The Arts Backpack UK

Leicester Pilot Evaluation

written by Jo Stockdale, Well Within Reach

Executive Summary

by Mimi Doulton, Development Officer at Action for Children's Arts

The Arts Backpack Leicester pilot ran in partnership with Attenborough Arts Centre from September 2022 to March 2023. We are grateful to The Mighty Creatives, the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, the Gigglemug Charitable Trust, and everyone who donated to our Aviva Community Fund crowdfunder for their invaluable financial support of this project, particularly The Mighty Creatives who have also provided creative advice and support throughout.

This was our third pilot of the Arts Backpack UK – our first pilot in England – and thanks to the ambition and hard work of Marianne Scahill-Pape and her team at Attenborough Arts Centre, we were able to scale up the project to an unprecedented level, delivering to over 900 children: a 350% increase on previous pilots. Thank you to all the organisations who made this possible through in-kind support, not least Attenborough Arts Centre.

This was our first child-led and wellbeing focussed evaluation, facilitated by Jo Stockdale of Well Within Reach. Thank you to Jo for creating beautiful resources that pilot participants could engage with, regardless of their age or any language barriers they may face. Although there have been certain challenges in analysing data generated by infant and primary school children, we hope that readers will find the voice of the child present throughout this report of interest.

Perhaps what we are most proud of can be found in the final pages of this report: to go from the majority of children never having visited an art gallery to over 900 children having, enjoying and engaging with this experience is at the core of why we started the Arts Backpack UK. We are delighted that all three schools have expressed their commitment to further support their pupils' engagement in the arts, to resume or develop relationships with ArtsMark and Arts Award, and to keep working with Attenborough Arts Centre. The Arts Backpack UK is about building strong creative communities, where schools and arts organisations work alongside each other to give children access to the best of the arts and culture, and that is what has happened here in Leicester.

Introduction

This report aims to evaluate the Leicester-based phase of the Arts Backpack UK: a pilot project run by Action for Children's Arts (ACA, a national organisation campaigning for children's arts) in partnership with Attenborough Arts Centre (AAC, an arts centre attached to the University of Leicester). The pilot ran in three Leicester schools from autumn '22 - spring '23:

- Catherine Infants
- Uplands Infants
- Bridge Juniors

In total, ten individual artists – including visual artists, performers and musicians – worked with a total of 926 children to deliver a programme of exhibition, participatory arts, theatre and music performances.

The following activities were delivered:

- Two in-school performances from Leicester International Music Festival (LIMF, a classical music festival)
- One in-school performance of Daryl Beeton's dance performance, and one school visit to see it at AAC
- Visits to the Lettie McHugh 'Anchorage' and Mohammed Barangi 'Playing in Wonderland' exhibitions at AAC
- Calligraphy workshops merging Persian and Roman script with Shazia Osman
- Workshops with the local music hub
- In-school art workshops
- In-school workshops with the B-Team

In addition to this, all pupils from Catherine Infants School have completed a Discover Arts Award (Arts Award Discover), two teachers have trained as Arts Award advisors, and all teachers have been offered Mental Health training via Place2Be.

Context and Rationale

The Arts Backpack UK aims to offer primary-school aged children access to five quality cultural experiences a year. Following a 2018 Feasibility Study, ACA has been piloting the project in different UK regions since 2020. This is the third pilot of four.

The rationale for the Arts Backpack UK to run in Leicester was to reach children who typically face barriers that prevent or reduce their opportunities to access and engage with the arts and cultural experiences. Leicester is a culturally diverse city and the participating schools were prioritised due to their inner-city locations in catchment areas of high socio-economic deprivation.

According to the latest Ofsted data, 12% of children at Uplands Infants are entitled to free school meals, 15% at Catherine Infants, and 17% at Bridge Juniors. For 94% of participants, English is spoken as a second or additional language, and it was considered that this would make their families less likely to take them to creative and cultural events and/or to access the city's plentiful venues. School was therefore thought to be the most effective route in enabling these children to access Leicester's rich cultural offer.

The aims of the Arts Backpack UK also align with the University of Leicester's *'Widening Participation'* priorities. These are especially significant in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, which stopped or dramatically reduced the number of schools taking children on visits and trips – experiences that can broaden their horizons accordingly.

Outcomes

The aims of the Leicester pilot were based on outcomes for both children and teaching staff. The primary outcomes for children were to:

- Increase their creative skills and interests;
- Strengthen and develop attitudes towards the arts and creativity, and what it could offer them;
- Improve their emotional wellbeing.

The outcomes for teachers were focused on creative skills; increasing their confidence in being creative, and their teaching of creative skills.

Methodology

The majority of the evaluation data collected was through self-evaluation activities designed for children around the project's specific outcomes.

Due to the large number of participants who either didn't speak very fluent English, or spoke English as an additional language, the self-evaluation tools were mainly 'worksheet' style tools created around visual metaphors, which enabled children to

creatively – and figuratively more than literally – indicate responses to various questions and prompts relating to particular outcomes in an engaging and accessible way. These tools were designed to enable participants to 'baseline' their creative skills and interests, their attitudes towards what the arts and creativity could offer them, and aspects of wellbeing.

The tools were designed to then either track their progress over the duration of their involvement, or to record an 'end point', thus allowing us and them to track the 'distance travelled'.

My Creativity Pizza

A pizza was used as a metaphor to record children's creative skills and interests. A quartered pizza template allowed children to create a slice of pizza over up to four sessions, by adding different 'toppings', which were each assigned to a particular creative skill or interest.

This tool was designed to show not only how participants' skills and interests developed sessionally, but to understand the relationship between particular activities and the development of particular skills and interests over the duration of the project. It was also designed to indicate wider patterns; i.e. which skills and interests developed consistently, which did not, whether some children developed skills and interests in response to a particular activity, while others did not.

Attitudes To Creativity Ladders

This tool incorporated a set of three ladders, respectively measuring changes in attitudes towards their confidence in arts and creativity; their interest in attending creative and cultural events; and the role of creativity in their wellbeing. Participants were asked to place themselves on the appropriate rung on the ladder at the beginning and end of the project, with the option of adding a speech bubble to explain this decision.

How Full Is My Cup?

This tool was designed to record changes across six different wellbeing competencies, through the metaphor of 'filling' up a range of receptacles, like glasses and cups. This simple idea enabled children to indicate the extent to which a particular wellbeing competency had been experienced, according to a particular activity or session, allowing us to track changes over time, including the impact of particular activities or even artists.

'Orientation Tools and Activities'

Recognising that within the context of the project, children may not be familiar with, or confident in, answering questions about the six wellbeing competencies, six 'Orientation Tools' were created alongside the self-evaluation tools. These were designed to help children develop an understanding of the competencies before being asked to answer questions about them in relation to the project, and thus respond more accurately and reliably to the self-assessment activities.

For example, the orientation activities helped them to explore their role as decision-makers in their own lives (Personal Agency) to identify their important people and places (Sense of Belonging) and to recognise the skills they found easy and more difficult (Resilience). Personal Agency, Sense of Belonging and Resilience are three of the Wellbeing Competencies that we defined for this project.

Collectively, the evaluation tools and orientation activities were all adaptable. They were accompanied by a range of more movement-based and practical ideas to use as alternatives to the visual 'worksheet' activities. These activities were designed to 'translate' the same outcomes as per the worksheet exercises; being recorded on a designated sheet that was included in the evaluation framework; ensuring that non-paper-based responses could still be captured and 'coded' to the outcomes.

'The Cup of Creativity'

This is a creative self-assessment activity designed for teachers. Similar to the children's activities, the Cup of Creativity enabled teachers to baseline their confidence in creative teaching at the beginning and re-assess at the end, with the option to self-assess the 'fullness' of the cup sessionally according to the particular creative activity explored through that session.

Challenges

Overall, the evaluation process has provided learning for the whole programme, as well as some interesting data and positive evidence around the project outcomes. With Action for Children's Arts' longer-term plans to develop the work in mind, much

can be learned from the Leicester pilot, most of which arises from the challenges experienced along the way. These are summarised below.

Defining the Outcomes

With regard to *'improving wellbeing'* the initial challenge was that a specific theory or definition of 'wellbeing' was not in place, meaning outcomes were at risk of being interpreted and measured subjectively by participants, teachers, artists, and any other observers. Thus, the first stage of the evaluation was to develop a framework of wellbeing, by breaking it down into six component parts; *Sense of Self, Emotional Awareness, Resilience, Curiosity, Sense of Belonging and Sense of Personal Agency*.

Not only did this mean that all partners were subscribing to the same definition of wellbeing, but that it could be measured more manageably in these components or characteristics, rather than the programme trying to [unrealistically] strengthen it in its entirety, or approaching it generically.

Time and Planning

The biggest challenge overall has been the tight turnaround time between the project funding being confirmed and the project starting. This left insufficient time to build the programme activity specifically around the outcomes; in particular, the six components of wellbeing.

Due to the short timescale of the project, we decided to base the evaluation primarily on self-assessment, which supports ACA's aim to centre the voice of the child in their work. As the evaluators did not know the children well, it would have been difficult for evaluator-observers to reliably observe changes in wellbeing or attitudes solely by observing children's interactions and behaviours.

Although we designed the 'orientation activities' to support children's self-assessment skills, for most settings there was not sufficient time to properly use these activities before the project, or to baseline the outcomes prior to the project beginning. Instead, all orientation and baselining activity that was used took place within the creative sessions themselves. The result was that the orientation activities were only used by one setting, and as they were not able to complete the subsequent '*How Full Is My Cup?*' evaluation tool it was difficult to observe true impact from this exercise. There was also insufficient time and capacity for any setting to complete the Creativity Pizza tool.

Despite this, all of the orientation activities and evaluation tools, whether used in the pilot or not, should prove useful in any future work that ascribes to the same theory and characteristics of wellbeing. Furthermore, the data we did collect has still provided us with rich, positive and interesting data. This is analysed later in the report.

Lack of Observation Data

With more time and resources it would have been useful to develop a framework for teachers to record observations of the children in addition to their self-assessment activities. Not only would this have allowed for more comprehensive evaluation, but the learnings from comparing self-assessment outcomes and observation data would have been interesting.

Volume of Data

Due to the higher than anticipated number of participants, it was perhaps an inevitable challenge of the process that a huge quantity of evaluation data was generated. Although the sensible step was taken to analyse a sample of this data for this report, much of the data remains unanalysed, and there may be more we can learn from it with further analysis.

Moving forward, it would be worth considering how to track outcomes progressively; i.e. could this be contained within the setting? Are there other mechanisms available to make collecting and collating data more efficient? There is also a question around how long data-collection continues – how much is generated, collated and analysed – once the evidence of its worth has been proven. There is always more to learn, and we should always be monitoring impact and progress, but equally, what – and how much – data is really needed going forward, and what will it be used for?

Jo Stockdale, Well Within Reach 2023
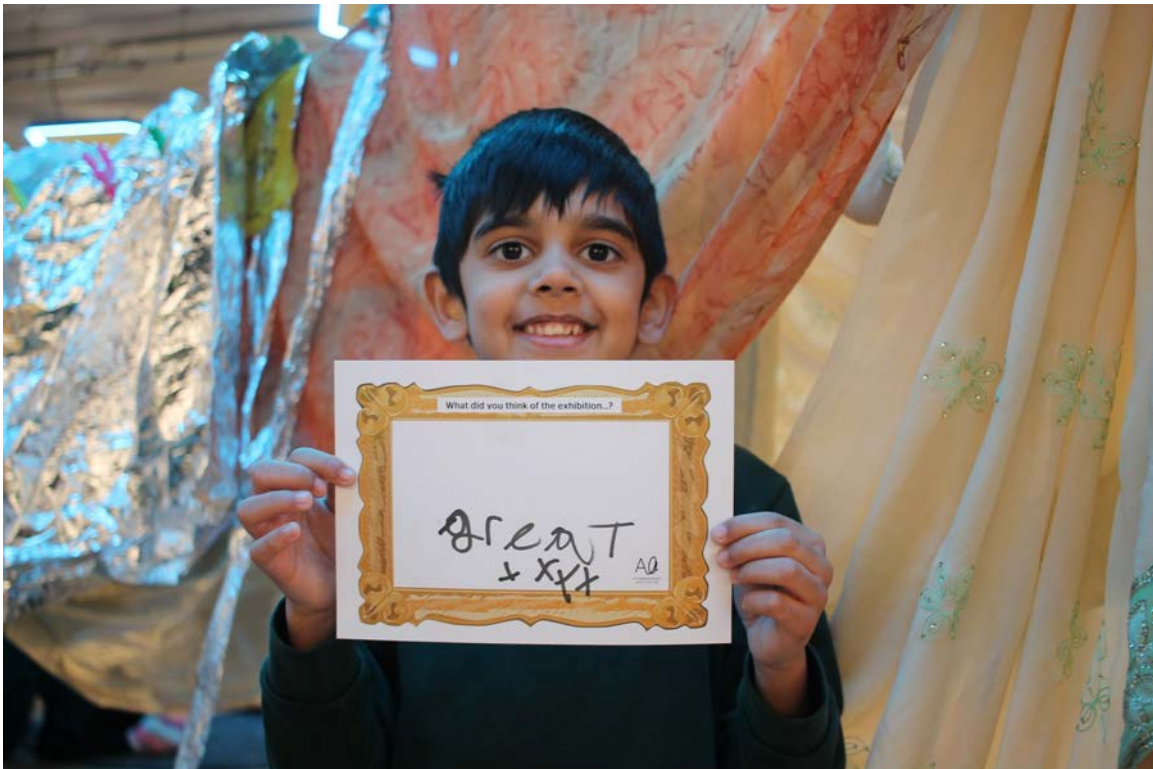
Analysis of Data

This section of the report collates some of the key findings and statistics generated by analysing samples of the creative evaluation tools and related 'orientation activities.'

'Creative Attitudes Ladders'

This tool measured the start and end point of three different attitudes to creativity, and the extent to which children agreed with the statements applied to them. The score options ranged from 0-7, and the attitudes measured were:

1. Their confidence in their own creativity
2. Their enjoyment of creative events
3. Whether creativity was good for their wellbeing

Because the 'Creative Attitudes Ladders' was used most extensively, two samples have been analysed to allow for a comparison between two settings, as well as that of the individuals within a group.

Summary of Sample One: *Class A (year 5)*
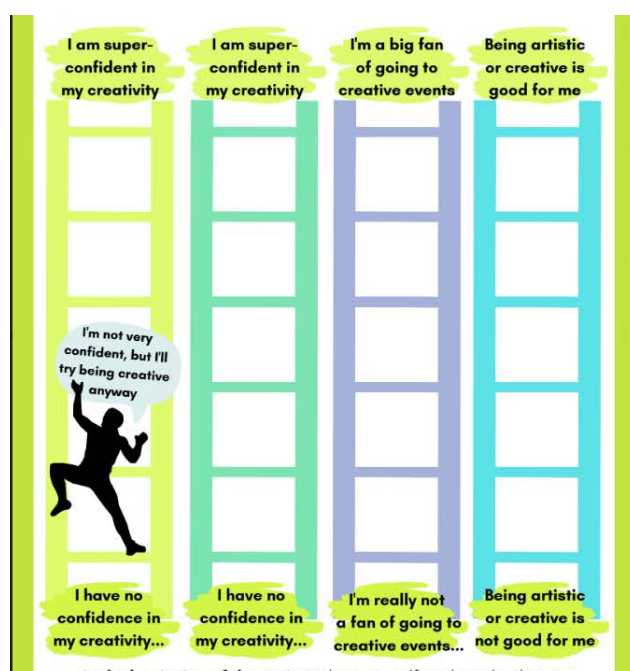
In this class, starting scores were relatively high – mainly 5 and 6 out of 7. A consistent improvement in attitudes was observed across all areas, and of the 29 children who recorded both a start and end score, none recorded a decline in their attitudes towards creativity.

Children who began with higher baseline scores didn't record as significant improvements as those whose baseline scores were lower. 16 of the 19 children who baselined at 6 for '*Confidence in Creativity*', remained at 6 at the end of the exercise, whereas the 3 children who baselined 2 reached an end score of 6. The greatest increase in score was from 0 to 6 in response to the '*Creativity is good for my wellbeing'* attitude.

Overall, the increases were consistent across all three attitudes: confidence in their creativity increased by an average of 11%, enjoyment of creative events by 12% and creativity being good for wellbeing by 11.5%.

Summary of Sample Two: *Class B (infant school)*

In this setting, starting scores were extremely low: of the 29 children completing the evaluation, all scored 0 out of 7 on the ladders at first, apart from a single 2 and 4 – an average of 0.2%. A consistent improvement was recorded across all three attitudes, with no children recording a decline and only one child maintaining a score of 0. The children who scored 2 and 4 increased to 4 and 6 respectively.

The lowest baseline score overall was in relation to '*Enjoyment of Creative Events*' – only one child scored 2, with the other 28 children scoring 0, an average score of just 0.07%.

In three instances, baseline scores of 0 increased to 7 by the end of the project, in response to '*Confidence in my Creativity*' and '*Creativity is good for my wellbeing*'. Overall, the increases were significant but consistent across all three attitudes: confidence in their creativity increased by an average of 93%, enjoyment of creative events by 99% (this was still marginally the lowest collective score), and creativity being good for wellbeing by 97%.

Comparison of Samples

Even though both samples indicate a clear and reassuring picture of 'improvement' clearly there is still enormous variation between them. In trying to account for these variations, it is worth considering the differences between these young people's experiences of creativity and culture prior to the pilot; their demographic profiles; and the existing creative offer in these schools prior to the pilot.

We can also consider the following questions:

- What was their understanding of 'creativity' to begin with?;
- Why did Class B feel that creative events had so little to offer them; is it because of a bad experience, or simply lack of experience?
- What were the qualities of the experiences they had that had such a transformational impact?
- Did participants' experiences influence and shape their perception of 'being well'?
- What aspects of the work; i.e. the art form, the artist, the visits, the novelty, the learning, the curiosity; made such a significant difference to their feelings of being well?

This is not an exhaustive list, but is designed to present a few aspects that we could or should aim to understand and position at the heart of developing any future programme, within and beyond Leicester.

Analysis of 'Orientation Activities'

Although the timeframe of the project did not allow for use of the wellbeing tool, one group of children did use the six related orientation activities. By running a control group in future pilots, we could better understand the extent to which the orientation activities impact children's capacity to understand and answer questions about the wellbeing competencies. Despite the lack of a control group, there are still outcomes and learning we can extrapolate from the data.

Analysis of Sample Three: *The Blob Tree (Emotional Awareness Orientation Activity)*

The Blob Tree (created by Pip Wilson and Ian Long) was offered as an 'Emotional Awareness' orientation activity to help children identify their own emotions and feelings, so they were better equipped to answer questions about that as part of their self-assessment on wellbeing.

Overall, there was a varied response, with 30 children identifying with between one and 13 of the 21 feelings expressed by the Blob characters, averaging at 4 per child. This does not mean that those who identified with a greater number of Blob people were more emotionally aware; on the contrary a child identifying with 13 feelings simultaneously may do so because they do not have the skills to articulate a narrower number.
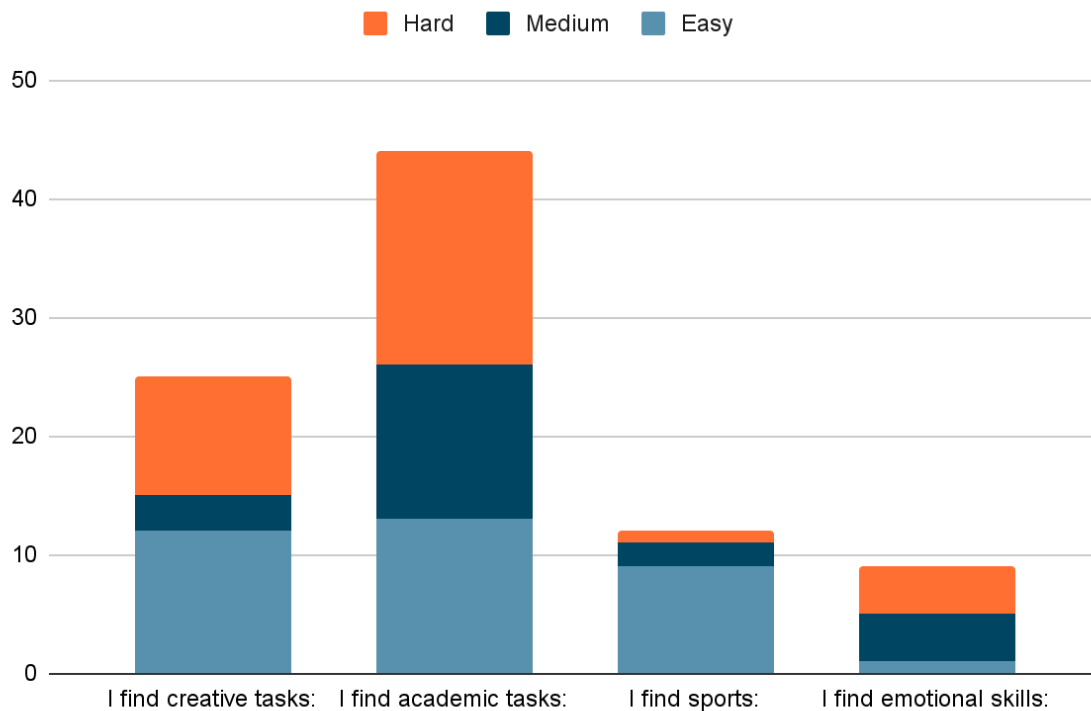
However, the engagement in the activity and the identification with the whole range of 21 Blob people suggests that it is a useful tool; that children understood the concept and could relate to the individuals and the relationships inherent in the image. Of all the comments that children included, friendship was the strongest theme, suggesting they identified particularly strongly with the friendship dynamics expressed in the Blob characters.

Analysis of Sample Four: *The 'I Can' Climbing Wall (Resilience Orientation Activity)*

A 'Resilience Orientation' activity was created to help children understand what resilience is through their own daily experiences. A summary of children's responses:

Resilience Orientation Activity

Legend: Hard, Medium, Easy

A stacked bar chart with four categories showing responses rated Hard (orange), Medium (dark blue), and Easy (light blue):
- I find creative tasks: Easy ~12, Medium ~3, Hard ~10 (total ~25)
- I find academic tasks: Easy ~13, Medium ~13, Hard ~18 (total ~44)
- I find sports: Easy ~9, Medium ~2, Hard ~1 (total ~12)
- I find emotional skills: Easy ~1, Medium ~4, Hard ~4 (total ~9)

This data suggests that children within this sample find sports easiest, creativity somewhere in the middle, and academic work the most difficult; which in the context of a school environment is perhaps unsurprising. The low number of responses regarding emotional skills, suggest that children in this sample relate to these as 'skills' less strongly than they do with sports, creativity or academic work. It could also indicate a deficit in this area, with only one child identifying emotional skills as one of their strengths.

Given that one of the main outcomes of Arts Backpack is '*increased wellbeing'*, there is perhaps an argument to position the development of emotional skills (i.e. emotional awareness and resilience) more centrally in future programmes, so that children may learn to identify with and value them as strongly as they do other skills.

Analysis of Sample Five: *The 'I Wonder' Brain (Curiosity Orientation Activity)*

The 'Curiosity Orientation' activity was created to help children explore their own wonderings, curiosity and thought processes so they were better equipped to

answer their own questions about the world as part of their wellbeing self-assessment.

Sport was the greatest interest children expressed, mainly who would win the World Cup, perhaps an inevitable curiosity at the time of this pilot. Beyond that, children's biggest curiosity was about the unknown: space, the bottom of the ocean, what animals know. Their futures came next, although no great anxieties were expressed through this activity. Some children wondered what they would become, or what kind of adult they would turn into. There were a few who expressed interests in other people; i.e. what other people think and feel, and death and dying was of equal interest. Lastly, a small number of children expressed an interest in fantasy, imaginary worlds, and had questions about what is and is not real.

Although rather vague, what this can tell us is that the children who answered these questions think about big (and potentially uncomfortable) topics, which they may not get to express as part of their school life. Curiosity and questioning have a huge part to play in effective learning. Albeit through an open-ended, free-thinking questioning approach – rather than predetermined questions or a focus on 'giving the right answer' – the curiosity expressed by these children does indicate that the Arts Backpack successfully engaged them in learning.

Analysis of Sample Six: *The 'I Choose' Wall (Personal Agency Orientation Activity)*

The overall analysis shows that children's strongest sense of agency is in relation to what they do; activities and skills. This is probably partly attributable to how easy most children find it to identify and articulate activities like 'Xbox' and 'football'.

Interestingly, children felt quite a strong sense of agency over their relationships; '*kindness*' was cited as being a popular characteristic. This may represent the children's community, the school culture or a particular scheme of work, for example.

Children expressed some, but overall, noticeably *less*, agency over their emotions or their behaviours. This is consistent with the indicators across other tools, and may

indicate that emotional and subsequent behavioural skills are considered less important in comparison to academic skills, sports and personal interests.

Thus, future Arts Backpack development could potentially focus more on emotions and behaviour (i.e.; '*emotional wellbeing*' and '*personal agency*'), to help children identify a stronger sense of personal agency over their emotional experiences.

Analysis of Sample Seven: *Teachers' Cup of Creativity* (Teacher Self-Evaluation)

The Cup of Creativity analysis covers six different creative experiences: gallery visits, installation art, calligraphy, talking about the exhibition, fabric hanging and poetry; 19 teachers completed the Cup of Creativity activity for gallery visits and installation arts, the only experiences to provide a sample of more than three teachers.

Overall, there was a 40% increase in teacher's confidence in leading gallery visits, and a 46% increase in talking about installation art.

Although small sample sizes (1-3 teachers) make the data not very robust, the data across the other four artforms is consistent with that of gallery visits and installation art; there was a 47% increase in confidence in calligraphy, 75% in 'talking about the exhibition', 15% in fabric hanging and 25% in poetry.

This data is inevitably very encouraging, because there is a strong pattern of growth across all artforms. Teacher's confidence is key to sustaining the creative practice of pupil participants', empowering them to continue providing opportunities to strengthen and expand upon the positive outcomes for children.

It is therefore recommended that teacher CPD and/or skills development is central to the development of future programming.

Unexpected and Overarching Outcomes

Beyond the data generated by analysing children's responses to the evaluation tools, the overall picture indicates significant progress has been made by the Arts Backpack Leicester, in terms of achieving its overarching aims.

The vast majority of children reported at the beginning of the programme that they had never been to an art gallery; most didn't even know what an artist was, and all three schools have expressed their interest, not only in continuing their relationships with Attenborough Arts Centre, but in embedding the arts into school life for their pupils. All three schools now plan to continue supporting their children's engagement in the arts, by applying, or reapplying, for their ArtsMark status, and by introducing, or increasing engagement with Trinity College's Arts Award.

Findings and Recommendations

The recommendations of this report can be summarised as follows:

The Arts Backpack UK significantly increases confidence in creativity for children and teachers, their enjoyment of creative events, and reinforces the belief that creativity is good for wellbeing.

The Arts Backpack UK engages child participants in learning through curiosity and open-ended questioning.

The Arts Backpack UK successfully builds relationships between schools and arts organisations, with a lasting legacy beyond the pilot phase.

Future Arts Backpack iterations could place greater emphasis on the development of emotional skills and personal agency over emotional experiences, so that children learn to identify with and value these as strongly as they do other skills.

It is recommended that when using these self-evaluation resources in future, more time is dedicated to the baseline activities, so that they can be used as an effective control for measuring changes in participants' attitudes.

Future child-led evaluation should consider how to track outcomes for pupils' more efficiently, and ask what quantity of data is necessary to provide a clear sample.

It is recommended that teacher CPD and/or skills development is central to the development of future programming.