
Learning from the Artsmark #BeeWell Pilot 2023-25

Delivered by Curious Minds, funded by Artsmark and Arts Council England · #BeeWell is a programme led by the University of Manchester, Anna Freud Centre, and Greater Manchester Combined Authority · Evaluation: Sophie Reid (October 2025)

Overview

Taking part in creative activities can have a direct positive impact on the wellbeing of young people – such as increasing feelings of connectedness and motivation¹. This pilot project explored whether the Artsmark framework, combined with insights from #BeeWell (a wellbeing survey of secondary school pupils), can be used to form creative and cultural interventions that focus on achieving positive impacts on the wellbeing of young people.

Over two years (2023–2025), seven Greater Manchester secondary schools (including two specialist SEND settings) used their school’s #BeeWell survey data as a starting point to deliver targeted arts-based wellbeing interventions, supporting pupils to design responses and commission creative practitioners. This work was embedded within each school’s Artsmark journey, connecting creative health practice to their wider arts education strategy.

Pupils were trained as Young Health Champions, completing the RSPH Creative Health module, and then supported through micro-commissions and neighbourhood level commissions, building leadership, agency and creative skills throughout.

7	38	~450	~230
Secondary schools across GMCA boroughs	RSPH Young Health Champions trained	Pupils reached through micro-commissions	Young people engaged in neighbourhood commissions
8	~12	71	3

¹ Bone JK & Fancourt D. 2022. [Arts Culture & the Brain](#): A literature review and new epidemiological analyses. London: Arts Council England

Creative practitioners commissioned (micro commission)	Artists/organisations commissioned (neighbourhood)	CPD attendees across 3 specialist sessions	Schools forming the Wigan Delivery Hub
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Key Findings

Impact on Young People

Pupils experienced meaningful and measurable benefits across wellbeing domains:

- **Enjoyment as a means to engagement:** Pupil voice feedback across schools demonstrated pupils enjoyed activities; leading to high engagement across all schools in arts and cultural activities they wouldn't have otherwise had opportunities to engage in.
- **Creative and leadership skills:** Pupils developed confidence, creative skills (including in artforms new to them), problem-solving, self-expression and tolerance of uncertainty.
- **Wellbeing and self-worth:** Pupils reported feeling valued, good about who they are, and a sense of autonomy from the project.
- **Stronger social connections:** Friendships formed across year groups and, in the Wigan Delivery Hub, across schools. Young people built trust with peers and trusted adults.
- **Increased cultural capital:** Some examples of pupils pursuing arts engagement beyond school, including returning to the sculpture trail at Pennington Flash with family.

*"I think that being a Creative Health Youth Champion has developed my own wellbeing, making me more aware of how to develop and practise wellness. The Five Ways to Wellbeing particularly stuck with me, giving me ideas on how to improve my wellbeing when I'm feeling negative." **Young Health Champion***

Impact on Teachers and Schools

- **Commissioning confidence:** Teachers grew in confidence to commission new practitioners, trust pupils with genuine agency, and reach out to new organisations.
- **Pupil voice and agency:** The programme gave teachers a systematic way to centre pupil voice, with pupils actively involved in interpreting data, writing briefs, co-designing and in some cases co-delivering activities.
- **Advocating for the arts:** Teachers reported finding it easier to advocate for arts investment, with visible outcomes to share with senior leadership teams.
- **Physical and cultural legacy:** Schools created wellbeing-focused spaces (outdoor installations, murals, sculpture trails, sensory gardens) that benefit the whole school.

- **Community partnerships:** Schools built relationships with local cultural organisations, community partners and other schools, which they plan to sustain.

“It has created a cultural shift in our school. The arts has been strong as the arts but it highlighted the arts as intrinsic to wellbeing and made that very visible.”

Lead teacher

The Value of #BeeWell Data within Artsmark

All schools found the #BeeWell data a valuable tool for identifying and validating wellbeing priorities. There were clear, logical connections between #BeeWell findings and what schools chose to commission, from tackling social isolation and anxiety, to improving access to nature and creative arts. The data provided a credible, anonymised evidence base to:

- Demonstrate need to Senior Leadership Teams and external funders (one school leveraged significant additional match-funding as a direct result).
- Work collaboratively with pupils to explore the #BeeWell findings, making headline data meaningful and bespoke to their cohort².
- Strengthen Artsmark Statements of Commitment and Impact, linking creative health activity to school-level priorities.

The programme demonstrated that the Artsmark framework provides an effective structure for embedding creative health practice in schools. Activity directly supported all seven Quality Principles and all dimensions of the Artsmark framework, from leadership and CPD through to range of offer, cultural collaborations, EDI and values and ethos. For schools earlier in their Artsmark journey, the programme raised the profile and status of the arts significantly. For schools further along, it deepened the embedding of arts as an essential component of pupil health and community engagement.

SEND settings: distinctive needs and strong impact

The two SEND specialist schools felt they needed to make considerable adaptations to programme elements, including how #BeeWell data was interpreted, how the RSPH Young Health Champions Creative Health module was delivered, and how ‘community’ was defined for the neighbourhood commission. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated some of the strongest impacts: significant growth in teacher confidence to commission external

² This was particularly useful for those who felt the #BeeWell survey confirmed ‘what we already knew’.

practitioners, expanded arts provision at whole-school scale, and transformative experiences for individual pupils.

Learning for Future Delivery

This pilot was achieved in a challenging context for schools, with severe staff (and cover) capacity pressures, and significant administrative demands. These things have been learnt:

- **Programme design matters:** The phased model was essential for building skills, confidence and ambition progressively.
 - **Staff capacity is the primary constraint:** Schools couldn't always release teachers for programme days; building in staff cover mechanisms and funding is vital³. The teachers who felt they could be most impactful were the ones who had more time off timetable.
 - **Be flexible about partnership:** Partnership working across schools was only feasible where geography, priorities and pupil needs aligned; a flexible and supportive approach needs to be taken to encouraging collaboration between schools.
 - **Maintain opportunities for collective and individual reflection:** Peer support from other schools was reported as an important component of the programme's success.
 - **Boost the value of the Young Health Champions qualification:** External administration of the RSPH Young Health Champions qualification caused delays and reduced its value for pupils. Its delivery format needed review for SEND settings. It worked best where its value could be extended through existing pupil leadership opportunities.
 - **Streamline monitoring and evaluation:** Ensure monitoring and evaluation approaches are focused on collecting the most meaningful data, for consistency and relevance.
 - **Continue offering support on leveraging additional funding:** Some schools secured significant additional funding by using #BeeWell data alongside pupil advocacy.
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What Next?

Further opportunities for schools, cultural organisations and partners to build on this learning:

- **Schools and cultural organisations in Greater Manchester:** Explore resources and the wider network at ourwellbeingourvoice.org

³ As a result, Curious Minds developed a 'Curious Cover' offer using creative practitioners for future projects.

- **Schools thinking about undertaking their Artsmark journey:** This pilot shows how the framework supports creative health work in practice. Find out more at artsmark.org.uk

Full evaluation report available from Curious Minds. For info: www.curiousminds.org.uk

