

Schools That Sing: Arts-Rich Learning in Leeds Practical Case Studies for Schools

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Preface

Schools play a vital role in shaping young people's cultural lives. For many children, school is the main – and sometimes only – place where they encounter the arts in meaningful, sustained ways. How schools choose to prioritise creativity therefore matters, not just for learning outcomes, but for wellbeing, belonging and opportunity.

This report brings together insights from Leeds schools that are already embedding arts-rich practice in thoughtful and sustainable ways. It captures what this looks like across eight different phases and contexts, including primary, secondary and SEND settings, and reflects on the decisions, relationships and conditions that support strong cultural education.

The examples shared here come from schools in Leeds, but the themes and challenges they address will be familiar to educators across the country. Time pressures, funding constraints and competing priorities are part of everyday school life. What stands out in these case studies is not the absence of barriers, but the ways schools have responded to them – often through small, intentional changes that build over time.

This is not a report about 'best practice' to replicate or a checklist to complete. Instead, it is an invitation to reflect on what arts-rich education can look like in different settings, and how it might be developed in ways that are realistic, inclusive and rooted in each school's context.

From Case Studies to Classroom Practice.

This report is designed to be used, not read from cover to cover in one sitting. Each section draws on conversations with schools to highlight practical approaches that support arts-rich education – from leadership and curriculum design to teaching practice, partnerships and student voice. Alongside examples of what schools are already doing, each theme includes reflective prompts and practical suggestions that can be adapted to different roles and settings.

You may find it helpful to:

- Dip into sections that feel most relevant to your current priorities
- Use individual themes as a starting point for discussion or CPD
- Reflect on how the practices described compare with your own context
- Focus on one area at a time rather than attempting change across everything

Schools can be arts-rich in many different ways, and not all approaches described here will be relevant to every context. Many of the schools featured here began with a single focus – such as protecting time, strengthening one partnership, or increasing opportunities to showcase student work – and developed their practice gradually. The aim is not comparison, but to support reflection, confidence and conversation. Arts-rich practice looks different in every school. What matters most is starting from where you are, building on what already works, and taking purposeful next steps that fit your community.

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1. Introduction and Foundations

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1.1 Why Arts-Rich Schools Matter

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Arts and culture play a vital role in helping schools build healthier, happier and more inclusive learning communities. Regular engagement with creative activities supports students' confidence, wellbeing and motivation, while also strengthening relationships, improving engagement with learning and contributing positively to school culture.

Participation in the arts gives children and young people opportunities to express themselves, collaborate with others and experience success in different ways. These experiences can be particularly powerful for students who may struggle to thrive in more traditional classroom settings. Creative learning also helps students develop transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, resilience and teamwork – skills that support learning across subjects and are increasingly valued in the world beyond school.

For many children, school is the primary place where they can access meaningful arts and cultural experiences. However, time pressures, funding constraints and competing curriculum

demands can make it difficult for schools to sustain rich and varied arts provision. In recent years, arts education has been reduced in many schools, leading to uneven access and gaps in opportunity. At the same time, schools have limited practical guidance on what strong cultural provision looks like in everyday practice, or how it can be protected and developed.

This report responds to that gap. Drawing on case studies from eight schools across Leeds, it explores how arts-rich practice is already being delivered across different phases and contexts – including primary, secondary and SEND settings. By sharing what schools are doing now, this report aims to make arts-rich education more visible, more achievable and more adaptable.

Rather than promoting a single model, the case studies highlight a range of approaches that have helped schools embed creativity in sustainable and meaningful ways. Together, they offer practical insights, ideas and encouragement for schools looking to strengthen their own arts and cultural provision, starting from where they are.

“There’s no failure in the arts ... which gives the children a sense of achievement and self-belief.”

Middleton Primary School

1.2 What is an Arts-Rich School?

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Image courtesy of Cockburn School

An arts-rich school is one where the arts – including music, drama, dance and visual arts – are embedded within everyday school life and learning. Students have regular, equitable access to a broad range of high-quality creative experiences, supported by thoughtful curriculum planning, confident teaching and a school culture that values creativity.

In arts-rich schools, the arts are treated as an essential part of a broad and balanced curriculum, rather than an optional extra or reward activity. Arts learning is planned, timetabled and protected, with clear progression and opportunities for students to revisit and deepen their skills over time. This may include weekly teaching across multiple art forms, access to specialist expertise, and

opportunities to work with artists or cultural organisations.

Crucially, arts-rich schools are defined not only by what they offer, but by how the arts shape the wider life of the school. Leadership prioritises creative learning, ensuring it is reflected in the school's ethos, values and decision-making. Creative work is visible and celebrated, and students are encouraged to see themselves as creative individuals.

An arts-rich school is therefore not one with the longest list of activities, but one where creativity is woven through curriculum, pedagogy and culture – influencing how students learn, how teachers teach and how the school connects with its community.

1.3 Why Go Arts-Rich? Evidence and Impact

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Research into arts-rich education presents a nuanced picture. While evidence for direct academic impact is mixed and not consistently causal, there is strong and well-established evidence linking arts participation to benefits in wellbeing, engagement and wider school culture.

The most consistent findings relate to social and emotional outcomes. Research shows that participation in the arts can support students' self-esteem, emotional literacy, motivation and resilience, and can lead to more positive attitudes towards learning (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2017; RSA, 2021; DCMS, 2020). Classroom-based studies also highlight improved collaboration, stronger social relationships and increased engagement – particularly for students who may find conventional learning approaches challenging.

Arts-rich schools are often characterised by strong and visible school cultures, where creativity is valued and shared (RSA, 2020; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2025). Partnerships with artists and cultural organisations can enrich the curriculum, expose students to new experiences and strengthen a sense of connection between schools and their communities. There is also evidence that equitable access to arts education can help build cultural capital and widen participation, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2025; A New Direction, 2023).

National reviews of creativity in education emphasise that sustained creative learning contributes to students' wellbeing, sense of identity and belonging, and should be understood as a whole-school condition shaped by leadership, curriculum design and culture, rather than a discrete or optional subject area (Durham Commission on Creativity and Education, 2019).

Large-scale reviews and meta-analyses show no clear causal relationship between arts education and academic attainment. However, these studies also point to the limitations of measuring arts education solely through attainment outcomes. Many of the benefits most consistently associated with arts-rich education – such as confidence, wellbeing, belonging and engagement – are central to whole-school effectiveness, even where they are not easily captured through examination data (EEF & RSA, 2021).

While the academic case for arts-rich schooling remains open to debate, the research is clear on one point: the arts contribute powerfully to whole-child development (DCMS, 2020; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2025). For schools focused on inclusion, wellbeing, engagement and positive school culture, these well-evidenced benefits make the arts a vital and enriching part of educational practice.

2. What Arts-Rich Schools Do: Key Practices from Leeds Schools

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- 2.1 Leadership that Champions the Arts
 - 2.2 Embedding the Arts Across the Curriculum
 - 2.3 Teaching That Adapts to Learners
 - 2.4 Using Specialist Expertise (In-School and Beyond)
 - 2.5 A Broad and Balanced Arts Curriculum
 - 2.6 Diversified curriculum for inclusive environment
 - 2.7 Protecting Curriculum Time for the Arts
 - 2.8 Celebrating and Sharing Students' Creative Work
 - 2.9 Working with Artists and Cultural Organisations
 - 2.10 Extracurricular Arts and Student Voice
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How this section works

Each theme is structured in the same way to support busy teachers and leaders:

- *What this looks like in schools – examples drawn directly from case study schools*
- *What we learned – key insights about why this approach matters*
- *Try this in your school – practical suggestions you can adapt to your own context*

The following section draws together what we learned from conversations with eight Leeds schools about how arts-rich practice works in real settings. These schools operate across different phases and contexts, but clear patterns emerged in how they prioritise, protect and develop arts and cultural learning.

Rather than presenting a single model to replicate, these themes highlight shared approaches that support strong arts provision in different ways. Each theme brings together concrete examples from schools, key insights from staff, and practical suggestions that can be adapted to different contexts. None of these approaches require perfection, significant additional funding, or specialist expertise to begin with. Many of the practices shared here started small and developed over time.

Taken together, these themes show how arts-rich schools build a culture where creativity is valued, purposeful and accessible – and how this can be achieved in a range of educational contexts.

2.1 Leadership that Champions the Arts

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This theme explores how leadership belief and visibility shape the conditions for arts-rich practice.

i. What this looks like in schools

Across the case study schools, strong arts-rich practice was consistently underpinned by leadership that actively valued and championed the arts. Where senior leaders clearly articulated the importance of arts and cultural learning, creative subjects were more likely to be prioritised, protected and embedded across school life.

Leadership commitment did not depend on specialist arts backgrounds. Instead, arts-rich schools were characterised by leaders who understood the broader value of arts education – including its contribution to wellbeing, engagement, inclusion and school culture – and who were prepared to advocate for its place within the curriculum.

In these schools, leadership support was visible as well as strategic. This included leaders attending performances and exhibitions, speaking positively about creative subjects, and ensuring the arts were represented in school communications and priorities. In some settings, leaders also continued to teach or work directly with students in creative subjects, reinforcing the message that the arts were valued alongside other areas of learning.

Where leadership support was consistent and visible, it shaped school culture more widely. It built confidence among staff, signalled parity between creative and academic subjects, and ensured the arts were included in conversations about curriculum design, resourcing and long-term planning.

ii. What we learned

Taken together, the case studies highlight leadership commitment as a foundational condition for sustaining arts-rich practice.

Key insights include:

- *Arts provision is strongest when leaders actively champion them, rather than passively approving them.*
- *Leadership belief and enthusiasm are often more important than subject knowledge.*
- *Visible leadership involvement raises the status of creative subjects for staff, students and families.*
- *When the arts are linked to whole-school priorities such as wellbeing, engagement and inclusion, they are more likely to be sustained.*

In short, leadership sets the climate in which creative subjects either flourish or shrink. Where leaders model belief, advocacy and engagement, creative learning is more likely to be sustained.

“It’s good to have that representation within the Senior Leadership Team.”

Cockburn School

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iii. Try this in your school

Build understanding, not just expertise.

Strong arts leadership does not require arts specialists on SLT – it requires champions who understand the value of creativity.

What you can do:

- *Share evidence linking the arts to wellbeing, engagement, attendance and school culture (this report can help).*
- *Present examples from your own school that show the impact of arts learning.*
- *Make explicit links between the arts and whole-school priorities such as inclusion, literacy, behaviour and mental health.*
- *Frame the arts as a driver of school culture, not an optional extra.*

Invite leaders into creative spaces.

Advocacy does not always need to be formal. Schools reported that informal exposure builds appreciation and understanding.

What you can do:

- *Personally invite SLT to performances, exhibitions or celebrations of work.*
- *Ensure student voices are heard directly by leaders – through feedback, presentations or informal conversations.*
- *Share positive feedback from students and families.*
- *Celebrate small creative successes regularly and visibly.*

Create ownership at leadership level.

Arts-rich schools often had clear leadership responsibility for the arts.

What you can do:

- *Request a named SLT link for arts and cultural learning.*
- *Invite leaders to department meetings or planning sessions.*
- *Encourage arts leads to present updates at SLT meetings.*
- *Make the arts visible in school improvement planning and strategic documents.*
- *Advocate for CPD to build confidence in creative teaching across the school.*

Align the arts with accountability and outcomes.

Speaking the language of leadership helps protect and sustain provision.

What you can do:

- *Link arts education to Ofsted priorities and cultural capital.*
- *Show evidence of impact on attendance, behaviour and engagement.*
- *Highlight post-16 pathways and creative career opportunities.*
- *Share outcomes internally and externally.*

Embed the arts in school identity.

When creativity forms part of a school’s identity, it is more likely to be protected.

What you can do:

- *Include the arts in vision and values statements.*
- *Showcase creative work in communal spaces.*
- *Publicly celebrate creative achievements alongside academic ones.*
- *Ensure the arts are visible on the school website and in external communications.*

2.2 Embedding the Arts Across the Curriculum

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This theme looks at how creative learning is woven across subjects, not confined to discrete lessons.

i. What this looks like in schools

Across the case study schools, the arts were not positioned as stand-alone or enrichment subjects, but embedded intentionally across the wider curriculum. Creative approaches were used both within discrete arts lessons and as part of learning in other subject areas.

In these schools, creativity was understood as a way of deepening learning rather than decorating it. Arts-based approaches were used to explore cultural themes, support understanding of complex ideas, and help students make connections across subjects. This meant that creative learning was experienced throughout the school day, not confined to specific lessons or moments.

Schools described deliberate collaboration between subject areas, particularly where themes, texts or historical periods overlapped. By aligning curriculum content across departments, students revisited ideas through different lenses – for example, encountering a topic analytically in one subject and creatively in another. This approach helped reinforce learning and support retention.

Leaders and teachers were also clear about the status of the arts within the curriculum. In arts-rich settings, creative subjects were described as having equal value to other areas of learning. Embedding the arts was not solely about using them instrumentally to support other subjects, but about recognising their intrinsic educational value while also acknowledging their wider impact on engagement, motivation and school outcomes.

ii. What we learned

Collectively, the case studies show that embedding the arts across the curriculum supports deeper engagement and more connected learning experiences.

Key insights include:

- *Treating the arts as equal curriculum subjects strengthens their impact and sustainability.*
- *Cross-curricular planning helps students make meaningful connections between subjects.*
- *Creative approaches can support understanding of complex, abstract or sensitive topics.*
- *Embedding the arts can increase engagement, motivation and retention of learning.*

When creative learning is woven thoughtfully across the curriculum, it benefits students' understanding while reinforcing the value of the arts as essential, not additional.

“We think that it gives our children a varied approach to their learning and their curriculum.”

Carr Manor Community School

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iii. Try this in your school

Treat the arts as equal, not additional.

Schools that successfully embed the arts position them as core curriculum subjects.

What you can do:

- Advocate for protected curriculum time for arts subjects.
- Ensure the arts are named explicitly in curriculum and school improvement planning.
- Celebrate arts achievements alongside academic results.

Use the arts to deepen learning across subjects.

Arts-rich schools use creative approaches to reinforce learning in subjects such as English, History, Geography and Science.

Examples include:

- Performing drama related to historical events such as World War Two.
- Using drama techniques to explore Windrush or Kindertransport.
- Linking felt-making to Geography (wool sources) and Science (materials).
- Using photography projects to investigate local environments or pollution.

What you can do:

- Map cross-curricular opportunities during curriculum planning.
- Identify topics where the arts could act as a learning ‘hook’.
- Embed role-play, performance and storytelling into literacy units.
- Use arts-based approaches to support abstract or challenging concepts.

Plan for cross-departmental collaboration.

Strong practice includes knowing what is being taught elsewhere and working intentionally together.

What you can do:

- Build joint planning time between arts and other subject teachers.
- Identify shared themes, texts or historical periods. Align assessment opportunities where appropriate.

Recognise and share the impact on outcomes.

Schools reported that embedding the arts supports broader school performance.

Embedded arts provision can:

- Increase engagement and motivation.
- Improve retention of learning.
- Support literacy and communication skills.
- Strengthen cultural capital.
- Contribute to overall attainment.

What you can do:

- Share evidence of impact internally and externally.
- Highlight how arts learning supports outcomes in other subjects.
- Make cross-curricular successes visible to staff, leaders and families.

2.3 Teaching That Adapts to Learners

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This theme focuses on flexible, responsive teaching approaches that support inclusion and engagement.

i. What this looks like in schools

A consistent feature across the case study schools was the use of adaptive teaching as part of arts-rich practice. Teachers described approaches that were flexible and responsive, allowing lessons to evolve in response to students' engagement, needs and interests rather than following rigid structures.

In these schools, staff planned with clear intentions but treated lesson plans as starting points. Teaching approaches were frequently adjusted in real time – through changes to activities, pacing, grouping or interaction – to ensure that students could access learning meaningfully. This flexibility supported creativity and enabled students to engage in ways that played to their strengths.

Strong knowledge of students underpinned this approach. Teachers emphasised the importance of understanding what motivated learners, what helped them feel confident, and which approaches enabled participation. Lessons were often shaped around students' interests, encouraging greater ownership and a wider range of creative outcomes.

Adaptive teaching also extended to practical and environmental adjustments. In particular, schools working with students with additional needs described modifying resources, equipment or spaces to remove physical or sensory barriers to participation. These adaptations were often simple but had a significant impact on students' ability to engage fully in creative activity.

ii. What we learned

Across the case studies, a clear pattern highlights adaptive teaching as a key enabler of inclusive and engaging arts-rich practice.

Key insights include:

- *Adaptive teaching is most effective when grounded in strong knowledge of students' needs and motivations.*
- *Flexibility in approach supports inclusion, creativity and sustained engagement.*
- *Small, responsive adjustments can significantly increase participation.*
- *Adapting resources or environments can remove barriers and enable students to access creative learning.*

Rather than a fixed set of strategies, adaptive teaching functioned as a mindset – one that valued responsiveness, reflection and ongoing adjustment.

“We adapt our teaching to ensure that it’s student led ...” Cockburn School

“Intentional interaction together often helps ... like shared space and shared work.” Penny Field School

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iii. Try this in your school

Start with strong knowledge of your learners.

Effective adaptive teaching is grounded in understanding students’ needs, interests and strengths.

What you can do:

- *Build regular opportunities for staff to share insights about students during planning or department meetings.*
- *Encourage staff to reflect on what motivates individual learners and how this can shape lesson design.*

Plan flexibly and adapt in the moment.

Adaptive teaching works best when lesson plans are treated as a starting point, not a fixed script.

What you can do:

- *Build flexibility into planning so activities can be adjusted or extended.*
- *Support staff to adapt pacing, grouping or approaches in response to student engagement.*
- *Provide CPD focused on responsive teaching strategies, including questioning and interaction.*

Listen to student voice

Arts-rich schools value feedback from students and use it to inform teaching.

What you can do:

- *Create regular opportunities for students to share what they enjoy and what helps them learn.*
- *Show students where their feedback has influenced teaching decisions.*
- *Incorporate student interests into creative briefs or project themes where appropriate.*

Make adaptations and provide specialist support where needed.

Inclusive arts practice often requires modifications to resources or additional support.

What you can do:

- *Ensure access to adaptable tools and materials.*
- *Encourage creative problem-solving when modifying resources.*
- *Advocate for specialist equipment or support where physical or sensory barriers exist.*
- *Normalise adaptation as part of good teaching practice.*

2.4 Using Specialist Expertise (In-School and Beyond)

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This theme examines how schools draw on specialist knowledge to strengthen arts provision.

i. What this looks like in schools

In many of the case study schools, access to specialist expertise played a key role in strengthening and sustaining arts-rich provision. Schools described drawing on a combination of internal expertise, visiting practitioners and specialist support roles to increase confidence, depth and ambition within creative subjects.

Access to subject-specific expertise supported high-quality teaching and richer learning experiences. In some settings, arts subjects were taught by staff with specialist training or experience, allowing for greater depth of knowledge and more coherent progression across the curriculum. In others, schools worked with external practitioners – such as artists, musicians or performers – to broaden the range of creative opportunities available to students.

Schools also described the value of developing expertise within existing staff teams. This included encouraging teachers to pursue further training, supporting early career and trainee teachers to share specialist skills, and creating opportunities for internal professional learning. Over time, this helped build confidence among non-specialist staff and strengthened arts provision across subjects.

In addition, specialist support roles – such as technicians or arts support staff – enabled more ambitious creative work by supporting preparation, managing resources and facilitating practical activities. These roles increased capacity and made it easier for teachers to deliver complex or resource-intensive projects.

ii. What we learned

Viewed collectively, the case studies suggest that access to specialist expertise strengthens the quality, confidence and sustainability of arts-rich practice.

Key insights include:

- *Specialist subject knowledge enhances depth and progression in arts learning.*
- *External practitioners can expand what schools are able to offer and bring professional insight into the classroom.*
- *Developing internal expertise helps build long-term capacity and confidence among staff.*
- *Technical and support roles enable more ambitious creative work and reduce pressure on teachers.*

Arts-rich schools did not rely on a single model of expertise. Instead, they balanced internal strengths with external support to meet their context and priorities.

“Some [specialist staff] are in-house and some come in from outside ... we have long-standing relationships with people from the community.”

Carr Manor Community School

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iii. Try this in your school

Recruit staff with creative expertise or strong interests

Arts-rich schools actively value creative expertise and enthusiasm when building their teams. This does not always mean formal qualifications; interest, confidence and willingness matter too.

What you can do:

- Ask candidates about creative skills, qualifications or interests during recruitment.
- Identify how these skills could support arts teaching or creative approaches in other subjects.
- Where appropriate, include creative experience or interest in job descriptions and person specifications.

Use specialist teachers where possible

Schools reported higher confidence and stronger quality of arts teaching when subjects were taught by specialists.

What you can do:

- Allocate arts teaching to staff with subject expertise wherever possible.
- Prioritise arts backgrounds or interests when recruiting for specialist roles.
- Ensure subject specialists have time and support to develop curriculum depth and progression.

Build relationships with external practitioners.

Visiting artists and cultural practitioners can expand what schools are able to offer, bringing professional insight and inspiration into learning.

What you can do:

- Build sustained relationships with local artists, musicians, theatres or cultural organisations rather than relying on one-off workshops.
- Invite practitioners to school events and showcases to begin conversations.
- Explore what your local authority or cultural education network can offer to support partnerships.

Use peripatetic teachers to broaden opportunities

Peripatetic teachers can significantly extend instrumental and performance-based provision.

What you can do:

- Work with local music services or independent teachers to offer regular instrumental lessons.
- Ensure access is equitable and not limited by family finances where possible.
- Build peripatetic provision into longer-term planning rather than short-term projects.



Image courtesy of Cockburn School

Develop internal expertise through CPD and collaboration.

Arts-rich schools grow capacity by sharing expertise across staff teams.

What you can do:

- Encourage specialist staff to lead CPD, demonstrations or planning sessions.
- Use team-teaching or collaborative planning to build confidence among non-specialists.
- Share good practice informally between colleagues as well as through formal CPD.

Support staff development and learning

Some schools strengthened provision by investing directly in staff training.

What you can do:

- Support interested staff to attend courses, qualifications or professional development in the arts.
- Encourage staff to develop their own creative practice and bring this into teaching.
- Recognise staff learning as part of school improvement and curriculum development.

Value technicians and arts support staff

Technicians and support staff often make ambitious arts provision possible.

What you can do:

- Where resources allow, invest in technical or support staff for creative subjects.
- Involve technicians early in planning projects, performances and exhibitions.
- Draw on their technical expertise to extend what students can make and do.
- Be ambitious – technical support often unlocks new possibilities.

Use trainee teachers as a source of expertise.

Trainee teachers can bring valuable specialist skills and fresh perspectives.

What you can do:

- Where appropriate, request trainee teachers with arts backgrounds.
- Encourage trainees to share specialist knowledge through peer-to-peer CPD.
- Invite trainees to contribute ideas to planning or model creative approaches.

2.5 A Broad and Balanced Arts Curriculum

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This theme focuses on how breadth, progression and representation within the arts curriculum support inclusion, engagement and creative development.

i. What this looks like in schools

A strong commitment to a broad and balanced arts curriculum emerged across the case study schools. Rather than narrowing provision to a limited range of activities, these schools exposed students to multiple art forms, creative techniques and materials over time.

Curriculum design emphasised progression as well as breadth. Students were supported to develop skills gradually, revisiting techniques in different contexts and building confidence through varied creative experiences. In many cases, this took the form of a spiral curriculum, where artistic skills and knowledge were returned to and deepened as students moved through year groups.

Schools also paid attention to the artists, cultural references and creative traditions represented within the curriculum. Deliberate efforts were made to broaden representation so that students encountered a wider range of voices, identities and perspectives. This helped ensure that the curriculum reflected diverse experiences and enabled more students to see themselves within creative learning.

A broad arts curriculum was also seen as a foundation for cross-curricular links. Exposure to different art forms created opportunities for learning to connect with wider curriculum themes, reinforcing knowledge and encouraging students to make meaningful connections between subjects.

ii. What we learned

Taken together, the case studies show that a broad and balanced arts curriculum supports both inclusion and creative development.

Key insights include:

- *Exposure to multiple art forms allows students to discover different strengths and interests.*
- *Revisiting skills over time supports progression and confidence.*
- *Representation within the curriculum matters for engagement and relevance.*
- *Breadth and depth can coexist when curriculum design is intentional.*
- *Arts-rich schools placed equal value on variety, progression and representation, recognising that a broad curriculum strengthens access, belonging and creative identity.*

“The children learn about drawing, painting, printing, sculpture, textiles and collage – and that is built on each year.”

Clapgate Primary School

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iii. Try this in your school

Offer a wide range of art forms over time.

A strong arts curriculum exposes students to multiple creative disciplines and techniques.

What you can do:

- *Map out a creative learning pathway showing what students will experience as they progress through the school.*
- *Plan opportunities for students to work with different materials and processes.*
- *Avoid narrowing the curriculum to a small number of familiar techniques.*

Plan for progression and revisiting skills.

Arts-rich schools design curricula that revisit skills and concepts over time.

What you can do:

- *Use a spiral curriculum approach so techniques are revisited in new contexts.*
- *Build complexity gradually across year groups.*
- *Ensure students can reflect on and build upon prior learning.*

Ensure diversity and representation within the curriculum.

Schools prioritised showing students a wide range of artists and creative voices.

What you can do:

- *Audit your curriculum to identify which artists and cultural traditions are represented.*
- *Intentionally include artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, genders and identities.*
- *Incorporate contemporary practitioners alongside historical figures.*

Involve students in curriculum choices.

Student voice helped ensure curricula remained relevant and engaging.

What you can do:

- *Ask students which artists or art forms they are interested in.*
- *Use student feedback to inform future planning.*
- *Encourage students to research and share artists they connect with.*

Make links across the wider curriculum.

Broad arts curricula can strengthen learning in other subjects.

What you can do:

- *Identify opportunities to link arts projects with history, geography, literacy or science.*
- *Use creative approaches to explore themes or concepts taught elsewhere.*
- *Plan collaboratively where possible to reinforce learning across subjects.*

2.6 Diversified curriculum for inclusive environment

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This theme explores how intentional choices about access, representation and student voice help create more inclusive arts-rich practice.

i. What this looks like in schools

After examining the case study schools, inclusion and equity emerged as central considerations in how arts-rich provision was designed and delivered. Schools paid close attention not only to what creative opportunities were offered, but to who was able to access them and feel represented within the curriculum.

Equitable access was a clear priority. Schools described intentional efforts to ensure that all students had opportunities to participate in arts learning, including through extracurricular provision. This meant actively addressing barriers related to finance, confidence or prior access, rather than assuming participation would happen automatically.

Curriculum content was also approached with inclusion in mind. Schools reviewed the artists, cultural references and creative traditions embedded within their teaching to ensure students encountered a broad range of voices, identities and lived experiences. This helped make learning feel more relevant and reflective of the communities students belonged to.

In addition, schools described the importance of engaging openly with cultural context rather than avoiding complexity. Creative subjects were used as spaces to explore identity, culture and experience thoughtfully and age-appropriately, supporting students to feel seen and valued. Student voice played an important role in shaping this work, with feedback used to inform curriculum choices and artistic focus.

ii. What we learned

Collectively, the case studies show that diversification supports inclusion most effectively when it is embedded intentionally across access, representation and voice.

Key insights include:

- *Inclusive arts provision requires proactive planning rather than passive availability.*
- *Reducing financial and participation barriers widens access to creative learning.*
- *Representation within the curriculum increases relevance, engagement and belonging.*
- *Open engagement with cultural context supports empathy and critical thinking.*
- *Listening to student voice strengthens inclusive practice over time.*

Diversification was not treated as an add-on, but as a core part of how arts-rich education was understood and delivered.

“The student voice feedback was really positive – they enjoyed learning about artists from different backgrounds.”

Clapgate Primary School

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iii. Try this in your school

Centre artists from diverse backgrounds.

Inclusive arts curricula intentionally reflect a wide range of cultural voices and identities.

What you can do:

- Audit artists and cultural references within your curriculum.
- Include artists from different cultural, racial and social backgrounds.
- Highlight artists whose lived experiences may resonate with students.
- Regularly review and update curriculum content.

Create space for honest conversations.

Arts-rich schools did not avoid cultural complexity.

What you can do:

- Use the arts as a starting point for discussion about identity, culture and society.
- Support staff with CPD on inclusive and culturally responsive teaching.
- Ensure conversations are well scaffolded and age-appropriate.

Use student voice to shape curriculum choices

Student feedback helped schools ensure provision remained relevant and meaningful.

What you can do:

- Gather student feedback through surveys, discussions or creative reflection.
- Ask students which artists, themes or art forms interest them.
- Use student voice to inform future planning.

Reduce barriers to participation.

Inclusive provision requires attention to practical access.

What you can do:

- Review participation data to identify who may be missing out.
- Reduce financial barriers where possible, particularly for instrumental learning.
- Normalise participation in creative activities across the school.

Build a sense of belonging through the arts.

Representation and access together help students feel ownership of creative learning.

What you can do:

- Celebrate diverse creative voices publicly.
- Ensure students feel their identities and experiences are recognised through curriculum choices.
- Position the arts as a space where all students can succeed and be seen.

2.7 Protecting Curriculum Time for the Arts

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This theme examines how timetabling decisions signal value, support progression and sustain arts-rich learning over time.

i. What this looks like in schools

One of the clearest indicators across the case study schools was the protection of curriculum time for the arts. Arts-rich practice was supported by deliberate timetabling decisions that ensured students had regular, sustained opportunities to engage in creative learning.

In these schools, arts subjects were positioned alongside other core areas of learning rather than delivered sporadically or through short rotations. Dedicated curriculum time enabled students to develop skills, explore ideas in depth and experience a range of art forms over time. This consistency supported progression and helped students build confidence in creative subjects.

Both primary and secondary settings emphasised the importance of protected time. In primary schools, allocating extended blocks of time allowed space for practical exploration, experimentation and reflection. In secondary schools, regular weekly lessons across multiple creative disciplines ensured students

experienced breadth before making subject choices and understood the value of the arts within the wider curriculum.

By embedding the arts firmly within the timetable, schools sent a clear message to students, staff and families that creative learning is an essential part of education, not an optional extra.

ii. What we learned

The case studies point to how protected curriculum time plays a crucial role in sustaining arts-rich practice.

Key insights include:

- *Regular, timetabled arts learning supports depth, progression and skill development.*
- *Sustained provision raises the status of the arts within school culture.*
- *Short carousel models can limit creative development and continuity.*
- *Protected time at Key Stage 3 supports informed progression into further study.*
- *Without deliberate decisions to safeguard time for the arts, even strong commitment and enthusiasm can be undermined.*

“Every Year 7, 8 and 9 gets art, drama and music every week.” Guiseley School

“Every class has a dedicated two and a half hours for the arts.” Beecroft Primary School

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iii. Try this in your school

Make the arts core to the curriculum.

Strong practice positions the arts as essential rather than optional.

What you can do:

- *Ensure arts subjects are included in the weekly timetable.*
- *Communicate the importance of creative subjects in curriculum planning.*
- *Protect arts time during timetable reviews or curriculum change.*

Avoid short carousel models where possible.

Brief rotations can limit depth and progression.

What you can do:

- *Review whether carousel models restrict learning opportunities.*
- *Provide longer blocks or sustained sequences of study.*
- *Plan learning so students can complete meaningful creative projects.*

Protect arts time in primary settings.

Creative learning requires time for exploration, reflection and making.

What you can do:

- *Schedule dedicated arts time each week.*
- *Ensure sessions are long enough for practical work.*
- *Balance different art forms across the year.*
- *Avoid arts time being regularly displaced by other priorities.*

Support progression in secondary schools.

Curriculum time at Key Stage 3 supports confidence and choice.

What you can do:

- *Ensure students experience a range of arts disciplines before GCSE.*
- *Make progression routes visible to students.*
- *Use curriculum time to build technical skills and creative confidence.*
- *Support informed decision-making around arts qualifications.*

2.8 Celebrating and Sharing Students' Creative Work

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This theme looks at how sharing creative outcomes builds confidence, motivation and a strong culture around the arts.

i. What this looks like in schools

Across the case study schools, creating opportunities for students to share and celebrate their creative work was a central feature of arts-rich practice. Showcasing creative outcomes helped students experience the full creative process, from developing ideas and rehearsing to presenting work to an audience.

Schools built regular opportunities for sharing into both curriculum and extracurricular provision. These included performances, exhibitions, assemblies and participation in local or national programmes. Working towards a public outcome gave creative learning purpose and helped students understand their work as something valued beyond the classroom.

Opportunities to share creative work varied in scale and form. Alongside large productions or events, schools also created space for smaller, more informal moments of celebration. This helped normalise creativity as part of everyday school life and ensured that a wide range of students had opportunities to participate.

Involving families and the wider school community was also important. Sharing creative work with others strengthened relationships, increased pride and reinforced the value of the arts within the school culture.

ii. What we learned

Viewed collectively, the case studies suggest that celebrating and sharing creative work plays an important role in sustaining arts-rich practice.

Key insights include:

- *Sharing creative work gives purpose and direction to learning.*
- *Regular opportunities to perform or exhibit build confidence and motivation.*
- *Celebrating creative outcomes raises the status of the arts within school culture.*
- *Involving families and communities strengthens engagement and connection.*
- *Valuing the creative process as well as final outcomes supports learning and risk-taking.*

Arts-rich schools treated showcasing not as an add-on, but as a meaningful and integral part of creative learning.

iii. Try this in your school

Plan showcases into the school calendar

Strong practice includes planning regular opportunities for students to share their work. *What you can do:*

- *Map performances, exhibitions or showcases across the academic year.*
- *Include both curriculum and extracurricular work.*
- *Schedule rehearsal and preparation time in advance.*
- *Celebrate a range of art forms, not just large productions.*

“We do family assemblies very regularly ... there’s always a bit of a performance for families.” Beecroft Primary School

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Create regular opportunities to perform or present.

Arts-rich schools move beyond one annual event.

What you can do:

- Plan multiple performance or sharing opportunities across the year.
- Use assemblies, festivals or themed events.
Celebrate both large and small creative moments.

Link extracurricular activities to real outcomes.

Clubs and projects are more engaging when they lead to public sharing.

What you can do:

- Align clubs with performances, festivals or exhibitions.
- Identify local or national programmes students can take part in.
- Use events as milestones within extracurricular provision.

Involve families and the wider school community.

Sharing creative work with families builds pride and understanding.

What you can do:

- Invite parents and carers to performances or exhibitions.
- Use school events to showcase creative work.
- Share achievements through newsletters and school communications.

Use school spaces to make creativity visible.

Displays reinforce the value placed on creativity.

What you can do:

- Create rotating displays of student work around the school.
- Include work from different year groups and disciplines.
- Celebrate drafts and works in progress, not just final pieces.

Share creative work digitally.

Digital platforms extend reach and support reflection.

What you can do:

- Share recordings or images of performances (in line with safeguarding policies).
- Create digital galleries of artwork.
- Encourage students to reflect on and document their creative process.

Celebrate the creative process, not just outcomes.

Arts-rich schools value experimentation and development.

What you can do:

- Display sketches, drafts or rehearsal notes alongside finished work.
- Give students opportunities to talk about how work developed.
- Use reflection to help students recognise their creative progress.

2.9 Working with Artists and Cultural Organisations

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This theme considers how partnerships with artists and cultural organisations deepen learning and expand opportunities for students.

i. What this looks like in schools

Partnership-working with artists and cultural organisations featured strongly across the case study schools. These collaborations extended what schools were able to offer, providing students with access to specialist expertise, professional creative environments and experiences beyond the classroom.

Schools worked with a wide range of partners, including galleries, theatres, dance companies, musicians, universities and colleges. Partnerships took different forms, from artist-led workshops and school visits to longer-term projects developed collaboratively over time. Sustained relationships were particularly valued, allowing trust to build and learning to deepen.

Schools also described the importance of taking learning beyond the school site. Visits to galleries, theatres and studios enabled students to experience creative work in professional contexts, often introducing them to unfamiliar spaces and possibilities. These experiences helped students see the arts as living, contemporary and relevant.

In addition, partnerships were used to explore future pathways. Engagement with artists, practitioners and education providers helped students understand creative careers and the

range of roles available within the cultural and creative industries. Schools emphasised the value of drawing on local connections and building networks within their communities.

ii. What we learned

Across the case studies, partnerships are shown to strengthen arts-rich practice by adding depth, authenticity and opportunity.

Key insights include:

- *Long-term partnerships are more impactful than one-off experiences.*
- *Working with artists brings professional insight and ambition into learning.*
- *Experiencing creative work in professional settings broadens students' cultural understanding.*
- *Partnerships can help make creative careers visible and achievable.*
- *Local networks are valuable and often under-used resources.*

Arts-rich schools viewed partnership-building as an ongoing process, supporting sustained creative learning rather than isolated activity.

iii. Try this in your school

Build long-term partnerships with cultural organisations. Sustained relationships allow for deeper learning and shared understanding.

What you can do:

- *Identify galleries, theatres and cultural organisations in your local area.*
- *Make direct contact with education or engagement teams.*

“It’s about finding people who are local and building a network you can tap into.”

Carr Manor Community School

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- *Build relationships over time rather than relying on one-off visits.*
- *Plan projects that develop across year groups or school years.*

Bring artists and practitioners into school.

Learning from artists brings professional insight and inspiration.

What you can do:

- *Invite artists to deliver workshops, talks or projects.*
- *Explore whether parents or carers have relevant creative experience.*
- *Co-plan sessions with practitioners so learning is meaningful and connected.*
- *Use both in-person and digital approaches where appropriate.*

Take students into cultural spaces.

Experiencing creativity in professional settings expands students’ sense of possibility.

What you can do:

- *Organise visits to galleries, theatres or studios (many galleries are free).*
- *Link visits clearly to curriculum learning.*
- *Build reflective activities before and after visits.*

Use partnerships to explore creative careers.

Partnerships can help make creative futures visible.

What you can do:

- *Invite organisations to run careers talks or workshops.*
- *Highlight a range of creative roles, not just performers.*
- *Link curriculum projects to real-world creative practice.*

Work with organisations that support schools.

Some organisations exist specifically to support arts education.

What you can do:

- *Engage with organisations that broker partnerships and funding.*
- *Join local cultural education networks.*
- *Maintain regular communication to build trust and reliability.*

Build links with universities and colleges.

Education partnerships can expand aspiration and access.

What you can do:

- *Connect with FE and HE institutions offering creative courses.*
- *Arrange studio visits, workshops or taster experiences.*
- *Host trainees or students to support projects in school.*

Be proactive and grow your network.

Strong partnerships often start with simple outreach.

What you can do:

- *Contact organisations directly to introduce yourself and your school.*
- *Follow up regularly and stay engaged.*
- *Record contacts and share them across your school team.*
- *Be persistent – many successful partnerships begin with a single conversation.*

2.10 Extracurricular Arts and Student Voice

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This theme explores how extracurricular arts and student leadership strengthen engagement, belonging and school culture.

i. What this looks like in schools

Extracurricular arts provision played an important role across the case study schools extending creative opportunities beyond the formal curriculum. These activities enabled students to explore a wider range of art forms, develop confidence, and take an active role in shaping the cultural life of the school.

Schools offered a broad range of extracurricular creative activities, including visual arts, textiles, music, drama, dance and digital arts. This provision created space for students to try art forms that were not always available within curriculum time and to engage more deeply with creative practice outside lessons.

Extracurricular arts were not described as optional add-ons, but as an embedded part of school culture. Regular provision, often running on multiple days, helped normalise participation and build strong creative communities within schools. In some cases, there was a clear expectation that all students would take part in at least one extracurricular activity, supporting equity of access.

Student voice was also a defining feature of extracurricular arts provision. Several schools described formal structures that enabled

students to contribute to decision-making, shape provision and take on leadership roles within the arts. These approaches helped move students from participants to co-creators, strengthening ownership and relevance.

ii. What we learned

Taken together, the case studies highlight that extracurricular arts provision strengthens engagement, inclusion and school culture when it is embedded and student-led.

Key insights include:

- *Regular extracurricular provision extends creative learning beyond the timetable.*
- *Consistency and visibility support participation and belonging.*
- *Normalising involvement helps widen access to creative opportunities.*
- *Student voice increases relevance, ownership and leadership.*
- *Extracurricular arts contribute strongly to school ethos and community.*

When treated as part of the wider educational offer, extracurricular arts play a significant role in sustaining arts-rich practice.

iii. Try this in your school

Offer a wide range of extracurricular arts activities.

A diverse offer encourages exploration and sustained engagement.

“We tend to have things on four nights a week.”

Guiseley School

“The children would tell you that school doesn’t finish at 3, it finishes at 4 ... it’s not expected, but it’s intrinsic that the students would stay.”

Carr Manor Community

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What you can do:

- Provide clubs across different art forms, drawing on staff strengths and interests.
- Use available facilities creatively when planning activities.
- Ensure clubs run regularly to build consistency and routine.
- Position extracurricular arts as a valued part of school life.

Ensure all students can access extracurricular provision.

Inclusive schools actively encourage participation from all students.

What you can do:

- Set an expectation or aspiration that every student engages in at least one extracurricular activity.
- Track participation to identify students who may be missing out.
- Promote clubs positively and celebrate involvement widely.
- Work to reduce financial or structural barriers where possible.

Embed student voice through an Art Council.

Student leadership strengthens relevance and ownership of arts provision.

What you can do:

- Establish an Art Council using a similar structure to a School or Student Council.
- Recruit students from different year groups with an interest in the arts.

- Clearly define roles, responsibilities and opportunities for impact.
- Involve students in shaping extracurricular activities and creative events.
- Support students to lead initiatives and share ideas.

Build a culture where extracurricular arts are the norm.

When participation becomes part of school identity, engagement increases.

What you can do:

- Offer clubs on multiple days to create regular opportunities.
- Promote creativity as extending beyond the school day.
- Publicly celebrate students who engage regularly.
- Support staff to sustain extracurricular provision effectively.

Use extracurricular arts to strengthen school culture.

Creative activity beyond lessons can deepen belonging and pride.

What you can do:

- Connect extracurricular work to showcases and events.
- Encourage collaboration between students and staff.
- Use extracurricular arts to build confidence, leadership and community.

3. Looking ahead

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3.1 What's Next for Your School?

3.2 Common Challenges (and How Schools are Navigating Them)

3.3 Taking Realistic Next Steps



3.1 What's Next for Your School?

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This final section invites reflection rather than comparison. The schools featured in this report are committed to arts-rich education, but they are not without challenges. Like most schools, they operate within tight financial constraints, limited curriculum time and competing priorities. What stands out is not the absence of barriers, but the ways schools have responded to them – thoughtfully, creatively and realistically.

Becoming more arts-rich is not about adopting every strategy in this report, nor about perfection. It is about identifying what is possible next, within your own context.

Reflecting on Your Starting Point

Every school begins from a different place. Some may already have strong specialist provision; others may be relying on the creativity and commitment of non-specialists. Some may have secure partnerships in place; others may be at the very beginning of that journey.

As a starting point, you might reflect on questions such as:

- Where do students currently encounter the arts in our school?
- Whose voices shape our arts provision – staff, students, partners?
- Where are the pressure points: time, funding, confidence, access?
- Which practices in this report feel most achievable right now?

Small, intentional changes – such as protecting time, celebrating work more visibly, or starting one new partnership – often lay the groundwork for wider change.

“Intentional interaction together often helps ... like shared space and shared work.”

Penny Field School

3.2 Common Challenges (and How Schools are Navigating Them)

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Funding was the most frequently cited challenge. Costs can limit the ability to work with external artists, offer instrumental lessons, purchase specialist materials or transport students to cultural venues.

Schools often responded by:

- Prioritising long-term partnerships over one-off experiences
- Bringing artists into school rather than travelling out
- Integrating arts experiences into existing curriculum time
- Being selective and strategic about where funding is used

Time and capacity

Curriculum time and staff capacity were also significant pressures, particularly where staffing or timetable structures had shifted.

Schools described navigating this by:

- Embedding the arts across subjects rather than relying solely on discrete lessons
- Prioritising certain year groups or phases
- Protecting time where possible, even in small but consistent ways

Understanding and valuing the arts

Some schools noted that the value of arts education is not always widely understood, particularly by parents or wider communities.

In response, schools focused on:

- Making creative learning visible and celebrated
- Sharing student voice and outcomes
- Linking the arts to wellbeing, engagement and future pathways
- Communicating consistently rather than defensively

“We’ve lost curriculum time in art ... because of money and staffing.”

Guiseley School

“It’d be lovely to get more people in but it’s money... getting a theatre company and getting an artist in is expensive.”

Guiseley School

3.3 Taking Realistic Next Steps

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What matters most is not where your school is now – but the direction it chooses to move next

Arts-rich practice builds over time. Across the case study schools, many of the strongest approaches started small – through one committed leader, one partnership, one timetable decision or one opportunity to showcase student work. This began with clear reflection on where the school was starting from and what was realistically achievable next.

You might consider:

- Choosing one theme from this report to focus on this year
- Identifying one structural barrier you could address
- Creating space for student voice in shaping arts provision
- Strengthening one partnership rather than starting several

The aim is not to do more, but to do what matters most, well.

Try this: Use the Arts-Rich School Audit Tool*

Leeds33 has developed an arts-rich audit tool to help schools reflect on their current provision and identify realistic next steps.

The audit supports structured discussion around leadership, curriculum, teaching, access and partnerships. It can be used individually, with a department, or as part of a staff meeting or CPD session.

What you can do:

- *Choose one theme from this report to prioritise this year*
- *Address one structural barrier you can realistically change*
- *Create space for student voice in shaping provision*
- *Strengthen one partnership*
- *Revisit the audit over time to reflect on progress and refine next steps*

***Access the Leeds33 Arts-Rich Audit Tool**
<https://leeds33.com/arts-rich-audit-tool>

4. Support and Further Resources

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- 4.1 Local Support and Connections**
 - 4.2 Delivery, Teaching and Training**
 - 4.3 Specialist Advice and One-to-One Support**
 - 4.4 Networks for Inclusion and Practice Development**
 - 4.5 National Research, Evidence and Advocacy**
 - 4.6 How Schools Engage with this Support**
-

Schools do not need to develop arts-rich practice alone. Across England, there is a growing network of local, regional and national organisations that support schools to strengthen arts and cultural education through connections, training, advice and advocacy.

Many of the practices shared throughout this report – from strengthening curriculum design to building partnerships and staff confidence – were sustained through these wider networks. External support helped schools navigate common challenges such as funding, time and capacity, and supported long-term development rather than short-term initiatives.

The examples in this section draw on organisations that supported schools involved in this research in Leeds. However, equivalent support structures exist across the country, and many of the approaches highlighted here can be accessed nationally or adapted to local contexts.

Where to start (if time is limited):

- *If you're new to developing arts-rich practice, or short on time, start locally.*
- *You do not need to engage with all of these at once.*
- *A simple pathway many schools follow:*
- *Begin with your local cultural education partnership or network to understand what support is available in your area*
- *Explore local or regional delivery organisations for practical teaching, training or CPD*
- *Use specialist national support for one-to-one advice if you encounter specific barriers*
- *National organisations can then support deeper practice, inclusion, and long-term advocacy over time.*

4.1 Local Support and Connections

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Start locally to understand what is available, build relationships and make cultural education feel manageable.

Many areas in England are supported by Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) – place-based networks that connect schools, cultural organisations, local authorities and other partners. These partnerships help schools navigate what support is available locally and broker relationships with artists, venues and providers.

Leeds example:

Leeds33 – the Local Cultural Education Partnership for Leeds – supported several of the case study schools by connecting them with cultural organisations, sharing opportunities and providing CPD.

Website: <https://leeds33.com>

Schools across England can find their local LCEP via Arts Council England. Other LCEPs operate in cities, towns and rural areas, each tailored to local cultural ecosystems.

4.2 Delivery, Teaching and Training

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Access practical support that strengthens classroom delivery and builds staff confidence. Many areas have local or regional services that provide direct delivery, specialist teaching and professional development in the arts. These organisations often work closely with schools to deliver music, visual arts, drama or dance, and to support non-specialist teachers.

Leeds example:

ArtForms, Leeds' music and arts service, supports schools through specialist teachers, instrumental provision and CPD.

Website: www.artformsleeds.co.uk

Comparable music services, arts services and cultural delivery organisations operate across the country, often linked to local authorities, music hubs or regional partnerships.



Image courtesy of Middleton Primary School

4.3 Specialist Advice and One-to-One Support

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Get targeted help when you're trying to unblock a specific challenge.

Some schools benefit from focused, one-to-one advice to help address barriers such as limited time, lack of confidence, funding concerns or partnership building.

National support:

The Cultural Education Network (supported by Arts Council England) offers free one-to-one sessions with Cultural Education Specialists for educators, freelance artists and cultural organisations across England.

This type of support can be particularly helpful for schools at an early stage of their arts-rich journey, or when a specific challenge needs attention.

Website: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/children-and-young-people>

4.4 Networks for Inclusion and Practice Development

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Connect with national networks that support equity, wellbeing and sustained professional learning.

Alongside local structures, national charities and organisations support schools to deepen arts-rich practice, particularly around inclusion, student voice and wellbeing. These organisations often provide professional development, communities of practice and longer-term programmes.

Example:

Curious Minds works nationally to support equity and excellence in arts education, bringing together schools, artists and cultural organisations through training, networks and programmes.

Website: <https://curiousminds.org.uk>

4.5 National Research, Evidence and Advocacy

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Use research and evidence to support leadership conversations and long-term planning. National organisations play an important role in strengthening the case for arts-rich education through research, policy engagement and advocacy. Their resources can be especially helpful for senior leaders, governors and trusts.

Example:

The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) provides evidence, briefings and advocacy that support strategic decision-making around cultural education.

Website: www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk



Image courtesy of Middleton Primary School

4.6 How Schools Engage with this Support

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Schools involved in this research often described a similar pattern of engagement:

- Starting with local networks or partnerships
- Accessing practical delivery or training support
- Seeking targeted advice when challenges arose
- Drawing on national evidence and advocacy to sustain and protect provision

This section is not intended as a checklist, but as a menu of support that schools can dip into as needed, at different stages of their arts-rich journey.



Image courtesy of Middleton Primary School

5. Closing Reflections

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The eight schools that contributed to this report show that arts-rich practice is not defined by scale, funding or specialist expertise alone. It is shaped by everyday decisions about time, relationships and belief in the value of arts, culture and creativity.

There is no single model to follow. What matters is starting from your own context, building on what is already working, and taking small, purposeful steps over time.

An arts-rich journey will look different in every school – but these case studies show that it is achievable, sustainable and deeply worthwhile.



6. Acknowledgements

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