



Among Ideal Friends Libraries & Artsmark - A framework for conversations

“How do libraries develop themselves as Artsmark Partners capable of providing cultural learning opportunities to schools?”

Reflections on the Among Ideal Friends Consortium work across the East Midlands.

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Full Research Reports Available,
created over AIF2 2018- 2022.



Artsmark
Partner

Supporting cultural education, endorsed by Arts Council England





Libraries & Artsmark - A framework for conversations

Background

Among Ideal Friends (AIF) is a touring performance project developed by The Spark Arts for Children in partnership with Libraries in the East Midlands. Working together to deliver and transport high quality family theatre performances and workshop activities, inspired by books and stories for children, families and schools, alongside training for library staff and community volunteers.

The consortium is a partnership between, The Spark Arts for Children, Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Rutland County Council, Nottingham City Council and Inspire: Culture, Learning and Libraries.

One of the consortium's key objectives is to support the development of libraries as Artsmark Partners supporting schools and making a contribution to Cultural Education Partnerships locally.

Libraries as Artsmark Partners – where this work started

Phase one of the AIF programme (2016-18) actively engaged 33 schools in its theatre programme, of which 6 were Artsmark. We know that 58% of schools had not previously made a class visit to the library and 88% of schools indicated they would do in the future. At that time, nationally there were 15 Libraries developing their Artsmark Partner programmes out of which 5 are from the AIF consortium. Demonstrating a collective commitment has been made in the region and is being supported through the consortia partnership approach.

The AIF consortium and its approach to school engagement has demonstrated its potential to grow and develop the role of libraries as Cultural providers, capable of playing an active and significant role in Cultural Education locally. We have reviewed the distance travelled and begin to see key indicators for how we enable success. Our evaluation revealed a number of key considerations, namely the need to increase skills and capacity amongst front line library staff in order to maximise on the opportunity which would provide local and national benefits.

This document shares some of our learning, key messages and recommendations, plus a mapping table of suggested ways that libraries can support education settings using the Artsmark criteria as a framework.

Response to the AIF programme for schools

The impact

Across the two phases of AIF which took place from 2016 – 2022, the partnership worked with **53 schools** in total across the programme, enabling direct engagement with over 4000 primary aged children. In addition, there was focused CPD delivery with 54 teachers.

This engagement was solely through the touring programme which included the following productions:

53
schools

over
4,000
children

CPD for
54
teachers



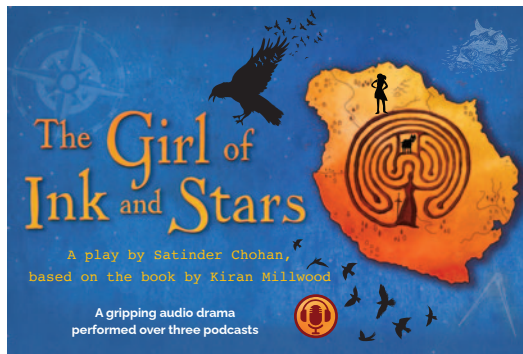
The First

Written by Jayne Williams



The Iron Man

Graeae Theatre



The Girl of Ink and Stars

The Spark Arts for Children & Inspire; Culture, Learning & Libraries (Digital Offer)



A Small Tale

Punchdrunk Enrichment

Each of these were accompanied by a selection of CPD sessions, resources, script texts and access training.

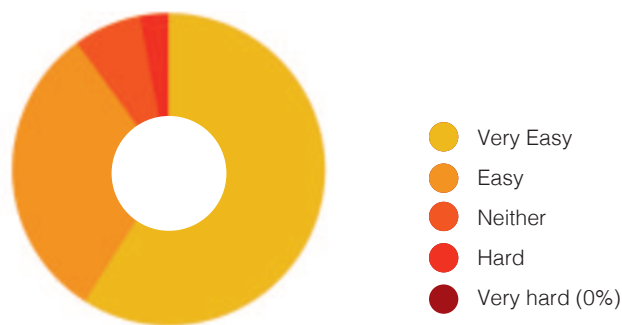
Responses to teacher surveys highlighted three top answers in response to the question

‘What overall impact do you hope the event will have?’

- 1** Stimulate child's interest in learning
- 2** Support child's work in classroom
- 3** Develop child's interest in arts

How easy / difficult has it been to integrate this visit and performance into the curriculum?

59% said it was very easy to integrate the work into the curriculum



Almost all said the experience had encouraged them to use a theatre performance for enhanced learning in the classroom again in the future.

Teachers fed back that it was an excellent experience for the children, themselves and the school as a whole.

“I feel this opportunity will be remembered by the children for a long time!”

A Small Tale, Teacher comment

We have not captured the broader engagement, re-visits, follow up family visits as a result of this work, or monitored the engagement with each library's broader cultural offer – but there is no doubt that these figures would be high, even during the recovery from a pandemic.



Libraries as places with distinct arts and cultural offers

Libraries maintain a unique position within our communities, a safe and trusted space, free to enter and open to all throughout our lives. Establishing a personal relationship and sense of belonging with your local library, at a young age, is a gift for life; where we can develop ideas, pursue independent research and gain knowledge, and where we can share ideas and celebrate culture.

For the arts and cultural sector libraries offer a connectedness to communities that many other venues can find challenging to achieve. Libraries are places which we all feel are there for us, and they serve us all. They support the whole community regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status or educational attainment.

For other arts and cultural sector providers, working in partnership with libraries gives them the opportunity to directly reach communities which, when not working with a library, they may struggle to engage with. Therefore, libraries can play a pivotal role in developing an individual's relationship with the arts. Libraries, working in partnership with other cultural sector providers and educational settings, can help ensure that our children and young people experience the breadth and richness of all that high quality arts and culture has to offer.

“Establishing a personal relationship and sense of belonging with your local library, at a young age, is a gift for life”

Like our schools, libraries also have varied organisational structures

The consortium has, through the Among Ideal Friends project, developed their arts and cultural offer through working in partnership with other arts and cultural sector organisations, specifically touring theatre. They have, through this work, extended their offer to local schools and families and increased their understanding of what is possible in terms of their role as arts and cultural providers and potential Artsmark Partners.

Each Artsmark Partner creates their own Artsmark Partner offer in-line with their bespoke programme of opportunities

The nuances of the different operational structures means that there are different library resources available in terms of their offers as Artsmark Partners for schools. This isn't a barrier to a library's suitability as an Artsmark Partner, as each Artsmark Partner creates their own Artsmark Partner offer in-line with their bespoke programme of opportunities and the support which they can provide schools in their locality, and each library will choose how they communicate this with their potential partner schools.

Do we need Artsmark in this context?

It was observed that many schools who demonstrate a commitment to arts and cultural provision and who forge productive and long-lasting relationships with their libraries may not be undertaking Artsmark. The libraries also provided feedback that Artsmark Award is not currently a priority for these schools.

That said, the Artsmark framework, its criteria areas and the supporting **Quality Principles**, did provide an excellent framework for building conversations between schools and libraries. The language of the Quality Principles helps all involved think about their work and could be used to interrogate plans when developing new opportunities. The Artsmark criteria helps ask questions of the offers at the planning stage and also helps articulate and promote the value of the offers. It can be used as a shared language between schools and arts and cultural providers to review and evaluate the impacts of the work and therefore help inform future developments.

It was also easy for those involved to see Artsmark as **something additional to the conversation** rather than something integral. It was felt this is about familiarity and therefore confidence, over time getting to know the criteria and with increased exposure to Artsmark in practise, this will shift from additional to intrinsic will occur.

Key Messages

Make time to talk

a conversation between school and library staff can result in generating great ideas and mutually beneficial opportunities

It is a lot easier to say than it is to do but, making time for a conversation between school and library staff can result in generating great ideas and mutually beneficial opportunities that can be in the longer-term time efficient, and achieve better outcomes and a more productive relationship.

The 'A Small Tale' production was a great example of this point; the library coming together with the schools it was working with for both the CPD planning session at the start of the work and again the coming together for the debrief and evaluation of the experience at the end (or towards the end for some) resulted in negotiated and adapted approaches to make the experience work for each locality. The needs and the practicalities could be discussed and reconciled and challenges could be addressed and overcome. The debrief supported lively conversations about the impact of the work and new ideas were generated for the application of skills and knowledge learnt both by the school and library staff.

One example was the impact on the children when they received a letter (in the classroom) from the library addressed personally to them (the teacher had written in each child's name at the head of each letter) asking for help. They were immediately engaged and actively involved in the progression of the production. This was something a library and school discussed, they spoke about how straightforward it was to do without much demand on resources but had a massive impact on the children and how they developed an immediate belonging and ownership of the visit to their library. This excitement was also shared with their families when they took their letters home.



Plan for replication and scalability

It always takes more time and resource to do something new or for the first time, but when it works well and is successful, have you planned for replication or extension? As one of the schools highlighted, doing a risk assessment for a class visit to a library (whilst still managing all the Covid-19 associated implications) was a significant undertaking. Therefore, if they could have planned regular visits throughout the year with classes across the school the pay-off to investment would have been greater.

Libraries spoke about having a universal offer, something that was available to all schools to opt into and schools spoke about their wish to be able to share resources with other staff and replicating activities and experiences for other classes or year groups.

The projects created by the consortium offered aspects of both in various forms; specific bookable performances, open online offers with access to extensive online resources in combination with an enhanced 'paid for' extension, and supportive CPD sessions to extend the work both in the classroom and as a partnership.

It's key to identify what opportunities are there for the library to help extend the ideas and concepts initiated by the work of the project and the arts and cultural partners, and how this can be planned from the start.

“if they could have planned regular visits throughout the year with classes across the school the pay-off to investment would have been greater.”



Collaborating with partners

Collaborating together as experts in our fields brings benefits and learning for all. It was noted that it was library managers and senior members of staff that were the recipients of the Artsmark Partner briefing, but how does this knowledge support frontline staff to have informed conversations with local schools and the teachers?

Initially it was suggested that a resource relating to libraries as Artsmark Partners could be developed so that the wider library teams, including front line staff and volunteers, could familiarise themselves with the Artsmark process and the underpinning Quality Principles which would help with enquiries from and engagement with schools. However, what really brings the concept to life is when staff are actively engaged in the collaboration between the library, the touring production and the school's work. Library staff spoke about the excitement in the team when engaging with the production '*A Small Tale*' and hiding evidence around the library in preparation for the class visits. This playfulness and sense of fun can be very uplifting and invigorating and in turn helps spark new ideas and approaches to partnership working, and for those involved maybe it is what really helps bring some of the principles of the Artsmark Award to life.

Support which underpins the knowledge and understanding of frontline staff, of the role of the library as an arts and cultural provider and that of an Artsmark Partner, maybe particularly relevant for those with community volunteers. Or for staff when connected, as a community hub, to mass participation and multiple partner events and festivals.

Build on what you are good at already

It can be difficult to identify what we are good at, to know all the things that we already do well. It might not be until we talk to others, who are struggling with these things, do we become aware of the things that come easy to us. The message is don't be afraid to ask partners and collaborators what they think you do well; the responses will either reaffirm what you already know or provide a useful insight.

All the libraries demonstrated different approaches to developing relationships with schools. They all provided the same opportunities; the differences were in how they had conversations with teachers and their approach to schools.

Some of the different models of Libraries with some pros and cons highlighted:

Branch libraries which operate as community hubs possibly with high percentage of community volunteers

- Connectivity to local community and voluntary organisations highlighted as significant in their relationship development with schools.
- Additional support from their Bridge Organisation discussed in terms of Artsmark Partner training for front line staff and volunteers.
- As community hubs with multiple services located in the same space, opportunities to collaborate on events and festival understood as a strength.

Libraries which are a part of a CEP

(Cultural Education Partnership; CEP models vary across localities)

- Good connectivity with other arts and cultural providers, venues and practitioners.
- Increased routes for communication with schools via multiple access points across the CEP.
- Better understanding of Artsmark and the role of Artsmark Partners across the CEP , therefore support for other staff to develop their understanding.
- A challenge for schools to know 'who's who' and the relationship between organisations and projects across the CEP.
- Teachers can find the sheer number of opportunities offered by the CEP overwhelming; resulting in lack of engagement.

Libraries which are a smaller service, smaller staff team, less densely populated areas maybe rural communities, lower number of schools

- Potential for developing 1:2:1 relationship with all schools.
- Every school represents a greater percentage of the total and therefore both challenges and successes can be felt more acutely
- Information sharing internally as a team easier (potential for Artsmark Partner role and process to be more consistently understood).
- Increased risk of knowledge and networks being lost if there is a change in staff.
- Collaborations and offers can be informed by in-depth knowledge of all schools in the locality.
- Less capacity, resources and target audience.
- Challenges are the same for other arts and cultural organisations and provides resulting in potential for collaborative offers which provide additional value for schools.

Libraries in localities with a greater density of schools

(e.g. city and city-suburb libraries)

- Opportunity to engage with higher number of schools.
- Potential for greater take-up of offers.
- A focus on building informative and insightful relationships with two or three schools can be a more manageable way to inform developments of wider offer.
- Travel infrastructure, which supports school visits, may be affordable and effective and less of a barrier.



Preparedness of libraries as Artsmark Partners

How easy is it for schools who are undertaking Artsmark, to know that they can have a conversation with their library, about their priorities for Artsmark?

If a library is an Artsmark Partner a teacher in a school which is undertaking Artsmark, who looks on the library's website, should be confident that the library will understand the Artsmark Criteria. The library will be familiar with the language of the Quality Principles (which underpin the Artsmark Award) and will have an appreciation for how their settings arts and cultural provision may support the school to address their whole school priorities. However, it also means that if a library is working with individual schools and educational settings on a regular basis, they can highlight the fact that they are an Artsmark Partner and that the offers which the setting is engaging with, could support school development in the different areas outlined in the Artsmark Criteria.

Communications with schools can prove challenging; changes in staff contact, changes in leadership and therefore changes in school priorities and getting information passed to the correct person; who is both interested and able to commit, can all have an impact on communications. For many, these challenges also contributed to the reluctance to raise a conversation about Artsmark once contact had been established. Some also noted the cost of Artsmark registration as being a difficult conversation to have when you are really wanting a school to sign-up to the educational arts and cultural offer; which is your primary objective for the conversation.

From a school's perspective, they are also often overwhelmed with opportunities and offers from outside agencies and providers. It was noted that a simple, distinct and clear offer is the best way to communicate with teachers about upcoming opportunities; otherwise, there is just too much to wade through.

One school suggested that they could appoint a Library Liaison, a teacher who could help disseminate information in school and who could be that named person for the library to communicate with.

There is a requirement for all Artsmark Partners to profile on their website how, as Artsmark Partners, their offer might support educational settings in relation to the different Artsmark Criteria areas. All Artsmark Partners are required to map their existing opportunities for educational engagement, aligned against the Artsmark criteria, and then promote these on their public facing platforms. It is not about creating new offers but more about understanding how current or future offers can support a school in relation to their Artsmark journey.

Some of the libraries were keen to highlight the requirement for them to ensure a universal offer for schools to engage with, that any offer should be open to all schools. Changes made to the original programme plans, in response to the disruption and restrictions cause by the Covid-19 pandemic, meant that the production *The Girl of Ink and Stars* could be offered universally with an enhanced offer; this was for a limited number of schools who



wished to buy-into the additional activities and interviews with creative practitioners. The effectiveness of this online resource, which had a 1-year licence, meant that there was also more flexibility for timetabling for the schools. During this period, home schooling was also happening so, the on-line features also meant that families could access the production. The supporting education pack and teaching resources produced, and made available along-side the production, was extensive and comprehensive. In particular it demonstrated the diverse range in which the production and the arts could support cross-curricula teaching.

Across the consortium libraries have a strong families programme, most had a strong and broad offer for pre-school and early years, with some sharing venues with other early years services. However, maintaining relationships with families throughout primary and secondary phases was less strong. It does exist but feels that this area could be developed further. It would be useful for the libraries when mapping their offers as Artsmark Partners to consider the support available to Secondary schools, and their relationship with older pupils, who are required to undertake independent study. How could the libraries arts and cultural opportunities, engage with, and be supported by older pupils?

The cross-curricula benefits of the arts and cultural offers provided by the libraries engaged in the consortium are extensive and the impacts identified by the schools who have engaged could be readily evidenced within the Artsmark framework

For example; one school stated that being a part of the project 'A Small Tale' required them to spend time as a year group teaching team to plan together for the term ahead. This is nothing new but it did give a focus for that term's curriculum design, and how the project activity was to be extended and embedded.

Another school reflected on the CPD offer which was made available to schools as part of *The Iron Man* performance schedule. This offer was widely distributed to schools; not just those who had engaged with the performance. The teacher; from a local secondary school, said she had been passed the CPD information by the arts faculty because she was the SEN lead for the year 7's. She attended the session as she was interested in how *The Iron Man* work was being used by the local primary schools particularly with its focus on inclusion and how this work would support her priorities around supporting year-6 to year-7 transition.

Recommendations & Future Opportunities

Through consultation, delivery, and experience there are a number of elements which could be considered while planning future work in this field.

- Learning platforms and pooled resources
- Dedicated marketing to Artsmark Schools on the role and opportunities provided by their local library
- A school and Library network as a ‘Specialist Arts Lead’ - bringing together a network of schools and libraries to develop their arts provision and policy, as part of a wider school communities across the network.
- A directory of local arts and culture provision.
- Go/See opportunities for teachers and Library staff
- Commissioning a Toolkit that looks at the nature of the relationship between schools and libraries, such as the Music Hub or Dance toolkit
- A crib sheet, that would help people feel more informed, so that they would at least feel more confident to ask if a school is an Artsmark school and know where to signpost to if they are interested in becoming one. (Similar resources exist for other arts and cultural sector specialists.)

A Resource for Libraries - mapping their offer against the Artsmark Criteria.

As a starting point for libraries, to help consider how their offers as Artsmark Partners may support schools on their Artsmark journey the following mapping table has been created. We would suggest that the libraries review and amend this document to truly reflect how their arts and cultural offers align to the Artsmark Criteria.

A downloadable copy of this mapping tool is available to download from thesparkarts.co.uk





Values and Ethos

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Promote arts and culture in your values and ethos

Definition: The setting actively promotes a lifelong love for learning and enjoyment of arts and culture through a range of experiences and opportunities. This is reflected in the setting's environment, ethos and the shared language used to celebrate and promote their achievements in arts and culture.

Libraries support for educational settings

Libraries are well positioned to support schools to deliver their Values and Ethos; which includes the promotion of arts and culture. The resources you offer can be broad and diverse, and libraries are often positioned in a neighbourhood locality where access to and other arts and cultural venues and opportunities are scarce.

Provide opportunities which support pupils to further develop their interests in arts and culture and help schools to signpost to further opportunities for their pupils.

Provide opportunities for pupils which develop understanding of the role of libraries have as arts and cultural providers. Share information on cultural career pathways, or provide work experience opportunities.

If you have a school attending the library for a class visit, why not make this a regular activity, libraries can help extend pupils understanding of the arts by showcasing different arts and cultural practices. Seeing different types of visual arts in displays and exhibitions, experiencing a story or a poem being read by library staff or local spoken word artist or writer.



Leadership

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Demonstrate leadership

Definition: The setting's development or improvement plan clearly demonstrates an ongoing commitment to the quality of provision and the breadth of arts and cultural education offered across the whole setting. Clear milestones and methods of evaluating impact are in place.

Libraries support for educational settings

There should be named individuals within the school who are driving the settings plans for arts and culture across the whole school and can explain how these plans address priorities in the school's development plan.

When arranging a school visit, or when a school engages with an offer, ask them what their priorities are for this year and discuss what you can offer that could help them achieve these priorities. Are there any common themes that emerge when talking to a number of schools?



Children & Young People engagement

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Engage children and young people

Definition: All children and young people can talk enthusiastically about, and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, understanding and experience of, a broad range of high-quality arts and cultural provision. The setting uses the Quality Principles to plan and measure the impact of engagement.

Libraries support for educational settings

You provide opportunities for pupils to showcase their work, where they can exhibit, perform or celebrate their arts.

Consider, and plan for, how children and young people may be involved in the development, planning, delivery or evaluation of arts and cultural opportunities in library settings.

Having a space where pupils work can be publicly exhibited or shared can help connect children to their wider community; it can help them **develop a sense of belonging and ownership** by engaging outside of the school, and can provide them with the chance to share and celebrate with family and friends.

Can you involve the pupils in planning how their work is displayed or performed or shared, what will be shared, what sort of event would they like to stage? Do pupils have the opportunity to reflect on library visits and projects and then discuss this with library staff? How do they share with you how they feel or their opinions or observations?



Curriculum design

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Embed a diverse curriculum

Definition: The value and impact of a broad arts and cultural curriculum is firmly embedded in the curriculum offer across the whole setting.

Libraries support for educational settings

Know how your existing annual arts and cultural offers support broader cross-curriculum outcomes.

Promote the teaching resources and educational packs which accompany your arts and cultural offers.

Talk to the teachers about how working with the library, attending visits and events features in the curriculum plans. Does your work help make the curriculum exciting, inspiring and engaging?

Do you help develop a sense of belonging and ownership in the curriculum for pupils, do you help pupils understand the breadth of the arts?



Range of offer

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Establish a wide-ranging arts and cultural offer

Definition The setting can demonstrate that they provide wide-ranging and high-quality arts and cultural experiences, during and outside normal teaching hours, for all children and young people.

Libraries support for educational settings

Support educational settings to extend and broaden their arts and cultural opportunities both within class teaching and as extra-curricular activities?

Provide the opportunity for pupils to meet or engage with the arts and cultural professionals and specialists.

Utilise your networks and partnerships with arts and cultural practitioners and organisations to develop a greater understanding of what's possible and to signpost to, to extend the range of offer.

You may be a pupil's first or only experience of the arts outside of school or the only arts and cultural venue in a school's locality. Can you exhibit work created by the pupils or stage a pupil performance?

Do you know local authors, performers or creatives who can attend and provide a 'Wow moments' during a programmed visit or can pupils explore a different arts form at each visit; an author, an illustrator, a poet, a spoken word artist, a curator? Can a performer bring a books charter to life providing an inspirational moment for pupils? Can you visit a school to share with pupils (and or staff) the varied arts and cultural opportunities offered at the library?



Continued Professional Development

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Offer staff development opportunities

Definition The setting can provide evidence of a clear commitment to CPD across the breadth of arts and culture for all members of staff, and has allocated appropriate resources for this.

Libraries support for educational settings

Provide specialist CPD opportunities for staff which supports the development of quality resources.

Provide opportunities for schools to share practice and resources.

In addition to any teacher packs and resources, if you are working with more than one school on the same offer is there an opportunity to bring the schools together at the planning stage so that they can share their priorities for this work with each other; to inspire each other and share practice? Are teachers able to attend a group debrief at the end of the experience to discuss extension work or future developments.

Many teachers don't reside in the areas where they work, can you help them get to know the arts and cultural opportunities on offer in your community at the library? Would a **regular 'come to your library event'** each year before the start of term help highlight what the library has to offer as an Artsmark Partner (and more widely)?



Partnerships

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Develop valuable partnerships

Definition The setting can demonstrate that they understand the value of working with a broad range of partners to provide and deliver high quality arts and cultural education.

Libraries support for educational settings

Your offers, and your work with arts and cultural and community organisations can support schools to engage with a broad range of partners within their locality.

Support schools to connect with each other through your arts and cultural offers.

Support schools to develop long-term and meaningful partnerships with yourselves to develop expertise and high-quality provision.

You may have universal offers with many schools involved but can you work with one or two schools more closely and at a deeper level so that you can better understand the needs and priorities of that school and collaboratively further develop your wider schools' opportunities? Consider how you reflect with partner schools on the impact of your relationship and partnership working on both organisations; the library and the school. What does this then mean for future work?



Equality & diversity

Artsmark Criteria - Guidance for schools

Ensure equality and diversity for all

Definition: The setting's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) evidence, or equivalent evidence, demonstrates a commitment to equality of education and the opportunity for all pupils and young people with protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010) to take part in arts and cultural experiences.

Libraries support for educational settings

Your offer for schools meets the needs of pupils from diverse backgrounds and with a range of needs.

Your offers support pupils to express their own culture and traditions and gain appreciation of diversity in other cultures, creating empathy and understanding of the difference between people.

You support schools to ensure an equality of access for all their pupils to engage with high quality arts and cultural experiences.

Are you engaged with local organisations who represent and reflect the communities in your locality?

Can they help you ensure your offer is reflective of the pupils accessing your offers, can they help you develop and promote your opportunities? Can you involve or recruit partners and practitioners who stretch pupils understanding of diversity and inclusion? Are you creating opportunities which, include resources and that are; representative of how arts and culture is diverse and inclusive and demonstrates equality?

Quick, write it down!

Has the information in this book started to spark ideas?

Don't miss the moment, note them down here!

You could think about what you already do and what you would like to do too.



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