



Theatre, Dance and Drama Use in Schools: Summary Report March 2022



St Ninian's RC pupils taking part in *In a New Light* by Imaginate. © Gudrun Soley Sigurdardottir

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Research by Wellside Research Ltd.

Introduction

The Culture Strategy for Scotland (2020) included an action for Creative Scotland to work with Education Scotland to help improve the access and quality of cultural and expressive arts experiences for learners. As a result, Creative Scotland commissioned Imagine to research how schools in Scotland engage with theatre, dance and drama, and to consider any barriers to engagement. The research was carried out by Wellside Research and aimed to provide evidence which could influence approaches to better support schools in engaging with theatre, dance and drama.

Objectives of the research included:

- ★ to map a national picture of the ways primary schools are engaging with theatre, dance and drama
- ★ to assess primary school's satisfaction with the level and types of theatre, dance and drama offerings
- ★ to assess and compare the impact of these different offerings on delivering the curriculum and supporting children's health and wellbeing, especially post-pandemic
- ★ to identify barriers to increased engagement from both primary schools and arts organisations' point of view
- ★ to develop case studies of successful and innovative interventions

Methodology

The research involved online surveys with nurseries/primary schools (116 responses) and artists/companies (40 responses). Schools in all local authorities were invited to participate. From the survey responses a range of case studies were identified and followed up with interviews with the relevant teachers (10 interviews) and written feedback from related artists or performing companies (4 reports). The surveys were conducted between October–November 2021, with case study taking place between December 2021 – February 2022.

Note: the timing of the surveys (straddling school holidays) and staff absence due to COVID-19, negatively impacted the response rate, with three local authorities opting out of the research entirely.

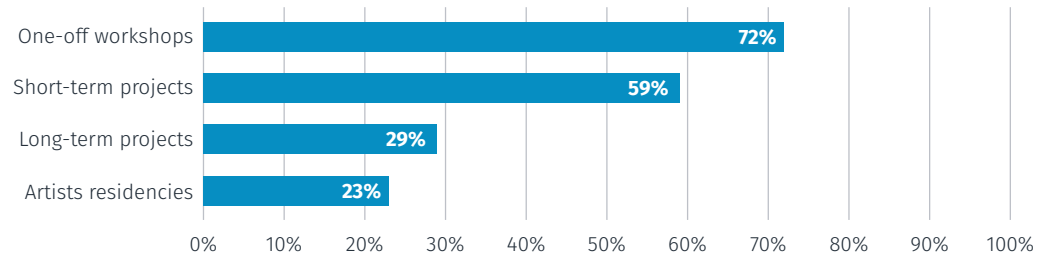
Thanks to our steering group members:

Serena Jagpal (Teacher), Julie Wilson (Head Teacher), Emily Reid (Eco Drama), Charlotte Mountford (Lyth Arts), Heather Armstrong (Starcatchers), Alex Ringham and Vanessa Boyd (Creative Scotland), Teri McIntosh (Education Scotland), Karen Anderson (Indepen-dance), Anna Derricourt (Theatre in Schools Scotland), KJ Clarke-Davis (Independent Dance Artist), Hannah Venet (Independent Dance Artist).

Mapping use of theatre, dance and drama

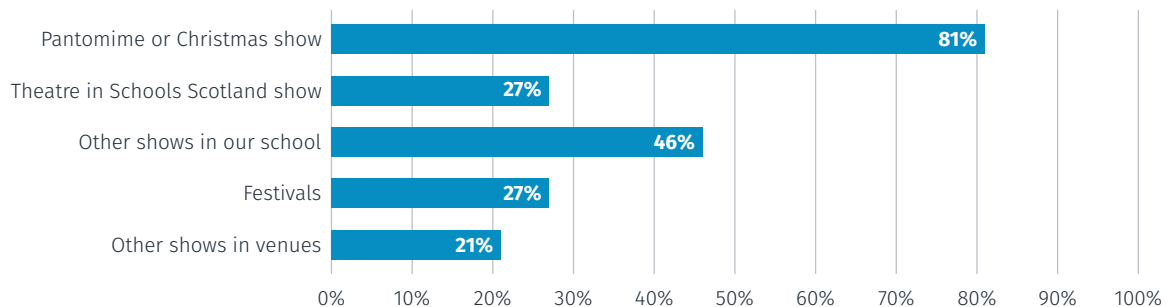
Most (**88%**) school survey respondents had watched performances while two thirds (**68%**) had taken part in participatory work.

Participatory work



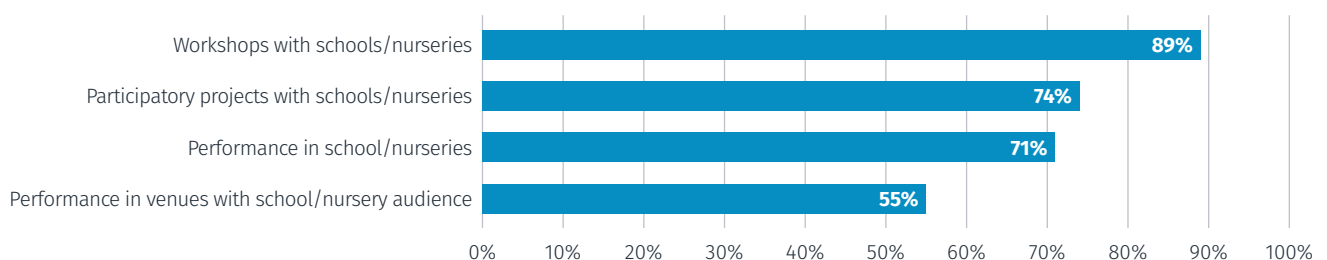
Performances had taken place equally in both external venues (**72%**) and in school or nursery (**82%**).

Performances



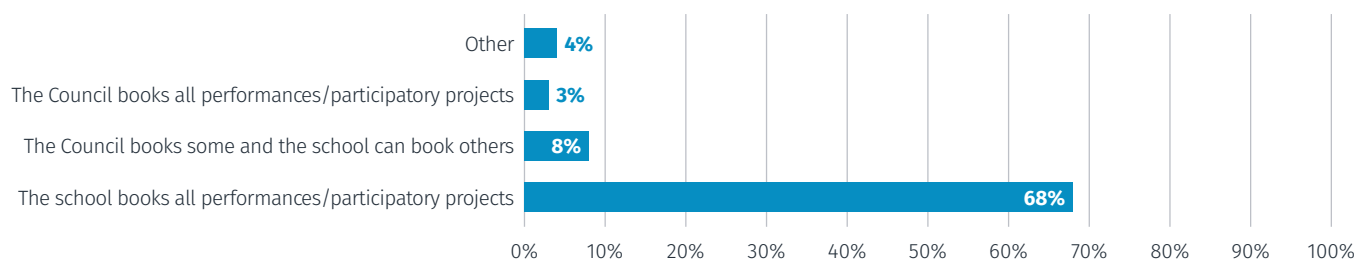
Most schools indicated that they either sometimes (**63%**) or always (**24%**) built lessons around the theatre, drama and dance that they engage with. Respondents also indicated that the provision of both pre- and post-engagement materials was helpful.

Artist involvement



Artists who responded to the survey had worked with schools across all local authority areas. Several (**23%**) reported only working in one area, while most (**73%**) worked across multiple areas.

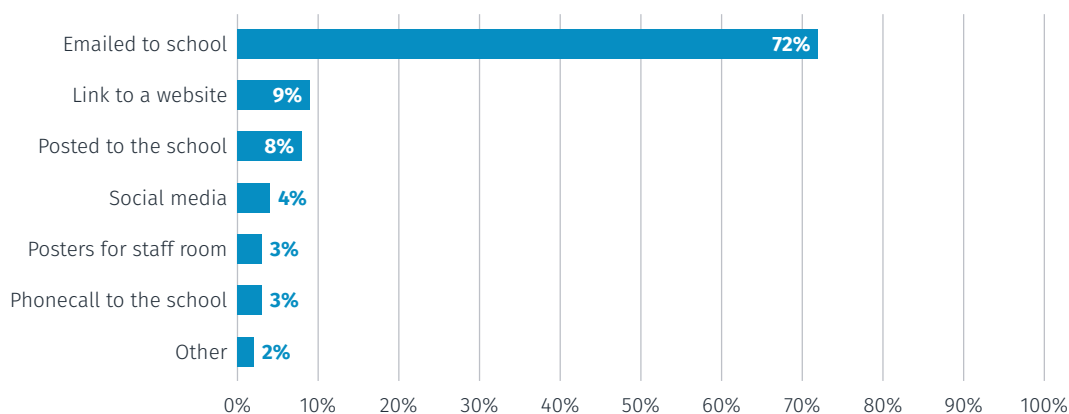
Who does the booking?



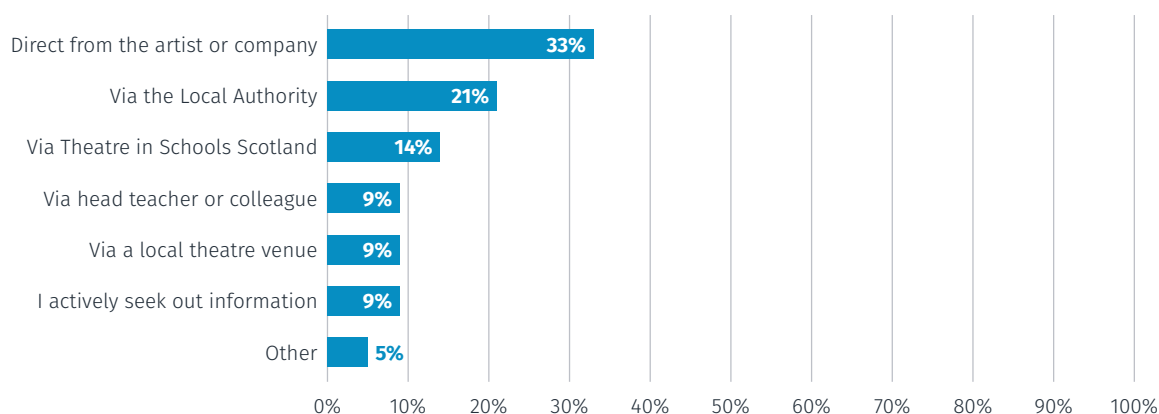
Most schools were responsible for booking performances and projects themselves, with local authorities only having a role in a minority of cases.

In order to promote theatre, dance and drama opportunities, schools indicated a clear preference for having information emailed directly to the school. However, there was less agreement around the preferred source of the information.

Preferred method of communication

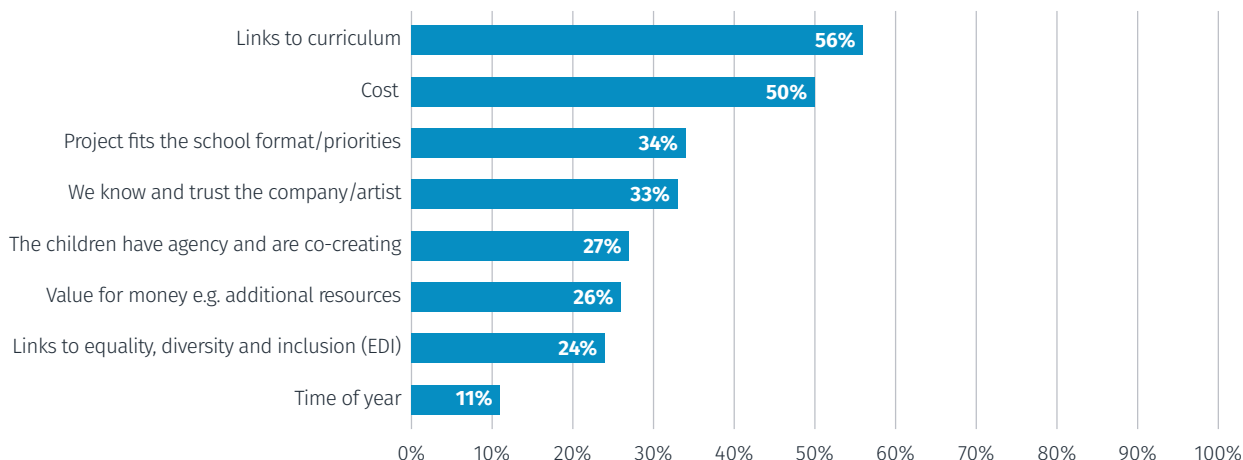


Preferred source of information

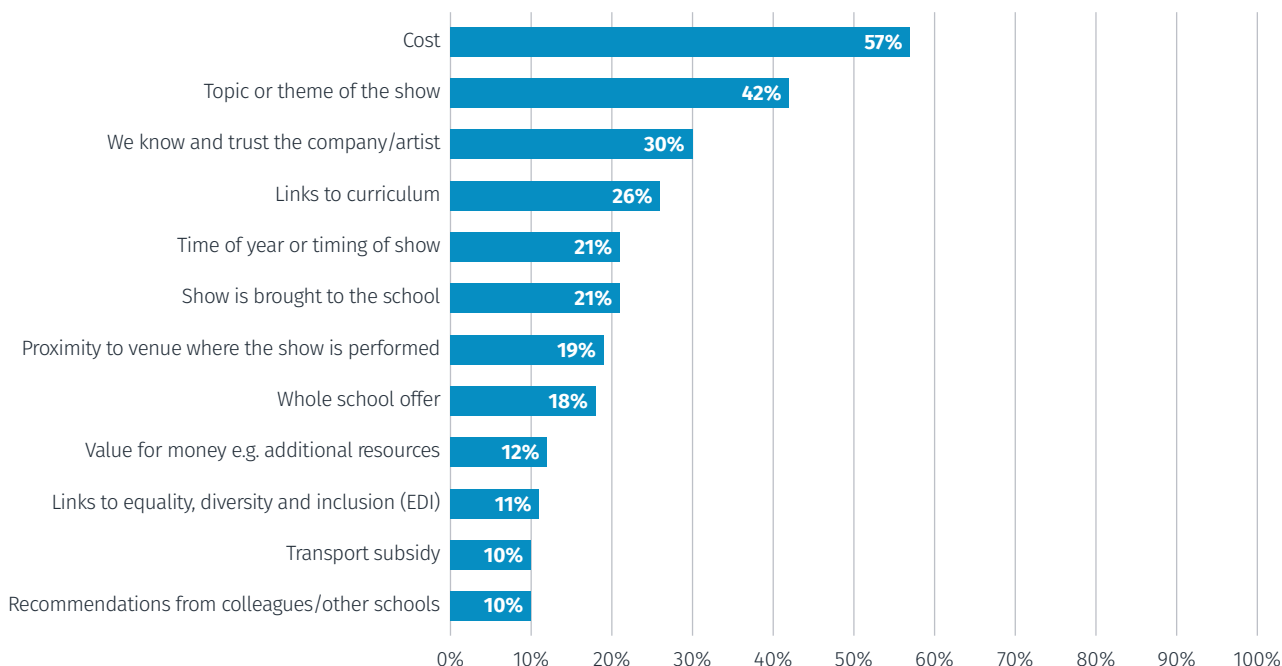


The key priorities when booking either participatory projects or performances included cost, links to the curriculum, that the topic/project fitted school needs, and trust in the artist/company.

Priorities for participatory engagement



Priorities when booking a performance



Although recommendations from other teachers/ head-teachers were identified less often in the survey, the case studies suggest this is an important factor and should not be overlooked. Several teachers indicated that they often discussed opportunities with colleagues and recommendations had an impact on decision making, while artists also highlighted that word-of-mouth was an important promotional tool:

“We find that the majority of bookings come from word of mouth, usually a teacher who has either moved school, or a head teacher who has been involved when they were a class teacher, and they then re-book it at their new school.”

Case Study Artist/Company – Out to Play by Eco Drama

Drivers of success

Survey and case study respondents highlighted various elements they felt had driven the success of performances or participatory projects they had engaged with.

Key drivers of successful participatory projects:

- ★ pupils were either exposed to new opportunities, learnt new skills, or had learnt about a subject in a new and engaging way
- ★ pupils had agency and their input was reflected in the activities and final product
- ★ the work was suitably tailored to the needs, interests and abilities of the pupil group
- ★ inclusive projects, where all pupils were able to take part, with different roles available to suit different interests, abilities and comfort levels
- ★ there was good communication between the school and artist/company, both to set-up the activity and to provide ongoing liaison/feedback throughout
- ★ good links to the curriculum, and opportunities for follow-up work in the classroom
- ★ creative, enthusiastic, and skilled artists delivering a high quality product
- ★ motivated and enthusiastic school staff/teachers
- ★ opportunity to upskill school staff to build their confidence in incorporating theatre and dance techniques into their teaching

Key drivers of successful performances:

- ★ elements which give agency to the children, either learning something about or from the show before, being involved in the performance in some way, or via workshops, question and answer sessions, or being shown costumes, props, etc. afterwards
- ★ being relevant to pupils and/or linked with curriculum or topic work
- ★ engaging performance – live performances were felt to better engage pupils
- ★ providing cultural/new opportunities, particularly for those who may not otherwise experience theatre or a show
- ★ being suitable for the audience (e.g. age, abilities, interest)
- ★ teachers' enthusiasm

“Personalisation and speaking to the teacher about what they want is important... we’re the experts in the class, so if we can help, we can maybe make the artist’s life easier and they can create something that the children would love. It could be quite beneficial... there’s got to be a bit of a mutual understanding about what we want from the company and from this experience, and what they’re looking for.”

Teacher, Victoria Primary, Edinburgh

CASE STUDY 1

6-week participatory project linked to classroom topic work in a rural school

This school stressed the importance of providing links between the theatre, dance and drama activities and the curriculum/classroom learning (and the importance of communication to support this). They felt this provided a more holistic learning approach and ensured the theatre, dance and drama activities were embedded in the wider learning, resulting in better engagement and information retention in the pupils:

“I think having that chance before we started the project to really tell [the artist] where I was going, [it meant] it didn’t feel at all like it was an add-on... I just felt like it was a fully immersive experience. There was nothing that they were doing in their activities, that wasn’t adding to the learning of the children.”

Teacher

“I think definitely having some lesson plans e.g. how to explore this in literacy, that’s where the curriculum links can be made. So if you weren’t so sure, if you had a lesson pack that was curriculum linked with outcomes and experiences across the curricular areas, that could be really beneficial. So then it’s not an add-on, it’s about what you’re doing in class.”

Teacher

CASE STUDY 2

Storytellers, musical groups, sensory theatre and English Opera at Fairview Primary (Perth and Kinross)

One ASN school highlighted the importance of communication before participating in activities or booking performances. It was crucial that the school ensured offers were suitable for their pupils, and for artists to understand the pupils’ needs:

“We’ll often speak with companies directly, just to make sure it is going to meet the needs of our pupils... I think it’s really important that they’re aware of the pupil group that they’re going to be working with. So we explain that some of our children have heightened sensory awareness, so we can’t really have it as loud as they would normally, etc., and most companies have been amazing.”

Teacher

Both schools and artists also stressed the motivation of the teacher as another important factor for successful engagement. It was noted that, where teachers saw value in artistic approaches, work tended to be more successful due to pupils picking up on the teacher's enthusiasm and because they were more likely to undertake some classroom based learning to support the activity. Similarly, it was also highlighted that having a 'champion' within schools meant it was more likely that they would engage:

“The most successful projects have been the ones where schools have fully realised the scope of our participatory arts projects, and have been able to integrate project activity into school life beyond the ‘core’ sessions they receive from artists... the most enriching experiences have been reported from schools with teachers who have taken this on board and personalised the project to their classes.”

Artist Survey Response

CASE STUDY 3

In a New Light project by Imagine with St Ninian's Primary (Edinburgh)

This school highlighted the importance of pupil agency and co-creation as a driver of success in this long-term participatory project. School staff noted how this had engaged pupils, encouraged pride in the final product, and provided a lasting impact, while the artist indicated that this had been key in developing a high quality final product:

“[A lasting impact is] how proud they are of what they've created. My kids are still asking, quite regularly “can we watch our film again?”. In years to come, they'll have this to look back on and say, “this is what I created, I made a film that was premiered at an international film festival”, it's really quite special.”

Teacher

“The collaborative element between young people worked incredibly well across the project – allowing them to share ideas, write, choreograph and film each other, and then respond and feedback to each other. The final film was hugely successful and brought all the ideas together in a cohesive way that still spoke of the voices and ideas from the young people.”

Artist

Benefits for the pupils:

- ★ learning new skills and being exposed to new experiences
- ★ developing both academic and cultural engagement
- ★ building confidence
- ★ the development of personal and inter-personal skills
- ★ promoting inclusion
- ★ developing interests and widening horizons

Benefits for parents/carers:

- ★ additional tools and techniques could be communicated to parents to support their child
- ★ encouraged to explore arts as a family
- ★ pride when they can see their child's achievements

Benefits of theatre, dance and drama

Benefits for teachers/ the school:

- ★ upskilling teachers or school staff
- ★ learning techniques and tools to use in the classroom to engage pupils generally or with specific pupils who may need support

Benefits for artists:

- ★ confidence building, both around their own skills and ability and to work more with children and young people
- ★ building longer-term relationships with schools
- ★ providing an opportunity to improve their offer

“A huge thing that’s come out of lockdown is emotional resilience. I just feel like drama, music and dance, there’s no better way to explore emotions because you can apply it to somebody else. So you’re not you in that time and you often find children acting out something they’re going through but without ever attaching it to themselves.”

School Teacher

CASE STUDY 4

Stolen Table Comedy Workshops at Victoria Primary School (Edinburgh)

Comedy workshops over five weeks, where the pupils contributed ideas and material to build a final sketch show. The teacher felt that pupils were learning without realising it, that confidence and literacy skills were being encouraged, and that all pupils had been included. They also noted that they had learned new techniques to support classroom learning, while the artists had developed their confidence working with a new audience and refined their skills:

“[There were] lots of reluctant writers that wanted to tell people jokes, wanted to write a script, offered suggestions, like “here’s what I think you should do”, or design a set. So they were actually creating something, which was really nice.”

Teacher

“It was great for me to just observe how the artists worked. I’ll never be a stand-up comedian, but I could observe how to teach as well.”

Teacher

“This project opened us up to working with young people, something which we had not considered before but we have continued to do since! It helped us learn a lot about our own writing and performing process as well. Taking the class through what we do helped us see our own practice through fresh eyes and begin to refine it.”

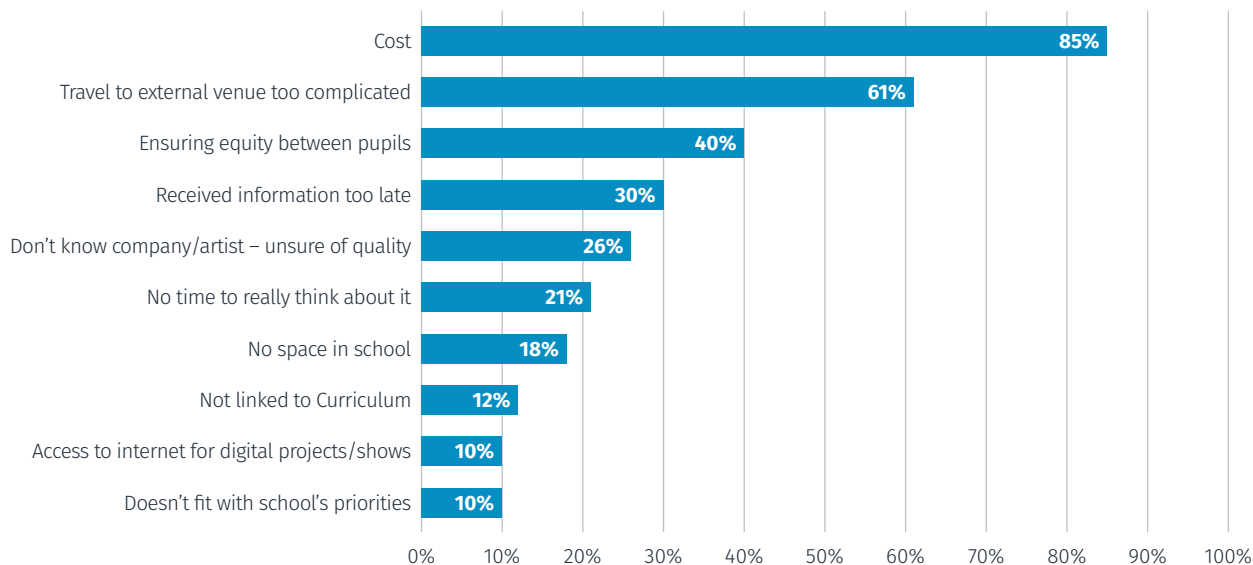
Artist

Barriers to engagement

While cost appears to be one of the main consideration when booking and one of the barriers to engagement, interviews indicated that the cost of theatre, dance and drama in itself was not necessarily the issue, but rather finite resources and competing demands.

Schools agreed that while they were supportive of theatre and dance, head teachers were often faced with difficult spending choices, and competing priorities limited the amount of money they had available to spend. Issues such as transport costs and equity of access between children were also considered as part of the overall 'cost' barrier.

Barriers to engagement



“It’s just so hard because there’s such a range of priorities from closing the attainment gap, health and wellbeing, and the learning environment and facilities. There’s so many different aspects within the curriculum that you want to develop further but you just can’t do everything.”

Case Study School – SS Peter and Paul Primary, Dundee, 6-week participatory drama project linked to classroom topic work

Encouraging Engagement: Recommendations

1 Communication between schools and artists/companies

Artists/companies should build time in for dialogue with the school to ensure projects are best suited to pupils and teachers' needs, especially for participatory projects. This was also key to build up trust between artists and schools. Similarly, for performances, schools were keen to be able to find out more about the suitability of performances or venues and discuss any potential wrap-around activities. Identifying and building links with theatre, dance and drama 'champions' within schools will also aide engagement.

2 Making curricular links clear

Schools are looking for quick ways to see whether a project or performance will help them deliver the curriculum so translating the art offer into educational sector "language" was key. This helps to identify the wider value of the work to schools and can be useful in supporting requests for head teachers to allocate finite resources. This could be an area that Creative Scotland and Education Scotland may be able to support artists and schools with. It may be useful to also build time into projects for discussions with the school around how to embed the offer within wider learning. Key areas that were important for schools were health and wellbeing, literacy (including talking and listening skills), confidence building, and encouraging creativity.

3 Communicating benefits for children

Highlight the benefits of the performance or project to the children's learning, while acknowledging that outcomes may depend on a particular class or teacher. While it is important to highlight the general expected benefits, it is also useful to liaise with the school in relation to their specific needs, pupil cohort, etc. to identify ways in which the work could be beneficial to them on an individual level, and possibly adjusted depending on circumstances.

4 Agency in performances and projects

This was important in driving success and perceptions of value for money. While all work should be artist-led, it is important to ensure that it is also child-centred. For participatory projects, co-creation between the artist and pupils was vitally important, while for performances, a workshop, question and answer session, or hands-on look at the set, props, etc. would be useful. Schools are very keen for children to take ownership of their learning.

5 Central online portal

Only a few of the teachers interviewed were aware of the Creativity Portal (and none had made use of it recently), however, many suggested that it would be useful to have a central information portal to improve awareness and promotion of opportunities in schools. This should include a search function to allow schools to identify what is available locally and what would be suitable for their needs.

6 Increasing staff confidence

Schools appreciated the opportunity to upskill staff and build their confidence in theatre, dance and drama, either by involving teachers in projects, or by providing the opportunity for CLPL. Such professional development could either be delivered as stand-alone training offered to schools, or as short sessions when artists or companies are already working with a school.

7 Long-term legacy

Artists should consider the legacy of their intervention and the long term impact they can have on pupils. As well as upskilling school staff, artists could discuss follow-up work which the school could undertake with the pupils or highlight warm-up exercises, games, or other techniques which could be used in the classroom to support learning. This could also help support the development of longer-term relationships with schools.

“Performances have sparked imagination, led to more participation and engagement across the school, given vulnerable children (who have often missed out) new experiences and opportunities to thrive, feel included, shine, learn and provided insight and a safe place to explore the world of work.”

School Survey – class teacher

“The main benefits are the rich cultural experiences, where our learners develop a respect for the values and traditions of others around them. The listening skills that they gain through working closely with their peers. The empathy they develop from taking on the role of another. Their use of language as they learn and take on board the contributions from those around them. Finally, the level of enjoyment that they experience from engaging in fun and exciting learning experiences that provide hope and prospective careers for the future.”

School Survey – class teacher



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