



My Creative School



**My Creative School
Evaluation:
Executive Summary**



Executive Summary

The My Creative School (MCS) programme has transformed teaching and learning experience in 18 schools in London and the Medway area of Kent in a two-year period from 2016 – 2018. Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the programme was delivered in partnership by A New Direction and The Education Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Southwark. It aimed to embed the arts as drivers of powerful learning experiences, unlocking the potential of developing teachers' practice through a new model of relationship between creative practitioners and schools. In its second year, the programme developed a model where the arts became a catalyst for developing whole school cultures and community relationships through the arts with impacts on pupil, teacher and artist skills development. The MCS programme has engaged with over 2,600 primary school pupils, 280 teachers and senior staff leaders and 13 creative practitioners.

The final report details examples of innovative arts practice in the context of challenging conditions for the provision of arts education in primary schools, including declines in pupil access to the arts, a decline in arts provision within primary curricula and difficulties for schools in recruiting or retaining staff. The programme identifies several models of practice which offer potential to be 'scaled up' to meet some of these challenges or ways of working that can be both replicated or made subjects for further research and development.

Impact on pupil skills

In Year 1 (Y1), pupils in focus groups in eight participating schools were tracked in relation to criteria identified by schools. In addition, data was gathered centrally by the Education Commission to assess progress in age-related expectations (ARE) among these pupils in relation to reading, writing and mathematics between autumn 2016 and September 2017. Data gathered indicated that all the focus group pupils either maintained their level or increased their rate of progress. Significant progress by focus group pupils was recorded in three schools.

In Year 2 (Y2), focus group pupils were assessed by teachers in 6 schools in relation to 21st-century skills development, including critical-thinking and problem-solving, collaboration and communication and creativity and imagination. An average of assessment figures of all focus group pupils in the six primary schools in Y2 was calculated in relation to project impacts on 21st-century skills development.

Significant progress was recorded during the duration of the project in all skills areas.

The biggest increases were evidenced in creativity and imagination with a rise of 2.2 points (on a ten-point scale). Case studies in the final report demonstrate the impact of particular arts-based activities in **generating high levels of pupil engagement and achievement**, in particular the use of: immersive arts experiences with use of materials or 'awe and wonder' moments generating the development of pupil imagination; processes of debate and questioning by pupils that encouraged pupils' independent learning and activities that encouraged 'slow' thinking and greater reflection.



Impacts on teacher and creative practitioner skill development

At the beginning and end of each year of delivery, teachers assessed their levels of confidence in working with the arts, the ability of teaching staff in their school to work with the arts in cross-curricular planning and their schools' capacity to develop creative approaches to the curriculum in schools. While in some individual cases, teacher levels of confidence rose dramatically, overall the average growth in levels of confidence was modest. Most striking, however, is a gain in Y2 teachers in their assessments of impacts on **cross-curricular planning using the arts**, with a rise from 5.8 to 7.6 points. Teachers were much more inclined to disagree with the statement that teaching in the arts made differentiation in teaching more challenging. Creative practitioners working on the programme also recorded increases in their understanding of the curriculum relevance of their work and their working knowledge of the curriculum.

Developing effective practice

In the design and delivery of the MCS programme, A New Direction with The Education Commission has been highly reflexive in its model of planning. Key factors observed during the first year of implementation, including a changed ecology for the arts with fewer arts inputs and a lack of familiarity among teachers with arts methodologies, led to a development of the programme in Y2 that included more 'hands on' initial planning and dialogue between teachers and artists. A philosophy of 'adaptive practice' also assisted teachers in identifying meaningful and achievable changes within existing parameters of available time, space and resources. Frequent reflection by the MCS core team identified key drivers of effective project delivery, including:

A clear School Development Plan (SDP) focus

Links in project planning to schools existing priorities were identified as pivotal in engaging school leaders and in managing expectations with teachers.

Efficient partnership management

The Y2 model included a well-structured system of network and regional meetings designed to support partnerships.

More detailed initial planning

More dedicated planning time at the outset, with the creative practitioner and on site in schools is essential to successfully 'embed' a project and develop a basis to sustain project impacts.

New routes for development

Practical approaches and techniques, alongside a toolkit of resources developed through the MCS programme, represent a highly transferrable model for application in future work. In addition, final reflections by the MCS Core Team and school leaders



identify key principles to further develop MCS methodology in future work. These include developing the planning frameworks pioneered on the programme with a focus on new specific measures such as creating a more detailed audit of schools' starting points in relation to understanding of the arts. It could involve, too, a focus on developing school leaders' skills and confidence in becoming champions of the arts in what are perceived to be increasingly hostile conditions. Further development could also include wider dissemination of the learning resources and a process of further research to offer more conceptual underpinning of the highly effective MCS practice created on this programme.



Acknowledgements

The writing of this report has been greatly assisted by the work of A New Direction and the MCS Core Team in project management and visiting many schools for session observations and final reflective conversations. This team includes:

Rebecca Branch, Programme Director

Chloe Osborne, Creative Producer, My Creative Schools Programme

Sarah B. Davies, Programme Researcher and MCS Learning Resource Curator and Editor

Alice Edwards, Senior Programme Manager Schools

Greg Klerkx, Creative Advocate

Data has also been collated and prepared by Hannah Joyce and Rebeka Berg (University of East London). Additional assistance in data gathering, observation and support was also provided by the Education Commission. This team includes Maria Caneda, Project Lead, My Creative School, and Joe McGettigan, Standards Administrator.

Additional thanks go to the many teachers, school leaders and pupils who have worked on the programme at:

- Churchfields Primary School, Bromley
- Holy Innocents' Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- Malden Parochial Church of England School, Kingston
- Margaret Roper Catholic Primary School, Croydon
- Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Primary School, Kingston
- The Priory School, Croydon
- Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School, Croydon
- St Anthony's Roman Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- St Benedict's Catholic Primary School, Medway
- St Chad's Catholic Primary School, Croydon
- St Fidelis Catholic Primary School, Medway
- St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Medway
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Kingston
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- St Peter and St Paul's Catholic Primary Academy, Bromley
- St William of Perth Catholic Primary School, Medway
- West Thornton Primary Academy, Croydon



Creative Practitioners

- Abigail Hunt
- Alex McIntyre
- Andrea Puerta
- Arjunan Manuelpillai
- Deanna Rodger
- Elspeth Penfold
- Katharine James
- Lucy Clare Thornton
- Maria Amidu
- Natasha Cossey
- Simon Batchelor
- Tas Embiabata
- Thor McIntyre-Burnie

Glossary

ARE	Age-related expectations
BAME	Black and minority ethnic
CPD	Continuing professional development
DFE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an additional language
FFT	Fisher Family Trust
Inset	In-service training
KS2	Key Stage 2
SLT	Senior leadership team

About the Author

Dr. Martin Heaney is Senior Lecturer in Applied Drama at the University of East London, where he is co-director for the Centre of Applied and Participatory Arts (CAPA). He has written several reports on creative learning programmes in schools, including work for A New Direction, Hastings and Rother Arts Education Network, and Royal Opera House Bridge.

Please direct any enquiries to m.heaney@uel.ac.uk