

Evaluating The South Tees Arts Project (STAR)

A pilot study to explore the development and implementation of a school-based dance programme with primary school children, their parents, teachers, and artists to inform suitable wellbeing measures

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0. Lay summary: Evaluation of the South Tees Arts Project (STAR)

Background

Creative activities, such as dance can help children who experience geographical inequality to improve their health and wellbeing. A partnership between Northern Ballet, the North East and North Cumbria’s Child Health and Wellbeing Network and TIN Arts have developed a dance and arts programme (STAR) for primary school children living in low-income areas to find creative and engaging ways for them to express themselves and to access arts events.

Whilst the phrase disruptive behaviour has been used in this report, we acknowledge its negative connotations, but as it is the terminology used by Ofstead and no agreed alternative is commonly used it has been kept within the report.

Methods

A team of researchers from Teesside, Northumbria, Huddersfield, and Newcastle Universities evaluated the programme at two schools in South Tees to explore the children, their parents, teachers, and dance artists’ views on the development and implementation of the STAR project. The research team used qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups with dance artists, teachers, and parents, combined with innovate data collection methods (Graffiti walls, VoxPops, songs and surveys) with children. These methods aimed to explore best ways to measure the impact of the project on children’s health and wellbeing in the longer term and develop more quantitative terms for future research.

Findings

Impact of the STAR project

The STAR project has been well received by children, their parents, teachers, and artists at both primary schools, with children demonstrating *positive engagement* in the project. Teachers reported that children enjoyed participating in the project and were *looking forward to it*.

80 families, including parents and siblings of pupils, attended the Pinocchio performance, which in many cases was their first visit to the theatre. In addition, over 120 children took part in the theatre performances at the end of the STAR project, celebrating their

achievements with their families and opening up conversations at school and at home about arts.

Artists suggested at the start of the STAR project that the dance activities and performances could contribute to children's *creative, social, cognitive, and physical skills, as well as increasing their confidence*. The focus group and engagement activities with children confirmed that STAR contributed to their *emotional wellbeing* ("happy") as well as *their physical health*, with outcomes, such as 'Feeling more confident', 'More fit and well' and 'Full of energy', most often mentioned by children in both schools across Year 1 and 5. Working in pairs, they resolved differences to make up new dance moves, demonstrating *improvements in teamwork and social skills*.

These benefits continued beyond school, with children saying that they were *doing more exercises when they got home* and were *keen to continue practicing* the dance moves that they had learned at school. Expressing themselves through dance appears to make children *feel more confident and happier to engage in schoolwork and other daily activities*. Teachers also noticed that children were more able to *listen and engage in classwork*, showing *less disruptive behaviour*. In addition, teachers reported improvements in children's *literacy, social and motor skills*.

More generally, it appears that STAR supported to get out of the classroom and experience a *different learning style* that helped with their *mental health and emotional wellbeing*. Teachers often do not have time or the tools to deal with mental health issues, particularly after COVID-19; the STAR project provided an outlet for children and an *opportunity* for teachers to address these experiences by *tapping into their creativity*.

Finally, project partners *worked well together* to deliver the STAR project coherently and to time and to budget.

The survey responses from Year 6 children (n=42) who were in Year 5 when taking part in (STAR) in one school collected after the delivery of the project suggested that the children felt particularly creative (74%) and fit (73%) after STAR. The majority of children were very active outside school after STAR (59%), had good fun with their friends during STAR (56%) by supporting each other in the dance sessions (46%), and were being able in at least some instances (38%) to express themselves through movement (with an additional 31% being very/ extremely able). As a result of the STAR project, almost half of the children (49%) were very likely or likely to go and see a future dance performance, which should be celebrated as a massive achievement given the lack of previous exposure to dance activities for many of these children.

Differences in engagement and changes in perceptions

Year 1 children were less self-conscious and engaged more readily with the dance activities but needed more support from teachers to model the movements for them, while Year 5 children, once engaged, participated more fully and showed more creativity in expressing themselves.

Some boys threw themselves into the dance activities, while other boys, particularly in Year 5, experienced stigma, which they were able to overcome with the support of male dance teachers. Girls felt more comfortable with the dance movements but also experienced more anxiety, particularly around their performances on stage. Girls felt more pressure to do well, as they often had previous experience of taking part in dance activities and felt they had to demonstrate these skills and progress more quickly.

Teachers' perceptions of the STAR programme appeared to change as the programme progressed, with the re-interviewed teachers only highlighted positive aspects. For example, strategies used by the STAR to overcome stigma in boys, better communication with dance artists, and improvement of children's vocabulary, motor skills, confidence and well-being, and the role of family involvement in the theatre performances to celebrate success.

Family support

In addition to the dance activities, 20 families which represented 44 children received home support from a family practitioner and two student social workers after being referred by teachers at the two schools. The Outcome STAR data collected for this intervention shows that families have made progress in all eight areas of family support ranging from 9 to 18% but in particular by helping families to set boundaries and improve behaviour (of their children and partners; 18.3%): increasing their social networks (16.9%) and improving their family routine (14.6%). Families also improved their education and learning (13.8%), and were better able to meet the emotional needs (13.1%), while keeping their children safe (13.1%).

Development and implementation

In the interviews and focus groups, children, parents, teachers, and dance artists identified barriers and facilitators for engaging children in the dance activities and performances.

Barriers	Facilitators
<u>Limited time & large classes:</u> 2 weekly 1-hour sessions made it challenging for artists to get to know children and tailor the project to their needs. Delivering sessions to up to 30 children at time also made this more difficult.	The two dance artists working together to support each other. Teachers supporting the artists to tailor sessions to personal needs and interest of children.
<u>Disruptive behaviour:</u> Teachers and staff had to spend considerable time on dealing with disruptive behaviour from some children, who were distracting other pupils from taking part in the dance sessions.	Teachers sharing information with artists about children who experience challenges, at school and/or at home.
<u>COVID-19:</u> the pandemic caused delays in delivery of the project in the schools. Lockdown affected children's confidence and social skills to engage. It also reduced communication opportunities	Children working together in pairs to motivate each other, build confidence and have fun.

between dance artists, teachers, parents, and project partners	Reassurance support from dance artists and teachers.
<u>Stigma</u> : artists and teachers had to overcome stigma around dance activities, particularly for boys in Year 5 affecting their confidence to engage.	Bringing in a male dancer helped to normalise the dance activities for boys and raise their aspirations.
<u>Anxiety</u> : Many children and their families had never been to theatre performances before the project and some children experienced anxiety about going on stage in front of their peers and families. Overcoming this anxiety became an achievement to celebrate in the theatre performances	Teachers engaging with the dance activities, particularly in Year 1 to model movements. Clarifying expectations with children and parents.

Active ingredients/ mechanisms

From the barriers and facilitators, we identified three mechanisms that are crucial for the success and future development of the STAR project.

Communication. Effective communication emerged as a major factor for a successful dance programme:

- Communication *between teachers and artists* to manage disruptive behaviour and build personal relationships with children.
- Communication *between TIN Arts and teachers* to help teachers understand how they can support children in the project and engage themselves in the activities.
- Communication *between schools, TIN Arts, and parents* to keep parents informed and help them understand how they can support their children at home and get involved themselves.
- Communication *between artists, teachers, and children* to provide simple instructions to children to increase their engagement and more information about the performances to reduce anxiety.

Linking dance and art activities to the school curriculum to support skill gaps, e.g., literacy skills, storytelling, and mental health support. Initial fears from teachers that STAR would take time away from them delivering an already cramped and challenging curriculum were alleviated by their observations that the project supported delivery of the school curriculum. Teachers noticed an increase in children’s attention and their literary skills in class, combined with more confidence, to express themselves more effectively, enhancing their engagement and learning in the classroom. Linking narratives in dance sessions to existing reading schemes in school could support embedding STAR in the curriculum.

Partnership working. Collaboration between Northern Ballet, the North East and North Cumbria’s Child Health and Wellbeing Network, TIN Arts and the Universities for STAR supported the successful delivery of the project, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic and the

various challenges this presented. The ethos of the partnership ensured adaptability and flexibility of the project, although some partners were less involved and struggled to make links with different teams.

Recommendations

1. *Organise a launch event* for dance programme at the beginning of school terms with school staff, children, and parents so they know what to expect, and when, over the course of the dance programme.
2. *Allocate time* for a briefing and debriefing before and after each session between dance artists and teachers on needs of children to adapt dance sessions to accommodate varied needs.
3. *Allocate time for artists' reflections* following each session [notes to be used as data in subsequent research].
4. *Provide regular feedback to parents* through newsletters about their child's progress in STAR and how they can support the project at home and get more involved.
5. *Encourage teachers to participate* in dance classes early in the programme until the dance artists gain confidence and trust of the children, then the dance artists deliver classes independently.
6. Consider delivering STAR to *older age groups at the end of each key stage* (Year 3 and 5) to support more holistic engagement from children.
7. Develop a *different focus for the dance activities in each year*, with Year 5 dance activities more focused on emotional narratives.
8. *Link these narratives to existing school reading schemes* to embed STAR more firmly in the school curriculum.
9. Deliver STAR to *mixed gender groups* and use targeted pairing of children (suggested by teachers) to support less confident children to engage in the dance activities.
10. *Explore including songs with words* as part of dance activities to encourage engagement, and using equipment, such as barres, to help children with their balance.
11. *Communicate early on with children and parents about expectations for the performances and organise dress rehearsals* in the theatre with the children as part of the dance programme to increase familiarity with arts and cultural venues to minimise anxiety.
12. *Develop referral pathways* for talented children identified in school setting to develop dance skills with professional dance artists.
13. Invest in strong working relationships with senior leaders in each school to support the delivery and implementation of STAR. E.g., to encourage buy-in from teachers and parents, and to provide teachers with reflection and training time to engage with dance sessions and artists.
14. *Develop future research to test the measurements and methods* developed in this pilot study on a larger scale and for a longer time. Consider including visual methods in follow-up research.

1. Introduction and background

Children from low socioeconomic income backgrounds are more likely to experience difficulties in emotional and social development, which can impact academic achievement (Masten & Coaresworth 1998; Dunham et al. 2000), and mental health and wellbeing in adult life (Goodman et al. 2015). Engaging in creative activities such as dance can be part of a health-promoting strategy which will not only impact on health and wellbeing but promotes social inclusion and positive environments (Karkou & Glasman 2004; Bungay & Vella-Burrows 2013).

Northern Ballet, the North East and North Cumbria's Child Health and Wellbeing Network and TIN Arts have developed a dance and arts programme to give schools in areas of South Tees that experience geographical inequality access to professional dance artists who help children to find creative and engaging ways to express themselves and to access arts events.

Children in Year 1 and 5 in two primary schools located in Redcar and Middlesbrough took part in weekly dance sessions from September 2021 for the duration of the school year, which explored creative and engaging ways to help them to develop their social, emotional, and physical skills, by relating it to characters in a narrative ballet (Pinocchio). Children also attended a performance of Pinocchio in a local theatre in April 2022 and the dance programme culminated with a celebratory performance of the pupils' work at a local theatre venue in June 2022, which brought all participating children and families together.

1.1 Aims and research questions

The overall aim of the project was to explore children, their parents, teachers, and dance artists' views on the development and implementation of the STAR project, and from these views explore suitable ways to measure the impact of the project on children's health and wellbeing.

Findings from this pilot study will inform the design of a follow-up study applying the measures and support the future development of school-based dance programmes, ultimately to improve children and their families' health and wellbeing at this critical period in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following research questions were explored in this project:

1. How do the children, parents, teachers, and dance artists view the development and implementation of the STAR project across the two primary schools? How feasible and acceptable is the STAR project to them?
2. What value did the partnership bring to the development and implementation process of the STAR project?
3. How can the health and wellbeing benefits of the STAR project on children be meaningfully measured, according to children, parents, teachers, and dance artists?
4. Are there any unintended consequences/ intangible benefits from developing and implementing the STAR project?

5. What are the preliminary effects of the STAR project on the health and wellbeing of children involved in the project?

2. Methods

We used a mixed-methods design, combining interviews and focus groups involving dance artists, teachers, and parents, with innovate data collection methods for children to explore their views about the development and implementation of the STAR project. This qualitative design helped to develop suitable survey measures for capturing how the project affected children's health and wellbeing. At the heart of our design was a co-production approach aimed at actively involving children, parents, teachers and artists in this process.

2.1 Co-production approach

We applied the Mosaic approach, which is a multi-method approach developed by the Health Foundation in which children's own photographs, tours and maps can be combined with talking and observing to gain deeper understanding of children's perspectives on the dance programme and their interactions with artists, teachers, and parents (Clark, 2001). The approach has been used in a range of studies in different countries, including primary schools (Clark, 2005). In addition, INVOLVE (Hickey et al., 2018) have published guidance on co-production which lists five principles:

- 1) sharing power
- 2) including all perspectives and skills
- 3) respecting and valuing knowledge of all when working together
- 4) reciprocity
- 5) building and maintaining relationships.

We have applied these five principles in our research, which we adapted for research with children as suggested by Liabo and Roberts (2019). For example, we have made efforts to understand children's priorities for health and wellbeing and have built outcomes measures around these (*power sharing*; Mosaic approach). We have *involved all perspectives and skills* by including children, parents, teachers, and artists in the research, using various methods to capture their views and experiences. Focus groups with children before and after dance activities have focused on how we can make the research important to them, to enable conversations about the focus of the research. In these conversations we have *respected and valued their knowledge*. We will provide feedback to children and families about the research using newsletters, including contributions from artists (*reciprocity*) and have invested time to *build and maintain relationships* with children and parents by attending their dance activities and performances.

2.2 Ethics and recruitment

Ethical clearance was obtained via University of Teesside Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

Schools were first contacted by the researchers, with an approach email, an information sheet and a setting consent form. Head teachers were asked to sign a setting consent form allowing the research to be conducted at their school.

All participants were invited by email to take part in focus groups and semi-structured interviews, with one or more members of the research team. Participants received an information sheet and gave written consent before interviews and focus groups were conducted. Children's consent was obtained via letters to the parents sent home by both schools. Children whose parents have given informed consent were asked for assent on the date of the data collection. Parents' consent was obtained through digital requests using the schools' online Parent Mail system, and by attending two parent meetings organised at each school after the children attended the Pinocchio performance in April 2022. We also provided an information sheet and asked consent of participating teachers and artists (Appendices xx).

2.3 Work package 1. Development and implementation of the STAR project

Focus groups and interviews were used, combined with innovative engagement measures, to gather views of children, parents, teachers, and the dance artists who delivered the dance programme to explore their views and experiences of the delivery, engagement, uptake, challenges, and sustainability of the dance programme.

Most focus groups and interviews took place in person at the two primary schools, but some interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The topic guides and engagement activities were designed by all members of the research team to provide some overall consistency to focus groups and interviews, while allowing for flexibility in relation to themes that emerged as important to participants during the fieldwork process. We outline the methods for each stakeholder group separately below.

2.3.1 Innovative engagement activities with children

Focus groups were conducted in each primary school with children from year groups 1 and 5, with approximately six pupils in each year group between March and July 2022. Children were sampled by the teachers from each Year group to reflect a range of experiences from the STAR project.

Two members of the research team (PW and PNL) visited both schools to conduct the focus groups with children, incorporated where possible creative methods, such as movement activities, graffiti walls, songs, and VoxPops, to explore pupils' expectations, experience and access to arts, included their reflections on the implementation of the dance programme at their school.

For example, children were asked to run to a corner in the class room with a photo that best represented their answer to the question asked by the researchers. Graffiti walls consisted of flipcharts on a table that children could stick post-it notes on with their answers to questions highlighted on the flipchart. VoxPops (from Vox populi, a Latin phrase that literally means "voice of the people") applied a journalism technique by giving children a microphone to do mini-interviews, with children passing the microphone to each other to record their responses to questions about the STAR project asked by the researchers. One of the researchers also wrote a song, asking children to join in with hand and body signals to respond to questions about the project. We developed and piloted these engagements methods to engage the children in the research in a fun and interactive way to elicit multiple responses to our focus group question.

All piloted methods were well received by the children; the VoxPops in particular proved popular with children in both Year groups being excited to hold the microphone and share their experiences. In total, nineteen (19) children took part in four focus groups, two in each school for the different year groups (Year 1 and 5) All focus group and engagement activities were voice-recorded and photos were taken of the Graffiti walls and movement activities for data analysis (see below).

Table 1. Sample of children participating in focus groups and engagement activities (n=19)

School	Year	Children
Thorntree	1	6
Thorntree	5	3
Grangetown	1	7
Grangetown	5	3

In addition, the researchers observe two of the weekly dance sessions in each Year group for each school and took structured fieldnotes.

2.3.2 Focus group with parents

Three parents took part in a focus group at Grangetown Primary School in June 2022 to share and reflect on their experiences of the STAR project. Two parents had a Year 5 child participating in the project and one parent had both a Year 1 and Year 5 child taking part. Unfortunately, no parents showed up at a second focus group for Year 1 parents organised at the school in July 2022. We were also not able to schedule any focus groups with parents at Thorntree Primary School, which means that we have limited insights into parents' experiences, which we reflect upon in Chapter 8.

2.3.3 Interviews with teachers

Nine teachers from both schools participated in initial face-to-face focus group discussion that were conducted in December 2021 (at Grangetown Primary School with two teachers from Year 1 and two teachers from Year 5) and in February 2022 (at Thorntree Primary School with three teachers from Year 1 and two teachers from Year 5) by three members of the research team (PW, PNL, LA). Focus groups with teachers investigated acceptability, adoption, and appropriateness of the dance programme.

A follow-up discussion was conducted by LA through an interview with two Year 5 teachers, one from Grangetown and one from Thorntree, after completion of the STAR project (July and October 2022 respectively) to reflect on observed outcomes for children. These follow-up interviews were conducted online, using MS Teams.

2.3.4 Interviews with artists

The two dance artists from TIN Arts delivering the dance programme in both primary schools were interviewed twice by CE at the start and end of the STAR project (in November 2021 and July 2022), with each interview lasting around forty-five minutes. The interviews with dance artists focused on their views and experiences of the delivery, engagement, uptake, challenges and sustainability of the dance programme. The follow-up interviews focused on outcomes and future development.

2.3.5 Interviews with project leads

To capture the reflections of the three project leads, the Executive Director of TIN Arts, the Programme Lead for North East and North Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network, and the Director of Learning at Northern Ballet were interviewed between August and September 2022. The interviews reflected on the planning and delivery stages of STAR and the impact of the project on the targeted audience.

2.4 Data analysis

Focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded using audio devices or via Teams and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative data from focus groups and the interviews were analysed using an inductive approach to thematic data analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006) in NVivo 12. Following familiarisation with the data, line-by-line codes for each transcript were created along with extensive analytical memos. Coding continued until a sense of no new codes could be identified from the transcripts. Codes were then mapped and developed into main themes which were named and defined. Initially, research team members developed themes and drafted the data themes for each stakeholder group separately. Final themes were discussed and interpreted by the research team in conjunction with their own fieldnotes, and illustrative extracts were discussed and selected for each theme. Themes are presented coherently alongside the quotes which illustrate each theme.

In addition, detailed notes were analysed from both the observations and focus groups to add to the description and interpretation of identified themes. Some of the data in response to different outcomes mentioned by the children were inputted in MS Excel to analyse differences between schools and year groups (see Figure 2), while word cloud software (Word Art) was used to summarise children's one-word responses to the STAR project (Figure 1).

2.5 Work package 2. Developing health and wellbeing measurements

We used insights from the focus groups and interviews with children, parents, teachers, and dance artists to consider how well existing tools for measuring children's mental health and wellbeing captures their experiences. For example, we reviewed the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI), which is a validated self-reported questionnaire (Schonert-Reichl et al. 2012, Gregory et al. 2018). The questionnaire assesses children's (Year 5) social and emotional function in the areas of optimism, empathy, prosocial behaviour, self-esteem, happiness, self-regulation and psychological well-being.

We also look at the Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ), which has been developed by researchers at the University of British Columbia (The Human Early Learning Partnership 2020). The questionnaire focuses on experiences in areas of child development that are linked to children's health, social and emotional well-being, language and cognition and community and context.

Based on their feedback, we concluded that these existing questionnaires did not provide a good fit with outcomes suggested by children, parents, teachers and dance artists. We initially piloted a heavily redacted version of the CHEQ questionnaire, which proved to be challenging for children in Year 5 to complete. Feedback from teachers suggested that children struggled to understand and complete the questions. Instead, we developed new questionnaire, incorporating the most important outcomes suggested by children, teachers, and artists (see Appendix 5).

2.6 Work package 3. Testing the adapted survey tools to measure child wellbeing

We used this new questionnaire to explore the effects, if any, of the school-based dance programme on child wellbeing by testing the survey with Year 5 children in one of the schools (Grangetown, n=42). Given previous challenges with using questionnaires with Year 1 children (limited literacy at this age), we decided not to test the questionnaire with these children. The survey findings provide an initial indication of outcomes, complemented with the rich data from the interviews and focus groups to provide a clear initial assessment of impact and personal narratives of change. Data from our health and wellbeing questionnaire was inputted and analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests to explore children's perceptions about their health and wellbeing and their behaviour related to STAR outcomes, including their intention to visit and take part in future dance performances (see Chapter 6).

We compared the initial findings from testing the survey with outcome data that was collected by one the project partners, Children North East, as part of the STAR project using the Family Plus Outcome Star. This tool measures children Journey of Change on eight areas of life (Physical health, Where you live, Being safe, Relationships, Feelings and behaviour, Friends, Confidence and self-esteem, Education and Learning) with a five-step scale (see Chapter 7).

In the following chapter we highlight the findings from the interviews with artists (Chapter 3), teachers (Chapter 4), children and their parents (Chapter 5), and project coordinators (Chapter 8).

3. Dance artists' experiences

3.1 Introduction

As noted above, the dance programme took place in two schools and was delivered by two-three dance artists employed by TIN Arts who were interviewed by CE in November 2021 and again at the end of the dance programme in July 2022. In total, four interviews took place online. The main themes identified cohered around:

1. the description of the dance programme
2. its active ingredients and mechanisms
3. delivery, engagement, and uptake
4. potential outcomes
5. challenges to delivery; and sustainability of the dance programme.

In what follows, major themes are presented with minority views to show some variability in views and experiences; each theme is discussed together with illustrative extracts.

3.1 Description of dance programme

The programme ran for a full school year and each dance session lasted 30 minutes (with Year 1) or 45 minutes (with Year 5) and took place once per week during term time. The sessions were structured as follows:

'We always start off with a general hello, how are you and finding out you know how the children are and then [dance artist] leads through a warm up, and just to kind of get their brains and their bodies awake. And then we generally break the session down into three sections, where we have three tasks and the tasks are generally linked to the same theme. But each task leads on to the next one, so we had like a production task and then the main task and then a development of the task' [ID02]

Content overlapped with the school curriculum, with dance activities drawing on the content of children's lessons e.g. maths, cookery recipes, or the solar system, through the numbering and naming different parts of the body, for example:

'We'll say when we're searching around for a [...] we're doing a game and you say OK, we need three keywords, what have you just been working on in maths?' [Follow-up interview, ID04]

Overall narrative structure of the dance programme was informed by a text, in this case, Pinocchio. The dance programme also incorporated an arts award as it was multi-modal and consisted of music, literature and poetry, drawing, photography, sculpture.

‘We used a poem the other day about bravery and we each picked out keywords like five keywords and we make a movement for each of these keywords and the children come up with the movements and then we select them. So it's really we try and make it really collaborative’ [Follow-up interview, ID04]

Whilst a specific theoretical approach was not specified by the dance artists, one participant mentioned that their focus was on creative and physical exercises around body and brain integration, drawing on elements of ballet and contemporary dance, and informed by approaches such as *Brain Dance* by Ann Green Gilbert.

3.2 Active ingredients of dance programme

Participants described multiple ingredients as important to the success of the dance programme. The importance of *planning and preparing* for the dance artists prior to and throughout each session was highlighted, so that activities could be adapted to each child’s abilities and needs (*‘it's being focussed, being clear, and one little step at a time’* [ID04]). Providing an *environment* which was regarded by the children as *safe* for expression and exploration through dance and movement was vital to *building trust and ownership*.

‘I think engaging the children in the project as much as possible is really important, just so it gives them ownership of it. Yeah, and like I say, then they just feel safe they feel you know they've got they've got your trust, or you've got their trust, as it were. So yeah, a nice safe kind of environment and keeping them in get keeping them kind of up to date with everything that's going on which leads that’ [Follow-up interview, ID04]

Values and principles underpinning the design of activities throughout the programme included a focus on developing *creativity* which in the context of dance was understood as the transformation of ideas into body movements, self-expression and collaboration with peers.

‘We play games so we do things like lucky dip with some pieces, numbers and body parts and different games where we sort of introduce the theme and then it turns into a game.

And we're always working on the same core things, really. It's so it's about this, sort of the cohesion of the group, the teamwork, the turn-taking, the observation skills. Uh, so we play games' [ID04]

There was also a *focus on play and enjoyment*, and *games* for social skills. The *theatre performance* at the end of the programme was a way to share what had been learnt throughout the year, and so was a key ingredient of the dance programme too. The participants sought to *increase the children's awareness and understanding of the theatre* by teaching the children about theatrical lighting and showing them pictures of the theatre so they were prepared and confident.

A *relatable narrative structure*, in this case Pinocchio, was required for consistency in core elements across the programme, such as rhythm and movement. At the same time, participants described that providing the *'freedom for the children to use their own imagination'* to contribute their own ideas was particularly central to the success of the dance programme. The importance of the activities being *child-led* was highlighted, where each child's *agency* was recognised through encouraging them to use their creativity in physical skills rather than just been told how to move (*'we want to give them layers to hook onto'*). *Offering a broad range of activities* therefore was important so that children could make their own choices about how they would like to engage.

Participants noted how the *interpersonal qualities* of the dance artists (e.g., smiley and energetic) were important in terms of *building connections* with the children to encourage their engagement. *Easy to follow instructions* (e.g., simple vocabularies and easy metaphors) was also mentioned as a key ingredient in terms of communicating effectively with the children. The *choice of music* played a key role in terms of creating energy to get a session going.

'We have music, you know, and connecting that to emotions about how does this piece of music make you feel so it's kind of connecting back to themselves. Like how do you feel now, you know. And we're trying to give them more vocab about feelings and emotions overtime' [Follow-up interview, ID04]

The *size of the space* in which the dance sessions took place was important in terms of being large enough to move around freely. *Time restrictions* meant that weekly dance sessions were limited to thirty and forty-five minutes, which was also mentioned as a potential challenge.

'It can feel overwhelming and we have to kind of always, we try and pair it back and go OK all those things are really important, but it we've got half an hour. That's always our

struggle because there's so much and especially you know, in primary schools there's so much to learn' [ID04]

Adaptability of the dance programme to *children's interests and needs* was an important ingredient.

'We do adapt things for each class. So for example, one class, we might need to move like physically in the space, more or less on the spot, so the game that we might have planned where we were going to do it as a whole group standing on the spot, we would change it into walking around this space' [ID04]

Though this depended on the availability and capacities of school staff to assist the dance artists at a time of increased pressure for schools.

'A big part of it was you could just see how much pressure the teams were under all the time. And it was quite difficult to ask sometimes. So I thought I could have, if that's about a child being able to access the sessions better than it's pretty important' [Follow-up interview, ID03]

'We're starting to work with the teachers as well to try and understand some of the children. Whether it's, you know, they have some diagnosis, behavioural or home life, so we're starting to work with the teachers to understand that. And if they've got methods that they put in place with that child, whether there's any trigger points' [ID03]

An element crucial to the success of the programme was a *supportive and encouraging school partnerships*, and the presence and engagement of the teachers in the dance sessions.

'The only thing slightly diverting is when the main teacher isn't in the session, even though children that would normally engage, didn't engage ... so the classes, where the teacher was very much in the mix, those seemed the classes that the children benefited more from. And I noticed, you know we know teachers are very busy. But when they kind of get in the mix that really does help' [Follow-up interview, ID04]

That two dance artists working together to deliver sessions meant that they were able to support each other, however they indicated that the *involvement of the teachers* was important not only for ensuring safety, but also for modelling enthusiasm for the dance programme, and thus promoting the engagement of the children.

‘We always, always, always found there were some teachers that we saw much more and then we were like really regular. And they were just there every week with their class and with the most successful, always this most successful class is. Cause I think there's just something in there about the children feeling the commitment of the teacher and completely present and involved’ [Follow-up interview, ID03]

Dance artists required *clear lines of communication* with teachers to know in advance whether there were 'triggers' that upset individual children, however reported that this was often not possible due to limited time.

3.3 Mechanisms of dance programme

Participants described how the dance programme enabled the children to *develop leadership skills* through *discovery*, being *brave* and taking *responsibility*, showing *vulnerability* and taking *risks*, *communicating*, *listening* and *responding* to ideas, as well as learning *creative skills* through *bodily movements*, *exploration*, *experimentation* & *freedom*. As noted above, the dance artists encouraged creative freedom and ownership of movements based on games or facilitated tasks as set-out by the dance artists.

‘Each group and each class had a full dance which was really lovely and it was their creative ideas that they'd, you know, movement they created from tasks we've given them, so there was a real ownership that this dance is theirs and very much so from the beginning’ [Follow-up interview, ID04]

‘We always want the children to feel like they are contributors, you know, and that it's their session and that everything that they say is an interesting and important. We get some brilliant things offered up to us when we ask, which obviously, then reveals their understanding about things and then we turn those things into some dance movements. So we might say, you know, uhm, we used a poem the other day

about bravery and we each picked out keywords like five keywords and we make a movement for each of these keywords and the children come up with the movements and then we select them' [ID04]

The theatre performance was not only an opportunity to *share* creative ideas, but also increased the children's *access* to arts and cultural venues.

3.4 Expected outcomes

Artists were aware of expected outcomes from the STAR project:

'That's when we've done our job a little bit because they're understanding how they can be creative and they're confident to give us their ideas and share their ideas in front of the others' [ID02]

'Key skills that we were trying to look at like team building and working with different partners, so not just someone you would normally work with but working with someone new, that confidence to be able to do that and taking it in turns listening following instructions ... the other side of it was the understanding of dance movement, how their bodies move being aware of how their bodies moved' [Follow-up interview, ID04]

A number of potential outcomes for children from engaging in the dance programme were indicated by participants, which included:

- *basic dance skills* (balance, core stability, learning how to warm and cool down the body)
- *increased cognitive skills* (memory, responsiveness, planning, co-ordination, increased fine and gross motor skills, and spatial skills)
- *increased dance vocabulary and creative skills* (storytelling and narrative creation through movement)
- *increased social skills* (communication, collaboration and team building skills such as listening, observing and following instructions, working in pairs and groups, sharing and taking turns)
- *increased access to arts and cultural venues*
- *increased general confidence*

- *educational outcomes* - connecting dance to curriculum, and the curriculum to dance, through the body. Fun and excitement through the body as a way to remember school curriculum better, improved educational outcomes.

3.5 Challenges to delivery of dance programme

Several challenges to delivering the dance programme were identified by participants. These challenges primarily affected the degree of engagement from children, which determined the success of the programme for the dance artists. *Communication* was commonly reported as the main challenge. This related to the dynamics between *dance artists and children, between children and school staff, between dance artists and school staff, and between the dance artists, school and caregivers*. Communication or '*dialogue*' between dance artists and teachers was essential for the dance artists to understand the needs of each child so the activities in the dance sessions were accessible. To gauge progress, participants were keen for ongoing feedback from teachers about how they thought the dance programme was going, and what could be done to improve it.

'So then to hear back and the feedback off the teachers later is really helpful. And then certain things that we can develop on is really important' [ID02]

'We're very curious about what the teachers are thinking at the moment and what their hopes are. But yeah, how they think it's going. And again, you know trying to get that honesty, trust, you know' [ID01]

Participants talked about how the children's, teachers' and caregivers' understandings and perceptions of dance, and their expectations of dance programme and theatre performance, could also be challenging. They reported that compared to the older children, the younger children seemed to have fewer fixed expectations about what dance should be about, which meant they were often more willing to engage.

'Of course the children at that age, especially the youngest ones, the expectations are well, you know, they're much more, they're not formed, it's just they're open. And whereas the older children have more expectations. Like about what dance is, you know what, what it should be' [Follow-up interview, ID03]

Class size affected the delivery of the programme. Difficulties were reported in connecting individually to each child due to class size (20+), with noise levels making it difficult to communicate with the children in larger class sizes.

‘It was about kind of trying to connect to the children and to see them, to be able to see them individually a bit and that's hard when you've got, you know, twenty children in a space and you're moving. So you're trying to kind of manage the space and managing level noise levels and all the needs’
[Follow-up interview, ID03]

A participant highlighted how large class sizes may have had a potentially inhibiting effect as it meant all the children were watching each other. Some disruptive behaviours, such as the children making fun of each other, particularly at the beginning of programme, were reported. Class mood was also reported as affecting the degree to which the children engaged (e.g. if just been told off by a teacher). The day of week on which the dance session took place also affected engagement, with Monday mornings and Friday afternoons reported by participants as the most difficult in terms of engaging the children.

Larger class sizes also made it difficult for the dance artists to gauge progress as they were not familiar enough with every child (n~170 per week) and it was hard to remember each individual child week after week.

‘So for us then, like week on week for that half an hour to connect with each child and remember what they were like last week, as well as remembering what you're teaching, and focusing on the development of that week, it's very hard but we just kind of gauge of how they are there and then and there unfortunately’ [ID02]

Also, varying physical fitness levels across class meant that certain dance-related activities could be too strenuous for some children. Some children wore inappropriate clothing/footwear or did not have PE kits which affected delivery. School safety measures meant that children could not dance barefoot, which was important in the dance sessions for balance. Given the limited time available, there was also the added element of the school staff having to arrange for the children to switch their shoes before and after each session.

During follow-up interview, a participant alluded to gender differences between the children during the dance sessions and how such differences were apparent in their

patterns of movement. For example, they observed how many boys moved only in response to the music, whereas many girls twirled. They talked about addressing gendered perceptions of dance through the use of gender-neutral figures. For example, rather than focussing on the fairy (considered feminine) from Pinocchio, the dance artists focussed on the water, so it was broadly relatable to encourage engagement from everyone.

COVID-19 restrictions had affected the extent to which the children could physically interact with their classmates in dance sessions, though was no longer relevant when restrictions were lifted. Compared with dance sessions delivered pre-COVID, participants observed a noticeable difference in rates of school absences for children, though it was unclear whether this was attributable to COVID.

A few children expressed anxiety towards the theatre performance, with some refusing to attend to school if they had to perform.

‘Right up to the end, you know, with the performance and we got a really anxious teacher saying so and so is really, really anxious. She doesn't want to come to school. She doesn't want to do it. And you know we said we know, we kind of said previously actually absolutely doesn't have to’ [Follow-up interview, ID03]

Participants mentioned how such anxiety was understandable and might have been reduced if the children had been provided with a greater degree of knowledge and experience of the theatre and performance in advance so that they were better prepared. They described how some caregivers had expressed negative views following the theatre performance, which might have been reduced if the caregivers had been adequately informed about the dance programme and the purpose of the performance.

3.6 Sustainability

Participants felt dance should be a part of the *school curriculum* in the same way other forms of art were included.

‘I mean that was massive for it to be in the school day, you know, week in, week out. So I just think you know, it should be just as any kind of art should be, you know, because it's a physical art’ [Follow-up interview, ID03]

They also mentioned how dance can be a tool for some children to learn other subjects in the curriculum through the dance, in a way that will *'stay with you for the rest of your life'*.

As dance artists, they were willing to provide teachers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to continue with the dance programme, should they wish to. They reported how they would like to see the dance programme continuing, particularly for those children who were well-engaged in the programme. However, they described how at the time of interviews there were no local dance studios to which the children who showed dance promise could be referred for further development.

‘And that was that always feels a bit frustrating for me because you see them in there and they’re getting it in school, but where can it go for them? Because that could be their thing you know, in life, and you can see it and you just, it’s frustrating, you just feel like they’ve got nowhere to take that because it is about money and it is about travel and access’ [Follow-up interview, ID03]

3.7 Methods for future research evaluation

Participants talked about difficulties in measuring the success of the dance programme and referred to witnessing the joy and happiness of children. In the absence of feasible and acceptable measures, they described how they assessed which dance activities were most acceptable to the children via the extent to which children asked for those activities to be repeated. They also regarded children’s level of engagement and enthusiasm throughout the sessions as an indication of success.

A particular measure of success for the dance artists was engaging those children who engage little in dance and other classes. A positive indicator of engagement was regarded by participants as a movement or verbal interaction, particularly if a child had not previously spoke. Here participants identified teachers as playing a crucial role in a programme evaluation, as they are more familiar with each child and would see the individual impact, if any, of the dance sessions.

Participants indicated that potential methods might take the form of visual and observational methods for ‘*seeing the children in action*’ at multiple points over the duration of the dance programme. Research methods therefore might include ethnography, visual analysis of physical movements using photography and filming, as well as asking children and teachers directly what they think, and making use of dance artists’ weekly written reflections. Participants advised that if professional researchers were to observe the sessions, then they should introduce themselves to the children prior to attending a session (e.g. by video message), and preferably participate in activities while in attendance to preserve the children’s sense of ‘ownership’, trust, safety and security. In terms of evaluation, measuring pre- and post-scores for balance, vocabulary and confidence was also suggested.

3.8 Summary

Communication between dance artists, schools, children and their caregivers was important so that what is happening, when, and why, particularly in relation to the final performance, can be conveyed to all. Effective communication to build relationships between dance artists and schools emerged as a major factor for a successful dance programme. Potential outcomes of the dance programme indicated by the participants were creative, social, cognitive and physical skills, which warrant further exploration in future study development. In terms of research methods, participants suggested that visual methods and making use of the dance artists' reflection may be most feasible in future evaluation studies, however the ethics of anonymity and confidentiality require further consideration. Notwithstanding the growing pressures on schools, in future dance artists would benefit from working closely with class teachers each week to adapt sessions and monitor progress for each child.

4 Teachers

4.1 Introduction

Nine teachers from both schools participated in initial face-to-face focus group discussion and two teachers took part in a follow-up interview after completion of the STAR project. The headings and subheadings below illustrate the themes and sub-themes from analysis their data, with quotes provided to illustrate each theme.

The focus groups with teachers occurred at the beginning of the project, before attendance of the theatre performance and children's own performance. Findings from the teachers' focus groups were focused on the following themes:

- a) Engagement
- b) Outcomes
- c) Impact of COVID-19
- d) Challenges
- e) Improvements and sustainability

4.2 Engagement

The teachers from Grangetown and Thorntree primary schools believed that the STAR project was widely *enjoyed and loved* by their pupils:

'Yes, they love it. They're devastated if it's not on. They're like, every Monday they come in, 'Are we dancing today, are we dancing today, what time are we going to dance?'. So, they love it and it is really good for them, it is.' [ID02]

Teachers reported that children were keen to *engage with energy* and were always looking forward to STAR project activities on Monday morning and Friday afternoons, which according to them, are usually the most difficult times to engage children. The challenging delivery days of the project were also highlighted by the artist in the previous chapter. They also highlighted how engagement and confidence were built throughout the programme, which was essential to making children more confident about their final performance:

'I thought it was really good for building the children's confidence just in general. I thought the dance artists were fantastic in their delivery, getting their point across.' [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

'I thought it was really nice how at the very beginning they didn't say "oh you're going to be on stage", like they didn't totally blow their minds at the start. They just drip fed it all throughout. I thought that was really well done because it would have probably been a bit overwhelming if they knew that's what the end goal was from the start.' [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

4.2.1 Differences in experiences between boys and girls

Teachers from Year 5 highlighting different responses to the dance activities for boys and girls, with some boys really "throwing" themselves into dance while some girls, who had more experience in dance were, feeling more nervous.

'I have a boy in my class, he's got a quirky personality, he's, you know, very unique, but he's sort of reserved and keeps to himself. He has to be quite confident to let his personality shine. But he threw everything into the dance, he was the one that came out with the energy, really challenged himself with the balances, and that was great.' [...] but my quieter girls were just very nervous I think, more about the performance. They didn't mind it in the group of just our hall in front of our classmates but that's sort of then next level on stage. They were very nervous about that.' [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

Teachers noticed a *stigma around dance activities*, particularly for boys:

'Initially, when we introduced that we were going to be working with dance, the boys do, do the, argh, kind of we don't want to do ballet, we don't want to do dance. And they don't automatically see it as a way of getting your feelings and your emotions out and a way of communicating. They don't see it like that. They see it as someone who wears a dress.' [ID03]

However, a Year 5 teacher was surprised about how much the *boys enjoyed the project* once it started considering their initial prejudices about the dance project:

‘They’re actually enjoying it and it’s a thing that historically boys find quite difficult, when you’re asked to do any kind of movement or dance. But I would say to a child, they really, really enjoy it. They look forward to it and they embrace everything that they do, and the girls ask them to do within the session they’re doing.’ [ID04]

However, the perception of the Year 1 teacher was different as the teacher noted that the gender stigma was not present at a younger age.

‘In year one I think it was pretty similar. I don’t think the boys felt, there wasn’t any sign of them feeling anymore anxious about it than the girls or feeling self-conscious about it. I think that age group, that kind of concept isn’t really there, and so it was fine. Yes, there wasn’t much difference at all.’ [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

Although boys and girls engaged differently in Year 5 with the dance activities, teachers were adamant that *mixed gender groups were important* to overcome these differences:

‘I think it’s been great as a group. I think if it was separated the boys would have had a very different experience. I think the girls have brought them out of their shell a little bit and I think if it’s separated, I think it would probably be a very different dynamic and it’s been great to have them mixed together.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

4.2.2 Differences in experiences between Year 1 and 5

Like the dance artists, teachers across year group reflected on their *differences in involvement*, with Year 1 children being less conscious about the dance activities and getting more easily involved (“They’ll give everything a go”), while Year 5 children were more conscious about their involvement, which resulted in some boys experiencing stigma, as outlines above, but also in more expressive outputs, once engaged. However, Year 1 children who engaged more readily, also struggled more with the execution of the dance movements and their teachers had to step in more frequently to model movements for the children:

‘I talked to X (Year 1 teacher) when we were at the theatre and I know he said that consciousness isn’t there, they’ll give everything a go, they’re still very young.’ [...] ‘Whereas I know

in year one the teachers were very much involved, doing it with the children, modelling it with them.’ *[Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]*

(Year 1 teacher) Yes, I was very involved. I just felt like, if I got involved then there definitely will be less sort of kids thinking that they can opt out. [...] Just to make sure the boys keep ticking over and make sure they don’t feel uncomfortable. If they saw me getting involved then it would be, like they’d feel comfortable to just do it.’ *[Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]*

As a result, Year 1 teachers took more often part in the dance sessions than the Year 5 teachers, which was noticed and reflected upon by the dance artists.

4.2.3 Engagement in theatre performances

As part of STAR, children first attended a theatre performance of Pinocchio and, at the end of the project, performed on stage themselves in the theatre. Teachers indicated that the children particularly enjoyed the Pinocchio performance. For many children this was their *first exposure to theatre* and there some children did not “grasp” the idea that they were attending a dance performance.

‘I think it was great because a lot of them didn’t even understand until we got there, some of them were saying they were going to the cinema, some thought they were going to a pantomime. And we were like, no, we’re going to the theatre, it’s a dance... they just couldn’t grasp it... X and Y was explaining, there’s no talking, it’s just dance.’ *[Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]*

‘I remember, when they were in the lead up to it, I had to explain to them quite a few times: “it’s not going to be something that you’ve experienced before but it is a little bit like going to the cinema. You sit in a seat and you’re watching something that’s going to happen in front of you but it’s not a screen, it’s a stage. It all happens and there’s real people there”’. *[Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]*

A Year 1 teacher explained that some children were surprised that there was no dialogue, but this has not limited their enjoyment and helped them to focus and was a built-up from what they have learned in the dance classes:

‘I think it actually helps to concentrate them. I think it meant that they didn’t need to take their eyes off what was going on to know what’s, like if there was dialogue then they could just look away and still hear what’s going on.’ [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

‘Through the sessions, the dance artists had actually done some of the dances that they saw; it meant that they were saying to them in the sessions: “look out for the water sprite for what she does here because this is what it means and things like that”. So, I think that would have helped keep their concentration because they would have been looking out for these little things that they knew they did in the sessions.’ [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

The exposure to theatre also extended to the wider family with siblings of Year 1 and 5 children being invited to watch the performance. The teachers noted that particularly the younger children, loved the performance:

‘I had a reception little boy come with me. He was so excited that for the first fifteen minutes he was like hysterically laughing at Pinocchio, thought it was amazing. And even now... every time he sees me he’s like, Miss [anonymised], can you remember when we went to see Pinocchio.’ [ID10]

Teachers commented on the *importance of family involvement* in the theatre performances. Many families could not afford to take their children to the theatre, and teachers noted how STAR enabled families to get engaged, experience performances together and talk about these experiences at home.

Even children who did not enjoy it got something out of it, such as a *discussion about art and culture*, and the appreciation of the artists' hard work in delivering the performance.

'Even some of the boys were like, oh there wasn't any talking, it was a little bit boring. And it was like, yes, but you've had this experience now and you've watched a display of creativity and artistry and you've gone, okay, that's not my cup of tea. [...] And I think that conversation that we normally wouldn't have, have come about, about respecting other people's work, what they dedicate their life to.' *[Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]*

According to the teachers, children were more nervous about their own performances at the end of the project:

'They were extremely nervous. It was a bit of a challenge.'
[Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

This was also noted by the dance artists in the previous chapter. However, teachers also highlighted the value of children overcoming their anxiety.

'One of mine... he's very sort of maths, science, analytical brain. Like he hates arts, won't touch it, like really gets annoyed when we have to do art on a Friday... And he was really upset about doing the dance, he really didn't want to do it...But he actually was really great in the dancing lessons and he got picked to be one of the sort of...'
[Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

'There was a little bit of hesitation at times on the stage from a couple of them, but they just got on with it in the end and it was fine. They came off the stage just beaming, it was great.'
[Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

In overcoming their anxiety, the children and their families were able to recognise their achievements. Not only were the theatre performances rewarding for families to get involved in, the performances by the children also provided parents with a rare opportunity to celebrate their children's achievements.

'From what I heard, yes, they absolutely loved it. I think it was quite a proud moment for a lot of them, just watching their child on a professional stage. I didn't speak to that many parents but the ones I did speak to were over the moon.'
[Follow-up interview, *Thorntree*, Year 1, ID11]

'...if their kids aren't great at Maths and English, again they're not getting that celebration for their parents, that moment of being, you know, you were amazing and we're just really proud of you. [...] Our big moments aren't always fun ones, it's a test at the end of half term or it's, you know, like something negative is a big judgement moment. But that was like a real fun celebration sort of and to have that with the parents was really great. You could see how proud they were and how excited they were to go into an environment that they haven't been in and watch their children do something really different, that was lovely.'
[Follow-up interview, *Grangetown*, Year 5, ID10]

4.3 Outcomes

Teachers from both schools noticed that the STAR project went beyond enjoyment and appreciation and reported notable improvements in *language/ literacy skills, confidence, physical skills, and a reduction in behavioural incidents*.

'It's also bringing on their literacy skills as well, isn't it? Because a lot of the sessions that I've been to have been telling a story, they're acting out the story.'
[ID03]

Additionally, they observed an improvement in the *pupil's vocabulary*. Teachers from both schools across year groups observed the impact of the STAR project on children's *essential life skills, listening and social skills*:

‘The listening skills are definitely improving ... their social skills as well because they do partner work quite a lot and that is what they struggled with before.’ [ID03]

These skills contributed to *children’s confidence*, illustrated by children’s ability to express themselves more clearly in the classroom:

‘We can say that they’re more engaged and we can say that they seem to be more expressive in classroom when they’re doing role playing activities. They’re able to describe like the way they move, people move. They’re able to describe expressions better.’ [ID02]

The dance artists helped the children’s confidence by *praising their contribution, making them work as a team and supporting each child’s strengths and weaknesses*:

‘X and Y (the dance artists) were really good at that, about making everyone feel like their contribution was good. They never felt like they weren’t good at it. It was always that, you know, they made sure they covered everything. So some of my boys are very boisterous, they were like diving around, and they made sure they did bits on that. Whereas some of the quieter ones were more for like balancing and doing a bit of a gentle movement.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

There were examples also of children who shined and demonstrated confidence that they usually did not show:

‘It was really good for the ones in my class that had low confidence. There was one particular child, who was not very confident in settings where there was a lot of people, and at the Halloween disco, she got like really scared and had to run out because she just couldn’t cope with the amount of people. Getting involved with the Star Project, you could see the change in her over time. I was expecting a meltdown and she didn’t. She went “oh right”. It was totally the opposite: There were no tears, no anxiousness, no last minute sort of backing out or feeling like she might; she was just brilliant. I think the whole experience, the way that it built up to it

helped with that for her. Yes, she's really came out of her shell.' [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

The STAR project was also perceived to have influenced *the reduction in behavioural incidents*, as evidenced by school records, supporting the children to channel their energy in more positive activities:

'We're looking at hard data, if that's the sort of information, we record all behavioural incidents. Yes, so the numbers of incidences have reduced.' [ID04]

'So now one of my boys, who can have behaviour issues sometimes and very dis-attached from school, he was coming in, he came in and he drew me, I'll show you, I've got it in my bag. He went home and spent like an hour sketching.' [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

The STAR project also impacted on *pupil's physical activity*, according to their teachers:

'I think any physical activity helps with education, whether it is dance or yoga or just massage, which we do regularly in class as well. I think anything physical that gets these children moving and thinking outside the box, as it were, is going to have a benefit for them definitely.' [ID01]

Teachers noticed that some skills learned throughout the project could be easily transferred to the curriculum:

'We use it a lot in the planning process before we write, so that the story is more memorable for them. They can't write about something that they've never experienced in some way. And so, that experience I think sort of helped them when they were getting ready to write a story. I think it helped in the long run being able to just write more from what they remember of a story in their head.' [...] I think it helped in their literacy to sort of hold the sequence of a story in their head because that's what they were doing in the sessions. [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

The theatre experience has also been linked to skills allied to the school curriculum:

‘It was actually really good for what’s called their inference skills, it’s something that we teach in reading lessons. You search for clues in either the text or in the pictures that you see in a book to work out what’s going on. And of course, that’s what ballet is; it’s all through body expression to work out what’s going on. I thought it was a good way to sort of utilise that skill for them as observers.’ [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

4.4 Impact of COVID 19 on children health and wellbeing

One teacher clearly emphasised the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on children’s development:

‘I’m expecting these children to be year fives, I’m expecting them to be like ten year olds but really their last full year in school was year two. So they were, you know, seven year olds and then they’d missed these two years of socialising.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

This teacher also noticed *the impact on children’s confidence, behaviour in class, motor skills and overall physical health*:

‘Their confidence is extremely low, that sort of resilience isn’t really there, that interaction with other people’s taken a while’ [...] ‘So that sort of two years in Covid has sort of affected that weight and energy levels and definitely the motor skill, those fine motor skills are just not as strong as I’d like them to be.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

The STAR project could also help to *address mental health issues* that children increasingly experience due to the pandemic:

‘But now we have a lot of children that do have different mental health issues or emotional issues. And I think this sort of get out of the classroom, away, do something different, do

something creative, and that has really helped on that sense as well.' [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

4.5 Challenges

Teachers expressed concerns about *inadequate information* about the STAR project, particularly about the dance lessons:

'I mean from our point of view, we don't really know that much about the project. So, we don't know if they've been given these lessons that they're working through or if they're writing their own or if they're adapting them.' [ID01]

The need for more information was also recognised by the artists, as described in the previous chapter. However, the teachers highlighted their support and weekly participation in the dance project:

'We're involved every week; we go in with them and stay with them. As much as anything else it's behaviour management with our children because they're very good for us but with different grown-ups in school they can sometimes, the boundaries are very different'. [ID01]

There was a concern that the project's timescale in the built-up to the performance was too tight and could have been extended:

'The period between going to see Pinocchio and then getting ready for the performance, there was a bit of a challenge there because it was a slightly shorter timeframe. I remember thinking like, I really hope I'm getting this right, but we did it in the end and it was good.' [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

The teachers were initially worried about the pupils' *poor communication skills*, which limited their engagement with the STAR project, and this sometimes led to disruptive behaviour:

'We've noticed that these children have no, or very poor communication skills and they can't socialise. The social interactions are very limited, and they will isolate themselves, which was what was happening. If they become confused and

they didn't, they just shut down, so they couldn't communicate how they were feeling. So, they communicate through their behaviours, which is what we saw during the dance lessons if it did become too hard and challenging.'
[ID01]

Teachers believed that the project was initially pitched too high with pupils *struggling to understand the artists' instructions*:

'They struggle with concentration, and they struggled with instructions. So, we need to keep things very short and sharp and very quick. [ID03]

Teachers perceived the dance project as *too verbal instead of activity-focused*, which was not useful for the pupils as they had a minimal attention span. Because of their short attention span, children were impatient to try out movements and did not want to wait for the instructions from artists to be finished. The teachers identified a *need for simple instructions*, which was also highlighted by artists, to engage children in the dance activities.

Teachers also suggested that communication with parents was a struggle as parents were not checking the letters being sent by the school. A teacher suggested that this could be improved by *using the School's online platform* to provide regular information about the project, including pictures and videos:

'I remember some of the parents didn't know about the performance. I don't know how much of that was them just not paying attention to what letters they're getting home or if it was the school's fault, I don't know. I remember there was a couple of parents from my class who were like: "my daughter's telling me that she's going to the theatre to perform today, what's going on?" I was like: "oh okay, did you get the letter?"' [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

'I think maybe if we did that more regularly and put it on seesaw for the parents, about this is what your children are doing, by the time it got to the performance they'd have been more aware of what was going on, known how hard they've worked to get there.' [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

However, another teacher suggested that it might be better not to give all information to the parents at the beginning, especially about the performance at the end, as this might make the children anxious:

‘So I’m thinking, if you were going to have like some sort of meeting with the parents at the school, it could be two months beforehand. So that you’re still drip feeding it to the children, you’re not telling them straightaway, but then there’s definitely no excuses for the parents to say they don’t know anything about it. I think also it would calm their nerves as well because I think a lot of them might have been a bit nervous for the children. And it would just build excitement as well.’ [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

4.6 Changes in teachers’ perception of the STAR project

The follow-up interviews with teachers showed how some of the challenges were overcome during the development and implementation of the programme. For example, the involvement of a *male dance artist* was credited by teachers for changing boys’ perceptions about dance; by inviting a professional male dancer to speak with the children, boys *overcame the barrier of stigma*:

‘I think having the conversation from, I can’t remember his name, he came and he was a professional dancer and he spoke to the children about it, I think that was a real good turning point for them. I think maybe if that was a little bit sooner it would have been even better because I think it put it in a new light for a lot of them, you know. If they think of professional athletes as, you know, these footballers that they admire, and they don’t think of dance as a career, they think of it as a hobby or something that girls do or just what you do for fun.’ [Follow-up interview, ID10]

At the end of the project, the teachers praised the interaction and understanding of the artists who delivered the weekly session with the children and did not report issues in communication but instead noticed an improvement in the children's vocabulary. Teachers reflected on how their initial sense of disbelief in the project was changed by changes they witnessed in the children:

‘At the beginning I was like, the sort of dancing skills are really poor and they don’t seem to be going anywhere. But at the end I was like, I can’t believe how far they’ve come actually, they’ve really been amazing.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

Moreover, teachers noticed how engagement in the dance activities also *changed their own relationships with the children*, enabling them to engage differently with children in their class.

‘It sort of breaks that barrier a little bit and it does bring that collection to the teacher as well, it’s not just the children. Sometimes our relationship can be very, even though I don’t like it, it has to be, you know, you haven’t done that right, we’re doing maths. If you haven’t done it right, if you haven’t put the effort in you do it again. [...] Whereas this, to have a real positive, where it’s all about celebrating with children, I never felt like I had to be negative.’ It was never, you know, you aren’t very good at that or this is what you need to do better. It was just about, just give it a go and just see what it’s like. We had fun with it and we could laugh together. It just has a different dynamic to the teacher/student relationship, which I like and enjoy.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

4.7 Improvements and sustainability

Teachers were keen to continue with the STAR project and *integrate the dance activities in the school curriculum*. They made several suggestions for improving the project, such as longer dance sessions beyond the 30 minutes to one hour allocated for the STAR project weekly. They believed that the limited time on the STAR project negatively impacted the progress of the pupil’s activities:

‘I think it's quite hard with it only being half an hour a week, one session for half an hour a week, and the sessions are very different each week, so it's not progressing on a scale.’ [ID01]

Reflecting on the difference in experiences between year group, one teacher suggested targeting children from older age groups, Year 3 to Year 5, at the end of each key stage:

‘I think it was great for the older sort of year three and year five maybe. Year one’s are very, they’ll just get up and they’ll do what you want them to do. They’ll give everything a go,

they're not conscious yet. I think sort of that motor skill and exercise wise it's great for them but the more holistic development has really helped our sort of older children personally.' [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

However, the Year 1 teacher believed the STAR project could be delivered for all Year groups, including Year 1 but was not sure about providing to younger children in Nursery and Reception. The teacher suggested developing different story lines for different age groups. For example, a version linked to a Key Stage 2 story might be more suitable for older groups, depending on available resources and time within STAR:

'I suggested something about maybe using, you know, stories from key stage two books, for example, Kensuke's Kingdom or the Boy in the Striped Pyjamas. Whether or not that could be implemented with the Star Project I don't know, because obviously that would involve planning and making scripts or designing whole play performances around that, which is obviously a lot of work. But at the same time, if that could be done, I think that could join the older boys a lot more if that was an issue.' [Follow-up interview, Thorntree, Year 1, ID11]

At the same time, teachers were initially concerned that the STAR project was *taking away valuable teaching time from them*. One teacher reflected on her own journey in the STAR project, from being resistant at the beginning of the project and worried about how this would affect children's learning to *become fully supportive* by seeing what the project has offered to children and how it integrated people from all school community to celebrate children's achievement.

'I was more reluctant at first, X (the other teacher) has been on side the whole time. I was just more stressed about losing time out of the classroom and how we needed to catch up. But actually, seeing how much the kids have loved it, it's been great and the opportunity that they've had to go to the theatre was phenomenal. And then perform at the theatre as well, it was amazing and sort of, it has really helped that creativity and broken some of the like stigmas and stereotypes, so we've all agreed on that.' [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

Other teachers were hoping that the STAR project could *support curriculum gaps*, particularly around *literacy skills*:

“We've got a problem, whereas we have the dance on a Monday morning and then the way the timetable works, we have our PE on a Friday morning. So that's two mornings a week that we actually lose our literacy time, our writing time, and that's huge for us because our children are so far behind anyway. So, the more kind of literacy based we could get through the dance, the better it would be for us”. [ID01]

Teachers suggested that if dance were incorporated and integrated into the school curriculum, it would *support other learning areas* and provide children with *new ways of learning*.

‘It’s on our English curriculum, it’s in lots more, to sort of articulate and to tell a story. This is, they’ve realised another way of telling a story now. Dance, sometimes, you know, putting on some Arianna Grande and jumping about and fist pumping or two stepping or flossing or whatever, but they don’t think of it as this sort of telling of a story. And we have to do a lot on that, different ways that you can get messages across. They’ve learnt to sort of listen to music, a lot of our music lessons are about finding a beat, finding a rhythm, pace, pitch, all those type of things.’ [Follow-up interview, Grangetown, Year 5, ID10]

4.8 Summary and discussion

At the beginning of the project, teachers reported that children enjoyed participating and were looking forward to it. They noticed at that initial stage that the project was promoting positive effects on their literacy skills, listening, engagement and behaviour in class, other than promoting physical activity. However, they observed some challenges, including the need for better communication about the project, with artists and with parents. The felt that the dance session were being "pitched too high and that children were struggling with the instructions from the dance artists. They also noticed a stigma around dance activities for boys, although they perceived that they were enjoying it.

Teachers' perceptions of the STAR project appeared to change as the project progressed and they noted how some of the challenges were overcome. For example, using a male dancer to overcome stigma in boys, and improvements in communication with dance artists.

They noticed unanticipated benefits for children, including more self-confidence, improvement in wellbeing, responsiveness, self-esteem and motor skills. They felt that the theatre performances exposed children and their wider families, often for the first time, to art in a fun and accessible way, and promoted further discussion on arts and culture in class and at home. Finally, the opportunity for children to do their own performance in front of their families and the school was a real challenge. However, it also made themselves and their families very proud to celebrate their achievements.

Concerning feedback for the future, they believed that the sessions' duration was insufficient to promote progress. However, they were also concerned about the pressure on the curriculum and suggested that the dance project could incorporate some of the elements required in the curriculum. Overall, they were optimistic about the project's success at this initial stage and suggested that the project should be delivered at a scale toward the country.

All teachers reported that they would like to see this project reproduced on a scale and perhaps target children at the end of each school key stage.

5 Children's and parents' experiences

5.1 Introduction

19 children from year groups 1 and 5 across the two primary schools took part in focus groups to share their experiences and views of the STAR project and what outcomes mattered to them. As reported in Chapter 2, the research team developed and piloted a range of engagement activities to make the focus group fun and interactive for them. In addition, a focus group was conducted with parents from children in year 5 in one of the schools to reflect on their experiences of the project.

Our analysis of this rich data, in combination with notes from observations, identified the following themes:

1. Engagement and perceptions of the STAR project
2. Suggested outcomes
3. Improvements

We will discuss each theme separate below with illustrative quotes from children, where possible. At the end of the chapter, we brief describe the findings from the focus group with parents.

5.2 Engagement and perceptions of the STAR project

Children in Year 1 and 5 in both schools enjoyed taking part in the dance activities as part of the STAR project. When asked to describe in one word what they think about the dance project, the children used most often the words 'happy' (8), 'fun' (4), 'good' (4) and 'amazing' (4). Children's responses suggest that participating in STAR contributed to their emotional wellbeing as well as their physical health, as activities made them feel 'tired' (3) and 'energetic' (3). The below word cloud illustrates the range of words children used to describe STAR.

Figure 1. Word cloud of children's one -word summaries of the STAR project (n=19)



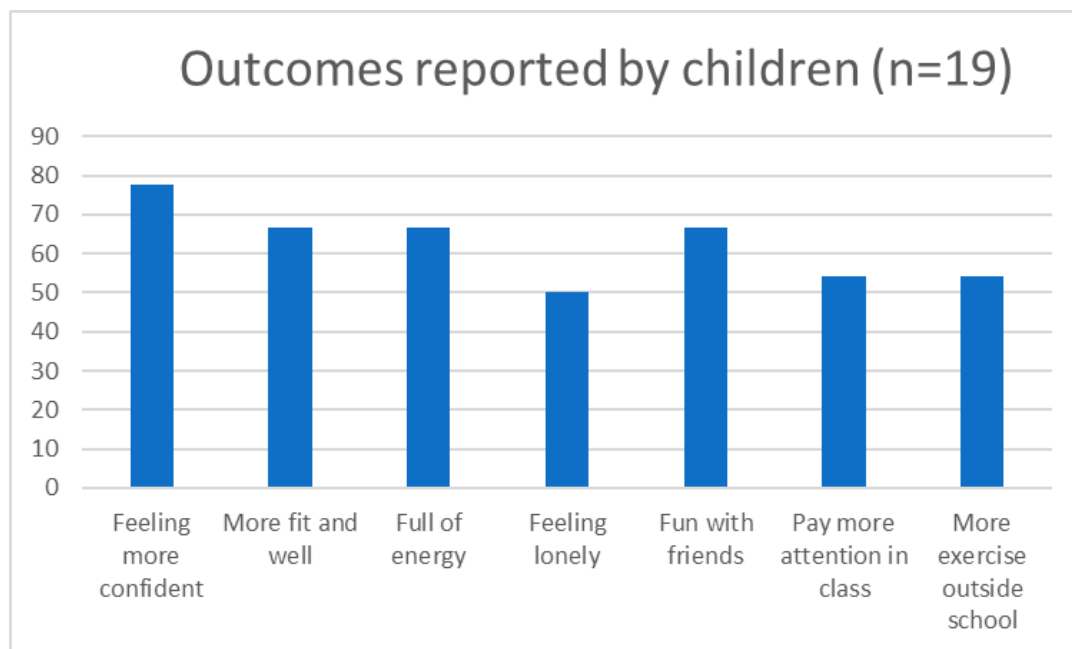
Highlights for children in Year 1 and 5 in both schools included the Pinocchio performance, the water sprout, jumping exercises, tapping and rhythm, stretch out and warm up activities and working with partners: *'I loved the movements and shapes.'* [ID02]

An impressive number of 80 families, including parents and siblings of pupils, attended the Pinocchio performance, which in many cases was their first visit to the theatre. In addition, over 120 children took part in the theatre performances at the end of the STAR project, celebrating their achievements with their families and opening up conversations at school and at home about arts.

5.3 Suggested outcomes

The children in both schools were also asked about a range of outcomes from the STAR project and how the project has helped them, e.g. did the activities make them feel more confident and fit, did they have fun with friends, and pay more attention in class afterwards or took part in more exercise outside of school. Figure 2 sums up the responses to each outcome for each year group and school. Given the low numbers of children taking part in the different focus groups, these findings need to be interpreted with caution; however, they give an indication of outcomes experienced by these children.

Figure 2.



What the Figure illustrates is that a *range of outcomes were reported by children* in both schools across Year 1 and 5, with *'Feeling more confident', 'More fit and well' and 'Full of energy'* most often mentioned. Children in Year 1 mentioned less often an impact on their

physical wellbeing (fit and well), loneliness and exercise outside school; but still felt that most outcomes applied. The relative high percentage of children feeling lonely might be related to their lock-down experiences with children missing social interactions with their friends at school, but we can't draw any firm conclusions given the small numbers in our sample. The family support intervention described in chapter 8, can provide additional support for children who feel lonely and follow-up research might be able to demonstrate the impact of this work on loneliness among children.

5.3.1 Emotional health and wellbeing

Feeling more happy, excited, and relaxed was one of the main outcomes that children mentioned, highlighting the impact of the STAR project on their emotional wellbeing and mental health. The children often linked this to an *increase in their confidence* and *feeling more resilient* afterwards, enabling them to *focus and work better in the classroom*:

'I'm a bit more confident about my daily things.'

'I feel more resilient and working in class.' [ID04]

However, not everyone agreed that they were more able to focus in the class room, and *some children struggled to make the transition back to the classroom* after the dance activities, finding it a challenge to cool and calm down and settling into the class again:

'I do listen to the teachers, but I listen more to the dance teachers.' [ID02]

The children also felt more confident to *express themselves through movement and storytelling* with the dance activities enabling them to get into a role:

'You could express yourself in the characters. You could jump about with Fanny the Frog or you could act gracefully for the Water Sprite. You can just express yourself. But all the characters have different feelings. Like Fanny the Frog was very like hyper and funny, where the fox is quite sly and quite shy.' [ID04]

Expression through dance enabled children to feel more confident and happier to engage in schoolwork and other daily activities. These findings confirm an important enabling

mechanism of the STAR project. However, some children in both schools *expressed anxiety around engaging in the theatre performance*, reporting feeling sad and nervous:

'I'm scared. I don't want to go on stage'. [ID01]

5.3.2 Physical health and wellbeing

In addition to improving their emotional health and wellbeing, many children reported *feeling more fit and well* after taking part in the dance activities.

'I feel more fit and well because you do a lot of stretching and more exercise.' [ID04]

They felt *more energetic*, and this helped them through the day at school:

'I feel more refreshed because I've just been sitting down for the morning, but after you've done dancing, it makes you feel better.' [ID02]

Feeling more fit and well also continued at home for many children. They reported *doing more exercises when they got home* and were *keen to practice the dance moves* that they had learned at school in their homes. Examples of activities at home included going on bike rides, running, skipping, trampolining, doing star jump, push-ups and cart wheels.

'I've been going over the field near where I live, and I like to do positions that they tell us to do, and I keep going and going until I get too tired.' [ID02]

For some children, the STAR project *rekindled an interest in dancing*:

'When I was little, I used to go around my living room dancing, then I stopped, and when I started dancing again here, it made me want to do it again, so I do it all the time now again.' [ID02]

The children also linked their improvements in fitness to their emotional wellbeing:

'I always feel good when I come back from dancing because I know that I get out of breath and stuff'.

'I think that's because it helps your body and your mind more.' [ID02]

5.3.3 Social skills and partnering

The children commented less on feeling lonely and how the STAR project helped them have fun with friends. Children acknowledged *that partnering up in the dance activities with other children* helped them to discover new moves together and they enjoyed working with other children:

'Partnering has made me really happy because usually we make up dances and it's really, really fun.' [ID04]

While this worked well for most children, some felt this could make the dance activities less enjoyable if you were partnered up with someone you don't want to work with:

'I feel nervous and angry if I can't work with my partner.'
[ID03]

Other children commented on the impact of a small number of children not engaging with the dance activities ('they don't like to listen'), *spoiling it for the rest of the class*, with teachers having to send the whole group back to the classroom:

'The dance people are kind but some of the kids just push it and the teacher has to tell them off, and sometime they have to get sent out or all go back to the classrooms. People were missing out because those people who were having fun and behaving also have to go back.' [ID02]

However, most children had fun with the classmates during the dance activities and, being able to work out differences to make up new dance moves, demonstrating *improvements in teamwork and social skills*.

5.4 Improvements

Finally, the children made several suggestions for improving the STAR projects. Some children commented that the *dance activities could be hard sometimes* but, overall, they enjoyed taking part in them. Other children requested *different music that included words*. Additional *equipment*, such as barres, could be helpful to support children with improving their balance:

‘With dancing we haven’t got anything that will help you balance, we don’t have any barres or equipment.’ [ID04]

Perhaps the best illustration of how well the project was received were suggestions to improve STAR by making the sessions longer and that children felt sad when a session ended:

‘I feel sad when I have to finish the dance.’ [ID01]

5.5 Parents’ experiences

In spite of limited data on parents’ experiences of the STAR project, the focus group with parents provided some insight into their perceptions of the dance activities that their children were taking part in. Parents highlighted communication as a particular issue.

For example, parents complained that their children did not talk about the STAR project at home. Therefore, they were *mostly unaware of what their child was doing at school as part of the project*:

‘My child only told me when she was about to go for the performance.’ [ID11]

‘They don’t speak much until you ask them.’ [ID11]

Parents overall *supported their children taking part in the STAR project* and could see the benefits for the children, helping them to express themselves and “*keeping them busy*”:

‘My child randomly dances now or tells me to put some music on.’ [ID11]

However, parents felt that there was a *lack of communication from the school and TIN Arts* about the project and would have liked to receive more information in between about what their children were doing, such as different dances taught, and what was going to happen next:

'I only signed consent letters about the project.' [ID11]

'Get more letters about the project with timelines so I can add that to my calendar.' [ID11]

Parents felt that *engaging Year 5 in the STAR project was too late* in the school curriculum and that Year 1 children would be a more suitable audience, as they were assumed to be keener to get involved in dance activities, while older children might be more hesitant. Year 1 children were reported as also more communicative at home about the project, enabling parents to get involved. As parents of Year 5 children, they felt less able to be involved.

Finally, the parents made several suggestions for improving the engagement of children in the STAR projects, such as rewards offered by the school (a hot chocolate at the end of the week) and using the school points system that children can use to buy treats and other items. *Using props* in the STAR project might also help to give children more confidence to engage with the dance activities.

5.6 Summary

The focus group with children demonstrated positive engagement of children in Year 1 and 5 with the STAR project in both schools. Their responses suggest that participating in STAR contributed to their emotional wellbeing as well as their physical health, with outcomes such as 'Feeling more confident', 'More fit and well' and 'Full of energy' most often mentioned by children in both schools across Year 1 and 5.

Expression through dance appears to enable children to feel more confident and happier to engage in schoolwork and other daily activities. Feeling more fit and well also continued at home for the children; reporting that they were doing more exercises when they got home and were keen to continue practicing the dance moves that they had learned at school.

The children enjoyed working with other children in partnership when developing and practising their dance moves, but this could also become a bone of contention if they were partnered up with a someone they did not get along with. Other children commented on the disruptive effect from negative behaviour by some children during the dance activities, which spoils the sessions for them. Some children struggled to make the transition back to the classroom after the dance activities, finding it a challenge to cool and calm down and settling into the class again.

The children suggest small improvements in the form of including music with words and make more use of equipment, such as barres, to help them with their balance, while parents reported a lack of communication as their main issue.

6 Findings from testing our health and wellbeing survey with Year 5 children

6.1 Introduction

The findings from the engagement activities with children, together with the insights from the interviews and focus groups with artists, teachers, and parents, were used to develop a short and easy to use questionnaire focused on the key outcomes identified by children.

Our questionnaire builds on existing questionnaires in particularly Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (Strohmaier et al., 2021) and the KIDSCREEN-10 index (Erhart et al., 2009).

6.2 Outcomes and existing questionnaires

The Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (CWS) were developed by researchers and clinicians at Canterbury Christ Church University and are designed to assess someone's sense of subjective wellbeing 'in the moment'. In other words, how someone is feeling at any given point in time. It was developed to be a straightforward and easy to administer questionnaire to assess the subjective wellbeing of people with dementia, their informal carers (family and friends) and professional carers who are working with this population. Because of the easy and visual design, we felt that these scales would also work well for children in Year 5.

In addition, we used questions from the KIDSCREEN-10 index, which is a generic health-related quality of life (HRQoL) measures for children and adolescents aged from 8 to 18 years. The short questionnaire was developed as part of European Public Health Research project to identify children at risk in terms of their subjective health. The screen tool is available in version with respectively 52, 27 and 10 questions. We opted for the latter version, as it only takes 5 minutes to complete. The KIDSCREEN-10 instrument provides a singular index of global HRQoL covering physical, psychological and social facets of HRQoL (10 items). When testing the questionnaire, this version scored high in terms of consistency and reliability¹.

We borrowed questions from both questionnaires based on the outcomes that children suggested to us and amended questions were needed. For example, we used 5-point Likert scales from KIDSCREEN-10 index for some of the questions identified from the Canterbury Wellbeing Scales, as we felt these scales fitted better than the visual analog scales from 1-100. We also added two new questions at the end of our questionnaire (see Appendix 5) to collect data on children's future interest in attending and participating in dance activities.

The questions and scales used for each outcome mentioned by children (see Chapter 5) are summed up in a table in the Appendix.

6.3 Piloting of the children's health and wellbeing questionnaire

We tested the new questionnaire (Appendix 5) to provide an initial indication of outcomes of the STAR programme in quantitative term, complemented with the rich data from the

¹ Internal consistency values (Cronbach's Alpha) reached .82 for the self-report version, test-retest reliability at a 2-week interval reaches .55. Item intraclass correlation (ICC) between self-reported scores and scores from parents filling out the KIDSCREEN-10 Index proxy-version reached .56.

interviews and focus groups to provide a clear initial assessment of impact and personal narratives of change.

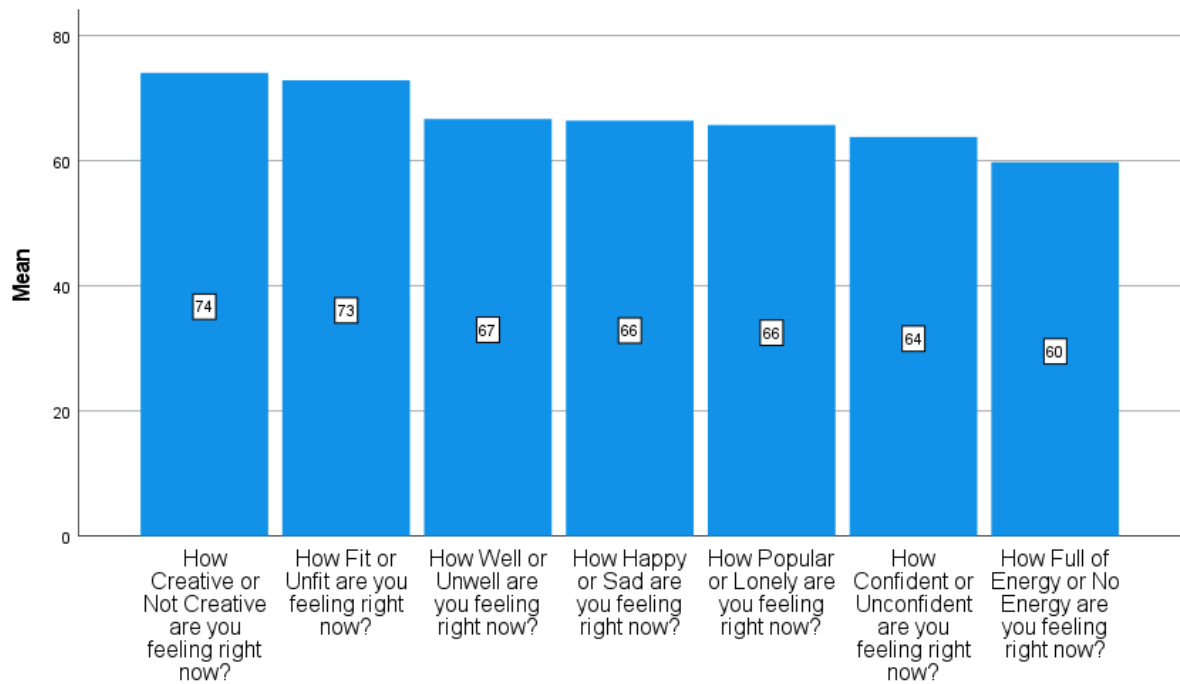
The survey was completed by 42 Year 6 children (who were in Year 5 when the STAR project was delivered) in one of the schools (Grangetown). Given previous challenges with using questionnaires with Year 1 children (limited literacy at this age), we decided not to test the questionnaire with these children. Data from the survey was inputted and analysed in SPSS, using descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests, and are presented below in bar graphs.

The Year 5 children were able to complete most of the questions, with only five questions showing small amounts of missing data (children not answering these questions). For example, only one child did not answer the question about seeing and attending future performances, while 2-3 children did not answer the questions about ability to express themselves through movement, having fun with friends and helping each other in STAR (2.4-7.1% missing data), which is acceptable for this stage of the research.

6.4 Pilot survey findings

Figure 1 shows that the children felt particularly creative after STAR (average score of 74 out of 100) and fit (73) but also reported feeling well (67), happy (66), popular (66) and confident (64). The children reported the lowest average score on feeling full of energy (60), which is partly due to the wide range of answers to this question (between 30-100). This suggests that this question is not specific enough and might need adapting for future use. The other health and wellbeing indicators all achieved a more concentrated spread of scores (between 50-70 or 60-100), indicating good specificity and highlighting that all children experienced positive feelings of health and wellbeing after taking part in STAR (see appendix 7).

Figure 1. Mean scores of children's perceptions about their health and wellbeing after STAR (n=42)



However, we cannot conclude from this data what the impact of the STAR project is on children's health and wellbeing, as we do not have any baseline data to compare changes in scores over the duration of the project. The aim of this study was to develop and pilot the questionnaire; future use of it at the beginning and end of the project will allow for making these comparisons and evidence changes in children's perceptions about their health and wellbeing.

Figure 2 below provides further information about the behaviour of children that supported key outcomes of the STAR project. The majority of children (59%) reported to be extremely or very physically active outside school after STAR, that they had good fun with their friends during STAR (56%), with 46% of children being very/ extremely helpful to their friends in STAR. Roughly a third of children mentioned being much more able to pay attention in class (36%) and being very/ extremely able to express themselves with movement (31%). An additional 38% of children reported that in some instances they were able to express themselves with movement (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 2. Behaviour related to STAR outcomes reported by children after STAR (n=42)

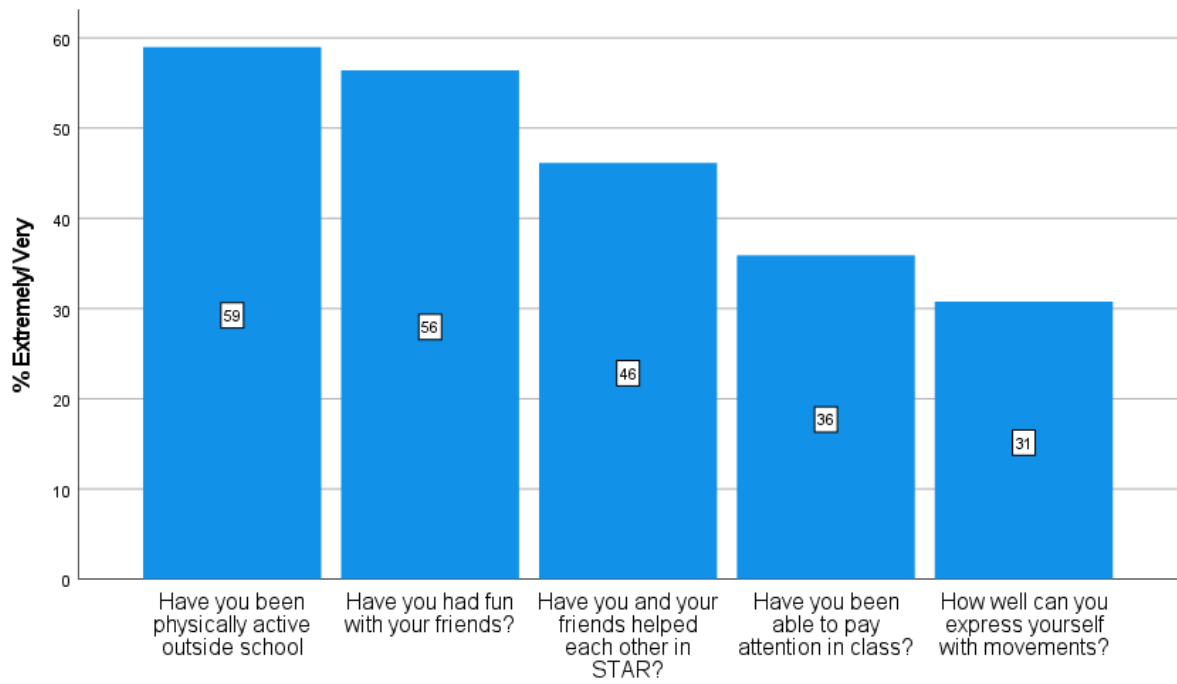
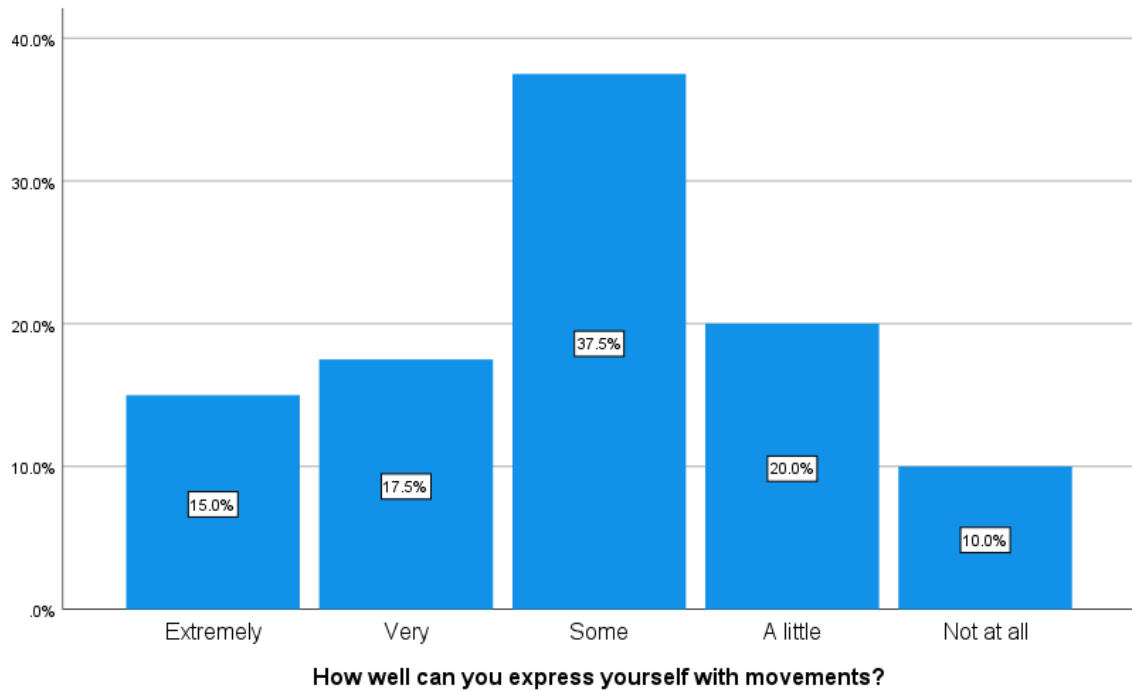
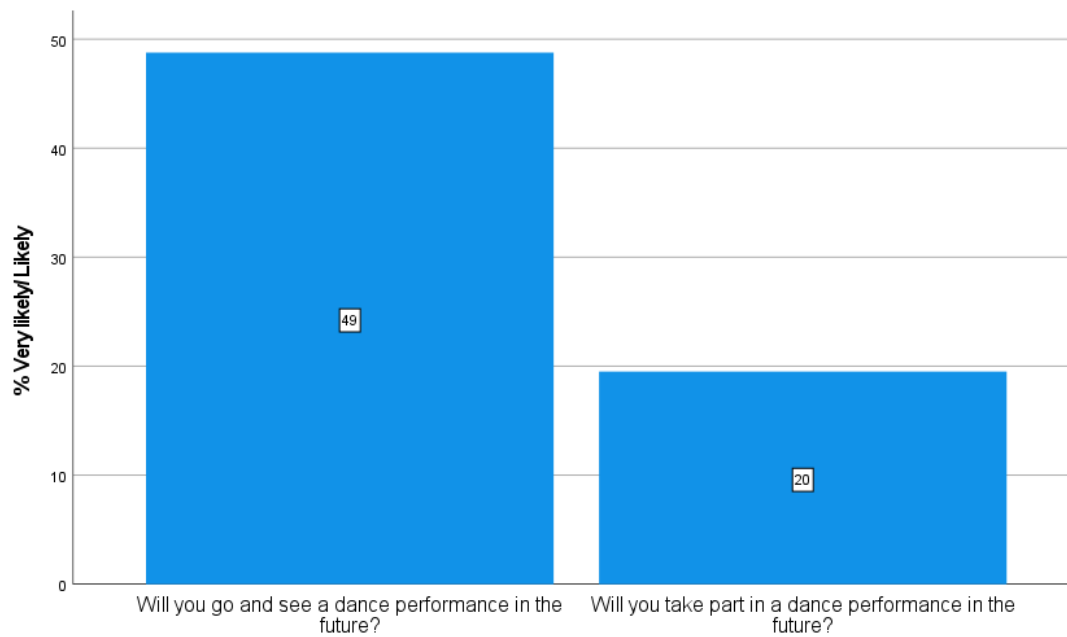


Figure 3. How well can you express yourself with movement? (n=42)



The survey responses also confirmed children’s interest in dance performances, as highlighted in the interviews with artists and teachers in the previous chapters. 49% of children reported that they were very likely or likely to go and see a future dance performance. The children were less keen take part in future dance performances, with only 20% expressing an interest in this, illustrating perhaps the anxiety some of the children felt in performing on stage, as reported earlier by teachers and artists.

Figure 3. Interest among children to go and see and take part in future dance performances (n=42)



However, a fifth of children expressing an interest in taking part in future performances is still a massive achievement for children who have not been exposed in the past to any dance performances. Given the stigma that teachers and artists had to overcome in motivating boys to show an interest in dance and art, the fact that almost half of the children want to go to future dance performances is a strong indicator of success in changing the perceptions of the children about the value of dance.

6.5 Summary

Piloting the survey in one school demonstrated that the indicators for measuring children’s health and wellbeing as part of the STAR project have potential to demonstrate changes in perceptions and behaviour among children. The Year 5 children were able to complete most of the questions, with only five questions showing small amounts of missing data (children not answering these questions). In particular, the question about how full of energy children feel might need further testing and tailoring, given the wide spread of answers received to this question.

The responses collected after the delivery of the STAR project suggest that the children felt particularly creative and fit after STAR. The majority of children were very active outside school after STAR, had good fun with their friends during STAR by supporting each other in the dance sessions, and were being able in at least some instances to express themselves through movement.

As a result of the STAR project, almost half of the children were very likely or likely to go and see a future dance performance, which should be celebrated as a massive achievement given the lack of previous exposure to dance activities for many of these children.



7. Family Support Intervention

7.1 Introduction

Children North East provided a Family Support Intervention as part of the STAR project from September 21 until end of July 22. Within this intervention, a family practitioner worked with identified families from two schools within their own homes. The family practitioner was supported by two student social workers, who were on placement with Children North East.

The family practitioners each planned and tailored their support offer with the families, based on individual needs, with a maximum time frame of 12 weeks available to each family. This included attending meetings and appointments with families where they felt they needed support, such as core group meetings, early help meetings, school panel meetings, health appointments, and housing or debt management appointments.

Near the end of the intervention, a clear exit strategy was put into place. This involved the family looking at what further support may be required and signposting/onward referrals.

Most interventions with families came to a natural end with outcomes met and families accessing universal services. Some families remained part of the Early Help Team for further holistic support or were escalated to Tier 4 provision (Children's Social Care by; n=2) due to significant concerns at the end of the project. All families were provided with appropriate contact numbers of where to get help and additionally continued to have support from school.

The family practitioners and student social workers worked closely with the schools, sharing information about families through the intervention delivery, helping teachers and family workers to seamlessly support each other. Staff used Children North East's Customer Relationship Management-system to record all the intervention activities with families.

7.2 Outputs and outcomes

The below tables shows that the family practitioners supported 20 families, including 44 children, over the school year delivering a total of 163 contact sessions, representing 1,630 hours of work.

Table. 3 Output of the Family Support Intervention

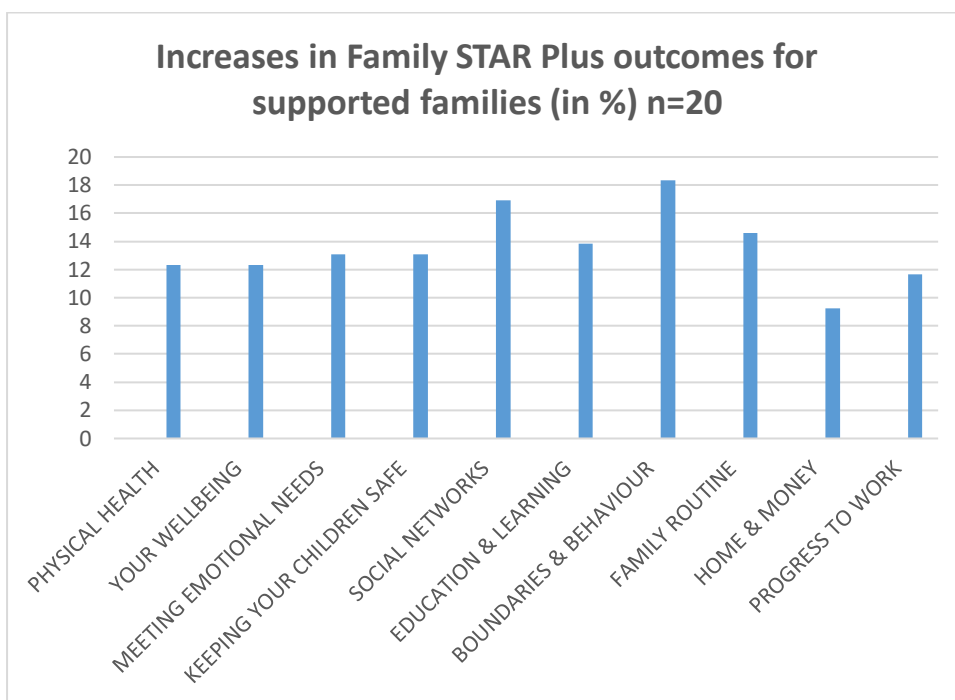
Number of referrals received		20
Number of families supported		20
Number of children supported		44
Number of contact sessions	Family Practitioner	111
	Student Social Workers	52

Number of hours worked	Family Practitioner	1,110
	Student Social Workers*	520

To measure the effect of the hard work by family practitioners and student social workers, Children North East used the Outcome star tool. Outcomes Star is an evidence-based tool designed to support positive change and greater wellbeing, with the steps presented in a star shape and measured on a clearly defined 'Journey of Change' of eight areas of life (Physical health, Where you live, Being safe, Relationships, Feelings and behaviour, Friends, Confidence and self-esteem, Education and Learning) with a five-step scale.

The Outcome Star is completed as part of conversations between families and the family practitioners. Within this project, family practitioners and students used the Family Star Plus at the beginning and end of the intervention to capture progress over the period of support. As a visual tool, it also helped families to see the changes they were achieving, however small.

Figure 2. Outcomes of the Family Support Intervention



The Outcome STAR data shows that families have made progress in all eight areas of family support ranging from 9 to 18% but in particular by helping families to set boundaries and improve behaviour (of their children and partners; 18.3%): increasing their social networks (16.9%) and improving their family routine (14.6%). Families also improved their education

and learning (13.8%), and were better able to meet the emotional needs (13.1%), while keeping their children safe (13.1%).

7.3 Two case studies

These impressive improvements are illustrated in the below two case studies that Children North East has given us permission for to include in this report.

Case study 1

Brief History

Reason for referral was that mum was a single parent with four young children, without any extended family support, although she received support from a neighbour. She has been involved with Children Social Care from a very young age; this involved being in the Looked after system. Mum's mental health was not in a good position, and she was not receiving any support with this. Whilst there were no concerns about risks for the children, they had an allocated social worker to support the relationship with their dad. Mum had very good established routines and boundaries, but this was in conflict to dads. The family support worker identified the following issues: Mum's mental health; limited extended support; concerns regarding the home conditions; trust with professionals; and behaviour of children at school, anger issues.

Intervention

The family support worker delivered 1-to-1 sessions to mum regarding how she felt about support and what she felt was the most important for her and built up a positive trusting relationship with her. This included looking at mum's mental health and how this may be impacting on her parenting ability and the children. The family worker also helped mum to spend time with the children after school to gain a better understanding of how life was for them, taking into account the voice of the children.

In addition, she worked 1-to-1 with the children at home and in school using play therapy to help them express their thoughts and feelings. She attended meetings at school with mum to offer support in relation to conflicting rules and lack of consistency with dad about his contact with the children, and met with social worker who was supporting the children.

Finally, the family worker provided support with housing issues. Mum's engagement was excellent and took on board the advice and guidance given, she was very aware of all of the children needs and safety.

Outcomes

Mum gave the family worker consent to speak to professionals in the first instance, this involved getting an appointment to see the GP regarding her mental health and to support with her recovery. Mum has gained the confidence to be able to speak to professionals should she need to. Housing issues were addressed, and all immediate repairs completed with a further work programme to be undertaken in the summer holidays.

Mum is now more confident in relation to seeking support from school and other professionals and the children's behaviour at school has improved. The conflict between the parents about managing their children's behaviour was in the end resolved, creating more consistency with rules and boundaries within the two households and with the times that dad saw the children.

Issues faced during intervention

The conflicting parenting styles between mum and dad impacted initially on the children behaviour both at home with mum and in school. The family were also registered with a dentist, but the children had not attended during COVID/or when mums mental health was poor which led to one of the children having to have 11 teeth removed.

Case study 2

Brief History

Mum and dad had separated with the oldest child going to live with dad. There had been an incident where one of children was taken to hospital with suspected ingestion of street drugs. At the point of referral to the Family Support Intervention there was no involvement from Children Social Care.

Presenting Issues

The family support worker identified the following issues: behaviour changes with child in the home; parenting consistency; impact of substance misuse on children; issues with school attendance; and mum's mental health and other health issues.

Intervention

The family practitioner built a positive, professional, and trusting relationships with the family by delivering 1-to-1 parenting work with mum, helping her to set family rules for the whole family and developing a plan for the child to go into school with support from the teachers. She also worked 1-to-1 in school with the child to help him express his thoughts and feelings. The school also offered some support via their emotional well-being worker.

The family worked also addressed the impact of substance misuse on the children and arranged appointment with health professional to support both mum and the child.

Outcomes

As a result of the intervention, the children in the family have now more established routines and boundaries, with mum being consistent with keeping to the rules and the children being more respectful. The intervention has improved mum's confidence and increased the children's school attendance.

All health issues were addressed and supported by the correct services while home safety issues were resolved following a completed home safety assessment.

8. Project leads interviews

8.1 Introduction

Three project leads were interviewed between August 2022 and September 2022 to share their reflections about the planning stages of the project, the delivery stage, and the impact of the STAR project on the targeted audience. The below themes were explored:

1. Engagement across schools
2. Changes to delivery of the STAR project
3. Success factors
4. Challenges in working in partnership
5. Sustainability and improvements

8.2 Engagement across schools

The STAR project was *well accepted by both schools* with excitement after the project leads initial engagement with the schools. Though the project was well accepted, there were some differences in how both schools accepted the STAR project and engaged with it, based on previous experiences with art activities:

‘I think there was differences in how able they were to engage in it. I think that’s partly historic about the schools and how the school is structured. I think that’s partly about how the schools have different varying levels around their previous engagement in arts and activities.’ [ID13]

Project leads described how *differences in engagement* were also linked to levels of communication:

‘So, I think they were both equally acceptable of the project, I think how they were able to engage in it was slightly different. One school was much better to communicate with than the other school. In the one school, which was more difficult to communicate with, the engagement with the young people was slightly better than the other school, where we were able to engage with them better. So, we could communicate with one school better than the other, but the pupils engaged better in the school we were less able to communicate with, in the actual kind of dance space, in the creative environment if that makes sense. So, there was this kind of contrast between the two.’ [ID13]

Some of the *communication issues related to the pandemic*:

‘The schools were always difficult to engage with and they had their own priorities, and they were also dealing with post-pandemic issues. The young people that they had before the pandemic were different to the young people they had after the pandemic and the issues they were raising in school. So, if you take those things and those barriers or those issues to deal with concerns, personally I think the partnership worked really well.’ [ID13]

However, project leads also acknowledged *a lack of communication with teachers and senior management* at some stages in the project, which affected their involvement in the STAR:

‘There’s nothing really we’d put down to not going so well. The key areas I’d address if I had my time again, much better communication and conversations with teachers and senior management in the school. To get them to buy into it and to make them contribute equally and to make sure they are collaborators with us in the project. So, some teachers sometimes just received it and didn’t put their energy or effort behind it. So we need them to be much more working with us.’ [ID13]

8.3 Changes to delivery of the STAR project

The project leads were satisfied that STAR project was *delivered as planned* and in partnership:

‘I think the project’s worked really well, I suppose this is where we could slightly blow our own trumpet. I think we’ve managed to bring together all the partners really well to deliver it coherently and to time and to budget. To achieve the outcomes around regular dance provision, make sure the research strand ran, making sure the family dance programme was present. Making sure the young people went to the theatre to see Northern Ballet and then they went to the theatre to do their own performance there.’ [ID13]

Although the project was delivered as planned, project leads felt that there was a difference with how they originally intended to set out, especially with the research element of the project but that turned out to work well overall:

‘So largely we’ve delivered the project as it was meant to be delivered. I think the findings from the research are different to how we originally perceived they might be. I think there’s some interesting ideas around whether statistical data, hard numbers, are stronger than or richer than co-produced outcomes, which better articulate and describe benefits. I have a preference that the latter is more where I sit and I prefer narrative over numbers. So that’s the only difference really to the project.’ [ID13]

The project leads were hoping that the research would provide evidence of the difference dance and arts makes to young people’s wellbeing, which would support further development and spread of the STAR project, and to convince funders for future applications. They highlighted several *measures of success around attendance, bringing energy to the children and the schools*, that would help them to succeed in other areas of the school curriculum and increase their wellbeing.

‘There are also things like attendance rates that might tell us things that we weren’t expecting. There might be things, you know, if people are more engaged. You know we spoke about that buzz around the school, if people are engaged in things, you go into your next lesson with quite a positive outlook. It’s at such a difficult time that this all happened, you’d hope that

this lifted the classes to do things, to thrive more and to succeed more in other areas as well, and just feel good and have a positive experience.' [ID11].

8.4 Success factors

The project leads felt that the STAR project was *delivered in a very consistent way* particularly by the dance artists:

'I think the consistency was really key and I think that worked really well. [...] being at the same time in the same space every week is really key. [...] I think having the two dance artists was also really key to the success. Teaching that many children over two quite short school days is really draining. I've been there, done it, got the t-shirt and it's hard work.' [ID12]

The importance of the two dance artists working together was also highlighted by the dance artists themselves (see Chapter 3). Project leads emphasised the *differences in pedagogical style as a success factor* for the STAR project, something which the teachers also commented on (Chapter 4). The dance activities and performances enabling different interactions and conversations between children and teachers and have parents and opportunity to celebrate their children's achievements; not for passing a formal test or exam but for giving it a go and having fun. In doing so, the STAR project offered an alternative format and platform for learning.

'I think the other key part to the success of this is how the workshops are delivered, so essentially the kind of pedagogical approach to the sessions.' [ID12]

The project leads saw the *theatre performance of the children with their families as a particular marker of success*:

'I can remember the Deputy Head at [anonymised] telling me, when they'd taken the families to the theatre to see the production, there was, not a concern, but I think the teacher was interested to see how the families might respond to being in the theatre, if they hadn't been in the theatre before and to see classical dance. When of course you haven't got, you know, it's a non-verbal art form, she didn't know how captivating it might be to some of the families. Her expression

was 'You could hear a pin drop in there'. She said everyone was fascinated.' [ID12]

They also praised *the role and support of the teachers* in the STAR project:

'The teachers went on the stage with the pupils, not all of them but some of them, and that was lovely to see them performing. It's quite a thing to do, they're putting themselves in quite a vulnerable position, you know, to stand on the stage with the children and everyone else that was there. So for the teachers to do that and the amount of respect for all the different performances as well.' [ID11]

Strong partnership working between the various partners in the project was also highlighted as a success factor:

'So I think the partnership across education, arts, TIN Arts, things like that, worked really well. I think TIN Arts facilitating the project management was great because they were the linchpin between all these disparate groups. Because we are different people and we've got different priorities, so they helped to bring it all together.' [ID13].

8.5 Challenges in partnership working

Running the partnership was not without its challenges and project leads had to work to *bring the different voices together*:

'It was difficult because there were a lot of voices in either the real room or the virtual room. Yes, sometimes it was really difficult and not because people had disagreements, it was more that there were so many ideas and so much ambition.' [ID12]

In particular, keeping *project members across different organisations connected* was sometimes difficult and project leads expressed how they felt less connected with some parts of the project team due to changes in team management:

'I think with the pandemic, I think it worked really well if I'm honest. As I said, the bit I feel a little less connected with is the link workers. I think because we started with, one person was leading it and then a different manager took over midway through the project. That probably, and it's not that it hasn't worked, it's just I feel less connected to that as a corporate team. But I've met all the link workers, they're fabulous, and I think we've got some good sort of case studies, but I think probably we could have stayed more strongly connected.'
[ID11]

Project leads also reflected on the *challenges for Northern Ballet to engage with partnership* due to COVID-19:

'I think one of the things that I think everybody would have appreciated and would have liked to have seen and experienced, I guess was a closer connection with Northern Ballet. I think that's something that definitely did get a little bit lost along the way. I think, not to blame everything on the pandemic, but, you know, the pandemic hit Northern Ballet really hard. So, it was a really challenging period for us. So, it was a little bit sort of batten down the hatches at times to just kind of survive and get through as an organisation.'
[ID12].

8.6 Sustainability and scale up

Based on the positive outcomes of STAR, the project leads felt it was important to continue by *embedded the project more firmly in the school curriculum* and *roll out the STAR project* in other schools:

'So, I think actually there's loads of cross-curricular opportunity that would involve much more planning and collaboration with those class teachers and really embedding it into the curriculum.'
[ID12]

Project leads suggested rolling out the STAR project *across all year groups* in schools:

'Do it to the full school. I'd give the opportunity to all areas of the school, not just some classes. I'd do a day at the beginning of term to share with the teachers. We'd do lots of communications with the families and have the holiday hunger workshop in the holidays. So, I think they're the main things at the moment.'
[ID11]

To support wider implementation of STAR in schools and engagement from teachers, project leads were keen to ensure ongoing communication. For example, *by organising an introduction workshop for the whole school:*

‘At the very beginning we did a bit of a workshop [with families], so that we’d create a bit of a bond and information sharing about the initiative. I think we needed to do something similar with all the school and the teachers.’ [ID11]

They also made suggestions for *making the theatre visits more interactive*, by giving children a look behind the scenes and get them more comfortable to perform on a stage, which align with concerns from teachers about some children feeling anxious to take part in the theatre performances:

‘I think we had, you know, big ideas and ambitions around kind of making that theatre visit, when the children went to see Northern Ballet, a bit more interactive. So, you know, having a bit of a sneak peek into more of the process that backs up that performance.’ [ID12]”

8.7 Summary

Overall, project leads were happy with how the project was delivered and the outcomes that were achieved. They highlighted differences in engagement between school, related to previous experiences, communication, and the pandemic. They also emphasised the importance of partnership working, in spite of the challenges in keeping partners and different teams connected. The leads praised the consistent delivery by dance artists and the active involvement of teachers in the dance sessions and performances and recommended more early engagement with teachers and senior management.

9. Discussion and conclusions

9.1 Benefits of STAR project

The focus groups with children demonstrated *positive engagement* of children in Year 1 and 5 with the STAR project in both schools. Teachers also reported that children enjoyed participating in the project and were *looking forward to it*.

Artists suggested at the start of the STAR project that the dance activities and performances could contribute to children's *creative, social, cognitive, and physical skills, as well as increasing their confidence*. The focus group and engagement activities with children confirmed that STAR contributed to their *emotional wellbeing* as well as *their physical health*, with outcomes, such as 'Feeling more confident', 'More fit and well' and 'Full of energy', most often mentioned by children in both schools across Year 1 and 5.

Expressing themselves through dance appears to make children *feel more confident and happier to engage in schoolwork and other daily activities*. Teachers also noticed that children were more able to listen and engage in classwork, showing less disruptive behaviour. In addition, teachers reported improvements in children's *literacy skills*.

Children mentioned *feeling more fit and well*, which continued beyond school; saying that they were doing more exercises when they got home and were *keen to continue practicing* the dance moves that they had learned at school.

9.2 Age and gender differences

Artists and teachers noticed differences in engagement between year groups and between boys and girls. Year 1 children were less self-conscious and engaged more readily with the dance activities but needed more support from teachers to model the movements for them, while Year 5 children, once engaged, participated more fully and showed more creativity in expressing themselves.

Some boys threw themselves into the dance activities, while other boys, particularly in Year 5, experienced stigma, which they were able to overcome with the support of a male dance teacher. Girls felt more comfortable with the dance movements but also experienced more anxiety, particularly around their performances on stage. Girls felt more pressure to do well, as they often had previous experience of taking part in dance activities and felt they had to demonstrate these skills and progress more quickly.

To maximise impact of STAR, teachers suggested targeting children at the end of each key stage (Year 3 and Year 6) to ensure children can engage fully in the dance activities, with sufficient self-confidence and focus, while allowing for the tailoring of sessions to individual needs of children, encouraging their personal creativity to develop over the course of STAR. Narratives for dance sessions could also be tailored to age groups, with older children focusing on more emotional topics, that enable them to understand and express deeper (and darker) feelings. These narratives could be aligned to existing reading schemes within school to link STAR to other curriculum components (e.g., English reading & literature) and embed the project more firmly within the schools.

9.3 Challenges and barriers in delivering the STAR project

9.3.1 Limited time & large classes

Both artists and teachers were concerned about the limited time they were able to dedicate to the dance activities with children. Two-weekly, one-hour sessions were deemed insufficient to engage with the children on a personal level, getting to know them, and tailor the project to their needs, in spite of artists (and teachers) best efforts to build relationships with the children. The timing of the sessions, at the beginning of the week (Monday and Tuesdays), were seen as particularly challenging when children just returned to school from the weekend, with artists and teachers spending considerable amounts of time on keeping children focused on the dance activities. It is a testament to the engagement skills of artists and teachers that many children reported that these time slots became their favourite moments of the school week, which they looked most forward to.

The ability to engage children in the dance activities was further hampered by the number of children that artists had to manage in each session, approximately 30 children at a time, reducing opportunities for personal contact with each child to build rapport and tailor the activities to their needs and creativity. Smaller group sizes, or more dance artists, to break classes down into smaller groups, of say 10 children, would be beneficial for personal interactions between the artists and children.

9.3.2 Disruptive behaviour

Teachers and staff had to spend considerable time on dealing with disruptive behaviour from some children who, for various reasons but often related to their home environment, were not engaging with the dance activities. Children noted how disruptive behaviour from some of their classmates negatively impacted on their own engagement, 'spoiling the sessions' for them.

However, the children enjoyed working with other children in partnership when developing and practising their dance moves, but this could also become a bone of contention if they were *partnered up with a someone they did not get along with*. Some children also *struggled to make the transition back to the classroom* after the dance activities, finding it a challenge to cool and calm down, and settling into the class again.

9.3.3 COVID-19

The pandemic had a major impact on the ability of artists to deliver the dance activities in the schools when they went into lock down, causing delays in delivery of the project and likely contributing to some of the disruptive behaviour of children mentioned above. Teachers also commented on the impact of COVID-19, in particular the lockdowns, on children's confidence and social skills, with children having missed two years of socialising and interacting with other children and adults. This meant that the children started from an even more disadvantaged position than they were already in when the STAR project was delivered in schools after lockdown. COVID-19 also impacted on the communication between dance artists, teachers, parents and children, reducing opportunities for

exchanging information due to restricted contact. We have explored communication in more detail in paragraph 8.5.1.

9.3.4 Stigma and anxiety

Both artists and teachers had to overcome stigma around dance activities. Particularly boys in Year 5 appeared more self-conscious about engaging in dance activities, with some experiencing stigma and feeling nervous about taking part. Girls, on the other hand, were feeling often more comfortable with the dance sessions, but also felt more pressure to do well, as they had previous experience of taking part in dance activities and felt they had to demonstrate these skills and progress more quickly.

Teachers were often amazed that the artists managed to engage boys in Year 5 and for them to express an interest in taking part in the performances. This was one of the main aims of the project: to make dance activities more accessible (and acceptable) to primary school children who experience geographical inequality who, more often than not, have never been exposed to these kinds of activities and have never visited a theatre with their families before the STAR project. Having never been to theatre performances before the project, caused some children to experience anxiety about going on stage in front of their peers and families.

9.4 Facilitators in delivering the STAR project

Teachers' and artists perceptions of the STAR project appeared to change as the project progressed and they noted how some of the challenges were overcome. For example, using a male dancer to overcome stigma in boys, and improvements in communication with dance artists. These changes highlight facilitators for engaging children in the dance activities and performances, which we discuss separately below.

9.4.1 Working in pairs and groups

The two dance artists worked together to deliver the dance sessions and, in doing so, were able to support each other and cope to an extent with the limited session times and large class sizes.

Similarly, children working in pairs was highlighted as an important facilitator by teachers, enabling more confident children to support less confident or shy children, and motivate them to engage in the dance activities. Input from teachers on which children to pair would strengthen this mechanism and support our reflections below on the importance of early and frequent communication between artists and teachers.

9.4.2 Sharing information

Teachers helped dance artists to tailor sessions to personal needs and interest of children by sharing their knowledge about children with the artists, and by providing additional support and reassurance to children who felt less confident or anxious. For example, teachers

shared information with artists about children who experienced challenges, at school and/or at home, which supported the dance artists in recognising their needs and tailor sessions where possible. In return, the successful engagement from children in the dance sessions reduced disruptive behaviour from children in the classroom.

9.4.3 Role modelling/ alternative pedagogy

The stigma about dance experienced by some boys in Year 5 was overcome by inviting a professional male dancer into the schools to speak with the children about how dance has helped him and played an important role in his life. Bringing in a male dancer helped to normalise the dance activities for boys.

In addition, observations of dance sessions and interviews with teachers highlighted that teachers in Year 1 often took part in the dance activities themselves to model the activities for their children, while teachers in Year 5 more often left the children to it. By engaging with the dance activities, teachers helped children to engage more effectively with the STAR projects. Teachers also felt that putting boys and girls together further helped boys 'getting out their shells' a bit more.

Parents also commented on how they appreciated their children being publicly acknowledged and celebrated for their achievements. This does not happen very often for children who struggle to keep up and fit in a formal curriculum that is focused on judgement/ assessment of highly structured subject knowledge and skills. Instead, the STAR project celebrated giving it a go and having fun, offering an alternative format and platform for learning.

9.5 Mechanisms/ Active ingredients

From the barriers and facilitators that we have outlined above, we identified three mechanisms that are crucial for the success and future development of the STAR project: effective communication; linking dance and art activities to the school curriculum; and partnership working.

9.5.1 Effective communication

Effective communication emerged as a major factor for a successful dance programme in schools in several ways.

Communication between teachers and artists

As highlighted in the challenges above, artists relied on information from teachers about the individual needs of children and communication before, during and after sessions between artists and teachers. This exchange of information was often crucial to identify and deal with disruptive behaviour, and to tailor activities to individual support needs. Artists also complained about a lack of reflection time after sessions to document issues and learning

with teachers and would welcome these opportunities in the future development and roll-out of the programme.

Teachers did not feel they had enough information at the start of the project to understand what the children and they themselves would be engaging in, and therefore, felt limited in their ability to support children, and by extension artists, in STAR. A more detailed and bespoke introduction session to teachers with the artists at the start of the project, would facilitate clear communication about expectation from both teachers and artists and how they could support each other during the project.

Communication between artists and children

Teachers identified a communication challenge around the instructions given to children by the dance artists and felt that the sessions were initially being pitched too high. They noticed that some children struggling to understand and follow the verbal instructions from the dance artists. These instructions improved over the course of the delivery of the dance sessions, with teachers highlighting good communications with the children by the artists and noticeable improvement in the vocabulary of children towards the end of the project.

Communication between schools, TIN Arts and parents

Communication was also mentioned as an issue by parents, who reported a lack of communication from the schools and artists about the STAR project. This made them unaware of what their children were doing at school during the dance sessions and how they could support these sessions from home. Particularly parents from Year 5 children felt that their children did not talk to them about what happened at school, making them reliant on the information sent to them by the school. A launch event or meeting with parents at the start of future STAR projects would be appreciated by parents and enable them to be more involved in the project.

Communication between artists, teachers, and children

Finally, communication proved crucial for expectation management. For instance, anxiety from children to participate in the final performance on stage at the end of the project appeared to be related to a misunderstanding among children and teachers about the nature of the performance required on stage. Intended as an informal showcase where children could do what they liked on stage to show off their creativity, children and teachers were worried about putting together a formal performance routine. More communication between artists, teachers, and children about the nature of the performance would have alleviated fears and could have made the experience more enjoyable from the start for some children.

That said, children overcoming their fears by going on stage in front of their family, friends and teachers also showed resilience and growth in confidence in these children, which needs to be and was celebrated at the performance.

9.5.2 Linking dance and art activities to the school curriculum

Initial fears from teachers that STAR would take time away from them delivering an already cramped and challenging curriculum were alleviated by their observations that the project supported delivery of the school curriculum. For example, by increasing children's attention in class, combined with more confidence to express themselves more effectively, enhancing their engagement and learning in the classroom.

According to teachers, STAR taught children to articulate themselves in a different way by teaching them how to tell a story (through dance and music) and enabling them to listen to music, discovering the different story telling elements, such as rhythm, pace, pitch, and lyrics. These new skills directly supported more formal curriculum components and subjects, such as English, where story telling is a key ingredient.

The dance project also supported children to get out of the classroom and experience something different that helped with their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Various children in the school experience mental health issues, particularly after COVID-19, but teachers often do not have the time or tools to deal with them. The STAR project provided an outlet and opportunity to address these experiences by tapping into their creativity.

Therefore, the STAR project addresses skill gaps in the current curriculum around literacy, storytelling, and mental health; teachers suggested that the STAR project could further incorporate some of the elements required in the curriculum. To make the project sustainable for schools and allow more time for delivery, both teachers and artists suggested to embed the dance activities more structurally in the school curriculum.

This also includes thinking about referral pathways for children whose interest in dance and arts is sparked by the STAR project: how can children who have discovered dance activities be kept engaged in them after the project has finished?

9.5.3 Partnership working

Collaboration between Northern Ballet, the North East and North Cumbria's Child Health and Wellbeing Network and TIN Arts for STAR supported the successful delivery of the project, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic and the various challenges this represented. The ethos of the partnership ensured adaptability and flexibility of the project, although some partners were less involved and struggled to make links with different teams.

Securing the sustainability and future roll-out of STAR across the North East (and beyond) requires strong (distributed) leadership and collaboration. The partnership ethos on which this project has been built demonstrates the value of different organisations coming together and each contributing their expertise and resources to a common goal, adding value from different perspectives.

Scaling up the programme to other schools and areas will stretch availability of resources to deliver the project and strategic decisions will need to be made by the partners about where to prioritise and invest resources.

In general, children, parents, teachers, and dance artists were optimistic about the success of the project so far and suggested that the project should be delivered at a scale. They made several practical suggestions for improvements of STAR in the future.

Teachers suggested that children could perhaps be targeted at the end of each school key stage. The children suggested small improvements in the form of including songs with words and making more use of equipment, such as barres, to help them with their balance. Parents also referred to the use of props to give children more confidence for engaging with the dance activities. Finally, parents highlighted existing reward systems within school to promote engagement of children, such as a hot chocolate at the end of the week, and by awarding points for taking part in each dance session, which children can use to buy treats and other items.

9.6 Limitations of study

As a pilot study, the focus of this evaluation was on understanding stakeholders' perceptions about the development and implementation of STAR, to inform and co-produce measures for health and wellbeing outcomes that were relevant to children engaging in the project. The qualitative data collected in focus groups, interviews with dance artists, teachers, and parents, and engagement activities with children yielded rich insights on their experiences of the project and helped the research team to develop and test a survey for outcome measures. This testing involved a small sample of children in Year 5 in one school and we have not been able to repeat to survey to measure changes in outcomes. Therefore, quantitative data is limited and outcomes emerging from the qualitative data and survey are only indicative of the impact of STAR on children health and wellbeing. Future research, which repeats the survey at the start and end of each STAR project in a school will provide more conclusive data about outcomes.

While we were able to interview all dance artists and teachers involved in the delivery of STAR in both schools, we only managed to interview two teachers, one from each school in the follow-up interviews, limiting insights on the changes in teachers' perceptions over the course of the project. Workload pressures on teachers, especially in a pandemic, should not be underestimated, and researchers should be flexible in offering teachers different options and times for engaging in research, building relationships with them and the dance artists by not only observing dance sessions but by engaging in them personally.

The children that engaged in the research activities also represent only a small part of the children across both schools that took part and therefore different opinions from other children might have been missed. It also limited the comparisons we were able to make between schools, age groups and gender of children. We deliberately limited the number of children in each activity to a maximum of six to maximise their engagement and support their interactions in each activity, which is time intensive.

Finally, we struggled to recruit parents for the focus groups in both schools, considerably limiting their input in the project. Despite several recruitment efforts through the schools'

newsletters, attending parents' mornings after the Pinocchio performance, and teachers' best efforts to encourage parents to attend, we only managed to complete one focus group with parents in Year 5. Future research could explore additional mechanisms for recruiting parents to focus groups, such as attending the launch event of the project with parents at the start of the project. The limited input from parents means that we were not able to ask parents how they describe and define living in disadvantaged communities and therefore we have opted to use the term 'experiencing geographical inequality', as suggested by Paterson & Gregory (2019).

In terms of future research methods, teacher and artists suggested that visual methods and making use of the dance artists' reflections may be most feasible in future evaluation studies, however the ethics of anonymity and confidentiality requires careful consideration.

9.7 Recommendations

Based on the views of children, parents, teachers, and dance artists, we make the following recommendations for improving and supporting the scaling up of the STAR project:

1. *Organise a launch event* for the dance programme at the beginning of school terms with school staff, children, and parents so they know what to expect, and when, over the course of the dance programme.
2. *Allocate time* for a briefing and debriefing before and after each session between dance artists and teachers on needs of children to adapt dance sessions to accommodate varied needs.
3. *Allocate time for artists' reflections* following each session [notes can be used as data in subsequent research].
4. *Provide regular feedback to parents* through newsletters about their child's progress in STAR and how they can support the project at home and get more involved.
5. *Encourage teachers to participate* in dance classes early in the programme until the dance artists gain confidence and trust of the children, then the dance artists deliver classes independently.
6. Consider delivering STAR to *older age groups at the end of each key stage* (Year 3 and 5) to support more holistic engagement from children.
7. Develop a *different focus for the dance activities in each year*, with Year 5 dance activities more focused on emotional narratives.
8. *Link these narratives to existing school reading schemes* to embed STAR more firmly in the school curriculum.
9. Deliver STAR to *mixed gender groups* and use targeted *pairing of children* (suggested by teachers) to support less confident children to engage in the dance activities.
10. *Explore including music with words* as part of dance activities and using equipment, such as bars to help children with their balance, and props.
11. *Communicate early on with children and parents about expectations for the performances and organise dress rehearsals* in the theatre with the children as part of

the dance programme to increase familiarity with arts and cultural venues and to minimise anxiety.

12. *Develop referral pathways* for talented children identified in school settings to develop dance skills with professional dance artists.
13. *Invest in strong working relationships with senior leaders* in each school to support the delivery and implementation of STAR. E.g., to encourage buy-in from teachers and parents, and to provide teachers with reflection and training time to engage with dance sessions and artists.
14. *Develop future research to test the measurements and methods* developed in this pilot study on a larger scale and for a longer time. Consider including visual methods in follow-up research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Topic guide for interviews with dance artists

1. Background	
Could you describe what happens in a dance session?	<p>Probes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Could you describe what you aim to do in a dance session?ii. How were these aims developed/derived?iii. Could you describe the activities involved in a dance session?iv. Is there a rationale or logic for selecting these activities in particular?
2. Process	
What do you think works well in the dance sessions?	<p>Probes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. What do you think doesn't work so well?ii. What changes would you make to improve the dance sessions, and why?iii. What are the challenges you have encountered to delivering the dance sessions?
3. Evaluation	

<p>Can you describe the ways in which you can tell that the children have benefited from the dance sessions?</p>	<p>Probes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How do you define a successful dance session? ii. How is success indicated to you? iii. How would you measure a successful session? iv. How can you tell if a dance session did not go as well as you had hoped? How is this indicated to you? v. Do you make use of any particular methods to do this? vi. If yes, what are these methods and how are the children involved? vii. Do you think the methods you use to evaluate sessions are acceptable to the children? viii. What would you do to improve existing methods of evaluation be improved?
<p>4. General</p>	
<p>How do you think dance generally helps the children?</p>	<p>Probes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. What do you think the children learn from the sessions?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Can you talk about the strategies you use to engage different children to join in the sessions? iii. Could you describe instances in which you have found it difficult to engage the children in the sessions? iv. Could you talk about the skills you think the children gain or develop from participating in dance? v. Have you noticed any changes in the children (e.g. in confidence, self-efficacy) from the start to the end of sessions? And over the course of the programme?
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5. Health & Wellbeing

<p>What do you think the health and well-being benefits are for children who participate in your dance sessions, if any?</p>	<p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Could you describe the physical benefits? ii. Could you describe the mental health benefits? iii. Could you describe the social benefits? iv. Are there any other unexpected benefits you have noticed the children gain from taking part?
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	v. How do you recognise/measure these benefits?
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Appendix 2. Topic guide for interviews with teachers

1. How do you see the use of extra-curricular activities for promoting children's wellbeing?
 - a. Could you describe some of the barriers?
 - b. Could you describe some of the key elements of the wellbeing activities which appears to work?

2. How do you see the use of dance and arts for promoting wellbeing in children?
 - a. What do you think are the mechanisms on how this would work?
 - b. Do you see any other benefits beyond wellbeing?

3. How do children engage with dance and arts in general?
 - a. What do you believe are children's perceptions of dance and arts?
 - b. Can you identify any barriers or facilitators for engagement?
 - c. Which factors would affect engagement (e.g. gender, skills,...)?

4. How important is the engagement of families in the activities?
 - a. What would be the benefits for families?
 - b. What would be the barriers to family's engagement?
 - c. How can we overcome these barriers?

5. How do you see this programme working in the longer term?
 - a. Could you see this being embedded in the curriculum?
 - b. How willing are you to receive training to deliver this programme?
 - c. How do you want the training to be delivered?

6. How would one be able to tell if a programme had a positive effect on children's wellbeing?
 - a. Have you noticed any changes in behaviour and attitudes?
 - b. What would be positive changes you would like to see in the short and longer-term?
 - c. How do you see the use of the academic evaluation to explore children's views on the programme and to examine the effect on children's health and wellbeing?

- d. Are there any challenges? How can we overcome those?
- e. What are some of the selling points of an academic evaluation?

Appendix 3. Topic guide for focus groups and engagement activities with children

Warm up

A bit about what we are going to be doing and why. Any questions?

A bit about you – EXERCISE – get them moving

Questions	Methods
About you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you live in Grangetown/Thorntree? • Do you like where you live? If yes why and if no, why not? • Do you walk to school or come by car? • How long does it take you to get to school? • Do you have brothers and/or sisters? 	Yes/No Corners General discussion
General health and wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think you are fit and healthy? • What do you do that you think keeps you fit? • How many times do you exercise? • What type of exercises do you do? • General thoughts on how they feel etc 	Yes & No flipchart sheets on the table – stick post-its on relevant sheets
The Dance Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who likes to dance? How/why – does it make you feel happy, healthy, sad, tired? • Are you enjoying doing the dancing in school? • What do you like best about the dance project? • Is there anything you don't like about the dance project? Why? 	Song
Physical/Emotional Wellbeing	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the dance project helps you feel better about yourself? –prompts: more confident, wanting to exercise/dancing more, dancing with your friends • Have you started to do more exercise outside of school? • Do you think you can sleep better after any activity or exercise? • Have you made any changes in what you eat recently? Favourite meal? 	<p>VoxPops</p> <p>General discussion</p>
<p>Finishing off</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One word to describe what you think about the dance project 	<p>Post-its</p>

Appendix 4. Topic list for focus groups with parents

Introduce research and purpose of focus group. Ensure consent is understood and given.

Perceptions of dance activities

1. How is your child engaging with the dance activities at school?
2. What do they think about the dance activities? (Do they like them? If so, what do they like about them? Anything they enjoy less about the dance activities?)
3. What do you think about the dance activities? (Are you happy with the school putting them on? Are they dance activities appropriate/ suitable for your child's age and ability?)

Engagement with the dance activities

4. How are you involved in the dance activities? (How is the communication with teachers and the artist about the activities? Do you feel that you are able to make suggestions to the teachers and artist about how the activities are done with your child?)
5. What difference, if any, does your involvement with the dance activities at school make for you and your child?

Outcomes

6. Are the dance activities at school helping your child to be healthy and feel well? If so, in what way?
7. Do you notice any differences in your child since they are taking part in the dance activities at school? (Are they happier? Do they talk more with you about how they feel? Are they starting to engage with other art and dance activities at home/ outside school?)
8. Do the dance activities help your child to make new friends, in and outside school?
9. What could the school and artists do to improve the dance activities for your child?
10. Do you have anything else to share or say about the dance activities for your child at school?

Appendix 5.

Table. Questions and scales used for each outcome mentioned by children to measure their health and wellbeing in the STAR project

Outcomes mentioned by children	Indicator	Scale	Source
Health	How well/unwell are you feeling at this moment in time?	1-100 visual analog scale	Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
Feeling happy/ excited/ more relaxed	How happy/sad are you feeling at this moment in time?	1-100 visual analog scale	Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
Express themselves (by movement)/ storytelling, getting into a role/	How well are you able to express yourself?	5-point Likert scale: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely	Adapted from Canterbury Wellbeing Scales but used scale from KIDSCREEN-10 index
Feeling more confident	How confident/ not confident are you feeling at this moment in time?	1-100 visual analog scale	Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
More fit and well/ physical skills/ stamina	Have you felt fit and well?	5-point Likert scale: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely	Question from KIDSCREEN-10 index but scale adapted from Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
Full of energy	Have you felt full of energy?	1-100 visual analog scale	Question from KIDSCREEN-10 index but scale adapted from Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
Feeling lonely	Have you felt lonely?	1-100 visual analog scale	Question from KIDSCREEN-10 index but scale adapted from Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
Fun with friends	Have you had fun with your friends?	5-point Likert scale: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely	KIDSCREEN-10 index
Collaboration and teamwork/ partner work/ social skills	Have you and your friends helped each other?	5-point Likert scale: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely	KIDSCREEN-10 index

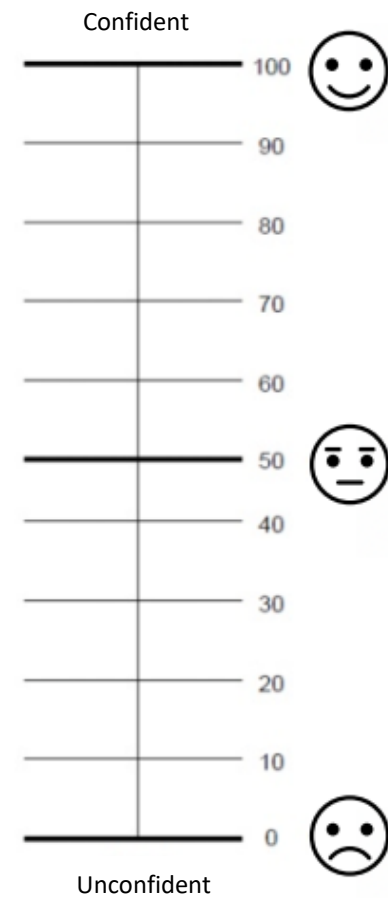
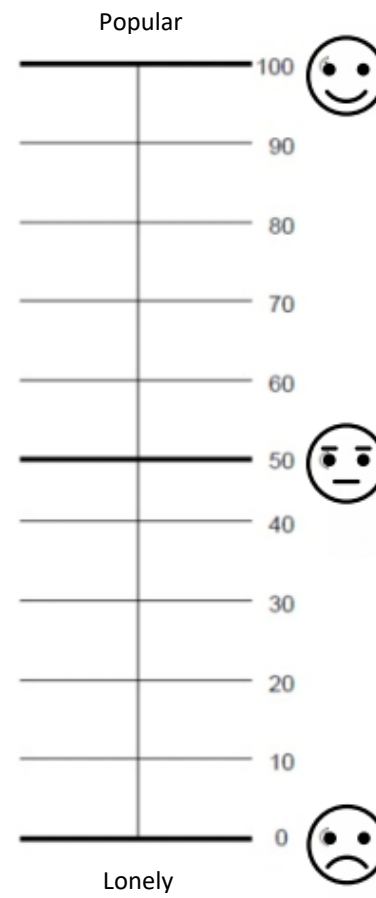
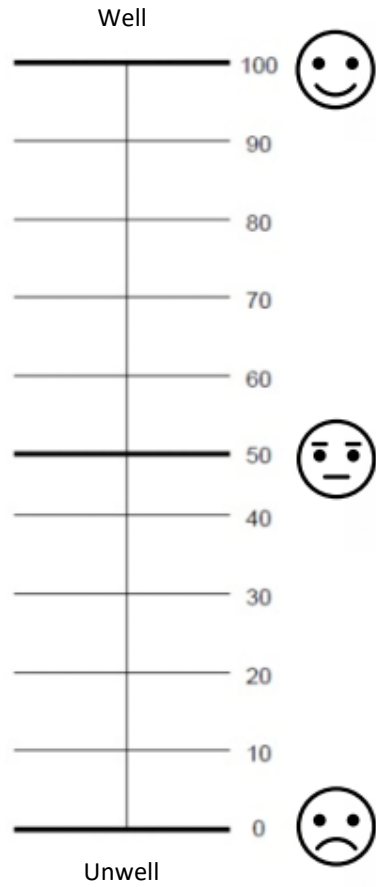
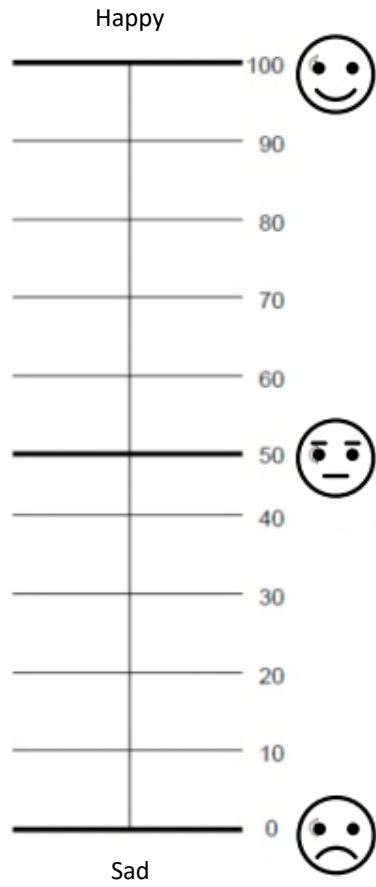
Pay more attention in class / focus/ following instruction/ listening skills	Have you been able to pay attention in class?	5-point Likert scale: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely	KIDSCREEN-10 index
More exercise outside school	Have you been physically active outside school?	5-point Likert scale: Not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely	KIDSCREEN-27 index
Creativity and creativeness	How creative/ not creative are you feeling at this moment in time?	1-100 visual analog scale	Adapted from Canterbury Wellbeing Scales
Interest in dance performances	Would you like to see another dance performance?	5-point Likert scale: Very unlikely, unlikely, not sure, likely, very likely	Own question
Interest in engaging in dance performances	Would you be happy to take part in a dance performance?	5-point Likert scale: Very unlikely, unlikely, not sure, likely, very likely	Own question

Appendix 6. Health and wellbeing questionnaire for children in Year 5

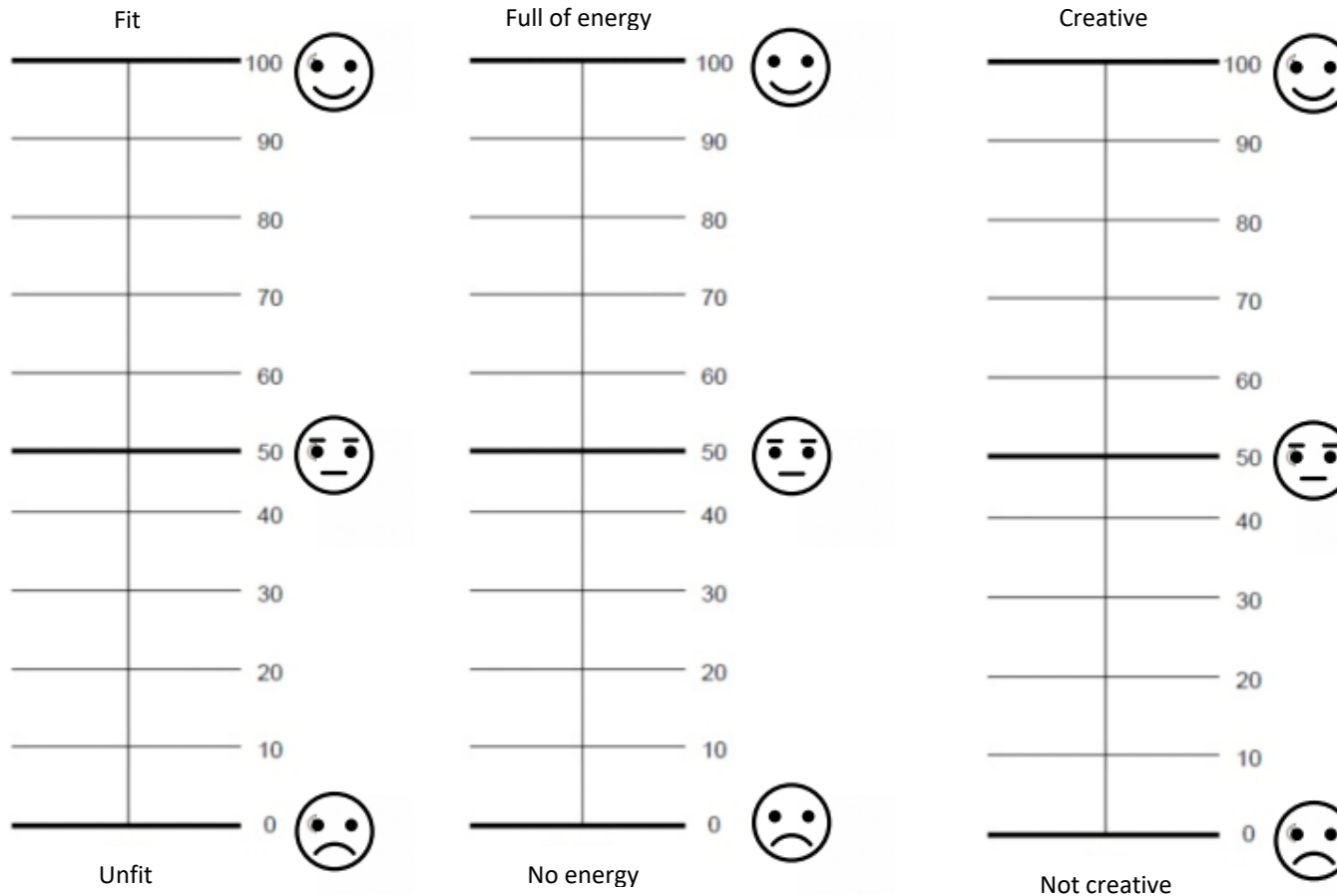
We would like to know how you are feeling at this very moment. Start with the first line between feeling as happy as you have ever felt (100 points; happy face) and as sad as you have felt (0 points; sad face). In the middle is where you feel neither happy nor sad (50 points; neutral face). Then, go on to the next ones about how well, popular and confident you feel. There are no right or wrong answers, just mark where you are feeling.

Similar to the questions on the previous page, we would like to know how you are feeling at this very moment. Start on the first line between feeling as fit as you

Please make a mark on these scales to show how you are feeling *right now* :



Please make a mark on these scales to show how you are feeling *right now*



We would like to know about experiences of the STAR project. Please circle which answer best describes your experiences for each of the three questions below. For example, circle the two arrow pointing upwards in the first question, if the STAR project helped you to express yourself with movements extremely well. Or circle the two downward arrows, if you feel that the STAR project did not help you at all to express yourself with movements. There are no right or wrong answers, just mark which answer fits best with your experiences of STAR.

Please circle which answer best describes your experiences for each question

How well can you express yourself with movements?

- ↑ ↑ Extremely
- ↑ Very
- ↑ ↓ Some
- ↓ A little
- ↓ ↓ Not at all

Have you had fun with your friends?

- ↑ ↑ Extremely
- ↑ Very
- ↑ ↓ Some
- ↓ A little
- ↓ ↓ Not at all

Have you and your friends helped each other in STAR?

- ↑ ↑ Extremely
- ↑ Very
- ↑ ↓ Some
- ↓ A little



Not at all

Please circle which answer best describes your experiences for each question

Have you been able to pay attention in class?

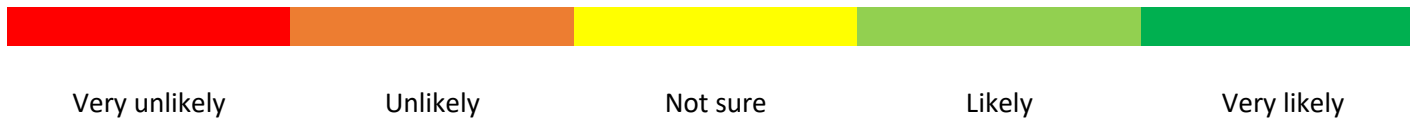
↑	↑	Extremely
↑		Very
↑	↓	Some
↓		A little
↓	↓	Not at all

Have you been physically active outside school
(for example, running, climbing, biking)?

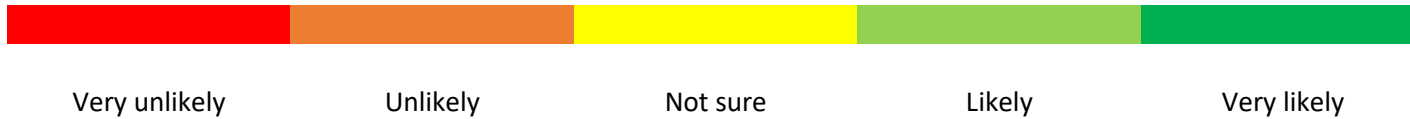
↑	↑	Extremely
↑		Very
↑	↓	Some
↓		A little
↓	↓	Not at all

Please make a mark on these scales to show us what you would like to do

Will you go and see a dance performance in the future?



Will you take part in a dance performance in the future?



Appendix 7.

Figure. Boxplots of scores on health and wellbeing indicators (n=42)

