music and poetry and were delivered in Primary, Secondary and special school settings. As part of their grant, freelancers also participated in a programme of training and development with education experts, supporting them to develop and deliver their activities to the highest standard and providing professional development around working in school settings. The freelancers also received 1:1 mentoring with arts education lecturers from Bath Spa University.

A programme of teacher professional development workshops was delivered by respected creative organisations and facilitators in the region. In person workshops were offered by organisations including Bristol Old Vic, Aardman Animation and Watershed, exploring how to embed different creative artforms into the curriculum. The Hub also worked with a Multi Academy Trust to design bespoke CPD

offers, delivered by freelance practicing artists.

The Creative Careers programme gave students insight into the range of career pathways in the creative and cultural industries. The programme included in school career workshops and out of school events delivered in partnership with key organisations such as Bath Spa University and Bristol Museums. A creative careers fair at M Shed invited students from eight schools to participate in career themed workshops with Aardman Animation, Bristol Old Vic and the Bristol Museums team as well as explore a diverse marketplace of creative organisations. In addition, a professional development day for teachers offered the chance to meet staff from key cultural organisations in Bristol, supporting them to better understand the variety of creative career pathways available to their students.

A map of work around the region



WEMAs' Cultural Education Hub's Creative Residency programme, which this report explores, supported schools and creative practitioners to co-design longer term, more in depth programmes that addressed identified school priorities through creative activity. Within the seven residencies delivered, artists worked in both a deep and broad way.

Why creative residencies?

Many of the opportunities offered regionally, including some directly funded through WEMA's Cultural Education Hub support creative artists at all stages of their career to further develop and embed their work in schools and other learning settings. They often seek to contribute to learning in schools, both artistic and holistically as noted in the rapid research review commissioned by WEMA as part of the Cultural Education Hub's work (Clark et al., 2025). There are multiple regional and national examples of the importance of this work in supporting schools to be Arts Rich (Thompson, Hall and Maloy, 2025). As is the nature of this work, particularly given the financial constraints and competing priorities in schools, this is frequently on a very short-term basis and whilst there is often considerable merit in this work, there is limited opportunity for schools to engage in a deeper and more sustained model of working alongside creative practitioners. The residencies within WEMA's Cultural Education Hub's wider programme were set up to offer a deeper experience alongside a multitude of other opportunities.

Overview of the school residences

Creative arts residences took place in seven schools across the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority region between May 2025 and March 2026. Schools across the region were invited to express an interest in hosting a residency. Each residency empowered a school to work collaboratively with an artist or group of artists to design a tailored programme of activity to support the school's endeavour of exploring a particular theme with a defined group of young people, which was grounded in a deep understanding of each school's context and priorities. It was envisaged in the planning process that the creative team in each school would have a wider impact across the school community and consider the legacy of this opportunity. It was also expected that schools who were successfully awarded residences would work closely with the Cultural Education Hub to share their experiences and outcomes as part of this research to better understand the processes and potential impact of artistic residences on young people, schools, teachers and creative practitioners. Five of the residencies were awarded to schools applying through this application process. Two further residences were awarded to organisations working regionally who were either keen to implement residences in specific school communities with whom they had worked previously or had a project concept they wanted to explore with a local school.

Clark, T., Andrews, J., Maisuria, A., & Fernandes, V. (2025). Rapid research review: Creative and cultural practitioners working with young people and teachers in formal education. <https://wema.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/rapid-research-paper-creative-and-cultural-practitioners-working-with-young-people-and-teachers-in-formal-education.pdf>

Thompson, P., Hall, C. & Maloy, L. (2025) The RAPS Project: Researching arts in primary schools - final report. <https://artsprimary.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/raps-final-feb-2025--4.pdf>

Autonomy over the decisions about the residences

Drawing upon research from Newham, East London, on the importance of schools being autonomous in the decision making (Daubney, 2024), schools involved in the initial five residencies were encouraged to be autonomous and ambitious in the decision making about what they wanted to explore and achieve and with whom, how they wanted to achieve this, and which art forms they wished to utilise. Working with the Cultural Education Hub lead at WEMA, artists were matched up using this information. Before any delivery took place, collaborative planning time, including a session with a researcher and time with the Cultural Education Hub lead, were built into each programme so that the aims and ambitions were clearly articulated, commonly understood and each residency identified what success might look like. Times and durations of delivery were also decided by the schools and artists, offering maximum flexibility about whether programmes were intense or took place weekly or fortnightly over an extended period of time.

In the final two residencies, where the residency was awarded to the arts organisation in the first instance, the same expectations of school engagement and planning were in place. Within these residences, the schools were matched to the ambitions of the arts organisations, although within this, flexibility to match ambitions and working models was also expected.

In every residency, it was set out at the beginning that the school leadership should be actively involved in supporting the work and utilising this work to explore something specific that the school wanted to work on through cultural engagement.

Embedding teacher and creative practitioner professional development

As an expectation of each residency, a strand for teacher and creative practitioner development was woven through the planning of each residency and time allocated for creative artists and teachers to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

A comprehensive professional development offer for creative artists has been developed through the Cultural Education Hub. This includes video training modules created and delivered by a creative education lecturer from Bath Spa University, a Creatives in Schools toolkit with practical advice and templates, and in person training and mentoring sessions.

Each creative artist involved during the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic year was also offered the opportunity to meet with one of the research team at the commencement and completion of their funded work to discuss their own developmental journey and aspirations for their own professional development.

Daubney, A. (2025) A Model for transforming inclusive musical learning, outcomes and aspirations for young people through targeted music enrichment. Newham Music Enrichment Programme Evaluation.

A brief overview of each residency:

Bridge Learning Campus

Developing awareness of creative career pathways and raising student aspirations for drama through the development of qualification opportunities in school with Brave Bold Drama.

Bournville Primary School

Developing language, oracy and communication skills through storytelling with playwright and theatre director Toby Hulse

Marshfield CE VC Primary School

Promoting engagement with, and understanding of, a different culture. Explored through songs, stories and dance with Senegalese singer, songwriter, dancer and drummer Batch Gueye.

Horton CE VA Primary School

Connecting with and developing understanding of the local community, past and present. Creating a lantern parade with community artists Lamplighter Arts CIC

Priory Community School Academy

Creating space and opportunities for young people to explore emotional-based school avoidance through creative writing, visual arts and storytelling, delivered by Super Culture. This programme also involves working with Worle Village Primary School to explore this from a primary-based perspective and plans to lead to the creation of a toolkit for schools and teachers as an outcome of this residency.

Kingsweston School

Building communication, self-expression and confidence in children with autism and/or learning needs and sensory impairment working alongside dance artist Kenzi Ireland, specialist in African dance forms.

Twerton Nursery & Infant School

Building a new creative curriculum in which the arts are central to wider learning. Explored with creative producer, participatory artist and forest school leader Holly Dabbs.

Regeneration of creative career pathways through a drama education residency



Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

Bridge Learning Campus
Key Stages 1 and 2
Creative Organisation: Brave Bold
Drama

Specific residency objectives:

- To develop young people's aspirations and awareness of more diverse creative career pathways through making them more visible.
- To raise pupils' aspirations for Drama.
- To support the reintroduction of a Drama BTEC for Key Stage 4 pupils.
- To provide opportunities for Key Stage 3 pupils to gain accreditation for their work on this residency as part of the Arts Award.
- To support a whole-school impact through CPD.
- To build staff confidence and capacity to embed creative careers education in ongoing subject delivery and as a catalyst for long term curriculum development in drama.

Background to the school

Bridge Learning Campus (BLC) is a non-selective all-through academy for pupils aged 3 to 16. Located in South Bristol, it serves the diverse Hartcliffe community. BLC describes itself as 'a school with a strong inclusive ethos. We welcome all students, and we do everything we can to help them succeed. Our ambitious, knowledge-rich curriculum shows our high expectations for every student and prepares them well for the next stage of education and the workplace'. There are approximately 1250 pupils on roll at BLC, with around 750 in the school's secondary provision.

Bridge Learning campus is situated in one of the most deprived areas of Bristol and in the top 3% of the most deprived areas in Britain in relation to income, employment, health and education, highlighting significant and persistent inequalities and challenges (English Indices of Deprivation 2025). Just over 56% of pupils at BLC are eligible for free school meals.

Background to Brave Bold Drama

Brave Bold Drama is a not-for-profit community interest company. They describe the organisation as 'led by two freelance artists who are working class and LGBTQI+'. We make award-winning theatre for families and for those living with dementia, and run a broad portfolio of community art projects made with and for working class communities'. Brave Bold Drama have worked with Bridge Learning Campus previously.



Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

Aims and synopsis of the residency

Bridge Learning Campus reintroduced drama on a carousel as a Key Stage 3 subject in the previous academic year, after 8 years of not having a drama specialist. With the removal of the EBacc accountability measure and drama being reintroduced into the curriculum at BLC, staff were keen to encourage students to broaden their options through subject choices and progression routes, particularly in creative subjects. This residency aimed to directly support the goal of building a visible, valued performing arts pathway, from KS3 to KS4 qualifications and beyond. The timing of this residency was considered ideal to consolidate Drama's new presence and support the successful introduction of a BTEC Drama qualification, which had failed to attract enough interest when offered in the previous academic year.

These are central to BLC's wider strategy to raise student aspirations and diversify progression routes, particularly in an area where access to cultural and creative industries for pupils in this school and area are historically limited. There is a clear arts entitlement gap in areas like Hartcliffe, and nationally, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly less likely to study arts subjects at KS4 and beyond (as highlighted in the government's recent Curriculum Review report) or work in the creative industries. This residency aimed to address that gap directly by raising the profile of Drama career pathways and boosting uptake at KS4. A drama residency was considered a suitable way to raise aspirations and widen progression pathways in a community with limited access to cultural capital.

“ The highlights - going over to the Bottle Yard [Studios] and our children being able to see what was in place over there and so close on their doorstep. I think everything that they've been out and seen has been really, really buzzy. ”

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement

The residency was noted as being potentially useful in helping the school respond to recent changes to statutory career guidance for schools in England from the UK government. This includes a requirement to strengthen arrangements for work-related activities for pupils in years 7-9 from September 2025 as well as providing

work experience for pupils in years 10 and 11. The residency was planned to support the school in developing new opportunities in this area, building longer term impact through developing staff knowledge of creative career pathways and developing local industry connections.

The residency also sought to help build staff confidence and capacity to embed creative careers education in ongoing subject delivery and as a catalyst for long term curriculum development in Drama, which was considered to nurture skills, values, habits and behaviours that support life and learning in other ways beyond subject study.

Bridge Learning Campus and creative practitioners from Brave Bold Drama elected to work together on this residency. The school recognises the value of this theatre company being established by two working-class artists who grew up locally to the school and know the local context.

The residency, which took place over the first two terms of the 2025-26 academic year, had several interweaving strands. Up to 20 places were made available for Year 9 students to attend backstage tours at The Bottle Yard Studio, the largest film and TV studio facility in the West of England (owned and managed by Bristol City Council) and to Bristol Hippodrome, a large professional theatre venue in central Bristol. Jen Roxburgh, a freelance lighting designer spent a day with Gill Simmons from Brave Bold Drama sorting out the lighting rig at the school, as it had fallen into disrepair and staff did not have the expertise to mend and use it. A staff training session on how to use it was facilitated and a detailed instruction manual was written to support its use in the future.

Following the trips, an after-school drama club was established through the offer of six 90-minute sessions in which film making was centrally positioned as chosen by those who participated. Three short films were produced by the young people who attended, and this culminated in an after-school film premier to an invited audience of staff, parents, carers and friends in March 2026, complete with popcorn. A Q&A panel with the creative practitioners from Brave Bold Drama took place after the screening.

As a final part of the residency, the six students who attended the drama club regularly further edited the films finalise and share. This work constituted the final requirements for the externally certificated 'Arts Award Discover' award.



Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

Key Outcomes

Young People

➤ One of the key reasons given in the application for this residency was for Bridge Learning Campus to reintroduce Performing Arts as a Key Stage 4 option in September 2026. Following the residency, 30 students have now signed up to study Drama BTEC next year. This is a significant outcome for BLC and its young people.

➤ The backstage tour excursion at Bottle Yard Studios reportedly inspired pupils in multiple ways. They got first-hand access to professional equipment and learnt how it is used and how this relates to ways in which it could impact their own film making and editing, which fed directly into the films made through the drama club.

➤ Bottle Yard Studios is within very close walking distance of the school. From the visit, pupils were able to appreciate and be inspired by having this in their community.

➤ The opportunity to do a backstage tour at Bristol Hippodrome was also very popular with pupils. As with the trip to Bottle Yard

“ They were buzzing for it [sharing the film] because they felt so safe to do that. And that's the environment that Gill and Paul and Laurie created. They had a safe space in which they could be creative. And they had, you know, some students saying, “no, I don't want to act”. And by the end of it, they all showed their face in [the film]. So, it was brilliant.

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement

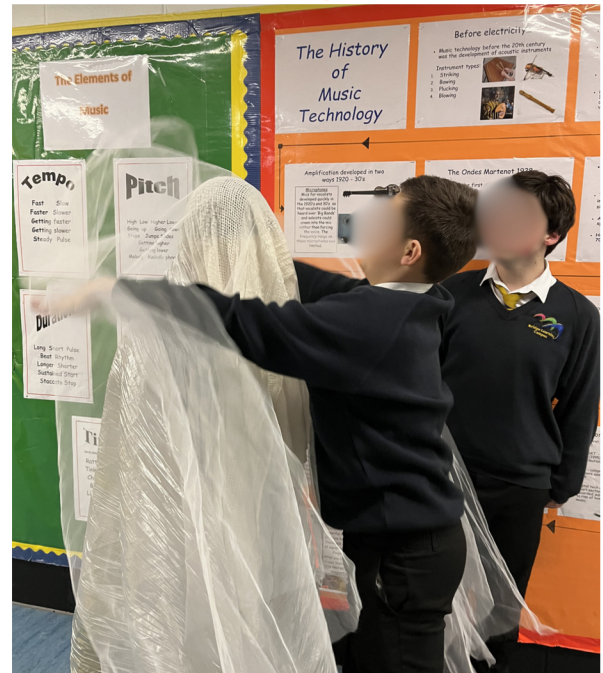


Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

Studios, the authenticity of being in a professional venue was reportedly inspiring and ‘mind-blowing’. Being on the stage was ‘an experience some will never forget’; one pupil burst into song and gave a spontaneous performance.

➤ The initial stimulus for the films provided a scaffold which was linked to the young people’s lives, locality and preferences. This framework encouraged them to generate and grow their own creative ideas and resulted in three very different films which were linked together for the screening.

➤ The name for the film company- “Trapped Monster Studios” - was chosen by the young people, which related to Yoda tied to some railings near the school that they all noted as something they saw every day.

➤ The young people taking part in the drama club chose the roles they took, whether this was acting, filming or being more involved in the production side of film making.

- Having something for the young people to work towards, share and celebrate which they owned was considered to be particularly important and powerful.
- The drop-down day for the final part of Arts Award Discover offered opportunities for pupils to make creative post-production decisions as they considered what to do with their film next. External validation of their efforts and achievements is appreciated as an outcome from this residency.
- The residency offered opportunities for young people who would not normally work together, and whom teachers “might previously not have considered putting together in a group” to share a space and cooperate with each other. This was considered pastorally beneficial as well as educationally helpful.

Staff

- Staff talked about why Year 9 pupils were selected to be involved in this residency. They reflected on the challenges of getting pupils involved and the role of the drama teacher, who is also Head of Year 9, in signposting the opportunities, actively recruiting pupils to engage at the start of the residency and how momentum built through the off-site excursions.
- A school leader described the impact of the residency on the wider school community. In particular, the legacy of now having a viable cohort for KS4 Drama qualifications is considered as a transformative outcome as it raises the profile of drama across the school and has started to change the way the creative arts are viewed and valued.
- The drama teacher is relatively new to the area, having lived and worked in London previously. She appreciated the connections and professional network this residency has tapped her into and the potential to be more connected in the future.

- The drama teacher chose not to be present in the after-school workshops. She felt that it was important for the young people to work uninhibited by the presence of staff from the school and that experience of working with the creative practitioners as a small group was authentic and inspiring.

“ I know that Tim, who's our Head of Music, has been dying to get those lights going for years and he was absolutely buzzing. And that made his brain go full of magical things he can do at the Christmas concerts. So yeah, it's not just a one-time CPD, it's a gift. ”

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement



Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

➤ Around 30 staff from across the school attended the screening of the young people’s film. Comments from staff included reflections on how surprised they were to see the young people’s confidence, which is not always evident in other curriculum areas.

➤ Performing arts teachers and technicians from across multiple departments attended the CPD session on how to use the school’s lighting rig and this has sparked ideas on using the lighting in the future, bringing more authenticity and professionalism to events. Some staff now feel confident to use it and are appreciative of the offer of being able to contact the creative practitioners for advice and practical support in the future if required. Having a professional freelance lighting designer co-leading this CPD also offered an opportunity for the school’s music teacher to have a professional conversation about sound.

➤ A bespoke training manual, produced by the creative practitioners, was described as “invaluable” in supporting staff to be able to use the lighting rig for future concerts, performances and events and is part of the legacy from this residency identified by one of the school’s senior leaders.

➤ The film is considered by staff to be an important tool in helping to recruit for drama at Key Stage 4 in future years.



Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

“ I just want to say how incredible it was - we had Gill and Jen doing our whole lighting rig, and there were about five or six staff that came to the actual talk. But actually, because they put together a booklet and all the information, that CPD is going to be ongoing...And that means our technicians can now teach the people to use it. So, it isn't just a one-time CPD session. This is going to be a Bible for us, for lighting, for an exceedingly long time. ”

Louise Saunders, Drama Teacher / Head of Year 9

Creative Practitioners

➤ This residency provided opportunities for creative practitioners with links to this area and an affinity with this community to collaborate with the school. Bringing this level of commitment and understanding into this school was appreciated and valued.

➤ The process of creating the films has supported the young people to develop a range of film making and editing skills. The tools and technologies were specifically chosen by the creative practitioners so that they would be readily accessible in school and potentially at home, utilising mobile phones and without additional cost for the young people to do this for themselves in the future. The creative artists expressed the importance of this accessibility.

➤ One of the creative practitioners leading this residency is a former secondary school drama teacher. This was considered by the school to be particularly useful in understanding the challenges faced by schools, and particularly this school and area. Through careful planning, the residency linked directly to the school’s priorities and curriculum, including the forthcoming Drama BTEC.

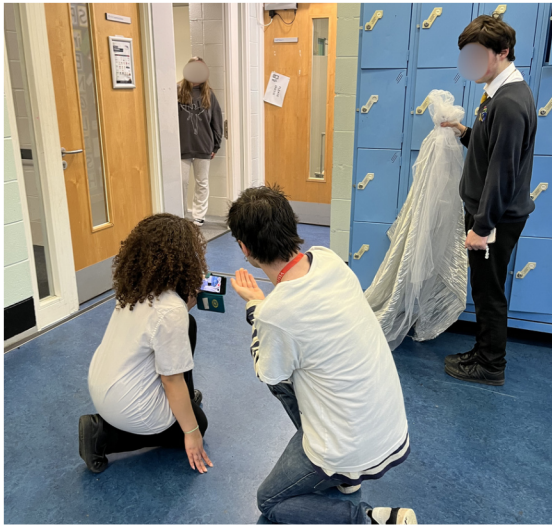


Photo Courtesy of Brave Bold Drama

➤ Creative practitioners stressed the importance of being able to speak directly to families and carers, celebrating the young people's work and having an opportunity to allay their concerns about encouraging their children to study the creative arts. They shared their perspective of coming from a working class background and reflected on the power of telling stories of their own personal journey. They talked openly about supporting themselves through various roles within and beyond the creative arts through the specific and transferable skills gained through their own learning journey. This reportedly seemed to resonate with parents as it was grounded and empathetic to Hartcliffe's context.

➤ The timing of this residency brought about an unexpected opportunity for a final year university student undertaking a work placement with Brave Bold Drama to be involved in the residency facilitation. This also meant that young people were able to work with creative practitioners with a range of ages and experience levels, furthering opportunities for them to reflect on different career stages and opportunities for their own future.

“ The fact that the residency encompassed more than just the direct engagement with students is lovely. I think that's particularly strong because there's a piece of legacy from that, which is that the staff or cohort of staff know how to use the tech, but also have some tangibles to refer to should they become stuck with how to use the lighting. ”

Paul Lawless, Creative Practitioner

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ Working with these creative practitioners was deemed particularly powerful in helping students to potentially “see themselves” working in the theatre and creative industries in the future because their own experiences growing up resonated with the pupils and families. The Sutton Trust's (2024) report *A Class Act*^[1] points out the stark inequalities for young people and adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and the significant barriers they face in accessing careers in the creative industries.

➤ Families and carers at BLC are influential in choosing options at KS4 and for most, studying creative arts or working in the creative industries was not in their own experience and not necessarily seen as something that would set their children up for a stable career. Holding a Q&A and having opportunities for individual conversations with families and carers after the film screening was deemed particularly important in helping to reassure them that studying Drama at KS4 would open doors

Holt-White, E., O'Brien, D., Brook, O., & Taylor, M. (2024). *A Class Act: Social Mobility and the Creative Industries*. Sutton Trust. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/a-class-act/>

not just to future study and work in the creative industries but also support students in multiple other aspects of their lives, whatever their career choices.

➤ Transport for trips was noted by the BLC’s Head of pupil engagement as a significant barrier to being able to take their pupils on trips, even though these opportunities are deemed important. Overcoming this barrier is one faced by multiple schools and something that needs to be given due consideration in funding bids. Within this residency, it was central to early conversations and planning. The bus tickets for young people to travel to and from Bristol Hippodrome were generously supplied by First Bus Group.

“ The fact that we're working with the working class community and we're all working class facilitators and their kind of people, actually is hugely important because if there's so much parachuting in and there's so much art washing because there's only 8% of us. Most people that young people from working class communities engage with as creatives are not from that lived experience. And that's problematic if there's never ever any representation. So, I feel like that's a lot to do with why this was successful. We were able to, you know, talk in a room really openly with parents about, 'yeah, we get it, you want your kids to have safe income'. And Jen's saying, 'you know, when the work drops off, I'm a qualified electrician, I can go and rewire houses and I have this backup plan'. And, you know, all of these kind of like real world conversations that people who are coming from more privileged positions just won't feel comfortable holding. ”

Gill Simmons, Creative Practitioner

➤ Six pupils were involved in the after-school club, although others appeared in the films. Young people in this community often face barriers to staying after school, including transport and caring roles they need to fulfil at home, as was the case here. The timing of clubs and other enrichment offers needs careful consideration if they are to target and be fully accessible to young people who would not get access to these creative opportunities otherwise. There are inevitable challenges and tensions with running them during the school day, but this would increase accessibility.

➤ The workshops at Bottle Yard Studios and Bristol Hippodrome undertaken as part of this residency tapped into the offers from Get into Theatre, a charity with a mission to “promote access to the arts and specifically to theatre careers for all young people regardless of their background, circumstance or lived experience” (Get into Theatre website). Whilst they were already available and free to access, the focus on creative careers resulting from the residency provided the catalyst for these opportunities.

➤ Working with these creative practitioners, who have knowledge of the scheme and connections locally has unlocked these opportunities. It highlights the value of external organisations working in partnership with schools and raises general questions about how partnerships are initiated and opportunities capitalised upon in the future given limited time, resources and funding in many schools and areas.

➤ With the forthcoming introduction of the Drama BTEC in September 2026, the drama teacher is grateful for the opportunities for careers education that have been initiated

through this residency and which are central to the qualification. She appreciated working alongside creative practitioners who understood her role and with whom she was able to have professional, subject-related conversations. This highlights the challenges of subject-specific support for teachers in minority subjects who are often one-person departments, and the important contribution that external partnerships and opportunities to work alongside other practitioners can make to their professional lives, connections and subject and pedagogic knowledge.

➤ The drama teacher is also Head of Year 9. This provided vital opportunities for her to engage with the whole year group on a regular basis and despite only teaching pupils for a rotational basis on the carousel, means that she knows all pupils pastorally and is known to them. Having support from senior staff who go beyond the subject realm is an important consideration if whole-school cultural change is sought.

➤ Challenges and frustrations around timetabling were noted from the school and creative practitioners during the process of this residency. Working with external partners in secondary schools requires flexibility from all, as seen in this residency, which had the added complexities associated with taking groups off-timetable and off-site. Nevertheless, the important value that the school and young people involved place on the opportunities afforded to them through this residency highlights the importance of working together to find amicable and workable solutions, as happened here.

➤ Like so many schools across the country, opportunities to take part in and study the performing arts at Bridge Learning Campus

have been significantly diminished by the EBacc accountability measure, as candidly reflected upon by one of the school’s senior leaders. This residency is credited with being central to building ambition, excitement and “bringing back the performing arts” at Bridge Learning Campus. There is much to think about here. BLC were already starting to reintroduce drama and invest, albeit on a carousel, in teaching Drama as a separate subject within their Key Stage 3 curriculum. It has the support of key members of the senior leadership team. But it was “doing something extraordinary” and beyond the reach of the school’s own capacity and resourcing that piqued the interest of young people, and catalysed enough momentum and interest to re-start a course leading to a qualification. This is costly and resource heavy. In harder-to-reach communities, the Government’s own data shows that access is the most limited, and yet, is considered by the school and in recent government policies and statements, to be vitally important, making this finding particularly timely.

➤ As shown through the residency at Bridge Learning Campus, Cultural Education Hubs are centrally positioned to allocate limited funding, connect organisations and ensure that programmes

“ Staff feedback was they didn't realise how confident a lot of the students were because they teach them in other subjects. When they saw them in the film, they were blown away. ”

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement

“ A highlight was the opportunity to speak with parents and be in a room with parents, for them to celebrate the work and the outcome, but also for us to hold space for a panel and then afterwards have an opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with some parents... for them to relay their thoughts and to ask questions and say thank you. That was really useful because although children often have a steer on what they do and what they pursue in terms of GCSE and A level or BTEC, sometimes it does take a bit of persuasion or it takes for the parents' horizons to be broadened a little bit for them to be like, 'oh, okay', it encompasses this and it's not as precarious because there's different pathways and it depends on what your pathway is or what part of that sector you pursue a career in. I think that, for me, was just really, really useful and essential. And that's what made this an extra success for me. ”

Paul Lawless, Creative Practitioner

are shaped ambitiously, planned meticulously and deliver against bespoke, well-defined and targeted objectives through embedding a strong accountability expectation alongside a reflective approach to honest and open evaluation.

➤ Given the focus on careers education that is now a statutory expectation in all schools, this residency has shown the important role of a West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub as a conduit in connecting schools, creative practitioners and cultural organisations. As seen in this residency, WEMA's Cultural Education Hub facilitates partnership working and signposts existing programmes that support young

people's engagement in the creative industries.

➤ The inclusion of continuing professional development was also noted as a factor that provided a strong legacy from this residency. However, a reflection from participants in this research is that it is not present, or a requirement, in many programmes run by creative organisations in schools as the external funding constraint is often that the money is allocated for delivery to the target audience. A professional learning strand is built in as a requirement for all residencies funded by West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub and should be considered essential in other programmes in the future, which requires funding, time and resources to be allocated to this.

“ For the [film-making] process, having that core small group, pretty much all of them, I think bar one, has picked Drama BTEC. And some of them I didn't think were going to choose it and they have because of this project. ”

Louise Saunders, Drama Teacher / Head of Year 9

“ This time last year we didn't have a cohort large enough to run a Performing Arts or Drama BTEC and just by running this one project we now have a class of 30. So yeah, I think what it does for us is it brings back the performing arts. So that's a huge win. ”

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement

Brave Bold Drama

bravebolddrama.co.uk

Gill Simmons - Co-Artistic Director and Community Arts Producer

Gill has worked in theatre and drama all her life. After gaining an MA in Drama and Theatre Studies from Royal Holloway in 2001 she became a secondary drama teacher and worked in education until 2013. She set up Brave Bold Drama in 2013 and for a while worked solo a freelance drama practitioner, delivering workshops initially in children's centres, schools and care homes.

In 2015 Brave Bold Drama became a theatre company and has been a registered Community Interest Company since 2017. Gill writes music for the company's productions and is instrumental in devising new work. She oversees Brave Bold Drama's community and education projects.

Gill is a freelance performer, facilitator, producer, composer and musician. She has worked as a musical director for Kilter Theatre Company, composed for Knapsack Productions, performed for Bristol Improv Theatre and has produced for Soap Soup Theatre Company. She is trained to deliver all levels of Arts Award from Discover to Gold.

Laurie Morgan - Student placement

Laurie is a final year theatre and film undergraduate at the University of Bristol, completing a placement with Brave Bold Drama, supporting with marketing shows, and accompanying them with their arts certification programme.

Paul Lawless - Co-Artistic Director & Theatre Producer

Paul is an award-winning actor/deviser & singer. He has worked extensively as an actor over the past few years featuring in classical, new writing and devised theatre productions accompanying his facilitation work in drama & singing. As a workshop facilitator, he specialises in devising work for adults with learning disabilities.

Paul co-devises and performs with the company and manages the tours of all Brave Bold Drama shows, which includes Alf the Highwayman (2016), George & the Flight of the Imaginees (2017), Sticky Ends (2018), Wonderland (2019), The Munch Mission! (2021-2023) and The Midnight Mission! (2022-2023). Paul is an associate performer at Bristol Improv Theatre and also makes theatre as Frenetic Fox Theatre.

Jen Roxburgh - freelance lighting designer

Jen is an award-winning lighting designer who creates evocative visual atmospheres for theatre, music, and multimedia events across the UK and internationally. A former BBC Performing Arts "Ones to Watch" fellow, her extensive credits include collaborations with the National Theatre and English Touring Theatre, as well as innovative touring productions.

Building oracy and communication skills through drama

Background to the school

Bournville Primary School, part of the Extend Learning Academies Network, describes itself as “a vibrant and nurturing community in Weston-super-Mare where children aged 2 to 11 begin and grow their learning journey in a safe, inspiring environment...We offer children rich opportunities to explore, play, and thrive. From nursery through to Year 6, we foster curiosity, achievement, and strong values, supported by wraparound care and a close partnership with families.”

Bournville Primary School has around 530 pupils on roll and serves the Bournville Estate; a “complex community” positioned in the top 1% of the most deprived areas of England in the 2025 English Indices of Deprivation. Nearly 60% of pupils in this mainstream school are eligible for free school meals and almost half have special educational needs (SEN). Every class has around four children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). A growing percentage of pupils at the school come from families where English is an additional language (currently around 19%, up from 10% two years ago) and the increasingly multicultural demographic is celebrated within the school. Bournville Primary School seeks to be “a school family” and this language is used frequently to describe this nurturing community.

Bournville Primary School
Key Stages 1 and 2
Creative Practitioner:
Toby Hulse

Specific residency objectives:

- **To support and develop the school’s focus on oracy.**
- **To nurture the development of pupils’ language acquisition, supporting them to be able to speak in full sentences and express themselves.**
- **To promote pupils’ verbal and non-verbal communication skills through developing a range of techniques and develop the confidence to speak out loud, projecting their voice and using their voices playfully.**
- **To promote pupils’ sense of community ownership, belonging and pride through collaboratively working with peers and sharing and celebrating their work with the wider community.**
- **To support teachers and other staff in the school in expanding the range of creative drama techniques used across their teaching to enrich learning and engagement across the curriculum and wider school life.**

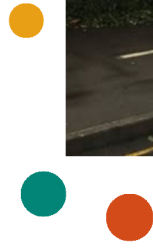


Aims and synopsis for the residency

Bournville Primary School’s leadership recognise and value the importance of strong verbal and non-verbal communication and there is an ongoing focus on developing children’s oracy skills across the school. Supporting children to develop their language skills and have the confidence to speak out loud and communicate in a range of everyday situations is an ongoing mission at Bournville. Adults in the school model “high-quality interactions” from the moment the pupils arrive at school, and this starts with a “meet and greet” in the playground, which many children find difficult. The Headteacher is passionate about giving the children across the school skills for learning and life, now and in the future, and especially into being able to thrive in secondary school and beyond.



Photo Courtesy of Bournville Primary School



“

Our children, they can be quite challenging to engage and in those slightly more unstructured activities like drama, music, those sorts of things, can lose it quite quickly and then you know that that you have those problems. But I think that there was a very clear ability for [Toby] to build those relationships really quickly with the children. And I think the greatest and the most successful work we ever do with any outside person coming in to work with us is around their ability to establish those relationships really quickly and get the best out of the children.

”

Marie Berry, Headteacher

In collaboration with leaders at WEMA’s Cultural Education Hub, Bournville Primary School chose to work with Toby Hulse for this residency, a playwright, director and creative practitioner who specialises in making Theatre for family audiences and in educational contexts. Toby was known to the school through work with his company Roustabout, who have developed three shows there in a co-creation model, as well as toured work for performance. The school leadership felt that Toby’s work and focus aligned with their priorities. It was also important to them to work with a creative practitioner who already knew the school, was familiar with the community context and had shown that they had the skills to work in this unique community, as past experience had shown that this initially was a challenge for some practitioners to adapt to the context. It was noted that time needs to be invested in building relationships with the children and becoming a familiar and welcoming face within the community.

The creative practitioner worked with every class from Year 2 to Year 6 as part of this residency. The delivery of the workshops happened across two time periods. For three afternoons in October 2025, Toby worked with one Year 3 and one Year 4 class for 45-60 minutes per week, where he introduced drama games and exercises that were focussed on speaking, listening and communication. A focus in these sessions was to be able to speak out loud to the group and to reflect on and express what this felt like.

Through discussion with the class teachers, Toby selected two stories from the school's 'Opening Worlds' humanities curriculum to develop further in the second part of the residency. Plans for this were shared with pupils before the first part of the residency so that they knew what was to come and could be excited about this. Toby created a script for 'Rama and Sita' (year 3) and 'Julius Caesar' (year 4) in which there were speaking parts for all pupils. He worked with the same classes for five afternoons in March 2026, rehearsing these short plays for an informal performance at the end of the residency.

Additionally, Toby worked across all the other Year 2 to Year 6 classes for between 60 and 90 minutes during the second part of the residency. The stimulus for each class was bespoke for the pupils in each specific class and the focus was on verbal and non-verbal communication through games, exercises and exploring speaking and listening alongside working towards a collective and community-owned focus. Whilst the residency has now finished, it is the school's intention that the pupils will continue rehearsing the short plays and give

“ It made me more confident because I was picked to do something in front of the whole class - I didn't think I would ever do that. ”

Year 6 pupil

a presentation to other pupils and an invited audience of parents and carers in assembly later this term, to which Toby will be invited.

As with all of the WEMA residencies, research meetings were held at the beginning and the end and the creative practitioner and the school were supported to consider what 'success' would look like and how they would evidence the process and outcomes.

Observations were collected throughout the process by the creative practitioner, class teachers and, at points, the Headteacher, who also actively sought feedback from the teachers and pupils on a regular basis. Pupils were also encouraged to reflect on how they felt about the workshops and the activities within them as part of each session and to talk about their thoughts and feelings.



Photo Courtesy of Toby Hulse

Key Outcomes

Young People

➤ The residency was described as ‘ambitious’. It gave pupils opportunities to engage in experiences they would not otherwise have had in school or, in most cases, out of school.

➤ Multiple examples of pupils who both thrived and surprised themselves and staff with their levels of engagement, enjoyment and confidence were shared.

➤ By having the session organised into two periods of time and working repeatedly with classes, the Year 3 and Year 4 children had the chance to get to know the creative practitioner better and build their confidence and trust in him and each other. They were able to look forward to the second set of workshops and knew what to expect so they could be more excited and relaxed about this.

➤ Each time the creative practitioner visited the school, more children acknowledged him and said hello around the school and asked if he was coming to their class today. Becoming a familiar face and ‘part of the school community’ reportedly helped pupils to feel more confident to engage in unfamiliar learning and be more open to being out of their comfort zone.

➤ Many children enjoyed having their own script, which ‘some took everywhere around the school’ with them. It was noted that the visibility of having the printed script itself was an important part of engendering a sense of belonging, ownership and pride, and demonstrates the power of working authentically.

➤ Whilst each child had their own line(s) to say, they took on helping each other out by prompting or filling in lines in a kindly and supportive way without taking over. This is different to former situations where this would have caused disagreements and disgruntlement within the class as pupils were previously noticeably ‘more precious’ about it.

➤ A small minority of Year 3 pupils were fully involved until the informal performance, when nerves/shyness were evident and they did not participate. In all workshops there were opportunities in the workshops for this to be talked about and feelings normalised, and also reflections on the paradox of not being or feeling able to participate but simultaneously not wanting to let others down.

➤ Even when they chose not to speak to begin with, most pupils stood with the group and were part of the play. Some pupils observed and then joined in when they were more ready to do so. Sometimes evidence of their listening and learning from the sidelines emerged later in the process and this demonstrates the importance of supporting children to stay in the room and keep an open mind about levels of engagement and learning.

“ One of the skills we are desperately constantly trying to build with our children is resilience, in that when something's challenging, we don't just give up and walk away from it, we find a way...actually giving children opportunities to speak and be able in [Toby's] very warm, very nice way which drama and this theatre model actually shows that. ”

Marie Berry, Headteacher

➤ Observing the creative artist make changes and adaptations ‘in the moment’ to find solutions to tricky situations and to make things work for all was considered helpful in modelling flexibility and problem-solving to the children.

➤ The exercises and games with each class focussed on building trust, oracy and verbal and non-verbal communication. This included being able to say and express oneself in different ways. The Headteacher reiterated that many children at Bourneville find it hard to express themselves and their emotions, especially when they are in a tricky situation, and the school hope that embedding drama techniques and drawing on the processes and outcomes of this residency will help develop pupils’ ability and confidence to communicate in other contexts, including supporting the school’s work around Zones of Regulation.

➤ Some classes visibly struggled with exercises such as being able to make and maintain eye contact with each other. This observation made teachers reflect on the benefit of using the exercises the creative practitioner introduced in the future to put more emphasis on developing skills, habits and behaviours that are needed to thrive personally and collectively as well as academically.

“ My class loved it! It was lovely to see some of the more nervous, quieter children grow in confidence over the hour Toby was with us. I saw sides and confidence from some children I didn't expect too. ”

Year 6 teacher



Photo Courtesy of Bourneville Primary School

Staff

➤ Multiple teachers reportedly expressed their joy at observing children in their classes engage with the creative learning opportunities that proliferated in the workshops and grow in confidence through the process.

➤ Allowing and encouraging children the space and time to bring their humour into the workshops was very impactful for building relationships with adults and each other, and this in itself is seen as a very important skill to develop. The Headteacher also commented on the importance of this in terms of helping pupils recognise where to draw the line within a school context.

➤ The impact on teachers’ thinking and practice from supporting and observing the creative practitioner’s ways of working in the workshops was a common feature of the feedback provided by teachers to the Headteacher. This demonstrates the importance and potential power of in-situ opportunities for teachers to learn with and from experts in their field, observing how they work with young people in real-life, not only hearing about theoretical situations, and having opportunities to follow this up with professional conversations to understand how and why decisions were

made. Having one-off opportunities to work with the creative practitioner was considered useful and even more so, to have repeated opportunities for this.

➤ Teachers observed how the creative practitioner supported children to be able to access and use spoken and written language. Examples shared included strategies being scaffolded in multiple ways to remember lines and to speak out loud with understanding and varied use of their voices, regardless of whether they were competent or confident readers, and also how to develop children’s co-owned scripts. Some teachers reported gaining new ways to support pupils that may help children to engage more confidently with learning across the breadth of the curriculum.

➤ Developing children’s speech and their toolkit of language and ways to communicate and express themselves has been shown through this residency to be beneficial in the short term to individuals and whole classes. Whilst the longer-term impact of this, and the residency as a whole, is as yet unknown, the experience has reaffirmed their interest in taking this work further.

➤ The exercises with each class focussed on oracy and communication, and being able to say and express oneself in different ways. The Headteacher reiterated that many children at Bourneville find it hard to express themselves and their emotions, especially when they are in a tricky situation, and they hope that embedding drama techniques and drawing on the experiences of this residency will help develop their ability and confidence to communicate.

“ Where you get the best out of any of these sorts of projects long term is where you've got somebody, that expert, who's coming in regularly to deliver that provision at the highest standard and with it comes the CPD. What will have happened last week is for those teachers that had the little session, they've had a little snippet of it, but for [the teachers in Year 3 and 4], they've had a week of CPD alongside Toby...So that's the legacy, that's the bit where you build that in working alongside those colleagues and building their confidence and skill set to be able to deliver this moving forward. ”

Marie Berry, Headteacher

Creative Practitioner

➤ The creative practitioner talked about his priority in ensuring that all pupils had a spoken line within the scripts he prepared and the importance he placed on this, regardless of whether the children delivered their line in the performance.

➤ This residency provided opportunities for the creative practitioner to work with all pupils from Year 2 to Year 6. This wide experience gave the artist a lot to reflect upon in relation to working with children of different ages and at different stages in their education, and to think about the different character of each class, their preferences and readiness to take creative risks.

➤ The creative practitioner reflected on the varied roles of the adults (teachers and support staff) in each workshop and how

they seamlessly supported individual pupils and groups in and out of activities through insightful reading of emergent situations as they arose. He was grateful for their engagement and recognised the importance of their roles in keeping workshops on track as pupil's engagement ebbed and flowed alongside changing levels of confidence and resilience.

➤ He also reflected on the sense of community and support for each other in each class, with children noting the learning challenges of their peers (for example with reading) and of their own volition, finding constructive ways to support them.

➤ The Year 3 play was initially less successful at keeping all pupils engaged and the creative practitioner reflected on whether this was in part related to the choice of public performance as a key outcome. However, the class teacher and pupils are still working on the play now the residency has finished and links to the curriculum are considered useful. Through a professional

“ The work with 4B was particularly successful because as I walked into the classroom, they had on the wall a script that they'd been writing, and obviously [script writing] was something that was of interest to the class teacher...So I was able to link the practical work really closely to their curriculum study and teacher and the children all said now it had given them a different understanding to what they've been doing with the script work. ”

Toby Hulse, Creative Practitioner



Photo Courtesy of Bournville Primary School

conversation with the school's headteacher, he could see that, on balance, the materials and the approaches were suited to many of the pupils and that for others, it took longer for them to gain the confidence and/or resilience to contribute. His continual adaptations to "make things work" were noticed and his flexibility was appreciated.

➤ The two periods of time in school with a gap in between provided opportunities for the creative practitioner to talk to staff and work with the children before the bespoke scripts were prepared. Being familiar with the school through previous work was considered advantageous by the school and creative practitioner. This allowed him to quickly adapt to the needs, personality and aspirations of each class, including in the one-off sessions across years 2 to 6 in the final part of the residency. His ability to build relationships quickly and to build on pupils' own ideas and "run with it" were noted by the Headteacher as a contributory factor in the success of this residency.

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ The flexibility of the creative practitioner and his ability to be so versatile and work through a cross-curricular lens were praised by the Headteacher. This has provided much food for thought for the school in terms of how aspects of their curriculum could be planned and accessed in more creative ways in order to hook more children into learning.

➤ The outcomes of this residency reminded the Headteacher of the importance of providing opportunities and providing support for children to work towards something they can collectively own, perform and celebrate, which has “fallen off the radar since Covid”. Teachers and the Headteacher reflected on the power of drama and creative learning to engage and inspire pupils and the importance of continuing to use this in the future. This may include adding new clubs to the school’s extra-curricular offer, depending upon the capacity of the staff, and there are plans for it to be threaded through the curriculum to enhance and support academic and holistic learning.

“ The children loved the workshop and were really excited to be given parts and a script. It was lovely that they worked on a story that they were already familiar with and linked to the curriculum, which brought their learning alive. Toby was brilliant with the children; he had endless energy and enthusiasm making it fun and engaging. He was nurturing and kind and worked hard to make sure all children felt included. ”

Year 3 teacher

➤ A second upcoming performance provides an opportunity for pupils who did not participate in the informal performances by choice and for multiple reasons, including lack of confidence, not yet being ready to step outside of the safety of just performing with the class and through performance-day nerves or shyness. Those who participated in the informal performances efforts and achievements were applauded and externally validated. It is hoped that having seen their peers getting this response, more will want to participate next time. This shows the importance of having multiple entry and re-entry points for engagement in order to include more pupils when they are ready, as has been the case throughout this residency.

➤ The workshop lengths were flexibly between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on how a class responded on the day, which was often reportedly related to the age and maturity of pupils. Leaving flexibility in a timetable, rather than rigidly sticking to fixed times was useful and gave space and time for work to flourish and come to a natural end. Whilst this is challenging for school timetabling, it shows that willingness to be led by the pupils can be very fruitful and organic.

➤ The authentic way in which pupils worked with and were treated by the artist contributed to the sense of purpose and ownership. The collective ambition and being able to visualise the tangible goal is important to this and can be motivating. The importance of “the goal” is sometimes lost in day-to-day education, as reflected on by the Headteacher.

➤ Seeing the responses of the children to creating something and working at it for a performance that they own and feel part of has made the staff team consider how they can bring the community into the school more to share and celebrate children's achievements through artform engagement more regularly, for example, in assemblies.

➤ The Headteacher and creative practitioner reflected on the limitations and pressure of a "very packed" school curriculum and the demands and challenges this brings to staff and schools. The learning processes and levels of engagement seen in this residency are deemed important to future thinking and curriculum planning.

➤ The Headteacher highlighted the significant contribution that this residency has brought to the school through collaborating with the WEMA's Cultural Education Hub and the importance of being financially and practically supported throughout the process, as well as providing the opportunities to reflect as part of the process. As a school in an area of significant deprivation, such opportunities are not ordinarily available to children in this area, and yet the impact of this residency across the school community is palpable. Finding ways to sustain and develop this work is important to the school and highlighted as an ongoing challenge.

“ And it felt like, if nothing else, it presented a model of 'if you find something challenging, find another way around it'. It's the secret of being a successful human, isn't it? ”

Toby Hulse, Creative Practitioner

“ Opportunities for these sorts of things are really, really important in actually giving young people in this area, in such an area of disadvantage, an opportunity to express themselves through theatre, through drama, through the arts. ”

Marie Berry, Headteacher

Toby Hulse

Toby Hulse is a playwright and director who creates theatre for young and family audiences, and in educational contexts. He has made work for theatres and companies across the UK, teaches regularly in drama schools and universities, and is a regular visitor to schools in the South West.

Toby has twice won the Distinguished Play Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, for his plays *To Dream Again* (2018) and *Beowulf* (2019), and received the Special Achievement in Innovation Award at the 2025 UK Pantomime Awards. His production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Southwark Playhouse (2025) was nominated for an Off West End Award for Innovation.

He is also one quarter of Roustabout Theatre, an award-winning team of theatre makers based in Bristol, born out of over ten years of collaboration and nonsense. Performed in theatres, schools, libraries & community venues, their work is for audiences of all ages, for anyone who loves play, and for anyone who delights in the communal act of sharing a story.

www.roustabouttheatre.co.uk

Promoting engagement with, and understanding of, a different culture



Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

Background to the school

Marshfield Primary School is a small village primary school with five classes. The school aims to “provide the best possible education and life experiences for our pupils” and staff seek to create a rich and engaging curriculum which opens up multiple opportunities for pupils to explore their place in the wider world. Most pupils at Marshfield are of White British heritage and there are a few pupils in the school where English is not the primary language, which mirrors the local community.

Marshfield CE VC Primary School
Key Stages 1 and 2
Creative Practitioner: Batch Gueye

Specific residency objectives:

- To diversify pupils’ exposure to influences of a culture which is beyond their own experiences.
- To involve the wider community in celebrating performing experiences from a less familiar culture.
- To develop artform skills in singing, dance and drumming.
- To ensure that the experience is universally accessible and inclusive, so that all pupils are able to fully contribute and thrive in the practical workshops.
- To develop staff understanding of how to weave more multicultural education into the curriculum in meaningful and authentic ways.

Aims and synopsis for the residency

WEMA’s Cultural Education Hub worked with the school to identify and engage West African griot Batch Gueye as the creative practitioner for their residency. Across a series of twice-weekly sessions during the final half term of the 2024-25 academic year, Batch worked with the year 3 class to develop their understanding of Senegalese culture and Africa through singing, acting, dancing, percussion and storytelling. Each session had planned learning outcomes which related to developing their cultural understanding alongside specific artform outcomes. Multiple opportunities were incorporated for pupils to ask questions and explore their own perceptions.

Batch also led whole-school assemblies which involved storytelling, singing and dance and included multiple opportunities for freestyle improvisation.



I always think back to the very first Assembly when you start and no one was really moving and by the end of that 25 minutes it was unbelievable, the difference.

Everyone was up dancing and singing, drumming along, and I felt then, gosh, if we can achieve this in 25 minutes, what are we going to achieve in a term and the end performance?

Yeah, it blew my expectations. I couldn't really believe it.



Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher

The residency culminated in an artistic performance in July 2025, in which the whole school performed together and the Year 3 class gave a presentation of the piece they had worked on with Batch. An audience of parents and school governors attended the performance.

The process of the learning was documented through the careful preparation of a large floor book which included pictures and quotes from children and staff. The final performance was video recorded.

Across the residency, Batch delivered 11 workshops for a group of 15 year 3 students, and four weekly assemblies for all 124 students in the school, culminating in the final performance at the end of term.

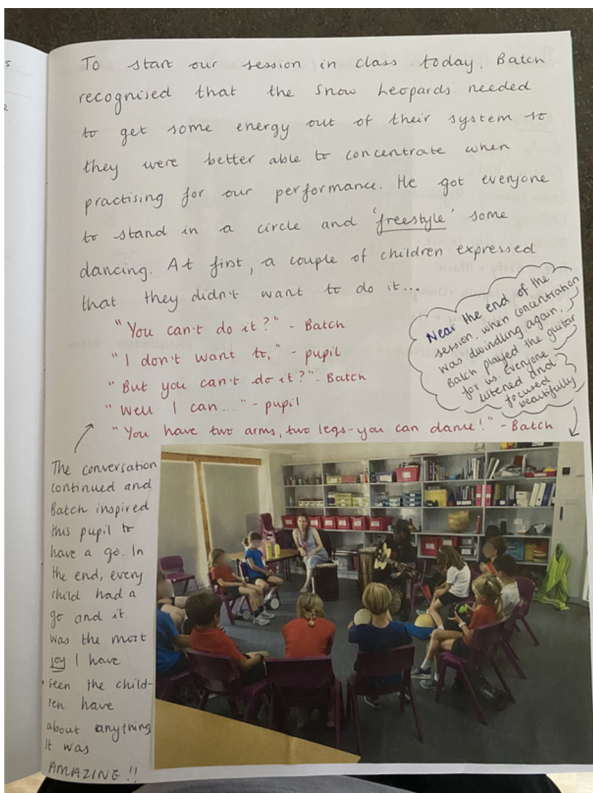


Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

Key outcomes

Young people

➤ Pupils in the class Batch worked with noticeably grew in confidence within the sessions. Some of the more reluctant performers and quiet pupils in the class were drawn in through the freestyle dance and drumming and this freedom positively changed their experience of performing.

➤ Some pupils maintained this confidence in other aspects of their school life, being more willing to contribute to class discussions and also to have more resilience to continue to engage when faced with challenges in their learning such as in reading or maths.

➤ Staff reported that children noticed more in the world around them as a result of taking part in this residency, seeing things that they seemed unaware of previously and noticing things about Africa, languages and the people they saw and how this related to Batch and what he had introduced them to from his culture.



Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

“ As a leader at school, I really like the way Batch unified the whole school. I think we really saw that with the chanting at the end, the ‘Batch Batch Batch’, you know everyone in the school was a part of that experience, even though it was Year three, working closely with him. But I think everyone would feel like they got to know Batch. They got to know something about his culture. So that aspect of it was fantastic and I think seeing people that look different to what we see in school usually is just really powerful for them, because they live in such a bubble and to have that experience is fantastic. ”

Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher

➤ Pupils appreciated being able to ask any questions and to explore their natural curiosity about things that were unfamiliar to them (e.g. “are those earrings attached to their clothes or their skin?” “What illnesses are in Africa?” “Does it make your hands sore when you drum?”).

➤ Pupils with specific learning needs were quickly able to engage through the strategies used to learn material, including in particular the use of call and response in the early sessions. The freedom offered by the improvisatory nature of some of the tasks was difficult for some children to engage with initially but through repetition, support from the teacher and others in the classroom, pupils were able to be more free and creative with their responses over time. They gained noticeably more confidence between the first and second session and were able to be fully engaged in the final performance.



➤ Using props and wearing costumes provided by Batch for the final performance made a huge difference to how children felt about performing. The shared experience of the performance reportedly brought the class community closer together and this shared experience continued to noticeably bond the class even after the final performance had taken place.

➤ Pupils responded well to the artist talking about his emotions and how it felt to perform. The acknowledgement that he sometimes felt nervous was helpful for some pupils who sometimes feel a personal pressure to “get everything right” or to do something in front of others where they may feel exposed.

➤ The pupils in the class Batch worked with felt ownership of the piece they performed. It brought together singing, dancing, acting and storytelling, and the inclusion of aspects that the children had developed themselves, such as some of the choreography, helped to engender this ownership.

Staff

➤ Through watching Batch working with the classes and also with the whole school, some teachers now feel that they are able to confidently keep promoting the repertoire taught and lead this themselves, for example in assemblies. However, the Deputy Head candidly talked about the recognition of the importance of the authentic voice that working with a Senegalese artist has brought, and whilst they can continue to lead the repertoire, they cannot do this with the authenticity that Batch brought to the learning situation and so they will aim to find ways to keep this authenticity in the curriculum as far as possible.

➤ Staff report that they have “masses of material” that they can continue to develop across the curriculum in future years. This includes in music, dance and drama. The residency has also provided opportunities for them to think about books and resources they use across the curriculum to further explore multiculturalism and how the curriculum breadth can be developed and expanded to keep nurturing the children’s growing interest in other cultures whilst maintaining core learning at the heart.

➤ Staff recognised the power of the “authentic voice” and how important it is when introducing and discussing certain topics, experiences and cultures. They reflected upon their own strengths in this regard and also the need to bring authentic voices into the curriculum wherever possible to help children gain a deeper understanding and experience of the world in which they live. In particular, English, history and RE were areas where they are giving this even deeper consideration, following on from this residency.



I think the biggest point for us which will influence a lot of the direction of the school moving forward is the authentic voice. Batch has come in as an authentic voice. It's about his own culture. It's not one of us teaching about African culture, I think that's been really important because it's made it... a lot more honest.



Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant
Headteacher

➤ The school’s Assistant Headteacher reflected on the power of having external creative practitioners working in schools over a period of time and the potential impact of this on the whole school community. He noted that staff often didn’t stay for assembly but having seen and heard what Batch was able to produce with the children after just 25 minutes, this experience “blew their expectations” and some of the staff attended future assemblies.

➤ The class teacher took a full and active part in the workshops run by Batch and gained the confidence to lead activities between the sessions. She talked about how she noticed that some of the children were now “always dancing” in the playground, and how this had evolved within the residency from them initially rehearsing the dance they had been learning to them developing their own choreography, some of which was also demonstrated in the final performance, which she felt validated their work because their creativity was rewarded.

➤ The class teacher reflected on how inspired she was seeing how the pupils reacted to this authenticity in the learning and how she could develop her own practice to bring more opportunities into the curriculum for pupils to develop their own ideas when exploring ideas and contexts that were unfamiliar to them.

“Wow, it was amazing. All your singing brought so much joy!”
Mrs J Bolt, Headteacher



Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

Creative practitioner

➤ The creative practitioner reported that he gained more experience of working in a mainstream school setting and, in particular, developed his understanding of how to engage pupils with a range of learning needs within a whole-class setting. He noticed how they were supported by others in the class and the importance of structuring learning so that pupils gain the confidence to join in.

➤ He also noted his own surprise at seeing the change in pupils from week to week. In particular, he recognised the need for him not to “judge” pupils based on how they initially presented, citing the example of a girl who was distracted and a little disengaged in the first session and went on to perform her own freestyle dance once she was confident to engage in creative risk taking in front of her teacher and peers.

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ This residency unified the school - the staff, pupils and the community, particularly the parents of the children in the Year 3 class. The whole school got behind the residency and relished the opportunities to work with Batch. In a very short space of time, Batch piqued the pupils' interest and their enthusiasm for singing and dancing in the whole-school assemblies was evident.

➤ The singing repertoire that the classes learnt is becoming more and more familiar to the whole school community and is already becoming embedded in regular singing now that the residency has finished. Pupils of all ages showed no inhibitions when performing it together and felt a sense of ownership and being part of a community that was further enhanced through the excellent facilitation.

➤ Pupils' confidence to "have a go" which was developed through this residency has, at times, spread into other areas of the curriculum, for example in Mathematics and reading and being more willing to answer questions in times tables tests.

➤ A parent reported that their child spontaneously talked about the experience at home, which was unusual, and showed an interest in the music and culture beyond the sessions. One parent shared that their child had looked up examples of the music on Apple Music and still taps out the rhythms that were learnt as part of the songs.

➤ Marshfield intend to apply for Artsmark Platinum in the near future. The learning from this work, in relation to the processes and the outcomes, are part of the ongoing legacy of the residency and will contribute to this Artsmark application.

➤ Having a residency such as this was viewed as a great success which will continue to have a legacy at Marshfield in terms of the repertoire used and developed, the resources and the diversification of ways in which staff may teach in the future. The school leadership recognise the value of providing such rich authentic multicultural experiences and would like to continue to expand their pupils' opportunities to do this. However, the cost and opportunities of this are particularly prohibitive to small schools without external funding and support.

➤ The co-creation of the final piece contributed to the sense of pride and ownership felt by the pupils. There is much to think about in relation to weaving opportunities for co-creation and bringing children's own ideas more into the curriculum.

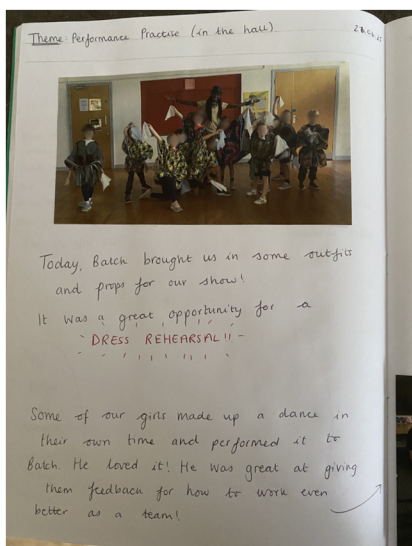


Photo Courtesy of Marshfield Primary School

Watch films about the project created by Batch Gueye's team:

Interview with Batch



Interview with Year 3 teacher, Nan Thomas



I think we're going to really use this idea of authentic voices, because it makes our curriculum more honest. It's not white people explaining what other cultures experience; we want to hear from the people that have lived that experience. So even things like books in English, we want to make sure we're reading books that are written by the people from that culture, so that it's the true lived experience. So I think that's the biggest impact that [the residency] is going to have for quite a few years now on the school.



Tomi Looker-Jones, Assistant Headteacher

Final performance



Batch Gueye:

Batch is a West-African Griot, a storyteller through his music and dance.

Singing Baye Fall chants is where Batch found his voice. Batch's songs are about life experiences: about travel, immigration, places he has lived in and people he met and is grateful to.

Batch sings his songs in the Senegalese language Wolof. However, language does not obstruct his music. The passion Batch has can be heard in his soulful voice and understood by all.

Batch's energy as a dancer is as vibrant and colourful as the patchwork clothes of his Baye Fall people. Like his music, his dance style is a collection of both traditional and modern African cultures.

In 2014 Batch formed *Sabar Family*, a community of artists dedicated to promoting arts and culture from West Africa and the African Diaspora, through education, professional practice, development and creative collaborations.

batchgueye.com

Connecting with the local community, through oral histories and lantern making



©Event Photography Bristol

Horton CE VA Primary School
Key Stages 1 and 2
Creative Organisation: Lamplighter Arts CIC

Background to the school

Horton CE VA Primary School is situated in the small village of Horton, a rural South Gloucestershire location about 18 miles from both Bath and Bristol and part of Sodbury Vale on the edge of the Cotswolds. As one of the smallest mainstream primary schools in the southwest of England, Horton Primary School has 34 pupils aged 4 to 11 who are taught in three small classes. Many of the school's pupils come from outside the village of Horton.

Background to Lamplighter Arts CIC

Lamplighter Arts CIC are experienced artists and designers based in East Bristol wanting to make positive change where they live. They have a shared practice in creating work which encourages social interaction. Lamplighter Arts CIC is an organisation where individuals can collaborate with each other to inspire and conceive projects to promote individual and community wellbeing. This may be achieved through the workshop process or by engagement in creativity in public spaces.

Specific residency objectives:

- **To develop pupils' connections to the village of Horton and deepen their understanding of the area and its people, past and present.**
- **To provide pupils with the experience of capturing oral histories.**
- **To involve the school and wider community in an inclusive participatory celebration event linked to the village of Horton.**
- **To co-create a lasting visual legacy of the work which is co-owned by the children and linked to the village.**
- **To support Horton's teachers to develop their own knowledge and experience of working artistically with children in new and creative ways.**

Aims and synopsis for the residency

The leadership at Horton CE VA Primary School wished to draw the community and school closer together and, in particular, to help pupils in the school feel more connected to the village of Horton, since many live outside of the village and travel in to school each day. This includes, amongst others, a group of pupils in the school from a settled traveller community who are not based in the village. Many of the villagers have no direct link with the school at this current time, although Horton is a place where many families have been resident in the village for generations. The school sought to mount a collaborative community event as a positive and engaging way to further integrate the school and the local community. A focus on the village of Horton also supported the ambitions of the History National Curriculum to learn about the local area, which was in the curriculum plan for the autumn term 2025.

“ As outsiders coming in, I was just so struck by how lovely and how much of a community the school felt like; how all the older kids knew all the younger kids’ names as they’re walking past, they’re saying hello. They’re looking out for them. And all the teachers got involved. And it’s so different to the schools we normally work in, which have three or four form entry...So to actually work across a whole school with children, from reception up to year six, and all the teachers getting involved in the project, I thought it was a really lovely and kind of a unique experience. ”

Amy Peck, Lamplighter Creative Practitioner



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Supported by WEMA’s Cultural Education Hub, the school chose Lamplighter Arts as the creative practitioners for this residency, an East Bristol based community arts organisation with over 30 years of experience in mounting community arts projects and events. Additionally, Dee Moxon is renowned for her work and interest in collecting oral histories. Having come across their work in other community settings in Bristol, the school felt that being part of a lantern parade would be a unique experience their children would relish and, given their rural geographical location, something that would not be available to them without this residency. Additionally, they recognised that the small size of the school staff meant that there is more limited resources and staff expertise for such opportunities than in a larger school in a more populated area where such community events are part of the established culture. They also felt that working with Lamplighter’s community artists would support their staff in gaining new artform and pedagogic knowledge, supporting their own subject development.

The meticulous planning for this residency took place over the summer and early autumn of 2025. As well as designing the artistic aspects of the residency, the planning involved Dee Moxon from Lamplighter researching the local history and working with the school and local community to put in place the plans and paperwork for a planned Horton Village lantern parade. Dee worked with KS2 children to train their interviewing skills to collect local histories so that the children could hear first-hand accounts of past life in the village from some of the residents. A team of artists from Lamplighter worked with every child in the school to create lanterns in a variety of shapes and sizes which celebrated the pupils and the village, past and present. The lantern parade started at the school and finished outside the village hall with a short performance from the school choir.

Across the residency Lamplighter delivered seven workshops for students, engaging all 34 students in the school across the project. The final lantern parade took place on the evening of 21st November 2025.

A digital tapestry/story cloth of the work was created by Lamplighter, and after forming part of the parade, is now permanently on display, providing a lasting physical legacy of the residency, parade and the children's work, with the ambition to display one in St James the Elder church and the other in the school.

The creative practitioners kept a recorded reflective conversation going throughout the residency, which was shared as part of the research.

Key outcomes

Young people

➤ Children in the school developed their understanding of what it was like to live in the village of Horton in the past. Many found it engaging to hear first-hand accounts from a small number of villagers and also from a member of staff in the school with a long-term connection to the village. They were confident to ask questions and discuss thoughts and feelings about the village and the school.

➤ Key Stage 2 pupils were trained by Dee in interviewing, which they enjoyed and provided some of them with a new skill. Due to the limited number of villagers that were available to be interviewed, they interviewed each other and worked on developing good questions to ask and how to listen well, collecting their own contemporary histories and opportunities to think about their own connections to Horton and the school.

➤ Making the lanterns afforded the pupils opportunities to work as artists in the small workshops and encouraged their own ideas to incubate and come to life through careful scaffolding.



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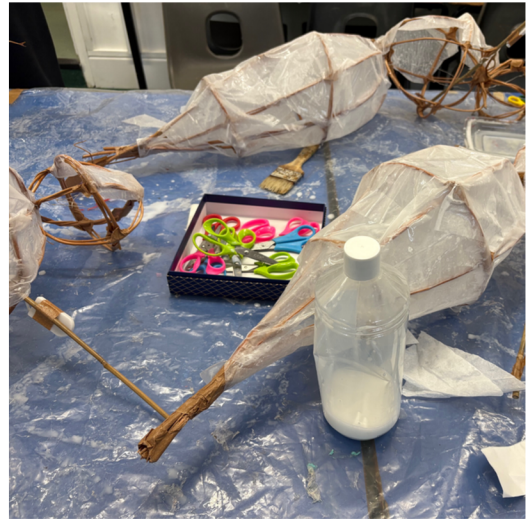
➤ Incredible effort was made for every child in the school to contribute to the creation of the lanterns, even those absent on the days of the workshops. Lamplighter’s artists ensured that all children, no matter the extent of their contribution to the creation of the work, were integral to the parade. This was appreciated by parents and caregivers as well as the children themselves.

➤ Many children reportedly felt a sense of pride and belonging as part of the lantern parade. They took responsibility to ensure that everyone could feel included and some children took it upon themselves to share things they were carrying with others when they noticed others were not so fully involved.

➤ Music is important to children’s lives at Horton Primary School and they were excited and proud to sing in the choir at the end of the lantern parade. Integrating this performance into the event demonstrates

“ We went on a whole school walk a couple of weeks ago and it was amazing to hear the conversations of the children be like “Oh yeah, and that's that thing, isn't it?” And “oh, and that's that lady's house” and that sort of thing. And the same thing when they walk down to PE, they're going through the village and I definitely get a sense of them looking around more. And it's not just walking from A to B to get to their PE lesson. It's “Oh, we're, you know, we're walking down that bit” or “I remember when we saw that” [...] the children have got more of an awareness of where they are. ”

Beth Nascè, Teacher



the importance of identifying, celebrating and developing what a school does well already when planning new experiences. The high quality of the singing was also commented on by attendees.

➤ Following the residency, some children in the school now have a better appreciation of and interest in the school, the village and the people who live locally, noticing and commenting on things they may not have been aware of or noticed previously. For example, their informal chatter when they walk around the village and go to the forest school area has been overheard by staff and includes chatter about who lives where and remembering the parade on the walk to the village hall for PE.



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Staff

➤ The residency gave the school's staff opportunities to think about contemporary and ancient history of the local area. It has generated much material, an understanding of new and different ways of working and opportunities to revisit and expand the work on local history the next time this comes up in the four-year curriculum cycle.

➤ The pupils interviewing each other gave the artists and the school staff a real insight into the children's lives in school, their aspirations and preferences. This elicited some surprising responses about the uniqueness of being in a small school, for example being able to play games all together in the playground. It also gave staff opportunities to reflect positively on the efforts they put into making this small community cohesive and the opportunities they were able to provide, despite limited resources. It also provided a deeper understanding of why these experiences, often which contributed to making positive

“ Something I really think is worth saying from a school's perspective is the idea of doing a big project like this. It was so lovely to have professional people who know what they're doing [...] and were very creative, because I'm personally quite a creative teacher, but I know that for other teachers it's a struggle. If we'd decided, 'oh, we have to do a lantern parade' and even if we knew how to make them, I don't know if they would have been as excited. And, you know, I think we would have seen it as an imposition [...]. So, actually to be able to kind of let go of the control of what the children have to make and how it has to look, it was quite nice for us. ”

Beth Nascè, Teacher

memories with others and feeling a sense of belonging, were so fondly recounted, particularly around the forest school which is embedded in the school's programme.



Photo Courtesy of Lamplighter Arts

➤ Some staff initially found it daunting to work in new artistic ways with whole classes, something which the artists reflected upon as the practices are so integral to their own toolkit and come naturally to them. Working alongside the artists and having opportunities to both observe them working and be part of the process was deemed to be useful for some adults.

➤ Staff found creative ways to link the work with their own curriculum, for example thinking about history in the context of the books used in class.

Creative practitioners

➤ This residency gave the artists a unique opportunity to work with the whole school, whereas in larger schools they often only work with part of the school community. This experience was appreciated.

➤ Working with mixed age groups meant that the artists reported needing to be flexible in their approaches to each aspect of the work and this was something they constantly thought about and adapted.

➤ The residency also provided opportunities for the artists to develop their own artform skills, particularly in creating or pioneering a new technique of digitally bringing together stories and artwork for the tapestry/story cloths, giving a detailed description of this process.

“ [The creation of the digital tapestry] was really lovely and organic. It just kind of emerged from the first day. Even though they were quite distinct, the art side and the oral history side, they were so linked ...When we were gathering the oral histories, the children were drawing and making collages at the same time, then they were writing their memories down so they would go in with Dee and interview each other ... And it all just linked and worked and emerged together. So, when I came to actually do the collage it was really clear how it needed to be and how it was going to look and how we would get all the elements in there. ”

Amy Peck, Lamplighter Creative Practitioner

➤ The creative practitioners reflected on the range of needs and prior experiences of the pupils in the school and ways in which they had worked collaboratively with the adults (teachers and classroom assistants) to be able to keep the children focussed on the work and engage in art in ways which they were unfamiliar with. One of the creative practitioners also noted the juxtaposition between the school and the village, and how this residency had, in part, served to soften this by bringing the village “into” the school as well as taking the school “into” the village.

➤ The ongoing professional conversation between the creative practitioners shone a light on their thinking and practices, highlighting their reflective and flexible approaches to arising situations and their working as a community of practice. It also very clearly demonstrated the “above and beyond” contribution that they made to the success of this residency in multiple ways, including, for example, the time given and scope of the project in relation to the

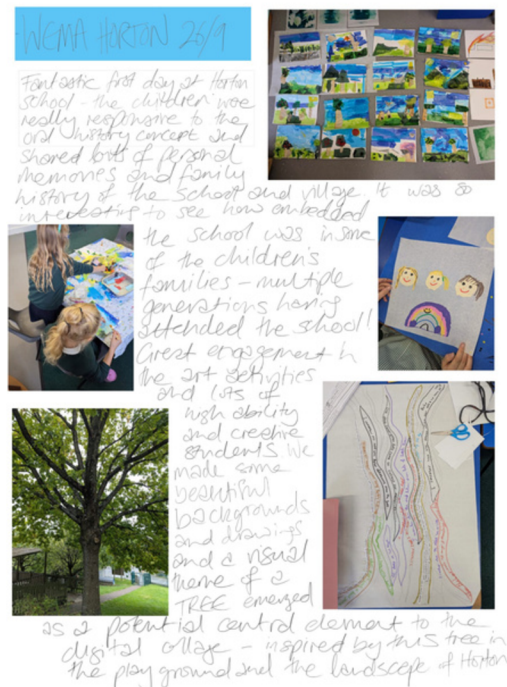


Photo Courtesy of Lamplighter Arts

budget available. They also noted the future potential for the large amount of material collected if more funding became available.

➤ One of the very experienced creative practitioners identified that she felt she would benefit from more training on working with young people with a wide range of learning needs in group situations to help her to develop her practical skills in making sessions as inclusive as possible. Horton Primary School has multiple pupils with needs that were usually well supported to engage by other adults in the room, and the creative artists built relationships with these pupils over time, which is not always afforded to them in the same way outside of a residency.

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ The residency has left a legacy at Horton Primary School in multiple ways. The work on local history branched off in the curriculum in multiple ways, linking together areas such as history, geography, literacy and citizenship/PSHE. Working with established artists and experienced and well-connected oral historians brought about other unexpected and well-received opportunities such as creating a “living history museum” where villagers were invited into the school to share their stories. The school described this residency as having “two projects in one” and were delighted with the opportunities for pupils to be able to make such deep connections across subject areas.

➤ Additionally, teachers feel that this residency “put them on the map”, which they feel is important to a small school in a rural



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community where the relationship between the school and the village as a whole is crucial.

➤ The feedback from parents was also very positive and the opportunity to bring the children and their parents together meant that some parents who are perhaps a little reticent to come to the school because they are usually there for more challenging reasons were able to enjoy the occasion and be included in the positivity of the event and their child’s contribution and achievement. This model of including families and caregivers as part of a residency is an important future consideration.

➤ Lamplighter Arts has a great deal of experience in launching large-scale community events. The logistics for this are complex and Horton Primary School were delighted to have such experienced partners undertaking this work on their behalf. Creating some written guidance, perhaps in the form of a small online toolkit with a checklist and skeleton paperwork could be something that would be useful to other schools and organisations in the future (recognising that rules and expectations change over time and this would need to be kept updated).

➤ The creative artists noted that they “seriously underestimated the amount of time the staff have at Horton” and the impact of such a residency on an already busy workload. Examples included managing the incoming contributions to the oral histories from the local residents and also finding ways to distribute the lantern-making kits to the local community “without putting undue pressure on the staff” and yet still keeping the school fully involved in the process of setting up the residency.

➤ Lamplighter creative practitioners also noted the logistical communication challenges with outside entities such as the village hall and the church, since the communication channels are generally directly through schools and talked candidly about how these were managed within this residency.

➤ Projects that collect oral histories need to have a great deal of sensitivity about how the stories are collected, shared and stored, and there are also issues to be teased out around ownership, legacy and how these can be used in the future. Horton School recognise that they have been lucky to work with Dee Moxon. As an oral history researcher, she is always concerned with the ethics of the work and has been working to establish a way for the collected histories to be ethically stored, including seeking permissions from the contributors. In this residency she sought advice from the regional adviser from the Oral History Society. This is something that could be easily overlooked in other projects and creating some straightforward guidance for educational settings could be another area considered in the future if funding is available.

“ There was one member of staff who is a village resident and she's quite a long term member of staff. We interviewed her and she was exceptional in terms of an oral history of the village. I think she thought she didn't have much to say until she got going, but really, between her and the other village visitor that we interviewed, the whole project quite quickly appeared. ”

Dee Moxon, Lamplighter Creative practitioner

➤ An ambition of this residency was to engage the wider community and the experienced artists knew that the success of this lay partly in the school and them being able to use and build key connections in the community and the church. The artists are thinking further on this, particularly in relation to how to draw more interest in a community arts workshop, which would have had the capacity to work with more families and children who do not attend the school. Nevertheless, some villagers and families beyond the school community supported the lantern parade either through joining in or watching from their windows.

➤ There is a case for funding residencies and artistic/learning opportunities in small rural schools such as Horton. There is sometimes an economic counter-case made for putting funding into areas with a larger population, but this residency has shown the important impact of bringing new experiences to a small community, especially when the focus is on creating a lasting impact and legacy as well as supporting exciting, creative and unfamiliar opportunities in the here-and-now.



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Watch a film of the lantern parade event featuring teacher Beth Nascè and artist Dee Moxon talking about the project:



“

I am immensely proud and deeply grateful for this wonderful experience and opportunity our pupils have been given. The lantern parade enriched their understanding of Horton’s history and community but have also helped them form meaningful connections with the place they come to learn each day. Watching our children grow in confidence, creativity and belonging has been truly inspiring.

My heartfelt thanks go to Lamplighter Arts, Mrs Nasce, our staff, our families and the villagers of Horton for joining us in creating something so memorable, inclusive and lasting for our school community.

Dean Hudd,
Executive Headteacher

Lamplighter Arts:

www.lamplighterarts.co.uk

Dee Moxon

Dee Moxon, founding member of Lamplighter Arts CIC, is an artist specialising in large-scale puppetry and community-led processional arts. Since 1998, she has created ambitious projects locally and internationally, bringing people together through inclusive, place-based storytelling and bold visual events.

Amy Peck

Amy is an artist and designer working across carnival, theatre and community arts. Her practice spans textiles, puppetry and installation, with work at major festivals and ongoing workshops and projects with schools and communities across the UK.

Stephanie Reeves

Stephanie Reeves is a socially engaged artist with over 20 years’ experience in carnival arts and giant puppetry. She creates large-scale spectacles, performances and installations for festivals, events and communities nationwide.

Seen and Heard: Creative spaces for belonging in school

Priory Community School Academy
Key Stage 3

Creative organisation: Super Culture

Background to the school

Priory Community School Academy (PCSA) is situated in Queensway, Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset. It is a non-selective mainstream secondary 11-16 school with around 1,500 pupils and is part of the Priory Learning Trust. Priory School prides itself on being a “happy community school where students come first”. It seeks to offer a whole-child approach to learning based around the school’s values of aspiration, integrity and respect, and supports its pupils to become “responsible citizens...who are confident and resilient young people with high self-esteem and are not afraid to take risks”.

Background to Super Culture

Super Culture describes itself as “a pioneering initiative that places outstanding cultural activity at the heart of Weston-Super-Mare’s daily life...We work with local communities and partners to create inclusive, ambitious cultural experiences that build skills, nurture social connection, spark understanding, and bring joy. Through public festivals, socially engaged projects, cross-sector partnerships, and talent development for local creatives, we aim to break down barriers, strengthen communities, and bring the extraordinary into everyday life”.

Specific residency objectives for Super Culture:

- To support children at risk of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) in developing a positive sense of belonging and identity within the school setting.
- To create opportunities for creative self-expression and collaboration.
- To embed children's perspectives into the school site through visual, spatial, or performative art.
- To trial a model of artist-led placemaking as a preventative approach to school disengagement.
- To inform future whole-school strategies for inclusion and mental health support.

Specific residency objectives for Priory Community School Academy:

- To improve self-confidence and self-esteem for pupils with EBSA and those at risk of EBSA within school and wider social settings.
- To support young people with EBSA or at risk of EBSA in developing their self-esteem, resilience and general wellbeing.



Aims and synopsis for the residency

Priory Community School Academy were approached by WEMA’s Cultural Education Hub and Super Culture to work collaboratively to develop a toolkit based around using artistic practices to support young people with, or at risk of, emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). Super Culture’s ambition is to create a toolkit for and with young people that can be used to support schools in encouraging more young people with EBSA to develop a sense of belonging, community, place and identity and to support preventative measures for those at risk of EBSA. As with many schools across England, Priory School has seen a rise in persistent absence since the Covid-19 pandemic and also a shift in parental attitudes to school attendance. This residency aligned closely with the strategic conversations and work on EBSA already taking place at Priory School and they were interested in how it could tap into the interests of specific students, with the ambition of supporting them to attend school regularly and to embrace the opportunities offered to them by the school through building their confidence and self-esteem, resilience and general wellbeing. Leadership at Priory School highlighted that the thresholds for young people to gain mental health support through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) had risen and some young people who may previously have had support were no longer eligible, and that CAMHS support was not always effective.

“ It was interesting how different areas of the [primary] school (like the gate or the head's office) could mean totally different things to different individuals. ”

Mike Akers, Creative Practitioner



Photo Courtesy of Super Culture

Working in collaboration with Priory School’s student welfare team, a small number of KS3 pupils (aged 11 to 14) were approached by the school’s Operational Student Attendance Lead to offer them the opportunity to be involved with this residency. Eight students took up the offer of attending workshops with creative practitioners from Super Culture. Six sessions took place at the start of the school day in January and February 2026, approximately weekly. Each session was facilitated by a creative practitioner from Super Culture alongside two artists who were trained by young people with experience of being outside the formal school system. Workshops were based around opening up conversation and honest discussion about thoughts and feelings on school, education and learning alongside artistic processes of creating and making which were tailored to these young people’s interests (including, in this case, games, lego and robots). A pro-active, positive approach to highlighting issues around the young people’s physical and emotional connections to the school and thinking about and discussing possible solutions to challenges raised was central to each workshop.

A playlist of the young people’s musical choices was also created for use in each session to make the environment more conducive and welcoming. The final session culminated in the participants collaborating to create a large Snakes and Ladders display of aspects of their work across the residency.

Prior to working with the students at Priory School, two creative practitioners from Super Culture led a workshop with a class of 22 Year 4 pupils at Worle Village Primary School, using discussion and creative techniques to gather pupils’ perspectives on their attitudes to school, the school environment and education, identifying what they celebrate and what they might want to change. This led to pupils writing letters to “the big kids” (in secondary school) about their thoughts and feelings about school and identity and designing envelopes to present the letters. The session culminated in writing down as many words as they could which they associated with school in a short amount of time. The thinking and writing



Photo Courtesy of Super Culture

“ We did speak to the children first rather than just saying “yeah, you've got to go along to this”. We wanted them to buy into it so they understood what they were doing as well. Because otherwise, we didn't want them not to engage with such a precious resource [the residency]. ”

Serena Robertson, Operational Student Attendance Lead, Priory School

produced by the Year 4 pupils in this workshop was used as a stimulus within one of the sessions at Priory School and also impacted the thinking about the design and content of the toolkit.

Super Culture’s lead creative practitioner kept a journal and detailed session notes throughout the residency, which was shared as part of the research, alongside a final impact report being produced by Super Culture. The reflections on each session and the activities that were trialled with the young people are central to the creation of the toolkit, alongside the feedback and ideas from the young people themselves, who were aware from the start of the residency that their contributions within the sessions would support the development of the toolkit.

The toolkit is being shaped with the help of Learning Everywhere CIC, to develop the ideas and learning from the residency workshops into language that is commonly understood within schools and adaptable for adults working in a range of roles with children and young people of different ages and backgrounds.

Key Outcomes

Young People

➤ Priory School kept registers for each session. Two young people attended all six sessions. Two attended five, two attended four, one attended two sessions and one attended one. Particularly for those attending the majority of sessions, this in itself was considered a success by the student welfare lead, noting that the sessions were held at the start of the school day and encouraged some pupils to come into school on that day and positively engage in the workshops. Whilst only accessed by a small number of pupils, Priory School were pleased to be able to offer this residency opportunity to these young people, noting the importance of tapping into their interest and recognising that a range of interventions better meets the range of needs and preferences for encouraging positive relationships with school.

➤ The young people attending workshops had a variety of views on the balance of art and talking in the sessions, some wanting more art and some wanting more opportunities to talk. This demonstrates the challenges in finding a happy balance; something which the artists constantly tried to adapt to in this residency.

“Most students highlighted the need for teachers to approach them in an empathetic manner, understanding their emotional needs.”

Casey Lloyd, Creative Facilitator,
Super Culture



Photo Courtesy of Super Culture

➤ Feedback from the lead creative practitioner described how 1:1 conversations were conducive to eliciting a range of responses and ideas from the young people that were often nuanced and individualised and that didn't come out to the same extent through group discussion.

➤ Recurring themes emerging through discussion about school in multiple workshops included these young people “feeling overwhelmed”, “lacking in motivation” and “not having the tools to regulate”. All of these are important in tackling emotional based school avoidance, and these are already identified in many of the EBSA toolkits used by schools (including the guidance and programme used at Priory School). The approach of “listening first and then putting in strategies to support young people” are followed already, but the potential uniqueness of this work is the use of the creative arts to support young people’s thinking and conversations alongside highlighting practical strategies to support them in feeling more comfortable and willing to come to school and engage in learning.

“ A good teacher accommodates for what you need and I feel as though I can talk to them. ”

KS3 pupil

➤ Many of the points of discussion elicited that these young people don't like being put on the spot or singled out, and that teachers need to find empathetic ways to help them settle into a class when they are late without doing this. Their perceptions of spaces, events, expectations, relationships and routines were also notable and raise some interesting points to be fed into the toolkit. How they felt about themselves as learners was also a recurrent theme.

➤ Another interesting outcome was that these young people expressed that they would like to have someone (adult / carer) to advocate for them during tricky conversations on school attendance. Some young people expressed that they felt they had a better rapport with support staff than the safeguarding team and found them easier to approach because they knew them better. Some discussed finding it easier to get into conversations about thoughts and feelings if scale questions are asked first, as this helps to frame their thinking.

➤ Students shared that the sessions helped some of the students be heard/listened to and provided a better sense of how they were feeling about themselves. One felt it broke down the barriers of attendance, so they felt that they could now speak about the anxiety around this, demonstrating a growth in confidence. Others still had anxiety about school and felt that they could have done with more sessions.

➤ Pupils reported that they enjoyed the sessions and would recommend it to other students that had worries/anxieties based around school, mentioning that they enjoyed the creative content.

➤ Year 4 pupils at Worle Village Primary School were responsive to the workshop. Adults from the school were in the room throughout the session. Their discussion and ideas elicited that different pupils see the same situations and even spaces in a range of ways, sometimes even polarised, which is perhaps unsurprising but gives much for schools to think about in supporting many children within one class.

➤ Even when some staff are in the session (such as in the primary school workshop in this residency), what the young people produce and talk about could be of great interest and of key importance to helping staff in the school gain better insights into the thoughts and feelings of their pupils. The letters written by the Year 4 pupils will be shared with the teachers at Worle Village Primary School retrospectively to aid this understanding.

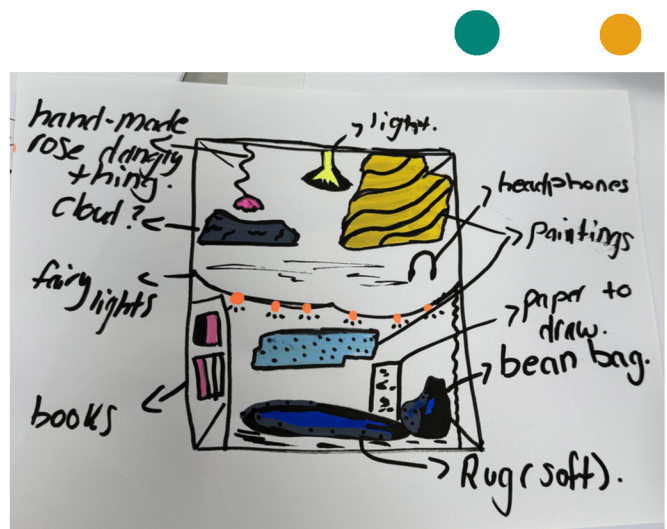


Photo Courtesy of Super Culture

Staff

➤ Staff from Priory School did not attend or observe any of the sessions. The student welfare team felt that this would give pupils more opportunities to talk freely and express themselves more honestly and openly than if staff from the school were present in the sessions. Nevertheless, the information elicited from conversations in the workshops relating specifically to the thoughts and feelings of these young people is very insightful. Finding ways to share this with staff so that specific strategies can be developed and implemented is crucial to tackling EBSA, which the school staff pointed out is often personal to each individual young person.

➤ Priory School’s Operational Student Attendance Lead is still keen for staff in the school to be offered a continuing professional development session by Super Culture on the toolkit and how the teachers and support staff will be able to flexibly use the toolkit to support other at-risk young people, support earlier intervention work and as an additional offer to families in attendance meetings. This CPD is funded as part of the residency and will be planned for the summer term 2026.

➤ As Priory is part of a multi-academy trust (MAT), they can see the potential benefits of staff from across the Priory Learning Trust attending CPD to use the toolkit across schools.

➤ The Operational Student Attendance Lead highlighted the importance of meeting with the artists to understand the purpose, processes and outcomes for the sessions. Communication and everyone prioritising the time for this is crucial and yet challenging.



Photo Courtesy of Super Culture

Creative practitioners

➤ Insightful feedback was provided via reflective journal entries after each workshop by the lead creative practitioner, who attended all of the secondary school workshops. This practitioner reflected honestly and candidly on the effectiveness of the planning, the quality of the questions which framed each session, and the appropriateness of the tasks.

➤ The reflective journal was also punctuated with young people’s comments and reactions, insightful reflections, emergent questions, and suggestions about how the processes and feedback could be used or adapted or developed within the written version of the toolkit. Alongside the session plans, it provided a thorough overview of the thinking behind the week-to-week design of the residency, alongside capturing young people’s reactions and dialogue in the workshops.

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ It can be very challenging for arts and creative organisations to find schools who are willing and flexible to work with them, even when funding is provided, and yet it is vital to hear young people’s views and lived experiences to tackle issues which impact their daily lives in impactful ways that are meaningful to the young people themselves. Finding the right people in schools to talk to about potential collaborations is key; the school engagement team at Priory School ‘jumped at the chance’ to secure this opportunity for their pupils as they felt it aligned with their current work and priorities and, being funded through the residency, is something they would not be able to trial otherwise due to funding constraints.

➤ Not having staff from the school in workshops demonstrates the need for, and importance of, good channels of communication between key school staff and visiting practitioners. Without this, developing the school’s understanding of how their young people think, feel and act may be diminished. There is much to be debated within creative arts programmes in this regard, particularly the balance between confidentiality and sharing. Collaborative planning and feedback time should be embedded into future residencies to promote the potential impact of the workshops.

➤ The first session started late because of the time taken for DBS clearance to be sorted out when the creative practitioners arrived at the school for the first time. This should happen in advance of a residency starting and be built into the planning time,

also allowing for ample setup time prior to each workshop.

➤ It can be difficult and frustrating to sort out regular times and suitable spaces when working with schools, and particularly in secondary schools where there is often less flexibility within the school day than in primary schools.

➤ This work, which is concerned with supporting vulnerable students and their wellbeing, highlights the need for creative practitioners within any project to understand their responsibilities with regard to disclosure and safeguarding. This is something which has been built in as part of WEMA’s training for all creative practitioners as part of their funding agreement within this Creative Hub programme and was on the radar in this residency.

➤ In this residency, having a learning mentor who knew the young people participating and who was able to talk to students and support them in getting to the sessions (and to and from classes) was important. This role should be present in all such programmes, despite the inevitable pull on a school’s resources, as without it, young people may feel less inclined or able to attend, which diminishes the potential impact of such work with practitioners from outside the school.



We asked, what questions/conversations do you find difficult to answer when asked by adults in a school setting about attendance?



Casey Lloyd, Creative Facilitator, Super Culture

➤ This residency recognised the need to look at the issue of school avoidance more widely (including across the primary to secondary transition) and Super Culture did a small amount of work with a primary school from one year group on this. Whilst Super Culture could not persuade a feeder school to Priory School to take part, the two schools are close together geographically and some of the issues, challenges and provocations raised by the Year 4 pupils are likely to be relatable to all schools and communities.

➤ Future residences could consider how to work effectively with academy chains and linked schools to maximise the impact. In this particular residency, this may be achieved through the offer of staff training next term.

“ I think the conversation is something that they [the primary school] will take forward, like things about those key spaces and those transitions between lunchtime and playtime that I don't think there is a lot of opportunity for reflection and feedback from children in terms of how their day is run when they go into school. ”

George Tivenan-Densley, Executive Director, Super Culture

➤ Super Culture's original proposal for this residency included using pre- and post-intervention scales to elicit participants' responses about their wellbeing; the facilitators decided not to collect this information, due to the small group size and needs of the group, instead using verbal or anecdotal check ins. The attendance data collected by Priory School before, during and just after the residency showed, unsurprisingly, no clear pattern. The School Attendance Team recognise the limitations and challenges of using and interpreting data, especially so soon after the completion of the residency and where the issues behind school attendance are so complex and varied. They also note that collecting pre-and-post intervention data in the future, alongside qualitative feedback, and taking a longer-term view of the potential impact, could help to open further conversations and work with individual pupils and gives a more balanced indicator of the impact of any intervention for individual young people.



Photo Courtesy of Super Culture



➤ This residency was different to most of the others in this series in that it was led by the artistic organisation who galvanised the support of a school, rather than the other way round. It demonstrates that there is sometimes a case to be made to support an organisation with a vision to lead the work in partnership with schools, to provide funding for creative opportunities to flourish, and to support their vision in developing something unique for a targeted community of young people, as has been the case in this residency. The challenge of this, as ever, is to marry together the needs, priorities and aspirations of all parties, whilst keeping the voices and aspirations of young people themselves right at the centre. It is a model that deserves much more debate and discussion.

➤ At the end of the final session, one young person asked “what happens next, then?”. For the participants, this is a crucial question and it underlines the importance of all residencies having a well thought out exit plan, legacy and strategic plan for sustainability and evolution.

“ When we run things like that, it wouldn't be fair for me to sit in on the sessions because it's a space for the students to be, it's time for them to talk because, they can practically say anything if a member of staff's not there. It's like that conversation between that group. ”

Michele Haberfield, Senior lunchtime supervisor/ Mentor



Photo Courtesy of Super Culture

➤ Having potentially gained the confidence and trust of adults to enable participants to verbalise and share thoughts, feelings, challenges and issues around a range of issues which impact their lives in and out of school, it will inevitably take time for changes or adaptations to be put in place, if this is possible, realistic, desirable or indeed seen and heard. For a young person, this speed or direction of change may in itself bring a range of emotions and/or behaviours.

➤ With any funded programmes, there is a need to consider the “outcomes” and complete reporting soon after programmes finish. In many instances, and particularly with programmes such as this residency that deal with complex, multi-faceted and often longer-term issues, it is perhaps what happens after the dedicated work that is of the most interest. Taking a more longitudinal approach to gauging “success” and legacy is something for arts organisations, schools and funders to give serious consideration to in the future.

Super Culture

superculture.org.uk

Super Culture believe that culture and creativity give people and places superpowers. A charity since 2007, they celebrate the rich diversity of communities and cultures within North Somerset and beyond. Working with communities and with cross-sector partners – including health, education, housing, heritage and justice – they weave culture into the areas of life that matter most to people. Super Culture worked with four artist facilitators to deliver this project:

Casey Lloyd

Casey has over 10 years experience working in the creative industries, working both nationally and internationally. As a Producer for Super Culture, he thrives on connecting and amplifying the voices of the communities found within North Somerset. He enjoys co-creating projects with communities, putting their voices into pieces of art that elicit social change and empower people.

superculture.org.uk/team_members/casey

Ramona Eve

Ramona is a participatory artist who uses sculpture, installation, and workshops to engage people in discussions and activities. Her work centres around three key elements: play, people, and props, creating art that empowers individuals and fosters a sense of community and well-being.

www.ramonaeve.co.uk

Heather Gibson

Heather is a queer creative on a mission for social change. Armed with thread, experimenting with all things tactile and creating video content - her aim is to shine a light on the misunderstood, misrepresented and mistreated.

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/residents/heather-gibson

Mike Akers

Mike is a writer, theatre maker, early years specialist. He has a long history of working with young people, both as a writer, a teacher and in the pioneering work he has done with Sandra Barefoot and Sarah Moody exploring non-verbal storytelling in Early Years settings.

www.mikeakers.co.uk

“ The sessions helped some of the students be heard/listened to [and have a] better sense of how they were feeling about themselves. One felt it broke down the barriers of attendance and the anxiety around this, felt that they now could speak about it, so confidence had grown. Others still had anxiety about school [and] felt that they could have done more sessions. They enjoyed the sessions and would recommend it to other students that had worries/anxieties based around school. ”

Michelle Haberfield, Senior lunchtime supervisor/ Mentor, summarising feedback gathered from students

Building communication, coordination and confidence through African dance



Photo Courtesy of Kingsweston School

Kingsweston School
Key Stage 3
Creative Practitioner: Kenzi Ireland

Background to the school

Kingsweston School is a multi-site special school in North Bristol for pupils aged 4 to 19 years with an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP). It serves a wide geographical area including Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, North East Somerset and Bath (BANES). Kingsweston School caters for pupils with Autism and a range of additional and/or associated learning needs and sensory impairment. As noted on the school's website, it offers "a personalised, ambitious curriculum that entices curiosity and develops skills for life. We promote a sense of identity and belonging to our school, local and wider community. We support our learners to flourish into healthy and resilient individuals. We champion independence and self-advocacy so the learner's voice is heard and respected. We achieve this through our values of Creativity, Connectedness, Nurture and Empowerment."

Specific residency objectives:

- **To implement opportunities for dance as a form of self-expression.**
- **To develop pupils' communication, coordination and confidence through movement and dance.**
- **To provide opportunities for pupils to explore a different culture.**
- **To support teachers at Kingsweston School to develop their own knowledge and experience of working artistically with young people in new and creative ways.**
- **To support the creative practitioner to gain more experience of leading a residency with young people with a range of specific learning needs in a special school context.**

Aims and synopsis for the residency

Pupils at Kingsweston School love music and the benefits this brings to their learning and lives is recognised across the school. With the ambition of tapping into their interests and enthusiasm for learning in practical and creative ways, staff at Kingsweston School wanted to use this residency to help pupils develop skills and competencies to support them in life and learning; in particular, communication, confidence and coordination. With support from WEMA's Cultural Education Hub they chose to work with Kenzi Ireland, specialist in African dance forms.

On Mondays over terms 2 and 3 from November-February 2025, Kenzi worked at Brightstowe site with pupils in four mixed-age Key Stage 3 classes, all with Autism and

“ Kenzi made such a positive difference to Brightstowe, the people looked forward to the sessions and really enjoyed Monday mornings for a change.

Some of the pupils involved not only have ASD but have significant learning difficulties and one pupil has a severe visual impairment - Kenzi managed to include all of these pupils and they all had fun.

Kenzi shared the history of African dance to two groups which she differentiated with adapted PowerPoints, a story and video clips.

We already miss her and her passion for African dance, its history and her ability to be inclusive.

Ms Remington, Teacher

a range of challenges related to socialising, communication and coordination.

Whilst the focus of each class was around African dancing, Kenzi personalised the experience for each class to meet the needs and aspirations of pupils of each group. In the first half term, workshops followed a similar structure each week and pupils participated in warm ups, rhythm games, exercises and learnt simple choreography, alongside frequent opportunities for freestyling and creative exploration. A stimulus for one group in the second half term was the illustrated book *Arcadia* by Odiri Ighamre, illustrated by Judith Elliot, which is set in Africa and explores current environmental issues. The illustrations in the book were used as stimuli for movement and discussion. Another group explored aspects of the history of African people's dance from past to present. Every session provided opportunities for pupils to develop and share their own choreography and creative ideas and sought for them to be able to collaborate effectively.

Teachers across the school wrote down and recorded comments and feedback from pupils throughout each week, offering an insight into how this dance residency was received by pupils and how it potentially impacted their learning and engagement in other ways. Sessions at the beginning, middle and end of the residency were also observed by the school's music lead, who was central to setting up this residency.

Across the residency Kenzi delivered 13 weekly sessions across terms 2 and 3 between November and February for a total of 23 students.

Key Outcomes

Young People

➤ A specially prepared social story written for the young people at Kingsweston School and shared with them prior to and during the residency was considered crucial in supporting them to be able to engage in this unfamiliar experience with a person they didn't know prior to the residency. It also helped them to transition out of the residency as they were prepared for it coming to an end.

➤ Having the residency on a Monday helped some pupils slide more easily into the school week, which could be tricky for them after the weekend. It was reported that it set them up well for a positive start to the week and was talked about and drawn upon throughout the whole week in their classes and with the teachers and support staff.

➤ Each workshop provided opportunities for pupils to lead aspects if they wanted to, including using their voices and bodies to create rhythms, sounds and movements for others to follow. This was very popular with pupils and the opportunities to be creative and expressive were noted as a highlight by some pupils.



Photo Courtesy of Kingsweston School

“ Confidence was the first thing that just completely amazed me, because they are adolescents, they are teenagers, but they could be a bit shy, not because they are autistic... But the moment that they were given the chance to show the skills or to, as Kenzi was saying, oh, 'let's come at the front and do this type of dance' ... they didn't show that anymore. After the second or third session, they were like, 'yeah, I can do that'. And they received claps and everybody cheered for them. So that meant that the confidence absolutely grew from the start.

Cinthia Chiluiza, Teacher

➤ The creative artist, teachers and other adults from Kingsweston School and the young people themselves saw progress being made week-on-week as pupils gained more confidence and had opportunities to build upon and extend their prior learning. This progress was multi-faceted and included their accuracy, timing and fluency in the dance, their ability to remember choreography and aspects of improvement such as their own spatial awareness, confidence to take part and try out new things and to communicate ideas and express themselves.

➤ Repetition helped pupils to engage and focus; some who were more reticent at the beginning joined in during later sessions as they become more familiar with the content and structure. It was also noted that some of the repetition in rhythms, vocal sounds and dance steps was later repeated and/or developed spontaneously by pupils in other contexts.

➤ Staff reported that pupils were able to concentrate for extended periods of time during the dance workshops and that breaking the sessions into multiple parts worked well for maintaining interest and engagement. Some pupils surprised the adults in the room in relation to what they could achieve and their levels of engagement.

➤ For some pupils, dance and movement is clearly very important to them and engagement in the sessions has allowed them to express themselves and communicate with others in ways that haven't been so obvious previously. The degree of support and encouragement for each other was also noted as a highlight by adults in the sessions.

➤ The repertoire chosen included a mix of familiar and probably unfamiliar tracks; all selected to be joyous and uplifting and well received by pupils. The workshops successfully built bridges between new experiences and music and ideas that pupils were more familiar with, contextualising the new ideas in helpful and understandable ways so that pupils could see the relevance in their own lives.



Photo Courtesy of Kingsweston School

“ It was so good, I like dancing, I liked the jump spin. I feel happy. ”

KS3 pupil

Staff

➤ Staff in the school were pleased and surprised by the high levels of engagement and outcomes for individual pupils and groups of pupils in each workshop. Kingsweston School is ambitious for all pupils and observing how well some pupils took to African Dance and the ways in which they engaged with the wider learning about the culture and practices has sparked new ideas for how to be even more ambitious for pupils in the future.

➤ Young people's high levels of engagement in the workshops, and particularly the opportunities to lead and express themselves, were noted as an exceptional outcome by some of the staff who attended and joined in with the workshops.

➤ It was noted that pupils engaged well with the storytelling and many showed a genuine interest in learning about an unfamiliar culture. The ways in which they engaged in storytelling, at times in a very tactile and active way, has given ideas for approaches to the curriculum in the future, highlighting the potential of creative arts to unlock access to other curriculum areas such as literacy. The good choice of text in this residency has also sparked further ideas for stimuli that draw upon young people's interests and concerns.

➤ One of the teachers reflected on the contribution that dance made to the pupils' health as well as their creative and



expressive development, and this included mental as well as physical health. She shared examples of pupils being able to talk about how the dance made them feel, noting that communicating feelings was something that many pupils rarely did as they found this extremely challenging.

Creative practitioner

➤ For Kenzi, the creative practitioner leading these workshops, this residency provided opportunities for her to consolidate and expand her own experience of working with young people with a wide range of learning needs in a special school setting. She sought advice and guidance from the school prior to starting the residency and also had a planning session with the Inclusion Lead at West of England Music and Arts (WEMA), both of which she noted that she found very useful and led her to “strip it [the delivery] down and start with a clear structure and a clear foundation, which was repeated and built upon”.

➤ The residency helped the creative practitioner to recognise that being able to draw upon the wide range of skills in her toolkit, developed through leading workshops and longer programmes in a range of other settings over many years, were key to the very flexible approaches

“ It was particularly good to hear feedback from the teachers about the young people and the different things that they were noticing, because for me, I'm just there for that one session. I only see them in that context. So, I'm not able to necessarily measure and see how it's maybe affecting them in other ways.

Kenzi Ireland, Creative Practitioner



Photo Courtesy of Kingsweston School

that she needed to take in this special school setting and which she feels were ultimately the key to successfully engaging these pupils.

➤ The residency built the creative practitioner's confidence in her own abilities to be able to plan and lead well in this special school context and she was thankful for the opportunities to work alongside colleagues in a variety of roles who knew the pupils well. This helped her develop new strategies and techniques relating to maintaining positive behaviours and engagement, drawing upon her wealth of prior experience. She was widely praised for being attuned to the evolving situations in the class and reading the need to move on or stay on an activity very well.

➤ Her approach also reaffirmed the importance of giving autonomy and opportunities for creativity to the young people; something which she considers a hallmark across her work. She put a great deal of time and energy into introducing these opportunities in ways which built and embedded trust with each pupil and also between the young people in each workshop so that they supported, encouraged and celebrated each other and their own contribution to the collective dance.

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

➤ For young people at Kingsweston School, it can take time to build relationships and to feel comfortable and confident to engage. A residency offers the necessary opportunities for them to be able to have this time, which one-off or short programmes do not afford. This meant that more young people were able to join in once they felt safe enough to do so and were familiar with the repetitive structure of the workshops delivered by a new person.

➤ The uniqueness of this opportunity, happening as enrichment within the school day, was pointed out by one of the teachers. Many young people with special educational needs and disabilities are unable to access the opportunities on offer outside of school compared to those in mainstream education and yet the importance of being able to experience something new, developing their own unique creative expression and feeling part of something they enjoy is just as important.

➤ The importance of being able to have ongoing professional dialogue and communication between the creative practitioner and the staff in the school was highlighted in this residency and, as with all the WEMA residencies, built into the programme. Both the creative practitioner and the school noted this as crucial to the success at Kingsweston School, because it helped to both provide a rich experience for the young people and also facilitated co-learning between the creative practitioner and the staff in the workshops.

➤ In a rich discussion about legacy, we talked about the importance of having opportunities for pupils to work with, and be inspired by, expert practitioners who are often highly specialised in a particular artform. Clearly, teachers cannot just 'take over' this work where it left off and continue it without this level of expertise, and Kingsweston School hope to work with the creative artist again in the future to build on the residency if funding allows. However, legacy is built and can be maintained in other ways - particularly continuing to develop the habits, values, behaviours and attitudes that pupils have shown during the workshops. In small ways, staff will also be able to use or adapt some of the practices and techniques from the workshops to develop communication and coordination, adding to their own repertoire to build these crucial skills as a result of observing and working alongside the creative artist.

➤ Even where pupils didn't want to dance, ways were found for them to actively enjoy being part of the workshops if they wanted to, for example through filming part of the choreography, reading part of the story to the class and taking part in discussions. For this to happen, there needs to be professional trust and understanding, and a high degree of partnership working and communication between the creative artist and the adults in the room, who know pupils well and can read emergent situations and behaviours in-the-moment, as happened in this residency. Being flexible and adaptable whilst encouraging, recognising that young people can experience something and learn in different ways without jumping straight in is also fine, as shown here, as some pupils took more time to become comfortable with this new learning situation.

➤ The physical space in a school is often not the absolute ideal space but another aspect of flexibility that is needed by a creative artist is to adapt to this (as well as to negotiate where possible!), as happened in Kingsweston's residency.

➤ Working in special schools in particular requires a great deal of flexibility in relation to gauging "how we know" the impact of the work and to gain the insights of the young people. As demonstrated so clearly in this residency, this relies on working closely with the adults supporting the young people who know the participants well in order to elicit this information and read and reflect on situations, emotional and physical responses, behaviours and outcomes that are emergent in-the-moment and may be verbal or non-verbal and show joy as well as distress or discomfort. Using an appropriate range of communication methods to hear the young people's input and as a means for them to express themselves, is also crucial, all of which were demonstrated in the residency at Kingsweston School.

“ The dance sessions were so engaging and students absolutely loved them! Students had so much fun and felt so empowered when given opportunities to share movements. Students really grew in confidence throughout the sessions. There was always a real sense of joy in the room and students learnt so much!

M. Henderson,
Assistant Headteacher

“

One last thing that was really amazing as well was the communication ... teachers kept thinking and saying, 'how come they can focus for that long?' And they are so interested in all of these stories and the books and the videos... They were all super engaged and they could talk about that. So when Kenzi is gone ... they keep talking about this stuff with the teachers, what they saw, what they felt, or the music, and how did it make them feel, or things like that. And that was for me the best part of it, because that's really hard for our cohort.

”

Cinthia Chiliza, Teacher

Kenzi Ireland:

Kenzi Ireland is an experienced dance artist, specialising in African dance forms with over 18 years' experience as a professional performer, choreographer and teacher. Kenzi has travelled to Senegal, Ghana and Gambia to deepen her knowledge and experience of traditional African dance, has trained and performed with companies and professional dance practitioners from around the globe and has performed across Wales, the UK and Europe with 'NIMBA African Dance & Music'.

Kenzi is an empowering teacher and an inspiring performer, delivering high quality dance experiences, her enthusiasm and passion for dance is infectious. Drawing from the strengths and diversity of African dance forms, her work aims to inspire true and honest expression and to celebrate and enrich our appreciation of dance of the African Diaspora.

www.kenzidance.com

Exploring art, nature and outdoor learning as central to a new 'Creative, Relevant and Active for Twerton' curriculum



Photo Courtesy of Holly Dabbs

Twerton Nursey & Infant School
EYFS-KS1
Creative Practitioner: Holly Dabbs

Background to the school

Twerton Nursery and Infant School is a two-form mixed community school with an onsite nursery for 2 and 3-year-olds on the outskirts of Bath, North-East Somerset. 56% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals; 22% of pupils are eligible for SEN support. The school has a long-established reputation for being both inclusive and responsive to children's individual needs and is ambitious in its aspirations to set pupils up well now and in the future. Their primary aim is "to provide an environment where every child can develop, flourish and thrive". Central to this ambition is the development of their new CRAFT curriculum - Creative, Relevant and Active for Twerton - and they identified the "golden thread" throughout this new curriculum as developing children's speech and language skills. The KS1 curriculum is mapped out on a two-year cycle and the residency took place at the end of the first year of curriculum evolution.

Specific residency objectives:

- **To redesign the curriculum to embed and promote thinking and action that sparks children's inquisitiveness and imagination, utilising space inside and outside the classroom for promoting creative learning across the curriculum.**
- **To further embed and promote the development of speech and language skills across all aspects of school life at Twerton Nursery and Infant School.**
- **To support teachers to encourage playfulness and encourage creativity, through developing their own pedagogic repertoire and subject knowledge in the visual arts and take this into other subject areas in meaningful and worthwhile ways.**

Aims and synopsis for the residency

Having identified the ambition for deeper engagement with the arts and play-based, creative learning to sit centrally to their new CRAFT curriculum, Twerton Nursery and Infant school chose creative producer, participatory artist and forest school leader Holly Dabbs to work with them alongside their pupils, teachers and school leaders to explore the aims and aspirations defined above. Holly had previously delivered a one-off workshop at this school through another strand of funding from the West of England Cultural Hub.

During the summer term of 2025, Holly's residency at Twerton Infant School transformed the school's woodland area and outdoor space into an outdoor living classroom to encourage children's awe, wonder and curiosity in the natural environment. Each session involved working as an artist in different ways and with different media; storytelling was also woven through the residency. As Holly described: "Each session invited children to slow down and tune in to the world around them: noticing bird calls, collecting natural materials, and creating artworks inspired by trees, leaves, weather, and wildlife. From nature collages to muddy masterpieces, the woods became a backdrop for playful learning and quiet reflection." Every class worked with Holly on a rotational basis.

Holly also worked alongside the school's teachers, support staff and leadership both within the workshops with the children and also through bespoke staff planning and CPD sessions, supporting them in developing their understanding of ways to bring more creativity and exploration into their approaches and curriculum design.



Photo Courtesy of Holly Dabbs

The children's artwork produced through this residency was exhibited at Bath Spa University's Sion Hill campus in summer 2025, which parents and caregivers were invited to attend.

The children's questions, comments and conversations about the learning as it unfolded were noticed and documented by adults in the classroom. Photographs taken throughout the sessions and of the exhibition also formed a lasting impression of the work. Holly delivered a total of 9 workshops and 1 teacher CPD session over 2 months, engaging 118 students across the whole school and 15 teachers.

“ The vision is to enable the constraints of the National Curriculum to be taught in the most inclusive and creative way possible. I think for us it was a vision initially, and it's becoming more of a reality. I think there's obviously still room for growth... thinking what other things we can be taking outdoors and teaching in a creative way. It's given a really, really good basis for that progression. ”

Astral Blanchard, Head of School

Key outcomes

Young people

➤ Children were excited and inspired by learning in different spaces and also exploring the natural world through a wide range of artistic processes. The playful and exploratory nature of the sessions, particularly at the start of the residency, provided multiple planned opportunities for children to have sensory experiences that many had not previously had; this was deemed important in helping scaffold their later opportunities to continue to think and act like an artist.

➤ Being outdoors and learning in ways that were structured and had freedom for children to explore led to multiple opportunities for talk to happen. This led to a noticeable increase in 'chatter' in other areas of school life and learning situations.



Photo Courtesy of Holly Dabbs

“ They've been able to access the sessions in a way that we've never seen. With one particular child ... he was not able to engage in the same way in a classroom and to be able to see the potential that's there in those kind of sessions and knowing that if we tweak the way we're teaching him, we will unlock that learning potential ..., that will form part of our understanding of similar children in the future ... It's just given that extra layer of understanding to children that need a different style of teaching. ”

Astral Blanchard, Head of School

➤ For children with speech and language challenges and those with English as additional language, the practical and creative nature of the work through the residency meant that they were able to fully access the learning; as described by the Deputy Head, the experiences offered through the residency 'unlocked learning' for them.

➤ The different ways of learning also led to some pupils being able to engage and achieve who had previously struggled in a classroom environment for a variety of reasons. As an infant school, pupils move to another school at the end of Year 2, but the strategies that the staff noticed were impactful will be useful to them for engaging other pupils in the future.

➤ Children's artistic engagement expanded as they explored new materials and ways of working, and the scaffolded activities gave opportunities for all to be successful and able to develop their own artistic flair individually and collaboratively.

Staff

➤ The school's deputy Headteacher/ curriculum leader (now the Head of School) identified the importance of meeting in advance of the residency to plan the work and for the school and creative practitioner to understand each other's perspectives and priorities throughout the process. Regular reflection meetings were crucial to this.

“ People have that confidence now ... But I think without being able to invest that time in such expert modelling that wouldn't have come, that's not something you can just do by going 'hey guys, come and watch one lesson' ... They have to learn by doing themselves ... you are so adaptable Holly and you've got all these different strategies that you've modelled that can get attention in different ways, or gather the children back together in different ways, or transforming that space with very limited resources, very simple ideas. ... And I think you've just given all the staff a toolkit of ideas that they can draw upon now ... So that is the impact on the children; the upskilling of the adults plus their understanding using the space in a different way. ”

Astral Blanchard, Head of School

➤ The professional development that took place through the residency was planned around areas noticed and identified by the curriculum leader, individual staff members and the creative artist. This meant that it could be targeted to individual aspirations, priorities, strengths and needs, which supported the development of confidence in pedagogic practices that were previously less familiar.

Holly led a whole-school CPD at the end of the residency which was well received and provided opportunities for staff to reflect on what they had actually seen, observed and done, and it is drawing upon these rich first-hand experiences that was most powerful.

➤ The scaffolded approach to professional learning, working alongside Holly, having opportunities for professional conversations through the process and co-planning and co-delivery promoted this space for thinking and adaptation. This led to noticeable adaptations to practice in other areas of the curriculum.

➤ Co-planning the sessions also ensured that the diverse needs of all children could be catered for as the class teachers and TAs have a lot of knowledge about children in their classes. Nevertheless, giving the autonomous decisions to the creative practitioner about the content, process and delivery was deemed as central to the success by both the Head and the artist.

➤ Holly's work modelled to the teachers the great potential of using the outside space in a multitude of ways and the simplicity of the ideas led to more teachers feeling able to both try out simple ideas themselves in their teaching and also utilise a variety of outdoor spaces more.



Photo Courtesy of Holly Dabbs



Photo Courtesy of Holly Dabbs

➤ Having a residency rather than one-off sessions allowed for the teachers to experience a wide range of often less familiar practices and media for making and creating art with their classes. Giving the children time and space for their own creativity and individuality within the learning meant that the ownership of the art was left with the pupils and they were all supported and scaffolded to achieve as appropriate to them. This is something that some teachers and adults in supporting children found impactful for thinking about future learning and the balance between teacher-led and pupil-led learning, as well as the role of the teacher as facilitator.

➤ The iterative nature of the process over time allowed for flexibility and adaptation between each session, giving Holly the freedom to reflect with the teachers and children on the process as it unfolded and to plan the next session based on the learning unfolding, rather than for it to be pre-planned, whilst still based on the curriculum goals in terms of what she wanted them to experience and the final outcome.

This was noticed by some of the teachers and served as a mirror for them to reflect on their own practices, approaches and roles.

➤ This experiential way of learning, and the focus on slowing down and giving pupils and teachers time and space to notice the world around them, encouraged a focus and priority to be given to the process of learning, rather than the outcome. It also took away the pressure of what children often see as the black and white nature of learning being "right" or "wrong".

Creative Practitioner

➤ Working with the children over a period of time and gaining the support of the other adults in the room through the planning and delivery meant that the creative practitioner was able to become more embedded in the school, its culture and practices and to support children and adults to take creative risks.

➤ The creative practitioner appreciated being part of the team and utilising the deep knowledge of the pupils that was held by the other adults in the room. The creative practitioner recognised the need to maintain flexibility in her delivery rather than planning it all out at the beginning.

“ [The residency] meant that I can explore particular methods of art making in a really in-depth way because it's not a one off. So for example, like the storytelling element of the sessions, because it wasn't a one-off performance I could actually engage with the children because I knew them. So there was much more of an exchange with the children. ”

Holly Dabbs , Creative Artist

Unexpected outcomes, challenges and further considerations

- The exhibition at Bath Spa University gave a real-life purpose to the children’s artistic endeavours and continued the sense of authentically working as an artist. Being a school with a high percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals indicates the economic challenges for many local families and the potential barrier for families to be able to visit the exhibition.
- The co-creation of the work contributed to the sense of pride and ownership felt by the pupils. There is much to think about in relation to weaving opportunities for co-creation and bringing in children’s own ideas and voices more into the curriculum.
- Turning a vision into a reality requires commitment to change and action, alongside a belief in the vision and feelings of ownership and autonomy over the changes. This residency set the wheels in motion for the curriculum evolution to become a reality. The school leadership has reflected very positively on this whilst candidly noting the need for this to continue and the potential that they see in developing staff and the curriculum per se side-by-side.

- During year two of the curriculum redevelopment, staff will continue to work in curriculum teams and be encouraged to proliferate flexible creative approaches that capture the awe and wonder of the residency across the curriculum. Books and texts have been chosen with this aspiration in mind.
- Having a residency at such a pivotal point in the curriculum development was considered hugely beneficial for helping the staff across the school to articulate the vision and see that it could work. The school’s leadership were grateful for the opportunities to work with such an experienced artist and educator.
- Whilst the learning went both ways, it does raise questions for other schools and settings about how to support more artists to gain such deep experiences in formal educational settings in the future, and to encourage teachers with an artistic background and interest to bring authentic artistic practices more into the foreground in their teaching and support of other colleagues.
- As an infant school, pupils leave at the end of Year 2 to go to another school. Managing and supporting the transition between schools is important and ensuring that the changes to curriculum focus and approaches is articulated to the feeder schools is something that Twerton Nursery and Infant School continue to prioritise; this year has seen a big change in both the curriculum and the learning modalities, behaviours, values and attitudes to learning displayed by the pupils, to which the residency has reportedly greatly contributed.



Photo Courtesy of Holly Dabbs



“ The biggest change for staff and for children, I would say is engagement. The engagement of the children has been completely different this year to previous years and, really interestingly, we're working quite closely with St Michael's [feeder junior school] at the moment because they inherit a lot of our children from year 2 into year 3 and they cannot believe the difference in the cohort of children that are going up this year. And I know cohorts are different, but if we look at the journey this particular year 2 have been on it's been phenomenal. They love learning. They really do and you know that they're not passive learners. They're engaged learners that are working together, collaborating, problem solving, using teamwork, questioning and it's all the kind of things that you want to be seeing because we're giving them that chance to be more creative, more physical in their learning, much less passive.

But I think also it's enabling teachers to be more creative practitioners and that has changed the level of engagement of the adults as well. The team feels very strong and very together and that's such a nice feeling because this is what you want, isn't it?

Astral Blanchard, Head of School

Watch a discussion with Astral Blanchard, Head of School, and Holly Dabbs about the project:



Holly Dabbs:

Holly is a Creative Producer, Participatory Artist, and Forest School leader. She has worked with schools, galleries and museums across the country to create creative, engaging and collaborative learning opportunities. Her work has led her to work with museums and galleries collaborating with organisations such as Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, National Trust, Bath Abbey and The Bath Preservation Trust.

As the founder of Foxglove Forest School, Holly provides wonderful outdoor, nature based sessions for early years children and their families. Running engaging events in schools and community settings in Bath and London.

hollydabbs.com

Discussion of key findings

This report offers insights into learning from seven creative arts residencies funded through West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub in primary, secondary and special schools across the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (WEMCA) region (Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset). Findings and discussion across the residencies illuminate the important positive contribution these models of collaborative working provide to artform and holistic learning, engagement, professional development and to catalysing change for young people, schools and their wider communities.

The UK Government's (2026) recent education white paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' outlines an inclusive ambition for childhood and schools where "every child will benefit from a refreshed and broad national curriculum that secures knowledge and delivers key skills, alongside a wide range of enriching opportunities within and beyond the curriculum, delivered through a new enrichment entitlement". Following on from the findings of the Curriculum and Assessment Review (2025), it is anticipated that the revised national curriculum will include "a strong enrichment offer and revitalised arts curriculum (which) will spark children's creativity". The white paper acknowledges the contribution of enrichment within and beyond the

curriculum and the importance of being able to give due consideration and attention to local needs in creating ambitious entitlement for all through providing innovative and responsive solutions that have relevance to young people's lives in and out of school.

The seven creative arts residencies shared in this publication were selected and co-planned before recent policy documents were published and yet align closely with the scope and ambition outlined by the government. These research reports provide much food for thought at a time when the potential for more creativity in education and the importance of learning that opens opportunities for further study and employment is undergoing a welcome renaissance.

Residencies were designed collaboratively with WEMA, seeking to be reactive and proactive to local needs and ambitions. They encouraged schools to target opportunities to areas of priority, deciding for themselves what constituted 'priority'. The diversity of foci included artform engagement through new and deepened experiences within and beyond the curriculum, opportunities for young people to work towards accreditation, broadening ambitions, supporting pupils with, or at risk of, emotionally based school avoidance, supporting communication and oracy,

UK Government (2026) Every child achieving and thriving

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version>

Department for Education. (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report: Building a world-class curriculum for all

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_final_report_-_Building_a_world-class_curriculum_for_all.pdf

building confidence and resilience, exploring multiculturalism, building community relations, hearing and telling stories and supporting the development of a more creative curriculum.

Thoughtful planning from desired learning goals took deep learning off in multiple and often unexpected directions, as the focus was on working towards defined objectives rather than being based on 'activity'. Schools and creative practitioners were encouraged to think carefully about what 'success' would look like and how change and learning would be seen and demonstrated.

School embraced opportunities for growth and planning for residencies often sought a whole-school impact alongside working more deeply with an identified target audience within the school. Building each residency "from the ground up" encouraged schools to consider identifiable and often visible inequalities alongside the uniqueness and strengths of each community and to give deep consideration to lived experiences. The notion of 'place' within each residency is central, and yet the temptation to see 'place' as simply a 'deficit' has been avoided. Instead, the uniqueness of embracing places, communities and cultures past and present through placemaking is celebrated, activated and strengthened in most of these residencies (aligning with a key priority for Arts Council England).

The residencies demonstrate WEMA's commitment to supporting schools across the WEMCA region to tenaciously tackle their own priorities and challenges through collaborating with the Cultural Education Hub to harness the power of creative and

cultural education. In doing so, each of the residences is unique in ambition, scope and design, and whilst the outcomes are bespoke to each residency, there are important commonalities. Residencies are rooted in a deep commitment to inclusion and social justice, utilising and interrogating the potential of creative arts, not 'just' for the sake of artform engagement and development, but equally, or perhaps more importantly, to instil and develop habits, values, attitudes and behaviours that support young people in learning and life, now and in the future, through creating safe and inspiring environments for exploration and risk-taking to flourish, nourishing a sense of identity and belonging.

The longer-term nature of creative and cultural residency programmes meant that time could be invested in building strong and trusting relationships, safe spaces and engendering feelings of belonging and co-ownership. This recognition of the importance of providing sufficient time and working at relationship building is crucial if children, adults and organisations are to be encouraged to take personal, collective and institutional creative risks.

Creative residencies rely on building trusting partnerships; providing something ambitious beyond what a school can offer on their own. Creative practitioners and cultural organisations working across these residencies brought authentic working practices and commitment to supporting young people to be inquisitive about different experiences and the world around them and embrace the opportunities offered. Subject restraints were abolished by blurring of the boundaries in which a curriculum is often organised. In all these

residencies, the creative practitioners matched up in collaboration with WEMA had experience of working with schools. Like teachers in schools, they are reflective practitioners who embrace professional learning and show personal commitment to continually developing their practice and thinking. Their engagement in the research has helped to shape and modify WEMA's professional development programme and resources for creative practitioners at all stages of their career. Many of the creative practitioners went 'above and beyond' across the residencies.

The model employed gave power for cultural decision making to schools and artists, bringing richness to the agency offered across these residences. With this agency comes accountability for targeting and spending money well in order to meet the agreed objectives of each residency and the expectation that schools, creative practitioners and creative organisations took a research-based approach alongside WEMA, cemented the importance of accountability and sharpened the focus within each residency. The research process itself and the role that WEMA's Cultural Education Hub played in ensuring compliance with utilising the funding as agreed at the outset contributed to the accountability.

The different models and modes of delivery show that there is no one way to design and run a residency. Flexibility is key and buy-in and shared understanding from both sides is essential. In five of these residencies school leaders were fully engaged in supporting the residency and engaging with the research process. In all five of these residencies, schools wrote an application for

the residency and whilst the funding was given straight to the artists once matched up, the collaborative processes between the artists and schools led to exciting, enriching projects and outcomes.

Where funding was awarded directly to artists for them to find schools to work with, despite the significant expertise they brought into schools, getting buy-in from schools and in particular school leadership was much more challenging. Nevertheless, this can be an important model in supporting cultural organisations and creative practitioners in co-developing their ideas and tools with and for young people and schools, drawing upon their own experiences and expertise.

A resource to support schools in thinking about and working through the opportunities, challenges and practicalities of planning, setting up and evaluating their own residences has been prepared as a result of researching these residencies.

In conclusion, this report positions WEMA's Cultural Education Hub as fulfilling a central role in giving agency to schools to make a positive change for their young people. This programme has empowered schools to decide for themselves what they want and need for their unique communities. WEMA's expertise and support facilitated fruitful partnerships between schools, cultural partners and creative artists in a range of ways, weaving in drama, dance and music, visual arts, creative writing, exploration of oral histories, storytelling, story making and more, to facilitate programmes that demonstrate the power and benefits for all of weaving arts rich experiences through school communities.

Acknowledgements

Dr Ally Daubney

Dr Ally Daubney is a researcher, teacher and educator who has worked across all ages and stages of education from preschool to postgraduate. Alongside her extensive work on international curriculum development and assessment, Ally is renowned for her work on creative and cultural learning and engagement across education and communities. She has conducted and widely published research and evaluation funded by local, regional, national and international organisations which has fed into policy making in the UK and abroad. Ally led the research strand for the West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub 2024-2026. Ally is co-editor of the British Journal of Music Education and an Honorary Senior Lecturer at the University of Sussex.

Megan Clarke

Megan Clarke was the programme lead for West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub during the period of this research. She is an arts and cultural engagement professional with over 10 years of experience working with children and young people, communities and artists to deliver inspiring creative engagement projects in the cultural sector. She has a passion for supporting people from all backgrounds to engage with arts and culture and the positive impact this has on people's lives.

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www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/innovation/creative-and-cultural/culture-west/



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