

# A Sense of Self: Engaging Primary School Children in Kent through Arts and Culture



## The People

Shepway Teaching Schools Alliance

- Castle Hill Primary
- Cheriton Primary
- Greatstone Primary
- Hawkinge Primary
- Palmarsh Primary
- Sandgate Primary
- Seabrook Church of England Primary

Canterbury Christ Church University

## The Project

### Context

Art and Design in schools is in a challenging position, with far greater emphasis placed on achievements in English and Maths. The implications of this stretch across the curriculum, meaning that in the last five years, less and less time is spent on Art and Design.

Teachers contribute this directly to the increased pressure on performance in Key Stage 2 tests (NSEAD, 2016). This is why opportunities for increased cultural education are vital for enabling our children to not only have access to the Arts, but also to engage them in a cultural dialogue that influences their future successes. Eisner (2002)



**Art is being creative. It can be anything and you use your imagination to do it. Art is about lots of different ways to do or say things.**

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(Reception child from a project school)

suggests that through the process of exploration and representation of something visual, children are able to engage in deep reflection and critical consideration of their subject, which can thus influence all areas of academic achievement.

In Kent, the *Sense of Self* project was developed following the success of Shepway Teaching School Alliance's *A Sense of Place* project (2014-15), which nurtured primary schools to develop their arts provision through connecting with art and artists in their locality. Find out more at: [asenseofplace.education](http://asenseofplace.education)

The focus of *A Sense of Self* was developed by teachers in the initial stage of the project, who ensured that it catered to both the age group and the nature of working with Early Years children. Through the course of the project, all schools showed an increased impact on their arts provision.

Like many Victorian coastal towns, Folkestone finds itself with issues relating to regeneration and employability, although it is fortunate to have a rich art landscape, thanks largely to the Creative Foundation. Folkestone has an impressive art scene; with a nationally prominent art festival – The Folkestone Triennial, which over its last three years has hosted works of art from an array of artists from across the world. As a result of this, there is a large amount of public art embedded within the landscape of the town. This includes 27 permanent commissioned pieces, which enable art to become a part of everyday life in the town, and give children, parents and the wider

community the opportunity to engage in arts and culture on their doorstep.

### Putting it into practice

The seven Primary schools taking part each nominated a 'key teacher' to lead, either their Arts Coordinator, or their Foundation Stage teacher. The teachers then came together in the initial stages to discuss and shape the project. Michelle Charlton-Taylor, Programme Coordinator for Shepway Teaching Schools facilitated the process.

It became apparent early on that the schools' ownership of the project would be paramount. It was recognised by all that it was not to be a simple repeat of [the programme that had inspired it](#). Instead, it focused on the specific needs of the schools and children involved. All teachers who took part were very positive about the experience. The projects were teacher-led, with individual schools responding differently, dependent on their cohort, curriculum and location. The schools felt it was vital that the children be able to explore, and schools were allowed the freedom to interpret the project's brief, whilst also enabling the children's personalised responses.

### Successes:

- The seven project schools engaged in Arts Award, and all became Arts Award Centres in the process. A total of 373 children achieved an Arts Award.
- Five of the project schools engaged with and started on their Artsmark journey, in order to demonstrate their commitment to providing an arts-rich curriculum.
- There was evidence of all schools evaluating and enhancing their arts provision over the course of the project.
- Children showed greater understanding of

**The project motivated and encouraged the school to continue with their Arts Award offer, alongside developing the profile of the Arts within their curriculum.**

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the Arts and displayed increased enjoyment and confidence in the subject. Their enhanced confidence and abilities subsequently impacted on their achievement across the wider curriculum.

- Schools involved offered a rich and diverse curriculum, which was highlighted positively during the Ofsted inspection process in two project schools.
- Arts Award training enabled teachers to explore their own knowledge and understand of the term 'Arts', as well as encouraging them to consider their value in the curriculum.
- Artsmark professional development sessions allowed the schools' Senior Leaders and project teachers time to consider their school's current Arts curriculum, whilst also considering how the Arts in the future might best support their school's development, as well their children's learning.

### Opportunities

- Children were encouraged to engage in arts and culture in a personal way, to ensure freedom of expression and exploration.
- Schools were given the support needed to develop and explore a stronger arts curriculum that reflected their own local community.
- Children were encouraged to access 'culture-rich' opportunities, such as those obtained through Arts Award and Artsmark.

**Before the project, many children found it difficult to name any artists, despite this being a requirement within elements of the National Curriculum**



- Schools and teachers engaged in funded professional development opportunities that enabled reflection on the role of the Arts in the classroom.
- Children had the opportunity to personally and directly share with their community in their enjoyment and engagement with the Arts.

## Engagement

At **Seabrook Primary School**, the project focused on Reception and Years 1 and 2. The classes considered 'What is art?' and 'What is an artist?', with an underlying focus on developing a child's sense of self through a range of artforms.

The children discussed the similarities and differences and explored what they thought made each medium 'art'. Interested answers prompted a discussion about professional artists and those who enjoy art as a hobby, and whether both could be considered as 'artists'. Children visited local artist Shane Record, who showed them his studio gallery and shared his personal motivations for painting. The pupils also explored the collage work of Henri Matisse, as well as nature print artist, Laura Bethmann.

The children took part in collage and nature printing workshops. They played with colour, texture and shape, without the constraints of having to create a finished product. The children then went on to consider 'self', firstly through objects that held significant meaning for them and then through their relationships to objects, their homes, and also their perceived image of themselves. An identity art installation was created outside the school, titled *Window*. Behind each pane was a photo of each child's significant items, their own quote, and a portrait of themselves. The children shared this work with other children and parents.

**Sandgate Primary School** were the only school to have also been involved in the *Sense of Place* the previous year. The school had made a conscious commitment to take part in *A Sense of Self*. Although no funding would facilitate them to participate, they felt it was too beneficial for their children's progression to not be involved.

Sandgate embarked on the Explore Art Award process, which began in the October. As part of this, all children were given sketchbooks to capture their thoughts throughout the journey. This arts engagement supported the expression and communication of personal feelings and ideas (as suggested by Hickman, 2005):

"Prior to the project, 'Child A' had been a challenging pupil, with emotional outburst that regularly led him to exit the classroom, impacting on his learning. The more he shared [his sketchbook work], the more confident he became, regularly bringing in artwork from home. It led to a significant decrease in his emotional outbursts."

## Impact of the project

### 1. Significant increase in children's understanding of the Arts:

At the start of the project, children were asked by their teachers what their understanding was of the term 'Arts'. Many of the children initially felt it only related to painting and drawing. Children's answers also suggested that art was something reserved for a specialist:

*"It's a really hard thing."*

*"It can easily break."*

*"You choose a person and draw them."*

*"It's made out of wood."*

*"My mummy does art. She's really good at it –"*



*she doesn't go out of the lines."*

All schools stated an increase in the children's understanding of different artforms. The graph below (Figure 1) shows one particular school that measured a considerable increase in awareness.

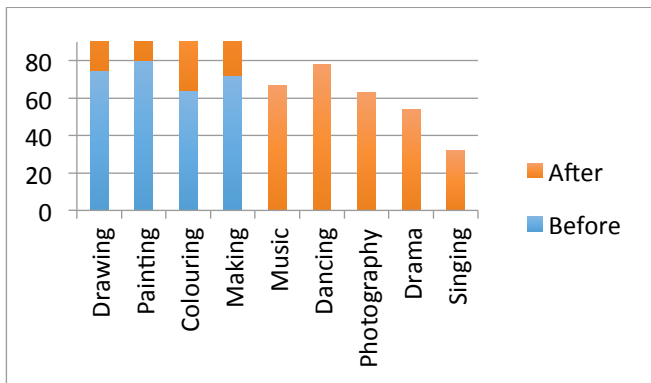


Figure 1.

X = Children's responses to 'What is art?'

Y = Number of children

The process of Discover Arts Award allowed children's learning about different artforms. It ensured that teachers and children discussed and explored different types of 'art' that they may not have previously had the opportunity to learn about.

## 2. Children's knowledge and understanding of artists increased:

It became apparent that some children across the schools had very limited understanding of who or what an artist could be.

*"An artist is somebody who makes pictures and paints things."*

*"People buy their pictures."*

They found it particularly difficult to name any artists, despite this being a requirement within elements of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014). In one project school, when all pupils were asked

**At a parent's evening, one child's parents commented on his demeanour at home, noting how he seemed much calmer and happier.**

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**An artist is somebody who creates something – they could be a musician or dancer or painter. We can all be artists because we can all be creative.**

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(Reception child from a project school)

to name an artist, only half could identify any. Through their engagement with the project, children developed a broader understanding of the term 'artist'. When children at the same school were asked during the final stages of the project to name an artist, almost all of them could. Their view of what an artist is developed too:

*"Somebody who creates something – they could be a musician or dancer or painter. We can all be artists because we can all be creative."*

*"An artist is someone who makes pieces of art. Not everyone likes the art they make but they make it because THEY like it."*

## 3. Teachers' knowledge of artists within their locality developed:

This became apparent due to the increase of schools using and working with artist partners in their local area. Two of the schools experienced Ofsted inspections during the project – one of which reported:

*"You have designed a curriculum which makes good use of the local area and involves interesting activities, many visits and visitors to bring learning to life." (Ofsted, 2016)*

## 4. Development in children's confidence in the Arts

Once children realised that the Arts were not just about drawing, they felt more confident in their own abilities as 'artists', and in expressing their own opinions about art. This translated into the way children felt they could talk about artists, enabling an enhanced potential to access new artforms and potentially changing the way they will engage with Arts in the future. (Figure 2)

This increase in confidence was also observed in their language and ability to communicate with each other.

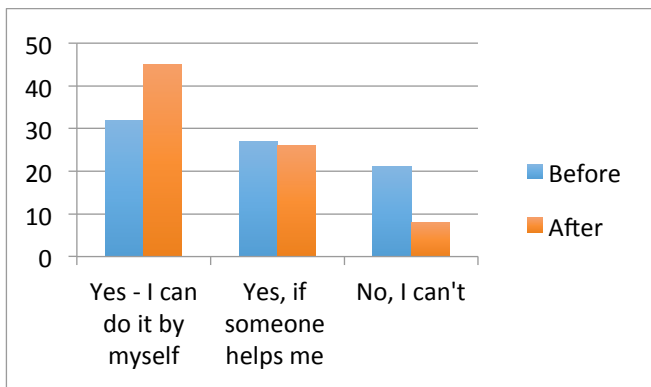


Figure 2. 'Can you talk about art you like and dislike?'

## 5. Children's skills and development within the Arts

As the project focused on working with Reception children, the creative arts goals in the Foundation Stage were considered as evidence of impact. Comparative data was used from children in the previous year who had not experienced the project, against data from those who had. The two different cohorts showed a significant increase in children's early learning goals, in relation to 'Exploring and Using Media', and 'Being Imaginative'.

## 6. Arts curriculum impacting on wider school development

- The project focused on Reception-age children, with each school engaging their pupils in achieving Arts Award Discover. All schools engaged with the Arts Award, and all became Arts Award Centres, enabling them to offer continued Arts Award support in a sustainable manner over time. All schools also committed to the Artsmark journey, attended the initial training and are currently in the process of submitting their Statement of Commitment. This will see the Arts firmly linked to school improvement plans, raising the profile of the Arts amongst teachers and governors alike. These Statements provide a positive legacy to the project over the coming two years.
- Two schools were inspected by Ofsted during the project. Both received positive results, with one moving from 'grade three' to 'grade two'. Significantly, Ofsted inspectors highlighted the Arts as a strength in both schools:

*"Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are significant strengths of this school...The diversity of the community is celebrated in daily life and through many activities."*

(Ofsted, 2016, on Cheriton Primary School)

*"One of the main factors that has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement in the inspiring and motivating curriculum. [It] is enriched with a wide range of additional activities, helping pupils to learn new skills and make a positive contribution to their personal, as well as their academic, development."*

(Ofsted, 2016, on Palmmarsh Primary School)

## Recommendations for Future Projects

- Consider the impact of the Arts within the participating schools, in terms of both attainment and curriculum – there is great potential for future schools to experience similar positive results.
- Reflect on your positive journey to date, and continue with Arts Award and the Artsmark journey.
- Continue collaborative school-based networks to engage in Arts practices that increase children's opportunities, and teacher's professional development.
- Consider the role of Arts in school development – as a crucial element in offering a broad and balanced curriculum, accessible for all.
- Build on the legacy of both *A Sense of Place* and *A Sense of Self* projects by

**The project gave the child the opportunity to explore dance, set design, drawing and cake decoration with a range of adults who were not always familiar to them – something they managed with marked and growing confidence.**

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sharing good practice with other schools  
wherever possible.

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## Credits

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