



# Dancing into *Wellbeing*

Evaluation of the Royal Ballet and Opera *Create & Dance*  
Programme in Bradford Primary Schools



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Report produced by Born in Bradford based on an evaluation commissioned by Royal Ballet and Opera

# Executive Summary

*“In a world where children face growing challenges to their mental health, physical wellbeing, and social development, programmes like Create and Dance show what’s possible when we embed creativity into the heart of education.”*

John Wright, Director, Bradford Institute for Health Research



## Background

Emerging research consistently highlights the positive influence of participatory arts, particularly dance, on physical and mental wellbeing. Dance uniquely combines physical activity benefits with emotional, cognitive, and social enrichment, fostering self-esteem, social connection, and emotional resilience.

The Royal Ballet and Opera’s Create & Dance programme is an innovative arts initiative designed to embed high-quality dance education within primary schools, aiming to support children’s physical, cognitive, and emotional development through movement, storytelling, and creative expression.

This evaluation, conducted by Born in Bradford, explores the programme’s impact across diverse school settings within Bradford, a city characterised by significant socioeconomic and cultural diversity.

## Method

A qualitative, multi-method approach was adopted involving nine Bradford primary schools. The evaluation methods included classroom observations, creative participatory focus groups with children, Ripple Effects Mapping with teachers, and semi-structured interviews with RBO partners. Data were analysed collectively using the pen portrait technique.

## Research Aims

The evaluation aimed to:

> **Examine the impact of Create & Dance on children’s wellbeing and identify broader impacts.**

> **Evaluate the implementation within Bradford primary schools, identifying factors influencing its effectiveness.**

## Key Findings Relating to Wellbeing

### Confidence and Joyful Participation

Observations and feedback consistently showed increased pupil confidence, engagement, and joy in participating in dance activities. Children moved from initial apprehension to enthusiastic involvement, boosting self-esteem.

### Social Connection and Collaboration

The programme successfully fostered an inclusive environment promoting teamwork, empathy, and social connectedness. Pupils actively engaged in creative collaboration, enhancing peer relationships and emotional intelligence.

### Embodied Expression

Create & Dance provided a unique outlet for creative, autonomous self-expression, allowing pupils to explore and communicate emotions and ideas through movement, enhancing their overall wellbeing.

### Enhanced Learning

The programme enriched children’s broader educational experience by integrating creative learning methods into the curriculum, resulting in increased engagement, enjoyment and learning.

## Wider Implementation Insights

Teachers, initially hesitant, benefited significantly from professional development opportunities provided by RBO, leading to increased confidence and competence in delivering dance-based curriculum activities.

The adaptive and inclusive approach of Create & Dance effectively addressed varying pupil needs and school contexts, particularly in schools with diverse ethnic profiles and higher deprivation levels.

## Conclusion

The Create & Dance programme demonstrated substantial positive impacts on children’s wellbeing, social skills, creative expression, and overall school engagement. Its flexible and inclusive nature makes it a valuable model for embedding arts education within primary schools, particularly in diverse and disadvantaged contexts. The findings should be used to advocate for integrating creative health programmes into national and local strategies for child wellbeing and education.

# Foreword

*“The evidence is compelling: dance doesn’t just improve wellbeing, it builds community, nurtures resilience, and inspires joy.”*

John Wright, Director, Bradford Institute for Health Research



This report celebrates something both joyful and profound: the transformative power of dance in children’s lives.

In *Dancing into Wellbeing*, we see how the Royal Ballet and Opera’s (RBO) Create & Dance programme, delivered in partnership with Born in Bradford, is far more than a creative arts intervention. It is a catalyst for confidence, connection, and creativity, especially for children who might not otherwise have access to high-quality cultural experiences.

What makes this programme truly special is its inclusivity. In schools across Bradford, one of the UK’s most diverse and dynamic cities, children of all backgrounds and abilities were empowered to move, imagine, and express themselves. Shyness gave way to pride, isolation gave way to collaboration, and routine school days were transformed by the joy of performance and storytelling.

The findings presented here are rooted in rich, participatory research that centres children’s voices and experiences. This isn’t just about learning dance steps, it’s about unlocking potential. Teachers, often initially unsure about leading dance, found new confidence and professional growth. Schools became vibrant spaces of creativity and kindness. And pupils discovered new ways to communicate, connect, and flourish.

In a world where children face growing challenges to their mental health, physical wellbeing, and social development, programmes like Create & Dance show what’s possible when we embed creativity into the heart of education. The evidence is compelling: dance doesn’t just improve wellbeing, it builds community, nurtures resilience, and inspires joy.

As we look ahead to Bradford’s year as UK City of Culture 2025, this evaluation lights the way. It shows how culture can be a powerful force for equity and empowerment, and how every child deserves the chance to dance into wellbeing.

**JOHN WRIGHT**  
Director, Bradford Institute for Health Research

Our sincere thanks go to the Born in Bradford team for producing this comprehensive analysis of the impact of participation in the Royal Ballet and Opera’s Create & Dance programme on the wellbeing of participants.

Given the national concern about the mental and physical wellbeing of children and the urgent need for interventions that make a difference, this report highlights the unique value of dance in encouraging embodied learning through technique and creativity.

While we intuitively judged that our programmes had a positive impact, it is deeply heartening to see such thorough research validate this. The Born in Bradford team have applied robust methodology and communicated their findings in a coherent way to produce a compelling case for dance in schools.

RBO believes that every child and young person should have a high quality arts education through their school career. The last decade has seen a squeeze on the arts in schools and evidence highlights the social and geographical disparities.

In response, RBO Schools works across the country offering programmes to build the creative confidence of teachers and inspire the creativity of pupils. In 2024-25 we engaged 1,440 schools, particularly in areas of socio economic disadvantage. Our evidence demonstrates the impact on learning, social and life skills and wellbeing. This Born in Bradford report goes deeper.

At a time of change in the school landscape, we need to re-double efforts to advocate for the value of the arts in schools and this report gives us the evidence to make a stronger case.

RBO has been working on a three year intervention to enrich Bradford’s year as UK City of Culture. This collaboration with the internationally renowned Born in Bradford team has demonstrated the value of rich partnership.

Particular thanks go to Professor John Wright and report authors: Marie Frazer, Jennifer Hall, Mariam Fargin, Megan Rogers, Charlotte Spriggs.

**SIR ALEX BEARD CBE**  
Chief Executive, Royal Ballet & Opera

## Chapter 01 | Introduction

*“Access to the arts, including dance, plays a vital role in supporting holistic development.”*

Research authors



### 1.1 The Importance of Dance for Health and Wellbeing

There is an increasing acknowledgement within public health policy in the United Kingdom regarding the contribution of creative arts to enhancing wellbeing outcomes. For example, the World Health Organisation described the arts as “low-risk, high cost-effective, integrated and holistic treatment options for complex health challenges” (World Health Organisation, 2019). Arts Council England’s creative health strategy positions the arts as a public health priority (Arts Council England, 2022), and a UK All-Party Parliamentary group on Creative Health was launched in 2024 to advocate for arts engagement as fundamental to a healthy, prosperous society. A comprehensive scoping review conducted by the World Health Organisation which synthesised 3,000 studies underscores the pivotal role of participatory arts, including dance, in promoting health and in the prevention, management and treatment of a diverse array of physical and mental health conditions (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Importantly, this review found that engagement in the arts was linked to increased physical activity levels regardless of socioeconomic status or existing levels of social capital, highlighting its potential to address health inequalities.

Dance, as a form of both physical activity and creative expression, has emerged as a particularly powerful medium for supporting both physical and mental wellbeing across the lifespan. Dance is bodily movement, as artistic/emotional expression, that serves physical, social, therapeutic, educational and/or spiritual functions (Barbour et al., 2020). As such, engagement in dance combines the well-evidenced benefits of physical activity (Marquez et al., 2020; Posadzki et al., 2020) with the emotional, cognitive, and social benefits associated with artistic expression.

Systematic reviews of the academic literature show that dance supports psychosocial wellbeing through increased self-esteem and social networks, and stress reduction (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Previously under-researched wellbeing contributions of dance, including dance facilitating expression and identity development, empowerment to transform other areas of life, a sense of belonging through non-verbally connecting with others, and immersion and escape (from everyday realities), have recently been evidenced through a systematic review and focus groups with professionals and communities (Chappell et al., 2021; Crickmay et al., 2021).

### 1.2 Children’s Wellbeing and Access to the Arts and Dance

Children and young people’s wellbeing has become an increasing priority within education and public health agendas, particularly in light of rising concerns around children’s mental health, social isolation, and reduced physical activity levels (Demkoicz et al, 2023). Access to the arts, including dance, plays a vital role in supporting holistic development. However, opportunities for engagement with high-quality arts provision remains unevenly distributed, often reflecting broader social and economic inequalities (Shaikh, 2021). UNICEF’s Report card 11 highlights the persistent wellbeing disparities among children in high-income countries, including the UK, emphasising the need for inclusive and accessible approaches to support all children’s development (UNICEF, 2013).

Schools are uniquely positioned to act as accessible platforms for arts engagement, particularly for children who may face barriers outside of the formal educational system. Embedding inclusive creative dance programmes which are delivered as part of the school curriculum offers a pragmatic route for engagement, particularly for children who may face barriers to engaging in creative dance. However, there remains a limited evidence base exploring the specific impact of school-based dance programmes on children’s wellbeing.

## 1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) commissioned Born in Bradford to conduct research focused on delivery of the Create & Dance programme in Bradford, UK. The evaluation is driven by two overarching aims:

1. To examine the impact of Create & Dance on children's wellbeing and wider impacts.
2. To examine the implementation of Create & Dance within Bradford Primary Schools.

To achieve these aims, the evaluation is guided by three specific objectives:

1. To understand the impact of Create & Dance by exploring what aspects of the programme work (or do not work) to influence wellbeing, how, for whom, and in what context.
2. To understand the barriers and facilitators to delivery within Primary schools, assess attitudes among school partners, and evaluate the fidelity of intervention delivery.
3. To inform continuous improvement and refinement of Create & Dance through research delivery and sense-making workshops.

## 1.4 Background to Royal Ballet and Opera Schools: Create & Dance

Create & Dance supports children's physical, cognitive, and emotional development through movement, storytelling, and artistic collaboration. It aims to encourage creative collaboration and build self-expression and confidence through high quality performance/sharing opportunities. Designed to be inclusive and accessible, Create & Dance addresses barriers to arts participation by embedding high-quality dance provision directly within schools.

Rather than being a stand-alone initiative, Create & Dance is part of the RBOs Schools programme, which is a free, curriculum-aligned initiative designed to embed high-quality dance and music provision into primary education across England. Developed in line with the National Curriculum, it supports teachers to deliver creative, inclusive learning experiences that nurture children's artistic expression, confidence, and wellbeing. Schools can engage with one or more of three creative pathways: Create & Dance (ballet), Create & Sing (opera), and Create & Design (stage design). Each pathway follows a common structure of: (a) one day in-person teacher CPD training, (b) a live digital lesson to introduce pupils to ballet, opera or stage design, and (c) access to online resources for teachers to flexibly implement the programme in the classroom. Create & Dance and Create & Sign strands also involve a live celebration session to share and celebrate the pupils' creativity with other participating schools. RBO schools sets out key values for the programme: artistry and playfulness, inclusivity, and collaboration.

RBO also leads two national professional development initiatives that complement its schools work, one of particular relevance in Bradford was the Cultural Champions programme, which trains and supports primary teachers to embed creativity into everyday teaching.

RBO schools is a universal offer, providing a meaningful and scalable approach to promoting wellbeing and equitable access to the arts. However, the RBO also takes a targeted approach to reach schools in areas of disadvantage through partnerships with organisations such as local school improvement services, and place specific partners. Partners are asked to invite schools who may not usually take up local arts offers and where there is greatest need for access to culture. RBO delivered their targeted offer in Bradford in 2024-25, alongside the Bradford 2025 City of Culture.

## 1.5 Wider Study Context

### Born In Bradford Context

This evaluation is situated within the Born in Bradford (BiB) programme, one of the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal cohort studies in the UK, focused on understanding and improving the health and wellbeing of children and families in the city. BiB has a long-standing commitment to reducing health inequalities and works in close partnership with local communities, schools, health services, and policymakers. These deep-rooted relationships provide a strong foundation for delivering community-engaged research that is both impactful and locally relevant. The BiB infrastructure creates an ideal context for evaluating the Create & Dance in Bradford, offering access to established networks, trusted community connections, and a wealth of data and local knowledge. This positioning enables a more nuanced and embedded evaluation of the programme's implementation in primary schools and its potential impact on children's wellbeing in Bradford.

### Bradford Context

The current evaluation is specifically situated within Bradford, a Northern English city that faces its own unique challenges regarding children's access to extracurricular activities, mental health support, and general wellbeing. Bradford is the 'youngest city' in the UK, with 24% of residents under the age of 16 (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2020). Furthermore, Bradford is a multi-ethnic city with more than 20% of the general population and over 40% of children and young people being of South Asian origin (Bradford Producing Hub, 2024). Bradford also faces significant deprivation, with 60% of the district population living in the poorest 20% of wards in England and Wales – placing it in the most deprived quintile of the index of Multiple Deprivation (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2020). National-level data shows low levels of cultural engagement in Bradford compared to other cities, with 53% of the district's population classified within the 'least engaged' Culture Segments, compared with 33% for England as a whole (Indigo, 2020). However Bradford 2025 City of Culture presents an opportunity to build on existing local assets to enhance access to arts and culture, including dance, for children in Bradford.

Alongside participating in Create & Dance, as part of the wider RBO schools programme, Bradford primary schools also had the opportunity to engage in other, complementary, RBO initiatives. This includes the RBO Cultural Champions programme which delivers training to empower and upskill primary school teachers and supports schools to embed creativity and culture into everyday learning. RBO also delivers a leadership programme called 'Leaders for Impact' to headteachers and senior school leaders who are well placed to influence creative and cultural learning.

## Chapter 02 | Methodology

*“...typically shy and non-verbal [children] in traditional lessons demonstrated some of the highest levels of creativity and originality during choreography of dance moves.”*

Charleston



### 2.1 Study Design

This study takes a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2018). We aimed to recruit up to 10 schools, where each school represents a ‘case’ and various data collection methods are employed across each case to understand the impact of Create & Dance on children’s wellbeing. Incorporating multiple schools enhances the rigour and robustness of the evaluation compared to examining Create & Dance within a single school, as it allows for different perspectives to be captured across different contexts (Mtisi, 2022).

The evaluation is committed to a qualitative methodology, incorporating focus groups with children, observations of Create & Dance sessions in schools, and Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) with teachers, across each participating Bradford-based school; see section 2.4 for more detail on each method. The emphasis on qualitative methods is crucial because it allows for a rich understanding not only of whether something works but how things work, and to identify any unanticipated impacts that might arise (Morgan-Trimmer, 2019). This depth of understanding is vital for refining programmes and for planning their effective delivery in different geographical or social contexts. Furthermore, the research plan is designed to be flexible and adaptive, reflecting a commitment to co-producing the research with delivery partners, local children, and their families. This collaborative approach ensures that the evaluation remains responsive to the real-world dynamics of the programme and the lived experiences of its participants.

We adopted a mosaic approach to participatory research with children (Clark & Moss, 2001). This approach recognises that children communicate and make sense of their worlds through a variety of modes including spoken words, drawings, play, mapping, and observation and that by piecing together these multiple ‘tiles’ of data, researchers can build a richer, more authentic understanding of children’s lived experiences.

This approach positions children as active meaning-makers and co-constructors of knowledge, rather than passive subjects (Brown et al., 2020). In line with this, the evaluation combined multiple qualitative methods that respect different ways of expressing ideas, ensured that children’s voices remained central, and created space for other key partners to reflect on impacts and co-create meaning.

A realist-informed approach was specifically chosen for this study due to its inherent suitability for exploring complex social interventions such as Create & Dance (Shearn et al., 2017). Programmes like Create & Dance are rarely linear in their effects, often involving a nuanced interplay of various factors that influence their success. A realist evaluation aims to understand how an intervention works, for whom, and under what specific conditions (Morgan-Trimmer, 2019). This methodological choice is critical for moving beyond a description of outcomes to a wider understanding of contextual factors that drive or hinder Create & Dance’s impact. By focusing on these intricate relationships, the study aims to uncover insights into the specific factors that shape wellbeing outcomes for children in Bradford schools. The selection of a realist framework is a deliberate decision to produce transferable knowledge, rather than merely site-specific findings (Hall et al., 2021). This means the insights generated will be more valuable for future policy development and programme adaptation in diverse settings, moving beyond simple efficacy studies to understand the active ingredients and necessary environmental supports for successful implementation.

## 2.2 Ethical Research Conduct

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Bradford Research Ethics Committee (Application Reference: E1273, approved on 31 October 2024). The research adhered strictly to the principles outlined in the University's Code of Practice for Research Ethics.

All participating schools, children, parents, and staff were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the evaluation. Informed consent was obtained from RBO partners and teachers involved in delivery, as well as from parents/guardians for children's participation. Parents and guardians were provided with a clear information pack explaining the aims, activities, and safeguards of the evaluation. An opt-out consent process was used for pupils, which teachers and families had indicated was most practical for low-risk, whole-class research in primary schools (see public involvement section below). In addition, verbal assent was sought directly from each child in an age-appropriate way before any focus group, activity or observation. Participation was entirely voluntary, and families and staff could withdraw from the research at any point without consequence. Given the involvement of children, additional measures were taken to safeguard their wellbeing, including developing appropriate information sheets, child-friendly consent processes, and secure handling of all personal and sensitive data in line with GDPR requirements. Data has been anonymised in reporting to protect participants' identities. Robust safeguarding protocols were followed throughout, including working closely with schools' designated safeguarding leads.

## 2.3 Sampling and Recruitment

RBO partners were sampled and recruited based on their involvement in designing and/or delivering the overarching Create & Dance programme and delivery in Bradford.

Schools were sampled and recruited for the research through the RBOs existing networks and Born in Bradford's trusted local partnerships. To be eligible for participation in the research, schools must have committed to delivering the RBO Create & Dance programme during the 2024/25 academic year. Across all eligible schools, schools were sampled to reflect varying pupil premium levels, ethnic diversity, and inner-city and suburban locations.

### Public and Professional Involvement in Shaping the Research

This evaluation built directly on the formative learning and public involvement from an earlier study exploring children's experiences with a digital physical activity intervention within the same Bradford context. During that prior research, extensive consultation sessions were conducted with primary school teachers and children to understand what makes school-based research acceptable and meaningful to them. Key lessons learned included the importance of using opt-out consent processes for low-risk, whole-class activities, which both teachers and parents found more practical and inclusive. Children and teachers also expressed a clear preference for research approaches that work with entire classes rather than selecting small groups, as this minimised disruption to lessons and fostered a sense of collective participation. These insights directly shaped the design of the Create & Dance evaluation. The use of whole-class involvement, clear opt-out consent procedures, and child-friendly information materials reflect this co-produced learning. By carrying forward the voices and preferences of local teachers and children into this new study, the evaluation team sought to ensure that the research was not only ethically robust but also meaningful, acceptable, and genuinely responsive to the priorities of schools and families.

A steering group composed of BiB researchers, RBO Create & Dance partners, and an academic advisor with significant expertise in dance and wellbeing met regularly throughout the conduct of the research to refine the protocol and iteratively inform research delivery. The study was also subject to peer review through the Born in Bradford (BiB) Physical Activity Research Group to ensure rigour, relevance, and ethical conduct.

Once schools were recruited into the research, headteachers and school staff were contacted directly by the research team to provide consent for their participation, and agree on practical arrangements for delivering the research activities alongside the programme.

Within each participating school we sampled children from one class and/or year group to participate in the research. To be eligible, the classes were required to be between school years 3-6 (children aged 7-11) and to be involved in Create & Dance. Teachers helped identify relevant year groups and communicated the purpose of the study to children and families, facilitating their recruitment.

## 2.4 Data Collection Methods

Multiple data collection methods were incorporated into the evaluation to ensure incorporation of diverse perspectives from different groups including children, teachers and RBO partners, and to address the different aims and objectives of the research.

### Observations

Observations were included to understand how the Create & Dance programme was implemented and adapted in practice. Direct observation is recognised as a key tool for capturing contextual factors, fidelity, and teacher-child interactions that shape how interventions work (Moore et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2021). In the context of dance, observing embodied participation adds additional depth to self-reported accounts. We aimed to observe one Create & Dance session with the recruited class/year group within each participating school. See appendix 1 for the observation template that guided researchers' observations.

### Focus Groups

Whole-class focus groups were employed to examine the impact of Create & Dance on children's wellbeing, from the perspective of participating children. We incorporated creative participatory activities into focus groups (e.g., wellbeing jars, drawing, and mapping), to enable children to express feelings and experiences in ways that feel natural to them; see appendix 2 for the focus group session plan and booklet. This reflects the Mosaic Approach's principle of valuing children's multimodal ways of knowing (Clark & Moss, 2001) and aligns with evidence that visual and group methods are particularly suited to exploring wellbeing with primary-aged children (Angell et al., 2015; Frazer et al., 2023). We aimed to conduct focus groups with all recruited children in the recruited class/year group within each participating school, following delivery of Create & Dance within their school. Given that classes usually include 25-30 children, we planned for multiple researchers to attend and simultaneously facilitate the focus groups with sub-groups of 6-8 children each.

### Ripple Effects Mapping

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) with teachers and other school staff was included to identify the wider and unintended impacts of Create & Dance. REM is increasingly used to map systems-level change in education and public health (Nobles et al., 2021). It helps visualise how impacts 'ripple out' from immediate classroom experiences to school culture and wider community engagement (Hall et al., 2021). We planned to implement a REM session within each participating school, following delivery of Create & Dance within their school. We invited the teacher who attended the RBO Create & Dance training and primarily delivered the programme within their school, and asked them to invite other relevant school partners who have been involved in or impacted by Create & Dance. We also planned to conduct a group online REM workshop towards the end of the research to uncover further wider impacts of schools' participation in Create & Dance and to facilitate shared learning and reflection between schools.

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with RBO partners were employed to explore processes underpinning the delivery and impact of Create & Dance and factors influencing implementation and adaptation. This approach supports a richer understanding of how the programme works in practice, drawing on principles aligned with realist thinking (Moore et al., 2015). We aimed to interview approximately five RBO partners who play a key role in designing and/or delivering the overarching Create & Dance programme and delivery in Bradford.

### Sense-Making Workshop

A final Sense-Making Workshop, using Driscoll's learning cycle as a guiding framework, was planned to bring together key partners to reflect on the evaluation findings and agree on next steps (Driscoll, 1994). This collaborative process echoes recommendations for co-produced, iterative learning cycles within evaluation practice and is grounded in wellbeing research that values participatory reflection as a way to embed findings into future delivery (Hall et al., 2021). We planned to conduct this workshop once a full first draft of the report had been completed and shared, to inform group reflection on key findings and co-production of recommendations.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The overarching analytical approach selected for this study was the pen portrait method as developed by Sheard and Marsh (2019) and Louch et al., (2022), designed specifically to handle rich, multisource qualitative data collected over time. This method was selected to ensure that complex, content dependent insights around change and experiences across settings were retained and integrated holistically. The pen portrait approach aligns well with the multi-case and multi-method nature of our data which includes observations, focus groups with children, and REM with school partners across multiple schools, and interviews with RBO partners.

### Reflexive Approach to Analysis

At the start of the analysis process researchers' positionality was discussed in an open and honest conversation. From this discussion positionality statements were agreed to help the researchers as a group understand the different perspectives being brought to the analysis (see appendix 3 for all researchers' positionality statements). Throughout the analysis, the team engaged in reflexive dialogue to question assumptions, surface biases, and respond to emerging insights, through regular analysis meetings.

### Step 1: Defining the Analytical Focus

The first step involved identifying the key focus for the pen portraits, which was how Create & Dance was experienced across different schools over the delivery period, with a specific focus on wellbeing-related and wider impacts, and contextual barriers and facilitators to delivery. This focus was agreed upon through team discussions which referenced the key research aims, which also allowed for and anticipated new areas of interest to be considered.

### Step 2: Developing the Pen Portrait Structure

Each school formed a single case unit for analysis. A standardised structure was designed to support the development of narrative holistic accounts while still allowing for flexibility to include new data. This included:

- Contextual summary of the school
- Significant moments and insights drawn from the focus groups, REM, observations, and delivery staff interviews related to children's wellbeing, wider impacts, and barriers and facilitators to delivery
- Cross-perspective insights (e.g. alignment/misalignment between children's and school and RBO partner accounts)
- Summary interpretation and provisional thematic links

Alongside the schools pen portrait analysis a pen portrait was also created from the RBO partner interviews. This portrait followed a similar structure to the schools where appropriate, including the learning on children's wellbeing and barriers and facilitators to delivery, but also highlighted the programme design and delivery and teacher development as unique themes stemming from the data.

### Step 3: Data Integration and Writing

Pen portraits were populated by drawing across all relevant data sources for each school (or RBO interviews). The process was inductive and interpretive, balancing description with meaning-making. Each portrait was written as a narrative rather than a fragmented account, allowing for the integration of multiple voices (children, school staff, RBO partners) and the identification of key turning points or shifts in perception or engagement. Where applicable, reflexive notes and team discussions informed the interpretation.

### Step 4: Cross-Case Synthesis

After completing the pen portraits for each school, we looked across them to identify shared patterns and key differences. We created a table to help highlight patterns and differences across schools, as well as any unusual or unexpected findings. Using this table and concise summaries of each portrait, the analysis team adopted an iterative approach.

Four researchers coded pen portraits for recurring concepts and ideas that emerged across the schools (e.g., peer relationships, teacher confidence). The team then met to compare and refine these codes, clustering similar ideas and discussing emerging patterns. Three researchers then collaboratively defined and refined the themes through several rounds of discussion, ensuring that each was grounded in multiple data sources where relevant. Following the development of the cross-case synthesis based on school data, the RBO partner pen portrait was incorporated to provide a fuller picture of how the programme was delivered and experienced.

Synthesised findings are presented through clear narrative summaries of key themes that were crafted through the analysis process, including illustrative quotes and figures where appropriate.

## Chapter **03 Findings**

*“This isn’t just about learning dance steps,  
it’s about unlocking potential”*

John Wright, Director, Bradford Institute for Health Research



**Nine schools, 252 children, and 5 RBO stakeholders were recruited to participate in the evaluation. All nine schools completed observational sessions and seven schools participated in focus groups (204 children). See Table 1 for brief summaries of observed sessions.**

Four schools engaged in individual Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) and five schools took part in a collective REM session; six schools in total completed REMs due to three schools engaging in both the individual and collective REM sessions.

Ten pen portraits were developed; one for each participating school (n=9) and one for the RBO partner perspective. See appendix 4 for all anonymised pen portraits. See appendix 5 for an example REM output.

Table 1. Observational summaries across participating schools

## Charleston

The session was delivered as a **history lesson exploring the Industrial Revolution**. The children were encouraged to embody factory and machinery movements through sharp, jerky dance sequences, creatively linking physicality with historical understanding. The session culminated in a performance for parents and younger pupils, giving it a celebratory feel. The teaching approach balanced creative freedom with structured guidance. The teacher used verbal instructions, physical demonstrations, and repetition to maintain engagement and help the children build confidence in the movement style.

## Contemporary

The session focused on **the character of the Mad Hatter** during a PE lesson. The children explored imaginative movement using storytelling and props, including plastic bowler hats. The session built on previous learning, with children recalling and extending choreography linked to the theme. The teacher used clear instructions, adapted resources, and utilised a playful narrative to guide the session. There was a strong emphasis on creativity, with children inventing their own movements in small groups. The atmosphere was energetic and engaged, with some overexcitement managed effectively through techniques like body percussion and redirection. There were thoughtful adaptations to include a blind child, who was supported by both a peer and a teaching assistant.

## Salsa

The session introduced pupils to Lesson 4: **The Queen of Hearts**. The PE teacher guided the class through dynamic activities using RBO resources, including music and visual prompts, to help children embody the Queen's fiery personality. They explored dance concepts such as "canon" and "unison," working collaboratively to build motifs inspired by a Kingdom of Cards. The atmosphere was lively and inclusive. Children showed creativity when forming heart shapes, balancing at different levels, and adapting movements for peers with physical disabilities so that everyone could join in. The teacher used engaging analogies, like a "Mexican wave," to help pupils understand sequencing and teamwork. The session highlighted strong peer support, shared leadership in choreography, and growing confidence in performance skills, culminating in a group showcase that celebrated collaboration and imaginative storytelling through dance.

## Swing

The class engaged in a session inspired by **the Mad Hatter**. Using cones as props, the session encouraged playful and imaginative movement while exploring rhythm and character expression. Initially, some children, particularly boys, preferred imitating demonstrated movements rather than inventing their own. However, as the session progressed, pupils grew in confidence and gradually contributed more original ideas to their group routines. Despite frequent interruptions in the communal hall and the teacher working without additional staff support, the session maintained a lively and inclusive atmosphere. Props helped children overcome initial hesitancy, boosting creative engagement and participation. The teacher's flexible approach enabled every child to take part meaningfully, resulting in a session that balanced structure with moments of joyful self-expression.

## Foxtrot

The session based around **the Mad Hatter character** was lively and physically engaging, with structured choreography reinforcing key movement concepts like unison. The teacher demonstrated strong adaptability and used humour, praise, and clear instructions with the use of a tambourine to aid classroom management. Despite technical issues and uneven pupil engagement, an assistant provided support for neurodivergent children to enable proportionate participation.

## Tap

The session introduced children to **Queen of Hearts-inspired** dance motifs in lesson 4 of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. The facilitator, with a background in dance, guided pupils through structured technical movements such as stomping, slicing, and dramatic poses. The session took place in a busy multi-use school hall. The teaching approach was notably directive, focusing on delivering six technical movements in a set sequence. Although imaginary props were used, there was minimal opportunity for open-ended exploration or child-led interpretation.

## Tango

The session uniquely integrated science learning into dance, **exploring the water cycle through movement**. Guided by the facilitator and using classical ballet music, pupils worked in groups to embody processes such as collection, evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. The session was highly interactive, with children collaborating closely to develop particle-like movements and creatively linking each stage of the cycle. Group work fostered teamwork and problem-solving, as pupils supported each other to refine ideas and create unified sequences. The session culminated in a whole-class circle where groups performed their water cycle dances, demonstrating not only scientific understanding but also growing confidence in dance performance. The environment was energetic and inclusive, with pupils naturally encouraging peers who were hesitant to join in.

## Jazz

The teacher, initially inexperienced in dance, gained confidence through provided lesson plans and training, and fostered an environment of curiosity and encouragement where even reluctant students became engaged through imaginative themes like **the Mad Hatter** and animal-based activities. Despite physical limitations of the hall and initial student trepidation, the session improved children's confidence, social interaction, and enjoyment of movement, with the teacher noting plans to integrate dance principles into other subjects like maths.

## Waltz

The session focused on **developing animal character motifs** from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Using RBO resources, including videos, a PowerPoint, and an animal motif booklet, the teacher introduced movements inspired by the rooster, turtle, eaglet, and caterpillar. The session began with a recap of previous lessons and moved from classroom discussions to active exploration in the school hall. Pupils practiced freezing, travelling, and linking motifs, gradually building confidence in combining movements into short sequences.

Despite minor distractions and a lack of music in the hall, the class adapted well, demonstrating creativity and enjoyment in interpreting animal characters. Peer interaction was strong throughout, with pupils giving each other feedback and learning from demonstrations. The facilitator encouraged experimentation with levels and shapes, leading to imaginative interpretations of the animals. By the end of the lesson, pupils showed greater comfort in performing and readiness to progress to the next phase of choreography.

### 3.1 School Characteristics

The recruited schools represented a diverse range of settings across Bradford, encompassing a mix of inner-city and suburban and semi-rural locations, varying levels of pupil premium eligibility (ranging from 20% to 50%), and considerable ethnic diversity. The majority of participating schools had a substantial proportion of pupils from minority ethnic communities, predominantly of South Asian heritage, with many students speaking English as an additional language. Year groups involved in the study ranged from Years 3 to 6, covering children aged 7 to 11. The pupil premium average in England is 25%. 7 out of the 9 schools had higher pupil premium levels than average. None of the schools (excluding Salsa) had a pupil premium level of less than 20%.

The participating schools reflected a broad range of ethnic diversity: while the majority had predominantly South Asian student populations, several included more mixed ethnic profiles, with some having a higher proportion of White British pupils. This diversity allowed for rich insights into how the Create & Dance programme was experienced across different contexts within Bradford primary schools. All participating schools have been assigned pseudonyms based on different dance styles. These pseudonyms are used solely for confidentiality purposes and do not reflect the school's approach to, or delivery of, the Create & Dance programme.

### 3.2 Developing a Definition of Children's Wellbeing

It was important for us to conceptualise children's wellbeing, to inform the development of interview and focus group topic guides, to guide researcher observations and facilitation of REM sessions, and to shape the analysis process. A thematic synthesis of academic and policy definitions of wellbeing was conducted to derive a definition for children's wellbeing. Thematic synthesis is particularly useful in health and social research for developing shared understandings of complex constructs across multiple sources (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The following literature sources were included in the thematic synthesis: Ben-Arieh et al., (2014), Bungay & Vella-Burrows (2013), Clarke & McLellan (2022), Gordon-Nesbitt & Haworth (2020), Huppert (2009), Keyes (2002), Mansfield et al., (2018), Ryff & Keyes (1995), UNICEF (2013), Stevenson & Worthman (2014), World Health Organisation (2019), and Zarobe & Bungay (2017).

Key conceptual elements/components such as emotional and physical health, social relationship meaning and personal growth were identified through the comparison of recurring themes across literature sources.

These commonalities were then integrated to create a coherent evidence-based definition of wellbeing to support the scope of this research. The final definition describes children's wellbeing as the overall quality of life they experience, encompassing their physical health, emotional wellbeing, education, social connections, and sense of purpose. It reflects their potential to participate meaningfully in their communities and environments. Based on the synthesis, we define wellbeing as:

“Well-being in children refers to the overall quality of life experienced by children, encompassing their physical health, emotional wellbeing, education, and social relationships. It reflects their ability to thrive, experience positive emotions, develop their potential, and participate meaningfully in their communities and environments”



### 3.3 Children's Wellbeing

Through our analysis, we crafted four themes that elucidate the influence of Create & Dance on children's wellbeing: (1) Building confidence through joyful participation, (2) Social connection, collaboration and kindness, (3) Embodied expression and active autonomy, and (4) Enhanced learning. It is crucial to recognise their interconnectedness. Rather than discrete silos, these themes operate synergistically, each often contributing to and being reinforced by the others, thereby collectively enriching children's wellbeing.

For instance, social connection (Theme 2) isn't just about peer relationships; it also fosters emotional security, which is foundational for both confident participation (Theme 1) and willingness to engage in embodied expression (Theme 3). Furthermore, the collaborative nature inherent in many Create & Dance activities directly enhances the learning environment (Theme 4) by promoting peer-to-peer teaching and shared problem-solving. However, this means there are instances of repetition across themes as they are presented, as we wanted each theme to be able to 'stand alone' as well as being part of the interconnected whole.

These themes have been brought to life through illustrations created by Buttercrumble.

### 3.3.1 Theme 1: Building Confidence Through Joyful Participation



The Create & Dance programme cultivates joy, engagement, and confidence in children through playful, inclusive experiences, an approach that sits at the heart of the programme's design.

An RBO partner emphasised that fun is foundational to its impact, describing children as "really enthusiastic" in sessions and highlighting the importance of offering "a different outlet," particularly for those who may find traditional academic communication more difficult.

Observations across schools showed how this joyful, expressive approach helped children move from initial shyness to enthusiastic participation, with many showing visible pride in what they created. One RBO Partner reflected:

"It's the whole thing of... sense of pride when you've created something... It's much more than [what] people think." (RBO Partner)

This sense of ownership and accomplishment was often supported through adaptive teaching and space for children to bring their own ideas into the movement. While some children found certain activities tiring or preferred different styles of movement, the overall experience consistently fostered confidence and wellbeing through embodied, creative self-expression.

#### Expressions of Joy and Engagement

Across schools, children were frequently observed expressing joy, energy, and enthusiasm during Create & Dance sessions. This joy was often expressed physically and spontaneously, through laughter, excited movement, and smiles, and served as an important foundation for engagement. The atmosphere in sessions was consistently described as energetic, welcoming, and filled with laughter. For instance, at Tango and Jazz:

"When they started, the volume in the room immediately increased, lots of energy and everyone immediately engaging with the activity.... There is a lot of laughter as they engage with the activity (about the activity, not distracted). There doesn't appear to be any/much distraction, even as the activities progress" (Tango, Observation)

"Children's energy and excitement were tangible throughout the sessions. During a group circle dance, several pupils were described as 'vibrating up and down' in anticipation" (Jazz, Observation).

In the Tango REM, the teacher also highlighted how children found the sessions enjoyable:

"Really enjoyed the dance, and if I said we are going to go down [to the sports hall] and put this into dance, they were really happy to do it, and afterwards they were like fizzy but in a good way, they don't get overexcited by it, they just really enjoy doing it" (Tango, REM)

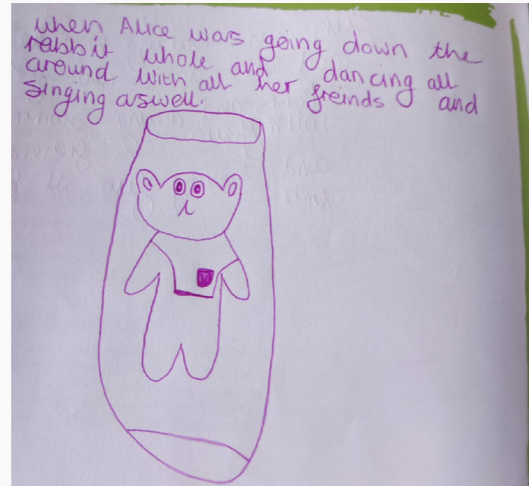
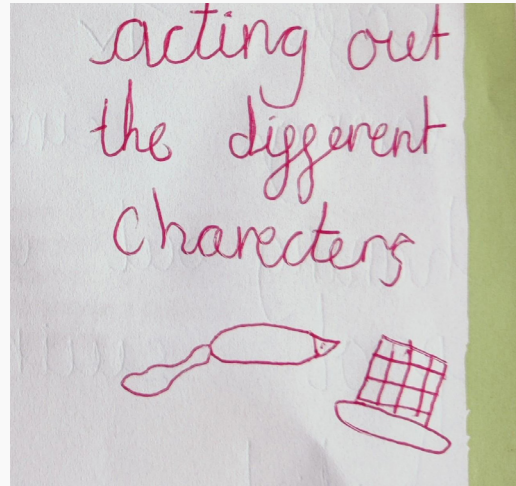
Elements of the programme's design and delivery contributed to participants' expressions of joy and enhanced engagement. While some of these aspects may also feature in detail within other thematic findings sections, their direct link to eliciting positive emotional responses and active participation warrants their inclusion here.

Imaginative elements, like the Mad Hatter hats at Contemporary, was a turning point. The class's energy increased and "they just came alive" when given permission to toss hats in the air and improvise how to retrieve them (Contemporary, REM). Children expressed their enjoyment, with one stating, "It made me excited!" while another agreed it was "fun to move around" and pretend to be different characters (Contemporary, Focus Group). One child drew her favourite action as spinning down into the rabbit hole and another commented "I like to spin around like a ballerina" (Jazz Focus Group). Through our analysis, we crafted four themes that elucidate the influence of Create & Dance on children's wellbeing: (1) Building confidence through joyful participation, (2) Social connection, collaboration and kindness, (3) Embodied expression and active autonomy, and (4) Enhanced learning. It is crucial to recognise their interconnectedness. Rather than discrete silos, these themes operate synergistically, each often contributing to and being reinforced by the others, thereby collectively enriching children's wellbeing.

For instance, social connection (Theme 2) isn't just about peer relationships; it also fosters emotional security, which is foundational for both confident participation (Theme 1) and willingness to engage in embodied expression (Theme 3). Furthermore, the collaborative nature inherent in many Create & Dance activities directly enhances the learning environment (Theme 4) by promoting peer-to-peer teaching and shared problem-solving. However, this means there are instances of repetition across themes as they are presented, as we wanted each theme to be able to 'stand alone' as well as being part of the interconnected whole.

*"I like being active because when I am active, I am happy"*

Jazz, Focus Group



Within their booklets children selected being different characters, and spinning down the rabbit hole, as their favourite elements of Create & Dance.



Dance specific physical activity and movement also lead to expressions of joy. At Contemporary, once the class tried the step-and-clap warm-up, “giggles spread around and the mood began to lift” (Contemporary, Observation).

At Jazz, children were “eager and happy to be dancing,” with some “literally bouncing in place with excess energy” (Jazz Observation).

The Create & Dance programme encouraged children’s creativity and autonomy, allowing them to express themselves freely and joyfully. At Tango, children expressed their enjoyment, stating they “love imagining” (Tango Focus Group). This sense of creative freedom was also evident at Charleston, where children who were: “typically shy and non-verbal in traditional lessons demonstrated some of the highest levels of creativity and originality during choreography of dance moves”, leading to visible pride and engagement (Charleston REM). The creative, expressive nature of the programme is covered in more detail in 3.3.3 *Theme 3: Embodied Expression and Active Autonomy*.

The programme consistently fostered a strong sense of social connection and collaboration, leading to expressions of joy. For instance, at Salsa, children attributed feeling happy to spending time with friends and the enjoyment of creating dances together. Overall 87% of pupils enjoyed spending time with their friends as part of the Create & Dance programme. This collaborative environment was a significant contributor to the children’s overall joyful engagement. The social nature of the programme is covered in more detail in 3.3.2 *Theme 2: Social Connection, Collaboration and Kindness*.

A further outcome, contributing to expressions of joy and engagement, was the children’s heightened sense of pride and accomplishment stemming from their participation. Contemporary children reported feeling “Proud because I have learnt something new,” (Contemporary Focus Group). This sentiment was echoed at Waltz, where students chose “happy faces” for feeling “proud of what I have done,” with reasons including “makes me feel good about myself” (Waltz focus group)

This widespread experience of joy lays a crucial foundation for the development of children’s confidence within Create & Dance, which will be further explored in the following subtheme.

**Creating Supportive Spaces That Nurture Confidence and Emotional Safety**

Children’s confidence and emotional wellbeing were supported by teachers’ use of adaptive and non-judgemental teaching approaches. Teachers who initially felt unsure about leading dance sessions were able to create spaces where children felt safe to try, make mistakes, and express themselves freely: key conditions for wellbeing. This reflects a core ethos of Create & Dance: empowering teachers to guide creative processes rather than perform as dance experts. One RBO partner explained, “Usually a lot of [teachers] will come feeling quite under-confident,” but often experience a “light bulb moment” when they realise:

“There’s no wrong answer in dance... I don’t have to necessarily create all this dance material. I use my kids’ creativity and together, collaboratively, we can do it.” (RBO Partner)

This shift supports the development of emotionally safe learning environments, where children feel able to explore and contribute without fear of failure. The Contemporary teacher, for example, established a judgment-free zone where nothing the children did could be “wrong” in dance, which helped alleviate initial shyness by assuring students “they wouldn’t be judged or singled out” (Contemporary, REM). She further reduced self-consciousness by laughing with them about any missteps and made it clear that effort and creativity were more important than perfecting the moves. A RBO partner also noted how the programme supports this ethos, with one delivery artist explaining, “We demystify the art forms,” enabling teachers to foster more relaxed, expressive environments that nurture children’s confidence.

Even teachers with no prior dance experience, like the Jazz teacher who admitted she felt hesitant and “had no idea what to do” until a prepared scheme of work and training were provided (Jazz, REM), gained confidence through support, enabling them to lead sessions effectively. This directly impacted children’s experience, as teachers who felt more confident were better able to create calm, playful, and responsive classrooms where children felt encouraged to take part, regardless of ability.

**Building Confidence Through Supportive Performance**

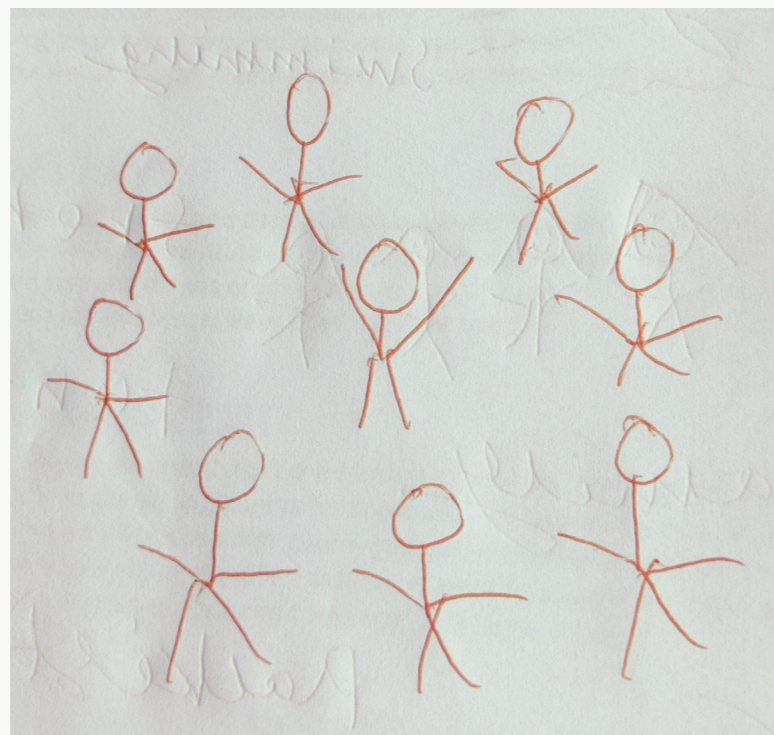
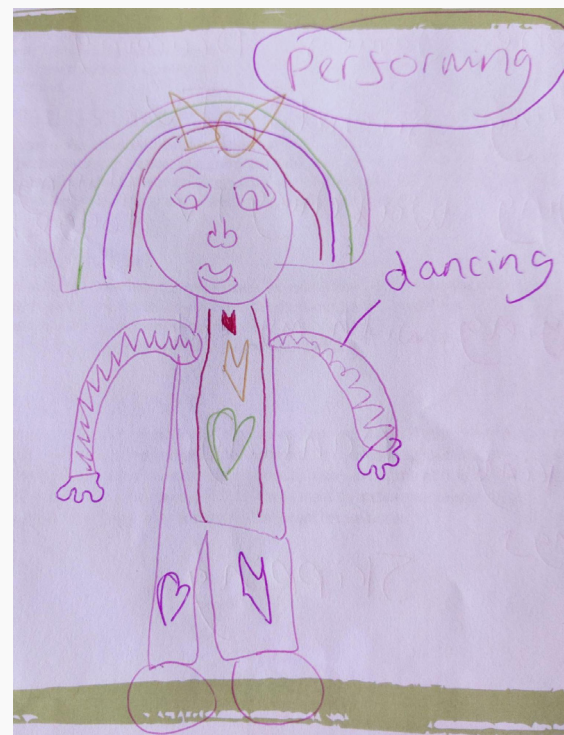
The Create & Dance programme cultivated children’s confidence by gradually exposing them to performance in supportive, low-pressure environments, leading to a profound sense of pride and achievement. Teachers and RBO partners actively fostered conditions where children felt emotionally safe to explore and express themselves, which was crucial for developing self-belief.

Initially, many children felt hesitant to showcase their work due to unfamiliarity with performing in front of others. For instance, at Contemporary, children initially didn’t want to show what they’d been doing. However, the programme’s design and delivery actively reduced pressure. The Contemporary teacher facilitated this by modifying performance formats, such as having the children all dance in a big circle or in groups rather than spotlighting individuals. This allowed children to gradually feel more comfortable, leading to a significant shift where:

“They were all going straight in [to the circle], and they wanted to show off their pieces” (Contemporary, REM)

Similarly, at Jazz, a child who had previously refused to showcase her dance participated in the third session, indicating increased comfort.

Specific dance moves like the canon fall led to laughter and enjoyment at Foxtrot. These examples reflect how the joy of movement was tied not just to being active, but to being imaginative, expressive, and free within a dance context.



Within the booklets children identified performance as one of their favourite elements of Create & Dance. These images show how children enjoyed performing in a circle, on their own, and in an assembly.

This experience significantly boosted overall confidence, leading many children to express a strong wish to perform their dances for parents and other classes. This eagerness to showcase their work indicates that the programme not only built internal confidence but also fostered a desire for external validation and recognition. Teachers, in turn, recognised this and expressed plans to embed more performance opportunities, aiming to “lift that glass ceiling of possibilities” for children and further inspire their long-term interest in dance (Waltz, REM).

**Pupil Development: Pride in Achievement and Performance**

The Create & Dance programme consistently fostered a strong sense of pride and achievement among pupils. Children frequently expressed feeling “proud” of their accomplishments, whether it was learning new dance skills or successfully performing in front of others (Tango, Salsa, Contemporary, Jazz, Waltz and Charleston, Focus Groups). This sense of accomplishment was often tied to the creative freedom and autonomy they were given, with one child proudly stating, “I feel proud because I made all the dance steps myself” (Tango Focus Group). The opportunity to stand out during performances also contributed significantly to their feelings of pride, and the enthusiastic applause they received after performing reinforced their efforts. These instances highlight how the programme structure, allowing for both individual creation and shared performance, directly enhanced children’s self-esteem and a sense of mastery.

RBO partners echoed this emphasis on pride and self-belief as central to the programme’s impact. One delivery artist explained:

“There’s that sense of pride when you’ve created something... It’s much more than people think.”

**Designing for Inclusion: Ensuring All Children Can Participate Meaningfully**

The programme’s design actively supported children’s joyful participation by prioritising access, inclusion, and differentiated ways of participating. RBO partners explained that inclusivity is embedded in the programme’s structure, not left to chance:

“From an inclusive perspective, we would probably always start with improv as a way in... it’s a more inclusive way of working in dance” (RBO Partner)

This strategy ensures that all children can access movement in a way that feels safe and manageable, regardless of ability or need. This was evident at Salsa, where a wheelchair user was able to participate on the floor with teaching assistant support after his mobility aids were removed. The teacher gently guided him, promoting independent participation when possible. At Contemporary, the teacher adapted her language for a blind student, using terms like “move your body how you think this character would” (Contemporary, REM) instead of “dancing” to ensure accessibility for a highly visual activity. RBO partners also highlighted the importance of adapting language to suit different learners and contexts.

One artist shared that sometimes we call it “creative movement” or “physical storytelling” rather than “dance” to make the programme feel more culturally appropriate, echoing the Contemporary teacher’s thoughtful strategy in a different context. These adaptations made it possible for children to take part without feeling excluded, which is central to their sense of belonging and wellbeing.

In several sessions, peers played a role in supporting each other’s inclusion. At Tango, the group-based nature of the session encouraged children to invite others to join, while at Salsa, children worked collaboratively to adjust a crab pose to start on the floor when one pupil struggled to manage it from standing. These adaptations helped ensure that all children could meaningfully participate, supporting their emotional wellbeing and social connection.

3.3.2 Theme 2: Social Connection, Collaboration, and Kindness



**The Create & Dance programme consistently promoted a strong sense of social connection, collaboration and kindness among participating pupils.**

This was supported by the programme's inclusive pedagogy, which encourages pupils to work creatively in groups, share ideas, and support one another. By creating an environment where every child feels valued, supported, and able to contribute creatively, the Create & Dance programme not only nurtures individual expression but also

strengthens social bonds and cultivates a culture of empathy and mutual respect among pupils.

One RBO partner said that the programme impacts children in "so many ways," emphasising "socially, it's a massive one... the social side of collaborating and working together, problem solving is massive" (RBO Partner). The collaborative nature of creative dance helps build communication skills, teamwork, and "cohesion as a group," which RBO partners note are key "soft skills that come through the arts" (RBO Partner). These social and emotional gains often translate into improved class dynamics and empathy among students.



**Building Peer Relationships**

Across multiple sessions and schools, children working together, often joyfully and supportively, emerged as a defining theme. Children expressed happiness and pride when dancing with their peers, when engaging in shared activities and forming group dance routines. Their enjoyment of being part of a team was evident through comments such as, "I love dancing with my friends because me and her make the good fit" and "It's more fun doing it with your friends and it's easier," (Charleston, Focus Group) indicating the positive emotional impact of shared creative experiences. For many children, dancing with others and their friends was a highlight of the programme as evidenced in the booklets (see above).

A teacher reflected that they had observed an unexpected absence of conflicts or exclusions among children during the group dance activities. Even participants who were not paired with their closest friends collaborated effectively and enjoyed the experience (Jazz, REM). Socially, the Create & Dance sessions encouraged new interactions, the children often teamed up with different classmates for activities, which at first some found disappointing, one child confessed she: "did not like that I was not allowed to pick my friend" for a pair task, highlighting how much friends mattered to her (Jazz, Focus Group). Over time, though, these mixed groupings led to broadened cooperation. Being with peers was central to their enjoyment: in a post Create & Dance focus group reflection, almost every child said that dancing with friends (and even family at home) was what made the experience happy for them (Jazz, Focus Group).

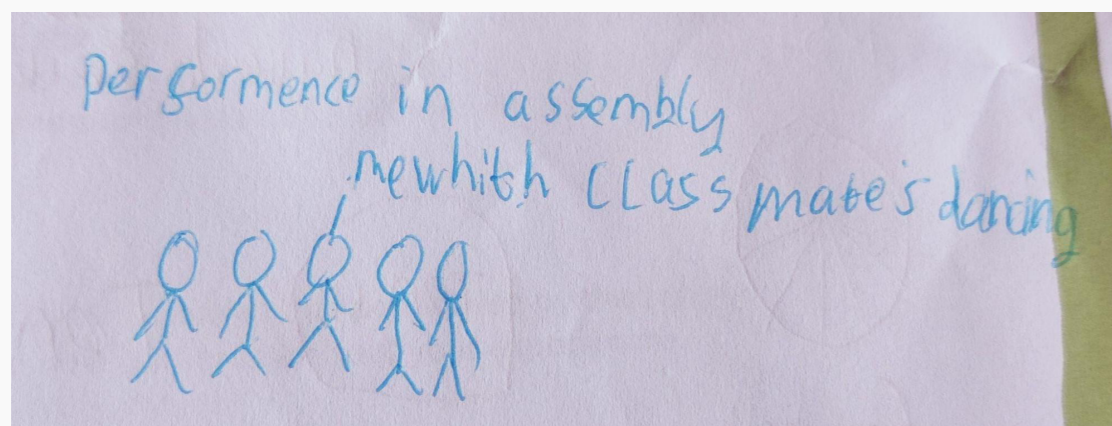
In another school, the researcher observed that children continued to work in the groups that their teacher had pre-assigned from the previous session. There were clear moments of cooperation, including sharing props and contributing to group routines. A balance of structured teamwork and peer-led exploration were observed.

Comments like: "I liked showing my friends my moves" and "I like when we are moving with our friends" (Jazz, Focus Group) reflect the social-emotional value of shared performance. Although some were initially disappointed at not choosing their own partners, mixed pairings led to new collaborations and a broadening of friendships.

Another facilitating factor was the children's interactions with one another which demonstrated strong collaboration during partner activities, including support in maintaining rhythm and timing (Charleston, Observation). This was further evidenced by the children through laughter, smiles, and verbal enthusiasm, particularly during partner work (Charleston, Observation). The presence of peers was integral to their enjoyment; in focus group reflections, nearly every child said that dancing with friends contributed significantly to their happiness (Jazz, Focus Group). When the children were asked in to share how they felt during the Create & Dance sessions, a child replied "Happy because it is really fun to be with my friends" (Jazz, Focus Group). Seeing their classmates act silly or be inventive through dance made them laugh together and brought a sense of fun. Children reported feeling happy during the lessons, attributing this to spending time with friends and the enjoyment of creating dances together (Jazz, Focus Group).

Many pupils linked their positive experience to kindness and collaboration, with comments such as "because my friends are kind" and "because it isn't lonely" (Salsa, Focus Group). These reflections suggest that social connection and peer support played a vital role in fostering emotional wellbeing. This underscores the significance of the social dimension of the experience for the children indicating that Create & Dance was not solely about dancing but a positive collaborative experience with peers.

Pages from the children's booklets



**Collaborative Learning and Teamwork**

Collaboration was identified across the data as a prevalent theme throughout the Create & Dance programme. Participating pupils worked in groups to choreograph dance routines by putting together various dance and movement components into sequential order; this requires peer interactions, feedback, compromise, shared decision-making and problem solving to develop their performances. Researchers observed groups working in various ways to choreograph routines.

One group were all holding hands as a circle and working together and discussing what movements best represent water collection. After some discussion they then did a different formation (hands on each other's shoulders). They are all working really well together and using listening and teamwork skills (Tango, Observation).

In several schools, children were observed making inclusive choices, such as adapting dance routines for peers with physical disabilities or encouraging less confident classmates to join in. These were not prompted by adult teaching or supporting staff but emerged organically within the group dynamics, reflecting genuine co-operation and empathy. In Salsa, children worked in small groups to choreograph short routines using their newly learnt vocabulary. They showed critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as a spirit of teamwork and inclusion. For example, one group adjusted a crab pose to begin on the floor after one pupil couldn't manage it from standing, while another group collaborated with a child to include seated spins and floor-level movements.

One group continued refining their choreography with thoughtful adaptations to support his participation (Salsa, Observation). Children often helped each other remember moves and gave compliments like "Cool move!" during group choreography. A friend system formed around a child who was blind: one of her classmates would take her by the hand or describe what others were doing so she could follow along (Contemporary, Observation), demonstrating empathy, kindness and consideration towards inclusive collaboration. Collaboration emerged as a prevalent theme not only because of the programme's structure, but because of the behaviours and relationships it actively encouraged through the application of the Create & Dance programme. Children were not simply completing tasks together, they were co-creating, supporting, adapting, and learning with and from one another. This relational and inclusive approach to group work made collaboration central to the implementation of the programme.

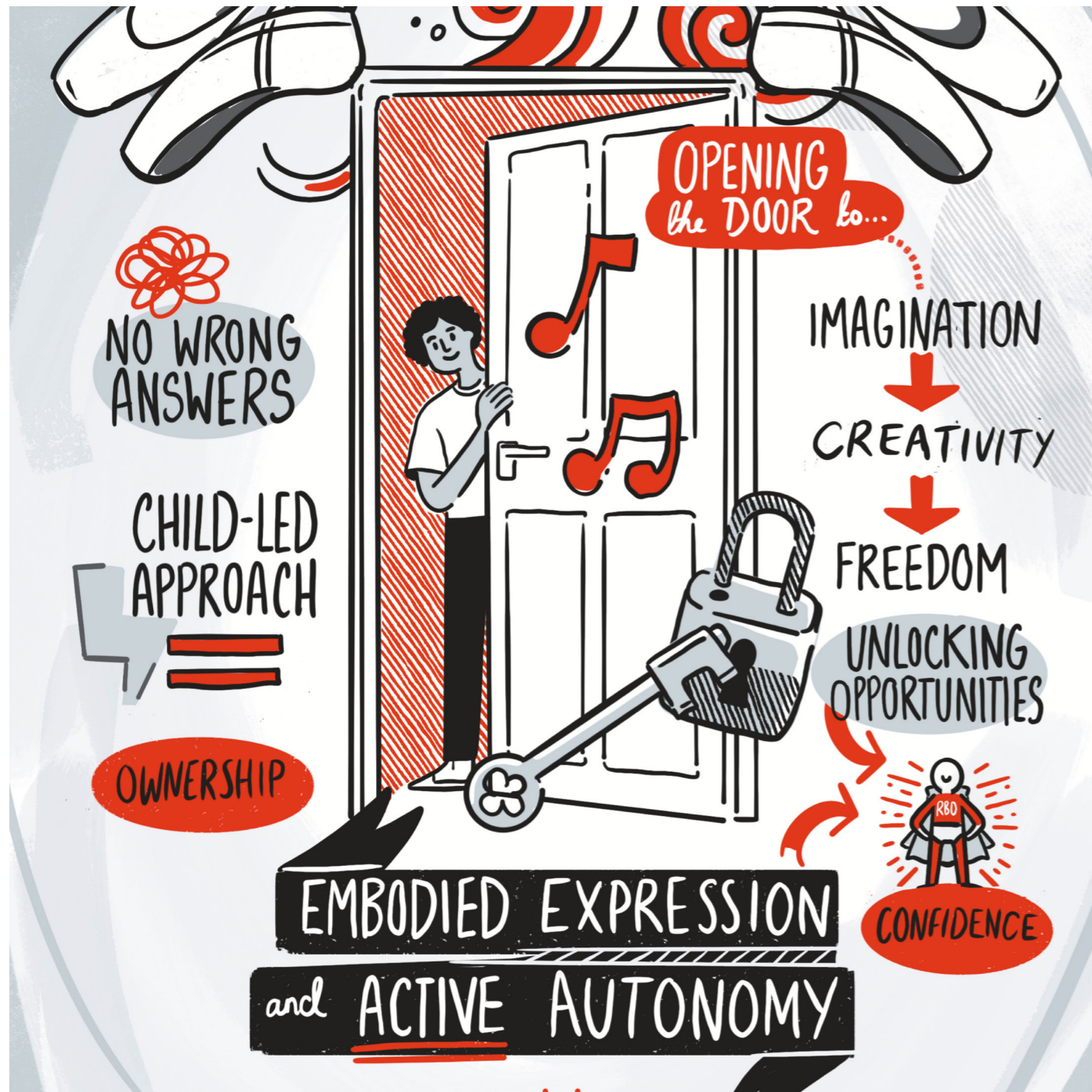
**Fostering Empathy and Mutual Support**

Children demonstrated kindness through encouraging one another, supporting children with Special Educational Needs, copying and celebrating peer-generated dance routines, and offering positive feedback prompted by the teachers, but increasingly emerged spontaneously. Many pupils linked their positive experience to kindness and collaboration, with comments such as "because my friends are kind" and "because it isn't lonely" (Jazz, Focus Group). These reflections suggest that social connection and peer support played a vital role in fostering emotional wellbeing.

During the Create & Dance session a child who uses a wheelchair and a device used to support their ankle and foot had their mobility aids removed so they could fully participate on the floor, supported closely by a teaching assistant. Despite their physical challenges, the child engaged actively in the session, joining in with expressive movements such as swipes and wriggles during a creative task inspired by the Queen of Hearts. The teacher and support staff demonstrated kindness by offering him encouragement, tailored support, and gentle guidance to promote his independence wherever possible. The inclusive atmosphere of the session was evident through both staff and peer interactions. Pupils worked collaboratively in groups to create routines, showing sensitivity and adaptability.

One able bodied group worked with the child to include seated spins and floor-based movements, ensuring they were able to contribute meaningfully. Their thoughtful approach, along with the teacher's praise and careful scaffolding, reflected a shared commitment to helping every child to discover and develop their unique abilities with confidence and joy (Salsa, Observation). Through its inclusive and creative approach, the Create & Dance programme enabled meaningful social connections, encouraging pupils to collaborate, support one another, and experience the joy of shared artistic expression.

### 3.3.3 Theme 3: Embodied Expression and Active Autonomy



This theme highlights the body as a tool for expressing creativity and choice-driven movement.

Through the Create & Dance programme we found that children engage in varying types and intensities of physical movement, using their bodies in expressive and autonomous ways to represent topics and characters.

#### Opportunities for Physical Movement

The Create & Dance sessions naturally involve children moving their bodies and thus engaging in physical activity. Observations from across all schools demonstrate that through Create & Dance, children are given the opportunity to comfortably move their bodies, and that sessions encourage children to partake in movements of a range of intensities; from sedentary, to light, to moderate-vigorous physical activity. Children were often sat relatively still for a small portion of the session; for example, in school Tango children sat and listened when the teacher explained the water cycle phases prior to representing these through movement:

“Everyone is sitting on their bottoms on the floor. People are putting their hands up to share ‘words’ (adjectives, describing words) to describe evaporation” (Tango, Observation)

However, the children were engaged in movement for the majority of the session, through for example “warm-ups (movement as animals), body percussion (clapping, stomping, tapping), and a creative task involving cones as hats” (Swing, Observation), and “embodying characters... [to] choreograph group routines” (Contemporary, Observation). In school Tap, some children who hadn’t attended the previous session were asked to sit and watch initially prior to participating, which limited their corporeal involvement. The observer noted that children appeared to ‘mirror’ others during this part of the session, which would have been possible for all children to engage in; teachers could be encouraged to maximise movement opportunities across all children to enhance their engagement in physical activity.

Most of the sessions involved opportunities for the children to create their own movements (rather than following pre-set movements), such as acting out animal movements as part of the RBO Queen of Hearts sessions in schools Jazz, Salsa, Swing and Waltz, and representing the water cycle and industrial revolution at schools Tango and Charleston, respectively. As such, in these instances it was not ‘pre-set’ whether the movements would be low or high intensity, and generally, the children varied their intensity levels throughout the session, depending on for example, at school Tango, the water cycle stages they were representing. However, it was estimated by the observer that around 50% of the session was spent engaging in moderate-vigorous intensity physical activity for most children, which is particularly beneficial for mental and physical health and wellbeing. Compared with when schools asked children to engage in pre-set movements, such as practicing standing in ‘parallel’ and ‘first position’ in school Tap, it appeared that encouraging children to create their own dances perhaps resulted in increased (amount and intensity of) physical activity. Note that the vocabulary ‘parallel’ and ‘first position’ are not provided by the RBO as part of the Create & Dance initiative and the inclusion of this terminology is a decision made by the school Tap teacher.

#### Children's Responses to being Physically Active

Overall, children had a positive response to the physical activity component of participating in Create & Dance. Across all the focus groups, when asked whether they liked being active and moving their body as part of Create & Dance, 69% said yes (and 10% said yes and no). Children linked being active to enhanced fitness and physical health, stating for example that participating in Create & Dance “keeps [them] healthy and fit” and “blood flows and feel energetic” (Tango, Focus Group). They also alluded to mental health benefits, commenting that it helps them feel “calm” (Tango, Focus Group) and happy:

“I like being active because when I am active, I am happy” (Jazz, Focus Group)

“It makes me happy and healthy” (Charleston, Focus Group)

Observers frequently saw children literally jumping with excitement or happily collapsing in panting heaps, cheeks red and smiling.

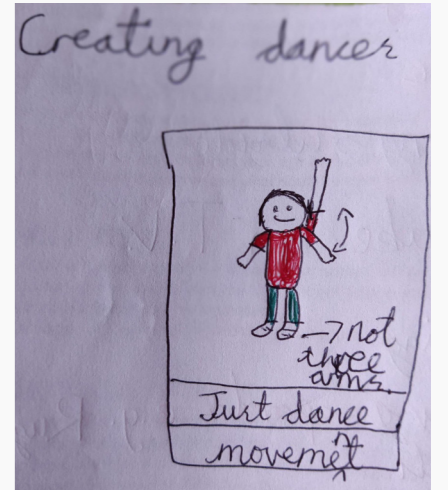
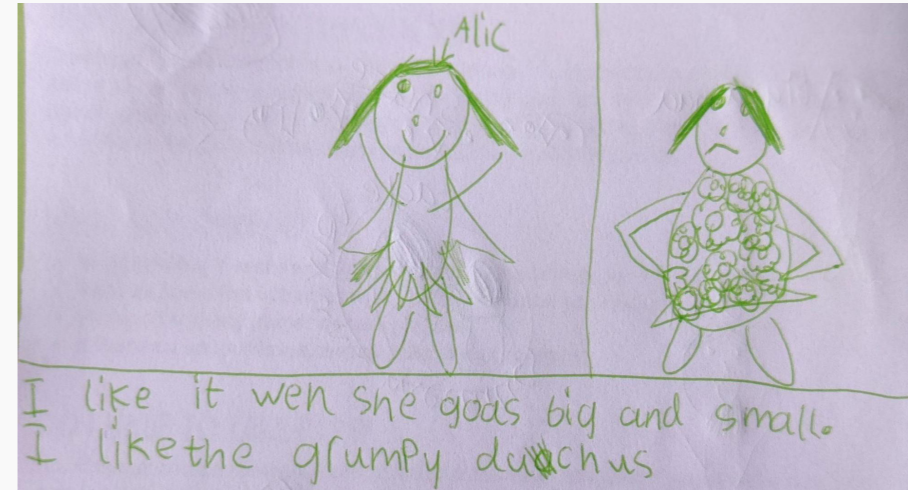
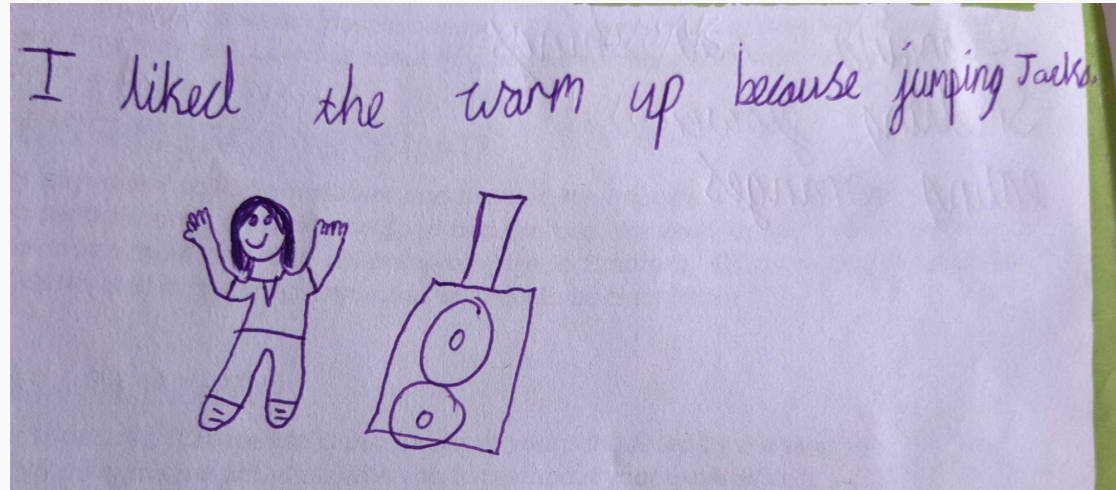
However, a minority of children had negative reactions to the physicality inherent within Create & Dance. Most often, children reported not liking being active through Create & Dance as it made them tired:

“I don’t like it because then I become tired” (Charleston, Focus Group)

This suggests that perhaps fitness and physical comfort play a role in whether children enjoy the physical aspect of Create & Dance. In school Tap, the observer noted that one girl complained she was hot and that whilst the children were active throughout the session, they were restricted from having water as the teacher decided they hadn’t “done enough yet” (Tap, Observation). This was in comparison to school Tango whereby children were “free to come and get water whenever they please” (Tango, Observation). Small accommodations like providing access to water for children when they feel they need it, is likely to help alleviate discomfort associated with the inherent physical nature of participating in Create & Dance for some children, and thus enhance their experience and wellbeing.

Drawings from the booklets illustrate how some of the children's highlights of Create & Dance were physically active moves such as Jumping Jacks.

Opposite page: the children noted in their booklets how they enjoyed creating their own dances, and pretending to be different characters and taking on their emotions:



**Encouraging Creative Expression vs. Technicality**

The programme's approach to movement is intentionally child-friendly, encouraging creative expression rather than striving for technical mastery, such as through drilling precise ballet positions, which we found to enhance children's enjoyment and subjective wellbeing. Through the observations, it appeared that there was only one school that placed primary emphasis on mastering dance moves:

"Started with a warm up – it was more 'technical' [than other school observations, and the teacher] asked people to stand 'in parallel' and 'in first position', for example" (Tap, Observation)

The technical nature of the session, including being asked to learn and perform six movements in sequential order, appeared to overwhelm some of the children and perhaps reduce their engagement and subjective wellbeing. This approach is in contradiction to the Create & Dance ethos of creativity and freedom.

Whilst in most schools children were asked to learn and perform specific dance 'moves', the teachers' approach often helped to dissolve early reticence around taking part, by setting a tone that effort and creativity were more important than 'perfecting' the moves. For example in school Waltz, the teacher laughed with children about how tricky the moves were, which children see mistakes as 'silly' and 'fun'. Despite this however, at least one child still felt pressure to 'get it right', bluntly stating "I can't say that dance is my favourite... I suck at dancing" (Waltz, Focus Group).

In some schools there was limited or no focus on learning set moves, with children being encouraged to create their own movements in line with processes (such as the water cycle) or Alice in Wonderland characters:

"They really, really enjoyed it... They were just able to kind of be a bit free, and kind of nothing was 'wrong'. Everything they did was right. It was just how they interpreted it. It was nice to kind of see just them rolling with it... Because sometimes it's like, 'you're not doing this right, you're not doing that right'. But with dance, they can kind of be free. So, it was quite nice for them to kind of have a look at the characters and just interpret it the way they want to" (Contemporary, REM)

In regular sports there's a correct way to hold a bat or throw a ball, and in technical dance sessions there is a correct way to stand in first position. However, in Create & Dance, encouraging children to express their creativity precluded a need to get things 'right'. As one RBO dance artist described:

"I use my kids' creativity and together, collaboratively, we can do it. And actually, the joy [is] there's no wrong answer in dance" (RBO Partner).

This realisation frees them from the pressure of being "expert performers" and allows them to become facilitators of creative expression, learning alongside their students.

The contemporary school teacher noted that:

"When the props came out, they were all like, 'Oh, this is amazing,' having so much fun," (Contemporary, REM).

Initial reluctance amongst some (most often boys) was transformed into active participation; de-emphasising technicality and framing movement as imaginative play helped to remove stigma and made engaging in dance more universally appealing.

**Autonomy, Ownership and Fun**

As described above, Create & Dance often promoted creative expression amongst children. This came hand in hand with opportunities for autonomous engagement. In schools where children were encouraged to create their own movements, high levels of engagement and active autonomy were displayed. For example, in school Tango when asked to represent the water cycle, not a single dance move was taught/shown by the teacher. Through breaking the water cycle down into stages and working collaboratively, each group created their own two-minute dance piece:

“The groups are very engaged in their own activity, not really looking at what the other groups are doing. The groups are all doing really different things, showing they are creatively engaging as a group with their own ideas and interpretations” (Tango, Observation)

The teacher was observed providing constructive advice to children, which appeared to support the children in developing their dance pieces, without compromising their autonomy:

“The facilitator praised some groups and offered advice on how particles may move, adjusting some of their formations but allowed children to be creative with their own moves and work together” (Tango, Observation).

This child-led, low/no choreography approach appeared to be key to fostering a sense of ownership and enhancing children's engagement and enjoyment.

Similarly, in schools that followed the RBO Alice in Wonderland programme, the teachers that took a low/no choreography approach and encouraged children to use their bodies creatively seemed to enhance autonomy, ownership and fun to a greater extent.

However, even when teachers placed an emphasis on structured choreography, they often still embedded opportunities for autonomous engagement. For example, in schools Foxtrot and Tap, despite being asked to learn set moves, children were given an opportunity to define poses and enact facial expressions for the Queen of Hearts, which they appeared to find more engaging than the structured choreography aspects:

“Whilst [the] facilitator is talking and giving instructions, some of the class are disengaged (e.g. sat on floor, doing movements unrelated to what facilitator is describing)” (Tap, Observation)

“Engagement levels were mixed, with higher enthusiasm for physically dynamic tasks like falling and less interest in structured choreography” (Foxtrot, Observation)

However, we found that teachers may need to develop and build their confidence over time, especially when they are used to teaching choreography:

“I feel like I was confident in teaching dancing before. But my experience of teaching dance before has been very much, I'd choreographed dance and then taught it throughout the half term, whereas this way, I got them to create it rather than me creating it and them just following. And it's a very different skill... it's a different way of teaching to how I had taught it before” (Jazz, REM)

Thus, whilst maximising opportunities for autonomy is likely to enhance children's engagement and wellbeing, teachers should perhaps be encouraged to work towards this and feel reassured that integrating some choreographic elements alongside opportunities for autonomous expression can still provide significant benefit for children.

**Children's Responses to Opportunities for Creative, Autonomous Movement**

In the focus group, when asked whether they liked being creative as part of Create & Dance, 82% of children across all schools responded yes. Reasons for enjoying expressing their creativity through Create & Dance included that “It helps me express my feelings and personality” (Charleston focus group) and because they “love imagining” (Tango focus group). Children's self-reported ‘favourite part’ of Create & Dance often related to the inherent creativity within the sessions. Examples included “being a different character like the turtle” (Waltz focus group), “twirling away so I'm free” (Tango, Focus Group) and “[when] we got to make our own dance” (Jazz, Focus Group).

These narratives reinforce how opportunities for autonomous, creative self-expression enhanced enjoyment and happiness, which are key contributors to wellbeing, for most children.

RBO partners highlighted that starting sessions with a simple improvisation task which allows children to respond at their own level, can be a conscious inclusive strategy to encourage engagement amongst all children. They also expressed how framing movement as imaginative play, such as enacting sword fights, helps to dispel the myth that dance cannot be ‘masculine’ and encourages participation amongst boys and girls alike. As one RBO partner stated:

“Wherever we go... we've interviewed the boys [afterwards], and they say, ‘I didn't really want to do this, but actually I was really surprised by how much I engaged with it’” (RBO Partner).

However, it is important to highlight that a minority of children did not enjoy the creative, autonomous aspect of participating in Create & Dance; one child explained that they “feel sad ‘cause I don't know how to be creative” (Charleston, Focus Group). Observers of the Swing school session noted that whilst high levels of creativity and autonomy was demonstrated by some pupils, others, particularly boys, appeared more comfortable copying demonstrated moves rather than generating their own. There was a clear tendency amongst several children towards imitation over invention. Use of props appeared to boost creative engagement, especially for those who may have been more hesitant at first.

Additionally, at Tap, the teacher explained to observers how she had adapted the RBO programme by adding further instructions and choreography, as she didn't feel as though the children had the necessary capability for the level of creative expression required. Examples from other schools that took a low or no-choreographic approach provide evidence that all children have the potential to be creative when given the opportunity. However, these ‘outlier’ cases highlight a need to embed scaffolding or confidence-building strategies for children, alongside remedial strategies for teachers to challenge perceptions that (some) children lack capacity for creativity, to support children's autonomous and creative engagement. This should ensure that all children can access the wellbeing benefits associated with creative expression.

*“Sometimes it wasn't always necessarily the person who you thought would take charge... somebody who wouldn't normally speak up became the one everybody looked to... to lead the way through the dancing”*

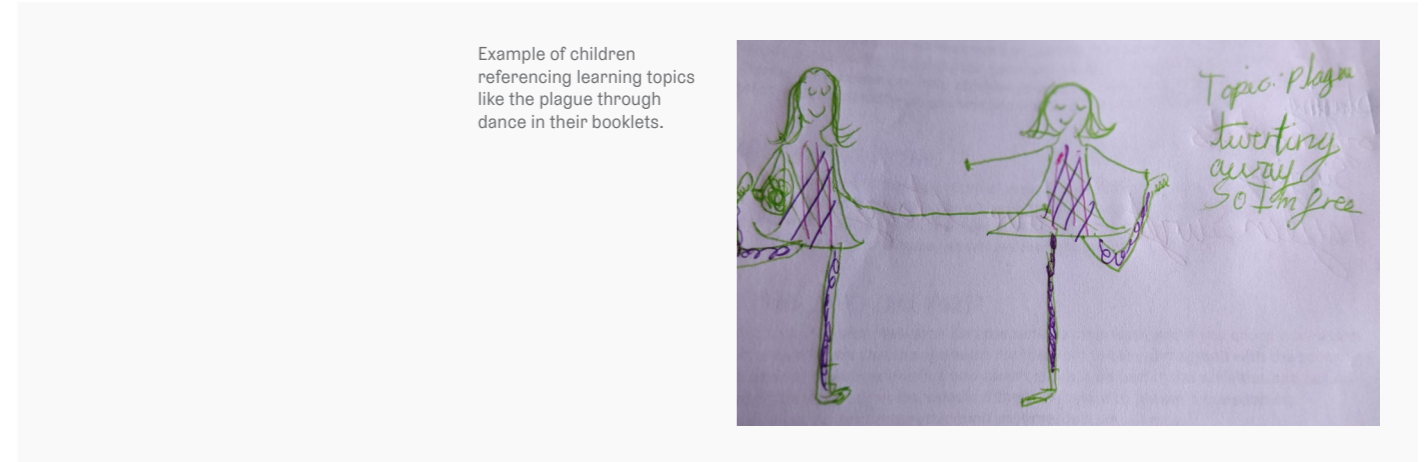
(Jazz, REM)

3.3.4 Theme 4: Enhanced Learning



This theme describes how Create & Dance deepened student engagement with the school Physical Education curriculum and supports learning amongst children through linking dance to other academic subjects and by making learning accessible in diverse ways.

There is also evidence from one school that Create & Dance contributed to improved perceptions of the school day.



Pedagogical Value of Dance within the Curriculum

The findings evidence that Create & Dance fits into the school's dance requirements as part of the Physical Education curriculum, which enabled teachers to cover dance in an engaging way without sacrificing academic core subjects. For example, a teacher at school Contemporary admitted feeling pressure about time, asking herself "when am I doing English and maths?" but found that dedicating a half-term Physical Education unit to this programme was "absolutely perfect" (Contemporary, REM). At school Salsa, the PE teacher leading Create & Dance noted "Our head teacher really liked having someone [from] outside, freshening up our dance curriculum" (Salsa, REM). This indicates that Create & Dance had a notable impact on pedagogical practice related to dance within schools.

Children valued the learning aspect of Create & Dance; as one child stated, "I feel proud because I have learnt something new" (Contemporary, Focus Group). RBO partners expressed how Create & Dance encourages children to develop essential motor skills such as co-ordination, balance and flexibility, through engaging in movement activities. Through dance, children learn to control their bodies and understand how to move safely in different environments, alongside developing their creative skills. At Contemporary, two Year 4 classes were able to demonstrate their enhanced creative skills through choreographing a joint dance that they subsequently performed. The teacher remarked that in just one Physical Education lesson they "were all able to do it together" and wanted to perform it "time and time again" (Contemporary, REM). The children's ability to transfer their learning from Create & Dance to developing a new dance routine, demonstrates how much their capability has developed.

There is some evidence that through linking dance to stories and characters and introducing dance concepts, Create & Dance allowed children to develop their dance vocabulary. For example, at school Salsa, whilst some language appeared initially challenging, the children grasped concepts like 'canon' and 'unison'. The teacher supported children's understanding by utilising accessible analogies, including "a 'mexican wave' to explain the canon [concept], which the class seemed to understand" (Salsa, Observation).

Having opportunities to choreograph short routines and apply such dance concepts, appeared to support children's grasp of the new vocabulary. However, in other schools, dance vocabulary was sometimes used by teachers with minimal explanation, such as use of the word 'motif' in school Swing may have caused confusion amongst children. In contrast, other schools reflected on how embodying language encouraged understanding e.g. the water cycle vocabulary at Tango (See supporting wider curriculum learning section below). This suggests that incorporating appropriate, child-friendly explanations of new vocabulary may maximise opportunities to develop dance language literacy.

### Supporting Wider Curriculum Learning

A small number of schools did not follow the RBO specific resources and instead creatively applied the Create & Dance concepts to topics from broader curriculum areas including Science, History and Maths. Our analysis indicates that in doing so, children's understanding of topics covered in Create & Dance sessions, such as the industrial revolution at school Charleston and the water cycle at school Tango, were enhanced. This aligns with RBO partner narratives that abstract concepts become tangible and memorable when embedded:

"...embedding [other academic]... topics in their school... like rivers or stone age... through the body and through movement is going to make them remember it much more than sat there writing lines and lines about it. So it's that kind of creative way, isn't it?" (RBO Partner)

At Charleston, the sessions effectively complemented history lessons, with the teacher stating that it was good to have "connections across subject areas and not have things just separate" and that the sessions "really helped them understand that topic further" (Charleston, REM). Children were able to demonstrate their understanding of the Industrial Revolution through movement, with several children referencing "machinery," "jerky movements," and "levers" in both drawings and verbal responses to being asked about their favourite part of Create & Dance (Charleston, Focus Group). One child explained their drawing, presented below, as representing "the machinery and the leavers in the industrial revolution" (Charleston, Focus Group), which indicates that historical learning was embedded in a physical and memorable way through creative movement and dance.

At Tango, for the observed session the teacher worked through each stage of the water cycle, evaporation, condensation, precipitation and collection, in turn. For each stage, they asked the children for examples of 'words' (adjectives) that represented that stage, and then gave each group of 4-5 children five minutes to create a dance in their small groups to represent that stage. Towards the end, the groups had time to put their four stages together to create a dance piece. It was evident that children were cognitively engaged during the sessions. Children highlighted that they found the learning aspect of the Create & Dance session enjoyable, for example one child said their favourite part was to "dance about the plague story with my friends" and another said "I liked it when we did the water cycle." (Tango, Focus Group).

When asked to represent different stages of the water cycle, children understood and engaged with this activity:

"Groups are doing different things and engaging with the specific task i.e. movements are different for condensation than they were for evaporation – whilst there is a lot of noise and energy the movements themselves are not as bouncy and they are 'lower' to the group, which indicates that the children are really engaging with the topic and learning" (Tango, Observation)

The observation extract highlights that children selected appropriate movements to represent different stages of the water cycle, which as well as being cognitively engaging, likely enhanced their learning with respect to the topic. This was corroborated by other observation, focus group and REM data. Within the REM session, the teacher noted that:

"With the water cycle, the children that did that are very good at remembering the order and the process because they've danced it out" (Tango, REM).

During the observation, it was noted that the teacher:

"Asked the class to put their hand up if they found it helpful for learning the water cycle – most put their hands up" (Tango, Observation).

Children noted that applied learning through creative movement aided their understanding of the topics compared to when they are taught in a traditional classroom format. One child said "it makes you understand things more" whilst another commented "it made me smarter" (Tango, Focus Group). The impact on learning was clearly linked to how the school applied the principles of Create & Dance to different 'academic' topics, compared to schools that utilised the RBO resources more directly.

In school Jazz, in addition to following RBO's Alice in Wonderland resources, the teacher described integrating movement and dance principles into other academic subjects, including Maths, in the classroom setting:

"I do a dance to learn rounding. It's five or more, you round up, yeah, four or less, we round down. Just if it's anything that needs remembering, I try [to] add a movement to it to make them remember it" (Jazz, REM).

The teacher explained how she had used these previously, but Create & Dance was a helpful reminder to re-integrate these techniques into her teaching, as she has found them to be effective for memory and attention. Taken together, these examples show that principles from Create & Dance can be incorporated into broader pedagogical practice to enhance learning of a wide range of subjects and topics.

### Inclusive Approaches to Enhancing Learning

RBO partners observed that children with no prior dance training often excel in creative expression. Lacking preconceived notions of how to perform specific dance moves, they freely invent and often produce wonderfully imaginative results:

"The more technically able the children become, the more codified their body becomes [and] the less creativity they have in a Create & Dance process," (RBO Partner)

This insight that potential for creative expression is not predicated on technical dance experience or 'ability' reinforces the programme's inclusive philosophy. Across the Bradford schools, observers noted that children were able to participate and express themselves. Create & Dance was delivered by teachers to support and encourage every child's unique creative contribution, and in doing so, it enhanced creative expression and learning amongst those who might otherwise be overlooked in a typical dance class.

By focusing on creative expression, Create & Dance serves children who may not thrive in a traditional 'classroom' format. For example, at Charleston, the teacher noted how children who were typically quieter in traditional lessons demonstrated some of the highest levels of creativity and originality during choreography of dance moves; "it was nice to see some of the really quieter children shine" (Charleston, REM). The programme provided a valuable outlet for these pupils to express themselves and their emotions in a supportive and imaginative environment, contrasting with the conventional classroom setting where they may be less inclined to communicate their ideas.

Using movement to support learning of academic topics and subjects appeared to be particularly beneficial for enhancing learning outcomes amongst children with additional learning needs. For example, at Tango, the teacher noted:

"We have linked it to English lessons, we've gone and done a dance, and come back up, and done a piece of writing, and I have noticed a lot of my lower ability children, the vocabulary they were using was a lot better because of the dance... Some of my reluctant writers who would [previously] magpie other people's ideas, following the dance they have lots more ideas and it actually flipped, they became the ones sharing the ideas with the rest of the class" (Tango, REM)

This aligns with theory relating to different 'learning styles' and that for many, kinaesthetic learning, i.e. 'learning by doing' is often the preferred way to absorb, process and retain information. Delivery of Create & Dance in this way enables the incorporation of approaches to allow children to learn in different ways, which perhaps supports a broader range of children to thrive in their learning and education compared to more traditional modes of teaching. However, the teacher also noted that she observed that this style of learning could be particularly challenging amongst children for whom English is an additional language:

"I have found with some of the EAL [English as an additional language] children, because it's quite abstract, an abstract way of doing things, they don't quite understand the concepts... so when we're, so we did it in our class with pollination, and when they're describing it they're talking about, they'd be like wiggling, and I'm like, that's not what the bees actually doing, that's just how we showed it, so they would struggle to see the difference between the dance and what that dance was representing" (Tango, REM)

Moving forwards, it would be beneficial to consider strategies to facilitate understanding amongst children that the dance moves are representing different concepts, rather than being direct descriptions of those concepts, to ensure that students' learning is not negatively impacted and that the benefits of this approach can be realised amongst a wider group of children.

### Connection to the School Day

In a small number of schools, teachers remarked on changes to how children were approaching the broader school day more positively. For example, Create & Dance challenged children's ideas of the "Friday afternoon P.E. slot," transforming it from a "death slot" into a session they looked forward to (Waltz, REM). This shift indicates a significant positive change in their attitude towards PE and a positive emotional connection to the school day.

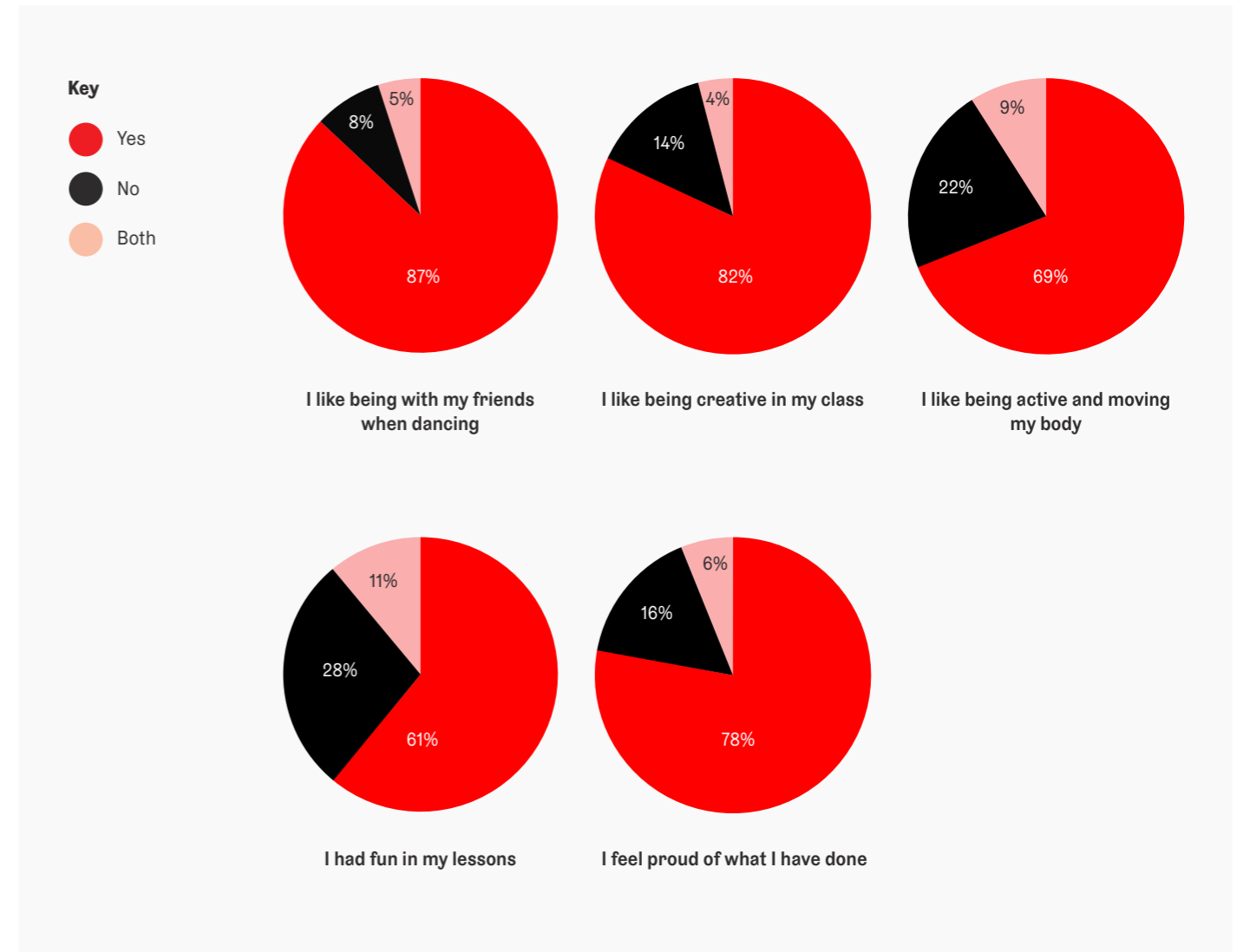
### 3.3.5 Children's Self-reported Wellbeing in Create & Dance Sessions

As part of their participation in the Create & Dance sessions, children were asked to reflect on aspects of their wellbeing by answering specific questions in a booklet. They indicated their responses by selecting from a smiley face (yes), a sad face (no), or a neutral face (both). Overall, children reported high levels of positive wellbeing during Create & Dance sessions.

The majority particularly enjoyed the social aspects of dancing, with 87% saying they liked being with friends, and 82% appreciating opportunities to be creative.

Feelings of pride were also strong (78%). While 69% enjoyed being active, fewer children reported consistently having fun (61%) or expressed neutral or negative responses to certain aspects, indicating some variability in individual experiences.

The chart opposite summarises children's responses to key wellbeing questions.



*“it was nice to see some of the really quieter children shine”*

(Charleston, REM)

## 3.4 Wider Impacts

This section moves beyond the contribution of Create & Dance to children's wellbeing specifically, and presents broader impacts that Create & Dance contributed to in Bradford schools and children. The wider impacts relate to children's leadership, impacts on teachers and schools, and potential future sustainable change.

### 3.4.1 Children's Leadership and Development

Beyond wellbeing benefits, Create & Dance fostered meaningful personal growth in children's leadership. Across schools, teachers observed how children began taking initiative within creative activities, leading peers in choreography, modelling inclusive behaviours, and positively influencing the wider classroom dynamic. These moments of relational leadership demonstrate how the programme empowered children not just as learners, but as leaders within the Create & Dance space, and possibly beyond.

#### Leading Through Creative Expression

Observations showed children taking initiative, for example one girl added a spin to her movement, while another confidently asked to lead a group canon. These moments didn't come from being formally put in charge but rather through how the children supported each other, took initiative, and grew in confidence across the sessions. For example, at Contemporary when the children took an activity in a new direction, the teacher was happy to follow their lead. The children started happily throwing their hats and inventing different ways to retrieve them and the teacher allowed it to continue because it nurtured their creativity and leadership:

"One hat is chased across the room when kicked and there is excited chatter from the other children. Children are encourage[d] to make the right choices and not be distracted but the teacher also allows the freedom for the children to throw and retrieve the hats" (Contemporary, Observation)

In some cases, leadership looked like a child guiding their peers through a routine or taking the lead on shaping a group's ideas. At Tango, one boy stood out as someone who took on this role instinctively; he stepped forward, gave instructions, and helped organise his group during their choreography. In the same school, leadership was at other times shared more quietly between children, such as when groups worked together to time their transitions using only non-verbal signals, responding to each other's movements and knowing when it was time to shift to the next part of the dance. There were also examples of children stepping into leadership unexpectedly. As described in Jazz:

"There was always like a leader within the group... sometimes it wasn't always necessarily the person who you thought would take charge... somebody who wouldn't normally speak up became the one everybody looked to... to lead the way through the dancing" (Jazz, REM).

For these children, having a safe, creative space allowed them to develop in new ways. This complements findings discussed in 3.3.1 Wellbeing Theme 1 'nurturing confidence and emotional safety' section, where children's growing confidence also translated into collaborative leadership behaviours.

#### Fostering Inclusion and Shifting Peer Dynamics

The Create & Dance programme subtly influenced wider class culture and peer relationships. In one school, staff observed that the programme shifted the social dynamics of the whole class. As children worked together during Create & Dance sessions, they developed new connections with peers they wouldn't normally choose to collaborate with. One teacher reflected:

"Socially, it was quite a good opportunity for children to work with children that wouldn't necessarily have ever chosen to work with... I think that stemmed from that because I did it at the beginning of the year. It's kind of stayed in place for the duration." (Jazz, REM).

This suggests that the impact of Create & Dance extended beyond the sessions themselves, fostering longer-lasting changes in how pupils interacted and supported one another throughout the school year.

Notably, the inclusive design of Create & Dance enabled meaningful participation from children who may otherwise feel excluded in traditional settings. At Salsa, a pupil with a physical disability was able to engage fully with the session, which staff described as a valued experience:

"I felt as though he could access everything. You know?... It was really well done... that he could access it and he felt part... [of the] class. I just thought that was really special and the music... It was really soothing... and calming for him" (Salsa, REM).

Similarly, at Jazz, the inclusive grouping strategy prompted children to show empathy and support towards their classmates with additional needs. Teachers noted a visible shift in attitudes:

"Children were empathetic towards SEND children who needed additional help... which I thought was lovely." (Jazz, REM)

These examples highlight how Create & Dance can cultivate a more inclusive, compassionate classroom culture. Such relational and attitudinal changes have the potential to positively influence interactions throughout the school day, reinforcing a sense of belonging and shared responsibility among pupils. These inclusive impacts align with the findings in the 3.3.1 Wellbeing Theme 1 'designing for inclusion' section, which highlighted high levels of engagement for children with additional needs.

### 3.4.2 Across the School and Beyond

The Create & Dance programme has demonstrated substantial wider impacts across the school and beyond, including relating to both curriculum development and staff professional development.

#### Curriculum Development and Learning Enhancement

One significant impact of the programme has been its influence on broader curriculum integration and pedagogical practice. At Salsa, a teacher reported using strategies learned in the training to successfully engage reluctant pupils, particularly boys, by integrating imaginative and relatable elements such as football-themed warm-ups and appealing characters like the Mad Hatter:

“A lot of the warm-up games are linked to football... The boys pretended they were Messi and Ronaldo... that really got them engaged.” (Salsa, REM)

Teachers at Salsa also reported applying elements of Create & Dance with different classes and year groups, particularly with younger students:

“We repeated some of the Create & Dance elements with another class later on... it made a real difference to how the kids engaged.” (Salsa, REM)

These examples suggest that the engagement strategies and pedagogical approaches introduced through Create & Dance were adapted for broader use beyond the immediate intervention.

At Waltz, a teacher reflected on plans to embed Create & Dance more structurally into long-term planning:

“From September, we’re just putting our times tables for next year together now, and it will be a core part of our PE curriculum, our indoor PE curriculum... at the moment it’s Year 5 and 6 that do it, but we are wanting to roll it out to lower Key Stage 2 as well” (Waltz, REM).

In several schools, staff reported a shift in how the arts were valued within the curriculum and leadership priorities:

“It’s just really freshened up our dance curriculum... [the head teacher] really enjoyed it... she loved watching... she was really keen and she enjoyed it...” (Salsa, REM)

Taken together, these examples show that Create & Dance pedagogy is not only shaping Physical Education and dance lessons but is also influencing wider teaching practices, staff development, and cross-curricular planning across schools.

#### Staff Professional Development and Empowerment

Teachers significantly benefited from Create & Dance, gaining transferable skills, confidence, and pedagogical insights that went beyond the dance studio. At Jazz, the teacher who attended the RBO training facilitated a school staff-wide CPD session that teachers described as both collaborative and uplifting:

“When I came back from the initial training, I did a staff meeting and delivered staff training to everybody... it wasn’t just about the Create & Dance and how we should be teaching dance. It was also like team building... it was really positive. Everybody had a really good time... it was great to push everybody’s boundaries and see how everybody else reacted to the things that we did in the workshop.” (Jazz, REM)

Across schools, teachers frequently reported feeling inspired, revitalised, and more confident in taking creative risks. The programme provided a space where teachers were both learners and facilitators, contributing to a shared sense of growth and professionalism. At Salsa, one teacher commented:

“I’m not a dance specialist. In fact, I would have actively avoided dance before we went to that session, and then I came [back] fully understanding how to implement it in my class. And I also [started] training two other colleagues at school... I think everybody went away feeling really excited and with the confidence to do it.” (Tango, REM)

This growth in professional identity and capability suggests the programme offered meaningful CPD with long-term benefits across the curriculum.

### 3.4.3 Sustained Long-Term Impact

The evaluation indicates that Create & Dance is delivering immediate benefits to participating classes while also laying strong foundations for long-term curriculum enrichment and broader cultural change within schools.

As outlined in the Curriculum Development section above, multiple teachers have already planned to embed Create & Dance into future delivery, expanding its reach from individual classes to whole year groups and even into lower key stages.

The Staff Professional Development findings highlight how teacher confidence has grown to the extent that they have begun sharing learning with colleagues. For example, staff training sessions delivered back in schools have introduced creative pedagogy to wider teaching teams, suggesting a ripple effect that could sustain creative approaches well beyond the programme’s duration.

In addition, schools described how peer-to-peer support and cross-school learning could help embed the programme more permanently. One teacher noted this would provide leadership with “that little bit of encouragement to think, ‘Oh yeah, this is a really excellent initiative’” (Waltz, REM).

Taken together, these findings show that Create & Dance has acted as a catalyst for lasting change, helping schools reintroduce arts as a valued part of education, influencing future planning, and building teacher capacity to sustain creative pedagogy across the curriculum.

*“[One teacher] further articulated that Create & Dance ‘brought back the joy’ to her work”*

(Waltz, REM)

## 3.5 Barriers and Facilitators

### This section explores barriers and facilitators that hinder or support the implementation of the Create & Dance programme in primary school settings.

The analysis highlights how logistical constraints, varying teaching approaches, resource availability, and school culture influenced delivery and engagement. The findings show that while some challenges, such as limited space, time, and technology access, impacted delivery, these were often mitigated by strong teacher adaptability, supportive leadership, and the inherent flexibility of the RBO programme's design.

### 3.5.1 RBO Training and Resources

This section details how the RBO's training and resources serve as key facilitators by enhancing teacher confidence and enabling broader curriculum integration.

#### RBO Training: Building Teacher Confidence

The RBO team designed the Create & Dance programme to demystify dance forms, making them accessible to everyone irrespective of their background or prior experience. A key success factor of the programme's delivery model is its focus on empowering teachers with knowledge and resources, rather than solely relying on visiting artists. As one RBO partner explained, the initiative operates through three core components or 'pillars', teacher CPD training, digital resources for classroom use, and live broadcast lessons from the RBO. The first pillar, in-person training, is specifically designed to:

"Build teachers' confidence creatively and enable them to put [RBO] resources in place," and to "inspire them to apply creative techniques to other areas of their teaching" (RBO Partner).

Teacher confidence in delivering Create & Dance inevitably grew over time as they became increasingly acquainted with the programme's methodology and resources, as discussed in the 'staff professional development' wider impact section 3.4.2. Many teachers, even those without prior dance backgrounds, reported a significant increase in their self-efficacy. One teacher, who initially had no prior dance background, reflected after the training that she felt "that training is what gave me the confidence [to teach dance]" (Waltz, REM). She further articulated that Create & Dance "brought back the joy" to her work, reigniting her enthusiasm and making her look forward to the Friday afternoon PE slot. She explicitly emphasised "teacher confidence and skill development" as "incredibly important," noting that the programme "upskilled" her and gave her the confidence to pass that on to the children. This teacher reflected that the programme highlighted a "disservice" they might have been doing to the children by not including such activities in the school curriculum previously (Waltz, REM).

Another teacher, also not a dance specialist, stated that the training was "really good in terms of how to plan a dance scheme for people who aren't dance specialists," adding that staff "went away feeling really confident and with lots of tools and resources" (Charleston, REM).

A teacher from another school echoed this sentiment, saying:

"I'm not a dance specialist, in fact I would have actively avoided dance before we went to that session. And I came away fully understanding how to implement it [Create & Dance Session] in my class" (REM, Tango).

Teachers particularly valued the well-designed structure of the RBO training. This practical approach enabled them to plan precisely how they would deliver the content in their own classrooms and ensured they had a clear scheme to follow, preventing them from feeling lost or losing the class's confidence. While some teachers without prior dance experience initially reported unfamiliarity with dance-related vocabulary and specific techniques, this challenge was consistently mitigated through effective RBO training and the provision of comprehensive resources. Moreover, teachers gained confidence as they observed positive engagement from the children and the wider school community. By empowering teachers with practical dance and drama strategies, Create & Dance ensures that the learning can be embedded in regular classroom practice, beyond a one-off workshop by an external provider.

#### Supportive Training Materials and Adaptive Teaching in Practice

To support teachers after the training, Create & Dance provides rich digital resources including detailed lesson plans, music, videos, and what the team calls "building blocks" of dance. These resources give teachers a framework, for example, creative tasks and warm-up games aligned to key movement concepts that they can readily "pull off the shelf and do a five-lesson scheme of work" (RBO Partner). Overwhelmingly, teachers utilised the training resources provided to deliver Create & Dance sessions. They used RBO resources such as PowerPoint presentations to help children visualise different characters. Importantly, the materials were perceived to be flexible enough that teachers can adapt the ideas to any topic or theme they might be covering, thereby allowing for significant integration with the wider curriculum. For example, the programme's "building blocks" of movement were effectively used by teachers to help pupils understand concepts such as the water cycle at Tango.

Resources, including lesson plans, music, and videos, were seen as valuable scaffolds that boosted the teacher's competence and comfort with dance instructions, despite some teachers having limited prior experience with dance.

However, one practical challenge encountered by teachers was the five-to-ten minute duration of the RBO video content, which one teacher considered too lengthy for a short Physical Education lesson (Salsa, REM). The provided lesson plans were described as "quite complex and long," requiring simplification by teachers to fit into a typical one-hour slot. One teacher expressed a desire for "Idiot Guide lessons" or "two versions" (a more detailed and a simpler one), as the current "brief guide" was "too brief" (Waltz, REM). Additionally, while the amount of resources was seen as comprehensive, it could also be "overwhelming and [in] detail" for some, though the inclusion of a "cheat sheet" helped mitigate this (Waltz, REM).

Discussions of online engagement, particularly during "Discover Ballet" sessions, indicated that participation was "not as high... when it's online." (Waltz, REM) Students tended to "switch off" during "chatty bits" suggesting a need for more dynamic and visually engaging content, such as "vloggy bits", which were reported to be more engaging (Waltz, REM).

The RBO resources provide YouTube video clips to accompany lessons, which were very well received. However teachers mentioned a lack of easily accessible music to go along with engaging characters such as the Mad Hatter. Additionally, teachers who applied the principles of Create & Dance to other areas of the curriculum noted that not having access to appropriate music increased their planning burden. Some reported difficulties in sourcing suitable music to accompany these sessions. As one teacher explained:

"The biggest thing for me is finding the right music ... I feel like sometimes I spend hours searching for the music. Because I'm not following [the RBO content], ...I'm doing my own things ...I seem to spend a lot of time [looking for music]" (Tango, REM).

Curated Create & Dance playlists and a comprehensive music selection guide including warm-up, working, and thematic/performance tracks with practical tips for choosing and sourcing music, were available to schools; links to these resources were provided during training sessions. However, some staff reported spending considerable time searching for suitable tracks, suggesting these resources were not always widely known about or accessed.

Additionally, in the Wish Jar activity during the Focus Groups, a couple of children expressed a desire for more choice over the music used in sessions. This could present an opportunity to further enhance delivery.

### 3.5.2 School Logistics and Environmental Constraints

#### Overcoming Practical Barriers to Access Technology

Access to technology presented some challenges, particularly where staff had limited or no access to smart screens or projectors to screen the Create & Dance presentations and videos. For example, at Foxtrot, although a projector was available at the front of the hall, the PowerPoint presentation was not used due to technical difficulties (Foxtrot, Observation). In another class, “the projector screen was mounted quite high, thus obscuring the view of dance videos for some students” (Contemporary, Observation). These environmental factors occasionally made the initial part of the lessons less consistently engaging for some children. However, teachers were able to adapt teaching resources to work around any constraints. For example, while halls often provided ample space for movement, the lack of a sound system in the hall in one school meant the teacher played the video in the classroom at the start of the session before taking the children to the hall for the physical element of the session.

#### Delivering Dance in Shared Spaces

While many Create & Dance sessions were delivered in a spacious “school hall with ample space for children to move freely” (Tango, Observation), these spaces are typically multi-use and subject to competing demands, such as dining, assemblies and seasonal performances. As most schools only had one large hall, securing regular and uninterrupted access posed some challenges. Where interruptions and logistical constraints impacted continuity and engagement, as for example increased noise impacted children’s focus, Create & Dance teaching staff demonstrated adaptability by utilising alternative spaces and modifying the space layouts to mitigate any issues.

For example “cones [were] used to define space parameters for marching activity.” (Foxtrot, Observation), and another teacher organised the children into “much smaller groups where less space is needed” (Tango, REM), thus supporting continuity in delivering the Create & Dance sessions. Despite the challenges posed by shared and multi-use spaces, teachers demonstrated considerable flexibility and creativity in adapting their environments to ensure the successful delivery of Create & Dance sessions.

#### Timetabling and Curricular Integration Challenges

Teachers were able to integrate Create & Dance into existing timetables by substituting it for regular PE lessons, allowing for smooth curricular alignment with minimal disruption to the wider school schedule. However, the research identified key challenges related to both lesson duration and overall timetabling. In many primary schools, PE lessons typically last around 40 minutes, yet teachers reported that this was insufficient time to deliver the Create & Dance sessions effectively.

To some extent, broader timetabling demands, seasonal factors, and competing curricular priorities also hindered consistent delivery of Create & Dance. These constraints particularly affected scheduling during busy periods such as the lead-up to Christmas, when the school hall was in high demand. Nonetheless, teachers consistently worked around these challenges. For instance, in school Jazz, the class teacher “...had to shuttle [the children] between their classroom and [the school] hall for PE” (Jazz, REM), a time constraint the teacher managed despite some lost time. Thinking ahead, School Charleston plans to utilise the hall more in the summer when PE lessons can be delivered outside, thereby freeing up the hall for Create & Dance.

### 3.5.3 Teaching Approach and Engagement Strategies

#### Teaching Style: Facilitating Engagement through Participatory Approaches

Teaching style played a pivotal role in the successful implementation of Create & Dance. Teachers who applied directive approaches identified higher levels of disengaged children as opposed to those who adopted the child-led, expressive nature of Create & Dance. For example:

“The teacher’s attitude set the tone; she was not afraid to be a bit silly or vulnerable in front of the class, which gave the children permission to relax. She actively participated in every session, demonstrating moves, narrating stories, and even joining group dances, to model a ‘have a go’ spirit” (Contemporary, Observation).

When confronted with student hesitance, teachers were able to draw on strategies from the RBO training (see Section 3.5.1) to reduce pressure. Instead of forcing anyone to perform solo, the teacher used a group circle format where many children danced at once, so no single child felt all eyes on them. Over a few weeks, students who initially only dared to step into the circle for a few seconds were staying in longer and longer, as they realised their classmates were busy dancing too and not staring or judging (Contemporary, REM). The teacher also proved very flexible and child-led in her delivery. She treated the official lesson plan as a guiding framework rather than a strict script. She said of the programme’s philosophy:

“It wasn’t like you have to do it like this... do it in your own way,” (Contemporary, REM).

When the children took an activity in a new direction, she was happy to follow their lead. In cases where staff embraced a participatory ethos, pupils engaged more confidently, and creative ownership was visibly enhanced (as discussed in Section 3.3.1). At Tap school there was a more directive teaching style, the children were observed appearing disengaged during periods when the teacher was providing specific instructions about how to perform certain movements.

#### Overcoming Preconceived Notions of Dance

Preconceived notions of dance often framed how children approached the Create & Dance sessions. This was acknowledged at the inception of Create & Dance by RBO partners who stated that gender stereotypes frequently posed a challenge to participation, with many teachers and parents expecting boys to resist dance activities. RBO Partners commonly hear concerns such as “what about Year Six boys?” and often witness sceptical teachers change their minds after engaging in the sessions themselves. The programme’s creative, playful approach, such as using pretend sword fights or character role-play helps to break down these stereotypes by making movement fun and accessible to all pupils. This approach quickly changes attitudes, encouraging boys and girls alike to join in enthusiastically once initial fears about dance being overly formal or feminine are dispelled. The study found that some gendered assumptions led to hesitancy in participation, particularly among boys. Yet, these barriers were counterbalanced by imaginative and story-driven content that resonated with pupils, along with a non-prescriptive ethos that encouraged expressive, playful engagement. Initially some children were extremely self-conscious about dancing, particularly boys. A couple of the boys who carried the attitude that dance wasn’t something they were interested in, in their teacher’s words, as soon as they heard “dance” mentioned, they’d cross their arms and say “not a chance. Don’t want to do it” (Contemporary, REM). Their teacher later reflected that the boys who said “I’m not dancing” at first became much more receptive when dancing wasn’t presented as formal ballet, but as pretending to be characters or playing a game with a hat. The teacher recalled about the change in attitude:

“When the props came out, they were all like, ‘Oh, this is amazing,’ having so much fun,” (Contemporary, REM).

Props such as a drum were used to maintain focus and provide auditory cues, particularly. These props appeared to boost creative engagement, particularly for those who were initially hesitant. In short, framing movement as imaginative play removed the stigma and made dance universally appealing. Peer support and the class’s camaraderie acted as facilitators (as detailed in Section 3.3.2, ‘Social Connection, Collaboration, and Kindness’). Despite these successful strategies, ongoing attention and proactive reinforcement of inclusive practices remain essential. Teachers could benefit from explicit guidance and additional training on employing consistently gender-neutral language, ensuring diverse role models, and continuing to embed broader narratives that challenge gender stereotypes within their teaching approaches.

### The Inclusion of Pupils with Additional Needs

Central to the Create & Dance programme is the RBO partners' deep belief that "everybody can dance, and everybody does dance", an ethos mentioned in the context of working with differently-abled learners. The Create & Dance sessions actively aimed to include pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and physical disabilities, and the extent of their inclusion was significantly influenced by available support and pedagogical adaptations. In settings where staff had adequate SEN provision and where peer collaboration was strongly encouraged (see Wellbeing Section 3.3.2, 'Social Connection, Collaboration, and Kindness'), pupils with physical or sensory needs were actively included through informal adaptations and group support. However, not all inclusion efforts were fully successful. In one instance, the lack of tailored facilitation may have contributed to a child who was neurodiverse disengaging during the session and leaving midway, despite support from a learning assistant.

Furthermore, a barrier concerned inclusivity for two children who used walking aids, as they were not actively included in either the partner work or practice sessions (Tap, Observation). This highlighted a gap in accessible planning and the need for more intentional strategies to ensure that all children, regardless of ability, are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the session. Despite these challenges, the programme also had a notably positive impact on a child who has autism who typically does not participate in the same lessons as the rest of the class (Charleston, REM).

Overall, where adequate support and a collaborative classroom culture existed, pupils with SEN and physical disabilities were meaningfully included through creative problem-solving and peer support. For pupils who appeared disengaged, additional engagement strategies, such as incorporating their interests or using more varied movement prompts, could boost participation. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to develop more inclusive strategies that enable children who use walking aids to participate more fully.

Despite strong efforts in inclusivity, there were noted gaps, especially concerning pupils using walking aids or with significant mobility restrictions. It was clear that although adaptations were made, these were occasionally ad-hoc and reliant on individual teachers' creativity. Providing standardised, inclusive resources, such as universally accessible movements or suggested adaptations, would support a consistent experience for all children.

*A friend system formed around a child who was blind: one of her classmates would take her by the hand or describe what others were doing so she could follow along*

(Contemporary, Observation)

## Chapter 04 | Discussion

*“The Royal Ballet and Opera’s ‘Create and Dance’ programme is an innovative arts initiative designed to embed high-quality dance education within primary schools”*

Research authors



**This evaluation employed a multiple case study approach across nine Bradford Primary schools to examine the impact of Create & Dance on children’s wellbeing and identify broader impacts.**

A secondary aim was to understand implementation across school contexts, identifying factors influencing delivery and wellbeing outcomes.

Overall, Create & Dance was found to have a positive impact on children’s wellbeing, and several wider impacts were identified including cross-curricular integration and school staff professional development. Key factors found to influence implementation include the school physical environment, RBO training and resources, and teachers’ facilitation style.

## 4.1 Children's Wellbeing in the Context of Create & Dance

Prior to conducting our empirical research, we conceptualised children's wellbeing as follows:

“Well-being in children refers to the overall quality of life experienced by children, encompassing their physical health, emotional wellbeing, education, and social relationships. It reflects their ability to thrive, experience positive emotions, develop their potential, and participate meaningfully in their communities and environments”

Through our analysis we developed four interrelated wellbeing themes: (1) building confidence through joyful participation, (2) social connection, collaboration and kindness, (3) embodied expression and active autonomy, and (4) enhanced learning. Overall, the findings map relatively neatly to our original conceptualisation of wellbeing.

### Building Confidence Through Joyful Participation

The first theme, building confidence through joyful participation, relates specifically to emotional wellbeing, and children's ability to thrive and experience positive emotions. However, this theme also specifically identified how Create & Dance nurtured the development of confidence and pride in achievements amongst children. Playful and inclusive experiences enabled them to progress from initial shyness to enthusiastic participation. This aligns with a rapid review of arts interventions for children that reported that increased self-confidence was one of the most commonly reported benefits of participation (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). It also aligns with findings from a systematic review of the health and wellbeing contributions of dance across the lifecourse, that identifies opportunities for creative expression as key to enhancing confidence and self-worth (Chappell et al., 2021).

The current evaluation builds on this by also identifying performance opportunities and pride in achievements as mechanisms underpinning enhanced confidence.

### Social Connection, Collaboration and Kindness

The second theme, social connection, collaboration and kindness relates specifically to the 'social relationships' component of our original conceptualisation of wellbeing. We found that Create & Dance facilitated connection amongst children, through partner and group activities. This aligns with other children's arts interventions that have demonstrated enhanced sense of belonging through exposure to different people and experiences (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). Here, Create & Dance's structure was key to enhanced collaboration and connectivity between children, as children moved beyond simply completing tasks together to co-creating, making adaptations to complement the varying needs of peers, and learning with and from one another.

### Embodied Expression and Active Autonomy

The third theme, embodied expression and active autonomy, relates to the physical health component of the original wellbeing definition. We found that Create & Dance provided opportunities for physical movement, which children reported supported development of their health and fitness. This aligns with wider dance intervention literature that shows that dance increases moderate-vigorous physical activity which improves health measures including body composition, blood biomarkers and musculoskeletal function (Fong et al., 2018). The current evaluation builds on this understanding by providing evidence that sessions that encourage children to create their own movements have potential to increase the amount and intensity of physical activity compared with dance interventions that teach children set dance moves. Additionally, this theme identified the importance of encouraging creative expression through dance over technical mastery for enhancing children's agentic engagement and subsequently their enjoyment. This builds on evidence from a recent systematic review that dance can enable the development and expression of creativity (Chappell et al., 2021), tying it more explicitly to enhanced wellbeing.

### Enhanced Learning

The fourth theme, enhanced learning, relates to the education component of our original wellbeing definition. We found that engaging in dance enhanced children's essential motor skills, their creative potential, and their dance vocabulary. Additionally, when applied to topics from broader curriculum areas such as science and history, Create & Dance appeared to enhance learning of these topics and subjects. This aligns with research findings from the Cultural Learning Alliance that participation in structured arts activities can increase cognitive abilities by 17% and that learning through arts and culture can improve attainment in Maths and English (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2017). We built on this evidence by developing an understanding of potential mechanisms by which dance and movement enhances wider curriculum learning; the opportunity to engage in kinaesthetic learning appeared to support a broader range of children to thrive in their learning and education compared to more traditional modes of teaching. It is also feasible that Create & Dance supports children to develop creative habits including curiosity, persistence, imagination, collaboration, and discipline, which have been linked to successful learning within and beyond the arts (Lucas & Spencer, 2017).

### Extended wellbeing definition

The findings presented herein allow us to extend our original wellbeing definition and contextualise it to the Create & Dance programme:

“Well-being in children refers to the overall quality of life experienced by children, encompassing their physical health, emotional well-being, confidence, creative expression, education, and social relationships. It reflects their ability to thrive, experience positive emotions, develop their potential, and participate meaningfully in their communities and environments”

Create & Dance contributes to enhancing children's wellbeing through increasing physical activity and health, enhancing enjoyment and emotional wellbeing, building confidence, supporting creative expression, enhancing learning, and developing social relationships.

Alongside enhancing wellbeing, our findings suggest that Create & Dance can support the development of physical literacy amongst children. Physical literacy is defined as the relationship with physical activity and movement throughout life (Sport England, 2022). It encompasses the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and motivation needed for confident and continuous engagement in various forms of movement (Bingham et al., 2025). Create & Dance supports the development of children's relationship with dance, a specific but wide-ranging form of movement. Our analysis highlights that children enjoy and find movement meaningful when engaging in Create & Dance, as well as the programme supporting skill development that will likely support children's engagement in broader movement activities. Thus, Create & Dance has the potential to support the development of a more positive relationship with both dance and other forms of movement for children, that could have a lasting impact throughout their lives.

### Wellbeing impact beyond the classroom

In observed sessions, children displayed increased confidence, stronger peer relationships, and collaborative problem-solving skills. They adapted movements to include peers with additional needs, offered encouragement during group work, and expressed pride in performing and creating their own routines. Such behaviours, rooted in teamwork, empathy, and creative autonomy, are supported in the wider literature as being transferable to other areas of school and community life (Caprara et al., 2000; Burkhardt & Brennan, 2012). Although this evaluation did not directly examine wellbeing impact beyond Create & Dance sessions, the consistency of these behaviours across schools, alongside existing evidence, indicates they may contribute to improved classroom dynamics, greater inclusion, and enhanced capacity for cooperative learning. There is also evidence from extant literature that dance initiatives can enhance physical activity across the day, not just within the dance sessions, amongst adults (Beune, 2022; Britten et al., 2023), which is linked to broader health and wellbeing benefits. Future research should specifically examine how Create and Dance influences children's wellbeing within their broader lives.

### The unique contribution of Dance

Dance occupies a unique space in supporting children's wellbeing because it combines the physical benefits of movement with the cognitive, emotional, and social gains of creative expression. Unlike music, art, or traditional PE, dance engages the whole body in communication and storytelling, requiring coordination, rhythm, and spatial awareness while fostering pro-social behaviours such as empathy, sharing, and mutual support (Karkou, 2004; Kotaman et al., 2024). Synchronised movement and collaborative creation promote peer connection and trust, while imaginative tasks encourage self-expression and identity development (Chappell et al., 2021; Crickmay et al., 2021; Verneert et al., 2021; Prakash et al., 2024). As observed through this evaluation within school settings, dance offers an inclusive medium where children of varying abilities and backgrounds can participate meaningfully, build confidence, strengthen social connections, and gain a sense of achievement. These findings highlight the importance of understanding why dance, in particular, produces these outcomes, and how these differ from the impacts of other physical or creative activities such as PE or singing. Further research in this area would strengthen the evidence base for dance in education and inform the ongoing development of Create & Dance.

## 4.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Evaluation

This evaluation is underpinned by a qualitative design that prioritises children’s voices, contextual understanding, and real-world relevance. The methodological choices reflect both rigour and responsiveness, and aligns well with the study’s aims to explore how the Create & Dance programme is experienced and implemented within school settings.

A key strength of the evaluation is its commitment to participatory research with children, including the use of classroom-based focus groups and creative, age-appropriate techniques informed by consultation with school staff and children. These methods are well-established for enabling children to articulate their experiences in familiar peer environments, and they are particularly effective at capturing group dynamics and shared perspectives. They are further strengthened by the large scale of the evaluation which involved nine schools and over 250 children. This breadth provided a rich and diverse set of perspectives across different school contexts, enhancing the robustness and transferability of the findings. However, classroom-based group formats can present challenges: dominant voices may overshadow quieter participants, and peer dynamics may discourage dissent or disclosure. Skilled facilitation was essential to mitigate these effects and ensure all voices were heard. The familiar school context supported widespread engagement but may have also reinforced power imbalances if children perceive the researchers as authority figures, similar to teachers.

The study benefits from the integration of Ripple Effects Mapping (REM), a participatory, visual method that supports group reflection on wider impacts. However, limited availability of broader school staff at REM sessions, due to time pressures, constrained the diversity of perspectives and perhaps meant that some wider unanticipated impacts were missed. Nonetheless, participation from the core teachers involved in delivery was strong, and their insights were particularly valuable given their deep familiarity with the programme.

The pen portrait analysis technique is a further methodological strength, providing a structured and flexible approach to synthesising data across multiple sources into coherent, narrative case studies (Sheard and Marsh, 2019). In this evaluation, most pen portraits were developed by researchers who had been directly involved in the data collection, ensuring continuity and depth of insight. One researcher joined at a later stage and worked with existing data to contribute to the analysis.

While this meant they were not present during fieldwork, their distance from the original data collection offered a fresh perspective and helped to surface alternative interpretations. Combined with regular team discussions and a collaborative analytical process, this mix of embedded and new viewpoints enhanced the rigour and reflexivity within the analysis.

The study was embedded within the Born in Bradford infrastructure, which offered unique advantages including trusted school relationships, established ethical procedures, and alignment with wider research into health inequalities. While the localised nature of the study may limit generalisability to other regions, this is partially mitigated by a parallel evaluation of the Create & Dance programme in Rotherham. The ability to compare findings across two distinct settings enhances the transferability of insights and supports a more nuanced understanding of how context shapes programme delivery and outcomes.

Finally, while the evaluation captures short-term outcomes and implementation processes within a one-year timeframe, it does not include longer-term follow-up. This limits the ability to assess sustainability or longer-term impacts of the programme on children’s wellbeing. Future research into the longer-term impacts of Create & Dance is recommended.

To contextualise the findings from the Bradford evaluation and better understand the potential of the Create & Dance programme across different geographical and educational settings, this section draws on the Place2Be evaluation conducted in Rotherham (Place2Be, 2024). By comparing delivery of Create & Dance across these two places, each embedded in distinct local systems but underpinned by the same national programme design, we can explore how context, delivery, and evaluation approaches shape outcomes. This comparison allows us to identify common themes, divergent practices, and transferable learning, offering valuable insights into the scalability, adaptability, and broader impacts of the Create & Dance programme. Understanding both similarities and differences helps build a more nuanced picture of what supports or constrains successful implementation and meaningful wellbeing outcomes for children.

### Similarities and Differences in Programme, Evaluation and Context

While the core Create & Dance programme was the same, there were noteworthy differences in context and approach between Rotherham (Place2Be) and Bradford (BiB) evaluations.

Programme focus and delivery: Both initiatives stemmed from the RBOs goal of using arts education to boost children’s wellbeing and creative development. Compared to the Bradford evaluation that focused exclusively on Create & Dance, the Rotherham evaluation incorporated both the Create & Dance and Create & Sing strands of the RBO Schools programme. Participating schools could choose either or both and findings were not delineated across the strands. In both Rotherham and Bradford, the programme was delivered by the classroom teachers, following training by RBO. All participating teachers received the same RBO Create & Dance resource pack, but how they used them differed. In Rotherham, indications are that schools largely followed the provided lesson plans and themes around Alice and Wonderland. There was likely less deviation from the set structure, as the evaluation was focused on fidelity to the model. In Bradford, while many did follow the core scheme (Alice in Wonderland themed dance), a number of schools instead decided to apply the programme’s principles to enhance other topics or adjust it to their context. The Bradford evaluation explicitly looked at how different applications of Create & Dance influenced wellbeing to differing extents or in different ways.

Evaluation aims and methods: Both evaluations centred on how engaging in dance (and music, in Rotherham’s case) could positively affect pupils’ mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. The aims of the Rotherham evaluation were narrower in focus than in Bradford, as they focused almost exclusively on examining impact on children’s wellbeing, alongside effects on teachers and class relationships. In comparison, the Bradford evaluation also included a focus on wider unintended impacts and barriers and facilitators to delivery, and included RBO partner perspectives alongside those of children and school staff. Whilst Bradford’s evaluation was exclusively qualitative in design, the Rotherham evaluation took a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a pre-post survey to quantify changes in wellbeing alongside focus groups with children and interviews with school staff.

Demographic Differences: Whilst the Rotherham evaluation doesn’t explicitly reference the ethnic make-up of participating schools, census data indicates that Rotherham is a primarily White British area (Census Data UK, 2021). Conversely, the schools participating in the Bradford evaluation were highly diverse, often with a high proportion of South Asian families.

### Comparison of Children’s Wellbeing Findings

The Bradford evaluation treated the programme as an intervention to adapt and refine, engaging deeply with how it fit each school’s ecosystem, whereas the Rotherham evaluation treated it as a set pilot to validate impact. These differences mean the findings are somewhat complementary: Rotherham evidences that Create & Dance measurably improves wellbeing, and Bradford explains the why/how behind that improvement and how to make it work in diverse, real-world conditions. Both evaluations provide evidence that a high-quality arts programme can enhance how children feel and function at school.

Both evaluations found that Create & Dance had a positive impact on pupils’ wellbeing, especially in terms of confidence, enjoyment, and social skills. In Rotherham, this was evidenced by statistically improved wellbeing and resilience scores, and in Bradford by abundant qualitative evidence of children’s joy and newfound confidence. Growth in self-esteem was a common theme: students discovered new abilities in themselves, leading to a sense of pride in both contexts. Likewise, peer relationships flourished; teamwork in creating dances brought out cooperation, friendship, and peer support in Rotherham and Bradford alike. Teachers in both sites observed that children were happier and more connected as a class after the programme. Whilst both evaluations found that the programme provided an avenue for creative expression, this was only explicitly linked to autonomy, ownership and fun within the Bradford analysis. The more in-depth qualitative inquiry allowed for this mechanism to be uncovered, with nuanced explanations for how different delivery approaches enhance and/or constrain creative, autonomous expression and wellbeing. A theme around enhanced learning was present within the Bradford evaluation but not within the Rotherham evaluation, whereby Create & Dance was found to support learning amongst children through linking dance to other academic subjects.

This difference likely stems from differences in delivery, as in Rotherham schools were encouraged to follow the Create & Dance session plans and themes, rather than adapting the programme to their context. This provides further evidence of the value of schools adapting the programme to their context and needs as it allows for wider wellbeing impacts to be realised.

## 4.3 Comparison to Rotherham Evaluation

Both evaluations reported that Create & Dance was delivered as a whole-class activity, enabling broad participation rather than being limited to children who were already confident or interested in dance. In Bradford, teachers adapted activities to ensure inclusion of children with special educational needs, such as a wheelchair user participating in floor-based movements and a blind pupil supported by peers and teaching staff. The Rotherham evaluation similarly described teachers adapting sessions to meet varied pupil needs, though it provided less detail on specific cases of SEN inclusion.

### Comparison of wider impact findings

**Teachers professional development and wellbeing:** Across both Bradford and Rotherham, the Create & Dance programme had a notable impact on teachers' professional development and wellbeing. In Rotherham, training and delivery helped demystify the arts, increasing teachers' confidence and creativity in the classroom. Similarly, in Bradford, teachers who initially lacked confidence became enthusiastic advocates, appreciating the programme's emphasis on expression over expertise. Teachers across both evaluations reported that participating in dance themselves gave them empathy for their pupils and strengthened teacher-student relationships. Both evaluations found that the programme aligned with teachers' values around inclusion and pupil engagement, and contributed to improved teacher wellbeing by introducing joy, variety, and connection into their teaching routines.

**Curriculum and Cross-Disciplinary Learning:** A wider impact seen specifically in Bradford was how Create & Dance opened teachers' eyes to cross-curricular learning opportunities. The programme acted as a catalyst for integrating arts into subjects like History, Science, Literacy, and Maths. In the long run, such practices can contribute to a more engaging, holistic curriculum in those schools. It aligns with the idea of "creative education" – using arts to enhance learning across the board. Whilst this was not a finding within the Rotherham evaluation, likely to do teachers being encouraged to deliver the Create & Dance session plans without adaption, the Rotherham report conclusion supports this, suggesting that embedding teacher-led arts programmes into primary schools could be "the best way to increase access and the benefits of the arts to all". As such, Create & Dance – particularly when schools are encouraged to adapt it to their school needs and context – can shift how schools approach arts education, making it a regular, integrated part of learning rather than an extracurricular luxury.

In essence, beyond making individual children happier or more confident in the short term, the Create & Dance programme in both Rotherham and Bradford generated ripple effect; empowering teachers, influencing teaching methods, and supporting a narrative that arts education is valuable for wider social and educational outcomes.

### Comparison of barriers and facilitators to implementation findings

Both evaluations shed light on what helped the programme succeed and what challenges had to be navigated. A major facilitator was the quality of training and materials provided by RBO. Teachers in both areas entered the programme with varying levels of confidence, but the structured lesson plans, music, and the reassuring guidance to use the pupils' creativity empowered them to deliver dance sessions effectively. Several teachers cited the training day as transformative, turning their uncertainty into excitement. This up-front investment in teacher preparedness enhanced teachers' willingness to participate and try something new. The Bradford evaluation found that those who really committed to the creative, playful ethos, laughing along with students, and participating fully in activities, saw enhanced wellbeing outcomes amongst children. Similarly, Rotherham teachers noted that showing vulnerability (e.g., dancing in front of their class) actually earned pupils' respect and strengthened bonds. In essence, teachers being facilitators rather than instructors of dance was a facilitator of success.

Another significant facilitator evidenced across both evaluations was that the programme was offered free to schools. Budget constraints are often a hurdle for schools and children participating in arts initiatives. This undoubtedly made it easier for schools to say "yes" to participation, especially in deprived areas where school budgets are tight. Thus, the funding model permitted equitable access.

Both the Bradford and Rotherham evaluations identified time pressures and busy school timetables as barriers to implementation. In both contexts, teachers initially worried about arts sessions displacing core subjects like English and Maths, especially in exam-focused years. However, supportive school leadership and flexible delivery models (e.g. integrating into PE or combining with academic topics) helped most schools find creative solutions, particularly in Bradford. Physical space limitations also presented shared logistical challenges; schools in both areas had to navigate small or shared halls, and teachers adapted by rearranging classrooms or extending sessions.

## 4.4 Recommendations

### Programme recommendations:

#### 1. Continue and Expand Create & Dance

Sustain the programme in future years, recognising its positive impact on children's wellbeing and engagement. If capacity allows, expand to additional schools and regions to widen access.

#### 2. Ongoing Teacher Training and Support

Provide follow-up CPD after initial training, such as refresher sessions, and short "how-to" videos, pointing teachers in the direction of music or the lesson adaptation guides to help teachers make full use of resources, and adapt delivery for diverse needs. Within the lesson guides, potentially provide suggestions on which activities could be prioritised (whilst still emphasising that teachers should select and adapt activities based on their context) if teachers do not have a full hour to deliver a session.

#### 3. Improve Awareness and Use of Music Resources

Ensure teachers know that curated Create & Dance playlists and music guides are available. Encourage their use to save preparation time, broaden musical variety, and allow pupils some choice over tracks.

#### 4. Support Children's Conceptual Understanding of Movement

Develop strategies and teaching resources to help children understand that dance movements are representations of concepts rather than literal enactments. This will help ensure learning is not misunderstood, particularly related to when Create & Dance is applied to broader curriculum areas like Science and History, and enable a wider range of pupils to access the creative and educational benefits of this approach.

#### 5. Foster a Teacher Network

Create opportunities for participating teachers to connect and share experiences, preferably teacher-led for sustainability, e.g., online forums, WhatsApp groups, regional meet-ups, or resource exchanges. This will support peer learning, maintain momentum, and encourage shared resource development.

#### 6. Support Teachers in Transitioning to a Creative Facilitation Role

Provide targeted guidance and CPD for teachers who are used to delivering fixed choreography, helping them unlearn more prescriptive methods and embrace the Create & Dance ethos of pupil-led creativity, improvisation, and co-creation, and the concept that all children can be creative. This could include modelling sessions, peer observations, and practical strategies for scaffolding creativity in the classroom, however, the specific approach and strategies to do this should be explored further with dance artists.

### Wider recommendations:

#### 1. Embed Creative Health in Education and Health Policy

Use the Bradford and Rotherham evaluation findings to advocate for integrating creative health programmes into national and local strategies for child wellbeing and education. Whole-system collaboration between schools, arts organisations, and public health services should be prioritised, with investment in teacher capacity and leadership to sustain delivery.

#### 2. Research "Why Dance specifically?"

Work with dance artists, teachers and children to explore what is unique about dance, compared to other physical or creative activities, in producing wellbeing and learning benefits for children. Use findings to strengthen the case for dance-based approaches in education.

#### 3. Build Evidence for Impact

Support teachers in articulating the specific impacts of Create & Dance, both within and beyond PE. This could involve co-developing simple impact-measurement tools or reflective practice frameworks, and empowering teachers to use the impact measures to advocate for the programme.

#### 4. Address Equity and Scalability through Research

Future research should examine how creative health programmes can drive system-wide change, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Longitudinal studies, coupled with realist and participatory approaches, are needed to understand sustained impacts, equity in access, and how evidence can best be translated into policy and practice.

## Chapter **05** | **Conclusion**

*“embedding creative dance in primary schools can have a meaningful and positive impact on children’s wellbeing, confidence, and engagement with learning.”*

Research authors



**This Born in Bradford evaluation of the Royal Ballet and Opera’s Create & Dance programme demonstrates that embedding creative dance in primary schools can have a meaningful and positive impact on children’s wellbeing, confidence, and engagement with learning. Across nine schools, 252 children participated, with teachers and pupils describing the programme as joyful, inclusive, and empowering.**

Through classroom observations, focus groups, Ripple Effects Mapping, and interviews, this evaluation found that Create & Dance positively influenced pupils’ wellbeing. Findings show that children developed greater self-esteem, discovered new abilities, and experienced pride in their achievements. Dance activities fostered collaboration and strengthened peer relationships, helping pupils feel more connected and supported in class. Teachers, many of whom initially lacked confidence in leading dance, reported increased skills and enthusiasm, recognising the value of creativity and expression in their teaching practice. The flexible, teacher-led design of the programme supported adaptation to different school contexts, including those with high levels of deprivation and cultural diversity.

These findings highlight the potential of embedding creative arts within the primary curriculum as a sustainable way to foster wellbeing, equity, and engagement in learning. By training and empowering teachers to lead dance-based creative learning, Create & Dance not only benefits children directly but also builds capacity within schools to integrate arts and creativity long term. The evaluation also revealed broader educational benefits. By integrating movement and storytelling, Create & Dance enriched curriculum delivery across subjects and offered new ways for children to engage with learning, particularly those less responsive to traditional approaches. Schools noted that these creative opportunities are especially valuable for pupils with limited access to arts and cultural activities outside school.

Successful delivery relied on high-quality training, accessible resources, and flexibility for teachers to adapt sessions to their pupils’ needs. Challenges included limited space, time pressures, and some logistical barriers, yet these were often overcome with planning and support. Overall, the Bradford findings highlight that Create & Dance is a feasible, scalable, and impactful approach for promoting wellbeing and creative learning in diverse school settings. Continued investment and opportunities for programme refinement will help maximise these benefits and extend access to more children, teachers, and communities.

## Chapter 06 | References

*“I feel proud because I made all the dance steps myself”*

(Tango Focus Group)



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Chapter  
**07**

# Acknowledgements

*“Access to the arts, including dance, plays a vital role in supporting holistic development.”*

Research authors



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Observation schedule

<b>Name of project</b>	Create & Dance	
<b>Observation context</b>	What session is being observed, is this a singular session or one of several? Does it have a specific focus or title?	
<b>Date and time of observation</b>	—	
<b>Observer name / role</b>	—	
<b>A description of the session being observed</b>	<p><b>Setting and attendees</b></p> <p>No. of participants, approx. age, gender etc.</p> <p>Description of the setting – table/chairs, size of space etc.</p> <p>Are there any materials and equipment e.g. music/ props</p> <p>Atmosphere e.g. does it feel energetic, welcoming, relaxed?</p> <p>Anything else of importance to note</p> <p><b>Start of the session</b></p> <p>How does the facilitator introduce and explain activities?</p> <p>Are instructions clear and age-appropriate?</p> <p><b>Main session</b></p> <p>Engagement Techniques: What methods does the facilitator use to engage the children (e.g., questions, demonstrations, encouragement)?</p> <p>Adaptability: How does the facilitator adapt to the needs and responses of the children?</p> <p><b>Participant engagement</b></p> <p>Participation Levels: Are all children actively participating? Note any variations in engagement.</p> <p>Children’s Reactions: How do the children react to different parts of the session (e.g., excited, confused, happy)?</p> <p>Peer Interaction: How do the children interact with each other? Are there instances of collaboration or helping each other?</p>	<p><b>Content and Activities</b></p> <p>Types of Activities: Describe the activities included in the session (e.g., warm-ups, main dance routine, cool-down).</p> <p>Relevance and Appropriateness: Are the activities suitable for the age group and skill level?</p> <p>Creativity and Expression: Are the children given opportunities to be creative and express themselves?</p> <p><b>Outcomes and Feedback</b></p> <p>Immediate Outcomes: What immediate effects do you observe in the children (e.g., improved mood, increased energy)?</p> <p>Children’s Feedback: Note any verbal or non-verbal feedback from the children during the session.</p> <p>Facilitator’s Feedback: Does the facilitator provide feedback to the children? If so, how is it received?</p> <p><b>Challenges and Issues</b></p> <p>Note any challenges or issues that arise during the session (e.g., behaviour problems, lack of engagement).</p> <p>Suggestions for Improvement: Any observations on how the session could be improved for better engagement or outcomes.</p> <p><b>Other Observations</b></p> <p>Any other relevant observations not covered above.</p>
<b>Reflective comments (memo)</b>	<p>Summarise the overall effectiveness of the session.</p> <p>Reflect on the key strengths and areas for improvement.</p> <p>Any additional comments or thoughts.</p>	
<b>Possible points / issues to follow up in interviews or other future data collection</b>	—	

## Appendix 2: Focus group session booklet

Booklet front cover

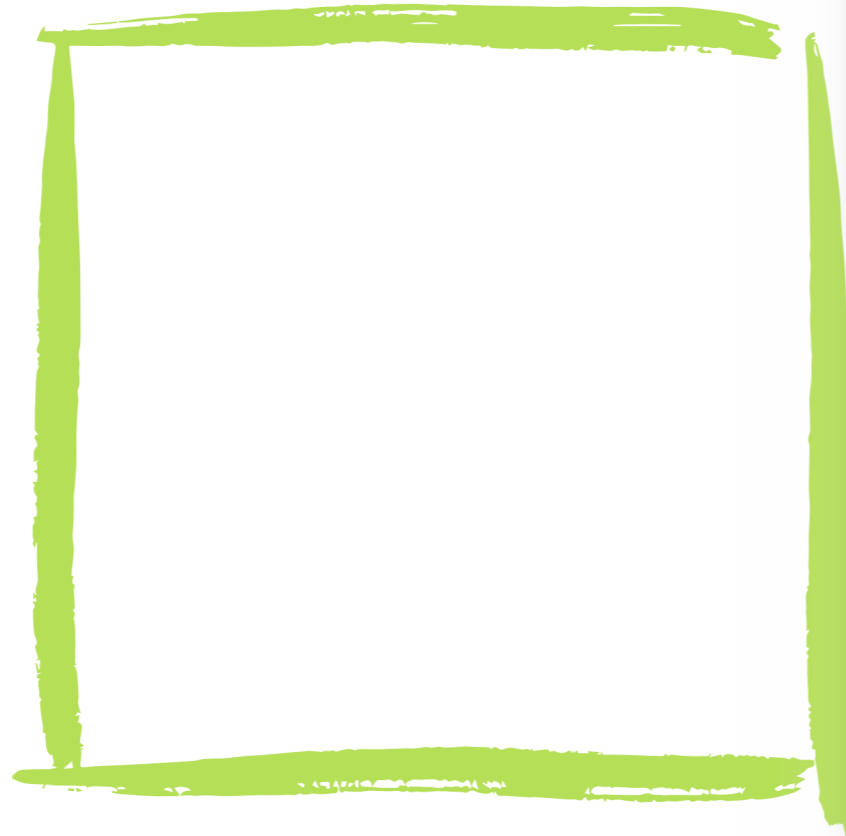


Booklet inner page

Booklet inner pages

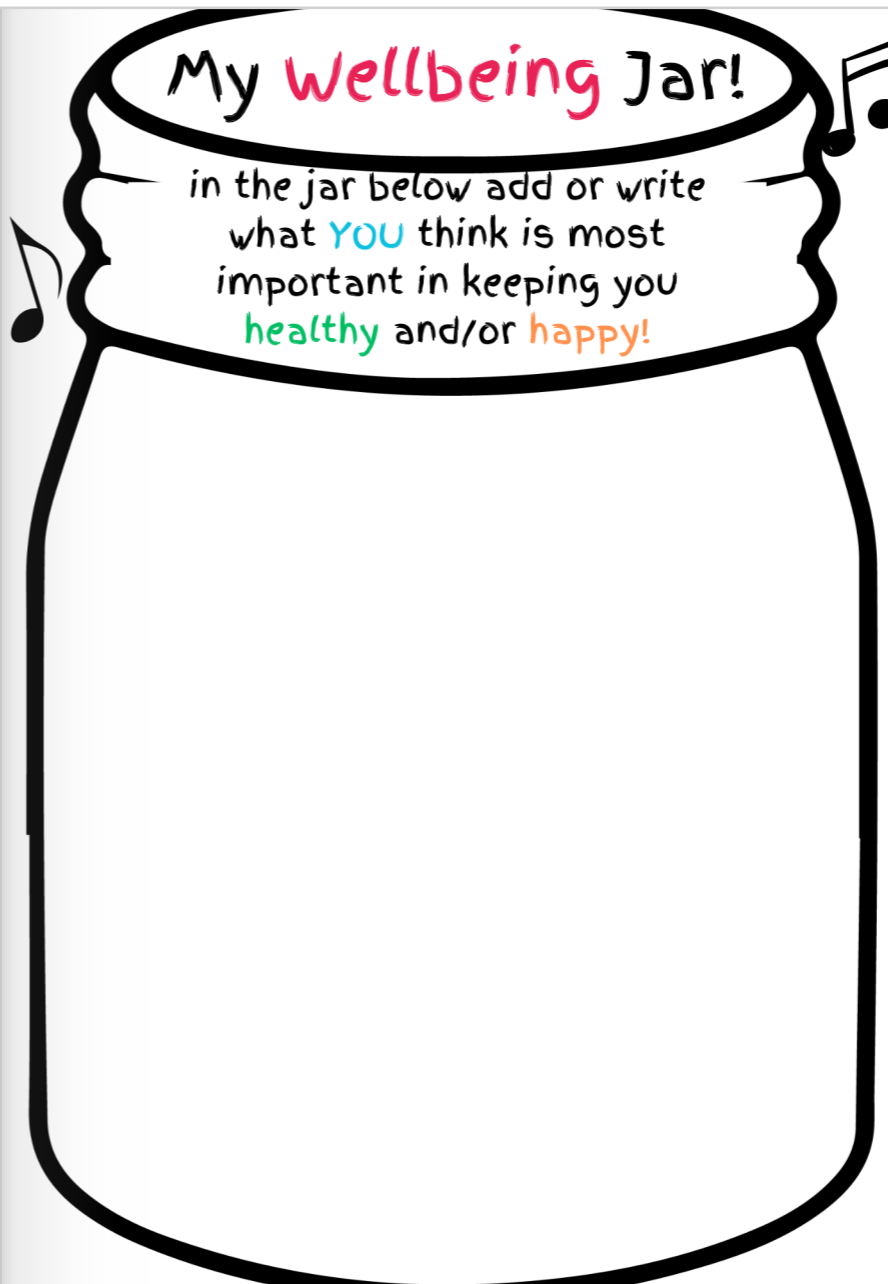
Can you Draw or write your favourite part of taking part in create and dance?

You can draw, bullet point or write sentences, whatever you would prefer in the box below Make sure if you do a drawing to label what your drawing is as we will look at them again later!



My Wellbeing Jar!

in the jar below add or write what YOU think is most important in keeping you healthy and/or happy!



Booklet inner pages

### Key elements of well-being

Below are some important aspects of well-being. Reflect on each one and choose a smiley face if you felt good about it, or a frowny face if it didn't feel as great. There's also space for you to write a little bit about how you felt.

Circle one:



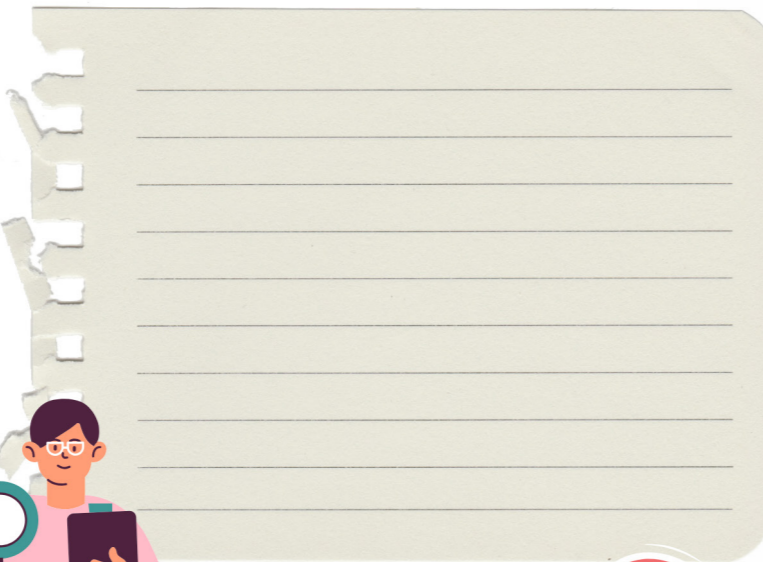
1. I liked being with my friends when dancing  
Why did you feel this way?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. I like being creative in my class  
Why did you feel this way?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. I like being active and moving my body  
Why did you feel this way?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. I had fun in my lessons  
Why did you feel this way?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. I like feeling proud of what I have done  
Why did you feel this way?  
\_\_\_\_\_

```


graph TD
    A((Create and Dance Programme Mind Map)) --> B((Working with Friends))
    A --> C((Industrial revolution))
    A --> D((Types of Movements))
    A --> E((Things I enjoyed))
    A --> F((What I would change))
    
```

Booklet inner page

Is there any Questions you would like to Ask the Researchers?  
Write your down your question(s) first, once everyone is finished writing we can go around the group.



Thank you for participating!



Booklet back cover

## Appendix 3: Researcher Positionality Statements

### Mariam Fargin

I am a Senior Research Fellow recruited to support data analysis and dissemination for this study. Although I do not have a background in creative dance, I have professional experience working as a teaching and bilingual support worker in SEND schools. I am about to embark on a PhD study focused on understanding the role of performing arts in wellbeing for South Asian Muslim families in Bradford.

As a South Asian (Indian Muslim) woman, I have a personal and professional interest in reducing health inequalities within minoritised communities. My own lived experiences will to some extent inform how I interpret the data collected in this research. I acknowledge that my background and perspectives may shape my analysis and understanding of the study findings.

### Megan Rogers

I am a Research Intern, working primarily on the Create & Dance research project. My role has involved a range of responsibilities, including attending school observations and focus groups, creating and printing focus group booklets, contacting participating schools, and organising REM activities. I was also involved in conducting some of these REMs myself, as well as transferring them onto Miro for analysis.

I have a background in Irish dance, which I began at the age of four and continued until I was sixteen. This experience gave me a deep appreciation for movement and performance, as well as the confidence and discipline that come with sustained creative practice. It also provided me with opportunities to compete internationally, which has shaped my understanding of dance as both a cultural and personal expression.

As a young woman working in research, my perspective is shaped by both my academic and creative experiences. I bring a particular interest in arts education and inclusive pedagogies, and my internship has deepened my interest in how creative programmes like Create & Dance can support wellbeing, engagement, and participation in diverse school settings.

### Jen Hall

I am a White British woman in my thirties. I am principal investigator for the Create & Dance evaluation; I developed the research proposal and secured the grant funding with the Royal Ballet and Opera, and have overarching responsibility for the delivery of the research. I conducted observations at three schools and facilitated focus groups at two schools as part of this research, attend weekly project meetings and bi-monthly steering group meetings with RBO, and crafted one pen portrait as part of the analysis. I will contribute to and have oversight of the analysis and report writing process. I have worked as a Senior Research Fellow with Bradford Institute for Health Research for approximately 8 years during which time I have primarily conducted qualitative research with a physical activity, health and inequalities focus and I have a PhD in Sociology (physical activity and health).

Over the last few years I have developed a specific interest in dance and wellbeing research. Aside from the Create & Dance research, I have developed a project called 'JU:MP culture' which aims to enhance physical activity amongst children and families in Bradford through dance and other cultural activities which has been funded by Sport England. I have also been awarded Economic and Social Research Council Funding to appoint a PhD student to conduct research alongside the 'JU:MP culture' initiative. I have also received National Institute for Health and Care Research funding, alongside British Asian dancer and choreographer Mahjabeen Ahad, to conduct preliminary work to support the development of a substantial research proposal focused on Dance and wellbeing amongst South Asian Muslim females. As part of this work I attended a one-day training course delivered by People Dancing focused on 'dance, health and wellbeing', and completed desk research to understand how wellbeing is conceptualised in the context of dance. Since Spring 2024 I have been a board member and Trustee of Yorkshire Dance, a local charity that works through dance to create happiness, health, connection and change. I am a co-investigator of a University of Bradford research project evaluating the impact of a Dance United Yorkshire dance initiative targeting women survivors of abuse. In 2025 I joined Bradford's 'creative health' steering group which takes a strategic approach to embedding arts and culture as a health/wellbeing-enhancing intervention across Bradford.

I have a personal background in dance as I attended dance classes (including ballet, tap, modern) throughout childhood. I took IDTA exams including the 'pre-associate' teaching qualification in ballet before I went to University. During university I was part of the dance society and performed in numerous shows and during my adulthood I have sporadically engaged in dance classes of various genres including contemporary, Kathak, and Ballroom. I therefore have first hand experience of the benefits of dance to subjective wellbeing and prior to evaluating Create & Dance I was a proponent of the programme – and other programmes like it.

### Marie Frazer

I am a 40-year-old white British female from Yorkshire, with a middle-class Catholic upbringing. My academic background includes a BA in Geography, an MA in Education, and a PGCE. Professionally, I've served as a geography teacher and Head of Year, and am currently pursuing a PhD.

My central role in the Create & Dance evaluation is to explore how the programme influences children's wellbeing. My involvement included designing and conducting observations, focus groups, and Ripple Effect Mapping (REMs), as well as attending two Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) CPD sessions. My research interest in positively and meaningfully including children in research stems from my decade as a teacher, where I consistently sought to foster their success. This background has shaped my constructivist stance: that knowledge is actively constructed through interactions and experiences, reflecting how students interpret lessons based on their unique contexts.

While my PhD research focuses on citizen science to evaluate the broader JU:MP programme and physical activity inequalities in Bradford, my direct involvement in Create & Dance has profoundly shaped my perspective. After Jen designed the study protocol, I led the development and implementation of methods, conducting observations, focus groups, and REMs sessions. I also trained colleagues to support these activities. Working collaboratively with Jen and Mariam, we developed an analysis plan that led to the creation of the pen portraits. Although I lack a creative dance background, my professional experience as a teacher, coupled with my PhD focus on the experience of YCS in research, influences how I interpret the programme. This lens, rooted in a commitment to reducing health inequalities, allows me to critically appreciate Create & Dance for its potential to empower diverse children, particularly those from minoritised communities, through accessible and engaging experiences, reinforcing my conviction in physical activity's importance for holistic wellbeing. Conversely, I am acutely aware of the time and academic pressures placed on schools, and therefore want to ensure any programme delivered is genuinely worthwhile for both teachers and children.

Given my background, I acknowledge potential biases, such as a predisposition towards educational solutions stemming from my teaching career. As an outsider to the diverse Bradford participants, my understanding of their specific contexts might be affected. To mitigate these, I practice continuous reflexivity through peer debriefing and collaborative analysis. Employing creative and iterative methods ensures participants' voices remain central, preventing my perspectives from dominating the research.

### Charlotte Spriggs

I am a white British 21-year-old psychology student currently on a placement year, working as a Research and Implementation Assistant on the JU:MP project, a physical activity research programme. I have engaged closely with the Create & Dance programme through participation in Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) CPD training, steering group meetings, and live lesson observations. My involvement includes attending one session observation, six focus groups, 1 online REM and attendance at weekly create and dance meetings. While I do not have a dance background, this role has enabled me to critically reflect on the programme's impact, drawing on my academic knowledge and practical experience as a research and implementation assistant. I have been involved in transcribing, organising and the first stages of data analysis through pen portrait models.

## Appendix 4: Anonymised Pen Portraits

### Pen portrait 1

School name: **Contemporary**      Date: **16th June 2025**      Author: **Marie Frazer**

Data source	Date	Year Group	School Level Data: Pupil Premium	School Level Data: Ethnicity
Observation	27/11/2024	Year 4	20-40%	Majority minoritised communities
Focus Group (FG)	04/02/2025	Year 4	N/A	
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	04/02/2025	N/A	N/A	
Online REM	Not completed	N/A	N/A	

### 1. General Description

The class was mixed gender, with slightly more girls than boys. Majority of children were representative of a minority ethnicity. Notably one blind pupil (Observation). The percentage of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is slightly higher than the national average.

This was the children’s first formal exposure to a dance unit, “they’ve never seen anything like this” the teacher noted, describing how novel the experience was for the students (REM). The programme was based on Alice in Wonderland themes, so each weekly lesson introduced a character (like Alice or the Mad Hatter) and corresponding dance activities (REM; Observation). Sessions were held in the school hall, where a large projector screen allowed the class to watch Royal Ballet videos (Observation). The teacher, who also served as the school’s PE lead, had attended a Create & Dance training and used the provided Royal Opera House lesson plans as a foundation.

The school offers diverse opportunities in music, arts, drama, outdoor learning and sports. Its focus is not just on high academic achievement, but also on nurturing confident, expressive learners with a lifelong love for knowledge. Specialist teachers in music, drama, art, and other subjects guide students to unlock their potential. The school also places a strong emphasis on teaching life skills and values, shaping caring, compassionate individuals. This approach underpins all learning, and the dance programme forms part of this wider journey of discovery and growth.

### Hat Dance

Two adults facilitated each session: the class teacher and a Teaching Assistant (TA). The TA focused primarily on supporting the blind student, guiding them through movements and ensuring the child could participate fully despite dance being a highly visual medium (Observation). The teacher f was very hands-on and enthusiastic. Initially, the teacher was hesitant “when I first got told about it... I don’t really want to be doing opera with children that are eight years old” but the provided scheme of work and training boosted the teacher’s confidence (REM). The teacher introduced activities through storytelling and demonstrations, often acting out characters from the Alice story to spark the children’s imagination (Observation). The teacher out plastic bowler hats for a Mad Hatter dance; this simple prop immediately grabbed the children’s attention and added a playful energy to the room (REM; Observation).

### Teachers approach

The teacher encouraged the class to use their bodies creatively, there was no “right” or “wrong” way to move like the characters, which helped everyone feel included. The rooster is mentioned, this was mentioned in another class and the children seem to enjoy embodying a rooster where they move with strong movements and angry faces (Observation). The teacher modified performance formats to reduce self-consciousness, such as having the children all dance in a big circle or in groups rather than spotlighting individuals (REM). Overall, the atmosphere was energetic and inclusive: a class exploring dance together for the first time, guided by a teacher who eagerly embraced adaptation to make the experience accessible and fun for each child, including those with additional needs (REM; Observation).

## 2. Wellbeing

### Novelty and reluctance to take part

At the start, many pupils approached the dance sessions with a mix of excitement and timidity. In the very first lesson, the children sat on the floor watching a ballet clip with wide-eyed curiosity – “oh, wow, what’s going on?” was a common reaction as they saw professional dancers and unfamiliar opera music on the screen (REM). This was paired with uncertainty; a few students were hesitant to join in when movement was first required. One girl, for instance, stood off to the side with her hands in her pockets, looking uncomfortable until she saw her friends begin to dance too (Observation). A shy boy also needed gentle prompting from the teacher to overcome his initial reluctance (Observation). Many children weren’t used to performing in front of others and at first didn’t want to show what they’d been doing (REM). However, the teacher’s approach helped dissolve this early reticence. The teacher set a tone that nothing the children did could be “wrong” in dance – unlike regular sports where there’s a correct way to hold a bat or throw a ball, here any expressive movement was valid (REM). Realising they wouldn’t be judged or singled out, the pupils gradually opened up. Even in that first session, once everyone got up and tried a silly step-and-clap warm-up, giggles spread around and the mood began to lift (Observation). The teacher laughed with them about any missteps and made it clear that effort and creativity were more important than getting the moves perfect (Observation). As the sessions continued, the class was visibly more relaxed and “just able to kind of be a bit free” in how they moved (REM) the teacher noted that by the end of the unit “they were all going straight in [to the circle], and they wanted to show off their pieces” (REM). Several children themselves said they felt “proud” of learning new dance skills and coming out of their shells (FG). One previously quiet girl who had hung back in autumn was seen happily leading a small group routine by winter (REM).

### Change in wellbeing over time

The introduction of the Mad Hatter hats was a turning point the class’s energy increased and “they just came alive” when given permission to toss hats in the air and improvise how to retrieve them (REM). Students who had once hung back were now fully engaged. For example, a boy who at first refused to dance he had muttered “no, I’m out, not a chance” when the idea was introduced ended up grinning and sprinting after his hat with total enthusiasm during the hat dance activity (REM). The playful, imaginative nature of the programme brought reluctant children out of their shells: by the final sessions, children who used to shy away from volunteering were eager to step into the centre and show off their self-devised moves to the class (REM). The teacher observed that “the big difference from the first lesson to the last was the pupils’ confidence – it really improved, and they were more confident in themselves” (REM). This boost in self-esteem was accompanied by a joy in creative expression. The pupils loved being characters and making up their own routines. “I enjoyed that, dancing with the hats,” one child said proudly about the Mad Hatter lesson (FG). Several others talked about feeling excited when they danced “It made me excited!” said one, while another agreed it was “fun to move around” and pretend to be different characters (FG).

### Social aspect

Dancing with friends also contributed positively to their wellbeing: an overwhelming majority of the class said they liked doing the sessions alongside their peers because friends could help and it was more fun together (FG). This social aspect was evident in class, where children often collaborated on small group dances and cheered each other on. There were moments of over-exuberance – for instance, a few kids got a bit too excited and started running around or arguing over ideas, which one pupil admitted made them feel “annoyed because some people were running” instead of listening (FG). But these hiccups were usually brief. The teacher’s firm-but-friendly reminders kept things on track (Observation).

### Emotions

The general emotional tone was very positive. Many children described feeling happy and accomplished after the dance lessons. They took pride in mastering new moves and learning about the Alice in Wonderland story through dance. “I feel proud because I have learnt something new,” one student reflected, indicating a sense of achievement (FG). Another child, who initially doubted their own abilities, later said they wished they could perform the dance for their parents, a sign that the experience had become something to celebrate (FG). Of course, not everyone loved every aspect: a handful of children remained lukewarm on dance, with one bluntly stating “I can’t say that dance is my favourite... I suck at dancing” (FG), and a couple complained the physical activity made them tired (FG). These responses show that a few personal reservations lingered. Overall, though, the Create & Dance project had a markedly uplifting impact on the class’s wellbeing. It fostered excitement, creativity, and growing confidence in most pupils, and even those who were sceptical were at least willing to join in and had “a little bit of fun” by the final session (FG). As the teacher happily noted, the children were “coming out of their shells” – a transformation that was really nice to see unfold (REM).

## 3. Other Impacts

Beyond wellbeing benefits, the Create & Dance project yielded a variety of other positive outcomes for Contemporary School.

### Curriculum

Curriculum-wise, it slotted neatly into the school’s PE dance requirements for that term, allowing the teacher to cover dance in an engaging way without sacrificing academic core subjects (REM). She admitted feeling pressure about time – asking herself “when am I doing English and maths?” but found that dedicating a half-term PE unit to this programme was “absolutely perfect” (REM).

### Across school

In fact, seeing how well it went, she is now planning to introduce the Create & Dance scheme to other year groups in coming years (REM). The programme also paved the way for new cross-curricular and extracurricular opportunities. The class took the creative skills they learned (like imagining characters and linking movements together) and applied them in a year-group performance at Christmas. Instead of doing a simple song for the school’s holiday concert, the two Year 4 classes teamed up to choreograph a joint dance to a festive track, and the teacher was astonished that in just one PE lesson they “were all able to do it together” and even begged to perform it “time and time again” (REM). The ability to transfer their learning to a completely new dance routine so quickly showed how much their confidence and dance vocabulary had grown. It also raised the profile of dance in the school: peers and staff saw what the Year 4s could accomplish, generating buzz about the Create & Dance approach.

### Further involvement with RBO

Building on this momentum, the school has deepened its partnership with the Royal Opera House. They have scheduled a special “Create Day” in the summer, where a number of local schools, including Contemporary, will come together at a public hall to put on a collaborative production, with each school performing a different part of an opera and then uniting for a finale (REM). Parents are invited to this event, giving the children a chance to showcase their talents to family and the wider community.

### Normalising dance

This kind of high-profile collaboration is something the teacher never imagined before; it has “normalised” dance and opera as something everyone can be involved in, not a niche activity. She remarked that when people hear the word opera or ballet, they often think it’s not for us too expensive, too elite, and she herself once felt that way. Now, after Create & Dance, she proudly tells anyone that “You don’t have to be in the highest paid job to go watch you don’t have to go down to London to watch an opera” (REM). This shift in mindset is an invaluable impact on the school’s culture: dance and classical music have become less intimidating, more inclusive parts of the learning experience at Contemporary.

### Teaching pedagogy

The project also influenced teaching practice and inclusion in meaningful ways. The teacher honed a more creative, student-centered pedagogy through this experience. For instance, the teacher learned to introduce activities by saying “let’s all move like this” rather than framing it as formal “dance,” which helped break down gender stereotypes and encouraged even reluctant children to participate (REM). For child who is blind in particular, this wording and approach made a huge difference – if I say, “come on, dancing (the child’s not going to know what I mean... but if I say) Move your body in a way where you feel like this.” – the child can join in (REM). In this way, Create & Dance pushed the teacher to adapt lessons for accessibility, and saw that those adaptations benefited everyone. The teacher also embraced more storytelling, imagery, and freedom in her PE lessons than they ever had before, letting children’s imaginations drive the action rather than sticking to strict drills. The outcome was a class that not only gained dance skills but also grew in creativity, teamwork, and cultural knowledge. Many pupils discovered new interests or strengths: some realised they loved performing for an audience, while others found they could express feelings through movement.

### Children and parental enthusiasm

Several children even started talking about pursuing dance, acting or asking to do another themed project – a few said they wish we could do it on a different story like Matilda or simply “wish we could’ve spent more time” dancing (FG). This lasting enthusiasm is evidence that the project sparked something in them academically and artistically. It also engaged parents indirectly, students went home talking about Alice, the Mad Hatter, and even teaching siblings the hat dance. A number of children were disappointed that their families didn’t get to see them perform during the project. One child voiced what many felt: “I wish I could have performed for my mum and dad.” (FG). In response, the school is looking for more avenues to involve parents, such as the upcoming Create Day and perhaps inviting families to end-of-unit showcases in the future. In sum, Create & Dance had ripple effects beyond the immediate class sessions: it enriched the curriculum, evolved the teacher’s practice, opened the school to new partnerships, and ignited a passion for the arts in this school community.

## 4. Barriers

### Visual nature of dance

Implementing a dance programme in this class did come with a few challenges. One clear barrier was the visual nature of dance for the blind pupil in the group. Dance routines often rely on imitation, but as the teacher explained, “a child who’s blind... dance [is] very visual,” so they had to find alternative ways for that student to learn the moves (REM). Without special adaptation, simply saying copy this dance would have been meaningless to them. The teacher had to carefully plan how to describe movements in terms of feel and direction for the blind child, and the teaching assistant or a peer would physically guide her as needed (Observation).

### Resources

The implementation of the Create & Dance project was not without challenges. One practical issue was the video content length, the Royal Opera House instructional videos ran 5–10 minutes, which the teacher found too long to play during a short PE lesson (REM). The teacher had tried to show an entire video in class, it would have eaten up a large chunk of their 40-minute session and likely tested the children’s attention spans. The teacher worked around this by previewing the videos and then showing only brief, key clips to the pupils, but the need to trim down materials was an added task (REM).

From the teacher’s perspective, the curriculum content itself was a bit of a hurdle initially: the Royal Opera House provided a wealth of materials, but parsing those and tailoring them to a Year 4 level took extra effort (REM). The teacher found that the lesson plans had to be trimmed and translated into the school’s usual format, and certain concepts (like “motif” in dance) needed to be taught from scratch so the children wouldn’t be confused (REM). This planning burden meant the first few lessons required considerable preparation time. However, once the teacher understood the material, this became less of an issue.

### Initial starting point of children

Another barrier was the initial reluctance and low self-confidence observed in several pupils. At first, some children were extremely self-conscious about dancing. Nobody wanted to be singled out to perform; if asked to volunteer in front of the class, they all demurred and said no (REM). This was especially true for a couple of the boys who carried the attitude that dance wasn’t something they were interested in – in the teacher’s words, as soon as they heard “dance” mentioned, they’d cross their arms and say “not a chance. Don’t want to do it” (REM). Preconceived ideas posed an early threat to engagement. Not every child naturally enjoys active movement; a small number reported feeling tired out by dancing or would have preferred doing other sports and games (FG). One child admitted they didn’t get much joy from the dance lessons because “I get tired” and would rather be playing football or cricket (FG).

### Behaviour

There were also minor behavioural and logistical issues typical of a lively class. The very energy that made sessions fun sometimes led to distraction e.g. children running around at inappropriate times or getting into squabbles over creative ideas, which could disrupt the flow (Observation). Fortunately, these incidents were manageable.

### Time pressure

Time and scheduling pressures were a broader barrier as well. The teacher was juggling this dance unit alongside many other school commitments (like preparing for a Christmas show and other initiatives), and initially felt anxious about fitting everything in. The teacher joked that with all the songs, dances and events to prepare, “when am I doing English and maths?” reflecting a concern about balancing the creative project with core curriculum demands (REM).

## 5. Facilitators

### Teachers’ enthusiasm and skill

A crucial facilitator was the teacher’s enthusiastic and adaptive approach. Being relatively confident in teaching PE (as the school’s PE lead) and having completed the Create & Dance training, she approached the unit with an open mind and willingness to learn alongside the pupils (REM). The teacher’s attitude set the tone; they were not afraid to be a bit silly or vulnerable in front of the class, which gave the children permission to relax. The teacher actively participated in every session, demonstrating moves, narrating stories, and even joining group dances, to model a have a go spirit (Observation).

When confronted with student hesitance, the teacher drew on strategies from the training to reduce pressure. For example, instead of forcing anyone to perform solo, she used a group circle format where many children danced at once, so no single child felt all eyes on them (REM). Over a few weeks, students who initially only dared to step into the circle for a few seconds were staying in longer and longer, as they realised their classmates were busy dancing too and not staring or judging (REM).

The teacher also proved very flexible and child-led in her delivery. The teacher treated the official lesson plan as a guiding framework rather than a strict script. “It wasn’t like you have to do it like this... do it in your own way,” they said of the programme’s philosophy, (REM). When the children took an activity in a new direction, they were happy to follow their lead. For instance, when the children started happily throwing their hats and inventing wild ways to retrieve them, the teacher allowed it to continue because it nurtured their creativity and enjoyment (REM). This flexibility helped maintain high engagement; the kids felt a sense of ownership and fun in the process, rather than feeling like they were being drilled in a routine.

### Content of the lessons

The use of imaginative content and props to hook the children’s interest. The Wonderland storyline, with its odd characters (Alice, the Mad Hatter, the Caterpillar, etc.), gave the class something to latch onto each lesson. The boys who said “I’m not dancing” at first became much more receptive when dancing wasn’t presented as formal ballet, but as pretending to be characters or playing a game with a hat. “When the props came out, they were all like, ‘Oh, this is amazing,’ having so much fun,” the teacher recalled about the change in attitude (REM). In short, framing movement as imaginative play removed the stigma and made it universally appealing. Peer support and the class’s camaraderie acted as facilitators as well. The children consistently mentioned that being with friends made the experience enjoyable (FG), and this was evident in practice. They often helped each other remember moves and gave compliments like “Cool move!” during group choreography time. A friend system formed around the blind pupil: one of her classmates would take her by the hand or describe what others were doing so she could follow along (Observation). This not only assisted the blind child in participating fully, but it also seemed to boost the helper’s confidence and empathy. The teaching assistant’s presence was another enabling factor. Having an extra adult meant the blind student received one-on-one guidance when needed (Observation).

Finally, the Create & Dance programme design itself provided key facilitators. The structured lesson videos and cheat sheets gave the teacher a start, they had material to fall back on each week, which was comforting whenever she was unsure how to proceed (REM). At the same time, the programme encouraged creativity and local adaptation, which the teacher took advantage of to tailor sessions to the pupils. This balance of structure and freedom made the implementation both reliable and adaptable.

## Pen portrait 2

School name: <b>Tap</b>	Date: <b>13th June 2025</b>	Author: <b>Mariam Fargin</b>		
Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	13/06/2025	Year 4	40% and over	Predominantly White British + Minority ethnic
Focus Group (FG)	N/A	Year 4	N/A	
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Online REM	N/A	N/A	N/A	

### 1. General Description

This school is attended predominantly by White British pupils and has minority of ethnically diverse students. Tap receives more than 40% pupil premium. This is a summary of two sessions, observed on the same day, one after the other. Both sessions covered RBO Alices Adventures in Wonderland which the teacher adapted to accommodate what they believed to be the capability of the children, resulting in a directive teaching style. The class was delivered in a spacious sports hall. In the first session some children were still finishing off their lunch in the hall while staff cleaned up. The hall also served as a corridor by providing access from classrooms to the main reception area. More so during the second session, pupils walked through, and some teachers sat in the hall who also at times engaged with the Create & Dance session. One child had a support worker with them to enable their engagement in the session.

#### Teaching Style – Engagement with pupils

Teacher had adapted the RBO programme by adding instructions to accommodate the children’s capability, they also added further direction as needed. The teacher believed that it was ‘beyond’ the children’s capability to think as creatively as the RBO programme outlined. During session 1, the teacher explained to the researchers that they provide children with instructions, otherwise the children ‘act out’ movements rather than doing movements which results in some children getting ‘lost’. Did the teacher sense some kind of hesitancy/awkwardness in the children to participate?

#### Teacher led approach.

The teacher led the class through dance movements and explanations which the children followed. When the teacher asked the children to transform into the character of the Queen of Hearts, they asked them to think of an angry pose, and then asked the children to re-enact a ‘kick’ movement as opposed to organic movements from the children as a means of their expression for ‘anger’. The children appeared disengaged during periods when the teacher was providing specific instructions about how to perform certain movements.

The teacher acknowledged that they were incorporating some elements of the children’s ideas into her choreographed routine for the children to replicate. To what extent does this approach inhibit autonomous participation? Is a directive style aligned to the notion of co-creation?

Emphasis on teaching the sequence and dance elements. The teacher was keen to cover all the core elements of the session plan from a technical dance move perspective, rather than allow time for expression of movement to flow organically. The teacher emphasised the need to learn 6 movements in sequential order. The researcher observations suggests that some children appeared overwhelmed with recalling the actions in sequential order. Was this too long a period for some children to follow instructions?

#### Engagement

The teacher offered positive encouragement to the participating children. The teacher performed the act of the angry Queen of Hearts in a contrasting manner and engaged the children for feedback to gauge their understanding of the difference in expression of varying characteristics.

The teacher engaged the children more in Session 2, enabling them to generate ideas rather than informing them what to do.

#### Engagement with peers

Each group were asked in turn to perform their act in front of the whole class, the teacher provided verbal positive formative assessment. Those observing were encouraged to applaud the performers. Although some of the observing children engaged in their own chatter and weren’t necessarily watching the performance. The children also engaged in providing positive feedback when prompted by the teacher. The children appeared at ease in performing to others, no visible signs of nervousness or apprehension were noted.

Children did copy actions performed by other children that they liked, i.e., “off with your head”, which the teacher commented on, but the children continued mimicking the movements regardless.

#### Participation

The children sang along with the teacher and copied the corresponding movements including standing, crouching, clapping hands and patting the floor in time and synch.

Particularly in session 2, the children appeared to engage in the discussion with extensive use of vocabulary through the discussion activity.

#### Disengagement

Children appeared disengaged during a part of the session where children were invited to listen to the teacher as they asked questions and discussed their answers between themselves.

Mid way through the session, one child with a support worker, the researcher observed that they were disengaged to the point of distracting others.

Children were asked to work with the partners they had worked with previously. Those who hadn’t attended a previous session were asked to sit and watch. In general, the researcher observed that children appeared to ‘mirror’ others and therefore not sure why they couldn’t participate by mirroring the group.

Limited inclusion of children’s ideas. In one of the sessions, the teacher incorporated aspects from a previous class as opposed to incorporating ideas from the children who were present in the session.

Age-appropriate vocabulary. During the warm-up, children were asked to spread out into their own spaces. Could certain vocabulary have been too technical for this age group? E.g. ‘parallel’ and ‘in first position’? (this terminology is not provided by RBO for use within the Create & Dance initiative).The children were engaged in the warmup by mirroring the movements of the teacher. Positioning: Were the disengaged children at the back of the class able to see the teacher?

**Props**

Children performed their dance with imaginary props, (i.e., imaginary hat).

The teacher showed the children an image of the queen of hearts and asked thought-provoking questions as to why the king might be hiding behind the costume. Children were asked to discuss.

Presence of others, staff and children during session

Other adult staff did arrive mid-way through the session. Some participated by re-directing children in the session. The observing researcher thinks the other teachers were utilising the space in the multi-use hall to mark work.

Support workers to facilitate proportionate participation for SEN children.

One child had a support worker with them to enable engagement in the session.

**Music**

The teacher played the music later in the session after having taught the dance moves/routine.

**Dress Code**

The children were dressed in their school uniform, some performed the session barefoot. Most children kept their shoes on.

**Hydration**

A child in Session 2 asked for a drink of water indicating that children need permission to access water bottled.

In session 2, a girl complained that she was ‘hot’. The researcher observed children were active throughout the session and didn’t have access to their water bottles.

**2. Wellbeing**

The participating children appeared to enjoy the session evidenced by lots of smiles and laughter. Some girls enjoyed seeing their skirts twirl. However, a small number of children appeared to be disengaged in both sessions.

**Gendered observations**

Girls appeared to enjoy practising more than boys. Girls also revelled in seeing their skirts twirl with the spin movement. Would costumes or props facilitate more engagement across all genders?

One girl vocalised her group performance by speaking “chop off their head this instant” and making angry noises which other children liked.

In session 2, one girl appeared shy and didn’t move very much. Albeit, girls generally appear more engaged with choreography.

In session 2, three boys were not engaging and appeared withdrawn/unhappy.

Teacher commented that ‘girls’ are more flexible than boys, but acknowledged that the boys are doing great at the warm up stretches regardless. To what extent do generalised gendered statements impact perceived capabilities?

**Distractions**

Environmental Distractions: Sessions took place in multi-use halls with foot traffic, cleaning, lunchtime residue, and other staff present, children accessing the hall as a corridor etc. leading to visible disengagement and divided attention.

Three girls were sat by the corner with a support teacher.

Children with SEN were at the back of the class, and were not engaging in the discussion activity. Would engagement for them had been more inclusive if they were not segregated at the back of the class?

To what extent does the presence of other staff and children in the hall hinder the session – do the children become self-conscious.

**3. Wider Impacts**

**Time Constraints**

Session 2 appeared to be somewhat compressed because the timing was closer to home-time. Although, broadly followed the same lesson structure incorporating all elements.

Health and safety consideration: Children worked around a wet floor sign in the middle of the floor.

**4. Barriers**

**Directive Teaching Style:** Emphasis on technical dance steps and teacher-led choreography limited opportunities for child-led creativity and co-creation.

**Environmental Distractions:** Sessions took place in multi-use halls with foot traffic, cleaning, lunchtime residue, and other staff present, leading to visible disengagement and divided attention.

**Access and Inclusion Issues:** Some children with SEN needs were physically separated or disengaged. One child left the session part way though the session.

**Lack of Comfort Provisions:** Children needed to ask for permission to access to drinking water. Observational data suggests that children performed the session dressed in their school uniform.

**Programme Adaptation Constraints:** The teacher altered the RBO content, citing the children’s lack of capability to follow open-ended tasks. This adaptation, while well-meaning, may suppress creative development.

**5. Facilitators**

**Warm-Up Engagement:** Movement mirroring during warm-up was effective in activating participation, even if some vocabulary was technical.

**Engaged Teaching Practices:** In Session 2, the teacher was physically involved and encouraged idea generation from the children, supporting creative participation.

**Positive Reinforcement:** The teacher offered praise, both verbal and through structured applause, which appeared to encourage performance participation.

**6. Overarching Reflections**

During the session, both researchers noted that the teacher seemed aware of their presence and, at times, provided commentary to explain her adaptations to the RBO programme. It was reflected that the teacher may have interpreted the observation as an evaluation of their teaching rather than as part of a neutral research process.

An observed emphasis on technical dance movements delivered in sequential order, rather than on creative expression, led to extended periods where children listened to and observed the teacher. This directive teaching style appeared to limit opportunities for co-creation and may have contributed to disengagement among some pupils.

Gendered differences in engagement were also observed. Girls appeared to enjoy practising more than boys and took pleasure in the visual effect of their skirts twirling during spin movements. Props were not used in the session, prompting reflection on whether costumes or tangible props might facilitate greater engagement across all genders.

**Timing and Space:** Session 2 was compressed due to proximity to home-time. Hall usage as a corridor and inconsistent adult presence may have affected flow and continuity.

**Engagement Imbalance:** Some children, particularly boys in Session 2, were visibly disengaged or withdrawn, suggesting varying receptivity to the session structure and content.

**Period of Inactivity:** Prolonged listening phases led to evident disengagement.

**Gender Stereotyping:** Teacher comments on flexibility and performance based on gender risk reinforcing limiting beliefs and may affect confidence and participation.

**Health and Safety Oversights:** Presence of ignored wet floor signs poses risks and could potentially threaten the continuation of such sessions if incidents occur.

**Creative Stimuli:** Use of storytelling (e.g., Queen of Hearts), and character role-play helped prompt children’s imaginative engagement.

**Peer Support and Group Work:** Working in pairs or groups fostered a supportive, collaborative environment which encouraged creative experimentation.

The session included periods of inactivity in which children were expected to sit and listen or observe instructions. While this adaptation was well-meaning, it may have inadvertently limited opportunities for creative development. The extent to which such passive periods may lead to disengagement merits further consideration. In one session, a researcher noted that the teacher addressed non-participating children in a raised voice. It was observed that the teacher had adapted elements of the RBO content, explaining that they believed the children lacked the capacity to follow open-ended tasks that required creative expression. This invites the question of whether RBO offers alternative strategies for engaging children in creative participation, while also recognising the challenges teachers face in managing classroom sizes and varying levels of capabilities and engagement. Notably, pupil engagement increased during peer group work, suggesting that such activities may help create a more supportive and creative environment.

## Pen portrait 3

School name: **Tango** Date: **13th June 2025** Author: **Jen Hall**. JH completed the observation with AH, was present for the focus group, and facilitated the online REM session.

Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	04/12/2024	Year 4	20-40%	Majority minoritised communities
Focus Group (FG)	23/01/2025	Year 4	N/A	
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Online REM	21/05/2025	N/A	N/A	

### 1. General description

The school serves an area of significant deprivation and pupils come from a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds with one predominant ethnicity, and a minority representing other ethnicities.; There was a relatively even gender split.

The teacher who attended the RBO training was the year 3 class teacher. This class teacher delivered training to other teachers, including the year 4 teacher, who delivered the session that was observed to their year 4 class. A teacher and another adult, assumed to be Teaching Assistant (TA) were present and largely observed the session, occasionally taking photographs. The observed session was delivered in the school hall with ample space for children to move freely, classical ballet music was used throughout the session. Children were barefoot, wearing their school uniform. The atmosphere was energetic and welcoming.

The session observed was focused on the water cycle (science lesson). Children worked in small groups of 4-5 throughout the session (each group mixed sex). The overall structure of the session was that the facilitator would introduce a stage of the water cycle and ask the students what ‘words’ (adjectives) represented that stage and children would provide lots of examples. They would then have 5 minutes to create a dance in their small groups to represent that stage of the cycle, before coming back together and moving onto the next ‘stage’. After all four stages the facilitator went through them all again verbally (presumably to consolidate learning) and then gave the children some time to put all their four dances/representations together. Then, the children got into a big circle and each group went into the centre of the circle to perform their ‘piece’, in turn. The class were very well behaved and engaged during the session, for example they transitioned very well between the dance parts and sitting down to discuss parts. The facilitator provided lots of praise and positive reinforcement throughout the session.

### 2. Wellbeing

When asked what wellbeing means to them, children most often referred to ‘activities’ including dancing, sports/physical activity, play, cultural activities like singing, reading and religious celebrations, and screen-based activities such as video games and YouTube. They also, albeit less frequently, wrote, drew and spoke of wellbeing in relation to having/spending time with others (mainly family and friends and animals/pets), and engaging in behaviours including healthy eating and talking about feelings. Perhaps due to the context of the focus groups children frequently mentioned dance in the context of what wellbeing meant to them, with one child stating: “I dance sometimes to keep me happy and healthy and if I am sad, I do dance and exercise to keep me more healthy” (FG). Within this context, the following section unpicks whether and how Create & Dance contributes to wellbeing. Overall, Create & Dance fits with the children’s idea of supporting wellbeing as it incorporates dance, physical activity, play, cultural activity (i.e. creative dance and music), and being and interacting with other people. However, it also appears to align with wellbeing based on other aspects of wellbeing not explicitly referenced by children in the initial FG activity, including fostering teamwork, creativity and autonomy, fun, cognition and learning, pride and achievement and inclusivity.

#### Physical activity and health

In the FG, when asked whether they liked being active and moving their body as part of Create & Dance, most/more than half the class children said yes and 6 said no. Children who said yes explained that it “keeps [them] healthy and fit”, helps them feel “calm”, and “blood flows and feel energetic”. Two of those that said no reported that it makes them “tired” with one adding that this is ‘annoying’. Through the observation, it was evident that Create & Dance led to children moving their bodies. Throughout the session children were sedentary for a small portion (when sat listening and talking about the water cycle) but they were predominantly being active through dance. As the children were creating the dance movements together, it was not ‘pre-set’ as to whether the movement would be low or high intensity, and generally, the children/groups varied this throughout the session, depending on the water cycle stages they were representing. However, the researcher estimated that around 50% of the session was spent engaging in moderate-vigorous intensity PA for most children, which is particularly beneficial for mental and physical health and wellbeing. Based on my observations of some other schools, it appeared to me that children creating their own dances perhaps resulted in increased (amount and intensity) movement compared to schools that ‘taught’ children set dances.

**Being with friends & teamwork**

In the FG, when asked whether they liked being with their friends as part of Create & Dance, 23 children said yes and 1 said no. A number of children referenced this as their favourite part of the programme: “I like being with my friends because I have fun when I dance, but more fun with my friends” (FG). As described earlier many of the children noted being with other people (including friends) as a key part of wellbeing, indicating that the group-based nature of the programme provides a mechanism by which Create & Dance influences children’s wellbeing. One child referenced “teamwork” as their favourite part of the Create & Dance project (FG); that children engaged in teamwork through participating in Create & Dance was also evident through the observation:

“Groups are working in different ways. One group are all holding hands as a circle and working together and discussing what movements best represent water collection. After some discussion they then did a different formation (hands on each others shoulders). They are all working really well together and using listening and teamwork skills” (observation)

The nature of delivery of Create & Dance in this school, whereby children worked in groups to create their own dance to represent different stages of the water cycle, appeared to especially promote teamwork and working together. As described in the observation extract above, the children took on different ‘roles’ to create a formation, that wouldn’t have been possible to do independently.

The nature of the group-based task also allowed children to develop and/or express leadership skills and qualities:

“One group had a boy who was “leading” the others in is group, taking charge and instructing them what to do” (Obsv).

During the performance part of the session, it was observed that the children were “able to follow each other’s lead through non-verbal communication on when to move on to the next bits of the water cycle” (Obsv). Through teamwork and dance, the children were able to develop and express their non-verbal communication skills.

**Creativity / autonomy**

In the focus group, when asked whether they liked being creative as part of Create & Dance, 19 children responded yes and 5 responded no. Reasons for liking the creative aspects including that they “love imagining” and “making own dance” (FG). One child said that her favourite part of the Create & Dance programme was “Twirling away so I’m free” (FG). As with teamwork, it appeared that the nature of the delivery of Create & Dance (children creating own dances) was linked to fostering creativity and autonomy:

“Not a single dance move is taught/shown by the facilitator. Through breaking it down into stages and working collaboratively, each group creates their own dance” (Obsv)

“The groups are very engaged in their own activity, not really looking at what the other groups are doing. The groups are all doing really different things, showing they are creatively engaging as a group with their own ideas and interpretations” (Obsv)

Having the autonomy to create their own dances and express their creativity appeared to foster engagement, as evidenced in the observation extract above that refers to the children focusing on their own groups and each coming up with very different ideas. This shows that all children have the potential to be creative when given the opportunity, and directly contrasts with a comment made by a teacher in a different school that she didn’t embed much improvisation into her sessions as ‘her children weren’t creative enough’. In the current school, the facilitator was observed providing constructive advice to children, which appeared to support the children in develop their dance pieces, without compromising their own creativity and autonomy:

“The facilitator praised some groups and offered advice on how particles may move, adjusting some of their formations but allowed children to be creative with their own moves and work together” (Obsv).

Children appeared to be given autonomy not just in creating the dances, but rather autonomy was embedded throughout the whole session. For example, children were “free to come and get water whenever they please” (Obsv). In the wish jar as part of the FG, a couple of children wrote that they would like more choice over the music selected for the session, which would be another opportunity to further enhance children’s autonomy (and which would also reduce strain on the teacher who indicated a lot of time was spent trying to select appropriate music; see barriers section). The children appeared to enjoy the session and had fun (see subsection below) which suggests that being given the opportunity to express their creativity is a mechanism to enhanced wellbeing through the Create & Dance programme.

**Cognition/learning**

Whilst cognitive engagement was not identified by the children as being key to wellbeing, it is recognised as a component of wellbeing within the broader literature. Children highlighted that they found the topic/learning aspect of the Create & Dance session enjoyable, for example one child said their favourite part was to “dance about the plague story with my friends” and another said “I liked it when we did the water cycle.” (FG). Through observation, it was evident that children were cognitively engaged throughout the session. When asked to represent different stages of the water cycle, children understood and engaged with this activity:

“Groups are doing different things and engaging with the specific task i.e. movements are different for condensation than they were for evaporation – whilst there is a lot of noise and energy the movements themselves are not as bouncy and they are ‘lower’ to the group, which indicates that the children are really engaging with the topic and learning” (Obsv)

The observation extract highlights that children selected appropriate movements to represent different stages of the water cycle, which as well as being cognitively engaging, likely enhanced their learning with respect to the ‘topic’; see the wider impacts section for further evidence that delivery of Create & Dance within this school enhanced learning outcomes amongst the children.

**Fun/engagement**

In the focus group, when asked whether they had fun as part of Create & Dance, 16 children responded yes and 3 responded no. Reasons for it being fun included it being “interesting”, “exploring”, and “teacher makes it unique/fun”, and one child’s response to their favourite part of the programme was “we get to do whatever dance we want”; further evidence that delivering Create & Dance in such a way to foster autonomy and creativity enhances engagement and enjoyment amongst children. One child who indicated that they didn’t find Create & Dance fun, said the reason for this is because it is “hard”, and another said they “get embarrassed” (FG). Observation data also corroborated with the reports from children about the sessions being fun and engaging:

“When they started, the volume in the room immediately increased – lots of energy and everyone immediately engaging with the activity... There is a lot of laughter as they engage with the activity (about the activity, not distracted). There doesn’t appear to be any/much distraction, even as the activities progress” (Obsv)

In the REM session the teacher also highlighted how children found the sessions enjoyable:

“Mine really enjoyed the dance, and if I said we are going to go down [to the sports hall] and put this into dance, they were really happy to do it, and afterwards they were like fizzy but in a good way, they don’t get overexcited by it, they just really enjoy doing it. It goes back to those, everyone can participate no matter what their ability level is” (REM)

**Achievement**

In the focus group, when asked whether they felt proud as part of Create & Dance, 18 children responded yes and 2 responded no. Of those that responded yes, reported reasons for this included it providing a “chance to stand out”, it being “hard work”, being “proud when do something good” and “because I made all the dance steps myself” (FG). These responses, particularly having the chance to ‘stand out’ perhaps point to the value of both the performance element and opportunity to create own dances, in fostering a sense of pride and achievement. The observation record also highlights a link between the opportunity to perform and feelings of pride amongst the children:

“When the music stopped, everyone clapped and the group seemed very pleased with what they had done, and the facilitator said they had just done a dance performance” (Obsv)

A number of children noted that they would like more opportunities to perform as part of the ‘wish jar’ element of the focus group, and the teacher in the REM session also indicated that they plan to embed more performance opportunities moving forwards:

“My plan for the future is that I would like the children to perform, to other classes and parents, because at the moment its all been within their own classes. They’ve not really performed to anybody else” (REM)

**Inclusivity**

Albeit not directly mentioned by the children, inclusivity and belonging is a key component of wellbeing. Through observation of the Create & Dance sessions it was evident that providing children with autonomy to develop their own dance fostered inclusivity amongst all children, as children did not have to perform ‘set’ dance moves that they may (or may not) have the capability to perform but rather they could express themselves in ways that worked for them. The group-based nature of the sessions also fostered inclusivity, as children took it upon themselves to ensure that other children were included and engaged:

“The group closest to me (four girls, one boy) are talking and laughing. The boy seemed a little disengaged but one of the girls in particular encouraged him to join in... No one has seemed excluded throughout the session or has not wanted to engage –children have facilitated inclusion themselves.” (Obsv)

I reflect here whether the crafting of mixed-sex groups was purposeful, as the facilitator may have known/anticipated that boys may naturally be less engaged, and that by splitting them across groups, this might increase their engagement.

In terms of further fostering inclusivity, one child’s suggestion from the ‘wish jar’ aspect of the focus group was to incorporate more religious songs into the sessions, which may aid in representation and belonging amongst children from different religious backgrounds (primarily Muslim considering the demographic of this school/class).

### 3. Wider impact

Enhancing learning: A key wider impact of delivering Create & Dance within this school was that it facilitated learning of aspects of the broader school curriculum. This was corroborated by all data sources: observation, FG and REM, as evidenced below. During the observation, it was noted that the facilitator “asked the class to put their hand up if they found it helpful for learning the water cycle – most put their hands up” (Obsv). Children noted that applied learning through creative movement aided their understanding of the topics compared to when they are taught in a traditional classroom format. One child said “it makes you understand things more” whilst another commented “it made me smarter” (FG). Within the REM session, the teacher noted that:

“With the water cycle, the children that did that are very good at remembering the order and the process because they’ve danced it out” (REM)

The impact on learning was clearly linked to how the school applied the principles of Create & Dance to different topics within subjects including English and Science, which was fairly unique to how this school applied Create & Dance compared to the other schools included in this research.

Within the REM session, the teacher noted how Create & Dance appeared to be particularly beneficial for enhancing wider learning outcomes amongst ‘lower ability’ children. They noted:

“We have linked it to English lessons, we’ve gone and done a dance, and come back up, and done a piece of writing, and I have noticed a lot of my lower ability children, the vocabulary they were using was a lot better because of the dance. And I mentioned as well how some of my reluctant writers who would often magpie other people’s ideas, following the dance they have lots more ideas and it actually flipped, they became the ones sharing the ideas with the rest of the class” (REM)

This aligns with theory relating to different ‘learning styles’ and that for many, ‘learning by doing’ (kinaesthetic learning) is often the preferred way to absorb, process and retain information. Delivery of Create & Dance in this way enables the incorporation of approaches to allow children to learn in different ways, which perhaps supports a broader range of children to thrive in their learning and education compared to more traditional modes of teaching. However, the teacher also noted that she observed that this style of learning could be particularly challenging amongst children for whom English is an additional language (EAL):

“I have found with some children who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), because it’s quite abstract, an abstract way of doing things, they don’t quite understand the concepts... so when we’re, so we did it in our class with pollination, and when they’re describing it they’re talking about, they’d be like wiggling, and I’m like, that’s not what the bees actually doing, that’s just how we showed it, so they would struggle to see the difference between the dance and what that dance was representing” (REM)

Moving forwards, it would be beneficial to consider strategies to facilitate understanding amongst children that the dance moves are representing different concepts, rather than being direct descriptions of those concepts, to ensure that students’ learning is not negatively impacted and that the benefits of this approach can be realised amongst a wider group of children.

#### Embedding Create & Dance across the school

Partly due to witnessing the benefits that Create & Dance brings to the children in terms of their engagement, wellbeing, and primarily, enhancing learning, the class teacher that attended the Create & Dance training reported that she has been training and supporting the other teachers within the school, with the aim of embedding Create & Dance across school years and across the curriculum. Only a few months after going on the RBO training themselves, they delivered training to other class teachers and offered hands-on support to teachers to encourage them to take up Create & Dance:

“I delivered the training back in November, I said to teachers ‘I am happy to come in and either plan or deliver your first lesson’... and just sort of support them how they need supporting. And a lot of teachers took me up on my offer to be there and plan the first lesson, so that they’ve seen it done first hand, and then they’ve gone away and had a go at it themselves which is nice. So they’ve definitely become more confident in doing dance and delivering dance” (REM)

An enthusiastic teacher who ‘gets’ the principles underpinning Create & Dance, in this case, appears to be key to supporting the wider embeddedness of Create & Dance across the school.

### 4. Barriers

#### Environment/space

The teacher cited access to space as a barrier to delivering Create & Dance optimally:

“I do think it depends on the dance, if it’s a big performance piece you do obviously need the hall for that. The times when we’ve done it in the classroom its been, they’ve been working in really small groups, and they haven’t had to move very far. So it is still a barrier the space, but we are doing what we can, and if you can work in the classroom, we have been encouraging staff to keep it in the classroom” (REM)

Despite space limitations within the school limiting performance opportunities, the teacher described how they adapted to allow sessions to go ahead in classroom spaces, for example by working in much smaller groups where less space is needed.

### 5. Facilitators

#### RBO training

During the REM session, the teacher highlighted the importance of the RBO training in enabling them to adopt Create & Dance within their school:

“I’m not a dance specialist, in fact I would have actively avoided dance before we went to that session. And I came away fully understanding how to implement it in my class” (REM)

They stated that they thought the RBO training was extremely well designed and delivered, and that working through four different lessons over the course of the day allowed them to plan how they would deliver it in their own lessons:

“That’s how I came away and had ideas how to put that across the curriculum and how I could approach other members of staff and say look I can see how it could perhaps go here or here” (REM)

It appears that a participatory approach to the training, giving teachers the time and space to plan within the training was critical

The teacher explained that one of the biggest challenges, due to the amount of time it takes (in a teachers’ busy schedule) is finding appropriate music to accompany the different sessions:

“The biggest thing for me is finding the right music for what I’m wanting. I feel like sometimes I spend hours searching for the music. Because I’m not following, you know the set lessons, I’m doing my own things yeah, I seem to spend a lot of time [looking for music]”

As suggested earlier, a potential solution could be asking for music suggestions from children, or perhaps RBO could provide music recommendations for teachers that are more generic or suited to different ‘lesson’ themes such as science, history etc.

to the teacher then implementing Create & Dance, as it required less work outside of the training session to further plan and adapt to their context. The teacher also commented that she liked how the training “put you in the children’s shoes” (i.e. of taking part) so teachers know how children might feel in the lesson, and how to help them with their confidence/nerves and the support they need etc. The teacher said a key message that taken away from the training was that it is not about developing excellent dancers, but rather a way of allowing children to be creative so it is about encouraging participation but not pushing performance etc.:

“It goes back to those, everyone can participate no matter what their ability level is” (REM)

It is possible that taking this away as a key message influenced the teachers’ decision to put children improvising and creating the dances ‘centre stage’ as this can be inherently more inclusive than teaching children set routines. Finally, the teacher noted the RBO training as being instrumental in having the knowledge and confidence to subsequently train colleagues (wider impacts section).

### 6. Overarching reflections

Overall, I reflect that this school is relatively unique in how they have applied Create & Dance, which has perhaps resulted in some slightly ‘different’ wellbeing and wider impacts compared to other schools, particularly around creativity/autonomy, and how Create & Dance facilitates learning. One of the school values is for a “vibrant and creative learning community where learning comes to life” which seems like an apt summary of how Create & Dance has been adopted within the school and could (partially) underpin why the school has adopted Create & Dance in the way they have. [REDACTED: Information about the school]This is because they have not had the opportunity to regularly return to important knowledge and concepts to secure this in their long-term memory. Leaders should ensure that there are frequent opportunities for pupils to revisit this knowledge, so pupils are better prepared for their future learning”.

A focus on enhancing knowledge retention across the school could also factor into the schools’ decision to link Create & Dance to the wider curriculum and capitalise on the wider learning outcomes.

The researcher noted as a reflection in the observation of this school: “This observation made me so happy!! It was so joyful to see the children expressing themselves and engaging with each other in a playful way, whilst also engaging with the science curriculum”. This is extended to writing this pen portrait for the school – The researcher acknowledges here their own biases and ‘preferences’ in how this school has applied Create & Dance, compared to schools that have followed the more standardised ‘Alice in Wonderland’ approach.

## Pen portrait 4

School name: **Jazz** Date: **16th June 2025** Author: **Marie Frazer**. MTF completed the observation with Charlotte, Completed an REM at the same time as the focus groups and facilitated the online REM session.

Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	20/1/2024	Year 4	40% and over	Majority minoritised communities High percentage SEN.
Focus Group (FG)	16/12/2024		N/A	
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	16/12/2024	N/A	N/A	
Online REM	21/05/2025	N/A	N/A	

### 1. General Description

The school's mission [REDACTED: INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL]. The class was diverse roughly ten a fairly even gender split of boys and girls, and an ethnically diverse population. Over half the pupils had identified Special Educational Needs (teacher informed observation). An observation of an Alice in wonder land lesson involving hats took place on 20/1/2024 after lunch at 1.10-2.20pm. The focus group followed which formed a PE lesson on 16/12/2024 1-2. At the same time a REM was completed with the teacher. A final REM session took place on 21/05/2025 with other schools in attendance

#### Teacher confidence

Create & Dance was this class's first formal dance unit. The teacher, who had no prior experience teaching dance, admitted they felt hesitant and "had no idea what to do" until a prepared scheme of work and training were provided (Observation; REM; MAY REM). With this curriculum support, and backing from the school's PE lead, the teacher grew more confident in leading the sessions (Observation).

#### Physical environmental limitations

Sessions ran weekly in the main school hall, chosen because it had a projector and sound system for showing the Royal Ballet's Mad Hatter dance videos used in the lessons (Observation; REM). This meant the class had to shuttle between their classroom and hall for PE, an inconvenience the teacher managed despite some lost time (REM). Each lesson intertwined dance with academic topics (the teacher helped mind-map links to their current curriculum theme during training) and built on prior weeks.

For example, one session involved a "Mad Hatter" routine from Alice in Wonderland, which the children watched on the big screen and then tried out themselves (Observation). The teacher and a teaching assistant were present each time, actively joining in. The teacher often jumped in to model movements or even act out characters, at one point enthusiastically clucking like a rooster during an animal-themed dance, signalling to students that it was okay to be playful and "silly" (Observation). Overall, the atmosphere was one of curiosity and encouragement: a class exploring dance together for the first time, guided by a teacher learning alongside them and using humour and positivity to keep everyone engaged.

#### Resources

The teacher found the lesson plans provided by the programme to be very clear, with video clips and step-by-step instructions that allowed her to learn alongside the children. This made the experience enjoyable and manageable, even for someone without a natural ability in dance. The teacher appreciated the ability to stop and rewind the video clips, which they found very useful (MAY REM)

## 2. Wellbeing

### Confidence and skill

At the start of the lesson, the pupils sat quietly on the hall floor watching the introductory dance video. A few looked uneasy or distracted, some eyes wandered to the floor or to friends instead of the screen (Observation). This was all very new, and a couple of children were initially reluctant to participate, especially in anything that felt like “performing” (REM). However, once the class got up to try the moves, the mood began to shift. The first activity which was a step-and-clap move was tricky for many children (some couldn’t coordinate the clap on beat or moved opposite to others), but everyone gave it a go (Observation). The teacher’s warmth and encouragement set the tone: the teacher laughed with the children about how hard it is to move arms and legs in new ways, making them smile at their mistakes (Observation). By the second run-through of the (mad hatter) video, about 90% of the class was focused and moving in sync, and even some of the quieter girls in the back perked up to answer the teacher’s questions about the dance (Observation). There was a sense of relief and energy levels rose as they realised it was okay if it wasn’t perfect. One boy who had been adamant “I’m not doing that” at the start was spotted stomping and clapping along with a grin by the end of the hour (REM). The early hesitance was giving way to curiosity and even a bit of fun. A notable shift occurred as one child, who had previously refused to showcase her dance in earlier sessions, participated in the third session, indicating a growing comfort level (MAY REM).

### Social and emotional

The children’s social and emotional wellbeing became increasingly evident through the children’s participation. They especially loved any chance to be creative and active (observation REM). During the observation, the class formed a big circle to practice a group dance; about half the children were literally bouncing in place with excess energy while waiting for their turn “vibrating up and down” as one observer described (Observation).

The teacher had to pause and gently refocus them multiple times, but this excitement was positive. They were eager and happy to be dancing. Children who at the start of the observed session were not fully on task were now volunteering to demonstrate moves or come up with ideas. Working in small groups to invent their own dance sequence, every pupil looked engaged – even those who usually held back (REM) were giggling and trying out steps with their peers (Observation). One previously withdrawn boy, who often hovered at the edges, ended up leading his group’s mini-performance, clearly proud of what they created (Observation).

A big part of what seemed to support wellbeing was the chance to be someone else, to create and step into a character. The Mad Hatter theme gave children permission to act silly or imaginative, and the animal-based activities encouraged physical play and invention. “It was like a race,” one child explained, “where there was a turtle, an eaglet, and a rooster.” Another added, “Everyone got to be anyone so we did not a real race but people did their best movements.” These moments of imaginative freedom were described as favourites, “I liked that one because we got to make our own,” one pupil said. Another added, “I really liked it because I could spin around and stuff,” while someone else just said simply, “Rabbit, when we can dance ourself.” The character work brought joy and ownership.

### Performance

These moments of performance and invention weren’t isolated they were shared. Children often mentioned how dancing with others made them happy. “Because I liked showing my friends my moves,” one girl said. “I like when we are moving with our friends,” said another. Being seen, heard, and celebrated by friends was central to the positive tone of the sessions.

### Social

Socially, the project encouraged new interactions. The children often teamed up with different classmates for activities, which at first some found disappointing (one child confessed she “did not like that I was not allowed to pick my friend” for a pair task, highlighting how much friends mattered to her) (FG). Over time, though, these mixed groupings led to broadened cooperation. The teacher noted there were surprisingly no friendship clashes or exclusions during the group dances, even those who weren’t with their best friends managed to work together and have fun (REM).

Being with peers was central to their enjoyment: in a follow-up reflection, almost every child said that dancing with friends (and even family at home) was what made the experience happy for them (FG). Seeing their classmates act silly or inventive in dance made them laugh together and brought a sense of fun. The overall vibe during sessions was inclusive and joyful, high-fives, copying each other’s silly moves, and little celebrations when someone did something cool.

Specifically the children mentioned their favourite elements as spinning down the rabbit hole with one child drawing her favourite action of spinning down into the rabbit hole.

And another commenting: ‘I like to spin around like a ballerina’. One child drew herself and her friends up on stage performing the Create & Dance sessions, carefully labelling all of their names and including the teacher. This shows how much the social side of the experience mattered to her, it wasn’t just about dancing, it was about who they danced with.

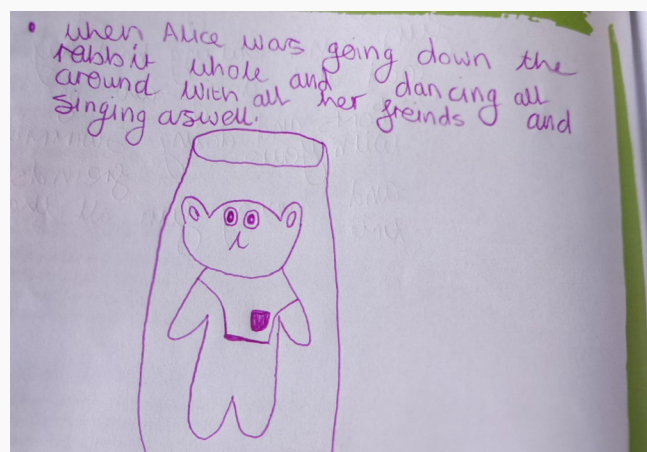
### Confidence

In the focus group, they spoke about the project with big smiles. Many described the sessions as “really fun” or said dancing made them happy (FG). Several students mentioned feeling proud of learning new moves or performing in front of others, one child wrote, “I feel proud because I am a lot better at ballet now,” linking achievement to positive emotion (FG). This suggests a boost in confidence for those children; skills they initially found strange or hard had become a source of personal accomplishment. One shy girl who it was difficult to coax to participate in September was eagerly showing off a ballet pose in December, according to the teacher (REM).

### Physical

Physically, the children enjoyed the active nature of the classes. “When I am active, I am happy,” one girl explained simply, capturing how movement and wellbeing went hand-in-hand for this group (FG). Observers frequently saw children literally jumping with excitement or happily collapsing in panting heaps after an energetic dance game, cheeks red and smiling (Observation).

Importantly, the children’s own voices show how social-emotional the benefits were: when given a chance to make a wish at the project’s end, many wrote down wishes to keep dancing or to do more activities with their friends. “I wish that the dance project continues, and people spread the word” one child wrote, while another wished, “I wish my best friend is my partner every day when we do dancing” (FG). They clearly valued the experience and didn’t want it to end. Of course, not everyone felt the same degree of enthusiasm, a small minority of pupils never quite warmed up to dance. A few described parts of the project as “boring” (FG), and one child even wished “ballet would stop” (FG). These were outliers, often the same children who from the start showed dislike or discomfort. For instance, one boy with a persistently reluctant attitude kept saying he’d rather play football. (FG/Observation). These comments remind us that while the programme lifted most children’s’ moods and confidence, a few did encounter personal hurdles that tempered their enjoyment.



The rabbit hole move was depicted in the booklets as a favourite move.

### 3. Wider impacts

#### Staff training

Upon returning from the initial training, the teacher conducted a staff meeting to deliver training on the workshop content to all staff members. This initiative was perceived as a refreshing and “nice” change from the school’s typical “math and English focused” staff meetings. The staff training was “really well received” and effectively functioned as a “team building” exercise, pushing “everybody’s boundaries” and fostering a positive, collaborative atmosphere among colleagues. As a direct consequence, “everybody in the school’s aware of different techniques you can use to teach dance,” indicating a school-wide increase in pedagogical knowledge and openness to arts education.

#### Maths

The teacher’s personal confidence in teaching dance significantly increased, transforming her approach from solely choreographing dances to facilitating student-led creation. The teacher noted that they no longer needed to rely on the school’s PE lead for dance-specific support, demonstrating a newfound self-sufficiency. The teacher integrates movement and dance principles into other academic subjects, such as using dance moves for learning maths concepts (e.g., a “rounding dance,” squats for multiples), which they have found effective for memory and attention (REM and MAY REM). The teacher had used these before but the programme was a reminder

### 4. Barriers

#### Physical Space

Several challenges emerged that affected implementation and student engagement. One was logistical: the lack of a screen in the usual sports hall forced the class to use the main hall for the video portions, meaning extra transitions (changing and moving spaces) that ate into lesson time (REM). The hall itself, while equipped with technology, was a busy thoroughfare, distractions from other classrooms and people occasionally pulled the children’s attention away (Observation). The projector screen was also mounted quite high up, and some students found it hard to focus on the small moving figures during the dance videos (Observation). These environmental factors made the start of lessons (watching and learning from the video) less engaging for some.

#### Boys and other initial reluctance

Initial trepidation among a few pupils. At first, a couple of children (especially those not used to performing or those who thought dance was not for boys) showed reluctance and even refusal to participate (REM, MAY REM). This could have derailed the sessions if it spread, but fortunately most classmates were willing to try, and peer pressure trended positive. Still, those hesitant individuals represented a challenge in needing extra encouragement – I think it is important we acknowledge that some pupils don’t take to it initially and persistence is needed.

#### Future

The Create & Dance programme is planned to continue as a regular “year four unit next year,” indicating its successful integration into the school’s curriculum. The teacher intends to adjust the timing of the unit within the school year, scheduling it for September or January, to ensure dedicated time for a performance element for parents or other classes. This was identified as a “lost opportunity” in the current year due to conflicts with Christmas activities and the hall being fully booked. The programme’s planning was easily shared with the other Year 4 teacher in this two-form entry school, who successfully delivered the lessons despite not having received the initial training. This demonstrates the programme’s accessibility (MAY REM)

A desire for children to experience live ballet performances, for example, at a secondary school or local ballet school, was expressed, to “bring it to life” beyond the screen and further inspire students. The teacher’s repeated emphasis that her students “don’t have that opportunity” for extracurricular dance due to prohibitive costs highlights a critical societal barrier related to socioeconomic disadvantage. The programme, offering a “so different” and “inspiring” experience that students “never experienced before,” implicitly addresses this (REM, MAY REM)

#### Personal preference and physicality

Personal preferences and physical comfort levels also played a role: as noted, a small number of children just didn’t enjoy dancing, finding it “boring” or tiring, which meant their emotional buy-in to the project was low (FG). One child’s complaint of a sore back or feeling too sleepy for morning activity indicates that timing and physical strain were minor issues for certain children (FG). Lastly, the teacher’s own inexperience with dance could have been a barrier, they started out unsure about how to teach it, but this was quickly mitigated by training and the structured lesson plans provided (REM). In fact, by having a clear scheme to follow, the teacher avoided the potential pitfall of feeling lost and losing the class’s confidence early on.

#### Live lesson

The “live lesson” component of the programme was explicitly deemed “not purposeful” by the teacher, as it was “very much the children watching and not doing”. This passive format led to disengagement, as it was perceived as “a little bit over their heads” and “too secondary based” for primary students. Another significant challenge was the missed performance opportunity. (MAY REM)

### 5. Facilitators

#### Teacher enthusiasm

A number of factors helped the project succeed and supported student wellbeing. Crucially, the teacher’s enthusiastic and open-minded attitude became a driving force (Observation). Even without prior dance experience, she embraced the programme, actively participating alongside the pupils, using humour, and modelling a “have a go” mindset. Her willingness to be a bit silly (e.g. flapping her arms like wings or hopping like a rooster) showed the children that everyone was learning and there was no shame in trying and messing up (Observation). This created a safe, fun atmosphere that facilitated engagement.

#### SEN

The teacher also demonstrated strong classroom management skills: knowing her class had many easily excitable or SEN children, she established clear behaviour boundaries from the outset (e.g. insisting on focus when needed, quickly addressing off-task chatter) (Observation). This structure, calm when necessary, let them be exuberant when it was safe to do so, kept the sessions from descending into chaos and helped all students, including those with attention difficulties, participate more successfully. Support from colleagues and the programme itself were further enablers. The presence of the teaching assistant each lesson meant extra help for children who needed one-to-one guidance or a quick check on behaviour (Observation).

#### Leadership and peer support

The school’s PE lead was fully supportive and had prior experience with the “Jump” initiative, which provided moral support and encouragement to the teacher (Observation). Additionally, the training session the teacher attended before starting was a big help: it not only gave her the specific lesson plans (complete with music, videos, and thematic activities) but also allowed her to network with other teachers for ideas (REM). The teacher came away with practical strategies, for example, they mentioned how they brainstormed in training to tie dance moves into their current class topic, which they then used in class (REM). These resources and peer supports boosted her confidence and preparedness, which in turn made the classroom delivery smoother.

#### Enjoyment and friendships

From the children’s side, their intrinsic enjoyment of movement and friendship acted as a natural facilitator. Once they realised they could dance and socialise, the sessions became something to look forward to (FG). The novelty of performing for visitors was an unexpected bonus motivator as well, when researchers came to observe, the children “felt important” and were excited to show off what they could do (REM). In essence, the combination of a positive teacher, supportive environment, and engaging content unlocked the children’s enthusiasm. The programme’s built-in fun, catchy music, interesting characters like the Mad Hatter, met the students at their level, making it easier to get even the hesitant ones to participate after a while. By the project’s end, the facilitating factors clearly outweighed the barriers, as evidenced by the children’s eagerness to continue dancing and the teacher’s success in delivering a dance unit that initially intimidated her.

### 5. Reflection

This pen portrait describes growth for both the teacher and pupils at Jazz. Initially tentative steps progressed as everyone found their footing in the dance programme. The children’s wellbeing flourished in an environment where relationships, fun, and creativity were prioritised most children during the delivery ended up happier, more connected with classmates, and proud of their new skills. Notably, even the traditionally “reluctant” learners began to engage once they saw their peers and teacher all in it together. Key constants emerged (the joy of being active and with friends) alongside clear changes (for example, a child who had disengaged being brought back into the session). The supportive factors, a passionate teacher, a structured yet flexible programme, and an emphasis on inclusion helped overcome the challenges like logistical hassles or initial nerves.

In summary, Create & Dance became more than a series of dance lessons; it was a positive collective experience that had the potential to leave an imprint on the class’s confidence and relationships, while also highlighting areas to refine (such as accommodating those few children who vocalised they didn’t enjoy the session, though the teacher would argue they did!). Overall children discovered new ways to express themselves and support each other through dance.

## Pen portrait 5

School name: **Salsa** Date: **12th June 2025** Author: **Megan Rogers**

Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	26/11/2024	Year 4	Not available	Ethnically diverse
Focus Group (FG)	11/02/2025	Year 4	N/A	N/A
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	11/02/2025t	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online REM	21/05/25	N/A	N/A	N/A

### 1. General description

Salsa is a primary school where a small Year 4 class took part in the Royal Opera House’s Create & Dance programme. The mixed gender class was comprised of pupils from a diverse ethnic background (Observation). An observation took place during a Queen of Hearts-themed session, drawing on Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland from the Royal Ballet repertoire. This lesson was held in the school hall, which was a large, rectangular space used for multiple purposes (Observation).

[REDACTED: Information related to the school].

The teacher leading the session was a PE specialist who had completed Create & Dance training. The teacher appeared confident, enthusiastic, and well-prepared, and was supported by two teaching assistants (Observation; REM). One-to-one support was provided for two pupils, including a child who uses a wheelchair. The child’s mobility aids were removed at the start of the session, enabling them to participate on the floor with close support from their Learning Support Assistant (LSA) (Observation). The care and encouragement offered to the child reflected the school’s ethos. The session began with a recap of the previous week’s lesson. Pupils sat barefoot in a circle and were invited to share what they remembered. One girl enthusiastically demonstrated a move, encouraging others to engage (Observation). The day’s focus ‘the Queen of Hearts’ was introduced with visible excitement from the class. A video from the RBO was shown on the projector, and while some of the language was initially thought to be challenging, the children grasped concepts like “canon”, “unison”, and to a lesser extent “accumulation”. The teacher supported understanding with accessible analogies, including the idea of a “Mexican wave” (Observation). Pupils then explored “angry” movements inspired by the Queen of Hearts, using facial expressions and expressive body language. They were encouraged to play with intensity as some girls added dramatic kicks and spins, while the child who uses a wheelchair joined in with swipes and wriggles, supported by the LSA. The teacher praised his effort and guided the child gently when needed, promoting independent participation where possible (Observation).

In the second half of the lesson, children worked in small groups to choreograph short routines using their newly learnt vocabulary. They showed critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as a spirit of teamwork and inclusion, for example, one group adjusted a crab pose to begin on the floor after one pupil couldn’t manage it from standing, while another group collaborated with the child who uses a wheelchair to include seated spins and floor-level movements (Observation). Not all groups had time to perform, but those who did received enthusiastic applause. The teacher highlighted creativity and praised groups who used different movement “levels” in their routines. The group working with the child who uses a wheelchair continued refining their choreography with thoughtful adaptations to support their participation (Observation).

The session ended with a cool-down activity in a circle, involving a movement canon where pupils passed on actions around the group. Movements gradually became more ambitious. While some struggled with a more complex back-step, encouragement from peers and the teacher kept energy high. One girl successfully completed the step and added a spin, earning praise. The session closed with gentle stretching, and two pupils received “stars of the lesson” one for inclusivity and one for consistent effort (Observation).

The teacher used a blend of questioning, storytelling, modelling, and praise to keep the class engaged and motivated. The teacher made thoughtful adaptations to ensure all pupils could participate, including those with additional physical or cognitive needs (Observation; REM). The atmosphere throughout was energetic, inclusive, and joyful reflecting the school’s ethos. [REDACTED: Information related to the school].

## 2. Wellbeing

Pupil engagement during the Create & Dance sessions at Salsa was consistently high. Many pupils linked their positive experience to kindness and collaboration, with comments such as “because my friends are kind” and “because it isn’t lonely” (FG). These reflections suggest that social connection and peer support played a vital role in fostering emotional wellbeing.

This sense of inclusion was also evident in the observed Queen of Hearts session. Children worked in small groups to choreograph routines, showing empathy and adaptability, particularly in their support for the child who uses a wheelchair. One group modified a crab-shaped movement to ensure that all members, including the child who was on the floor could take part equally. This inclusive approach was nurtured by the teacher, who consistently reinforced group efforts through praise and encouragement (Observation).

Creativity emerged as another key contributor to wellbeing. Pupils engaged enthusiastically with imaginative tasks, such as inventing “angry” Queen of Hearts movements or improvising expressive gestures during cool-downs. Observations showed children taking initiative for example, one girl added a spin to her movement, while another confidently asked to lead a group canon. The PE teacher noted that the fantasy-based structure of the programme enabled all pupils to engage on their own terms. Some connected most strongly with Alice, while others identified more with the Queen of Hearts or the Mad Hatter (REM).

## 3. Wider impact

In terms of broader influence, the teacher reported that the Create & Dance programme had a notable impact on both school culture and pedagogical practice. Other staff members, including the class teacher and the headteacher, responded enthusiastically, praising the way the programme revitalised the school’s dance curriculum. Building on this momentum, the teacher expressed plans to integrate more cross-curricular links in future delivery, particularly with music and art to deepen engagement and extend creative opportunities across subjects.

Looking ahead, the teacher also voiced an ambition to forge connections with local dance clubs to open access to extracurricular dance experiences for pupils. This approach aims to support sustained participation for children who may not otherwise have opportunities to engage with dance outside of school. Importantly, the teacher observed that the programme appealed not only to those already interested in dance, but to a much wider range of pupils including boys, neurodivergent students, and those with physical disabilities (REM). This inclusivity was seen as one of the programme’s key strengths and a reason to consider its expansion across other year groups and subjects.

The sessions were also designed with accessibility in mind. The teacher explained that although some activities required adjustment, most could be adapted to accommodate a range of physical and learning needs. For example, a pupil with a physical disability was able to crawl instead of run and still accessed the full content with enthusiasm. The teacher suggested that Royal Ballet might consider offering base-level or arm-focused movements to ensure all children can participate in a shared experience without feeling singled out (REM).

Resources such as PowerPoint presentations helped children visualise different characters, while the December Everybody Dance online session proved especially popular. Pupils were visibly engaged, and the character of the Mad Hatter captured the imagination of several boys (REM). Initially, some children appeared uneasy looking away from the screen or showing reluctance to “perform” (Observation; REM).

The teacher has already repeated the programme with a Year 1 and 2 class and is considering further expansion next year, embedding dance across different curriculum areas. The success of these early adaptations suggests that the model is flexible and well-suited for wider school implementation.

Pupil reflections further support the case for broader rollout. Many children expressed a strong desire to perform their dances for parents, and several suggested imaginative extensions to the programme such as adding costumes, more characters, or choosing their own music for choreography. These suggestions reflect not only enthusiasm but also a sense of ownership and creative investment. One pupil noted, “I wish I could perform in front of my mum and dad,” a sentiment echoed by others. Such comments reveal how proud the children felt of their creations and how meaningful it would have been for them to share this work with their families (FG).

## 4. Barriers and facilitators

### Barriers

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response to the Create & Dance programme, a few minor barriers to implementation were identified. One practical issue related to time constraints during PE lessons. The teacher noted that the PowerPoint presentations and video introductions, although helpful, sometimes cut into the limited lesson time allocated for physical activity. The teacher suggested that shorter, more PE-suitable versions of these resources might help improve efficiency and allow more time for movement-based learning (REM). The teacher also found it challenging to deliver the PowerPoint while managing the physical space and time pressures of a PE lesson, reinforcing the need for a streamlined version tailored specifically for PE delivery.

Inclusivity, while recognised as a strength, also presented a learning curve. The teacher successfully adapted activities for children with physical and cognitive disabilities by modifying movements, such as replacing full-body actions with universal arm-based alternatives. However, the teacher that future iterations of the programme include more inclusive tools as standard. For instance, offering suggested facial expressions or universally accessible arm movements would help all pupils participate fully without drawing attention to differences or creating separate routines for those with physical limitations.

The length of some lesson components and the required transitions between watching videos and engaging in physical activity occasionally disrupted the flow of sessions. These minor logistical hurdles, however, did not substantially hinder engagement, thanks largely to the teacher’s creative problem-solving and adaptive teaching style.

## 5. Overarching reflections

Overall, the researcher reflected that School Salsa provides a strong example of how Create & Dance can be embedded in a meaningful and inclusive way. What stood out most was how the programme supported a wide range of learners including those with physical disabilities and initially reluctant attitudes towards dance through a combination of flexible teaching, creative freedom, and a strong emphasis on emotional wellbeing. The teacher’s willingness to adapt and grow in confidence was mirrored by the pupils, many of whom showed increased self-expression, pride, and ownership of their work.

This school seems to have used Create & Dance not just as an arts activity, but as a tool to build community, confidence, and creativity. The researcher was particularly struck by how the teacher created a safe and joyful space that encouraged even the quietest or most hesitant pupils to join in. The fact that the children wanted to perform and continue dancing beyond the sessions suggests something deeper is happening as Create & Dance is clearly resonating with them on both a personal and social level.

### Facilitators

Key facilitating factors helped the programme succeed and supported student wellbeing. The teacher’s confidence and creativity were instrumental in overcoming barriers. Drawing on their PE background and training, the teacher a classroom culture that prioritised effort and imagination over technical accuracy. This encouraged all pupils, including those initially reluctant or self-conscious, to take part. Adaptations such as incorporating football-themed warm-ups like “kicking” an imaginary ball helped draw in children who might not otherwise feel enthusiastic about dance (REM).

Importantly, the teacher praised the pre-prepared programme materials, saying they provided a clear structure and a solid base from which they could confidently adapt. These resources, including lesson plans, music, and videos, were seen as valuable scaffolds that boosted the teacher’s competence and comfort with dance instruction, despite the teacher’s limited prior experience.

Overall, the programme’s flexible content, supportive staffing, and the teacher’s commitment to inclusion and creativity worked together to make the sessions successful. The balance between structure and adaptability allowed children with diverse needs and preferences to participate meaningfully, while reinforcing the school’s wider commitment to arts education and wellbeing.

The teacher’s plan to connect Create & Dance with other areas of the curriculum and the wider community also points to a model that is both sustainable and scalable. This could reflect a broader school ethos that values creativity and emotional development, alongside academic learning. The researcher recognises their own positive response to this school’s approach especially how they moved beyond a more standardised delivery and instead personalised the experience for their context and learners.

In summary, Salsa School’s experience illustrates the profound value of arts-based initiatives when embedded thoughtfully into school life. The Create & Dance programme fostered physical engagement, emotional expression, and social connection demonstrating that with the right support, dance can be a joyful and inclusive experience for all.

## Pen portrait 6

School name: **Foxtrot** Date: **13th June 2025** Author: **Mariam Fargin**

Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	13/02/2025	Year 5	40% and over	Ethnically diverse
Focus Group (FG)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online REM	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### 1. General Description

The session took place in the main school hall. A projector was at the front of the hall but the PowerPoint wasn't used owing to technical difficulties. Children were barefoot, dressed in comfy clothing. Teacher used a tambourine for classroom management.

The teacher began the session with a warm-up, practicing the "Mad Hatter" movements, and emphasised the key theme of the lesson: "Unison." Teacher asked the children to define unison and demonstrate the "Queen of Hearts" pose while using questioning techniques to engage them in defining movement qualities. Instructions were generally clear but sometimes had to be repeated due to a lack of focus from students. Demonstrations were the primary mode of instruction, reinforced with questioning and feedback.

Cones used to define space parameters for marching activity.

Energetic and somewhat chaotic atmosphere interspersed with frequent distractions and off task behaviour.

#### Content and Activities

The activities in the session included a warm-up with "Mad Hatter" movements, a main routine featuring Queen of Hearts movements in unison, House of Cards formations and falling in a canon and marching into position for a performance piece. The cool-down involved a "Sleepy Cards" activity transitioning into putting on shoes.

The activities were age-appropriate and built on prior knowledge, focusing more on structured choreography rather than free expression.

The session successfully reinforced key movement concepts and built upon previous lessons.

Students responded well to structured physical activities but struggled with listening and transitions.

#### Environment/setting

The session took place in the main school hall

#### Teaching style

**Engagement.** Questioning techniques to engage them in defining movement qualities.

**Adaptability.** During the main session, the teacher used various engagement techniques, including questioning, physical demonstrations, and encouragement.

When the projector failed, teacher adjusted the lesson accordingly.

**Behaviour management strategy.** Teacher used a tambourine for classroom management.

Teacher attempted to redirect off-task behaviour multiple times and used humour and exaggerated incorrect movements to engage students.

The session faced multiple instances of off-task behaviour such as talking, running, and hugging. The teacher had to provide multiple redirections and occasionally raised her voice. Some students ignored instructions despite repeated requests, and a few feigned injuries or disengaged when they were not in preferred roles.

Despite some challenges, the teacher managed to maintain control and guide the session effectively.

To improve future sessions, clearer behavioural expectations could be set at the start to minimise distractions. More structured transitions between activities would help maintain focus, and greater use of music or rhythmic cues could enhance engagement. Providing more opportunities for student-led movement choices could increase creativity, and implementing strategies for more equitable engagement across all students would be beneficial. Areas for improvement included more explicit structure for transitions, and increased opportunities for creative expression and student autonomy.

#### Facilitation

**Praise.** The teacher provided frequent praise and constructive feedback such as reminding students to face forward during transitions. Expectations were reinforced, and improvements were acknowledged.

The teacher demonstrated strong adaptability and classroom management skills despite multiple challenges.

Key strengths of the session included clear instructional techniques, effective questioning to prompt critical thinking, positive reinforcement to maintain engagement, and adaptability to unexpected disruptions.

#### Engagement

Engagement levels were mixed, with higher enthusiasm for physically dynamic tasks like falling and less interest in structured choreography. Peer influence played a significant role, as engagement levels were dictated by friendship groups.

#### Disruptions

Disruptions such as injuries requiring first aid, technical issues with the projector, and interruptions from other adults hindered the consistent flow of the session somewhat.

#### Resources

A projector was at the front of the hall but the PowerPoint wasn't used owing to technical difficulties.

The teacher did not use the cheat sheet but relied on the PowerPoint resources for lesson structure and dance vocabulary to guide the movement sequences.

**Props.** Props such as a drum were used to maintain focus and provide auditory cues.

**Health and Safety**

Several minor injuries required first aid, but the facilitator managed disruptions well and maintained control.

**Participation**

Participation levels varied, with some children eager to answer and participate, while others were disengaged.

Most children participated in physical activities but struggled with listening and transitions.

**Noted gendered differences**

A group of three boys chatted and ignored instructions, while another boy ran to the back of the room.

A group of three girls in the back remained consistently engaged. Most children participated in physical activities but struggled with listening and transitions.

**SEN Participation**

A child who was neurodiverse participated intermittently with support.

Consistent structure were sometimes difficult to maintain because of the interruptions.

**Peer Interaction**

The children were excited and enthusiastic during falling activities, but some expressed frustration when instructions had to be repeated due to off-task behaviour.

Peer interactions showed a strong tendency for children to stay within their friendship groups. Some collaborated in forming shapes, such as diamonds for the “House of Cards”. A few instances of disruptive (off-task) behaviour included hugging, talking, and ignoring instructions.

Possible points for future data collection could include analysing how different engagement strategies affect participation levels, understanding how peer influence impacts engagement in structured dance activities, identifying the most effective behavioural interventions for maintaining focus in movement-based learning, and exploring how structured choreography can be balanced with opportunities for student creativity.

**Creativity and Expression**

Creativity and expression were somewhat limited, though students had opportunities to define poses and choose suites. The teacher allowed for some character exploration, such as facial expressions for the Queen of Hearts.

**Immediate outcomes**

Immediate outcomes included engagement in physical movement and character-based learning, an improved understanding of unison by the end of the session, and increased energy and enthusiasm in the falling activities.

The session supported pupil wellbeing through active movement, peer collaboration, humour, and positive reinforcement, creating a generally engaging and inclusive environment. However, was occasionally undermined by behavioural disruptions, minor injuries, and limited opportunities for creative expression, suggesting a need for clearer structure and more student autonomy in future sessions.

**2. Wellbeing**

**Expressions of joy**

Laughter and enjoyment were observed during certain segments, such as the canon fall.

**Engagement with peers/social interactions**

Peer interactions showed a strong tendency for children to stay within their friendship groups. A few instances of disruptive behaviour included hugging, talking, and ignoring instructions. Although this is noted as ‘disruptive behaviour’, one could argue that the children would actually attribute these behaviours with positive feeling of excitement and wellbeing.

**3. Barriers**

Some students feigned injuries or disengaged when not in preferred roles. Frequent off-task behaviour (e.g., chatting, running, hugging, ignoring instructions).

**Uneven levels of engagement**

While some students were enthusiastic, others were disengaged or inattentive. Transitions between activities proved difficult and often led to a loss of focus.

Listening skills were a particular issue, with repeated instructions often necessary. This could be attributed to the environment. It is plausible that children positioned further away from the teacher could not hear/see. This issue can be countered if the children formed a circle around the teacher.

Peer influence contributed to selective engagement and behavioural disruptions. Strong alignment to friendship groups limited broader collaboration.

**SEN/ND Engagement**

The child who is neurodivergent required support and engaged intermittently, indicating a need for tailored differentiation or additional strategies.

**4. Facilitators**

**Adaptability of the teacher**

The teacher adapted fluidly to challenges, especially given the technical failure of equipment and maintained lesson flow.

**Use of Clear Instruction and Feedback**

Humour, physical exaggeration, and immediate redirection were used to retain attention.

Instructions were generally clear and supported with demonstrations.

The teacher used targeted questioning to encourage critical thinking about movement.

Constructive feedback was used to reinforce learning (e.g., reminders to face forward).

**Positive Reinforcement**

Regular praise helped to sustain motivation and engagement.

The teacher acknowledged student improvements and reinforced expectations.

**Use of Props and Auditory Cues**

A tambourine and drum were used effectively to manage classroom attention and transitions. Cones were used to define spatial boundaries, supporting physical structure.

**Physical Activity and Thematic Engagement**

Activities such as the “falling” sequence and “House of Cards” formation generated high energy and enthusiasm.

Engagement with prior knowledge, recap from previous session. The session reinforced prior knowledge and aligned with the theme, which supported learning continuity.

**Staff Support**

Additional adults, including a Learning Support Assistant for the child who is neurodivergent provided reinforcement and assistance in managing the class.

**5. Overarching Reflections**

The session was characterised by effective facilitation strategies, with the teacher making consistent use of praise and constructive feedback to support pupil engagement and behaviour. Specific verbal cues, such as reminders to face forward during transitions, reinforced expectations and acknowledged individual improvement. The use of clear instructions, often supported by demonstrations, helped to maintain focus, while humour, physical exaggeration, and immediate redirection were employed skilfully to sustain attention and manage classroom dynamics. Targeted questioning was used to prompt critical thinking about movement, while constructive feedback reinforced learning outcomes. Although moments of self-expression were allowed—for example, through creative poses such as the “Queen of Hearts”—the strong emphasis on structured choreography limited broader opportunities for creative autonomy.

The use of props and auditory cues played an important role in classroom management. Instruments such as a tambourine and drum were employed effectively to signal transitions and direct attention, while cones were used to define spatial boundaries, helping to maintain physical order within the space.

Finally, the presence of additional staff, including a dedicated support worker for child who is neurodiverse, provided valuable reinforcement and contributed to the smooth facilitation of the session. Overall, the session demonstrated a well-structured approach with effective use of multi-sensory cues, adult support, and behaviour management techniques to maximise engagement and participation.

## Pen portrait 7

School name: **Charleston**      Date: **13th June 2025**      Author: **Charlotte Spriggs**

Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	26/02/2025	Year 4	20-40%	Majority ethnic.
Focus Group (FG)	02/04/2025	Year 4	N/A	FG took place during seasonal festival period.
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Online REM	21/05/2025	N/A	N/A	

### 1. General Description

The school vision and values places some emphasis on art, music, dance, drama and poetry [REDACTED: School data]. Charleston primary is [REDACTED: School data]. Two Year 4 classes [REDACTED: School data]. <60 pupils took part in the Create & Dance programme, The classes were mixed gender, evenly split between boys and girls with a predominantly South Asian background (observation). The observation was carried out with two Year 4 classes, while the focus group was conducted with only one Year 4 class.

Among the participants, two children required walking equipment, and some children sat out on benches, either observing or using laptops (observation). The sessions were based on the Industrial Revolution, incorporating machine-like movements into dance with the teacher emphasising mechanical, jerky movements to fit the Industrial Revolution theme (observation). The sessions were held in a medium sized hall with sufficient room to move around (observation). The sessions effectively complemented their history lessons and learning of the historical period and the teacher stated that it was good to have “connections across subject areas and not have things just separate” (observation, REM). The teacher [REDACTED: Participant data].

The teacher stated that the RBO training was “really good in terms of how to plan a dance scheme for people who aren’t dance specialists”, noting that staff “went away feeling really confident and with lots of tools and resources.” (REM). All children demonstrated enthusiasm and a strong willingness to participate throughout the programme and notably one child who had autism who followed a different curriculum to the rest of the class occasionally joined in with the sessions, demonstrating the inclusive and engaging potential of the programme (REM). Children were encouraged to perform in front of their peers, which helped build confidence, particularly among non-verbal and shy pupils – as they were able to communicate through movement instead of speech (REM). Pupils had the opportunity to work with children who they do not usually work with helping them build trust, develop relationships, and feel safe in the process (REM). The observed session followed a clear and structured format, beginning with a musical warm-up and progressing to group practice of industrial-style, jerky movements. Pupils then took part in partnered improvisation to create three unique movements, followed by the formation of a mechanical ‘wheel’ with one child in the centre. The session concluded with a final performance by two groups, presented to an audience of Year 2 pupils and several parents (observation).

## 2. Wellbeing

### Children’s understanding of wellbeing

When asked what wellbeing means to them, children linked happiness with spending time with friends and family (e.g., “time with my family,” “my cousins,” “friends,” “family is together”), play and fun (e.g., “Roblox,” “fun fair,” “football,” “sparklers”), nature and the environment (e.g., “sunny days,” “park,” “Lister Park,” “birds”), as well as special places and events (e.g., “[REDACTED: identifiable data]. Pakistan,” “cousins [REDACTED: identifiable data]. Children highlighted healthy foods and water playing a role in being healthy (e.g., “broccoli,” “carrots,” “fruits,” “watermelon,” “water and milk are healthy”). Notably, frequent mention of friends, cousins, and family reflects a need for belonging and connection, which is a core component of wellbeing. A key aspect of wellbeing that was noted in both children’s perceptions of wellbeing and examples of wellbeing from Create & Dance sessions was social connections with others.

### Creativity/self-expression

Several Wellbeing impacts were noted during the Create & Dance programme, with creativity emerging as a prominent theme. Children who were typically shy and non-verbal in traditional lessons demonstrated some of the highest levels of creativity and originality during choreography of dance moves (REM). The teacher noted that “it was nice to see some of the really quieter children shine” (REM). The programme provided a valuable outlet for these pupils to express themselves and their emotions in a supportive and imaginative environment, contrasting with the conventional classroom setting where they may be less inclined to communicate their ideas. Similarly, a pupil with autism occasionally participated in the sessions, despite following a different curriculum from the rest of the class, demonstrating the inclusive and engaging nature of the activities (REM).

In general, pupils responded positively when asked if they enjoyed being creative, with many sharing their excitement in comments like “It helps me express my feelings and personality,” “I like to because it’s fun!” and “I liked being creative because we have different things to do” (FG). However, one pupil did express a lack of confidence, stating, “I feel sad cause I don’t know how to be creative” (FG).

### Social connections

The majority of pupils [REDACTED: school data]. reported that they enjoyed spending time with their friends. Comments included, “I love dancing with my friends because me and her make the good fit,” and “Because when we did it we got to choreograph it ourselves.” However, a few participants expressed negative experiences when working with friends. For example, one pupil shared, “I did not because I did not like my partner,” while another said, “I felt like sad because my friends were away.” This suggests that some children were unhappy with their assigned partners. One child expressed mixed feelings, stating, “Fun and nice exploring with friends. Annoying too at the same time.”

Social interactions were improved, with many pupils noting the value of working with friends (FG). One participant stated when asked why teamwork is important – “It’s more fun doing it with your friends and it’s easier,” highlighting collaboration as a key strength (FG). The children especially enjoyed the circle aspect of the dance, with many commenting on how much fun it was. Some shared: “When we did a circle and ran around,” “My favourite part was creating the circle,” “I liked the circle—it was rotating,” and “Rotating the circle because it is fun.”

### Pride and achievement

Another notable aspect of wellbeing observed was a strong sense of pride in pupils’ achievements (FG). Many participants expressed pride in their work, sharing comments such as, “I like feeling proud of what I have done because I put a lot of hard work into it,” “I felt proud as if I was famous,” “I felt good inside,” and “I felt proud of my cool moves in the dance” (FG). While most pupils reflected a deep sense of accomplishment, some also demonstrated self-awareness and a desire to improve, with one noting, “I am proud, but I could be better” (FG).

### Physical activity

Most pupils [REDACTED: school data] reported that they enjoyed being active and moving their body. Pupils who reported that they enjoyed physical activity stated, “I loved being active!”, “Because when you move your body it makes you do the right movement” and “It makes me happy and healthy”. In contrast, pupils who did not enjoy physical activity explained, “I don’t like it because then I become tired” and “I don’t like to move my body that much because I don’t feel like it”.

## 3. Wider Impacts

Beyond wellbeing benefits, the Create & Dance programme yielded a variety of other positive outcomes for the Charleston School.

### Embedding Subject Knowledge Through Dance

The programme supported curriculum integration and engagement, especially in history and the teacher noted that the sessions “really helped them understand that topic further.” Pupils demonstrated understanding of the Industrial Revolution through movement, with several referencing “machinery,” “jerky movements,” and “levers” in both drawings and verbal responses (FG). Dance helped embed historical learning in a physical and memorable way and allowing for clear cross-curricular links. For example, one pupil explained their drawing as sitting down and holding hands with their cousin whilst they moved backwards and forwards. They said this represented the machinery and the leavers in the industrial revolution (FG). Similarly, another child depicted “pulling and pushing each other like a lever”. (FG).

### Cross curriculum integration

In addition, the teacher plans to continue delivering dance at Charleston Primary School in the next academic year, with more teachers delivering the lessons (REM). The teacher intends to integrate dance alongside PE lessons or deliver it during the summer term, when PE can take place outdoors and the school hall becomes available for dance sessions (REM). The teacher is motivated to sustain this provision as they believe “it can be linked to so many other curriculum areas” (REM). To support this, there are plans to share the CPD training with all teaching staff to build their confidence and capacity to deliver dance sessions (REM).

## 4. Barriers

### Pupil engagement and distractions

One clear barrier was keeping the pupils engaged – especially boys – and several pupils were restless and lost focus which disrupted the session (observation). Furthermore, children at the front of the class were more engaged and active compared to pupils at the back of the class who were more passive, and issues emerged when pupils were getting into pairs (observation). Frequent reminders from the teacher were required and the teacher altered the pace and format to maintain attention (observation). Adjustments were made when children lost focus, such as restarting sections or repositioning students (observation). While partner work generated high levels of excitement, some pupils appeared to use the opportunity to play rather than remain focused (observation). Some children also struggled with spacing and transitions, leading to confusion and multiple restarts, highlighting the need for clearer spatial guidance and movement structure (observation).

### Inclusivity

A further barrier concerned inclusivity, as the two children who used walking aids were not actively included in either the partner work or practice sessions (observation). This highlighted a gap in accessible planning and the need for more intentional strategies to ensure that all children, regardless of ability, are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the session (observation).

### Practical barriers

Another barrier to delivering dance sessions in the future is the limited availability of space, as the school has only one hall, which is frequently in use for PE sessions (REM). In the future the teacher plans to use the hall more in the summer when PE lessons can be delivered outside.

### Emotional barriers: student embarrassment

A further barrier identified by a pupil was embarrassment around dancing (observation). The participant shared, ‘Sometimes it’s weird to dance in front of people,’ expressing that she found it uncomfortable and preferred not to perform in front of others (observation).

## 5. Facilitators

Many facilitators were observed during the Create & Dance programme.

### Teacher enthusiasm and effective engagement strategies

For example, the teacher effectively engaged students by using a combination of verbal instructions, physical demonstrations, and repetition, while consistently providing positive reinforcement to encourage participation and reinforce learning (observation). Furthermore, the teacher played a key role in supporting pupil development by offering praise and constructive feedback on spacing and movement. The teacher’s consistent emphasis on building confidence and encouraging effective use of space created a positive and supportive environment, enabling pupils to explore movement more freely and expressively (observation).

### Pupil interactions

Another facilitating factor was the children’s interaction with one another which demonstrated strong collaboration during partner activities, including support in maintaining rhythm and timing (observation). This was further evidenced by the children through laughter, smiles, and verbal enthusiasm, particularly during partner work (observation). Furthermore, partner work encouraged creative freedom for the children (observation).

### Progress and Positive Engagement in Dance

Another positive outcome observed was the improvement in movement execution through repetition, accompanied by a rise in engagement as the session progressed (observation). Overall, the children appeared to really enjoy the sessions, especially the opportunity to work with a partner and to learn about the topic through dance.

## 6. Overarching reflections

Charleston’s progression through the Create & Dance programme highlights significant personal growth and development – for both the teacher and the children alike. The programme provided an opportunity for children to flourish, improving several aspects of their wellbeing. Notably, there was a noticeable increase in creativity and more meaningful social connections, particularly among children who do not typically work together. A key observation was the strong sense of achievement children felt in their work, contributing positively to their confidence and overall engagement.

The focus group was conducted during the festival celebrations, with a party scheduled to take place shortly afterwards. This context contributed to a heightened sense of excitement among the children, resulting in a lively and distracted atmosphere. Consequently, the session had frequent off-topic discussions and reduced engagement with the Create & Dance focus group activities.

Although wellbeing impacts were clearly observed when children were asked about their enjoyment of the Create & Dance sessions, responses varied. Thirteen children stated that they enjoyed the sessions, while eight said they did not. Those who did not enjoy the sessions gave reasons such as: “I don’t like dancing, that’s why I didn’t have fun,” “It was boring,” and “I like doing maths and calculations.” In contrast, children who reported enjoying the sessions said things like: “I have fun because I learn new things,” and “Because I love the movements, and I was very happy to do the lessons.” One child added, “I did have fun, but it took a long time with the two classes.”

The Create & Dance programme proved beneficial for the majority of pupils, particularly those who struggle to express themselves through more traditional means. For example, non-verbal and shy children were able to flourish by using creative methods as a form of self-expression. The programme also had a notably positive impact on a child who has autism who typically does not participate in the same lessons as the rest of the class. It fostered a sense of inclusivity and enabled meaningful interaction with peers.

To further enhance the effectiveness of future sessions, several areas for development were identified. Assigning partners proactively could help ensure the inclusion of all children, particularly those who may be more reluctant to engage. Providing more structured guidance on spacing would support pupils in navigating the space safely and confidently. For pupils who appeared disengaged, additional engagement strategies, such as incorporating their interests or using more varied movement prompts, could boost participation. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to develop more inclusive strategies that enable children who use walking aids to participate more fully.

## Pen portrait 8

School name: **Swing** Date: **16th June 2025** Author: **Marie Frazer.** Only the observation was completed at this school.

Data source	Date	Year Group	Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	25/11/2024	Year 4	20-40%	Majority minoritised communities
Focus Group (FG)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online REM	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### 1. General Description

The session took place in a Year 4 class, with less than 30 children: relatively even gender split of boys and 10 girls. The class was represented by children from a predominantly ethnically diverse background.

The session took place in the school’s communal hall, a large, shared space that also functioned as a thoroughfare, with frequent interruptions from other pupils and staff passing through. These distractions, while handled calmly by the teacher, did create some challenges in maintaining focus – interruptions frequently occur – could this be covered in the training?

The teacher leading the session was the only staff member present. The session was the third in a series of Create & Dance (C&D) lessons, focused on the character of the Mad Hatter. This particular session had been postponed from the previous week.

At the start, the atmosphere felt slightly tense, likely due to behaviour management challenges and the presence of observers, but it became more relaxed and creative as the session progressed. The children were barefoot and in school uniform, and music and slides were used via RBO resources, with added props (cones) to represent hats. Despite initial distractions and moments of disengagement, the session featured many creative and engaging elements, which several children clearly enjoyed.

### 2. Wellbeing

#### Physical activity – gendered?

Movement was a central part of the session, including animal-based warmups, body percussion, and re-enactments of routines. Although there were moments of disengagement (particularly among boys), most children were physically active at various points. The boys appeared to enjoy the freedom to move energetically, especially during animal movement and play-based tasks, though this sometimes led to off-task behaviour. Overall, the session offered opportunities for moderate physical activity that were appropriate and enjoyable for the group.

#### Being with Friends & Teamwork

Children worked in pre-assigned groups from the previous session. Some groups collaborated well, especially those led by girls who displayed strong communication and leadership. Others, most notably a group of boys, engaged more independently, using the tasks as opportunities for playful expression rather than coordinated teamwork. Nonetheless, there were clear moments of cooperation, including sharing props and contributing to group routines. A balance of structured teamwork and peer-led exploration was observed.

#### Creativity / Autonomy

Creativity was encouraged throughout the session, particularly in the use of cones and body percussion. Girls, especially those confident from the outset, demonstrated high levels of creativity and autonomy. Some even took on informal leadership roles in their groups. In contrast, many boys appeared more comfortable copying demonstrated moves rather than generating their own. There was a clear tendency among several children to prefer imitation over invention, highlighting the need for scaffolding or confidence-building in creative expression.

#### Adapting materials

The teacher’s adaptable approach, such as skipping more complex elements like “inverted space”, helped to maintain a safe creative environment. The props appeared to boost creative engagement, especially for those who may have been hesitant at first.

#### Fun/Engagement

Despite variable engagement, all children participated at some stage. Activities that allowed for playful self-expression, such as using cones or rhythm phrases like “I like drinking tea”, drew audible laughter and enthusiasm. By the session’s end, even those who had initially disengaged were moving and participating. One particularly noticeable example was a girl who sat at the back, separate from the group, at the start of the session but was actively involved by the end. This progression speaks to the inclusive and gently coaxing nature of the session’s design.

That said, the session did not fully follow the RBO structure, and the full lesson wasn’t completed within the hour. Whether this was due to time, pace, or the children’s needs is unclear, but it’s a helpful reminder that flexibility is key.

#### Inclusivity

The teacher’s ability to provide 1:1 attention was limited due to being the sole adult present. A richer level of inclusion may have been possible with another staff member present, especially to support children sitting on the sidelines or unsure how to contribute.

### 3. Wider Impact

With no focus group or REM data, it's not possible to assess longer-term impacts at this stage. However, from this session alone, there were positive signs that Create & Dance helped build creativity, confidence, and social interaction. Importantly, some children became more engaged over time, suggesting that trust and familiarity with the format may increase participation.

The use of physical space, play-based props, and freedom to move supported a gradual warming-up effect among the children. It's also worth noting the observer's reflection that girls were more drawn to the dance element, while boys leaned into more general, unstructured movement.

### 4. Barriers

Communal space led to frequent distractions.

- Single adult meant limited capacity to manage behaviour and provide individual support.
- Children showed a tendency to copy rather than create, indicating a need for more scaffolding around imaginative movement.
- The lesson was not fully completed, potentially due to time constraints, group dynamics, or complexity.
- Technical language (e.g., "motif") wasn't explained and may have caused confusion. The language used come up a lot - I know RBO see it as improving dance language literacy but a crib sheet may be useful.
- Observers reflected that their presence may have influenced the initial atmosphere.

### 5. Facilitators

The teacher was flexible and positive, adapting the plan based on the class's needs.

Use of props (cones) boosted engagement and playfulness.

Familiar routines increased confidence and allowed all children to succeed at some level.

Despite early challenges, the group dynamic improved noticeably throughout the session.

## Pen portrait 9

School name: **Waltz** Date: **16th June 2025** Author: **Marie Frazer**. MTF did not complete the observation but did attend the focus group where MTF carried out the REM. The school also attended the REM session online but MTF did not facilitate.

Data source	Date	Year Group	School level data: Pupil Premium	School level data: Ethnicity
Observation	28/02/2025	Years 5/6	20-40%	Majority minoritised communities
Focus Group (FG)	28/02/2025	Years 5/6	N/A	N/A
Ripple Effects Map (REM)	28/02/2025	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online REM	21/05/2025	N/A	N/A	N/A

### General description

[REDACTED: Class observational data]. [REDACTED: School data]. Years 5 and 6 participated in the Create & Dance session. Relatively even gender split. The dance unit ran over 6-week blocks (effectively a 12-week unit) in weekly lessons, each lasting about 75 minutes, instead of splitting into shorter sessions: the teacher explained they “didn’t want it to be half an hour, half an hour... a ticky box-y thing” (REM). The unit’s theme was Alice in Wonderland, with children embodying different animals (rooster, turtle, eaglet, caterpillar, rabbit) through motif-inspired movements (Observation). Each session began with a video and discussion in the classroom (children seated on the floor in front of the board) and then moved to the school hall for physical practice (Observation).

#### Sound issues

The hall had ample space for movement but no sound system, so music from the Royal Ballet videos was used primarily during classroom segments (Observation). The class included a teaching assistant who observed and sometimes joined in (Observation).

#### CPD

The teacher relied on Royal Ballet lesson plans and an initial workshop, and reported that after training they felt “That training is what gave me the confidence” to teach dance (REM).

#### School Context

Waltz has a [REDACTED: school data], a documented framework outlining activities children have either achieved or aspire to undertake (REM). The schools ethos [REDACTED: school data], demonstrates alignment with [REDACTED: school data], Create & Dance programme align well. This pre-existing cultural receptiveness likely fostered enthusiastic engagement from both leadership and students, illustrating how a programme’s success can be significantly amplified when it resonates with the fundamental mission and values of the institution (REM).

The teacher reported exceptionally high overall participation, stating that out of [REDACTED: pupil data], “nobody said they didn’t want to take part”. This highlights a remarkable level of initial and sustained engagement. Additionally a pupil with an EHCP who required no special adaptations, is a suggestion that the inclusive design and the teacher’s delivery meant it is an accessible programme – The teacher repeatedly mentioned that the children don’t often get opportunities like this because of [REDACTED: school data], implying the socioeconomic make up.

## 2. Wellbeing

### Positive emotions

The programme changed student ideas of the “Friday afternoon P.E. slot,” transforming it from a “death slot” into a session they looked forward to (REM). Children asked, “Oh, are we doing dance tomorrow?”. This shift indicates a significant positive change in their attitude towards PE. Students anticipated specific activities, repeatedly asking if they were “definitely doing that” when the teacher mentioned the upcoming “race” moves. (REM)

The dance lessons fostered a positive, enthusiastic atmosphere. At first, some children were tentative (a few looked away from the video or were “not doing that” when asked to dance), but with encouragement nearly everyone joined in (Observation, REM). As one child warmed to the activities, he went from “I’m not doing that” at the start to stomping and clapping along with a grin by the end (REM). The teacher’s warm approach helped shift moods: the teacher laughed with the children about how tricky the moves were, making mistakes “silly” and fun (Observation). By mid-lesson most pupils were smiling and focused on the music (Observation). One child who had been quiet found himself leading a group dance, clearly proud of their mini-performance (Observation), and others who normally held back were (Observation).

The “My Wellbeing Jar” activity, revealed that their happiness came from a diverse range of sources, including social connections (e.g., “hugging my dog,” “my friend,” “my family”), various activities (including “dancing,” “playing sports,” “making things”), and personal comforts. This broader context confirms that dance contributes to a broader sense of wellbeing, integrating with their overall positive experiences (FG REM).

This suggests that Create & Dance is not just about physical activity but about fostering a positive emotional connection to the school day, demonstrating how arts education can encourage engagement across the curriculum.

## 3. Wider impact

### Long term and across school

It’s a “core part of our P/E curriculum of our indoor P/E curriculum” starting from September. The school has plans to expand the programme to [REDACTED: school data]. The school’s long-term objective is to “embed” and “sustain” the practice, ensuring dance becomes a lasting part of the curriculum. (REM)

### Parents included

There was a sense of pride through the “ Celebration Assembly and showcases featuring student work”. Dance was successfully incorporated into a class assembly, specifically a poetry slam, in November. This marked the “first time dance had been included in such an event”, highlighting a cross-curricular approach. Parents attended these assemblies and provided “lots of really positive” feedback, indicating strong community support.

### Physicality

Pupils “excelled in movement based activities, demonstrating increased confidence and self-expression” (REM). Development of personal agency and comfort in physical expression. The teacher emphasised that the programme functioned as an “equaliser” because “it’s not a test” (REM). This allowed children to participate at the same level. Student feedback further supported this, with 14 out of 16 respondents expressing “happy faces” for the statement “I like feeling proud of what I have done”. (FG) Their reasons included sentiments like “makes me feel good about myself,” “I have learnt a lot,” and “I really enjoyed it and I felt proud,” directly linking participation to self-esteem.

Favourite aspects of the programme, such as “being a different character like the turtle,” “acting as characters,” and “dancing with my friends”, highlight how imaginative play and social interaction were key for self-expression and enjoyment.

Teacher wellbeing – (Create & Dance) “brought back the joy” to their work, reigniting their enthusiasm and making her look forward to the Friday afternoon P.E. slot. The teacher emphasised “teacher confidence and skill development” as “incredibly important,” noting that the programme “upskilled” them and gave them the confidence to pass on that to the children. The teacher reflected that the programme highlighted a “disservice” they might have been doing to the children by not including such activities previously.

### Leadership

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT), particularly the head teacher, demonstrated “really good” and “really, really enthusiastic” support, granting the teacher “free rein” to implement the programme as they saw fit. This strong leadership support would have supported integration and sustainability. The programme was described as “lifting that glass ceiling of possibilities” for children, fostering long-term interest in dance and broader cultural events (REM)

## 4. Barriers

### Logistical

“Physical space” limitation of the size of the school, [REDACTED: school data], with “one hall which is used for absolutely everything”. This constraint directly impacted scheduling, particularly during busy periods like the lead-up to Christmas when the hall was in high demand. (Observation REM)

Another significant logistical challenge highlighted by the teacher was the financial burden of travel and accommodation for external events in London. While RBO provided tickets, the teacher personally covered hotel and travel costs, noting this as a considerable barrier for others who “can’t do that” or “don’t live in London”. This points to broader accessibility issues for cultural opportunities that extend beyond the immediate school environment – this was part of cultural champions (REM).

## 5. Facilitators

### Inclusion of boys

A remarkable positive impact was the complete absence of gender stereotypes in participation. Despite the presence of “preteen boys” in a Year 6 class, “nobody made a comment as in, ‘I’m not dancing, girls do it,’ or ‘that’s a girly thing to do,’ or ‘I don’t do ballet’”. This outcome challenges common preconceptions about boys’ engagement in dance. (REM)

### Teacher impact

The teacher’s willingness to adapt lesson plans and their renewed “joy” in teaching created a highly positive and engaging learning environment. The Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) training “upskilled” them and provided the necessary confidence to effectively deliver ballet lessons, which they had not done previously. Their emphasis on “control of your body;” “positioning, posture” provided clear,

## 6. Reflections

- Impact on teachers as a theme
- Pupils confidence, improved social-emotional development, and a tangible shift in cultural attitudes regarding gender roles.
- Long term potential and sustainability – achieved due to leadership support?

### Lesson plans – resources from RBO

The provided lesson plans were described as “quite complex and long,” which needed simplifying by the teacher to fit her one-hour slot. She expressed a desire for “Idiot Guide lessons” or “two versions” (a more detailed and a simpler one), as the current “brief guide” was “too brief”. Engagement in online “Discover Ballet” sessions was “not as high as it when it’s online”. Students tended to “switch off” during “chatty bits”, indicating a need for more engaging content.

The teacher also felt that at their current level, dance required “more of the same” practice for improvement rather than advanced differentiation for highly skilled students, suggesting a limitation in catering to very high-ability students within the existing framework. (REM)

achievable learning objectives for the students, contributing to their sense of accomplishment. The teacher effectively used “mastery pairing” for group work, strategically matching students based on complementary qualities, which proved successful in the dance context (REM).

### Wider offering from RBO

The initial school workshops featuring various artists served as a “massive” and impactful starting point, (they were involved in a range of RBO programmes – opera cultural champions etc.) generating significant excitement. RBO videos provided “inspiration as to what was possible” for the students, offering a concrete visual reminder of what they could aim for. (REM)

## Pen portrait 10

### RBO Partner Perspectives on the Create & Dance Programme

#### Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) staff involved in the Create & Dance programme describe an initiative that goes far beyond teaching steps.

Through their experiences and reflections, a picture emerges of a programme that simultaneously nurtures children’s wellbeing, empowers teachers, and strives to be accessible and inclusive.

This pen portrait gathers together the voices of RBO Partners, programme creators, and non-delivery staff, highlighting their insights on impact, design, inclusivity, and the barriers and facilitators.

### Children’s Wellbeing Through Dance

RBO Partners consistently observe that Create & Dance has multifaceted benefits for children’s wellbeing – socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. One RBO Partner said that the programme impacts children in “so many ways,” emphasising “socially, it’s a massive one... the social side of collaborating and working together, problem solving is massive” (RBO Partner). The collaborative nature of creative dance helps build communication skills, teamwork, and “cohesion as a group,” which staff note are key “soft skills that come through the arts” (RBO Partner). These social and emotional gains often translate into improved class dynamics and empathy among students. For example, staff have seen children become more comfortable sharing ideas and valuing others’ contributions; as one creator noted, students develop the confidence to express themselves and “demonstrate empathy when working with others”, freely sharing their work and opinions in a supportive group setting (RBO Partner).

Emotional expression is another wellbeing outcome highlighted by the RBO. Create & Dance gives children an outlet to convey feelings through movement. “The ability to...express themselves and actually have a different outlet is massive,” explained a facilitator, who felt this creative release was particularly valuable for children who might struggle to communicate in traditional academic ways (RBO Partner). RBO Partners also pointed out that simply having fun is an important part of wellbeing, and fun is evident in these dance sessions. Children are “really enthusiastic” in class and often display pure joy in movement and play, an RBO creator observed, noting that the overlapping social, emotional and cognitive benefits all “kind of overlap, and creativity is in the middle of it” (RBO Partner). In other words, by engaging in creative dance, children exercise their bodies, minds and imaginations in tandem, an experience that can contribute to a happier, healthier “state of being” for each child.

Physical wellbeing is naturally embedded in the programme as it involves movement and bodily expression. RBO Partner members see improvements in children’s physical confidence and dance literacy, even if the focus is not on formal technique, children learn to comfortably use their bodies and get active. One artist defined wellbeing as encompassing “physical wellbeing – being fit, no illnesses as well as mental, social, and emotional wellbeing”, all of which dance can support (RBO Partner). Create & Dance’s approach to movement is intentionally child-friendly: rather than drilling precise ballet positions, it encourages creative physicality.

This means every child, regardless of athletic or dance ability, can participate and enjoy some form of success. Several staff remarked that when children create their own movements, they experience pride and satisfaction that feeds their overall confidence. As one RBO Partner put it, “it’s the whole thing of...sense of pride when you’ve created something... It’s much more than [what] people think” (RBO Partner). Taken together, these staff perspectives illustrate a strong belief that Create & Dance positively influences children’s wellbeing in holistic ways building not just dance skills but happy, healthy, and socially connected young people.

Notably, RBO personnel admit that “the programmes weren’t made with [wellbeing] in mind” initially (RBO Partner). The original impetus was educational, to fill a gap in the curriculum, but over time the wellbeing outcomes have become increasingly evident. Especially post-pandemic, schools have voiced greater concern for children’s mental health and social-emotional development, and RBO Partners have begun consciously exploring how arts participation in Create & Dance might support those needs. They have heard “anecdotally [from] schools... how beneficial it is for children to be doing these programmes for their wellbeing and their cohesion as a group”, even if early on the team lacked hard evidence to back those claims (RBO Partner). This has led RBO to partner in new research initiatives (for example, with child wellbeing researchers in Bradford) to formally measure impacts. One staff member explained that in recent years the conversation around Create & Dance has expanded to consider, “how does arts participation support wellbeing?” – a question now driving evaluation efforts to capture the program’s longer-term influence on children’s mental and emotional health (RBO Partner). In summary, while Create & Dance was born from a desire to enrich the curriculum, RBO Partners have come to see it as a powerful vehicle for children’s wellbeing, yielding social-emotional growth, physical activity, creative thinking, and sheer enjoyment.

### Programme Design and Delivery: A Creative Model for Schools

The design of the Create & Dance programme reflects a thoughtful response to schools’ needs, combining curricular relevance with a wide reach. According to one of the RBO Partners, the idea originated from a recognised “curriculum need”: in primary schools, dance in the Physical Education (PE) curriculum was not well-defined, and many generalist teachers felt ill-equipped to teach it (RBO Partner). RBO took this opportunity to support schools by leveraging their expertise in ballet and opera in an accessible way. The result was a programme that uses ballet and opera as a lens rather than a strict syllabus, “our work will always centre ballet or opera... but with a kind of creative and inclusive dance practice”, meaning children are not taught formal ballet steps, but instead become choreographers of their own movements (RBO Partner). This child-centred creative approach was deliberately chosen to “open up the art forms for new audiences” and “change perceptions of what ballet and opera are and who they’re for” (RBO Partner). In other words, the RBO team designed Create & Dance to demystify the art forms and welcome everyone into the world of dance, irrespective of background or experience.

A key success factor of the programme’s delivery model is that it works through teachers rather than relying on visiting artists to teach children directly. As one staff member explained, the initiative has three core components or “pillars”: teacher CPD (continuing professional development) training, digital resources for classroom use, and live broadcast lessons from the Royal Opera House. The first pillar, in-person (or sometimes online) training, is meant to “build teachers’ confidence creatively and enable them to put our resources in place,” as well as inspire them to apply creative techniques “to other areas of their teaching” (RBO Partner). By empowering teachers with practical dance and drama strategies, Create & Dance ensures that the learning can be embedded in regular classroom practice, not just in a one-off workshop by an outsider. One RBO Partner member described their role as helping schools see that “it’s not just a single class that would benefit in a single term, [but] that teachers are upskilled and confident to use this work... it’s there for generations of children” (RBO Partner). In essence, the programme’s design emphasises sustainability – investing in teachers so that creative dance becomes an ongoing part of the school culture, lasting well beyond the initial intervention.

To support teachers after the training, Create & Dance provides rich digital resources – detailed lesson plans, music, videos, and what the team calls “building blocks” of dance. These resources give teachers a framework (for example, creative tasks and warm-up games aligned to key movement concepts) that they can readily “pull off the shelf and do a five-lesson scheme of work” (RBO Partner). At the same time, the materials are flexible enough that teachers can adapt the ideas to any topic or theme they might be covering, allowing for integration with the wider curriculum. As one artist noted, teachers learn how to “embed... things like rivers or the Stone Age [topic]... through the body and movement,” which can make student learning more memorable and engaging (RBO Partner). The third component, live lessons, involves interactive video broadcasts where children across the country dance along with professional artists from the Royal Opera House in real time. These live-streamed sessions serve to “enrich the work that is happening through the resource”, giving pupils a direct connection to world-class dancers and a sense of participating in something special beyond their classroom (RBO Partner). Teachers often use the live lessons as a highlight or celebration, some do one at the start and one at the end of a unit, to “bookend” their Create & Dance scheme.

This multi-pronged design (training + resources + live engagement) was cited by staff as a strength of the programme, as it provides teachers with both the skills and the tools to implement creative dance confidently.

RBO Partners stress that Create & Dance was built with access and equity in mind. “The important thing for us is that everything is done with open access,” explained one staff member; “any school anywhere can access the CPD, and the resource is free” (RBO Partner). All training and materials are provided at no cost to schools, which is a deliberate “social justice aspect of our work” (RBO Partner). The team recognises that tight budgets often prevent schools from engaging with arts programmes, so they removed that barrier. Moreover, Create & Dance is “designed to be a whole class project, rather than for children who already have a particular aptitude for dance or music” (RBO Partner). In practice this means the content is pitched so that every child in a class can take part – it is not an enrichment for the gifted few or an after-school club for those who opt in. RBO Partners feel strongly that “cultural and creative learning should be available to all schools in every setting” (RBO Partner), and this philosophy underpins how the programme is delivered. From urban schools in highly diverse Bradford to rural schools with limited arts access, the goal is the same: to invite all children to experience creativity through dance as part of their normal school day.

That said, delivering a national programme at scale is not without challenges. One practical challenge the team faces is how to maintain support for teachers after the initial training. Several RBO Partners expressed a wish to “follow up” more with the teachers they train – to observe lessons or give feedback down the line – but they acknowledged that RBO’s small team cannot realistically provide intensive mentorship to every school. “Because of the scale and the agenda for growth that we have, it’s very hard,” one creator explained, noting that the programme aspires to reach 20% of all primary schools nationally (RBO Partner). With such ambition, the model has to be scalable: “we cannot – even if I worked out how to clone myself – manage going into schools [individually]” to coach teachers one-on-one (RBO Partner). Instead, RBO has tried strategies like optional virtual “check-in” sessions for teachers, though turnout for those has been low. The staff have learned that they largely must “hope that it’s happening [in schools], unless [teachers] self-select to tell us” how it’s going (RBO Partner). To improve ongoing support, RBO is considering new ideas, such as a badging system where schools could submit evidence of their Create & Dance work to earn recognition as an “RBO School.” This could encourage schools to stay engaged and allow RBO to monitor impact remotely. Still, the tension between depth and reach is something staff actively reflect on. One experienced facilitator voiced a personal belief that it’s better for a teacher to thoroughly embed the practice with one class even over a year to ensure quality, before trying to roll it out across the whole school. “It’s fair enough reaching more children, but what’s the quality of your reach?” she challenged, emphasising that chasing big numbers should not come at the expense of meaningful outcomes (RBO Partner). This reflective stance shows that even as RBO Partners pursue growth, they remain mindful of maintaining the programme’s integrity and effectiveness on the ground.

## Inclusivity, Accessibility, and Breaking Barriers

Inclusivity lies at the heart of Create & Dance, and RBO Partners are both proud of their progress in this area and candid about the ongoing work needed to reach every child. On a fundamental level, the programme’s open-access, whole-class approach ensures that children of all abilities and backgrounds get to participate. RBO Partners intentionally use a range of facilitation styles so that different learners can engage. “We’ve worked hard... thinking about our different facilitation styles and their impact in terms of inclusivity,” one facilitator noted, indicating that over the years the team has refined how they lead activities to make sure everybody can get involved (RBO Partner). For instance, many sessions start with simple improvisation tasks, which require no prior dance knowledge and allow children to respond at their own level – a consciously inclusive strategy. “From an inclusive perspective, we would probably always start with improv as a way in... it’s a more inclusive way of working in dance,” the same artist explained, underscoring that the pedagogy is designed to lower barriers to entry (RBO Partner).

Another key aspect of inclusivity is adapting to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). RBO Partners believe deeply that “everybody can dance, and everybody does dance” a motto mentioned in the context of working with differently-abled learners (RBO Partner). They have begun focusing on how to welcome children with sensory needs or profound and multiple learning disabilities into the programme. For example, workshops have been developed for “sensory learners and in PMLD settings”, recognising that creative movement can be accessible to children with severe disabilities if approached thoughtfully (RBO Partner). While acknowledging this positive work, staff also admit there is more to learn: “What are those more nuanced barriers that we don’t understand?” one artist mused, wanting to continually improve how they accommodate every child’s needs (RBO Partner). This humility and willingness to adapt are part of the programme’s inclusive ethos.

RBO Partners are also very aware of cultural inclusivity, ensuring the programme respects and resonates with children from diverse cultural or religious backgrounds. In a place like Bradford, for example, some communities have specific concerns about dance or music in school. One RBO Partner reflected frankly on this point: “Culturally... we have a long way to go to learn about the nuances of [different] spaces” (RBO Partner). They noted that in some cultures or families, there may be discomfort with children performing or with certain types of music and movement. “Sometimes I worry, how are we modelling difference when we’re not representing difference in the room?” she said, questioning whether the RBO facilitators (who may not reflect the demographics of all the schools they serve) could do more to acknowledge and honour cultural differences (RBO Partner). This self-critique shows that staff are actively grappling with inclusivity on deeper levels than just “everyone joins in.” The Create & Dance team is learning to address such challenges by, for example, working with local partners who know the community, being sensitive to school preferences (like avoiding music choices that might be problematic), and communicating that the programme is flexible to different contexts.

Gender stereotypes are another barrier the programme works to break down. A recurring theme in staff interviews was the initial resistance some teachers (and parents or students) assume – particularly the notion that “boys won’t want to dance.” RBO Partners encounter this frequently: “nearly every single CPD [training]” a teacher asks “what about Year Six boys?” (RBO Partner). The staff have a resounding answer: given the right approach, boys engage as much as anyone. One artist laughed about how even the most sceptical teachers soon change their tune. She recalled a male teacher – “a six-foot-six rugby player” – who came to training declaring “dance is not for me. I am not dancing.” By the end of the day, he was fully participating (at one point joyfully acting out the role of the flamboyant Queen of Hearts from Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland), and he left excited to involve his students. His biggest worry “was about those boys,” but after experiencing the creative, game-like activities himself, “he’s back into school excited” to prove his worries wrong (RBO Partner). RBO’s creative approach, which might include framing movement as pretend sword-fights or football-like team challenges, quickly dispels the myth that dance isn’t masculine enough or is only for certain kids. As one creator put it, “wherever we go... we’ve interviewed the boys [afterwards], and they say, ‘I didn’t really want to do this, but actually I was really surprised by how much I engaged with it’” (RBO Partner). Once the stereotype of “ballet = strict, feminine, not fun” is broken – usually within the first session – boys and girls alike dive in with equal enthusiasm. RBO Partners have observed that children with no prior dance training often excel in creativity compared to those who have taken dance classes. Lacking preconceived notions of the “right” moves, they freely invent and often produce wonderfully imaginative results. “The more technically able the children become, the more codified their body becomes [and] the less creativity they have in a Create & Dance process,” explained the programme’s creator, whereas children with no set idea of ballet can be “more engaged” and original in their movement (RBO Partner). This counterintuitive insight that less dance experience can mean more creativity reinforces the programme’s inclusive philosophy. It values every child’s unique creative contribution, not just polished technique, and in doing so, it can encourage those who might otherwise be overlooked in a typical dance class.

Beyond the classroom, staff talk about inclusivity in access to culture. They see Create & Dance as a way to boost children’s “cultural capital”, a term often used in education to mean exposure to rich cultural experiences. Many participating schools serve disadvantaged communities where a trip to the Royal Opera House or a live ballet performance is beyond reach. Create & Dance brings a taste of ballet and opera to them. RBO Partner love that a child in a small town or a deprived area can learn through *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*, create their own dances, and even see professional productions via the live streams. One staff member mentioned that teachers use the term cultural capital when they take children to a theatre or invite artists to school; by that measure, “taking the children to see a ballet is way up on the cultural capital list”, and “engaging in this kind of activity” through Create & Dance likewise gives children a new cultural reference point (RBO Partner). In short, the programme strives to ensure that no child is excluded from the arts. Whether through adapting teaching methods, addressing cultural sensitivities, or simply removing financial barriers, inclusivity is an ongoing commitment voiced by all RBO Partners involved.

## Teacher Development and Confidence Building

If children’s growth is one pillar of Create & Dance’s impact, teacher development is the other. RBO Partners describe witnessing profound shifts in teachers’ confidence and pedagogical mindset as a result of the programme. Many primary teachers come to the training a bit nervous – dance is outside their comfort zone, and some fear they “can’t dance” or will do it wrong. The programme directly targets these fears. “Usually a lot of [teachers] will come feeling quite under-confident about delivering dance,” one artist observed, but there is often a turning point during the training – a “light bulb moment” when the teacher realises that they don’t have to be a master dancer at all (RBO Partner). The facilitator’s job is to show them a new approach: “It’s not about teaching a routine. Dance is much wider than just steps.” (RBO Partner). Teachers discover that they can guide a creative process rather than perform a polished piece. As one artist passionately described, “I don’t have to necessarily create all this dance material. I’ve got some starting points, I use my kids’ creativity and together, collaboratively, we can do it. And actually, the joy [is] there’s no wrong answer in dance” (RBO Partner). This realisation frees them from the pressure of being “expert performers” and allows them to become facilitators of creativity, learning alongside their students.

Several RBO Partners mentioned that by the end of a CPD workshop, teachers who were initially timid are dancing with gusto, laughing, and sharing ideas. They leave not only with a plan for a dance scheme, but with a new confidence in their own creativity. One facilitator marvelled at the change, noting teachers often tell them how excited they are to put it into practice: “You’ve just done... four or five hours of dance, and now you’re confident enough to go and do this in front of your whole school staff – that’s amazing.” (RBO Partner). Indeed, some teachers are so inspired that they immediately plan to cascade the training to colleagues in a staff meeting or professional development day. From the RBO perspective, this is a huge success teachers becoming champions of dance in their schools. RBO’s National Schools Management describes their mission as creating these very champions: working with local education networks to find enthusiastic teachers and headteachers who will embed Create & Dance and advocate for it among peers (RBO Partner). In areas like Bradford, they have recruited “cultural champions” – teachers who serve as ambassadors to get more schools involved. While recruiting these champions can be challenging (finding the right communication channels and incentives), it has proven valuable in sustaining the programme’s momentum in target regions (RBO Partner).

Teacher development through Create & Dance also has a ripple effect on general teaching skills. RBO Partners pointed out that once a teacher gains confidence in using movement and creative tasks, they often incorporate those techniques into other subjects. For instance, a teacher might use a quick dance activity to explore a science concept or to help students embody a story from history. As one staff member explained, the goal is for teachers to “apply the way we might work in a rehearsal room creatively to other areas of their teaching”, not just in arts lessons (RBO Partner). There is a strong cross-curricular element: teachers learn to merge dance with literacy, geography, science any topic where bringing physical movement or drama could enhance understanding. One RBO Partner gave the example that children will remember a topic like the water cycle much better if they perform it with their bodies rather than just read about it. By “embedding it through the body and movement,” abstract concepts become tangible and memorable (RBO Partner). In this way, Create & Dance doubles as professional development in creative teaching methods. It enriches teachers’ toolkit of strategies for engagement and caters to kinaesthetic learners who may not thrive in a traditional lecture format. RBO Partners take pride in this wider impact: they are not only spreading arts education, but also contributing to school improvement and innovative pedagogy. As one interviewee summarised, “Dance has a lot more to give... than [teachers] originally thought” it’s not an add-on, but a powerful medium for learning across the curriculum (RBO Partner).

Teachers learning by doing, and gradually building confidence to involve more students or colleagues. It aligns with the programme’s ethos of empowerment: teachers are trusted as professionals to adapt and grow the initiative in their own contexts. And when teachers do succeed the RBO team celebrates those wins as validation of the model.

## Reflections

Throughout their interviews, RBO Partners displayed a notable blend of passion and pragmatism. They are passionate about the arts and the transformative effect they believe Create & Dance has on children and schools. At the same time, they are pragmatic in recognising areas for improvement and adaptation. Several emergent themes stand out from their collective reflections:

### 1. Adapting to Context

Staff repeatedly mentioned the importance of context whether cultural, regional, or individual school contexts and the need to be responsive. They learned that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for engagement. For example, what works in one region (like sending information via a local arts network) might not in another, so they pivot and find new local partners to champion the programme (RBO Partner). In communities with cultural reservations about dance, they approach gently, sometimes using different vocabulary (focusing on "creative movement" or "physical storytelling") to ease acceptance. This adaptability has been a key facilitator for implementation. It also leads staff to continually educate themselves about the communities they serve, embodying a stance of respect and learning.

### 2. Advocacy for Arts in Education

A strong undercurrent in the staff interviews is the belief that programmes like Create & Dance are filling a void left by an increasingly academic-focused curriculum. With arts hours being squeezed in many schools, RBO Partners see their work as "making sure that all children have access to high-quality arts and culture" (RBO Partner). They often find themselves "talking to headteachers" and decision-makers, not just about the programme logistics but about its value from boosting literacy and creativity to supporting wellbeing and social skills. In doing so, they frame Create & Dance in whatever terms resonate most with a given school's priorities (be it improving mental health, raising attainment in writing through inspiration, or enhancing physical activity). One staff member said there are "all sorts of reasons why schools do our programmes... the more ways in we have for them the better" – whether a school is drawn by the professional arts connection, the promise of happier kids, or the free resources, RBO is happy as long as it results in children dancing (RBO Partner). This flexibility in advocacy shows an emergent strategy: positioning the programme to align with varied stakeholder goals (from social-emotional learning to academic achievement) in order to secure buy-in and sustainability.

### 3. Evidence and Evaluation

Another theme is the desire to evidence what staff feel intuitively is happening. As noted, wellbeing impacts were observed anecdotally for years; now there is an effort to gather data (through formal evaluation partnerships) to validate and understand those outcomes. The programme creator spoke about integrating research like creative habits of mind and even conducting pre/post tests for things like children's creative writing, to see if dance made a difference (RBO Partner). Some early results apparently showed improvements in students' descriptive language and empathy after engaging in dance, which excites the team and spurs them to dig deeper.

Staff seem eager to have concrete findings to back their advocacy, not for the sake of numbers alone but to improve the programme. For instance, if evidence shows particular emotional benefits, they might tweak the activities to amplify those; or if certain groups are not benefiting as much, they can adjust to be more inclusive. In this way, a culture of reflective practice and learning is evident among the RBO Partners – they treat the programme itself as a living, evolving entity.

### 4. Balancing Growth with Quality

As highlighted by one RBO Partner's candid remarks, RBO Partners are conscious of balancing the push for scaling up with the fidelity and quality of implementation. The organisation has set bold targets for reach, and there is pressure (from funders or internal goals) to increase the number of schools and children participating. Staff generally embrace this mission, as it aligns with their ethos of "arts for all," but not at any cost. They don't want Create & Dance to become a shallow, tick-box exercise. This has led to internal discussions about strategies like regional "hubs" or training additional trainers to maintain quality. It also ties back to empowering teachers as the linchpin of quality – the better the teacher training and resources, the more one can trust that even as numbers grow, children are still getting a meaningful experience. That said, the staff comments reveal a healthy vigilance: they celebrate reaching hundreds of schools, yet are quick to ask, are we still seeing the spark in each classroom? In essence, the team's goal remains the child dancing with joy and purpose and they gauge success by that, as much as by spreadsheets of school counts.

### 5. Passion and Personal Fulfilment

An emergent but subtler theme is the personal fulfilment staff derive from this work. Though not always stated outright, it's apparent in their voices. They light up when recounting a child's imaginative moment or a teacher's breakthrough. Some have backgrounds in dance or education and find Create & Dance the perfect fusion of their passions. One artist mentioned [REDACTED: participant data] how working on this programme for a few years has been deeply rewarding (RBO Partner). Another staff member, [REDACTED: participant data] spoke with enthusiasm about how Create & Dance grew during their tenure and how much they valued the partnerships and school relationships forged (RBO Partner). This personal investment by staff translates into a narrative of care and authenticity: they genuinely believe in what they are doing, and that sincerity undoubtedly contributes to the programme's positive reception in schools.

## Conclusion

In drawing together these insights, we see a coherent narrative of a creative education programme powered by vision and reflection. RBO Partners depict Create & Dance as a dynamic interplay of art and education, one that enriches children's wellbeing by making them active, collaborative creators, and that empowers teachers to embrace arts-led teaching with confidence. The programme's design reflects a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, from being free for all schools to consciously engaging those who might feel "dance is not for them." Challenges exist, of course: securing teacher buy-in, addressing cultural nuances, and scaling support across many schools require constant effort and innovation. Yet the prevailing tone from staff is optimistic and solutions-focused. They share stories of change—a timid teacher transformed into a champion, a class of disinterested 11-year-olds turned exuberant dancers, a school in a disadvantaged area gaining access to the arts—that illustrate the programme's potential when it works well.

Ultimately, the RBO Partners envision Create & Dance as more than a series of dance lessons. It is, in their eyes, a catalyst for positive change in schools: boosting children's self-expression and happiness, fostering inclusivity and empathy, enhancing learning across subjects, and reminding school communities of the importance of creativity. One RBO team member noted that at first glance there are "so many outcomes" one can attribute to Create & Dance from physical development to social-emotional growth that it can seem overwhelming to pin down what it does best (RBO Partner). It doesn't silo outcomes but rather brings them together. As she put it, the various benefits "all kind of overlap, and creativity is in the middle." When creativity is placed at the centre of education, children and teachers flourish together.

## Appendix 5: REM output example

