



Arts in Schools: *Opportunities and ideas for change*

A Clore Duffield Foundation Roundtable at Tate Britain

15 January 2025

Summary of Discussion

| Background

To mark its 60th Anniversary, Dame Vivien Duffield, Chair of the Clore Duffield Foundation, long-time champion and funder of cultural learning, convened a group of leaders in education, culture, philanthropy and the creative industries with Ministers Catherine McKinnell, Department for Education (DfE) and Sir Chris Bryant, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for a roundtable at Tate Britain to explore how to create more equal access to an excellent arts education.

The meeting, chaired by Clore Duffield Foundation Director Kate Bellamy, shared policy and practice recommendations from the sector, discussed the changes needed for pupils and the teachers to thrive, and the role the Curriculum and Assessment Review will play in ensuring children benefit from a rich and relevant curriculum.

Dame Vivien Duffield opened proceedings, Ministers each spoke, setting out their concerns and ambitions for arts education in schools and we heard contributions from Lucy Heller, Ark Schools, from an education perspective and Maria Balshaw, Tate, from a cultural sector perspective, before opening to the floor.

The round table was held under Chatham House rules, so the note is non-attributed. A background briefing note was circulated in advance and is available upon request. An attendee list is also available on request.

| What we heard from the Ministers

Ministers outlined key priorities for their departments, including:

- breaking the barriers to opportunities
- giving all children the best start in life
- making sure all children receive an excellent education in schools
- tackling the root causes of child poverty
- giving children access to the enriching power of art

They set out their commitment to arts and creativity in schools, recognising that children find their voice and develop creativity and self-worth through the arts.

We heard their concern with identifying and addressing ‘cold spots’ where arts access and resources are limited in schools and the need to consider how to prepare children for careers in the creative industries.

They explained that the independent curriculum review will strive to create a rich and broad curriculum. They acknowledged the difficult fiscal context. They both expressed a firm commitment to collaboration between DCMS and DfE on this agenda.

There was a recognition that there are significant recruitment and retention issues with the teaching workforce, including in arts disciplines. Ministers asked whether this was an issue that the freelance creative workforce could do more to support.

The issue of school capital and equipment was raised, including the need to ensure that schools everywhere have adequate, sustainable resources and buildings for arts and creative learning. The need for children to encounter world-class culture and heritage in their own location and in their own community was discussed.

Barriers to higher education for all children were acknowledged. The Minister noted the particular cost barriers associated with auditioning for conservatoires and noting that often only those with means can access these opportunities.

“It is inspiring to see so many passionate voices come together to ensure every child has access to a high quality arts education, allowing them to achieve and thrive.”

Catherine McKinnell, Minister for School Standards

“This government is committed to breaking down barriers for children and young people. We know that a creative education is part of a complete education and we will ensure that children and young people do not miss out on subjects such as music, the arts and drama.”

“By bringing influential people together who support this vision, we can lay the building blocks to ensure that every young person, no matter their background or place they were born, has the opportunity to see a future working in the arts.”

Sir Chris Bryant, Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism

| What we heard from participants

1. The importance of joined-up working between the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver arts education in schools

Contributors, including the Ministers, all recognised that ensuring high-quality arts and creative learning in schools requires close and sustained partnership between the DfE and DCMS. It was suggested that both departments need to align language, investment, and policy to ensure that the education and cultural sectors work towards a shared agenda.

“...it does mean joining up, and that’s why we need two Ministers here at once, because we need to work across departments if we’re going to make a success of this.”

“Obviously, it’s a really important thing that Culture and Education work together, because this is not something that we can solve in one department. You can’t just have the Culture department bang on about how important creative education is if the Education department isn’t also saying so.”

The point was made that arts, culture, and creativity must be embedded in the DfE’s Opportunities Mission Board and in the DCMS Growth Mission to ensure that Spending Review funds are allocated to this area.

“How can we link back to that opportunities initiative that ministers were talking about too? Because we all know that there’s a Spending Round coming up. We all know that it’s a really difficult for us to be talking about investments. But it is a moment when the next three years of funding are going to be set by government. That three years of funding needs to ensure cultural education and creativity for all children. The DfE owns the Opportunities agenda with DCMS feeding into that mission board.”

2. The need to go beyond the Curriculum Review to design systems and accountability to promote and encourage arts education in schools

Participants felt that while a refreshed curriculum will create a basic framework to support children’s learning, this is only the first step. They agreed that it will be important to assess how far the Minister’s stated ambitions in this area are addressed through the Curriculum Review and to identify subsequent areas for reform, as well as the policy and investment needed from both departments.

Several contributors called for the abolition of constraints or incentives within the system that have contributed to the reduction in both the time and quality of arts education, specifically mentioning accountability measures such as the EBacc and Progress 8. It was also suggested that Ofsted should more explicitly assess arts education provision. These changes fall outside the scope of the current Curriculum and Assessment Review but are seen as significant barriers to arts and creativity, influencing school leaders and parents, and directing time, resources, and subject choices.

“We need to look again at accountability measures. Headteachers respond to incentives. It’s difficult when you’re being measured on the academic outcomes of your students,

not to focus solely on that. I think we need richer accountability measures that reflect whole child outcomes.”

“Schools are under pressure to teach to the EBacc and for Progress 8, if we can remove that constraint, that means that...families and young people will give more value to the art subjects, because schools will be able to teach more inclusively... I really believe that that one act of removing constraints would benefit the whole system of schools and workforce, because then there’ll be demand for young people who want to study creative subjects. Create the demand, and then the workforce, to some extent, will follow.”

“I was teaching when the EBacc came out, and within months, the rhetoric around it changed. It was so powerful. Parents would say there is no point in my child studying art subjects at GCSE, because it doesn’t count. And as an art teacher, I can say, no, no, it counts for your child. It’s just not counting for the school. So the simple solution is changing the accountability measures for schools. Schools have budgets...and then they have to decide how to spend that money. If the accountability measure includes arts subjects, behaviours will change, everything else will follow.”

“There are simple changes that the review of Accountability could address. Like making sure that a 10 yr old’s SATs results (in English and Maths) don’t become the baseline to determine their progress in their KS4 Dance qualifications. Target setting at KS3 is pulled from KS2 assessments, but as these are drawn from unrelated SATS results, so learners are often seen as wildly over or underachieving in Dance.”

“Ofsted report cards are really important because that’s a very simple thing. They could include a clearer focus on creativity in schools and arts subjects”

It was also suggested that consideration of high-quality extra-curricular arts provision, including clubs and school trips, should be built into accountability systems, such as Ofsted.

“I think sometimes we say too much about whether people are doing the arts, the drama GCSEs, and we should be looking more at, are you doing really high-quality drama in clubs and other things? It tends to get squeezed out in timetables, but quite often, Heads will give the resource to that kind of thing.”

Several participants highlighted that how a subject is assessed is important. Exam systems often drive and influence the content of what is taught. There was a strong call to trust schools more in assessing coursework, particularly in GCSE and A-Level arts and humanities subjects. The value of coursework in teaching skills such as project management, resilience, and perseverance was also emphasised.

“Bravery and trust, which is not only about the trust in schools to design and then deliver a curriculum that is fitting for the cohort that we’re serving, but to offer value to the coursework element, because that is something that certainly fell away alongside the EBacc. The subjects that suffer most when coursework is obliterated or slimmed down are arts subjects and that, I think, came down to trust because coursework is done and assessed in schools.”

3. The primary arts curriculum and provision needs particular attention

It was felt that more must be done to clarify and expand expectations for an arts-rich curriculum in primary schools, alongside improved access to arts specialists and facilities. This would require supplementing the limited framework of the National Curriculum with model curricula and guidance. Contributors also highlighted the benefits of arts education for SEND students.

“The art curriculum is a page and a half for primary schools. There must be more depth and diversity offered... At the moment, it’s 90% male old masters, with a few women sprinkled in there.”

“...you can tell when a Primary school has a specialist input into their curriculum.”

“Arts can help communication and act as therapy for SEND students. Arts can help close the gap between SEND and other students.”

4. Schools should be better trusted by education authorities, provided more freedom to design their offer, and be braver in delivering an arts-rich curriculum

While contributors agreed that the curriculum must have sufficient rigour to ensure high-quality arts education across all schools, they also emphasised the importance of giving schools the flexibility to design a curriculum that best meets the needs of their pupils and teachers.

“I am hopeful that the Curriculum Review will do a lot to improve the balance. I think it’s a very tricky balance between establishing a sense of clear entitlement for basic things, which includes arts education, but at the same time giving schools freedom to reflect the needs of their students, of their community.”

Schools should be encouraged to confidently offer a well-rounded education.

“I think schools need to be braver. And, regardless of the incentives or the demands placed upon us by government, we need to make sure that we’re valuing whole child outcomes and not just league tables and academic results. Something is worth doing not just because it gets examined at the end.”

Underlying the call for flexibility and a braver approach was the belief that more trust should be placed in schools to deliver high-quality arts education, including providing teachers with appropriate training linked to the cultural sector and creative industries.

“One of the reasons why lots of professional development is so prescriptive, comes from last government’s view that they didn’t trust teachers and schools to make the right decisions... Please can we trust schools, with more agency to headteachers, to make effective decisions around professional development for their staff, for the best interest of the kids in their care in these important [arts] subjects.”

5. Creative learning should be embedded across the curriculum, not just focused on arts subjects

Several contributors spoke about the value of a creative education and how this can be embedded across the entire curriculum. Teachers should be trained to teach creatively and to foster creativity in their students.

It was also suggested that the government should support schools in participating in the PISA evaluation of creative thinking as a way to measure and track creative learning.

“We miss opportunities to squeeze a bit more drama into the curriculum. Creativity in science, maths is important. Creativity can cut across, and I think, can be done again without any additional cost.”

“By taking the EBacc away or reforming it so that arts subjects have equal place, by engaging with the creativity measures in PISA, so that we can see how we’re doing in that, that would change the conversation when it comes to how we perform as a country.”

6. Arts education and creative learning must be taken seriously

All attendees agreed that arts subjects are no less important, academic, difficult, or rigorous than other subjects. Arts education is particularly relevant to the creative industries, including growth sectors such as AI, and should be taken seriously to develop the future workforce.

The importance of government rhetoric was highlighted. One participant noted that when Ministers speak publicly about the value of arts and creativity, it changes perceptions in schools and with parents. It was also emphasised that parents and guardians need to be involved to better understand the value of a rigorous arts education.

“Art brings joy and rigour, enrichment and discipline. Music theory, visual analysis—these are incredibly rigorous subjects, as well as joyful.”

“You’d never say ‘give it a go’ about science. Art is just as serious a subject.”

“It’s not only about those young people that end up being artists. The capacity to problem-solve, to invent, imagine, to dream, is critical for all children for their development, but I would also say it’s critical for success in science, maths, politics, business. If we want to be an AI superpower, we need the creative brains that will shape that technology for the good. So, it’s absolutely critical for the economic missions as well as for the educational missions that this government really values.”

“...the dearth of coursework...is leading to young people leaving school having never started a project and sketched it out, designed, assessed what hasn’t worked, obtained feedback and delivered a major project on time...The creative process which you go through for the creation of any piece of art or performance or any rehearsal, but to do that, that’s massive...”

7. The need for better data and knowledge-sharing to improve arts education in schools

The theme of access to good data was raised repeatedly during the discussion. It was agreed that if the cultural sector had better data about need, what works, and existing provision, resources could be more effectively targeted, and transparency and accountability would be improved. Government guidance should include more information on expectations and provide access to better data to support collaboration between schools and arts organisations.

Attendees also expressed the need to identify where arts education needs strengthening. Mapping which schools have arts partnerships and which do not would help arts organisations and funders target resources more effectively.

Participants highlighted that arts education data for primary schools and SEND settings is currently extremely limited, hindering progress in both policy and practice.

The quality of data and research was also a concern, with a call for better evidence to inform policymaking.

“Do the arts organisations always know the right way to do it, do they have the right data to target the schools and schools’ information? And equally, do schools know what they can do? And does the school know what is expected of them in terms of their extracurricular activities? We need clarity in terms of a framework and then you let the system organise around it.”

“What language do we use together to describe the capabilities that expressive arts subjects and experiences are building in our young people at all ages, because then the teacher is able to do their own mapping against the kinds of capabilities that these subjects experiences can build.”

“What are the datasets we need to help us understand where it works? We have no data about what provision in Primary schools is happening. In terms of arts and culture experiences, the only data we have at Secondary is based on who is applying for different art subjects.”

“We need a revolution in how to think about evidence, including large-scale datasets that look to track pupils really over their entire lifetimes. Britain is well-served with cohort studies, where you can look particularly at intersections and interactions, things like class, race, gender, disability, as well as education choices. None of this gets done for the arts... how do we evaluate programmes, and how are we going to speak a particular language beyond ourselves? Or else, I suspect we’ll have these conversations over and over again with very little purchase on decision making at DfE and Treasury.”

8. Bridging and brokerage are required to enable schools to benefit from the rich cultural learning offer of arts organisations

Cultural organisations such as galleries, museums, theatres, and heritage sites offer much to enhance arts education and creative learning in schools. Participants agreed that these organisations should be a major asset to government and schools, provided the programmes are well-designed and accessible. However, too often there is a mismatch in provision; either these programmes do not meet the needs of schools, or schools are unaware of or unable to access them. Skilled individuals, organisations, and Local Authorities can act as brokers to bridge this gap.

Creative Partnerships and the Bridge Network were specifically mentioned for their brokerage services, which help cultural and education partners meet children's needs. However, these programmes are often short-lived, as the political agenda shifts.

More needs to be done to spread best practice and support collaboration to leverage the value cultural organisations can add in schools.

"We see a lot of examples of carefully considered programmes, but they're engaging with the education system pretty thinly, suggesting the incentives in the school system run counter to the idea of engaging with the creative sectors."

"We need a set of shared outcomes, so that every arts and cultural organisation and individual and every school understands the shared things they want to deliver for the children and young people in that area."

"Extracurricular activity is hugely important, not just for individuals, but for what we see in terms of school improvement. Culture in schools is hugely transformative. But our schools can really struggle to explore what is out there. They [cultural orgs] just don't know how to talk to schools... We started to do a project with Curious Minds, which is a brokerage organisation in the northwest, an education charity that really facilitates that conversation between schools and the arts sector... That kind of infrastructure of organisations that are tasked with facilitating the conversation with schools and the arts and culture sector are invaluable."

9. There is a wealth of good practice available: Learn from what works

Attendees strongly believed there is already much good practice taking place in schools—both in the UK and abroad—that should be identified, rediscovered, and scaled. Through the Durham Commission, Arts Council England has supported the development of creative pedagogies, which are now being tested by Creativity Collaboratives across England and could be expanded.

There are also new initiatives underway, such as charitably funded arts education posts working across MATs, including Ark (funded by Clore Duffield) and Star. These posts support arts curriculum development, partnerships with cultural organisations, teacher training, pupil workshops, and school trips.

“The Creative Partnerships Programme, which was set up 23 years ago by the previous Labour Administration, also as a partnership between the DCMS and the Department for Education, they funded artists and arts organisations to work in the most economically and socially challenged schools across the country.”

“We should learn from Singapore, and I’ll tell you why. They are the best performing nation in English and Maths and Science, but they’re also the best performing nation in creativity. We didn’t enter the creativity tests in International PISA Creativity tests in 2022 because our former Schools Minister didn’t believe in it, but every other country and jurisdiction did, and when you look into Singapore, they are teaching for creativity, both through English and Maths. So let’s go and find out what they’re doing. What PISA and OECD say is that in those classrooms, those young people have space to talk, they have space to reflect, they have space to come up with their own ideas.”

10. There is an urgent need to act now

Colleagues expressed frustration that there are often calls for more research into the value and impact of arts and creativity on children and young people. They strongly felt that while more data could be helpful, there is already ample evidence demonstrating the value of arts education and creative learning. There is also evidence that arts education is currently inadequate in the state sector, and that too many children are missing out. Participants were adamant that action should not be delayed while waiting for further research. We should act on what we already know and make change happen now.