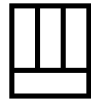




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Foundation

The RAPS Project

Researching the Arts in Primary Schools



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We thank all the schools that participated in the RAPS research. We hope that you can recognise yourselves in this report. We loved getting to know you and we want others to do the same.

Collectively you have so much to teach the wider school system.

You show that the arts are not a luxury but a necessity. You are the living evidence that the arts can unlock every child's potential and can create schools where every student belongs and thrives. In a time of unprecedented challenges, you lead the way in asserting the power of the arts to transform lives and life chances.

Our children deserve nothing less.

Executive Summary

Arts-rich primary schools are highly diverse. There is no one way to be arts-rich. However, there are patterns across the schools that can inform other schools and the school system more generally.

Arts-rich schools offer art and music to all children every week and every year. They also offer other expressive arts subjects. Arts-rich schools offer a wide range of extra-curricular arts activities and special events; these are complementary to the regular arts programme

The expressive arts are integral to the schools' identities and their philosophies. They all see the expressive arts as integral to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Commitment to the expressive arts does not come at the expense of other subject learning. The majority of the arts-rich schools we studied did at least as well as, if not better, than equivalent schools and schools in their local authority. Children's success across the full range of subjects was recognised in their inspection ratings.

Key to the schools' arts-richness was the commitment of senior leaders, and the appointment of specialist staff with expertise. Specialist staff taught an arts subject, planned the arts curriculum and supported classroom teachers.

Arts-rich schools go against the grain of research evidence that most primary classroom teachers do not feel confident teaching expressive arts subjects: generalist classroom teachers in arts-rich schools felt confident in teaching a range of expressive arts subjects.

Arts-rich schools are notable for the depth and density of their arts leadership. Children and governors contribute to this depth and density by working with arts specialists.

Arts-rich schools have strong, ongoing relationships and partnerships with artists and cultural organisations. These add to the specialist expertise within the school and enhance children's learning.



Introducing the Researching Arts in Primary Schools (RAPS) project

At present the expressive arts in schools in England appear to be in considerable trouble. While students in independent schools routinely participate in dance, drama, music, creative writing, art and design, this is not the case in the state school sector (Ashton & Ashton, 2022). Although the arts are part of the national curriculum and deemed necessary for a broad and balanced curriculum, enrolments in secondary school arts subjects have fallen, and time devoted to the arts in primary schools is greatly reduced (All Party Parliamentary Group on Art Craft and Design Education, 2022; Ashton et al., 2024; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024; Daubney, 2023). Creative teaching and learning also appears to be very patchy, with teachers urged to opt for more whole class and direct instruction methods in all subjects (Coe et al., 2014). Nevertheless, there are schools where children and young people enjoy the benefits of expressive arts learning. There are initiatives to build teacher learning in the expressive arts. Support from the arts sector and, in particular, from cultural organisations, is a significant factor in maintaining school arts and creativity programmes (Tambling & Bacon, 2023).

Arts projects arising from the joint activities of cultural organisations and schools are often evaluated. However there has been less attention paid to the primary schools that have consistently prioritised expressive arts learning over a long period. This research was specifically designed to find out more about this group of schools – the arts-rich schools.

The term “arts-rich” was coined by James Catterall (2009; Catterall et al., 2012). Catterall’s large scale longitudinal cohort studies in the US established that

Teenagers and young adults of low socioeconomic status (SES) who have a history of in-depth arts involvement show better academic outcomes than do low-SES youth who have less arts involvement. They earn better grades and demonstrate higher rates of college enrolment and attainment (2009, p. 12)

Catterall argued that the schools offering in-depth arts involvement were “arts-rich”, by which he meant they offered a full range of arts subjects to graduation level and had specialist staff and facilities. They also had something indefinable, a zeitgeist Catterall called it: a school culture which supported and promoted the arts.

Catterall only looked at secondary schooling. But, if young people are to take advantage of a secondary arts offer, they need a firm foundation in the primary years. Arts-rich primary schools can teach us how primary arts subjects can be successfully taught.

We use the term arts and expressive arts interchangeably in this report – the term expressive emphasises that we refer to art, music, dance, drama, creative writing, film, photography and creative activities that arise from cross-curricular work.

Building on the Tracking Arts Learning and Engagement (TALE) research

RAPS both builds on and extends the Tracking Arts Learning and Engagement project (Royal Shakespeare Company, Tate, University of Nottingham funded by Arts Council England, 2016–2019).

TALE examined: the ways in which teachers used professional learning, gained through their engagement with the RSC or Tate, in their teaching; what this offered their students; and what students said about their experiences and the benefits. The research was conducted in thirty secondary schools in England, fifteen nominated by the RSC and fifteen by Tate. Two teachers, the head and GCSE and A level students doing arts subjects were interviewed for each of three years. Lessons were observed and school documentation collected. The longitudinal case studies were accompanied by a survey of all students in GCSE years and above. The survey shared some items with the DCMS Taking Part survey, so it was possible to compare the arts participation (audience) and engagement (cultural production) of TALE students with the national average.

A key finding was that senior secondary students in TALE schools, regardless of whether they were still studying an arts subject or not, had greater rates of arts engagement and participation than the national average. Students studying an arts subject had even higher rates (as could be expected). A quarter of the surveyed students credited their school with introducing them to the arts and just over a third said that the school helped them to maintain their arts engagement and participation.

We explained these results by suggesting that arts-rich secondary schools:

- offered a broad and balanced lower secondary curriculum where students experienced the full range of arts subjects taught by qualified and well-resourced teachers

- saw the arts as integral to their organisational identity and thus offered a range of extra-curricular arts opportunities and an ongoing programme of performances and exhibitions; they also supported community arts
- built and sustained a wide range of partnerships with artists and cultural organisations.

Arts-rich schools benefited from and supported the work of arts-broker teachers. Arts-broker teachers were not simply teachers of arts subjects – they embodied what it means to make cultural engagement and participation a significant part of everyday life. They encouraged their students to take an interest in the arts both in and out of school, and they built and maintained strong cultural networks which supported their teaching and their students.

Arts-broker teachers benefited from immersive professional development offered by cultural organisations. Immersive professional learning supports ongoing arts disciplinary knowledge building and arts practices. It is long term; it provides resources for classroom pedagogies through direct work with artists. Cultural organisations working with teachers saw their role as complementary to that of teachers: there was mutual respect and recognition of each other’s expertise.

The TALE research concluded that the arts-rich school has an effect beyond that of arts subject teaching. The school-teacher-cultural organisation ecology supported young people to be cultural citizens – active cultural producers and critical appreciative audiences in the present – as well preparing them for an active cultural future (Thomson & Hall, 2023; Thomson et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

The TALE research has two important limitations. It dealt primarily with teachers of the visual and performing arts and not music, film, creative writing or dance. And while the arts-rich schools did offer the full suite of arts options, particularly in the junior years, the study focused on senior secondary students. The situation in primary schools is very different, not least because the expressive arts are almost always taught by generalist classroom teachers with perhaps some support from specialist arts teachers.

The RAPS research design and methods

The RAPS research is a purposive study of primary schools where the arts and/or creative approaches are flourishing. We did not set out to ascertain the situation in all primary schools. Our aim was to develop understandings of arts-rich schools per se. We aimed to provide specific details of organisational structures and cultures in primary schools. We aimed to document the specific challenges of teaching a broad and balanced curriculum in which the expressive arts have parity of treatment and esteem. We aimed to find out what were the benefits for children of being in arts-rich schools.

Our research questions thus were:

What is an arts-rich primary school?

What do arts-rich/creative primary schools offer to children?

What are the benefits for children of being in an arts-rich/creative school?

How do schools sustain this arts/creative education offer?



The first challenge then for the RAPS project was to find and select arts-rich primary schools.

RAPS Stage One

We decided that we needed a core sample of 40 case study schools across England. This number was practicable given the size of the research team, but large enough to give scale to the results.

To make the selection of the 40 case study arts-rich primary schools, we generated a list of potential sites. We asked the then Arts Council-funded youth ‘bridge’ organisations if they would identify the schools in their regions that would be of most interest to us. We added schools with platinum Artsmark, schools that had featured in previous research on arts-richness, and schools that had featured as Times Educational Supplement creative school winners. This produced a list of 168 schools. We also made an initial examination of all 168 school websites to assess whether they met initial criteria for arts-richness — an arts curriculum plan which worked across all year levels, a commitment in their vision/mission statement which included the expressive arts and evidence of arts activities.

We wrote to all the schools inviting them to be part of the project and asked them to fill out a short online survey. The survey was designed to provide base-line information about curriculum, staffing and facilities. 76 schools responded to the survey invitation. The survey responses were collected between 15 June and 30 July 2021. All 76 schools agreed that their survey results could be included in the project and that their school could be involved in the ongoing research. This survey is a separate appendix to this report.

RAPS Stage Two

We then selected schools from the 76. Although this was not a representative sample, we did want to cover schools from all parts of the country, large and small schools, schools which served diverse populations, and schools which prioritised different art forms. We chose 40 schools with two reserves. We then wrote to the schools inviting them to participate in the next stage of the research. Only one of the initially selected schools refused and we went to the next school on our list. As it happened, one of the 40 opted out during the second stage and we went to the final listed school. We thus had 41 schools in total although only 40 at any one time. We generally use 40 in the report except where we discuss Stage Two and Three together.

Our research was based on case studies which required extended school visits. However, the RAPS project was profoundly affected by COVID-19. While we were waiting for schools to open to visitors, we decided to experiment with an arts project and invited Leap Not Look to design a project where children from the RAPS schools could make a short film or power-point describing their school’s arts programmes. Eight schools took up the invitation and the videos are available online on <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4jOwF3V9VFIVaqEldPMiCA>.

When we were eventually able to visit schools, it was only for two to three days rather than the week we had initially designed. This time frame allowed us to conduct interviews with staff and focus groups of children, make photographic surveys of facilities and equipment and collect school documents. We were unable to conduct systematic observations of classes in action. In each of the schools we asked to interview:

- The head or member of the senior leadership team (SLT)
- The arts lead teacher
- A classroom teacher
- Groups of children from Years 4, 5, and 6 and children involved in extra-curricular arts activities and/or arts students leadership groups.

Some schools went beyond this request, organising more teachers, arts specialists, artists and governors for interview. Some schools were unable to meet all our requests because of the continued effects of the pandemic on staffing and school organisation.

All the interviews were transcribed using voice recognition software and then hand corrected. We developed ongoing case descriptions for each of the schools, comparing their arts provision, leadership teams and structures and curriculum and assessment plans.

RAPS Stage Three

Our initial intent had been for Stage Three to be a case control study in which a smaller number of RAPS schools from Stage One would be compared with ‘like schools’. Like schools are those which share several key characteristics – size, population (socio-economic status, racial and ethnic mix, special needs etc) and location. Like schools are preferable to league tables which generally reflect social advantage rather than any school effect (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017). Progress (value-added) measures are also used for comparative purposes, but the basis for measuring progress is hotly debated (Prior et al., 2021).

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), an English charity dedicated to supporting the better use of evidence to break the link between family income and educational achievement, has developed a data base of school families (like schools). EEF use data on prior attainment, percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and the number of children with English as an additional language, to construct families of 50 schools.¹ The EEF families are used by schools and researchers. Each family is organised in a league style performance table created by using test/exam and progress data. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EEF school family data base was removed because of missing test and inspection results. We had already downloaded the data relevant to the RAPS research before it was taken down; however, it is important to note that the data we use for comparative purposes is relevant to schools’ performances at the start of the project.

Based on the analysis of the 40 RAPS schools, we selected 22 for the third stage. We eliminated some schools because they had unique characteristics, and we wanted to probe what it was that regular schools could learn from the research. We wanted to avoid any conclusions that arts-richness was tied to unusual locations or populations. We also ensured national coverage and a range of school sizes and populations.

Using the EEF family data base, we noted the position of each RAPS school within their family.

Our initial intention had been to revisit twenty RAPS schools and conduct a one-day visit to one comparator school. We also intended to survey Year 5 students across the 40 schools, 20 RAPS, and 20 comparators. Our decision to increase from 20 to 22 meant that we were looking to also expand the number of comparator schools. However, we were unable to get sufficient

positive responses from comparator schools. The ongoing effects of the pandemic were certainly an important factor; it might also have been because the schools did not see the research as important, or they were already over-researched.

We therefore decided to focus only on publicly available data – test results, inspections and performance measures – and to include two comparator schools for every RAPS school rather than one. We selected the two comparator schools immediately on either side of each RAPS school in the EEF table, as these were likely to be most similar. Where the RAPS school was top of the family group, we selected the next two down. We thus examined comparative public data from 66 schools.

Our second case study visits to the 22 RAPS schools were focused strongly on school organisation. We wanted to know specifically how the school organised the arts curriculum, and what was involved in sustaining arts-richness. In each school we spoke to the head and to all arts leads. We also surveyed all year 5 children about their experiences in the schools. We extended our initial case study design to include a survey of generalist classroom teachers. Both surveys are available as separate appendices to the report.

Our total data set consists of:

- Arts-rich school survey (n= 76)
- Interviews (n = 854 children, 150 adults, largely teachers and SLT). See Table 1.
- Classroom teacher survey (n = 151 from 16 schools)
- Year 5 children survey (n= 1017)
- Documentation from 41 schools
- Photographic survey of 41 schools
- School data from 76 schools
- Comparator performance data from 22 RAPs and 44 EEF family schools

¹ See <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eeef-blog-introducing-the-eeef-families-of-schools-database>

School	# of student focus groups interviewed	# of students interviewed (approx.)	Total # of interviews/ focus groups	# of staff interviewed	Total # of people interviewed
Allens Croft, <i>Birmingham</i>	4	13	7	3	16
Anston Greenlands, <i>near Worksop</i>	4	22	6	2	24
Beecroft Garden, <i>South London</i>	4	20	7	3	23
Billesley, <i>Birmingham</i>	6	30	10	4	34
Blackrod, <i>near Wigan</i>	4	20	9	5	25
Bourne Westfield, <i>Lincolnshire</i>	4	20	7	3	23
Cherry Grove, <i>Chester</i>	5	25	8	3	28
Feversham, <i>Bradford</i>	3	15	9	6	21
Fourfields, <i>Peterborough</i>	2	10	6	4	14
Gomersal, <i>Cleckheaton</i>	4	20	7	3	23
Greenside, <i>London</i>	5	25	8	3	28
High View, <i>Plymouth</i>	5	25	10	5	30
Hillstone, <i>Birmingham</i>	4	20	11	5	25
Horfield, <i>Bristol</i>	4	20	8	4	24
Hotspur, <i>Newcastle</i>	5	25	9	4	29
Kelsall, <i>Tapoorley, Cheshire</i>	4	20	7	3	23
Lansbury Lawrence, <i>Tower Hamlets London</i>	5	25	8	3	28
Leamington Community, <i>Liverpool</i>	4	25	8	4	29
LIPA Primary, <i>Liverpool</i>	5	25	10	5	30
Marine Academy, <i>Plymouth</i>	5	30	8	3	33
Mellor, <i>Leicester</i>	4	20	7	3	23

Table 1: person data set by school

School	# of student focus groups interviewed	# of students interviewed (approx.)	Total # of interviews/ focus groups	# of staff interviewed	Total # of people interviewed
Nancledra, <i>St Ives</i>	3	15	6	3	18
New Bewerley, <i>Leeds</i>	4	20	8	4	24
Newlyn, <i>Cornwall</i>	1	10	4	3	13
Palm Bay, <i>Margate</i>	3	18	10	7	25
Queen's Park, <i>Brighton</i>	3	18	6	3	21
Ramsgate Arts, <i>Ramsgate</i>	4	20	11	7	27
Robin Hood, <i>Nottingham</i>	4	20	8	4	24
School 21, <i>East London</i>	2	10	5	3	13
Sidegate, <i>Ipswich</i>	7	35	11	4	39
Soho Parish, <i>Central London</i>	5	20	8	3	23
Somerleyton, <i>Lowestoft</i>	3	15	6	3	18
Springfield Juniors, <i>Ipswich</i>	5	25	9	4	29
St Andrews C of E, <i>Bath</i>	3	15	6	3	18
Torriano, <i>Camden London</i>	5	22	8	3	25
University of Cambridge, <i>Cambridge</i>	4	20	7	3	23
West Jesmond, <i>Newcastle</i>	5	25	8	3	28
West Rise, <i>Eastbourne</i>	5	25	8	3	28
Wix & Wrabness, <i>Colchester</i>	5	25	8	3	28
Worsborough Community, <i>Barnsley</i>	4	16	3	3	19
Wyburns, <i>Southend Essex</i>	5	25	8	3	28
TOTALS	170	854	318	150	1004

Table 1: person data set by school (cont.)

This data set has been analysed as:

- individual school cases, with comparative themes developed across the cases
- positional cross-cases (student, classroom teachers, governor). Within position themes (student, arts lead and SLT) were also developed.

Thematic analysis of transcripts was done by a team member reading and coding. Their themes were read against thematic transcript summaries made by the AI programme Claude. There have also been several readings of the data looking for specific information e.g. partnerships with cultural organisations. This report is a summary of this analysis.

Values, visions and purposes in the RAPS schools

“Creativity is a prism which through all the learning and the subject specialisms are orchestrated, and that is because the school itself deeply values the rights of the child, the importance of academic excellence, but also the idea of education being about more than that.

It’s around teaching children about how to be a good member of society and what those responsibilities are.

You’ll see all around the school, it talks about being a change maker and we think it’s important to teach those complex issues whether it’s around climate change or around inequality. And the arts are perfect - the arts are very important in making those really complex issues available and accessible. People are able to connect with and understand those issues through the arts.

Helen Bruckdorfer, Torriano Primary

Arts-rich schools have a shared vision and values with the arts at the heart

Educational researchers (e.g. Ainscow, 2024; Fullan, 2023; West et al., 2006) stress the importance of a school having a vision, values and purpose. The vision, a long-term view of what the school will do and be in the future, steers planning and decision-making. Values underpin the everyday actions and interactions in the school. Purpose brings vision and values together providing the reasons why the school is moving in a particular direction and does some things and not others.

Critics (e.g. Courtney & Gunter, 2015) say that schools in England have had limited freedom to decide where they will be — what they are and can do is limited by policy, competition and accountability measures. While we agree that there are significant pressures on schools to conform, our research shows that arts-rich schools do have particular visions, values and moral purposes which work against the dominant policy grain.

This chapter begins to tell this story.

Shared vision, values and purposes

All the RAPS schools saw the arts as integral to their school identity. They often spoke about the arts as part of their DNA. The headteachers all referred to a shared vision for the school in which arts education was central. If the school was to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, then the arts were an essential component.

The school staff we spoke to shared a belief in the power of the expressive arts in children's lives and learning. Their vision was not just of artistic knowledge and skill development, but of nurturing curiosity, empathy, resilience, self-belief – the realisation of every child's potential. As one head put it,

“The arts provision gives students experiences and skills that are hugely enriching and often transformational, which is the ultimate reward and makes navigating the challenges worthwhile.”

Being an arts-rich school was a source of pride and distinctiveness that shaped how the school was perceived. The arts featured prominently on school websites, for example, with galleries of children's work, regular postings about arts activities and anthologies of creative writing demonstrating that the arts were not an add-on but part of regular school activities.

The RAPS schools were all strongly committed to a holistic view of education, where all aspects of development were important. School staff offered strong arguments for the centrality of arts subjects in their schools. They told us that a strong arts education is an entitlement. A high-quality arts education was a right for every child, not a luxury. Beyond specific subject knowledge and skills, the arts provided unique opportunities – creativity, self-expression, self-belief, agency, identity and wellbeing. RAPS school staff were generally critical of what they saw as an over-emphasis on a narrow range of skills and knowledge. While recognising their importance, they also saw the significance of overall personal development and wellbeing, particularly in a post-pandemic world.

RAPS schools were adamant that the arts were a lifeline for children who struggled in traditional academic settings. They provided alternative ways to learn, communicate, and succeed as well as an incentive to attend school regularly. The arts

provided a safe space for children to take risks, experiment, and build confidence in their abilities. Through the process of creating, reflecting, and refining, they developed resilience and a 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2017). The arts provided children with audiences they could share their achievements with. These confidence-building experiences were particularly transformative for children who had had limited opportunities to shine.

In addition to the learning within arts subjects themselves, the arts were also seen as an important support for learning in other areas. Most of the RAPS schools shared a vision of the arts as a powerful vehicle for learning across the curriculum. The arts were seen not as separate from, but deeply connected to, and supportive of, learning in other subjects. The schools developed a range of ways of teaching arts together with other subjects, often around key themes and significant local and national events.

The arts were widely understood to develop voice and agency. Participatory arts experiences, where children take on leadership roles or co-create with professionals, helped to develop students' sense of self and their capacities to act. They learnt that their ideas, perspectives, and creations mattered. As one head said,

“The arts allow children to say, ‘this is the true me,’ in a world that is forever trying to make children all the same.”

The RAPS schools saw themselves as part of, and accountable to, their local communities. The arts were an effective bridge between school, families, and the wider community. Many of the schools held large arts events and exhibitions that brought people together. These arts events engaged parents, showcased student achievement, and contributed to the cultural life of the community. Such events also enhanced the reputation of the school and attracted parents keen to have their children receive an arts-rich education. They also connected with the local community through the employment of local artists and through establishing strong curriculum links.

Many heads and arts leads in the study were acutely aware that the families they served depended on the school to provide experiences which the families could not afford. Many of the leaders emphasised how the arts can “level the playing field” by providing experiences that some children would not have access to outside of school. As one headteacher said,

“Arts education is crucial for providing children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with cultural capital and opportunities they might not otherwise have.”

Staff also saw the arts as providing powerful ways for children to explore, express, and take pride in their diverse identities. Culturally responsive curriculum pedagogies and content, combined with opportunities for community connections, enabled children to see themselves and their communities represented and valued.

RAPS schools also saw a role for the arts in preparing children for life beyond school, seeing the creative and collaborative skills nurtured through arts education as precisely those needed for success in today's and tomorrow's workforce. And, in providing children from all backgrounds with opportunities to innovate, communicate, and work in teams, arts-rich schools were teaching capabilities that might also show children arts careers as an aspiration, regardless of their starting points.

Staff in RAPS schools told us that, in a world where too many children face barriers to success based on their background, arts-rich schools offered hope. By providing all children with the opportunity to discover, develop, and express their unique creative potential, their schools were helping to build a society where every voice is valued, and every child can thrive.

Diversity in RAPS school visions and values

There were of course important differences in the RAPS schools' vision and values.

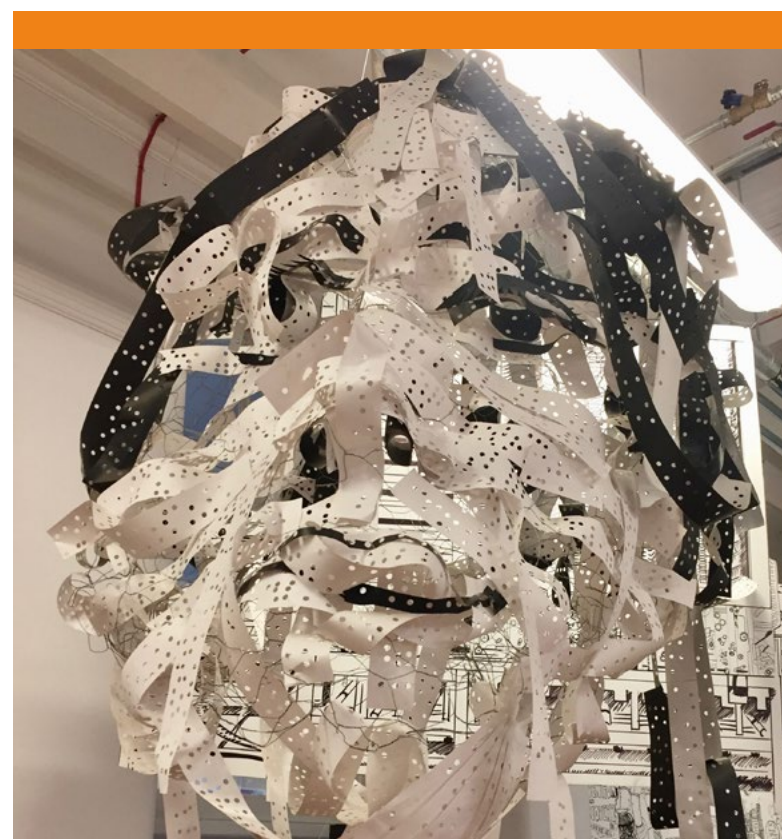
All the RAPS schools had educational priorities other than the arts. In addition to the importance they gave to progress and attainment generally, the most common of these educational priorities were programmes associated with eco-schools, forest schools, rights-respecting schools, creativity and philosophy for children. These priorities were not separate, they worked together with the arts. Children explored questions related to the environment and rights through the arts and these were often the focus for displays, events and ambitious projects.

While all the RAPS schools valued the arts, they were differently positioned in the curriculum. Some schools had completely rewritten their curriculum around the arts. Others kept a more traditional subject structure but ensured rich arts provision within and alongside it. Some schools focused on integrated project-based learning, others on discrete skills progression. These differences reflected different pedagogical beliefs as well as contextual constraints such as school size, location, staffing expertise and resources.

Some of the RAPS schools had a specific art form focus, in addition to their general arts provision. For example, Greenside is known for film and media arts. A specific art form focus allowed schools to develop deep staff expertise and to dedicate resources to high quality equipment and facilities. Sometimes the specialism arose serendipitously from staff passions but, more often, the specialism was related to local or national partnerships with cultural organisations.

All the RAPS schools valued and had a rich web of external arts partnerships. The nature and intensity of these partnerships varied. Some of the RAPS schools had deep, long-term partnerships that fundamentally shaped their arts provision and annual calendars. Others regularly brought in a range of artists and cultural organisations for specific projects or visits.

Each of these elements had a significant influence on the RAPS schools' ethos and vision and the ways they saw and represented themselves.



Put to the test: Does arts-richness really make a difference?

We suspected that there might be headteachers and governing bodies who saw poor performance on key measures as the inevitable result of prioritising the arts. The RAPS schools themselves told us about the tension between offering a rich arts curriculum and ensuring good test results and inspection outcomes.

One of our primary concerns in this research has been to get underneath what people say they do, and to offer more detailed explanation and some concrete evidence. As we explained in the previous chapter, we designed this project to have a comparative element. Note that we cannot reveal the names of comparator schools for ethical reasons.

When we compare the public data about each of the 22 RAPS schools with two comparator schools from the EEF school family data base (see previous chapter), we can see that the majority of RAPS schools are doing at least as well their comparators.

77% of the RAPs schools were doing as well as, or better, than other schools in their family. In other words, when compared with schools with almost the same prior attainment, percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and number of children with English as an additional language, 77% did as well as or better (EEF performance data). This performance was also reflected in inspection judgements, with the same schools being rated good or outstanding.

We also compared RAPS schools and their comparators with other schools in their local authority. Local authority schools serve a range of different populations, but there are also often similar characteristics among the schools.

This comparison showed that:

- 36% of **arts-rich** schools perform well above their local authority average compared to 28% of comparator schools
- 60% of **arts-rich** schools perform either above or well above their local authority average compared to 43% of comparator schools
- 70% of **arts-rich** schools perform either at, above or well above their local authority average compared to 56% of comparator schools.

The majority of arts-rich schools perform well in their local authorities. And importantly, arts-rich schools generally perform better than their comparators within their respective local authorities.

We conclude that this comparison strongly suggests that **(a) there appears to be little or no penalty attached to having an arts-rich curriculum and (b) there are additional benefits that arise from being arts-rich.**

The vision of the arts-rich schools is realised without detriment to other subjects.

Put to the test: What do children say about their arts education?

Another test of whether RAPS school values, visions and stated purposes were more than just words was to ask the children. Children told us a lot about whether they thought the arts are important (Table 1); about subject learning and about how they saw the personal benefits of their arts education (Table 2).

When we surveyed children in Year 5 in our second phase case study schools (n=1017) there were children who saw the arts as important and those who felt other subjects should be prioritised.

Table 1: Children’s views of the importance of the arts.

View of the importance of the arts	Exemplar quotes
Arts are the most important subjects. (8.9%)	“Art boosts a child’s creative side and therefore is as important or even MORE important than other subjects.”
Art is just as important as other subjects. All subjects, including art, are part of a well-rounded education. (75.6%)	“Because every subject is equally important.” “Because every child needs a little bit of every subject in school to learn.” “Because if we didn’t have those subjects most of us would find school boring and wouldn’t want to come.” “Because it’s good to have more than just maths, English and guided reading.”
Other subjects like maths and English are more important than art. (15.5%)	“Because maths and English are the main lessons.” “Because maths, English and science can be very important for other jobs in the future.”

The picture was more arts positive in focus group conversations, perhaps because children were not being asked to compare the arts to their other subjects, or perhaps they were less prepared to be critical in a group discussion with their peers. Children talked in detail about the specific knowledges and skills of particular arts subjects and what they were learning. We identified five dimensions of knowledge and skills in the children’s responses:

1. Knowledge about the art form: knowing about artists, genres, platforms and histories was often supported by visits to and with professionals and cultural institutions.
2. Skill development: children recognised that they improved in the arts through regular practice, effort, formative feedback and learning from mistakes. They evaluated their progress by comparing current work to past artefacts and performances (Thomson et al., 2024)
3. Developing creativity and creative expression: across the arts, children learnt knowledge and skills which allowed them to use their imaginations, express themselves and create something unique. They used the arts to explore and express feelings and meanings which could also be communicated to others.
4. Knowledge of different cultural forms and genres: through the arts, children learnt about different cultures, religions, and ways of life. They engaged with art forms and traditions from around the world.
5. Connections with other subjects: arts learning was often integrated with other subjects like history, science, maths, English, geography, and religious education. Children frequently mentioned arts projects related to topics they were studying, such as ancient civilizations, World War II, the environment, or Shakespeare.

Children also told us about personal benefits. They said that the arts offered enjoyment, an outlet for self-expression, a way to relieve stress, opportunities to build resilience, and a sense of pride in their creative accomplishments. Children valued the agency and ownership they had in arts classes, the opportunity to express and understand emotions, the experience of collaborating with peers, and the potential to lead and support others in their artistic development.

Children recognised and appreciated these aspects of arts learning in addition to the skills and knowledge they gained.

Arts benefit	Exemplar quotations from children
Self-expression, creativity and imagination	“We can release our imagination. We can release all our creativity. So, we can express ourselves.” “You can express your feelings and emotions.” “Art lets people shine in their own way.”
Enjoyment, fun, happiness, and relaxation	“Sometimes you need to have a little bit of fun at school and it’s really fun to do arts and music.” “It makes me feel amazed and proud of what I am able to do [drawing].” “It’s still learning but it’s calming.”
Developing resilience and perseverance through artistic challenges	“If you make a mistake, nobody should notice you because in a choir you can cover it up.” “You have to persevere, to fix things and adapt.” “Even if you think you can’t do it ... the only person that can stop you from achieving it is yourself.”
Improving mental health and emotional well-being	“It helps you calm down.” “It might improve your mental well-being because if you’re really stressed all the time, it could help calm you down and make you happier in life.” “Art really helps people stay happy throughout the day because there’s so many colours and so many beautiful drawings.” “Instead of always doing work ... [children] should just let it all out on paper because [they] might not understand how they’re feeling.”
Sense of pride and confidence from creating art and sharing it with others	“I was really proud of my part in Romeo and Juliet, because in one of those final weeks of rehearsing, I think I did really well because I didn’t use my script.” “Everyone’s work is going to be different.” “Sometimes if you draw something, it comes across more powerful than words.”
Agency	“We’ve started doing creative topics. You get to decide what you do. The teacher doesn’t say ‘you’ve got to do this’. “We’ve started doing creative topics. You get to decide what you do. The teacher doesn’t say ‘you’ve got to do this’. She gives you some instructions and then you just follow it and then you can do whatever you want with it.” “It’s not really about what the teachers think. It’s about what you think. So if you don’t like it, just try your best and try to make it how you would like it, not how other people would like it.”
Empathy	“You can express your feelings and emotions. You can sometimes have chats with your friends and maybe you can draw how you feel or show how you think other people feel.” “We were learning about serious feelings like depression and feeling disappointed. We had to make a facial expression out of clay.”
Collaboration	“We had to work really hard to get to that top point, especially when there’s lots of children.” “When some people gave up, we had to help each other out, to give them motivation to keep going.”

Table 2: Children’s views of the personal benefits of their arts education.

There is considerable overlap between what children say and the reasons their school prioritises arts learning. We develop these points, and the ways in which purposes, values and vision are put into practice, in the remainder of the report.



Arts-rich schools as design

“Some of our children have very, very little access to the arts unless we give it to them. Theatre trips are not something that are seen as a part of life. That’s not a judgement, it’s just not a thing here.

But children need that in their life because that’s where the inspiration is coming from. It’s coming from the theatre. It’s coming from visual arts. It’s coming from dance; it’s coming from drama. It’s coming from music. There’s something there for everybody.

You need something to spark you. The kids need to spark, they need something. They need inspiration. They need a reason to believe that they can succeed, and I think they get that through the arts.

Paula Weaver, Allens Croft Primary

Most arts-rich schools taught art and music to all children, every week, all year. These are core elements of arts-rich school design.

In thinking of school as a design, we draw on both the visual arts and literacy research.

In the visual arts, design can be a process where a specified number of elements can be combined and recombined in endless permutations. But in the visual arts design can also mean a process, a strategy for problem-posing and possible (re)solution. Thinking about design as a process, as action rather than an end point, draws attention to (1) movement, design is not static but in continued motion, and (2) designers, those who work together in, through and with the process of design. Arts-rich schools as designs are not fixed but are always a work in progress, the result of the inter-related actions of all those who work in them.

The New London Group (1996), an international collective of literacy researchers, took up these allied notions of design to consider how meaning is made through language. The NLG focused on the continued and changing combination of linguistic elements — vocabulary and metaphor, modality, transitivity, information structures and so on. Their work generates some helpful ideas for our research on arts-rich primary schools:

- Design almost always works with available designs. Design is not the invention of something new, but rather a process of redesigning in which there is never a simple repetition but always a re-thinking and varying representations. We take this to mean that arts-rich primary schools work with familiar elements e.g. staffing, time, space, curriculum and pedagogy.
- Designing is thus always redesigning and is the work that is performed on available designs through various processes of meaning-making. We take this to mean that arts-richness in primary schools is the result of ongoing and explicit action e.g. discussing and deciding, planning, resourcing, evaluating.
- In the process of (re)design, the available designs are both reproduced and transformed. We take this to mean that as arts-rich primary schools work with the recognisable and familiar elements of schooling, there are both ongoing and changing practices e.g. different ways of thinking about who is a staff member, how assessment might be carried out and so on.

This chapter documents the core elements that constitute the arts-rich school as both design and redesign.

Core elements of arts-rich primary school design

Our understanding of arts-rich primary schools comes from two sources, the initial survey and case studies. In this chapter we report key findings from our survey of 76 arts-rich primary schools and our survey of Year 5 children in the 22 Stage Three RAPS schools. The full survey results are available on the artsprimary.com website.

As was expected, the vast majority of the schools saw the expressive arts as being as important as any other subject; a quarter thought they were more so. 91% of the schools saw the arts as integral to their identities and cultures. They displayed student work in their foyers and corridors and on their websites. Seven out of ten had published arts curriculum plans and had an arts policy and just over half referred to the arts in their mottos or values/vision statement.



Example of a published curriculum intent statement:

At Beecroft Garden we bring the curriculum to life by taking an innovative and creative approach.

We believe that children achieve best when excited by and immersed in their learning. Our aim is for our curriculum to develop global citizens of the future, who love learning and have the relevant knowledge skills and attitudes to prosper in an uncertain world. Our curriculum has been designed to cover the requirements of the national curriculum in a way that excites and inspires children, allowing them to see links within big concepts and how learning transfers to the real world. It develops children's life skills and global understanding and has been designed to reflect the rich diversity of our community.

A passion for the arts lies at the heart of all we do. Children have rich opportunities to participate in art, drama, music and dance in our school, taught by a specialist team of educators. A focus on the creative arts allows children to develop their self-expression, work collaboratively, communicate in different ways and develop their self-confidence.

Whole school half termly themes allow children to focus on key local, national or global events, acting as campaigners and agents of change. With purposeful whole school outcomes, be it acting as climate activists, fundraising or promoting healthy lifestyles, our curriculum embeds in children an understanding of how they can have a positive impact on our world. At a year group level, each term children follow a themed learning journey, designed in consultation with children, which brings together different subjects to create purposeful outcomes or deepen understanding.

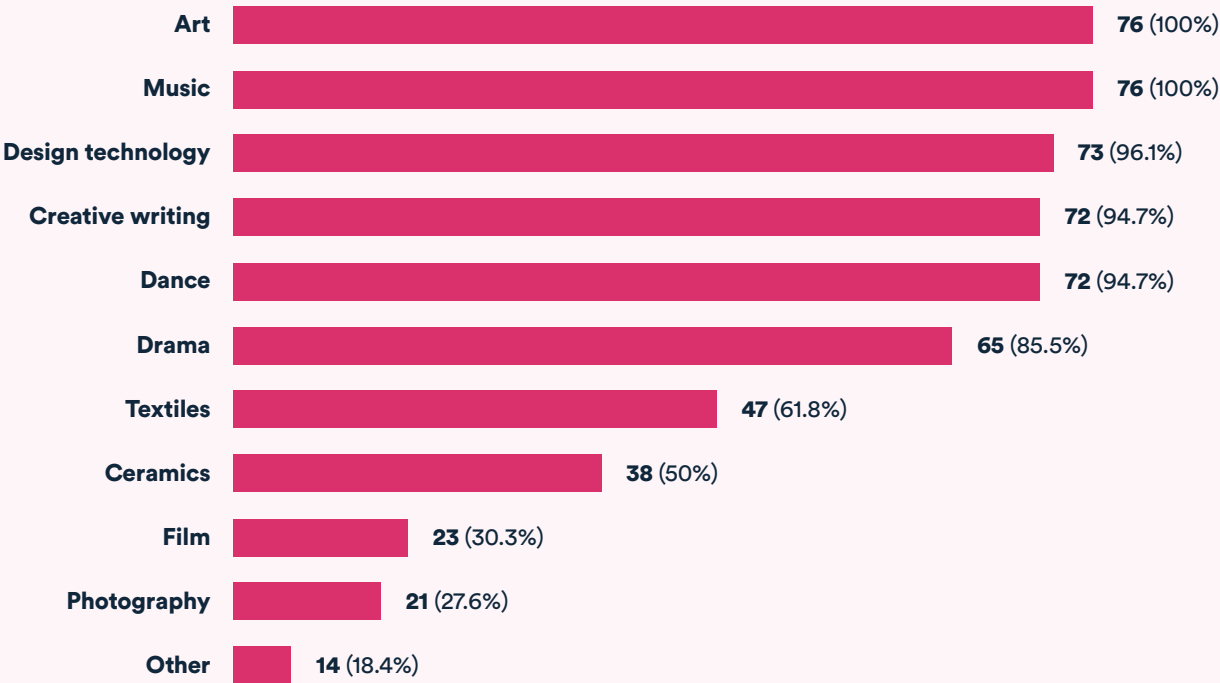
(extract)

We asked the schools about their curriculum. The survey showed that:

All 76 arts-rich primary schools taught both Art and Music to all children; almost all taught them all year round and in every year of primary school.

They also offered a range of other arts subjects. However, Art, Music, Creative Writing and Drama were taught much more and more consistently throughout the schools (see Fig 1). There was a little variation between KS 1 and 2, with Creative Writing becoming more prominent as children got older. Design and Technology teaching was also strong, in contrast to its diminishing status in secondary education. Some subjects however were not so widely covered. The relatively low focus on photography and film is perhaps surprising given schools' ready access to digital 'kit'. The crafts also appeared to be marginalised, with textiles particularly at issue. This is consistent with the status of crafts in secondary schools, where crafts are increasingly incorporated into Art, rather than being offered as stand-alone options.

Fig 1: Creative arts subjects taught in schools²



² The other category included a wide range of activities from poetry, opera, sculpture to Forest School. The category thus reflects activities that survey participants saw as being outside the usual expressive arts subject areas.

Most arts-rich schools had at least one specialist teacher who had specific expertise, training and often a qualification in the area.

80% of schools stated that they had specialist Music teachers. This percentage was considerably lower for Art (52%), Dance (33%) and Drama (29%)

The majority of arts-rich primary schools had some specialist facilities. Just over two thirds (68.2%) had specialist Music facilities and just under a third had facilities devoted to Art. Nearly one in three (27.3%) had dance facilities and one in four (25%) had dedicated drama spaces. High View for example, a relatively new school, taught music and performing arts in a large hall with raked seating, high-end lighting, several mixing desks and PA systems. There were retractable thick black curtains for shows and sound baffling, with theatrical mics hanging down from the ceiling.

A minority of schools reported having specialist facilities for ceramics (22.7%), design and technology (18.2%), film (9.2%), textiles (9.1%) and radio/DJ studios (6.8%). A significant minority offered expressive arts in generalist classrooms and in multi-purpose school halls. Many also had outside facilities such as Forest School areas in the school grounds or nearby. Forest school activities are very often arts based or combine arts and science. At West Rise Junior, for example, where they have invested heavily in forest school education – leasing 100 acres of floodplain next to the school and, amongst other activities, rearing Asian water buffalo – the children regularly make artworks inspired by the marsh and its wildlife, while also studying the science, history and geography of the environment.

We know from our case study visits that many of these additional facilities were financed by fundraising and built by the school, rather than being part of the standard provision. Some schools also experienced losing dedicated arts spaces as their enrolments increased, while the converse was also the case.

Arts-rich primary schools regularly added to their ongoing classroom based expressive arts programmes through complementary intensive arts activities.

Almost all the schools (93%) organised special arts events and arts weeks. Children who were particularly interested in the arts were able to extend their engagement through lunchtime and after school

clubs and other extra-curricular arts activities. 71% offered extra-curricular dance, 67.6% music and 54.9% drama. We know from the case studies that these activities were elective and cross-age and were designed to offer children the opportunity to extend their learning beyond the regular curriculum. Marine Academy Primary, for example, had 31 extra-curricular clubs including cheerleading, street dance, choir, field gun, and Forces Friends, the latter two reflecting the influence of the naval presence in Plymouth.

Arts-rich primary schools had a variety of partnerships and networks.

81% percent of schools had partnerships with arts organisations and 82% of schools were part of an arts network. There is, understandably, considerable cross-over between the organisations listed in partnerships and networks.

Nearly two-thirds of the schools had an Artsmark (64%). Of those that specified, 19 schools had a Platinum certificate, 24 Gold and four Silver. Thirteen schools were either in the process of applying or had applied and were waiting for a response.

Children’s reports of the core arts-rich school elements

We asked children in Year 5 to tell us about their arts curriculum, what subjects they accessed and how frequently (Table 1). These results largely match the responses given by the 76 school leaders who filled in our initial survey.

It is important to note that this survey was developed in the third stage of the project, and the categories we used are drawn from focus groups – they thus represent the ways in which schools talked about their expressive arts activities. The ‘often’ category was defined as once a week or every two weeks.

Children’s responses indicated that the majority of schools taught music, art, creative writing and forest school on a regular basis.

Table 1: Frequency of creative arts areas taught at Year 5: Year 5 children

Arts area	Often % of schools	Less often % of schools
Music and singing	90 %	10 %
Art: Painting/drawing	84 %	16 %
Creative Writing	82 %	18 %
Forest School	71 %	29 %
Dance	47 %	53 %
Choral speaking	45 %	55 %
Design Technology	40 %	60 %
Drama	36 %	64%
Poetry	30 %	70 %
Ceramics	30 %	70 %
Art: Sculpture	20 %	80 %
Textiles	20 %	80 %
Photography	16 %	84 %
Film making	13 %	87 %

Children did have the option of a ‘never’ response. According to the children, there were no nevers. They had experienced all these activities – the difference was in the frequency of the experience. For example, all of them reported doing some photography, with children in 16% of schools reporting it as a regular activity.

We also asked the Year 5 children which of these subjects they enjoyed (Figure 2). Children could pick more than one option.

The variation between the subjects taken and the enjoyment response reinforces the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Schools need to provide more than one arts subject so there is ‘something for everyone’.

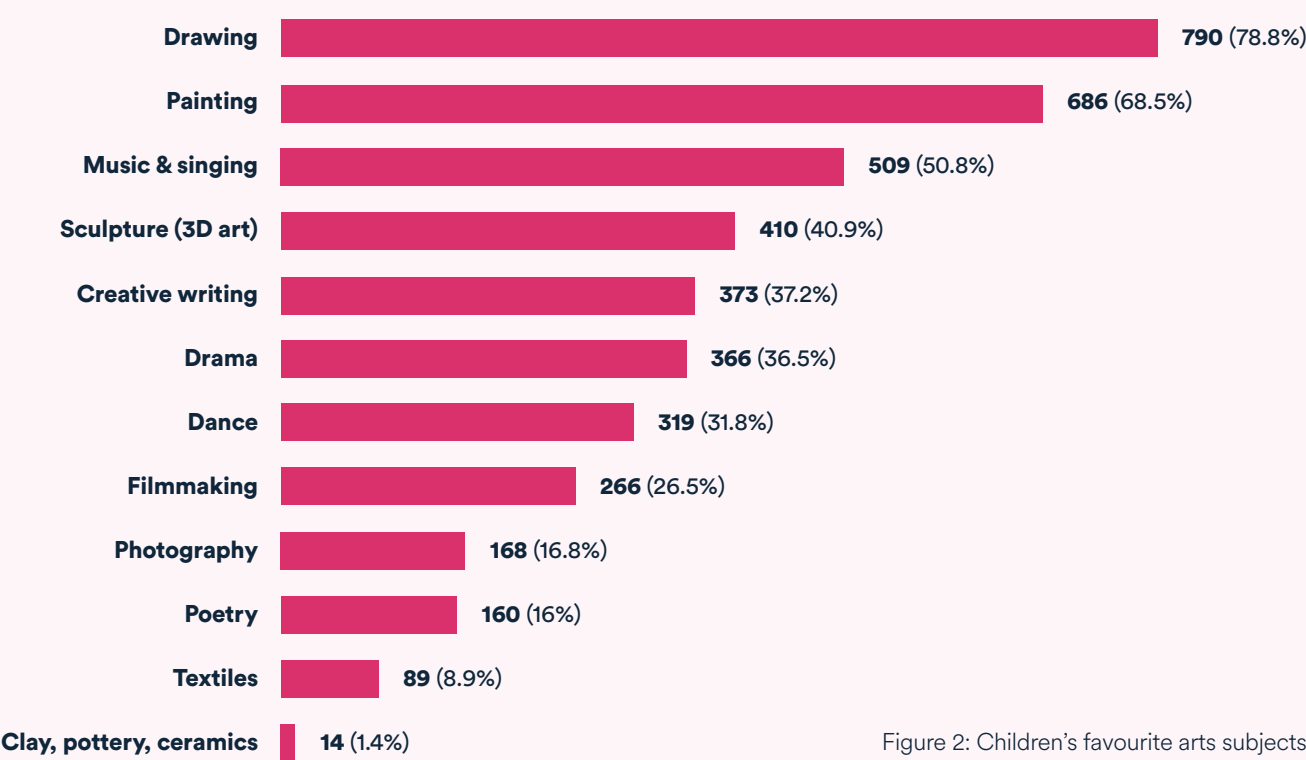


Figure 2: Children’s favourite arts subjects

There are many ways to be arts-rich

“If I asked you to make a house in the North Pole you might come up with an igloo. And then you move around the North Pole and everywhere you go you build igloos because that’s the best structure available. And you look at all the research that says igloos are the best structure and then ...

You get posted to the Sahara.

You’ve got all this research about igloos are the best residential structures and you look in the desert and you think What is the first thing I need here? Right, I need an ice-making machine. Yeah, that’s what I need because there’s no ice here. Because all my research shows that the best structure is an igloo.

But you might come up with a leather tent. It will have the same architectural principles as the igloo in terms of light and air movement and flow and shelter. So all of the elements will be exactly the same.

Both the structures will look entirely different, but they are the same.

Naveed Idrees, OBE, *Feversham Primary*

Arts-rich schools are highly diverse. There is no one way to be arts-rich.

While there are common core elements across the schools, as we showed in the previous chapter, the ways that arts subjects are organised, taught, and combined with other elements varies significantly.

This is not the only time we have seen patterned diversity. Our Tracking Arts Learning and Engagement (TALE) research on forty arts-rich secondary schools in England also showed that there were many ways to be arts-rich (Thomson & Hall, 2023). Similarly, the creative schools we studied earlier were also highly diverse, and we coined the term “vernacular change” to describe the ways in which the schools developed their own bespoke approaches to embedding creativity, taking into account their histories, locations, particular communities and staff capabilities (Hall & Thomson, 2017). Vernacular here means local and everyday: we use it in the way that we might talk of vernacular architecture, or of speaking in the vernacular.

The schools in the RAPS research were also highly diverse. They each had their own identities. They were not, to use the metaphor offered to us by one of the headteachers in the study, all identical igloos. Their different locations, size, buildings and grounds, staff, student and family mixes, histories, complementary priorities, and associations and partnerships all contributed to their distinctiveness.

Here we discuss one key aspect of the vernacular: place.

Place

‘Place’ is about specific localities and their relation to the wider world, about history as well as geography, about individual and collective stories and endeavour. Cresswell (2015) identifies five broad categories embedded in the definition of place: **location** (i.e. the point on a map); **locale** (place as a setting for social relationships); **place as experienced through the senses** (subjectively, emotionally, aesthetically); **place as landscape** (viewed from the outside), and **the spatial experience of place**. All these categories are pertinent to the RAPS schools, though they are differently weighted for each of them.

It’s that age-old phrase ‘roots and wings’, isn’t it? If you have your roots and where you’ve come from and you understand your heritage, it will give you the confidence to have the wings to fly and go off to where you want to be but having that sense of groundedness.

... Textiles was a massive part of this area. A huge new housing estate now, which has over 400 houses where a lot of our children live, was the site of what was at the time one of the biggest textile mills in Europe. It created all the yarn for the khaki fabric in World War One and World War Two. It’s where a lot of our children’s grandparents and their great-aunts and uncles worked, so we spent a lot of time gathering together stories and starting a whole community project on ‘what did Gomersal used to be like and how has it changed? And how has textiles played a major role in that?’ It allows the children the opportunity to understand their heritage, but also to see how that’s also still relevant. So it’s not just about the Luddites and smashing machines up two hundred years ago and the old-fashioned looms and how working conditions have changed. It’s also that Yorkshire is famous for its textiles because of the nature of the land. Farmers hundreds of years ago, when they looked at the lie of the land in Yorkshire, pretty much the only thing you could do was rear sheep. It wasn’t good for growing crops. We always laugh in our family about Yorkshire water being the best in the country due to filtration, how it comes off the moors and filters through the different rocks that we have. It genuinely is very pure ... You’ve got the Yorkshire water; you’ve got the sheep who are drinking the water and the grass and the bracken. Everything grows on the moors, so over hundreds of years the sheep in our local area have got the right textured fleece. It’s been about right place, right time and things fall into place.



Gomersal — Mending

It’s still really relevant in our local area because that’s what our university is working on and it’s brought in the innovation. We’ve got weapons grade lasers in the Textile Centre of Excellence in Huddersfield, who are currently working on how to agitate the fibres in sheep’s fleece so it’s naturally waterproof when it’s turned into garments. So rather than having waterproof clothing, that’s got all your plastics in it, they’re trying to invent a way of agitating sheep’s fleece so it will become more valuable to the farmers. It’s a natural product and it will be better for the environment. And that’s an industry that our children can go into when they’re when they’re older — it’s happening on their doorstep ...

Once you realise that whole heritage side of it and how important it has been to the local area, it then gives other opportunities, of how that can tie them and weave them into the future. Our children have absolutely loved it - to be able to gather stories from family members and make it relevant to them. I mean, our children have always learned about World War Two and history. But to say that the majority of the uniforms, the yarn that was spun, came from over the road where your house was built! They’re fascinated ... We believe that children need to be curious. They don’t need to just be sat there in lessons waiting to be told the facts. They need to want to find out more. It’s not something that we just want to happen in the art room. It’s something that we want to weave into to everything.

Figure 1: Mandy Barrett, specialist art teacher at Gomersal Primary, discusses place.



Lansbury Lawrence — Peggy Angus tiles in the foyer

Mandy Barrett’s comments are focused primarily on locale — Gomersal’s heritage as the site of textile mills that drove the local economy and established particular patterns of social relations, work, housing and cultural life. But her account is also about location, putting Gomersal — a small town with a Bradford postcode and a Cleckheaton postal address — on the map. And about the Yorkshire moors as landscape: ‘You’ve got the Yorkshire water; you’ve got the sheep who are drinking the water and the grass and the bracken. Everything grows on the moors ...’ Above all though, the account is notable for the pride and love Mandy Barrett expresses for Gomersal as a place, with its pure water, ‘weapons grade’ laser technology at the local university and sheep with ‘right textured’ fleeces. It comes as no surprise that she doesn’t want to constrain this focus on place by keeping it exclusively in the art room: the study of local textile manufacturing here involves science and history, geography and economics, woven together with the arts.

Two other, briefer, examples also illustrate the importance of place and heritage in schools’ rationales for their approach to the arts. The arts lead at Bourne Westfield school, for example, told us about their Arts Week that:

was all linked to Charles Worth who was born in this tiny little town, who actually was the first person in Paris to open up a haute couture store. He developed haute couture. So for that to come from this tiny little town was just amazing. It blew the children’s minds that, from this little place in Lincolnshire, this person in the past created amazing gowns and also all the design techniques and things that come into it.

A key feature of Lansbury Lawrence’s website is a film, made by the children, about the heritage and locality of their school. The film gives an overview of the school’s history and (now grade 2 listed) features. Built in 1951 in Poplar in the east end of London as a model school for the Festival of Britain, Lansbury Lawrence, with its many notable architectural features, was a key part of the vision of a better post-war future for the local community.

The Bourne Westfield example, like the Gomersal one, is about putting a small town on the map and building a sense of local pride. It’s also about aspiration; as Mandy Barrett puts it, being ready to spread your wings and fly. The Lansbury Lawrence example is more about the school itself as a place: its connections to national events (the Festival of Britain) and to national figures (George and Elizabeth Lansbury, Susan Lawrence, Peggy Angus), but also to the vision for the redevelopment of Poplar after the war, a vision of a community where all the needs of the local population would be provided for, with the schools at its heart. So there is an emphasis on locale and the sensory experience of place, as well as a focus on spatial aspects of the school as a place — light, design, colour, durability, accessibility.

The concept of place is key to understanding arts-rich schools. Attention to place drives the vision and values of all the arts-rich schools we studied and links them to one another. But it also helps to explain some of the differences between the schools.

Schools in differing locations and locales emphasise different aspects of place and these different emphases can be tracked through the ways in which the schools develop their own versions of arts-richness. They develop in vernacular ways, shaped by local events, histories and relationships. Some of these key events and relationships – such as funding or teacher supply issues, national changes in educational policy, inspections – are common, though differently inflected, across schools within the same system. Others are specific to a school (particularly fruitful and productive relationships or tragic events, for example) or to a particular locality (such as a change in local demographics). There are observable patterns across schools in the ways they change and develop, but even when faced with common challenges or situations, change is vernacular because schools have their own DNA, a DNA that is rooted in each school's particular combination of people, events, ideas and place.

If we consider two further schools from our sample, we can see how place plays out in the ways in which arts-rich schools develop their own identities.

Palm Bay Primary is in Margate, a town with a 250+ year history as a popular holiday resort. Over the last 30–40 years, however, the town's tourist trade has fallen off and its formerly grand architectural heritage has fallen into disrepair. More recently though, since the opening of the Turner Contemporary in 2011 and Tracey Emin's return to the town in 2017, Margate has seen a resurgence in popularity and a degree of regeneration in some of the housing stock and new businesses opening – shops, bars and small galleries that appeal to an incoming arty, more bohemian population.

Palm Bay Primary is located right on the coast; it looks out onto a stretch of grassland and over a small drop to the beach and the sea. The school's headteacher, Lizzie Williams, described how their arts agenda had evolved in recent years:

Arts has evolved in a really lovely way over the last six years, from being, you know, a distinct subject called Art that children maybe do once a week if their teachers are confident and, I'll be honest, sometimes it could be one of those subjects that sort of falls off in the busier times. Now, I would say it just permeates through everything ... it's about creativity, not just visual arts... to me, there's been this lovely, sort of organic and reciprocal relationship with teaching the children about citizenship really and being an active member of

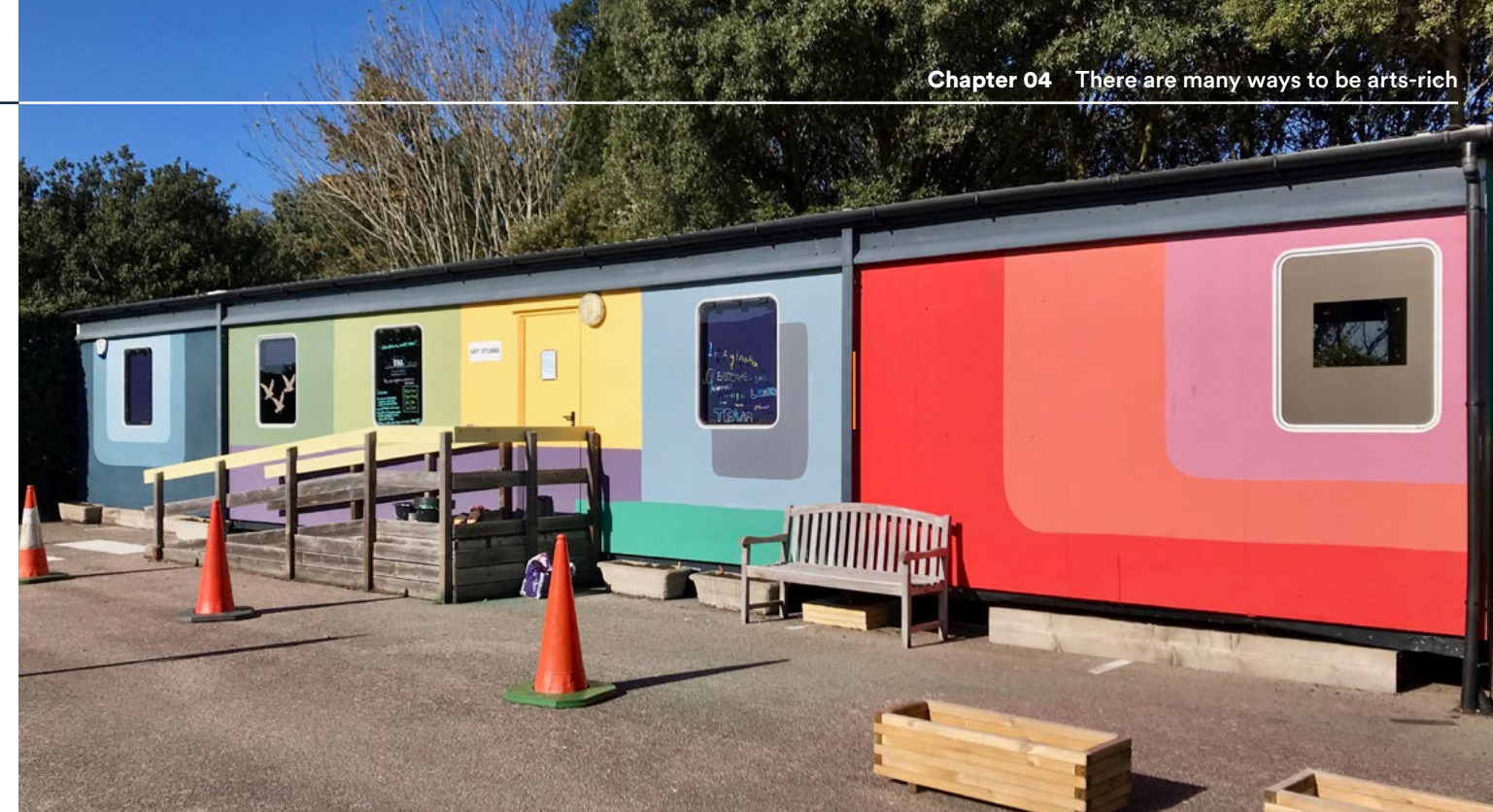
the community. And the arts are a vehicle for that. So another of our priorities here at Palm Bay is pupil voice and teaching children about citizenship and politics, and about how to get engaged in local issues. And I think that art can be absolutely a way to do that.

The priorities the headteacher identifies here are about promoting creativity across the curriculum and in the daily life of the school, developing active citizenship, voice and engagement with the local community. Two distinctive elements of Palm Bay's arts offer can be seen as particularly reflective of these emphases. The first is a long, semi-permanent cabin which has been installed at the front of the school. This building serves as a studio for four artists in residence and as a classroom, equipped with a kiln and a printing press, for a wide variety of arts. The second element is Palm Bay's annual art auction, which was held in the school for a couple of years, then in the ballroom of a local hotel and then the Turner Contemporary. The artwork that is auctioned – in aid of Palm Bay's arts fund – is donated by the school community, which includes amongst its parents and friends some professional artists and designers. Mel Tong, the school's art lead, described how the event had become well known locally:

Now there are people trying to get tickets that are not related to the school. It's spreading to the wider community.

So people think they can pick up a bargain?

Yeah. Well, it is a bargain. We've got some big names. It's quite humbling to think that these people are all now joining in.



So Palm Bay's version of arts-richness, in many ways like Margate's, is entrepreneurial, oriented towards the commercial, demonstrating that art is a way of making a living and drawing on its particular assets (people, space and a vibrant local culture). It is oriented outwards, towards community building and participation, through the studio classroom and residencies, the occasion of the auction and the public celebration and valuing of art and creativity.

Beecroft Garden Primary is in south-east London, in the borough of Lewisham. The current school building, set back from the high street, is attractively decorated with bee-themed murals. Asked why, over a decade ago, they decided to develop an arts-rich curriculum, Graham Voller, the headteacher, said:

I think the main reason was the fact that the building looked a state from the outside. It looked like a rundown NHS mental health facility. I actually drove past a couple of times when I come in for interview because I couldn't quite believe it was a school! ... So the rationale first of all was to actually make the place look inviting.

Later he commented:

You know, if this was somewhere else, that was maybe like a farming community, maybe we'd be doing different things and it wouldn't be an arts-rich school, it would be a farming rich school with lots of kind of information around, you know, husbandry and planting and all that sort of stuff.

The agenda in the first few years was about school improvement:

It's changed a lot in the thirteen years that I've been here. When I first came, this was not a school of choice. It was a dumping ground. It was a two-form entry school that was forced to go down to one-form entry because they couldn't fill it. So financially it was costing an absolute fortune to run. We were literally just attracting people from over the bridge from a local estate who couldn't get into the school at the turning ... As we became more successful in terms of the academics ... we changed everything with big push, had a couple of years where the SATs results went up really, really well – and then, all of a sudden, it's kind of not a bad place. And then the arts followed that. So all of that stuff started to grow together; there was a big movement. We went into special measures in 2010 ... We came out of special measures in two years which is pretty phenomenal. And then we got an Outstanding a year later after that, which was just, unthinkable, really.

As inspection grades and the environment improved at Beecroft, the school's arts-rich approach became an important draw for parents:

We live in London. I don't know what the percentage of income is in London for the creative arts, but it's massive ... lots of our parents are in the creative industries and they see the worth of what we do. So that drives us. ... I think now lots of parents choose us because of the creativity. You will see parents who are actually working in creative media or who have jobs that are linked to the creative world, and they come to us because that's what we do.

The headteacher's approach to developing the school's arts focus was to employ a part-time member of staff, an outstanding teacher who is also a practising artist, to work solely on the arts. Like the head at Palm Bay, he was concerned about school finances and encouraged the arts teacher to look for funding sources to support ambitious projects and help them provide the children with high quality resources. And again like the head at Palm Bay, he values creativity across the curriculum and aims to strengthen links between subjects.

Arts-rich schooling at Beecroft, then, has many things in common with arts-rich schooling at Palm Bay: headteachers with similar beliefs in the value of creative education; a parent body interested (and sometimes working in) the creative arts; embedded cross-curricular approaches, and for the children, good access to professional role models, high quality materials and ambitious projects. But the emphases of the two schools are different because they are in very different places, which are changing in different ways, and because the schools are responsive to their locales. Beecroft Garden, located in a densely populated city with other primary schools close by, initially used the arts focus to change local perceptions and encourage more parents to choose their school for their child. In recent years, it is not only the number but also the mix of children in the school that has changed, as more refugee families have moved into the borough and some of the social housing has been sold off to high-end developers. "You've got", the headteacher said, "very, very well-to-do families rubbing shoulders with some of families with probably the lowest deprivation level you can get". In this new context, the school's priorities are less about encouraging parental choice — which is likely to be relatively self-sustaining because of Beecroft's successful branding and improved reputation — and more about the contribution the arts can make to community building and inclusion within the school.



We can see from these examples that place is a key concept for analysing and understanding specificities at the school level, but in our analysis we also identified observable patterns related to place-based curriculum.

- Across the case studies, RAPS schools demonstrated their commitment to reflecting on and celebrating local communities and heritages through the arts. They saw a place-based approach as crucial for making learning relevant, inclusive and engaging for students.
- Children learnt through the arts about the history, geography, and cultures of their immediate environment. Schools celebrated community diversity, developed curiosity, understanding and respect for cultures both within and beyond their immediate community. They learnt multiple ways of expressing identity and belonging through the arts.
- Arts projects brought together different generations and encouraged family engagement. Children learnt that the arts could strengthen family and community bonds, supporting wellbeing.
- Children developed a sense of pride and connection to their community. This in turn, fostered a sense of ownership and belonging, prerequisites for active citizenship. Schools therefore often used the natural and built environment as a learning resource. Place-based projects taught children to look carefully at their surroundings, appreciating local assets and envisioning positive change.

Leading the arts-rich school

“We’ve got a broad and balanced curriculum where the children get to do arts every week. You know the children get to do dance every week. They get to do drama every week. They get to do art every week. You know it’s not an Arts Week and then it’s forgotten about. It’s not a dip in every now and again.

So here, we have an artist in residence. We’ve got a dance company that comes in every week. We’ve got a creative practitioner in every week.

The creative practitioner is paid for by the PTA, they committed to that because they can see the ethos and vision and the children have gone home and said, “It’s brilliant.”

But it’s not easy you know. It takes a lot of time and commitment. It takes a lot of resources.

David Wearing, Kelsall Primary

Most arts-rich schools taught art and music to all children, every week, all year. These are core elements of arts-rich school design.

School leaders are significant in what schools do and don’t do. Heads do not have total autonomy or authority — what they do and do not do is strongly framed by prevailing policy. In England all heads are mindful of inspection and standardised testing which can trigger intervention or forced academisation (Thomson, 2020).

School leaders have an indirect influence on classroom teaching (Day et al., 2011), although there are teaching heads in small primary schools. Indirect influence is exercised through symbolic leadership (setting the school vision and values, telling the school story, culture and ethos, including ensuring a safe and orderly environment), management (selection of staff, allocation of money, time, space and equipment), and attention to capacity through the professional learning of staff. Heads are also responsible for school self-evaluation.

Although there is evidence that many English headteachers now have little scope for action (Courtney et al., 2022), arts-rich primary schools appear to be an exception to this case.

The RAPS school heads saw their job as one with space and a warrant to act.

Although headteachers in RAPS schools shared a strong commitment to arts education, they had diverse backgrounds and arts experiences. A few had been professional artists before entering teaching. Some had trained in an art form and had an arts practice outside of the school. Some had done arts electives as part of their primary teacher education. Others had no direct experience of arts education, except as classroom teachers themselves, from which they came to understand the benefits that come from arts subject learning.

Headteachers also came to their RAPS school in different ways:

- they won a position in an arts-poor school and led the change to arts-rich
- they were attracted to and won the position in a school already strong in the arts and wanted to sustain its arts specialism, or
- they began as a teacher in the school and were gradually promoted – they were a ‘home-grown’ arts-rich school leader.

Heads also possessed differing knowledges and skills which ‘fitted’ their particular context and type of school.

We can confidently say that the RAPS study shows that there is no one best way to become the head of an arts-rich primary school. Nevertheless, there were some common features of the head’s leadership practice.

RAPS headteachers’ leadership practice

Headteachers led the development of the school vision, values, identity and ethos. They were the lead ‘arts storyteller’ in the school, regularly talking with staff, students, parents and the wider community about the benefits of the arts. They wrote arts education into their school planning and had long term strategies for continuing improvement.

They appointed highly knowledgeable and skilful arts leaders. For heads who were wanting to transform an arts-poor school this was a crucial early step. Many of the specialist teachers in the RAPS schools had had professional careers in their arts form, and often maintained an arts practice alongside their teaching.

Heads trusted their arts specialists and gave them considerable autonomy to develop curriculum and pedagogies. Specialists were also given time and space to work with generalist teachers, design and run special events and develop teaching resources.

Heads ensured that arts subjects had sufficient resources; they dedicated budget, facilities, time and staff to them. Despite increasing financial pressure, they protected funding for specialists, materials and trips. They often had to be entrepreneurial to sustain their arts programmes, finding additional sources of funds from special project funding, charitable donations and fund raising. As one head said, “You have to ring-fence funding and resources for the arts, it’s a long-term investment even when budgets are tight.” Some of the RAPS schools invested in long term partnerships with cultural organisations, in the knowledge that this was an economical way to expand provision and to provide expert tuition.

ANSTON GREENLANDS BUILDS A THEATRE

Have you been shown the outdoor theatre? The head - one day he said, ‘Let’s build an outdoor theatre’ and then he hired a digger and then a couple of weeks later it was there ... that was because of the whole COVID situation. We normally do our end of year performances in the hall, and we just felt that we couldn’t cram that many people into one space together. So he made an outdoor theatre. The atmosphere, the feeling in having the community together after that year of not being able to see each other. ...the seats in the theatre were just packed with socially distanced parents. The sun just going down over the trees and it was the most lovely feeling of belonging and community and just everyone together, just enjoying something, enjoying a piece of theatre.

I think that had a huge impact.

(Arts lead teacher)

Headteachers focused on building arts education capacity across the school. Individual RAPS schools developed their own blends of specialist and generalist subject teaching, but all the heads ensured that:

- specialist staff were able to engage with professional learning opportunities outside the school
- there was ongoing professional development for all staff, and heads often participated in professional learning activities themselves.

As chief storytellers, headteachers in the RAPS schools led events which celebrated and showcased children’s arts work - performances, exhibitions, public artworks, and community events. They saw these as important ‘symbolic leadership’ activities which not only engaged parents and the community and boosted students’ self-belief, but also consistently underlined the importance of the arts to the school’s identity and ethos.



ARTISTS AND CLASSROOMS

We often saw classrooms named after artists. At Blackrod Primary each classroom was themed with an artist — Gauguin, Ringgold, Van Gogh, Lowry, Mahlangu, Kahlo, Milhalzes, DaVinci, Mackintosh, Ai Wei Wei. A quotation from the artist was in each room. There was also a big wall sized ‘Where our learning takes us’ display in each room. The arts and artists were used to teach geography, history and current issues. The work of local artists (Roger Hampson and LS Lowry) was displayed in frames, on loan from Bolton Museum/Library. The Art Lead explained that some of the pieces featured landmarks that are local to the school and would be familiar to the children. Arts leads talked about not wanting to fill the walls with art works — the emphasis was on the enrichment of the child and their entitlement to the arts. Some walls were left blank on purpose, ready to be filled with selected pieces.

Reflection and evaluation were integral to the RAPS headteachers’ arts education planning processes. They used combinations of existing school data, feedback from governors, staff and students, external project evaluations and sometimes school-based inquiries to identify strengths and areas for improvement. About half of the RAPS schools were involved with Artsmark and found this a useful way to work against national benchmarks.

Common challenges

All schools in England are currently facing considerable challenges. The RAPS schools were no exception. Chief among headteachers’ concerns were:

1. Maintaining focus and momentum in the face of external challenges, such as COVID disruptions, policy changes, and/or shifting community needs. Heads had to adapt plans while staying true to their core arts vision.
2. Competing accountability pressures, particularly around core subjects and academic results. Heads had to continually argue for the value of arts education alongside other demands. They frequently told us about the ongoing tension created by an “overcrowded curriculum and pressure to focus on tested subjects”.
3. Funding constraints and budget pressures had increased year on year. Diminishing finances made it difficult to sustain arts staffing, resources, and partnerships in the long-term. Heads often had to make difficult trade-offs and think creatively about income generation.
4. In line with the more general teacher shortage, heads found that recruitment and retention of high-quality arts specialists was increasingly difficult. When key arts staff left or went on leave, it was often challenging to replace them and sustain momentum.
5. Heads were also concerned with educational questions related to ensuring better educational outcomes for all their students. In particular they were concerned about ensuring progression in arts learning and the consistency of lessons taught by non-specialist staff. Heads described the need to balance giving teachers autonomy with ensuring quality and coverage.
6. RAPS heads were also focused on eliminating barriers to participation, particularly for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds or identified as having special needs. Heads had to ensure their arts offer was inclusive and tailored to their context.

Leading an arts-rich school

We conclude from the example of RAPS school headteachers that leading an arts-rich primary school calls on seven key competencies (see Table 1). We present these competencies in a form that could be used by a school seeking a head’s commitment to arts-richness.

Competency	RAPS evidence
An explicit commitment to the value of arts education	All RAPS heads had a deep-rooted conviction that the arts are fundamental to a well-rounded education. This went beyond lip service to the importance of the arts, to a clear articulation of their transformative potential.
Knowledge of the impact of the arts on learning and development	Many RAPS heads were committed to the school producing evidence of arts subjects benefits such as creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. They were also generally knowledgeable about research which showed the positive impact of the arts on students’ academic, social, and emotional development. This knowledge base allowed them to make the case for the arts to a range of people, from governors to parents, to Ofsted inspectors.
Interest in and understandings of arts pedagogies and curriculum design	While RAPS heads were largely not arts specialists, they had strong views about the nature of a high-quality arts education. Heads understood the principles of good curriculum design in the arts, including the need for progression, coherence, and relevance. They were also aware of the need to balance knowledge acquisition, skill development and creative expression, the role of feedback and critique, and the importance of authentic performance and exhibition opportunities for personal development. These understandings allowed heads to tell powerful stories and to support arts leads in shaping provision by asking the right questions and providing meaningful feedback.
Competencies in strategic planning and resource management:	Sustaining an arts-rich curriculum requires careful strategic planning and creative resource management. RAPS heads aligned staffing, timetabling, budgeting, and facilities with their arts vision. They were skilled at forging partnerships that expanded the school’s arts capacity, e.g. with local cultural venues, visiting artists, and/or other schools.
Ability to foster a positive arts culture and ethos	RAPS heads recognised that an arts-rich curriculum is not just about discrete lessons or activities, but about creating a pervasive culture that values and celebrates creativity. They had the interpersonal and communication skills to inspire and motivate staff, students, and parents to embrace the arts. Arts-rich heads led by example, such as by attending performances or taking part in arts workshops themselves. They consistently communicated the importance of the arts through newsletters, social media, displays, and events. Heads were skilled at creating a safe, supportive environment where students felt confident to take creative risks and where staff felt empowered to innovate in their arts teaching
Commitment to building arts capacity through ongoing professional development	RAPS heads knew that sustaining high-quality arts education requires ongoing investment in professional development. They identified and prioritised the arts-related training needs of their staff, from specialist arts teachers to generalist classroom practitioners. They brought in external expertise, facilitated peer observation and coaching, and supported staff to pursue arts-related qualifications or research.
Influencing skills to advocate for arts education	Most RAPS heads championed the arts within and beyond their own school. They often navigated complex power dynamics and built alliances with key stakeholders, from governors to local authority officials to politicians. They were adept at using data and case studies to demonstrate the impact of their arts provision on student outcomes and school improvement.

Art curriculum leadership

“ I think the head and myself have the same vision.

We are very much on the same pathway: what we want for children, what we think our school should be — we do have that joined up thinking.

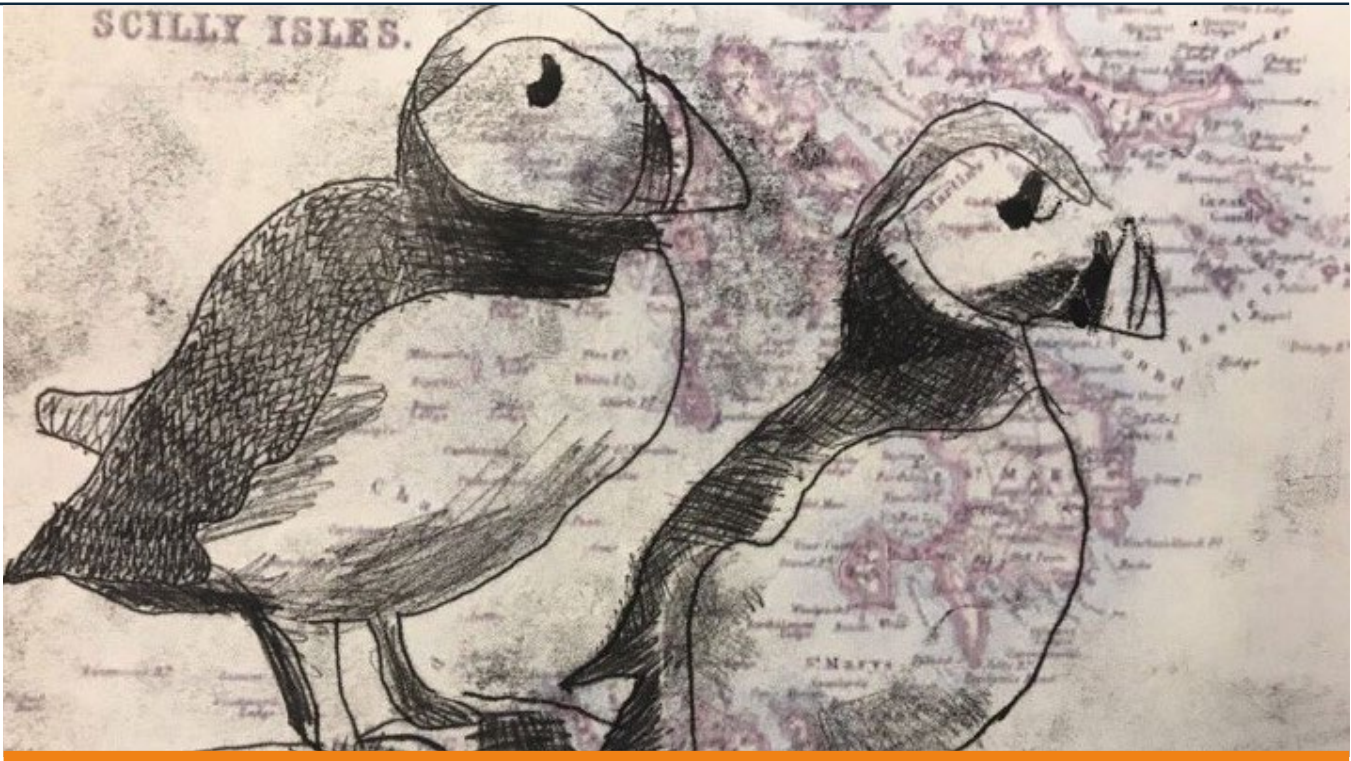
So I’ll say, I’ve got this idea how to bring the curriculum to life in this area. Is that okay? And she’ll say yes.

And whenever something happens in the news, or if I want to change our curriculum, or if some community initiatives come up and there is a way to fit it into the curriculum ... She’ll say yes.

So that’s brilliant.

When you’ve got your head who fully embraces the arts that makes a huge difference in a school.

Mandy Barrett, Gomersal Primary



Specialist arts staff are key to children’s arts-rich learning.

Specialist staff are, by definition, highly skilled practitioners. They possess what is often called Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1986). PCK refers to teacher capacity to effectively teach specific subject material to a particular group of students, taking into account their prior knowledges and misconceptions. PCK brings together subject (content) knowledge, curriculum knowledge (which knowledges and skills are important, how they are to be coherently organised and sequenced), knowledge about education in general and children (particularly understanding the specific children in the class and school) and pedagogical knowledge (texts, tasks and activities, methods, pacing, and assessment).

PCK is developed through experience, reflection, and continuing professional development. Teachers use their PCK resources when they anticipate student difficulties, select appropriate examples and materials, and adapt their teaching strategies to meet the needs of individual learners.

A specialist arts teacher possesses PCK in specific areas. They have:

- deep knowledge of the concepts, principles, and skills of their arts discipline and the arts domain more generally
- expert knowledge of the pedagogies used in their art form, including familiarity with various approaches to teaching, instructional strategies, and classroom management
- well-grounded understandings of student learning in their art form. They understand how a diverse range of students learn, their common misconceptions, and the difficulties they may face when learning in the arts
- in-depth knowledge of their art form curriculum, including the scoping, sequencing and pacing of subject matter, as well as the available resources and materials for teaching
- knowledge of assessment practice in their art form — they understand when and how to effectively evaluate student learning and provide meaningful feedback.

Arts specialists integrate art form content and pedagogical knowledge to create engaging, effective, and meaningful learning experiences for their students.

RAPS school heads all told us that selecting highly knowledgeable and skilled arts specialist staff was key to school success. While all primary schools in England now have a designated arts lead, far fewer have specialist arts staff with training, qualifications and experience in a particular art form.

Our initial survey of 76 arts-rich schools showed that 80% of schools stated that they had specialist Music teachers. This percentage was considerably lower for Art (52%), Dance (33%) and Drama (29%). One of the criteria we used to select our sample of 40 RAPS case study schools was that they all had at least one specialist teacher. Many had more than one. Our case study school specialist teachers represent the full variety of art forms with Music, Art and Drama being the most common.

However, the way arts curriculum leadership was structured differed across the forty schools:

- The level of leadership varied. Most RAPS schools had arts leads as middle leaders but, in some schools, the arts specialist was part of the senior leadership team. In a few cases, the heads themselves were arts leads.
- The organisation of specialist staff also varied. Some schools had a clear hierarchy with an overall arts lead overseeing specialist leads in each art form. Others had a flatter model with collaborative arts teams, where arts leadership was spread among staff, some perhaps with other roles.

These differences reflected school size, staffing, school history and headteacher preferences.

The RAPS schools’ arts specialists

The 50 arts leads that we interviewed in our 40 arts-rich schools had on average over 10 years’ experience of teaching in that school and had been arts leads for around five and a half years. Nearly 40% of them had previously worked in one or more other schools. Around 60% of them mentioned having an arts-related degree. In our sample, these included BAs and Master’s degrees in Fine Art, Embroidery and Textiles, Art and Design, Musical Theatre and Society, Photo Media and Design, Creative Arts Communication, Theatre and Performance, History of Art, Community Arts, Sculpture, Dramatic Arts, Animation and Media Studies, Music, Musicology and Dance. Qualifications in teaching/education included Masters degrees in Work Based Learning, Educational Leadership, International Education, and Educational Policy,

and BAs, HNDs, PGCEs and professional studies qualifications in Early Years Education, Primary Education and Teaching. Many of the staff had chosen to specialise in arts subjects as part of their teaching/education qualifications.

Many of our arts leads also had professional backgrounds in the arts, working – or having worked – as artists, musicians, photographers, dancers, designers, actors and comedians. The sample also included an arts lead who had worked as a puppet maker and puppeteer, a woodworker, a videographer, freelance teachers of music, dance, drama and musical theatre, a community artist, a psychotherapist, an art handler who became a paper conservation specialist in a gallery, and a fashion textile designer. A number had either worked for arts-based charities or in one case, had set up their own arts-based charity.

Some of our arts leads continued their professional practice, leading and/or singing in choirs, doing session musician work, working as arts/music consultants, running comedy nights, acting, devising plays, painting, drawing and taking photographs.

Over 10% of our arts leads had a senior leadership role. One had previously been a head teacher.

Arts leads’ views of the purposes of arts

Arts leads talked to us about the benefits of the arts. Many of them told us how the arts were different from other subjects and how students could succeed in the arts in ways that were closed to them in maths, English and other core subjects. They talked about how the arts allows student to “immerse themselves in a different way of learning.” Others talked of how the arts create “opportunities for alternative ways of thinking and learning and developing and creating” and serve as “an alternative part of the curriculum in which to be successful” in which students can “do something creative as opposed to something purely academic.” The arts were identified as “a very good way of expressing yourself without being academic.” “We can’t do that with the core subjects” suggested one arts lead. Others talked about how the arts “give children a chance to shine in a way that is not necessarily academic.” Some were explicit about how the non-verbal nature of many of the arts allowed students to “communicate their thoughts and feelings without having to be tied down to words” and were particularly beneficial for students with special or additional needs and those with English as an additional language.

Feversham Primary

In addition to arts leads with expertise in drama, dance and art and design, the school has invested heavily in music. Jimmy Rotherham is Feversham’s music lead. He explains

“What we do is so vast now. It’s a lot more than a one-man job. We’ve got guitar teachers, drum teachers and various instrumental specialists. We have a Nasheed singer who sings with the community who we bring in, and we also coach all the staff to teach music. And if you think about subject like maths, if you had just one person coming in for half an hour a week, progress would be pretty slim, wouldn’t it? We wouldn’t teach maths like that and music’s no different. So, we have the specialist input, but we also expect teachers to have good subject knowledge and skills.”

Jimmy puts the success of the music programme, and successes in other curriculum areas, to the way in which the headteacher works with him.

“He trusts that I know what I’m doing and understand music much better than he does, you know? So he leaves me to it and trusts me to make all the decisions and supports me with making my decisions rather than making them for me.”

Many of the arts leads noted the role of the arts in fostering the expression of emotions, often in ways that were not possible through words. One had led a project in which children thought about which colours represented their feelings to “visualise their complex feelings through art.” Another suggested that the arts were beneficial for “expressing themselves very regularly.”

Some arts leads saw their role as “teaching children how to express themselves and to communicate.” They spoke about promoting children’s ‘voice’, in one case through a collaborative design project with an external artist that resulted in a bench: “the children can now say, that’s my bench that I designed. It is really powerful for them to think that their voice matters and that their opinions are valid.”

‘Voice’ and expression were at times spoken about in response or in relation to the social disadvantage of the students and the deprivation of the community. One arts lead explained: “When you see those pupils who appear so broken in many aspects of their life just because of their situation, their disadvantage, they just rise. The arts give them a voice and the chance to become themselves.” Another arts lead in an economically poor area spoke of the arts as an avenue to freedom: “Many of the children don’t know

what freedom is in that way because they have such limited experiences ... so it’s our job to allow them to see the possibilities and that that freedom exists.”

Arts leads spoke of how the arts were key to developing resilience. Indeed, this was seen by some as the foundation on which all other teaching was built. We were also told how the arts, specifically the use of paint brushes, pencils and musical instruments, developed students’ fine motor skills, something that was seen as essential to early years children and was even more urgent for children returning to school after the lockdowns. As mentioned previously, the arts were linked to improvements in behaviour. At more than one school cross-subject and “project-based learning with the arts at the core seems to have settled things.”

Confidence and expression were seen as integral to the wider aim of getting children to think of themselves as artists. Arts leads spoke of “opening doors to them to be inspired by art in its widest form and to see that it’s something that they can be” and “putting them on that journey to find their own musical self.” One spoke of “... making the children feel that they can be fearless artists.” Others spoke about aspiration and confidence as building blocks for becoming an artist.

³ Nasheed is a form of unaccompanied singing or chanting. At Feversham, Nasheed is strongly connected with the Islamic practices and heritages of the school community.



On the need for diversity in primary arts, one arts lead told us:

I really want the children to see themselves in the artists. What's really interesting is that often, when we focus on artists, the children will say, 'that artist looks like someone in the class', or 'that artist looks like me'. What makes teaching art so special is that they can see someone who is brave and expressive and changes the world with art and they can see themselves mirrored in that.

Another reiterated that the school's arts curriculum both "reflects the culture of our society and increases the cultural capital of the children in terms of their experiences and opportunities".

Becoming an artist did not depend entirely upon skills, practice and the resulting artworks. To one arts lead, it was about "the children's approach to art and the way they will speak much more freely about it."

Developing children's perceptions of themselves as artists in school was often linked to talk of careers in the arts. Perhaps most tangibly, the students' professional aspirations were stimulated by contact with artists in residence and visiting artists, as well as teachers and arts leads who had professional arts backgrounds. They spoke of "showing children how somebody in the real world has grown up and uses those skills for their career" and how "meeting people who are artists helps it becomes a reality, rather than thinking about Van Gogh." In one school:

Every single child knows who (name) is and knows that she's an artist, and they think 'I can be an artist ... and make a career out of art.' And it's lovely for them to be able to see that role model for their own aspirations.

An arts lead in a remote rural area talked about how a visit to the Tate in St Ives "gave them aspirations about being an artist, that you could work in a place like this." A focus on careers was linked to the need to expose students to the diversity of professional jobs in the arts: "I want the children to think that the arts are a viable career. I want to make sure that they're aware that it's not just having a canvas and a paint brush."

The role of the arts in breeding aspiration and 'opening doors' to students was seen as particularly important in remote and/or deprived areas. One arts lead explained that:

The children are trapped down here. They have a lack of understanding of what we've got around us ... but they also have a lack of understanding of the wider world. Our guiding principles for everything are aspiration and sense of belonging.

Arts lead roles: putting PCK to work

Although each RAPS school had its unique structure and context, there were six common aspects of the arts lead role, aspects where their pedagogical content knowledge was vital:

- 1. Curriculum design and progression:** Arts leads led the design and implementation of a coherent, progressive curriculum in their art form. If they were lead across arts, this responsibility extended across the arts domain. They mapped the key knowledge, skills, and experiences students should encounter from Early Years to Year 6. They generally created detailed progression documents for each year group, ensuring students built systematically on their learning, increasing mastery over time.
- 2. Classroom teacher development and support:** Arts leads provided training, guidance, and support to enable all classroom teachers to teach the arts effectively. They led whole-staff CPD sessions, provided resources and lesson plans if needed and offered individual coaching and mentoring. Most also team taught, working closely with class teachers to co-plan and co-teach lessons, gradually releasing responsibility as staff gained confidence and skills. In some schools, arts leads ran drop-in sessions for staff to practise techniques and build confidence.
- 3. Resourcing and budgeting:** Arts leads were generally responsible for managing the arts budget. They sourced and procured high-quality resources, equipment, and facilities to support teaching and learning. They kept a close eye on resources, ensuring equipment was maintained in good condition. The RAPS schools ensured every child had hands-on musical experiences and most were able to provide a wide range of musical instruments and high-quality materials across a range of media and platforms in art and design.
- 4. Partnerships and enrichment:** Arts leads were generally the key contact for establishing and maintaining partnerships with arts organisations, cultural venues, and practitioners. They actively sought out opportunities to enrich

the curriculum through visits, workshops, residencies, and performances. Many of the RAPS schools had very long-term partnerships which the arts leads sustained and sometimes extended.

5. **Showcasing and celebrating:** Arts leads led the development of opportunities for students to share and celebrate their artistic achievements; they organised exhibitions, concerts, productions and community events. Many of the schools had arts weeks, and ambitious concerts and recitals, often in prestigious venues. These were important highlights in the regular arts learning timetable.
6. **Advocacy:** Arts leads advocated for the value and importance of the arts within their school and beyond. They made the case for the impact of the arts on students' learning, wellbeing, and personal development to governors, parents, and the wider community. Some arts leads were active on social media and in professional arts organisations.

There were of course significant variations in the ways in which arts leads fulfilled these roles. School size, context, partnerships and philosophy positioned schools, and their art leads, differently.

One of the key differences was the way in which the schools balanced specialist and generalist teaching in different art forms. In some schools, for example with music at Somerleyton or drama at Hillstone, the arts lead was also the primary specialist teacher, teaching lessons across the school. In others, for example with art at Newlyn or dance at Hillstone, the lead played more of a coordination and support role, with class teachers teaching lessons. Some schools, like Lansbury Lawrence, had a hybrid model where specialists and generalists worked together. The role of the arts lead was adapted accordingly, from direct teaching themselves, to resource creation, to team teaching.

Another point of difference arose from whether the arts lead took a whole-school or subject-specific focus. The scale of leadership responsibility created particular expectations and practices. While all arts leads were experts in their discipline, some had a wider whole-school remit than others. Some schools had appointed an overarching arts lead who coordinated the work of the individual subject leads. In some RAPS schools, the arts lead's role encompassed improvement activities, and they were involved in strategic planning across all art forms. In other schools, leads were more focused on their

specific subject area, with collaboration across art forms happening more informally/less frequently.

There was also variety in the ways in which arts leads were involved in extra-curricular provision and community engagement. Some music leads ran a wide range of ensembles, choirs, and instrumental groups. Others were less involved in direct extra-curricular provision. Similarly, some arts leads were heavily involved in establishing community partnerships and organising public-facing events, while for others this was more peripheral to their role. This often depended on the school's size, context, and community links.

Many of the arts leads were extensively involved in networks and partnerships beyond their own school. The music lead at Bourne Westfield, for instance, led on a major Arts Council project across their multi-academy trust. The art lead at Lansbury Lawrence was active in local and national arts education networks. Others were more internally focused, concentrating their energies on provision within their school. The scale and scope of these external roles affected the nature of the arts lead's leadership and influence.

Children's views and specialist teachers' PCK

We were interested to see whether the children's reports of their arts learning resonated with what the arts leads told us. We looked for points of alignment between children's perspectives and connections with arts leads' expertise. We found some key similarities which provide some affirmation of arts leads' PCK.

Both children and arts leads stressed the importance of developing arts subject knowledge, skills and techniques over time. A year 6 pupil at Nancledra School explained "It's fun. So a lot of the time we're going back home and trying to do stuff, do what we did at school again, to try and get better." And a year 6 pupil interviewee from West Rise school said "Creativity is such a massive part of what I do, and what I like specially, because we have different things I need to do at school. When you think about school you think 'Work!' but actually when we go to Room 13 that's just kind of a break and you just do your own thing. Creativity is an extraordinary thing. I love it."

Children frequently mentioned getting better through practice and learning from mistakes. This aligns with the arts leads' focus on giving timely formative feedback and on designing progressive



curricula that build skills sequentially. Both children and arts leads spoke of the importance of creativity and self-expression.

Children valued the opportunity to express themselves creatively and use their imaginations, which matched arts leads’ emphasis on incorporating open-ended exploration and giving students agency over their learning.

Both children and arts leads talked about collaboration and sharing. One year 4 pupil at Sidegate Primary said: “I’m proud of the butterflies and cocoons and eggs [on the display in the corridor] because I know that everyone’s took part in it.” Another pupil agreed: “If I see something that I did on the walls, I think that I’m part of something. And when I see other people’s art, I feel I’m a part of something.”

Children enjoyed the social aspects of arts learning, like singing together or collaborating on projects. This fits with the arts leads’ efforts to create opportunities for group work, peer feedback, and shared experiences. Both recognised the value of the arts in fostering teamwork and communication skills.

Why do you think it’s important to be creative and artistic in school?

If we were just doing the normal learning, then there would never be anytime for anything fun because no one would ever be interested in anything fun. If they make some fun with the normal things, there will still be enough time for fun.

So you’re suggesting that the creative things that you do are fun?

Yes

Queen’s Park Student Arts Ambassadors

Both arts leads and children highlighted enjoyment and engagement. Children consistently mentioned the fun, happiness, and relaxation they experienced in arts classes. This matches the arts leads’ selection of engaging pedagogical strategies, provision of high-quality resources, and meaningful real-world connections.

Both children and arts leaders stressed the importance of real-world relevance. A year 5 pupil at West Rise reflected: “Sometimes it’s just fun to express your feelings in art, but sometimes people would grow up to be artists and so they do art. Or I want to be a teacher. I’m going to start in a primary school, then go to a secondary school and do acting. But you need to be able to do art to teach kids how to do it. And like, maybe you can teach your own children if you have it. And I just think it’s a good way to express how you’re feeling.” Children’s reports of being excited about arts projects that connected to their lives and communities aligns with the arts leads’ PCK in making learning relevant and forging links with real-world contexts and careers.

To a lesser extent, both children and arts leads referred to the importance of inclusivity and differentiation. Some children mentioned the importance of arts classes being accessible to everyone, regardless of ability level. This corresponds with the arts leads’ differentiation of activities, provision of various entry points, and adaptation to students’ needs and interests. Both groups valued inclusive arts education.

We did find some issues important to arts leads’ practice that were not necessarily prominent in children’s accounts. For example, while children appreciated choice and agency in arts classes, they did not spend time talking about the careful structuring and scaffolding that teachers provided for this to happen. Similarly, although the arts leads worked to balance open-ended exploration with carefully sequenced knowledge and skill development, this behind-the-scenes planning was not visible to students. And while arts leads often emphasised the importance of the artistic process and used strategies like reflective journals and portfolios to document learning, children often saw these as a means of measuring progress, rather than significant in their own right. Helping students see the intrinsic value in their journey, not just the destination, is an ongoing challenge. Only a few children made direct comments about arts learning and other subjects or life skills. Of course, children may not always explicitly recognise these transferable benefits, focusing more on the immediate enjoyment and creative outlets the arts provide. Children did however largely reflect the arts leads’ views that they were ‘artists’ not just arts students.



The arts specialist lead job description

We conclude from the example of RAPS school arts leads that leading an arts-rich curriculum calls on core arts knowledges, skills and values. We present this as a job description that could potentially be used elsewhere.

The arts lead has a passion for the arts and a belief in their transformative power. They are committed to the provision of high-quality arts experiences for all learners, regardless of background or ability. They are well informed about current research and best practices in arts education, model reflective practice, regularly evaluate their programmes, are dedicated to supporting colleagues’ ongoing professional development and seek out opportunities for their own professional growth. They are creative problem-solvers able to devise innovative solutions to challenges. They are open to trying new approaches and taking calculated risks to improve students’ arts learning. They work well with a wide range of people, from students and colleagues to parents and community partners. They have a collaborative, inclusive approach to leadership that values diverse perspectives and empowers others to take ownership of the arts. They are adaptable and able to navigate the challenges – from budget constraints to shifting policy landscapes. They are resilient in the face of setbacks and always keep the needs of students at the forefront of their decision-making. They are deeply committed to ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully in high-quality arts experiences regardless of their background, ability, or prior knowledges and exposure. They actively work to remove barriers to participation and create learning environments where every student feels valued and supported.

Essential knowledge	
Deep subject expertise in their art form(s)	Arts leads must have a strong command of the key concepts, techniques, and history of their discipline(s). This allows them to design rigorous, coherent curricula and provide expert guidance to colleagues and students.
Understanding of child development and learning in the arts	Arts leads must possess a solid grasp of how children learn and progress in the arts at different stages of development. This allows them to plan age-appropriate activities, differentiate instruction, and assess student progress.
Knowledge of effective arts pedagogy and assessment	Arts leads must be well-versed in a wide range of culturally responsive strategies for teaching and assessing the arts. This includes knowledge of formative assessment techniques specific to the arts.
Familiarity with relevant arts curriculum frameworks and standards	Arts leads have a strong command of (inter)national and local curriculum frameworks in the arts which allows them to both align their programmes with recognised standards and to make the case for the arts’ contributions to broader educational goals.

Essential skills and experience	
Curriculum design and instructional planning	The arts lead designs coherent, sequential curricula that build students' skills and knowledge over time. They set clear learning objectives, select appropriate content and activities, and plan for differentiation and assessment.
Teaching and facilitation skills	The arts lead is a skilled practitioner who models high-quality teaching and facilitates engaging, inclusive learning experiences for diverse learners. They use a wide range of responsive strategies to scaffold learning, provoke critical thinking, and encourage creative risk-taking.
Team teaching, coaching and mentoring	Arts leads support the professional growth of their colleagues, particularly those who may be less confident or experienced in teaching the arts. They provide constructive feedback, model best practices, and facilitate reflective dialogue.
Partnership-building and community engagement	The arts lead is highly skilled at forging partnerships with external organisations and involving the wider community in the arts, e.g. arranging visits to cultural institutions, bringing in guest artists, and organising community events showcasing student work.
Budget and resource management	The arts lead manages their subject budget wisely, allocating funds for staffing, equipment, materials, and enrichment activities. They are involved in strategic planning, prioritisation, and creative problem-solving to maximize limited resources.
Data analysis and evaluation	The arts lead gathers and interprets a range of data to evaluate the impact of their programmes and inform improvements, e.g. analysing student results, gathering feedback from children and parents and/or conducting research.



Leadership density

“

**I'm the arts governor.
My dad came here. It was quite a rough school.
It's a very needy catchment.
But they've turned the school around.**

**I support the head with what he's been doing.
One Christmas we went to the (venue) and sang
with lots of other schools.**

**I also have been involved in The X Factor which
they do at the school when all the classes enter
songs. I've been on the panel of judges just giving
them tips and advice and congratulating them.**

**The head talks through his plans with the arts
team. Recently I came in when he had all of the
Arts Council, the new student arts councillors and
they were sharing their ideas. So I came in to help
on that morning, which was nice because I hadn't
seen the children since Covid.**

Governor, Allens Croft Primary

Arts-rich primary schools are characterised by their leadership density.

Much of the contemporary writing on schools promotes the notion of distributed leadership (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership is the alternative to the singleton leader, either the hero or authoritarian head. The 'distributive' head surrounds themselves with a team, each of whom has separate roles and tasks. The notion of distribution is often critiqued for maintaining the head's power - they delegate tasks rather than share power (Gronn, 2003; Hatcher, 2005).

In the distributed leadership literatures, density is a subordinate indicator that distribution is occurring - there are many people engaged in leadership activities.

By itself, the notion of leadership density has a somewhat different emphasis. Density is when the senior leader creates an environment where a critical mass of school community members - staff, students, parents - are able to lead (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986). This older idea of leadership density goes beyond delegating existing tasks; it refers to the ways in which various people are able to take initiative, have ideas and realise them, in order to move the school strategically and ethically towards its vision (Barth, 1990).

Leadership density means that senior leaders respect and trust others in the school and both value and rely on their contributions (Starratt, 2003). **Density and contribution go hand in hand.**

The RAPS schools were characterised by their leadership density; as we have shown in previous chapters, they had structures and cultures where leadership was shared among a team of experts. In all but the smallest of the schools, the arts team consisted of specialists across art forms, each bringing their own unique skills and perspectives. The team worked together as a cohesive unit with a common purpose sustained through regular collaboration and dialogue. At Palm Bay Primary, for example, the arts leads met weekly to plan and reflect on their practice, sharing ideas and supporting each other’s growth. As one Palm Bay leader told us, “It’s not about egos or titles. It’s about all of us pushing each other to be the best we can be for our students.”

In small schools the pattern was similar but, inevitably, reduced in size. The head at Wix and Wrabness Primary, a tiny one-form entry school, described how, when he was still relatively new in post, he had been able to appoint a senior teacher who he had worked closely with in a previous school. Because of their shared history and values they were able to get to work quickly on the head’s aim of developing the curriculum, “bringing it to life using arts as the vehicle...When you’re trying to make a big change like that, you need more than one person to do it...when you start that wave off, you need a certain amount of numbers, don’t you, in a group or society, to make change... by working together, we were able to - it’s only a small setting, 20 to 25 staff - so having two people really advocating for the arts and for a new way of teaching and learning made it happen.”

The RAPS schools are, in different ways, moving away from the traditional model of top-down delegation, where leadership is concentrated in the hands of a few. These schools take a more collaborative approach, where trust, respect, and shared values are key to the schools’ culture. In the schools we studied, there was shared ownership of the vision, and collective commitment to realising a rich, vibrant arts education that engaged and inspired every child.

Central to leadership density is the idea of shared routines and ways of working. For example, the headteacher at Queen’s Park Primary explained how they timetabled Arts Weeks at particular pressure points in the school year. The weeks were important, she said

because it’s learning about art and children learning about themselves through art. But also it’s really good for calming a lot of our children. So after Christmas children will often come back into school and they’re quite dysregulated because Christmas hasn’t been all lovely at home. It’s been quite typical that we’d start with an arts week in January, and it really kind of grounds them again, and it really gets their confidence back up and it gives them that time and space to kind of get back into school. So we used it that way. We also use arts week, for instance after SATS. Again, it’s calming. It’s kind of resetting themselves after difficult, difficult times. I think it’s really important. It’s really important to us for emotional well-being.

Such regular special activities are not top-down mandates, but organic practices that emerge from the collective team.

But leadership density is also about being open to new ideas and approaches and having the courage to innovate. At Hotspur Primary, for instance, the arts leads have developed a common language and framework for teaching creativity across the curriculum. This framework provides a shared reference point for teachers and students alike, helping to embed a culture of creativity throughout the school.

While schools often told us about the ways in which they worked, we were keen to see how the interviews with different staff lined up together. We found a striking coherence between heads and arts leads. Here we present a sample from one school which shows how the heads and arts leads worked separately but the work was complementary (Table 1).

Common to HT, Performing arts lead and Visual arts lead	
Shared Vision & Prioritisation of the Arts All three emphasise the importance and centrality of the arts in the school’s identity and curriculum. There is a common vision of providing an arts-rich education that is meaningfully woven into all aspects of the school.	Headteacher: “The arts are positive. They make people happy, and we can do so much through them. We can run our school’s rules through them. It is just that constant thread.” Performing Arts Lead: “Fundamentally it comes down to the why. The reason that we really put central importance on the arts at this school is because our community needs it.” Visual Arts Lead: “I feel like it’s really taken focus. We need to make sure we have our arts, we’re held to account for that ... we prioritise it and it’s not allowed to be dropped.”
Collaborative Decision-Making Decision-making occurs through curriculum teams, or dialogic partnership between the headteacher, performing arts lead, and visual arts lead	Headteacher: “We operate on a team structure.” Performing Arts Lead: “The vision is kind of led by the school as a whole, really. We talk about what needs to be done within the curriculum for each of the year groups.” Visual Arts Lead: “It’s really collaborative and I really like that because I’m able to give my ideas and I get help shaping them and making them better.”
Engaging & Meaningful Experiences There is a shared focus on making the arts curriculum engaging, connected to the wider community, and creating opportunities for meaningful experiences/outputs for students.	Headteacher: “We have parents come and look at us because they are particularly interested in an arts-based education. We communicate everything. Tell them the good stories. Tell them the good news, what you’re doing. Tell them they’re going to the theatre. Tell them the theatre’s coming in. Showcase everything. Get them involved in parental workshops. Involve them. So it becomes - it’s the things that you become good at, you get a reputation for that. Then it attracts parents from outside the local community who are actually saying that’s what I want for my child.” Performing Arts Lead: “So they (children) need to be excited and engaged by what’s going on, because without that nothing will happen and it’s a one-way ticket to bad behaviour and all of the other things that are associated with that. So you’ve got to find something that the children really engage with.” Visual Arts Lead: “We do really want to take them on that [field trip]. It’s ... The Year Twos we have currently there, there’s quite a few flight risks and very challenging behaviours, so we have been a bit constrained with taking them outside. They are going to the (venue) at Christmas to watch a show. I do really want to take them to somewhere like the art gallery in town. But it’s just figuring out logistics. So it might be more a case of us bringing something outside into school rather than necessarily taking them out.”

Table 1: Leadership density with head and arts leads.

This example demonstrates the ways in which the head and two arts leads share the vision of the school as arts-rich and talk about collaboration and the shared approach to curriculum from different perspectives. They do not speak with one voice, and they are speaking from particular organisational points of view. Put together, the quotations indicate how it is that their combined beliefs and activities are greater than the sum of the individual parts. It is the

three perspectives working together that create the arts-rich culture and ethos.

But RAPS schools also involved people in arts leadership who might not ordinarily be included. We focus next on two aspects of leadership density that were very significant in the RAPS schools — children and governors as arts leaders.

CHILDREN AS ARTS LEADERS AT NEWLYN SCHOOL

Children as arts leaders

Twenty-five of the RAPS schools had developed structures that allowed students to be arts leaders:

- Children served on arts councils or committees, representing student voice in decision-making about arts provision.
- Some schools had an ‘art champions’ programme where older students were trained to lead lunchtime arts clubs for younger children.
- In some schools students worked alongside professional artists to co-curate community exhibitions and performances, learning curatorial and public engagement skills.
- Several schools had student directors or choreographers for school productions, working closely with staff to develop their leadership.

Arts leads supported these groups. we did not often see groups with a more formal connection with a students’ representative council or forum; these child arts leaders were largely a separate organisation within the school.

Children came to be on these bodies through different pathways. In many of the schools, children

were chosen by their teachers based on their interest and performance in the arts. Arts leads said they looked for children who were confident, respectful, patient, and good at arts. Some schools had children formally apply for a position against set criteria, while in other children volunteered or put their names forward and then the teachers selected. Less often, children were voted for by their classmates based on their artistic interests and achievements.

The number of arts ambassadors varied, but the most common pattern was two representatives from each upper primary class or year group (Years 3–6). The total number of arts ambassadors in a school was generally between 10 to 20 students.

Through these varied organisational structures, children helped to plan and run arts events, such as exhibitions, performances, or festivals (see Table 2). They led arts workshops or lunchtime clubs, sharing their own skills and passions. They represented and advocated for the arts within and beyond the school, for example through assemblies, social media and/or community events. They often took specific roles within arts projects, such as directing, curating, or project management. And they provided feedback and evaluation to help improve the school’s arts offer. Their contribution helped to raise the profile of the arts within the school and wider community.

Table 2: Children’s reports of arts leadership activities

Task	Examples from children’s focus groups
Planning and organising arts events	“One of our main jobs is to decide what we’re going to do for arts week.” “We organise it and the school does it.” “We expand arts in our school.”
Contributing ideas	“So in our meetings, Miss X says, are there any ideas for fundraising?” “To suggest things to [first name art lead] that we could do in the school to make it be more an art school.”
Promoting the arts to other students	“Try and make people enjoy the arts and make sure there’s enough arts in the school.” “To represent the school with arts.”
Assisting with arts activities and resources	“We tidy up behind the red curtain and I stay in at break to tidy and sort the drawers, tidy the watercolours, every colour in a packet and I tidy and sharpen the pencils and put them in colour order.” “We were the narrators. We’d speak for the children.” (referring to supporting a Christmas production by younger students) “We get the role of ushering parents in and showing people to their seats.”
Going to special events and on trips	“Yesterday, most of the arts council went to The National Gallery and got many ideas for what we could do for arts week.”

There were of course differences in the ways in which schools worked with student arts leaders. The frequency of meetings varied, from weekly to a few times a term. And the actual work the students did also differed. In some schools, the arts ambassadors were given special responsibilities like judging art competitions or speaking in assemblies. Some had additional perks like special hoodies identifying them as arts ambassadors. Some schools had child arts leads working on a special project of their own e.g. a cross-school textile project, designing a public sculpture in collaboration with another school, creating a promotional video for the school’s Artsmark status.

So you’re year four and five combined. Maybe you could start off by telling me about some of the creative things that you do in school.

I started an art club recently. That’s been going well.

Do you want to tell me about art club then?

I draw up some references for myself and then I can help other children draw what I try to draw.

So art club is an after-school club. Is that right?

Just in the afternoon

So I think this is a personal club, not an adult run club.

Yeah.

This is a special club.

Yeah.

So how many people are in Art Club then?

Seven, eight or nine

How do you get to join art club?

It’s just a register that we use and eight people sign up every week to do an hour of art.

So 7 or 8 people from your class go to this art club and do a special thing in a small group?

Yeah.

And who’s the art club teacher?

Me. It’s not an adult run club.

OK, so you get together. How do you decide what you’re going to do?

We usually do a vote of different types of pictures that I drew. And we will do a step by step on how to do it.

So you’re the teacher?

Yeah.

Wow.

She does specific types of drawing. It’s called anime. It’s a Japanese art.



We were told by staff that acting as an arts leader brought multiple benefits. Being an arts leader meant that children developed ownership, initiative and agency in their arts education, making it more relevant and engaging. They learnt and practised teamwork, communication, and organisational skills through real-life roles. Some added additional benefits, about the ways in which participation connected with their classroom arts programme, or about being part of a wider leadership team.



Student arts leaders largely confirmed what their teachers said (c.f. Thomson, 2012) (Table 3).

Table 3: Children’s views of arts leadership benefits

Learning benefit	Exemplar quote from child arts leader
Supported interest in arts learning	“How does it feel to be an Arts Ambassador? Exciting and very challenging, so you can believe in yourself more and try your best in arts. It feels good.”
Contributing to school arts-richness	“Well, we organise stuff or raise money for charities. If we do creative curriculum, we help do fun, fun things for that. Add some arts.” “Miss gets a paper and she asks and we will put our hands up and she notes down our ideas of what we could do and what inspires us for it.” “Getting to see all the plans for the creative curriculum. And having a heads-up on what we’re gonna do, all the exciting things.”
Citizenship	“Well, apart from just saying if we’ve been in the meeting and we’re organising something, raising money, you can share it to your class and say this is happening and the deadline.” “Organising events and telling them to your class. Saying ‘oh, this is happening’. And them asking questions.”

There were also benefits for the school. The school was able to hear children’s perspectives and ideas and use them to shape their arts provision. Schools often told us that listening to students’ views and taking them on board led to higher quality and more ambitious arts projects, with students pushing themselves and each other to excel. Students provided refreshing energy and affirmation for school staff working hard to maintain arts provision despite challenges.

Students’ arts voice (s) often attracted external partners and funding. Schools thus worked to ensure that students’ arts contributions were sustained and made integral to the arts-rich culture of the school. To this end, older students often acted as peer mentors, supporting younger students to develop their arts knowledge and leadership.

RAMSGATE ARTS PRIMARY LEAD TEACHERS DISCUSS
STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND ACCESS TO ART

It’s about understanding and being confident in your own sense of the arts and it isn’t about being able to go into a gallery and say, oh, if it was a piece of abstract art, oh, I could do that. It’s about understanding what abstract art is and being able to have a relationship with it, whether you are enjoying it or not. Actually being able to understand what the arts are. And I think that in terms of our school, in the visual arts, we’ve had children who have been mentors at the Turner Prize, who have been guides, have shown children’s leadership in the arts. It doesn’t mean that they think that every single Turner Prize is an amazing piece or a contribution to society, but they understand what it’s about and they are confident about interacting with it and telling other people and giving people a chance.

I mean, the young leaders going into the Turner, it was so inspirational, where they have groups of people coming up to them and they would show them round with confidence and ask their opinions. I think that’s what access is. It’s not about what is a good art piece. It’s about knowing yourself and to be able to understand it.

Governors as arts leaders

Governors in arts-rich schools were often involved in supporting and sustaining arts-rich provision. While the specifics varied, there were some common ways in which governors were involved and contributed:

Arts expertise:

Some RAPS schools actively recruited governors with arts expertise, who could provide specialist advice and guidance to leaders and teachers. Governor specialisms might include arts education, arts management, creative industries, or community arts. These expert governors offered curriculum advice, staff training, or help with funding applications. For example, in one school, a governor who was a professional musician helped design a new music curriculum and provided mentoring for the music lead.

Resource and risk management:

Governors oversaw the financial management of the school, ensuring arts provision was appropriately and sustainably resourced. They helped leaders to manage risks associated with arts activities, such as health and safety for visits or public performances. They supported leaders in making strategic decisions about investing in arts facilities, equipment, or partnerships. For example, in one school, governors worked with leaders to develop a long-term funding strategy for a new arts studio, combining school budget, grants, and community fundraising.

Strategic oversight and accountability:

Governors were responsible for ensuring the school's arts provision aligned with its overall ethos, values, and improvement priorities. They monitored and evaluated the impact of arts education, holding leaders to account for the quality and equity of provision. They ensured arts education was given appropriate status and resources within the school's strategic planning and budgeting processes. For example, in one school, governors regularly reviewed data on arts participation and outcomes as part of their monitoring role, challenging leaders if any groups seem under-served.

Championing and advocacy:

Governors advocated for the arts both within the school and in the wider community, raising the profile and celebrating successes. They often spoke about the value of arts education with key stakeholders, such as parents, local authorities, or multi-academy trusts. They networked with potential partners or funders, helping to secure resources and opportunities for the school's arts provision. For example, in one school, a governor with professional arts experience brokered a partnership with a major cultural venue, leading to students showcasing their work in a high-profile exhibition.

Monitoring and ensuring school improvement:

Effective governing boards understood how an rich arts offer can drive wider school improvement, for example through enhancing engagement, wellbeing, or community links. They supported leaders to articulate and evidence the impact of arts education on the school's key priorities. They celebrated arts successes as part of the school's overall narrative of improvement.

Valuing and volunteering:

Governors demonstrated their valuing of the arts through regular attendance at school arts events and celebrations. Some governors volunteered practical support, such as helping with costumes, sets, or supervision on arts visits. Their visible presence and support signalled the importance of the arts in the life of the school. For example, in one school, governors took turns to attend every arts performance or exhibition, and always sent a personal note of thanks and appreciation to the students and staff involved.

We were told, sometimes by governors themselves, that RAPS school governors believed that creative and cultural education was not an optional extra, but a fundamental entitlement for every child. Governing bodies were integral to the ways in which leaders achieved this vision.

Building arts expertise across the staff

“

Creativity is just a natural thing for children, isn't it? We love to teach art and we do art in so many ways. It's fantastic to teach all the different variations of art.

We've got a fantastic art lead who's created a progression document which we're all still developing.

That helps us know what to teach and how to teach it and where children should be at.

There are people here that have a background in arts and it's utilising them to the maximum. So if there's anything ever that we're unsure - I'm unsure - about I will go and speak to my team.

James Hilton, Greenside Primary

Classroom teachers in arts-rich schools generally feel prepared and competent to teach arts subjects.

They have a repertoire of practice which is up to the job. This means that arts teaching and learning can be an everyday practice, permeating every classroom. Classroom teachers with repertoires of arts teaching practice contribute significantly to the school culture and ethos.

The term 'teaching repertoire of practice' refers to the range of instructional strategies and methods that a teacher uses to present content, engage students, assess understanding, and manage the classroom environment. A well-developed teaching repertoire of practice allows educators to be responsive to student needs, adapt to different learning situations, and continuously improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers expand their repertoire of practice through professional development, collaboration with colleagues, and reflective practice.

Research shows that generalist classroom teachers in primary schools lack both the confidence and knowledge and skills to offer most arts subjects (e.g. Hennessy et al., 2010; Robb, 2024; Russell-Bowie, 2009). This is in part because there is very little time for the arts in initial teacher education. Our survey of teacher education providers showed

an average of four hours in a year to cover all arts subjects, and teacher educators torn between offering some immediate practical activities and foundational understandings of arts disciplines. Research also suggests that the arts are not generally part of ongoing teacher professional development. The Art Now report (<https://www.nsead.org/community-activism/policy-and-research/all-party-parliamentary-group/artnow-inquiry-2023/>), for example, shows that even arts leads have little access to professional development and generally have to pay for it themselves and attend out of hours. It is little wonder that most classroom teachers feel that their repertoires of arts practice are inadequate.

Arts-rich schools need classroom teachers to teach arts subjects, they cannot depend on specialist teachers alone.

TAKING ON ARTS LEADERSHIP AT WEST JESMOND PRIMARY

The art curriculum lead teacher at West Jesmond, “did an art GCSE once upon a time. But that’s about it really.” A generalist classroom teacher, when he took over the role, he thought the art “looked really nice but it was all the same and quite prescriptive, and I don’t think it necessarily created artists.” He wanted to encourage the children to be more creative and independent.

“And so I read up a bit. Followed a few teaching twitters, things like that, teaching blogs and realised that it’s different to other subjects in a lot of ways - how you learn and how it should be framed. And then took it from the point of view of trying to put myself in the shoes of the children who traditionally wouldn’t class themselves as good artists. And from teachers - put myself in their shoes as people who are afraid to teach art. They’re not good artists. And took it from there, really. And that was: so, how can we solve that problem? Then take it somewhere where it’s for everybody, for all of our children, rather than just some or most.”

What did he do? He describes a process of learning, refining and changing things as they’ve gone along; working quite closely with colleagues and with the Baltic; asking for and receiving help with curriculum design, finding different artists and new ideas; identifying “tasks that can build skills but without being prescriptive”; using sketchbooks to help children value the process and practising as well as finished pieces of work. “Now,” he says, “you can see where the inspiration has come from but that what the children have come up with has been their own.”



In striking contrast to published research (Bowen & Kisida, 2021; Lemon & Susanne, 2013; Wilson et al., 2008), RAPS schools’ classroom teachers taught a range of arts subjects and felt comfortable doing so. Our survey of classroom teachers (Figure 1) showed only 8% who taught no arts at all.

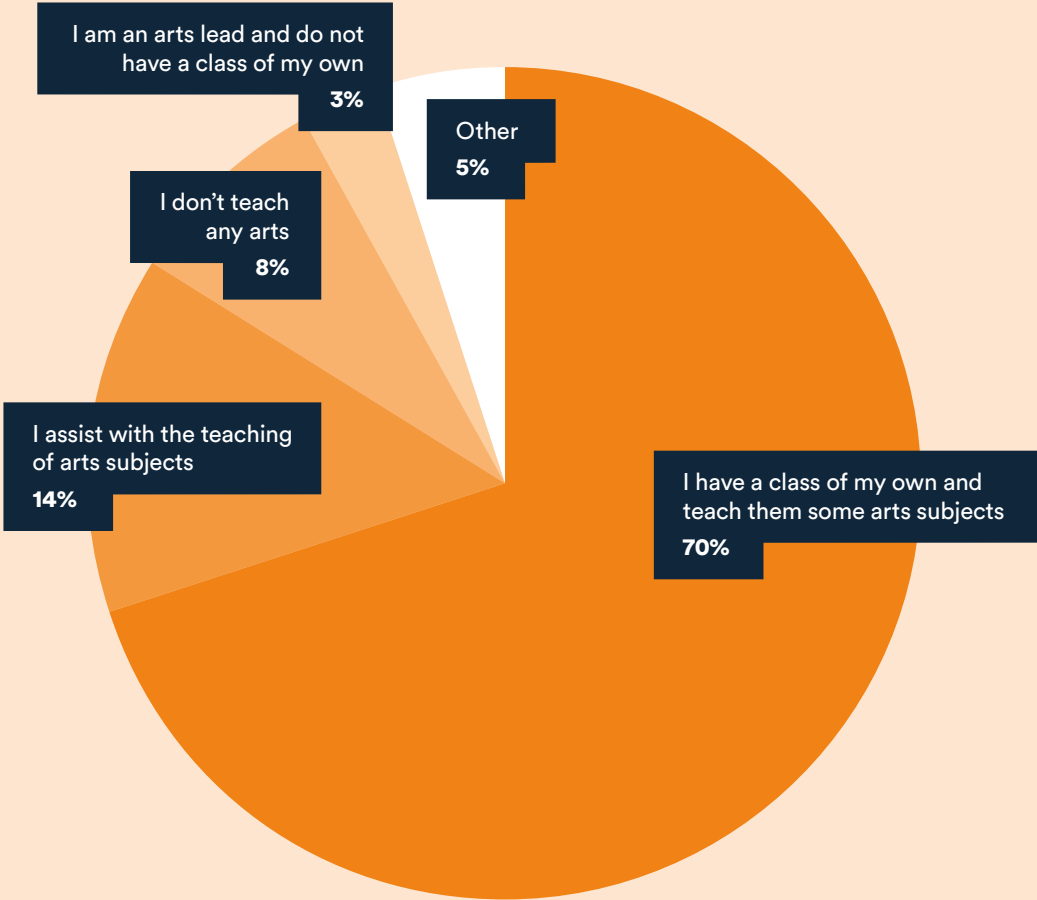


Figure 1. Arts subjects taught by classroom teachers.

The most common subjects taught by generalist teachers were drawing and painting (86% of teachers), singing in class or for assemblies (83%) and creative writing (76%). The majority of teachers (over 50%) taught singing for productions, musicals and/or choirs, dance, drama, sculpting and 3D art, textiles, and other visual arts such as collage. A third of generalist teachers were teaching pottery (clay, ceramics). Nearly a third (31%) of teachers were teaching some sort of digital arts such as animation and GarageBand, while nearly one in ten were teaching children to make films and videos. One

in ten were also teaching ‘other media’ such as audio recording, using a radio studio and/or making podcasts.

We also asked teachers how much time they spent on arts subjects each week. Just over half (53%) taught an arts subject for between 30 and 60 minutes each week. Around a quarter (23%) taught arts for between 60 and 90 minutes each week. One in ten teachers (10%) taught arts for more than 90 minutes each week. They may of course have also spent additional time on arts in integrated themes or topics.

RAPS classrooms teachers and arts subjects

We asked teachers to tell us the difference between teaching in the arts-rich school in the RAPS study and in any other school they had previously taught in (Table 1).

Table 1: Classroom teacher comparison of schools.

In comparison with previous school	Illustrative quotations
This school has more focus, and commitment to the arts	“Far more opportunities and a wider range of offer in this school. In my previous setting, art was taught in isolation. Here, art is a part of everything.” “The arts are at the forefront of our curriculum. They are not just taught but embedded within and across the curriculum. At my previous school, this wasn’t the case as the arts were seen as lessons to be taught ‘sparingly’ and more as a ‘reward’.” “We live and breathe the arts.” “In my previous school, art would be displayed in our classroom only. Here, much of the children’s art is used for displays around the school.”
This school has a specific arts curriculum	“A specific curriculum designed by the art lead, rather than a purchased scheme.” “The focus on quality and build-up of skills in my current school is exceptionally high” “In my previous school the arts curriculum was very outcome-driven, with children being expected to “create” something by imitating something that the teacher had done and there was little room from creative freedom. Here, the focus is much more process-orientated and children are free to take their work in whichever direction they choose “
This school has more resources	“High quality resources” “More dedicated arts time”
This school has internal specialists	“Specialist teacher ensures quality and progression” “Specialist teacher available for advice and support”
This school has access to external specialists	“Specialist teachers coming in to support” “Greater involvement with outside agencies”
This school offers arts specific CPD	“In my previous school, we would be told what creative projects to do. However, here, I can liaise with the art lead and discuss my classes interests and what outcome would be most engaging for them”
This school’s staff support the arts	“Best practice is shared and discussed openly” “If anyone can help each other they do” “Staff are enthusiastic about teaching art”
This school has high expectations of children in the arts	“The standard and expectation of children’s work is much higher” “The arts teaching is more holistic, more ambitious and more purposeful”

We asked teachers about sources and resources for lessons and projects (Figure 2). The majority of classroom teachers confirmed that arts leads were their greatest source of teaching resources.

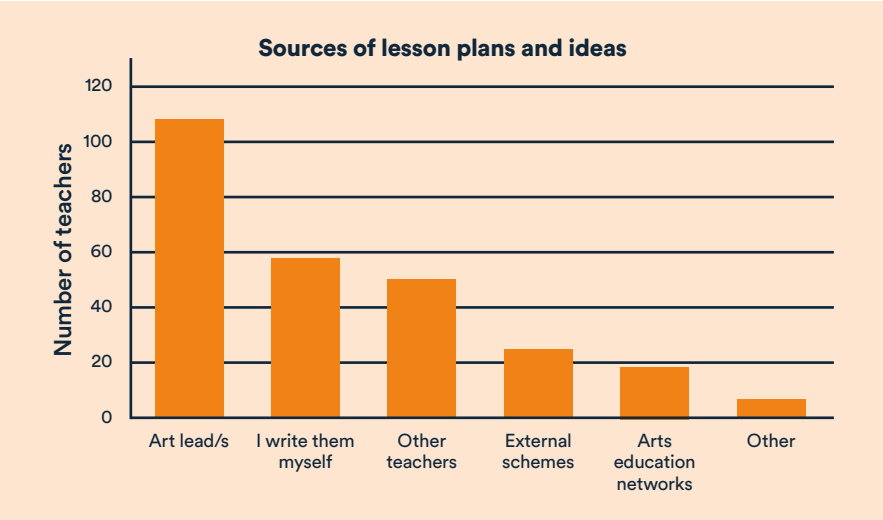


Figure 2: Sources of lesson plans and ideas.

We also asked teachers about their own arts subject learning. 15 % had never had any formal CPD in arts teaching. The remainder had all had some formal CPD, most commonly either once a year (38% of teachers) or every term (31%). However the vast majority reported having informal CPD through sharing resources, observation, co- teaching and being observed. The frequency of teachers’ informal support for the arts as a whole matched the patterns seen for their formal support, with termly (33%) and yearly (32%) support being the most common. This is very different picture to that in other research.

The survey also canvassed teachers’ views of their own competence in teaching arts on a scale of 1-10 (Figure 3). Most teachers rated themselves as a 7 (29%) or an 8 (27%). One in five (20%) rated themselves as either a 9 or a 10.

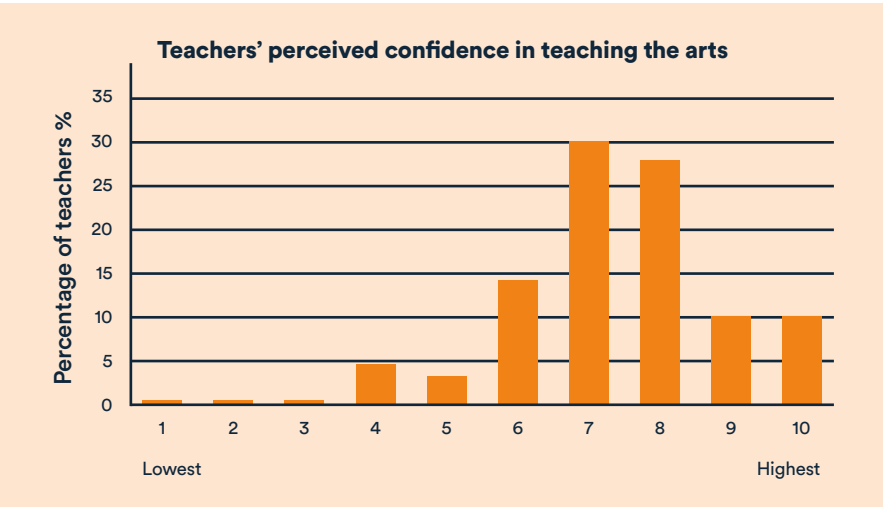


Figure 3: Teacher confidence in teaching arts.

We also pursued the relationship between classroom teachers and arts specialists in interviews.

Specialists' support for classroom teachers' repertoires of practice

We interviewed at least one classroom teacher in most of the case study schools (n=38). Across this data set, all teachers incorporated visual arts into their teaching, while about half also taught music and over a third taught dance and drama. The teachers' length of experience at their current school varied, with about a quarter being relatively new (2 years or less), a third having 3-5 years' experience, and the remaining 42% split evenly between 6-10 years and over 10 years at their school. Only a handful of these teachers had any specialist arts training.

As in the survey, teachers largely relied on arts specialists for curriculum guidance. For example, at Lansbury Lawrence Primary, a teacher explained: "our art lead, our wonderful artist ... has kind of planned out for every year group ... what skills have come before, what skills they need to build up." The specialists often provided planning, resources and guidance that the classroom teachers then implemented. At Marine Academy a teacher told us, "... she'll ... give us the planning way in advance. If it's something I was unfamiliar with, I'd be able to go to her, maybe the week before and go 'now ... do you mind just give me a quick debrief.'" In many cases, the arts were taught in an integrated way, linking to other curriculum subjects. A teacher from Worsborough Common Primary reported that "we just try and make a massive thing of all the things that we do, as the children can see that they're succeeding at them." At Torriano Primary a teacher explained that "overall, across the course of the year, to see that they are improving those skill core skills ... we use some of our progression documents that [the art lead has] outlined."

Close collaboration with specialist arts teachers is a crucial factor in building generalist teachers' skills, knowledge and confidence in teaching arts subjects. According to the teachers we interviewed, collaboration took various forms, including team teaching, informal coaching and mentoring. Teachers told us that a team-teaching approach, with the specialist modelling and coaching, was highly effective professional development. As a teacher at Hillstone Primary explained: "(arts lead) gave us lesson ideas and stuff on them which really helped. And then it's professional development going out on training ... We have a drama man that comes in normally on Wednesday and so he'll do bits, and you'll pick up things from them." Here, the combination of specialist-created lessons and resources, plus

opportunities to observe specialists teach, supported the teacher's own development.

Where these opportunities were not available within the resources of the school, online CPD that gave access to specialist teachers in other schools was highly prized. At Nancledra Primary, for example, a small Cornish coastal school, staff were rethinking their use of sketchbooks based on a CPD session they'd attended on Zoom with Gomersal school in Yorkshire. Nancledra's headteacher identified staff training as the biggest challenge in developing and maintaining an arts-rich curriculum

My job as a leader is to provide some kind of fertile ground for staff to be up for it...that's the challenge - to take them out of their teaching role temporarily - in terms of budget or just the flexibility of the timetable, so all those management things. ...You'll get over that if you've got the strategy, if you've got the vision, if you've got the leadership kind of perspective. You will make it happen. That's the bit that's important, though, organising timetables and covering a teacher while they go for some CPD somewhere.

The interviews did indicate that teachers' attitudes to teaching arts subjects may have owed something to their own background as well as how frequently they worked with specialists. For example, a teacher with an arts background at Leamington Community Primary said, "I love art ... and so I think it's such a strength of our school the way that we all work together." Another teacher told us, "I'm not an artist and I'm not educated in the arts ... I don't know artists. But we believe that every child can express themselves through art and adults as well. I don't need to have studied ... I believe everybody could be an artist." Generally, teachers' perceptions about any lack of expertise did not correlate with an unwillingness to teach arts subjects. A third teacher illustrated this, saying "For about three or four years, (a music specialist) taught my music. So it was like just hand it over to you ... But I would say now I feel - I know I don't do it as well as (the specialist) would do it - but I can still, you know, I can teach hopefully a fairly good quality music lesson."

It is the level and quality of support non-specialist teachers receive that makes the difference. As another teacher reported: "I think every class teacher has probably got subjects that they feel more confident teaching ... probably everybody feels with some subjects that I'm not the best at that particular lesson. But I know that if I'm not completely confident

in a subject that I can go to [the arts lead] and ask for more support, more skills, more strategies, as well as looking at the resources that we have on our drive or online."

Our combined survey and interview data suggests strongly that generalist classroom teachers benefit from working alongside specialist arts teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence. A well-planned combination of team teaching, coaching, specialist-created resources and targeted training can significantly enhance teachers' capacity to deliver effective arts education, even if they lack a specialist background.

The evidence from RAPs school suggests that schools that prioritise collaborative professional development are likely to be more successful in embedding the arts across the curriculum and enriching students' learning. However, because teachers' individual starting points vary, a differentiated approach to CPD may be necessary to ensure all reach a level of confidence. RAPs schools show that this is possible and that all teachers can, over time, develop repertoires of practice in teaching arts subjects.



Working with cultural organisations and artists

“When I became arts leader, I took on the leadership of what the Birmingham Rep would do in school.

At the time we were trying to see how we could infuse drama into our core subjects.

How can drama help with vocabulary and reading?

How could we use drama to help with idea generating and writing?

And then the Rep invited us to an open evening with all their education partners and they started to talk about how they were doing immersive theatre in another school. And I'm like, “What? That sounds amazing”.

So then I asked them to come and do a session with one of our classes last year and I said, “Just show me what this looks like, please, because it sounds like it could have a real impact.”

And I saw a really good lesson that the children were really enthused about.

So then I spoke to SLT and said, “I really want to see what this looks like”. And then we set up a trial period in year six, and it went really well. So now we're supporting that across all of the years.

Arts lead, Billesley Primary School



Partnerships

As our initial survey showed, arts-rich primary schools had a rich variety of partnerships and networks. One criterion for the selection of case study schools was that they had at least one strong and long-standing partnership with an artist or cultural organisation. All had more than one.

Many, although not all, of these partnerships were with local artists and organisations; there were also regional and national partnerships. These collaborations took various forms, but all aimed to enrich students' arts experiences, provide expert input, and enhance staff expertise.

Across the schools, a range of arts organisations were involved:

- **Cultural venues:** Many schools partnered with local museums, galleries, theatres, and concert halls. Students visited for workshops, performances, and/or special projects. School staff received training or reciprocal visits from education teams.
- **Arts education charities and programmes:** Some schools worked with organisations that specialise in bringing arts experiences into schools, often with a focus on disadvantaged communities. Across the RAPS schools, engagement with orchestras and choirs, dance companies, theatre companies, opera companies and galleries were often sustained for years.
- **Practising artists and companies:** Schools often brought in individual artists, ensembles, or companies for residencies, workshops, or collaborative projects. These spanned the visual arts, music, dance, drama, and more. Some had a special focus, like a textile artist or an Asian dance troupe.
- **Universities and colleges with strong arts programmes:** These collaborations involved university student placements, research projects, and/or access to specialist facilities.

This chapter illustrates just a few of these partnerships.

Building partnerships

Partnerships require careful cultivation and need to meet the needs of both parties.

The Turner want to serve the community. They were finding that their demographic tended to be white, middle class educated people often coming on the train from London. So how do you breakdown those barriers and make it accessible? They did a lot of work about putting on events at the Turner that were noisy, messy, fun family days. So it wasn't like the gallery was a cathedral and you have to walk around in hushed tones and say intelligent things about pieces of artwork. And so we were right there at the forefront of that, and our children led some of those family workshops. The Turner got a lot of families who wouldn't normally consider going for a day out in a place like that. It got them in there. In the two years after (arts lead) ran a project called "My classroom is at the gallery" and this was about challenging the notion that learning can only take place in a classroom. And through the course of the twelve months we took every single class to the Turner for a whole day. And they did all their learning, their maths, their English, their science, and again it was about breaking down the barriers - that it's not just somewhere you go to contemplate art. Over the years, we've had parents as arts leaders who've gained qualifications with us. And then we do events, like The Big Draw, where we will invite parents to come along, and we open up our art cabin.

(Arts lead, Palm Bay Primary)

Schools and their cultural partners often shared a focus on staff capacity-building. At Allens Croft Primary in Birmingham the arts lead not only nurtures partnerships for the school but has also directly benefited personally.

Another part of my role is leading on partnerships with people like the Hippodrome, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, BCMG - the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, a local company that focus on contemporary music.

I've come in from a very kind of traditional approach. I've got a music GCSE, but that's where my academic link to music ends ... and I play the piano to Grade Eight. So that's one kind of very narrow strip of music and what working with BCMG has been really good at is just expanding my horizons about what music can be and how you can use sound and manipulate sound. So it's developed my practice. That obviously has a knock-on effect on what I get the children to do.

At Torriano Primary the arts lead told us that partnerships with arts organisations generally had multiple benefits.

Year 5 have a history of working with The Place, a dance company, and they've come to our school several times over the years, and they would have had planning meetings with the dance teachers. Our staff have become skilled in that way through the co-planning sessions with the dance teachers. Also, in every kind of big project that we have, be it a whole school project or a STEAM project, there will be lots of planning meetings with subject leaders that allow staff members to identify their weaknesses and also their strengths. If weaknesses are identified, then we book them CPD sessions to develop their skills and knowledge in those areas of weakness. So yeah, there's a lot of planning sessions leading up to lessons or projects where we kind of pull from the experts and get everyone together to help it be a successful project.

However, the bottom line for partnerships was almost always direct benefits for children.

Soho Parish Primary, located in the midst of the London theatre district has capitalised on their unique location to develop a network of partnerships with various cultural organisations in London. Children have easy access to numerous cultural institutions. They often receive free theatre tickets and are frequently asked to participate in pilot programmes or special events. For example, the school choir has performed at various venues, including Downing Street.

Soho Parish's partnerships play a crucial role in enhancing the arts education and experiences of the students. For several years, the Soho Theatre have conducted a script writing project with Year 6 students. This collaboration allowed students to write scripts that were then performed by professional actors at the theatre. In turn, the students also had the opportunity to perform scripts written by the theatre, providing a unique and immersive experience in dramatic arts. The ongoing partnership with the Primary Shakespeare Company allows Year 3 class to participate every year in a performance alongside other schools, exposing students to classic literature and theatre at a young age.

A particularly innovative partnership was developed with the London Transport Museum. Children and teachers worked with the museum to pilot and develop educational programmes, with students providing feedback to help shape the museum's resources and sessions.

The National Gallery is another partner, providing bespoke sessions for the school's Student Arts Council. This partnership arose from a chance meeting at a community event and has led to tailored experiences for the students to gather ideas for their annual Art Week. An architect has also partnered with the school, conducting



workshops with Year 5 students on redesigning parts of the school. This partnership expanded into a significant project where students designed Christmas lights that were installed in the local area, culminating in a community switch-on event attended by the Mayor of Westminster.

The school's Student Arts Council plays a significant role in these partnerships. They visit museums or galleries, gather ideas for art projects, and then present these ideas to teachers for the school's annual Art Week. This model has been used with different venues each year, empowering students to take an active role in curating their arts education.

While these partnerships offer rich opportunities, the school is careful to balance them with regular learning time. They assess each opportunity to ensure it aligns with current learning objectives.

Arts-richness comes from seeing and taking opportunities when they are on offer. The headteacher at New Bewerley Community School in Leeds described the ways in which they took advantage of as many potentially profitable partnerships as they could. Sometimes this was about acting quickly in response to invitations that were a good fit with the strategic direction of the school.

There were lots of little bits that we were doing and one of the things that we accessed was Opera North workshops. Opera North enjoyed working with us and they were looking for more schools to work with. And I think because we fit their demographics of the children that they wanted to work with, they asked us. So I was immediately interested. I then spoke to the leadership team and the governing board at the time, and it was decided that we could go ahead with it. And then from that point on, it took hold the school in a way that we then shaped our ethos around it, our culture around it. And we grew into that performance art focused school. And then that's when we ended up applying for Artsmark Platinum. And so it was kind of a journey from just ... Accidental really, but then it found its way into our school.

At New Bewerley, the partnership with Opera North led them towards a particular focus on performance. This in turn led them to invest in a partnership with In Harmony, whose work is now fundamental to the school's music curriculum. The head explained that this is not an add-on — the investment of time and budget mean that the school can't afford (and don't want) that to happen. Instead the partners work together to ensure that arts provision offered by outside experts is embedded in the school's core curriculum provision.

I think the biggest challenges are the ones that we're exploring at the minute, working through with In Harmony now and also the other people that we work with. Historically arts, especially performing arts, was maybe seen as an add-on to the curriculum, something to enhance the curriculum, maybe the history curriculum or the geography curriculum. But what we're doing now is saying that we want arts to lead our curriculum and that's hard to plan for, isn't it? So if we are investing in the music with In Harmony, if we are investing in drama workshops, if we are investing in art workshops, then that becomes the curriculum. It's not an add-on. It's not something we squeeze in and drop something else to do. That has to be the curriculum. We have to make sure that those opportunities are woven into our long term and medium-term plans to make sure that they're done properly, and that nothing else is sacrificed at the expense of these workshops. And I suppose, as well, when we're working with so many external providers, to make sure that our subjects are taught by them. Do they understand that? Are they in fact teaching the curriculum and meeting the objective? And are there assessment opportunities within all of that as well? That is the biggest hurdle or the biggest problem I would say. Making sure that it done well, and not an add-on.

Gary German, (now former) headteacher of New Bewerley School, speaking in 2022



Partnerships between schools and cultural organisations can begin small but have profound impact. Schools, if they have a mind to, can engage with external partners to build new ways of approaching their existing practices.

The connected curriculum at St Andrews Church School in Bath has its roots in an innovative “School Without Walls” project that began over a decade ago. This project, pioneered by the late Sue West, posed a provocative question: What if school could happen anywhere, not just within the confines of a school building? This simple yet radical idea sparked a transformation in how St Andrews approached learning, leading to the development of their current rich, arts-infused connected curriculum.

School Without Walls began as a seven-week experiment where school transferred to the Egg Theatre. During this time, one class of children explored what education could look like in a completely different environment. They interacted with theatre professionals, worked in various roles around the venue, and discovered how core subjects like maths and English could be taught through creative, real-world experiences. This immersive approach demonstrated the power of learning beyond traditional classroom walls.

Inspired by this success, St Andrews expanded the concept to create “mini School Without Walls” experiences for all classes. Each class chooses a cultural centre in Bath to visit for an extended period, accompanied by an artist and a documenter who serve as critical friends. For example, one year the reception and nursery classes spent a week at the Holbourne Museum, integrating art, science, and other subjects through hands-on experiences in the museum and its grounds.

Over time, and through the connected curriculum, St Andrews has cultivated strong relationships with numerous cultural organizations in Bath, including the Bath Preservation Trust, Bath Abbey, No. 1 Royal Crescent, The Roman Baths and Victoria Art Gallery. These partnerships afford regular visits, workshops, and special projects that enrich the curriculum. For instance, the school recently worked with the Bath Preservation Trust to develop loan boxes of museum artifacts that teachers can use in their classrooms, extending the museum experience back into the school. They also work with the Bath Philharmonic Orchestra, bringing students to rehearsals and having musicians visit the school for composition workshops. And they maintain connections with local artists who often visit to work on projects with students.

Both schools and cultural organisations must work on building and maintaining trust, and often must find creative ways to continue resourcing their shared activities. Across the case study schools, a common strategy was to make partnership work a key part of one person's role. Sometimes this was an arts lead, sometimes SLT. It was not uncommon to see a group of arts leads in larger primary schools each responsible for specific subject-related partnerships. Having particular people as contact points was key to relationship building.

Some of the case study schools and cultural organisations had developed to the point where a school staff member was on the cultural organisation's governing body and a cultural organisation staff member was a school governor. This was indicative of the mutual understanding and shared commitment that had built up.

Over time, the art form and practice of the arts partner also became part of the school's vernacular design. Schools saw themselves as having particular art form strengths, particular art form pedagogies, and particular educational arts affordances which were tied to their ongoing relationship with a cultural organisation or artist.

Sustaining partnerships

Across the case study schools we identified twelve important practices that supported partnerships:

1. Strategic alignment and long-term commitment:

Successful partnerships are built on a shared vision and long-term commitment. Schools like Hillstone Primary have developed multi-year relationships with organisations like the Birmingham Rep and local music services. These partnerships are aligned with the school's overall arts strategy and curriculum goals. Heads and arts leads work to ensure that partnerships are not just one-off experiences, but part of a sustained, progressive arts offer.

2. Clear communication and planning:

Effective partnerships involve regular, clear communication between the school and the cultural partner. At Newlyn Primary, for instance, the arts lead meets regularly with their partners to plan projects and align them with curriculum objectives. Many schools have designated staff members (often the arts lead) who act as the main point of contact for external partners, ensuring consistency and continuity.

3. Collaborative project design:

Rather than simply receiving pre-packaged programmes, arts-rich schools work collaboratively with artists and organisations to co-design projects. This ensures that partnerships meet the specific needs and contexts of the school. Leamington Community in Liverpool, for example, has strong links with the Bluecoat and the arts lead works closely with visiting artists to tailor projects to their current curriculum themes and student interests.

4. Integration into the curriculum:

Successful partnerships are deeply integrated into the school's curriculum, rather than being treated as standalone projects. At Greenside Primary, film partnerships are woven throughout the year's learning, providing rich contexts for work across subjects. Schools often use planning time to ensure that partnership activities connect meaningfully to ongoing classroom learning.

5. Professional development focus:

Many schools use partnerships not just for student experiences, but as opportunities for staff development. At Kelsall Primary, visiting artists work alongside teachers, modelling techniques and building teachers' confidence. Some schools, like Torriano Primary, have arrangements where partner organisations provide regular CPD sessions for staff.

6. Reciprocal benefits:

Sustainable partnerships offer benefits to both the school and the cultural organisation. Schools provide artists and organisations with opportunities to work with young people, test new ideas, and fulfil their educational missions. In turn, schools gain expertise, resources, and inspiring experiences for students. The Somerleyton Primary partnership with a local music organisation has led to the school becoming a national leader in music education practice, benefiting both parties.

7. Funding and resource sharing:

Arts-rich schools are creative in finding ways to fund and resource partnerships. This might involve applying for grants together, sharing costs across a network of schools, or offering in-kind support (like space for rehearsals or exhibitions). At Beecroft Garden Primary, the arts lead actively seeks out funding opportunities to sustain their partnerships, often collaborating with partners on bids.

8. Flexibility and adaptability:

Successful partnerships can adapt to changing circumstances, whether that involves shifts in school priorities, funding changes, or external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools like Palm Bay Primary have shown flexibility in moving some partnership activities online and adjusting project formats to meet changing safety guidelines.

9. Celebration and visibility:

Schools work to make partnerships visible and celebrated within the school community. This might involve public performances or exhibitions, features in school newsletters, or inviting partners to school events. At Bourne Westfield, for example, their music partnerships culminate in high-profile concerts that are a regular part of the school calendar.

10. Student voice and leadership:

Many schools involve students in shaping and evaluating partnerships. At Gomersal Primary, student arts council members are involved in planning meetings with cultural partners. This helps ensure that partnerships remain relevant and engaging for students.

11. Networking and community connections:

Arts-rich schools often use their local networks to build and sustain partnerships. They might connect with other schools to share the costs of bringing in an artist, or work with local businesses to sponsor arts projects. Some of the RAPS schools were leading work with the Creativity Collaboratives; these are a good example of how schools can collaborate to access a wide range of partnerships.

12. Regular evaluation and reflection:

Successful partnerships involve ongoing evaluation and reflection. Schools like Feversham Primary regularly gather feedback from students, staff, and partners to assess the impact of their collaborations and identify areas for improvement. This reflective practice helps ensure that partnerships remain fresh and effective over time.

Maintaining successful partnerships with artists and cultural organisations requires intentional effort, clear communication, and a shared commitment to arts education. It's not just about bringing in external expertise, but about creating meaningful, sustainable relationships that enrich the school's arts provision over time. As the head of Newlyn Primary noted,

“It’s about building a community of practice around the arts, where everyone — students, teachers, artists, parents — has something to contribute and something to gain.

”

How to become an arts-rich school

“If we’re going to grow our leaders of the future, they have to feel that they have a voice. And having a voice is being part of decision making.

So when we developed our curriculum, it was developed as a team.

So myself and the deputy grew the seeds of the curriculum and that’s been done over time.

However, the teachers had full participation in the actual decision making about the curriculum.

You have to give your middle leadership team the responsibility and the ownership to allow them to explore and to experiment.

And things might work, things might not.

But you have to allow that to happen.

And that’s about trust, isn’t it?

Jayne Rochford- Smith, St Andrews Primary

This chapter summarises what the RAPS research has found about becoming and being an arts-rich schools. We asked all of the RAPS school leaders what they would advise other school leaders to do.



Leadership is the key to change. Leaders in arts-rich schools committed to the expressive arts as an integral part of a broad and balanced curriculum. They saw the arts as part of children’s learning entitlement and central in the curriculum.

“
We wanted to flip the learning and do that in a different way. To do it in a different order - allow the art to be the thing that starts the learning. Allow that to be the thing that inspires the writing or allow that to be the thing that links you to the maths first, so that you have that as your context.”

Leaders understood that taking the arts seriously did not mean that other areas of the curriculum would suffer. While some of the school leaders had arts in their own professional backgrounds, others did not- they took it on themselves to learn more about expressive arts education together with their staff.

School leaders ensured that someone in the school was responsible for the arts curriculum and its development. In many instances this person was a specialist arts teacher who was specifically recruited for this job. In other instances, heads chose someone on the staff who had a passion for the arts and then supported their ongoing professional learning.

Leaders gave arts leads autonomy. They trusted their expertise and worked with them to develop the arts curriculum.

“I believe that what makes the difference in this school is me recognising the ability that arts lead has got, a passion for something that is going to benefit our children overall.”

Schools on an arts-rich journey did not stop with one specialist appointment. Arts leads often began by teaching arts in teacher preparation time, but this was not the end point. As the school moved towards the goal of teaching arts to all children, every week, all year, school leaders selected and employed additional staff with specialisms in different art forms and bought in specialist staff both to teach directly and to support staff development. Time and support were also provided for classroom teachers with some specialist knowledge and interest to develop further.

Arts leads were given the autonomy and authority to develop an arts curriculum framework, to produce and curate resources for generalist class teachers. They also team taught with class teachers and were generally available for informal conversations and informal support.

School leaders and arts leads looked to build depth and density in arts leadership, aiming to create a coherent staff team focused on collaborative planning and CPD that dealt with the immediate demands of curriculum coverage.

“I think the curriculum has played a key role in terms of upskilling teachers’ knowledge base.”

“What we’ve done in school is we’ve got the expertise, but we’ve also tried to do CPD with our staff as well so the specialism is there, and they can always touch base with it. We’re trying to train up our teachers at the same time”.

“We saw the opportunity to work with In Harmony as a way to provide expert tuition for the children and also upskill staff”.

Arts leads generally involved teaching assistants in CPD as well as teachers. Nearly all the RAPS schools had also appointed a governor as arts champion and many also involved children in arts leadership. Arts talents and enthusiasms across the wider school were recognised, valued and made use of.

School leaders knew that becoming arts-rich had benefits beyond the formal curriculum.

“We don’t get turnover of staff and I think that’s because they choose to come here...when we interview them, it’s very much: this is what we will do, this is what the school’s about. So if this is what you want, brilliant. If it’s not what you want, then it’s not the school for you.”

“I mean, people come to work in this school because they know they’ve got this opportunity to think differently and have the creative freedom whilst developing really strong specialisms.”

“
The message has gone out and it’s very clear that we have a very strong identity that really embraces working through the arts...and the staff that come here for interview always talk about that ethos and those values and beliefs in their interview. And the school in a sense chooses the staff and the staff choose the school.”

A vital aspect of building leadership depth and density was through arts partnerships. Initially, artists and arts organisations were employed to work directly with children. Arts leads generally were able to identify artists who would make the best contribution to the school. As leaders identified partnerships that were worth developing, they committed to particular artists and arts organisations for the long term. Many of these artists and organisations worked directly with staff adding their professional knowledges and know-how to the arts pedagogical expertise already within the school.

Once the school was committed to teaching the arts regularly to all children, school leaders and arts leads attended to the detail of arts sequencing and progression.

“At that time, we weren’t as critical about the sequencing and the real conciseness of what a creative curriculum would be in terms of progression and individual steps of how you develop children’s skills and knowledge, etc. We were thinking more about the enrichment and experience and exposure, so that was the driver at that time, to provide opportunities for children to experience, to go and visit places, to get artists in...to flood children’s experience with creativity. It wasn’t particularly structured to be honest with you. In the last 3 or 4 years obviously because the government have given us direction to be much more structured with our sequencing in our curriculum that’s probably focused us a little bit more...the structure [now] is much clearer and there’s defined progression in skills, so in terms of drawing for example, now the introduction of sketch books in the last few years and the introduction of really specific skill sequence of how to use pencils...so when you start broadening that experience with children, when they use charcoal for example, when they use 4B pencils as opposed to HB...”

“It has become more focused over time. We have now drilled down into what skills each event already focuses on. We’ve got a really good curriculum that builds on those skills throughout and cycles back. Before, previously, I think it was more ad hoc and more designed to what would support the project, whereas now I think there is a very clear progression of skills through the curriculum.”

School leaders and arts leads valued the expressive arts for their challenging and ambitious practices. They accepted that it takes time to produce high quality work.

“The children here work slowly. They work in a controlled way. They know when a piece of art is finished. They know when a piece of art is not finished, and they give it the amount of time that’s necessary. And that doesn’t happen just through giving children great stimulus. It doesn’t happen through just having great resources. It comes from the sort of real sense of what art is, the value of it. And I think that does take a good deal of time to really instil in your children. You can get everything else in place but actually keep showing the value and the time it takes to think creatively, to plan.”

Leaders ensured that children also had timely feedback on their work and that they understood and valued the purpose of practice. They also ensured that children had real audiences for their work and thought about how they can make an impact on that audience.

“Always there is a big creative artistic outcome at the end that we get to invite parents to be a part of, and just kind of say come and share this lovely example of how your children have been learning in a really creative way...”

“So when we say to children, right, we’re putting on a performance of this, and at the end of term all their parents will be there — it gives them an audience, gives them a purpose and raises the expectations and the game.”

When the arts had a secure footing in the school, and when classroom teachers and arts lead agreed, senior leaders also looked to use the arts to enrich the whole curriculum. They were aware of the distinction between learning the arts and learning through the arts:

“**it’s integral and very much the fabric of the curriculum and interwoven into everything we do. We very much talk about learning through the arts as opposed to learning the arts, which very much backs up that idea that the arts will be present in every aspect of everything we do.**”

Arts-rich schools often teach the arts in conjunction with other subjects and use the arts to connect with local events, histories, stories and people. Extra-curricular arts clubs provided enrichment complementary to the mainstream arts curriculum. Arts Weeks for example were not a substitute for regular arts teaching but provided an important occasion for arts integration, cross-age activity and whole school celebration.

A signature of the arts-rich school was that the arts were integral to its identity. This was not an accidental development. Leaders promoted and advocated for the arts, they ensured that the arts agenda addressed key times in the whole school calendar – first week back after Christmas, post SATs, etc. They discussed and monitored arts affordances — these ranged from being ambitious, curious and critical to being persistent, resilient and keen to improve. Leaders advocated for the unique opportunities the arts offer to work and make decisions together. They ensured that these were valued in assessment practices, featured in school newsletters and on websites, and they looked for regular opportunities for children to be deeply immersed in creative work. They always provided opportunities for the whole school to come together to be immersed in and to celebrate the arts.

School leaders did not shy away from the resource implications of arts-richness. They committed to arts-richness financially “because it’s not cheap”. Time and space are important educational resources. Time, as well as encouragement, was provided for teachers to plan together:

“The change that really happened was when we asked teachers to plan together. So we share PPA time, and the arts specialists join in on that. That really helped people bounce ideas around because the specialists would look at something and say ooh well, you know, I can connect music this way.”

Leaders prioritised cover and timetable changes to ensure that professional learning could happen; they removed obstacles.

The timetable was often adjusted to allow class teachers to be flexible about break times where it benefited the children’s concentration. School leaders also organised regular sessions or days when the timetable operated differently, including allowing children to work in different groupings.

Leaders dedicated space to arts specialisms (studio, workshop, performance space) and often saved up to provide additional arts spaces — open air theatres, arts buses and portable buildings. Investment also had the benefit of making the arts visible. Many arts leads and school leaders found income-generating possibilities through the arts (e.g. by running an art club). Specialist arts spaces were timetabled to ensure equity.

“Across KS2 every child goes in the Art Room once a week for a full morning or afternoon and then early years and KS1 go on a rolling programme. While they’re there they’re learning specific art skills but arts lead tailors it to the curriculum so they’re not only learning the art, they’ll also be reinforcing elements of the different parts of the curriculum. So a lot of history would be taught through art as well, but we have also combined science ...”

School leaders had a clear view of how the arts would fit with their general school improvement strategy. They often saw the arts in combination with other priorities such as environmental sustainability or rights education. They found ways to use external programmes to advance the arts within the school.

“Artsmark has always been our main driver really and that was born out of how we spent a few years putting arts at the heart of our curriculum...we wanted to partner with an organisation that would push us a little bit and challenge us and kind of allow us to give some external measure of how well we were doing these things. Because you can easily get lost in your own rhetoric and your own kind of glory.”

School leaders were conscious of always being in development, advising others to recognise the stage of the journey they were on.

“At the start, it was about using experts for that real high quality, always with an idea in terms of sustainability about how to upskill the staff. So that’s been a long journey...but that’s where it really started from...Then what happened is colleagues have just expanded, improved, developed. And partnerships developed.”

School leaders continually evaluated what stage they were up to.

“What we’re looking for is this golden thread of being able to prove that the work we do around the arts has a positive impact across the whole curriculum. So we’re working on habits of mind, you know, learning dispositions... those kinds of ideas, that being creative in one sense will give you strategies to draw on in another area — so by singing, does that make you more confident? If you’re more confident you speak better in class. If you speak better in class, does that mean your writing’s going to be better? So that’s what we’re looking for, that golden thread...we need to be able to prove that and show that when we give more time to creativity there’s a positive impact on everything we do.”

Leaders were also concerned to make sure that the expressive arts were embedded in the school and would be sustained and sustainable.

“

“I would be looking at building up something behind me. That means when I do move on, that ethos continues. It would take a lot of breaking down because it’s embedded.”

Recommendations for becoming an arts-rich primary school

- 1

Expressive arts entitlement:
School leaders should commit to an entitlement to expressive arts learning for every child as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.
- 2

Building arts leadership density:
School leaders should:
 - a) appoint an arts lead
 - b) ensure that there is at least one specialist arts teacher to support the development of the arts curriculum
 - c) partner with cultural organisations to enrich the curriculum and build arts expertise
- 3

Teacher professional development:
To make pupils’ expressive arts entitlement a reality, generalist classroom teachers need continuing professional development and learning:
 - a) Arts leads should provide both formal and informal support for classroom teachers through team teaching, provision of resources and the development of curriculum frameworks.
 - b) School leaders should ensure that generalist classroom teachers have time to collaborate with each other and to plan and to work with arts leads and arts organisations.
- 4

Arts curriculum development:
 - a) School leaders should build arts into their school plan, strategically using external initiatives such as Artsmark.
 - b) Arts leads can support ongoing development of the expressive arts through, for example, teaching arts together with other subjects, using the arts to explore place and identity and the provision of complementary extra-curricular arts activities.

Conclusion: Learning from RAPS schools - Towards an arts-rich school system

“Invest. This does not mean purely money: time, commitment, people, resources, space. All of these, in different ways and combinations, are essential in making sure that the curriculum you want will be sustainable and progressive.

Once you have assigned the ability to create something with monies, resources, etc, then the people you involve need to have not only the knowledge — that can come from a course or a book any day — but the passion and drive to make the arts a real, living thing for all the children you are enriching.

A specialist can make all the difference, as their innate understanding and commitment to the arts translates across into the classes they teach and the curriculum they make.

Once that passion is in place, the knock-on effect with other members of staff can be seen, whether in the form of CPD, co-teaching, coaching... A spark can make a flame!

Siobhan Meredith, *Marine Academy*

The research shows that RAPS schools have high levels of arts professional capital. Much can be learnt from them about how to scale arts-richness across a system.

Professional capital is a term developed by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) to describe the collective capacity of an education system to improve student learning and outcomes. It consists of three interconnected components: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital.

- **Human capital** - the individual talents, skills, knowledge, and experience of teachers and other educators, including qualifications, professional development, and effectiveness in the classroom.
- **Social capital** - the quality and depth of relationships among educators, which enable them to share knowledge, ideas and support. Strong social capital is built on collaboration, trust and collective responsibility for student learning.
- **Decisional capital** - the ability of educators to make informed judgments and decisions in complex situations using evidence, experience and professional expertise to make wise choices that benefit student learning.

According to Hargreaves and Fullan, the most effective education systems invest in and develop all three forms of professional capital. They argue that focusing on human capital alone, such as through individual teacher evaluation and performance pay, is insufficient for sustained improvement. Instead, they advocate for a more comprehensive approach which

- Provides high-quality initial teacher education and ongoing professional development
- Fosters a collaborative professional culture that encourages sharing of knowledge and best practices
- Empowers teachers to make informed decisions based on their professional judgment and expertise
- Develops system-wide policies and practices that support and value the professional growth of educators



RAPS schools and arts professional capital

The RAPS research set out to answer the following questions:

- What is an arts-rich primary school?
- What do arts-rich/creative primary schools offer to children?
- What are the benefits for children of being in an arts-rich/creative school?
- How do schools sustain this arts/creative education offer?

The RAPS research has found answers to these questions. In sum, the research shows that arts-rich schools see the arts as an essential part of the curriculum and not an add-on. Their school identity and culture places arts at the centre. A diverse range of arts subjects are taught to all children, every week, all year. Specialist arts teachers support arts learning and the work of generalist classroom teachers. The schools have dedicated time, space and money for the arts, despite facing considerable budgetary challenges.

Arts-rich schools value process and creativity, and encourage students to take risks, experiment and offer interpretations, have and realise ideas and communicate with a range of real-world audiences. Arts are often integrated with other subjects to enhance learning. However, there

is no one way to be an arts-rich school. The school's location, catchment and partnerships with cultural organisations, as well as the school history, size and organisational preferences, help to create distinctive school identities.

Arts-rich schools aim to nurture well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also creative, expressive, and culturally literate. The RAPS research shows that these arts learnings do not come at the expense of other learning. The majority of RAPS schools do as well or better than like schools in tests, inspections and performance measures.

Headteachers in RAPS schools take concerted, strategic actions to place the arts at the heart of their curricula, staffing, and resources, while navigating a range of persistent challenges. They believe deeply in the transformative power of the arts to support equity, engagement, skills, personal growth, community, and school success. Their leadership and vision are critical to sustaining arts-rich education in a challenging context. Arts-rich schools are characterised by their leadership density and the depth of pedagogical knowledge that is used to ensure children make good progress in a carefully sequenced and paced curriculum. Heads and governing bodies trust and provide the necessary time and autonomy for their specialist arts curriculum staff to lead and sustain continued improvement.

While the RAPS research has answered the questions initially posed, two more questions now come into view.

The first is rhetorical –

Is there any sound reason why a school would prefer to be arts-poor? If there is no penalty for offering an arts-rich curriculum, and additional benefits for children, wouldn't all schools want to be arts-rich?

The second question is practical and assumes that in fact no school would willingly deprive children of the arts. The question then becomes:

What it might take to offer arts-richness at scale? How might a system grow its professional arts capital?

Building professional arts capital at scale

The current school system can be seen as arts-poor, lacking in professional arts capital (see Ashton et al., 2024; Tambling & Bacon, 2023).

We can imagine a school system where

an arts entitlement is a reality,

all primary schools teach all children expressive arts subjects each week, every year.

All schools have access to arts specialist teachers who support classroom teachers to develop their repertoires of practice.

All schools have some specialist facilities and all of them can afford extra curricula activities and excursions.

Cultural organisations and artists routinely and regularly work with schools.

This is a school system where the expressive arts are taken as seriously as they are in the independent school sector (Ashton & Ashton, 2022).

But how is this to happen?

Scaling up arts-richness in primary schools across the English state school system requires a long-term commitment, ongoing investment, and collaboration among administrators, teachers, students, families, and community partners. But help is at hand. There is much to be learnt from the RAPS schools and others like them. Following the RAPS schools' lead, we suggest three strategic priorities for scaling up arts-richness.



Step One: Vision, values and purposes

System leaders need to develop a long-term vision for - and commitment to - the expressive arts. This is more than providing a framework for a national curriculum, but rather goes to the responsibility of policymakers to articulate clear purposes for schooling, considering the particular challenges children and young people face in their futures. The unique affordances of the arts in building personal and societal flourishing should be integral to that vision. The role of the arts in schooling should be discussed and promoted with teachers, families and in the wider community. By prioritising the arts, school systems can create more vibrant, engaging, and equitable learning environments for all students.

Step Two: Professional capital

While building that shared vision, system leaders need to attend to the arts professional knowledges and repertoires of practice of staff. Teacher education courses should offer more than a cursory foray into the arts; they need to provide a sound foundation for the ongoing professional development to which all primary school teachers are entitled. There are at present insufficient specialist staff to support primary schools across the country, and more needs to be done to ensure a supply of specialists. To boost numbers of specialist staff, the school system should offer targeted teacher education courses for artists and creative practitioners. In addition to specialist options in teacher education courses, the system must work with the cultural sector to ensure that all schools can build partnerships which enrich the capabilities of both school staff and students.

Step Three: Arts education disciplinary knowledges and practices

We need a focus on professional arts capital at a system-wide scale: regular evaluation and systemic support for arts programmes and initiatives, based on feedback from schools, higher education and the cultural sector, with data used wisely to inform decision-making and continuing improvement efforts. Building a network of arts-rich schools to work in partnership with arts teacher organisations will provide strong foundations for this work.



Achieving arts-richness at scale

Arts-rich schools are an untapped resource within the school system. They already have the necessary knowledges and skills to lead national curriculum development in the expressive arts. England might lead the world in establishing a **national network of arts-rich schools which share and disseminate their practices**. Such a network would lead from the middle (Hargreaves, 2024), realising leadership density that is system wide. An arts-rich school reform network could hold master classes for senior and middle leaders embedding continued development of professional capital and pedagogic content knowledge.

RAPS schools told us that specialist arts teachers are in short supply. Our research shows that they are the key to developing the expressive arts curriculum in schools and the wider school system. Our parallel research on the arts in initial teacher education suggested that very few providers offer arts electives, and specialists are very likely to have had a formal arts qualification and/or professional experience. This is simply not good enough if the expressive arts in primary schools are to be provided at scale. The government must look to **fund places for specialist expressive arts primary teacher education**.

International research shows that classroom teachers generally do not feel confident in teaching expressive arts. This is not surprising as our survey of initial teacher education providers suggests that very little time is devoted to arts education. Generalist classroom teachers need ongoing support and resources. We would certainly like to see more time devoted to the expressive arts in initial teacher education. But it is equally urgent to **ensure that generalist classroom teachers access professional learning in expressive arts**. This might be provided in partnership with cultural organisations, subject associations and with school clusters, networks and trusts.

Specialist arts teachers can provide systemic leadership across school clusters, networks and trusts. Some specialist arts leads in the RAPS schools already work in this way. However, arts specialists also need to maintain their own knowledge and skills. Cultural organisations and higher education institutions are well placed to provide specialist expressive arts learning programmes. **Support for advanced professional development for arts specialist teachers** will allow them to work at greater scale and continue to provide expert leadership.

All RAPS schools had sustained partnerships with cultural organisations and artists. These contributed to school identity and ethos, children's learning and staff expertise. However, funding for cultural organisations to work with schools is too often project based and short term, rather than for sustained engagements. Ongoing partnerships have reciprocal benefits for cultural organisations and schools. The government should support for **cultural organisations to build and sustain partnerships with schools, prioritising those in the most disadvantaged areas**.

RAPS schools, like all others, are facing significant budget constraints. The expressive arts are expensive. Schools are currently struggling to provide the funding for essential materials and equipment and enriching excursions and visiting artists. There are many calls on pupil premium funding, but this model of funding could be extended to the arts and ring fenced. We urge the government to **create a cultural pupil premium fund** as a tangible commitment to ensuring an arts entitlement for all children.

Many of the RAPS schools had some specialist facilities. These had often been developed at their own expense rather than being part of their regular building provision. Multi-purpose halls were often used but these were far from ideal for many arts activities. Ensuring that **all new and renovated primary schools have some specialist expressive arts facilities** would go a long way to making sure that schools are easily and regularly able to offer extended and ambitious expressive arts learning.

Recommendations for scaling up arts-rich primary schools

- 1 Expressive arts entitlement:**
We need an entitlement to expressive arts learning for every child as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.
- 2 Teacher education and development:**
To make this pupil expressive arts entitlement a reality, we also require an entitlement to teacher education and teacher development:
 - a) Specialist arts teachers are in short supply in primary schools. They are, however, the key to developing the expressive arts curriculum in schools and the wider school system. **We need places for specialist expressive arts primary teacher education.**
 - b) Specialist arts teachers can provide systemic leadership across clusters, networks and trusts. Cultural organisations and higher education institutions are well placed to provide specialist expressive arts learning programmes. **We need advanced specialist teacher professional development.**
 - c) Teacher education provision in expressive arts is minimal and patchy. Every primary teacher needs a foundation in the expressive arts as part of learning to teach a broad and balanced curriculum. **We need expressive arts learning in initial primary teacher education to be expanded.**
 - d) If classroom teachers are to feel confident in teaching expressive arts, they need ongoing support and resources. **We need continuing professional learning in expressive arts for generalist classroom teachers.**

- 3 A national network of arts-rich primary schools:**
Arts-rich schools are an untapped resource within the school system. They already have the necessary knowledges and skills to lead national curriculum development in the expressive arts. **Creating a national network would enable arts-rich schools to share and disseminate their practices.** A network might initially be convened by an arts charity with national reach and a sound track record of working with schools. Engaging arts-rich schools as partners in the formation and running of a network will be key to its success.
- 4 Support for cultural organisation partnerships with schools:**
Funding for cultural organisations is too often for short-term projects rather than for sustained engagement. Ongoing partnerships have reciprocal benefits for cultural organisations and schools. **We need a commitment to ensuring that the cultural sector can respond to school needs through sustained partnerships, prioritising schools in the most disadvantaged areas.**
- 5 Creating a new cultural pupil premium:**
All practical subjects require essential materials and equipment. **Expressive arts subjects also require enriching excursions and visiting artists.** Schools are currently struggling to provide the funding for these. Supporting state schools to provide expressive arts experiences for those whose parents are economically struggling would be a significant step in providing an equitable arts entitlement for all children. This is a social justice issue.
- 6 Specialist expressive art facilities in primary schools:**
Most primary schools make do with multi-purpose halls and portable equipment. However those with dedicated facilities are easily and regularly able to offer extended and ambitious expressive arts learning. **Expressive arts facilities should be an integral part of school building programmes for all new and renovated primary schools.**

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