

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Creative Schools evaluation report 2023

A background note

July 2023



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Background

The Creative Schools Partnership (CSP) Programme has been running since 2017/2018, funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), Education Authority (EA) and the Urban Villages Initiative (UV). This tripartite relationship combines sector expertise and relationships with an area-based approach.

Eleven post-primary schools took part in the 2022/23 programme school year, engaging a total of 227 students.

Bringing young people together and engaging their parents, around shared creative activities, the programme has provided a unique and positive forum to discuss and resolve serious issues around community identity and cohesion.

Arts activities naturally support emotional maturity, empathy, understanding of difference, and acceptance of nuance, which are valuable protections against hardened attitudes or positions. The joy and personal expression fostered by taking part in arts projects means that change is easier, and less likely to meet resistance, than other forms of public programmes.

Main findings

- The community development events organised by the Programme Manager intensified the impact and gave the sense of a shared initiative.
- Projects were ambitious, benefiting from four years of experience and community connections.
- Creative learning was extended beyond the programme into the wider school (e.g., using project based, student led sessions).
- There is a growing belief that schools need to use creative learning to help improve attendance rates, which have not recovered since the pandemic.
- More noticeable this year was a view from lead teachers that these kinds of projects should be available to all pupils in all schools.

Student survey

Responses to a student survey show positive outcomes for confidence, wellbeing, and engagement with learning, consistent with anecdotal evidence from schools.

Teachers referred to the lasting effect of Creative Schools Partnership: where pupils or classes who took part in projects in earlier years are still distinguishable by their confidence, engagement in class and leadership role in the school.

Key survey findings:

- 96% of students said they enjoyed the creative learning project.
- 74% of pupils reported feeling happy in the creative learning sessions with the professional artist, an indicator of the contribution to wellbeing.
- 91% of students said they felt their voice mattered and their ideas were listened to.
- 83% of pupils said the Creative Schools Partnership project had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.
- 94% of pupils said they developed skills from the Creative Schools Partnership project.
- 84% of pupils said the Creative Schools Partnership project had a positive effect on their relationship to learning, especially in making them feel happier in school.
- 89% of pupils said the positive impacts from the Creative Schools Partnership were sustained.

Stakeholder outcomes / impacts:

The evaluation highlighted a huge range of outcomes/ impacts for students, schools, and the wider communities. These are highlighted in the table below. The evaluation report provides detailed examples of how these were accrued.

Students:

- Wellbeing
- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Empathy
- Confidence
- Leadership
- Emotional intelligence
- Teamworking
- Engagement in learning
- Behaviour
- Creativity

Schools:

- Confidence in working in the community.
- Intergenerational understanding
- Embedding of creative learning in development plans
- Interdepartmental working
- Teacher development
- Links between schools
- Cross departmental collaboration
- Enhanced school profile
- Enhanced community cohesion

Community:

- Confidence in working in the community
- Wider connection with the community
- Good relations
- Improved physical environment

The Creative Schools Programme Evaluation Report 2023 is available to download at:
[Creative Schools Partnership Evaluation Report July... | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](#)

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