

# Final Evaluation Action for Children's Arts

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The Arts Backpack - Fife Part 2

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## Introduction

This document serves as an evaluation of the Arts Backpack programme in Fife. This study covers two Arts Backpack sessions completed during the 2022-23 school year, including Filmmaking and Bookbinding. It combines evidence from surveys, interviews, and online resources to demonstrate the value that the Arts backpack programme has brought to a series of primary schools in Fife. This evaluation also looks to the future of the Arts Backpack programme and how access to the arts for children could be shaped in the future.

## Research Methods

Initially four primary teachers were invited to participate in a short, written survey about the Arts Backpack sessions at school in Fife. They were invited to attend a short interview to gain deeper insight into how the sessions had been received by the children, and the longer term impact of the Arts Backpack programme. An additional aim of these interviews was to gain insight into how this evaluation could most effectively include children. Teachers advised that surveys were the best method, and as such, surveys were distributed to teachers, who passed these on to their classes. One teacher felt that completing the survey as a class would be the best option. The other teacher suggested that the survey should be filled in by the pupils individually using Microsoft Forms. The survey results were compiled and shared with both teachers. Additionally, the survey results were presented back to one class via an online conference. In all, around 60 children took part on this evaluation, aged from 9-12.

## Context

Schools who participated in Arts Backpack included:

- Benarty Primary School
- Kelty Primary School
- Cowdenbeath Primary School
- Hill of Beath Primary School

Fife is a mostly rural council in Scotland, with many pupils living in areas of multiple deprivation. Teachers advised that many children come from families where no one works, and that it can be rare for families to leave the Fife area, despite it being within a short train distance from Edinburgh. Experience of the arts tends to be limited to what children experience at school or online rather than something that families do on a regular basis. A few children participated in after school activities such as music, dance or art. The children themselves provided information on when and where they participated in the arts, with the majority saying that they had participated at school.

● At school	7
● After school	6
● With friends	3
● With Family	1
● Other	8



Figure 1: When children participated in the arts

However, generally the Fife area has had low participation in the arts and the Arts Backpack programme has been vital in providing children with access to experiences that they might not otherwise receive.

## Prior to Arts Backpack

All of the teachers who completed the initial survey spoke well of the CPD sessions that had been offered the previous year by Arts Backpack. Teachers initially advised that there had been enthusiasm in Fife school for arts provision, but that COVID had paused this aspect of school evaluation. During COVID teachers made extensive use of online arts programmes including virtual museum visits, which were very popular with children. Prior to the Arts Backpack programmes this year, one school had run field trips to Edinburgh to visit a museum-this was well-received by children, but many felt that they did not get as much time as they would have liked. Within some schools, there are primary teachers who provide tuition in music, specifically musical instruments, but this is not consistent. Overall, when it came to performing arts, the feeling from teachers was that they were either very confident or had no experience whatsoever.

The children provided some insight into activities they had enjoyed previously. More than half of children said they liked visual arts:

"I really like drawing because if I ever want to be myself I can draw by myself which can help me calm down."

"I really like drawing people and 1900's outfits because I really like the past."

"I like painting because I can paint in any colour."

One child said they liked acting:

"I like acting because it is really fun and you can do things that are really funny like comedy."

As will be discussed in later sections, many children were intimidated by the prospect of performing in front of others.

Other children gave indicators of their hobbies:

"I like football and rounders because I am outdoors."

"I like to make wooden models."

These hobbies might not necessarily constitute arts, but can also provide insight into what pupils might like in the future, and how arts activities could be adapted or contextualised. For example, sculpture could be “sold” to children who like making models. Performing theatre outdoors might be appealing to children who like sports. Even incorporating sports into the arts might be appealing to some groups of children.

## Filmmaking

The Filmmaking activity was a highly successful programme which saw a professional filmmaker come into the school and lead an activity where children made a short film about dinosaurs. This activity was well-received by teachers who were enthusiastic about the use of professional camera equipment:

“[Filmmaking] was really beneficial to the children. Using real life camera equipment hooked them in and made them feel mature. I also think it gives the arts a real-life context and the belief that they could have a career in that area too.”

Teachers also advised that the activity helped children to develop their vocabulary and that they used technical terms in class discussions on a regular basis. The filmmaking activity also helped children to develop social skills such as turn taking, delegating and listening skills. Even children who normally did not engage well with normal classes were highly attentive in the filmmaking session.

Two thirds of children said that they would like to do filmmaking again They also had plenty of positive feedback about filmmaking:

“Filmmaking was fun because we got to use professional equipment.”

“It was cool to hold the cameras, which were really heavy.”

There were few criticisms of the filmmaking activity. Teachers said that it might have been better to divide classes into smaller groups, as in some cases children had to wait a long time before getting to handle equipment. Both teacher and children thought that they might have enjoyed filmmaking more if it had been done over several days, rather than in just one day. Children were quite keen on filming people, and a few older children were less keen on dinosaurs. However, overall, the filmmaking activity was highly successful.

## Bookbinding

Bookbinding was also well-received by teachers and pupils alike. Teachers were very positive about its impact on more traditional academic skills such as reading and writing, with one teacher saying:

“...it was great to see the pupils have more freedom than I might give them in the majority of writing lessons.”

Some children were more interested in the visual aspects of bookbinding, which meant that the activity was inclusive for children who may not have been confident in writing:

“Some children just created little doodle books, which was fine because they were engaged in what they were doing.”

Children also offered positive feedback on the Bookbinding programme.

"We got to be free and do anything and make a book about anything we wanted."

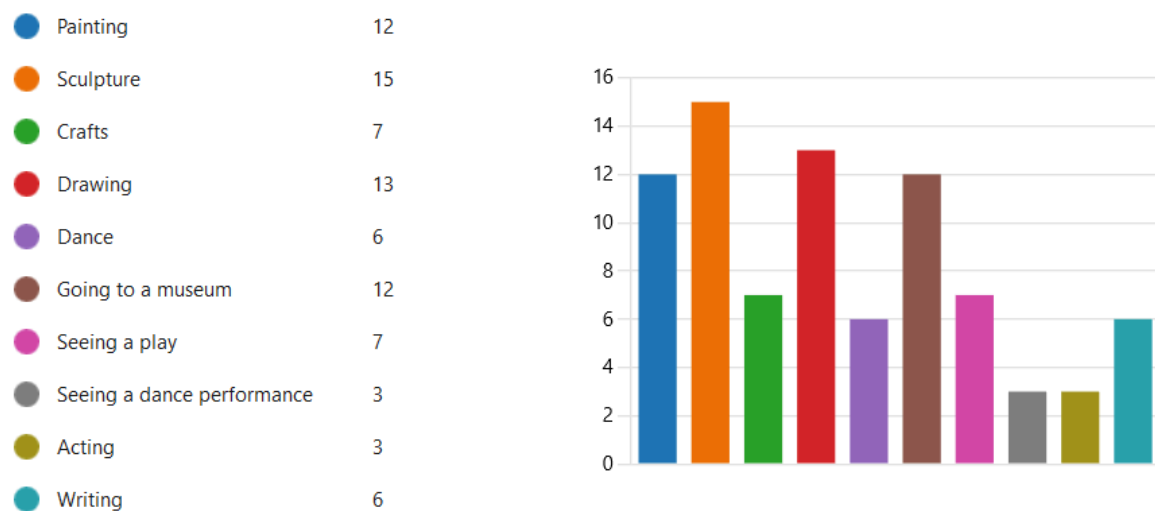
"We got to make our stories realistic or fake, it was so cool that we got to make lots of different books about anything we wanted."

Nearly 80% of pupils said that they would like to do Bookbinding again. Teachers and pupils alike said that the only real problem with Bookbinding was that they did not get enough time with it, and that they would have liked to do the activity over several days. Teachers said that with more time, they would have encouraged children to engage more with writing a story than with pictures, but otherwise the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

## What's next?

Pupils were asked to provide information on what activities they might like to do next.

As we can see from the chart below, visual arts were very popular, with painting, drawing, sculpture, crafts and going to a museum being the most popular choices. There were also a lot of votes for seeing a play and creative writing.



Pupils gave many reasons why they thought they would like these activities:

"We've rarely been to museums."

"I've never done sculpture before but it sounds fun."

"Painting is relaxing and fun. "

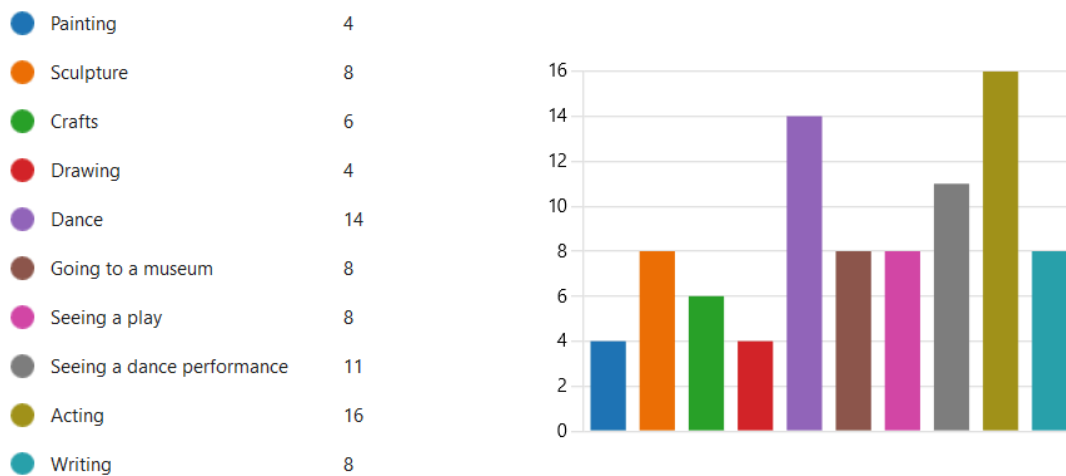
"Writing is calm and peaceful."

"With drawing you can use your imagination."

Quite a common theme in children's feedback is that they think that arts activities make them feel relaxed and calm. The therapeutic aspect of the arts is something that future iterations of the Arts Backpack should consider in designing programmes.

Children were asked about what activities they might not like, and given opportunities to discuss more about what could improve activities they felt they would not like.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the performing arts were unpopular with children:



Nearly all respondents said that they did not like the idea of performing in front of people. This was universal across all genders and all age groups. However, there is hope for engaging children in these areas. A few children said that they already liked dance and acting. When the survey was presented back to a primary 4 class, children were asked if the fact that older children were afraid of speaking in front of people made them feel less intimidated. Most raised their hands in agreement, and seemed to respond well to the idea that everyone feels the same way. Arts Backpack activities in the performing arts should emphasise to children that many people are nervous about performing in front of others. Additionally, there might be creative ways around encouraging children who are reluctant in these areas. Children who are confident in performing should be encouraged to develop their leadership skills in this area to help others.

## Lasting Impact

Teachers gave deeper insights into how they saw the Arts Backpack developing over time, and how they thought it had impacted their daily life. Teachers said that they had incorporated arts activities into their lesson plans, and that children spoke well of Arts Backpack activities long after the events had taken place.

One teacher spoke of the impact that Arts Backpack had on them and their pupils:

“I think it's that teachers are more confident, teaching the expressive arts and using it in lessons. I think it's just made a lot more children enjoy them and given them experiences, something that they wouldn't have had before and I think meeting people that give it a real life context, people that use these skills in their everyday life.. it gives them some inspiration, and they think, ‘ if they can do it, I can do it.’”

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Arts Backpack has clearly had a positive impact on teachers and children in Fife. The activities thus far have encouraged engagement across the curriculum. Without the Arts Backpack programme, children's access to the arts in Fife would have remained limited. Working with specialists has encouraged children to develop their social and soft skills, and to gain access to careers they might not have otherwise considered.

### **The following recommendations may be made:**

Overall, the Arts Backpack should be continued and expanded in Fife and throughout Scotland

Choosing activities was well-received. However, this does mean that children miss out on activities that they might enjoy. Arts Backpack should consider how less-popular activities in the performing arts might be sold to children in teachers in the form of improving mental health, outdoor learning and physical activity.

Consider how the Arts Backpack can be aligned to other parts of the school curriculum, including less obvious choices such as sport. Consult teachers and other educational professionals.

Consider how children who enjoy less popular options such as dance and theatre might be encouraged to exhibit leadership.

Where possible, Arts Backpack activities in schools should be expanded to take place over longer time periods so that children can get more from their experiences, and teachers can align activities with teaching.