

CANTRELL SCHOOL
AND CITY ARTS IN
PARTNERSHIP



PRIMARY COLOUR

BUILDING A CARNIVAL
PROGRAMME FOR A
PRIMARY SCHOOL





Introduction

This paper celebrates the four-year partnership between City Arts and Cantrell School, and the work we have produced together. The partnership will continue into the future, but in 2019, the project reached particularly positive milestones in its development. With the programme paused in 2020 due to the pandemic, it felt appropriate to use the time to stop and reflect on the journey together so far, how it could be developed for the future, and how this good practice could be shared with other schools and arts partners.

The partnership was centred on the development of a whole school carnival programme. It brought together professional carnival artists, school children and teachers to design, build and produce a carnival parade to celebrate the end of the academic year. It supported the creativity of the school as a whole, gave a platform for established artists to produce new work and created opportunities for placements and CPD for new and emerging artists.

Over this first four years, different approaches were trialled each time, with enthusiasm and confidence developing alongside. Year four culminated in the school being invited to be part of a local arts festival, and taking our parade into the town centre to a large and appreciative audience. This was a big success, triggering discussions about how the project could be developed to include more schools, and developing a new carnival for the area.

This paper charts that journey, the different approaches taken, the successes and challenges of the partnership and the top tips we have learnt.

Alison Denholm
Creative Development Manager
City Arts (Nottingham)



The City Arts & Cantrell Whole School Carnival



City Arts and Cantrell School have been collaborating on a whole school carnival programme since 2016. In that time, they have explored different approaches to the annual programme; building in artist residencies, staff training, young leaders programmes, placement opportunities and responding to the curriculum. Each year has seen the partnership develop, and has built on the previous learning.



The project has grown in ambition and creativity since it's beginning. Over this time, the school has been awarded a Gold Artsmark from Arts Council England for their creativity overall, of which this partnership was of key importance. The Artsmark team commended the schools 'commitment to the arts, and commends the ethos of 'taking a risk' to 'be involved in the shaping of a generation of British artists'. They noted the school's approach of building partnerships with local galleries and arts organisations.

“ You engage with a range of arts and cultural organisations and can evidence the positive impact of these partnerships. Your children and young people have an opportunity to further develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of arts and culture and you are working to share the expertise you have established.

Amanda Rigler

Senior Officer, Artsmark, Arts Council England

In 2019, having previously been rated as 'NI' (Needs improvement), Cantrell was rated as 'Good' by Ofsted, with their creativity highlighted as a strength. The inspection team highlighted the good practice around the Arts and wider curriculum as a whole, including its important role in developing the pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development (SMSC).

City Arts has also benefitted from the sustained nature of the partnership, being able to plan for the project over a sustainable and longer-term period. The on-going positive relationship means that other projects City Arts has in development can be fed into the partnership. This brought further opportunities for the children and staff to be part of city-wide initiatives and has strengthened the hand of both partners.

“ It has been really exciting to develop this project over the last four years, and see the creative confidence of the school, pupils and staff alike, grow. We have learnt a lot from the partnership, but also know our expertise is really valued. Cantrell are always open and excited about what we offer, and not afraid of being ambitious.

Alison Denholm

Creative Development Manager, City Arts (Nottingham)

The working relationship has developed gradually and at a steady pace since 2016, giving it a solid foundation. This slow burn approach is one of its great strengths. It has built on the school's annual summer fair, which was run by the Friends of Cantrell PTFA (Parent Teacher and Friends Association), and was already a familiar celebration of the end of the year. It then meant that year by year, new ideas were introduced, and the work was developed from the reflections on the previous programme.



“ We wanted to provide the children with a showpiece event that they could all look forward to, work towards together and share with the community. I had been to carnivals before in other cities and seen how they can invigorate and bring colour and joy to the local area. In Nottingham, we have a fantastic carnival, and events such as Light Night, which are always so magical for the residents of our city. We wanted to create some of that buzz and energy in our Bulwell school. It was really important to us that this event would be open to all children and families and be really inclusive. That's why we chose to work with City Arts who have a proven track record of fantastic work in this field.

Jordan White

Teacher and Creative Arts Coordinator, Cantrell Primary

The City Arts/Cantrell project has become an annual landmark for the school, a celebration of the end of the academic year, and a support for the creativity and learning for all involved.

Since the beginning in 2016, Cantrell's carnival day has coincided with a local neighbourhood event, the Bulwell Arts Festival. In 2019 for the first time, City Arts and Cantrell produced an out of school parade with the festival, creating a carnival procession for the opening weekend. This had children and staff involved, featuring their costumes and dance routines. It gave City Arts the chance to bring large-scale street puppets, and the artists involved also brought additional dancers and costumes.



“ The Bulwell Arts Festival celebrates creativity within the community and hosts annually a varied program of activities of Family Fun across the Bulwell area in July. We work with our whole community, but one of our proudest moments during the year is working with all our seven Schools in Bulwell and the successful projects we do collaboratively. Working with Cantrell Primary School and City Arts developing a Carnival programme has not only enhanced our objectives but has been really effective helping us engage with the public at an even greater level. The Carnival has really helped bring our community together and instil a sense of community pride. With hopes of having this as an annual event at the Bulwell Arts Festival programme we can help transform Bulwell and make it a great place to live.

Nicola Curzon
Coordinator, Bulwell Arts Festival

The success of the partnership with Bulwell Arts Festival offers a new chapter for the project overall. Bulwell Arts Festival would like to support City Arts and Cantrell to involve more schools in the area, building out the opportunity. City Arts and Cantrell will continue to develop the in-school programme along side this.



Year by year

The project started small and evolved each year.

YEAR 1 2016

This was the first year City Arts linked with the school, and it was very light touch. There was a whole school parade that Cantrell was producing already, so City Arts brought some costumes, carnival headdresses and large scale puppets to the event, giving it a lift and opening up to the school the scope of what could be achieved through a partnership with a specialist company.



YEAR 2 2017

City Arts was in residence with the school for a three-week period. In this time, they worked with every class in the school. A team of artists were with the school every day, and worked with each child to create a carnival headdress. The school was split into two themes inspired by nature. The upper school was the Rainforest, and the lower school was Under the Sea. The school also delivered other activities around this, including percussion sessions and science workshops.

On the day, the brief to all the children was that it was a non-uniform day, but they had to wear clothes as bright as possible. The school has seven-year groups from reception to year six, so City Arts brought in seven larger pieces of costume. A member of staff was nominated to wear each one and lead the year group, bringing in the extra wow factor.



YEAR 3 2018

One of the challenges of the 2017 model was the expense of having a team of artists in school for a sustained period of time. However, working with every class did mean that City Arts also worked with every teacher. This year, the focus was on teacher inset sessions. From a budget point of view, this was more economical, and it had a number of other benefits. It gave staff ownership over their class design-and-make period, and teachers were able to rise to the creative challenge. 2018's theme was more firmly embedded in the curriculum, as this year, the design choices were informed by a favourite class text.

2018 also offered a space where Cantrell set up an Arts Ambassadors group to work specifically on Carnival. Developing the confidence in arts leadership at an early age, making engagement in culture instinctive.

This group worked directly with the City Arts team, and were able to respond to other opportunities CA were managing, including the first Nottingham Puppet Festival. The link with the Nottingham Puppet Festival was very successful, with the children taking part in the finale event, a Nottingham City Centre parade, with work that they had made through the project at school.

“ This was the year I enjoyed the most. The children found it really relevant because they understood the purpose. As it was something they were already engrossed in, it made it more memorable to them.

Emma Smith

Year 2 Teacher, Cantrell Primary School

Further links were built because of City Arts partnership within the Nottingham Puppet Festival. A second core partner of the festival is Nottingham Trent University, and City Arts was able to invite students and academics from the Theatre Design Department to the school to be part of the programme. This connection has been sustained between Cantrell and NTU, with children now regularly attending student showcases and events at Trent. The team see this as particularly valuable, enabling the children to see inside the school of Art and Design first hand, and what higher education looks like generally.





YEAR 4 2019

This was the first year that there was the realised ambition to create a parade that could happen on the streets of Bulwell, as well as in the school.

The staff once again led the class carnival costumes, with a theme of Modern Artists as inspiration. Each class was given an artist to research and use as inspiration for costume designs.

This year's development focus was on the Arts Ambassadors group, and creating a second group, the Dance Ambassadors.

The Arts Ambassador worked with a new artist in residence, Yasmin Long. Her brief

was to explore a co-design approach with the children, and to allow design ideas to come from them. After a whistle stop introduction to world carnival, the children were asked to design their own carnival character. As many of them had been involved over the past few years, they were familiar with the format, and created some amazing drawings. Yasmin then sifted through the themes and ideas that were presented, and created a single design from this, the Weather Wizard! Over the next ten weeks, the children worked to create a single centre-piece costume, along with individual headdresses and accessories.

“ Cantrell school carnival was one of the most interesting events of 2019. The kids all came together and out performed my expectations. What an event it was and the whole school taking part was one of the biggest school events I have been a part of.

Lewis Hunter
Lead Dance Artist



An eight-week dance project ran alongside this, with the pupils learning a routine that was performed in front of parents. The lead dancer also got the school and parents dancing as part of the finale of the whole school parade.

The work that the Arts Ambassadors and the Dance Ambassadors created was taken out of school for the first time, and a new parade was created for the Bulwell Arts Festival opening weekend. A member of their team who was also on the Cantrell PTFA supported this partnership, so it felt a natural next step.

The parade in Bulwell town centre was a huge success, and was the trigger for the future plans of the project overall. There are seven primary schools in the Bulwell Area, and an indicator of that success was children from other schools going back in after the parade, asking why they were not part of it.

This enthusiasm gives us the opportunity to develop a programme that has resonance with the wider community, whilst still retaining the core partnership between City Arts and Cantrell Primary School.

What we learned



What were the aims of the partnership?

- Something that differentiates Cantrell to other schools in the area, and which now they can take a lead
- On-going project for City Arts in an area of Nottingham that would benefit from an exciting creative intervention
- Celebration of summer
- Helping to unlock and celebrate the talent of the children and teachers
- Producing something to share together
- Push back against the narrowing of the arts curriculum
- Letting children know there is an arts industry in the UK, supporting future career aspirations and employability

What did Cantrell and City Arts want to get out of the partnership?

CANTRELL:

- To create a whole school carnival
- Celebrate the academic year
- Finale event for where the arts want to get to that year
- Develop a relationship with a cultural organisation
- Work with every child, not rely on parents to bring them to an afterschool event
- Provide a really enriching cultural day that all children have equal access to
- An equal experience for everyone, as there is difference of opportunity in the school from children travelling abroad with families, to children who are very locally based and have little access to creative or cultural opportunities
- Celebrate the school community and what we have in our cultural backpack eg the diversity of the school, be outward looking during times such as the referendum, show children the wealth of working together in different cultural groups
- Arts Mark journey, putting in the statement of commitment
- Being in a position to make the most of creative opportunities

CITY ARTS:

- A sustained relationship with a school
- Conscious decision to work in an area with social challenges and low cultural engagement
- Working with staff and students
- Explore ideas around co-design enabling creative ownership and authorship for the children
- Support creative development of the school overall
- Create vibrant community anchored event
- Offer artist development opportunities through supporting lead artists and creating placement opportunities
- Brokering other enriching relationships eg NTU/Bulwell Arts Festival

How have staff been involved in design and delivery?

- Senior Leadership buy-in has supported the project to become part of the school culture
- Initially, themes were quite broad, such as the environment. Over time, this has refined, drawing on things like the class book as a design source, which has made it easier for the staff team to take a lead on their class design
- The project has had to strike a balance between staff's day to day delivery requirements and the ambitions of the event, not overloading the staff team
- The inset sessions for staff from external artists has helped cascade skills and build confidence
- Teacher development has been notable, with staff confidently leading the design and delivery of each class theme.
- Giving the staff a chance to feed into this report has been valuable

How have the children engaged with it?

- Over the evolution of the project in the four years, the children's engagement has grown
- They have enjoyed the sustained relationship with the City Arts team, and thrived on the structure of the project
- They have stepped up to being able to make decisions within it
- The arts ambassadors team has enabled pupil voice, with the group leading the design in response to the artist brief
- This has been further developed through the Dance Ambassadors group
- Since Arts has been pushed at the school, attendance is up, the children are now really happy. They enjoy the closer working weekly sessions with the artist in residences and benefit from the positive role modelling
- The children have been part of bigger city wide events and visited centres such as Nottingham Trent University, broadening their horizons



What are the highlights?

- Everyone has enjoyed it, so it's worth doing.
- It can be done, we can work with everyone, get everyone excited, the children look forward to it, it is in the mental calendar and part of the school culture.
- It has added a cultural event into the school calendar that is particularly identifiable for Cantrell.
- There is now a strong group identity within the project demonstrating the strength of everyone working together. The team see this as something that can help counter the individualism culture we are within currently.
- The response from Bulwell Arts Week was very affirming with the reaction from the wider Bulwell community sparking further ambition around what can be achieved.
- The year the class book was the design inspiration developed the most creativity in the costumes and designs. It played to strengths of what was going on in the classroom, rather than being additional. As the subject matter was embedded in the class the children were able to creatively respond to lots of familiar source material

What were the tricky bits?

- Working out the different routes around the school, where best to process with 500 children
- Co-ordinating the parade day and all the associated events
- Keeping the parents happy, making sure they have a good day and that they see their children in the parade
- Having a project that is nice and visible, but still making sure the school is safe and secure
- Sourcing enough materials in advance so when each class is ready to get going, they have everything they need
- Communicating across all the whole staff team

Top Tips and Successes

- The PTA buy in and fundraising support has meant a source of income over and above what the school could afford. This has helped address the need to provide a depth of experience that is lacking for some children, and supports the schools core budgets to achieve this
- The support of the Senior Leadership Team has meant full buy in across the school, ultimately supporting the schools performance at OFSTED and SMSC
- It has helped create a space in the school calendar for the parents to engage with their children in a different way, like sports day.
- It has built a space for wider community engagement, external to the schools current reach
- It has brought together with a good team who are open to collaboration
- We have been able to advocate for the project including with local Bridge Organisations and the Cultural Education Partnership for further support
- Thinking big but start slowly has meant the partnership is strong and stable
- Be lucky with the weather!



WITH THANKS TO

CANTRELL SCHOOL

Jordan White *Creative Arts Co-ordinator*

Debbie Weaver *Headteacher*

Emma Glossop *Visual Arts Lead*

+ all the team, as well as the Friends of Cantrell PTA whose fundraising has supported the programme over the years

CITY ARTS

Alison Denholm *Creative Development Manager*

BULWELL ARTS WEEK

Nicola Curzon

Cathy Mahmood

+ all the team

ARTISTS

Jessica Kemp

Sarena Kay *Can Samba*

Yasmin Long

Solomon Lewis Hunter *Inspire Urself*

Bryony McCombie Smith

Kay Egglestone

Corinne Seonghye Cho

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