

Cultural Alliance

A three-year journey of learning,
relationships and possibility



Trinity Community Arts 2024-2026

TRINITY.



Executive summary

The Cultural Alliance was not simply an arts project delivered in schools. It was a three-year partnership between Trinity Community Arts, four local primary schools, children, families and artists - exploring what becomes possible when creative learning is given the time, trust and space to develop.

Across 2024–2026, 483 children experienced sustained, curriculum-linked drama and dance, demonstrating the impact of long-term, relationship-based creative practice on confidence, participation, communication and engagement with learning - particularly for children experiencing multiple barriers to opportunity.

“

When I know I have got drama, I am really happy to go to school that day.

Child participant

Developed through listening, experimentation and continuous adaptation, the Cultural Alliance created a tested model for how arts organisations and schools can work together to improve educational outcomes, strengthen communities and ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive through creativity.

Understanding change

I had the pleasure of working alongside Sarah Franke and the Trinity team to develop a series of research activities with practitioners, teachers, and children to help surface the difference the Cultural Alliance programme made.

To get close to the complexity of this programme and the changes it has contributed to, the evaluation focused on the voices and experiences of those involved. The findings show clear signs of increased confidence, imagination, and engagement with learning, recognised consistently by children, teachers, and practitioners.

What feels most important, and this also reflects the care Trinity has taken to listen throughout the programme, are the stories of change. They help us see the small but powerful ways change happens over time and show the importance of relationships in creative learning.

I feel sure the impact of the Cultural Alliance programme will continue to be felt long after the programme has ended, but I hope its true legacy will be in encouraging future collaborations that are given the time needed to build trusted relationships, nurture creativity and support sustained engagement with the arts.

Harriet Hand

Trinity Researcher and
Senior Research Associate



Why Trinity?

Creative Expression for All

Trinity is a community arts organisation. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience culture, express themselves creatively and participate in shaping the cultural life of their community.

The Cultural Alliance was a natural expression of this vision: a long-term partnership with four local primary schools, bringing Trinity's creative expertise into schools while working alongside school leaders, teachers and pupils to understand need, shape provision and adapt the approach over time.

- Rooted in place
- Creative expertise
- Partnership
- Responsive practice
- A community arts hub.

The Cultural Alliance put Trinity's vision of Creative Expression for All into practice – creating the foundations for a longer-term role as a trusted and valued arts partner for local schools.



Our approach was different

**The Cultural Alliance was designed as a partnership,
not a programme dropped into schools**



“

The Cultural Alliance was not a fixed model delivered to schools. It was a model developed with schools.

Core programme learning

The distinctive feature was not simply the use of drama and dance. It was the combination of:

- Long-term, regular engagement rather than one-off workshops
- Creative learning connected directly to the curriculum
- Artists working alongside teachers rather than separately from school life
- Children, families and schools helping shape the work
- Continuous reflection and adaptation
- A focus on relationships as a condition for participation and learning.

Why this mattered

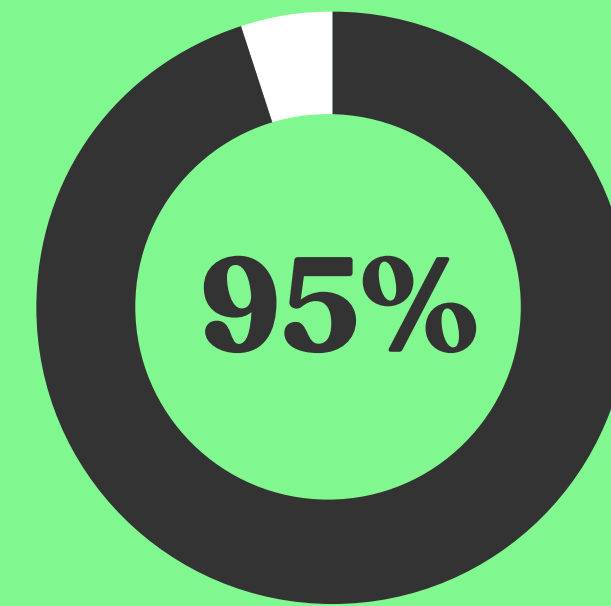
The programme began with a question about access

The participating schools served communities experiencing a disproportionate level of creative inequality, high cultural diversity, significant SEND needs, disadvantage and multiple barriers to accessing arts and cultural opportunities.

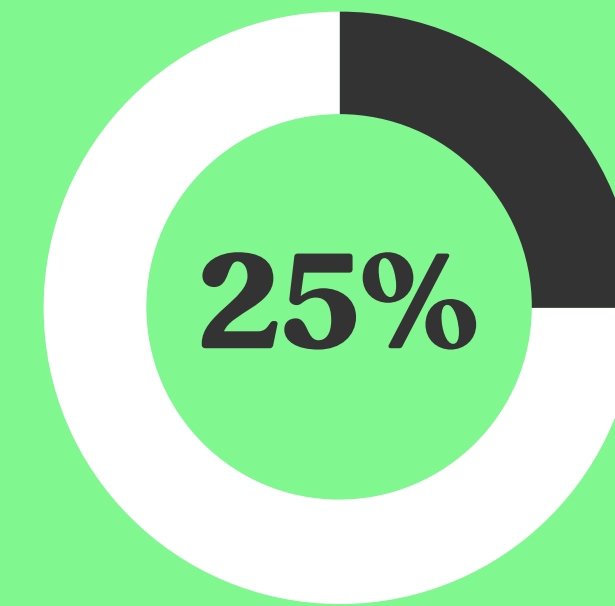


50+ Languages

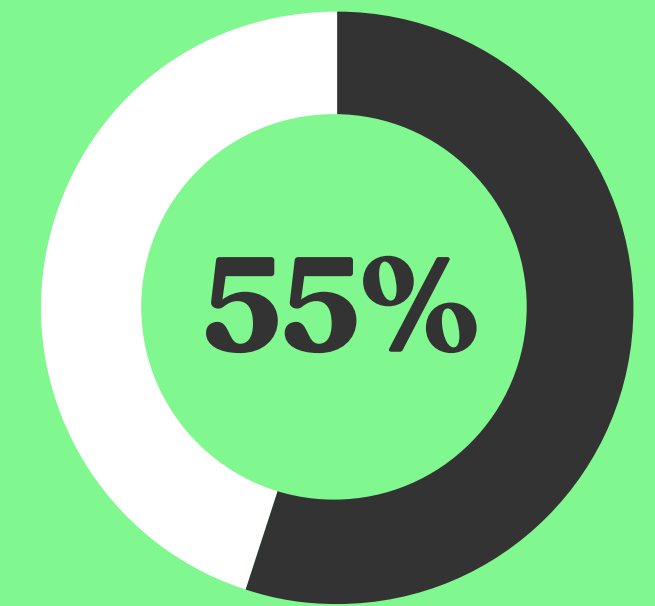
Spoken across participating schools



Pupils identifying as Global Majority



Pupils on the SEND register



Eligible for Pupil Premium

“

Bringing history, science and geography to life has really helped all children access the curriculum including EAL and SEND.

Class teacher

The journey

Three years of listening, testing and deepening

The programme evolved. Each phase built on what had been learned before.

YEAR 3

Deepen & share

Long-term relationships began to translate into visible changes in participation, confidence, ownership and curriculum engagement.

YEAR 2

Test & adapt

The programme became a learning laboratory. Teachers, artists and Trinity reflected together, strengthening practice and responding to SEND, EAL, SEMH, engagement and group dynamics.

YEAR 1

Listen & build

Consultation, co-design and relationship-building. Schools, children, parents and carers helped shape the programme.

The Cultural Alliance approach

Listen. Build. Create. Adapt.

The programme's distinctive model can be summarised in four connected practices:

“

Strong relationships matter. Creativity flourishes when supported by structure.

Programme learning

Respond to what is actually happening in the room

Adapt

Understand context before designing the response

Listen

Build

Invest in trust between children, teachers, artists and partners

Create

Use drama and dance to connect curriculum, imagination and participation

Our approach to evaluation

People-centred

Pupils and teachers reflect on their own experiences of participation.

Shared

Learning is captured and shared in ways that are accessible and useful to the people involved.

Situated

We observe and develop practice in context, rather than apply an off-the-shelf model.

Equitable

Different voices, experiences and forms of knowledge are valued equally.

Learning-focussed

We use evaluation to learn and improve, not to judge.

Proportionate

We create space for reflection with all stakeholders, adapting our approach as the programme develops.



How change happened

The mechanism of change

The programme combined long-term relationships, curriculum integration and responsive creative practice. As trust developed, children became more willing to participate, take creative risks and contribute their own ideas.



The programme in numbers

4

Schools

483

Children

432

Hours of drama

288

Hours of dance

4

Public
performances

11

Professional
practitioners

29

Teachers and class
assistants engaged



Scale matters. So does the quality of the experience

The distinctive feature was sustained, weekly creative learning over an extended period – not a one-off cultural experience.

A different way to learn

Children described learning as active,
expressive and imaginative



“

It makes me feel like I can
use my imagination more.

Child participant

“

We get to learn the same
things, but in a different way.

Child participant

“

You don't have to just sit at the
table; you can have exercise.

Child participant

Learning became more accessible

Creative practice opened up different routes into the curriculum

Teachers described drama and dance as helping children access learning through movement, imagination, storytelling and practical experience.

“Bringing history, science and geography to life has really helped all children access the curriculum including EAL and SEND.

Class teacher

“

It is huge and it is really reflected in their writing and their understanding of subjects.

Class teacher



Children found confidence and voice

For some children, the creative space made participation possible

“

Our children were starting to believe in themselves.

Class teacher

“

They start to become really confident.
Then they start to perform.
Then they start to flourish.

Class teacher



A quiet girl found her voice

A story of confidence, language and participation

Before

Extremely quiet. New to English.
Rarely spoke or participated.

The moment

During a drama session exploring belonging and migration, she independently delivered a line in English.

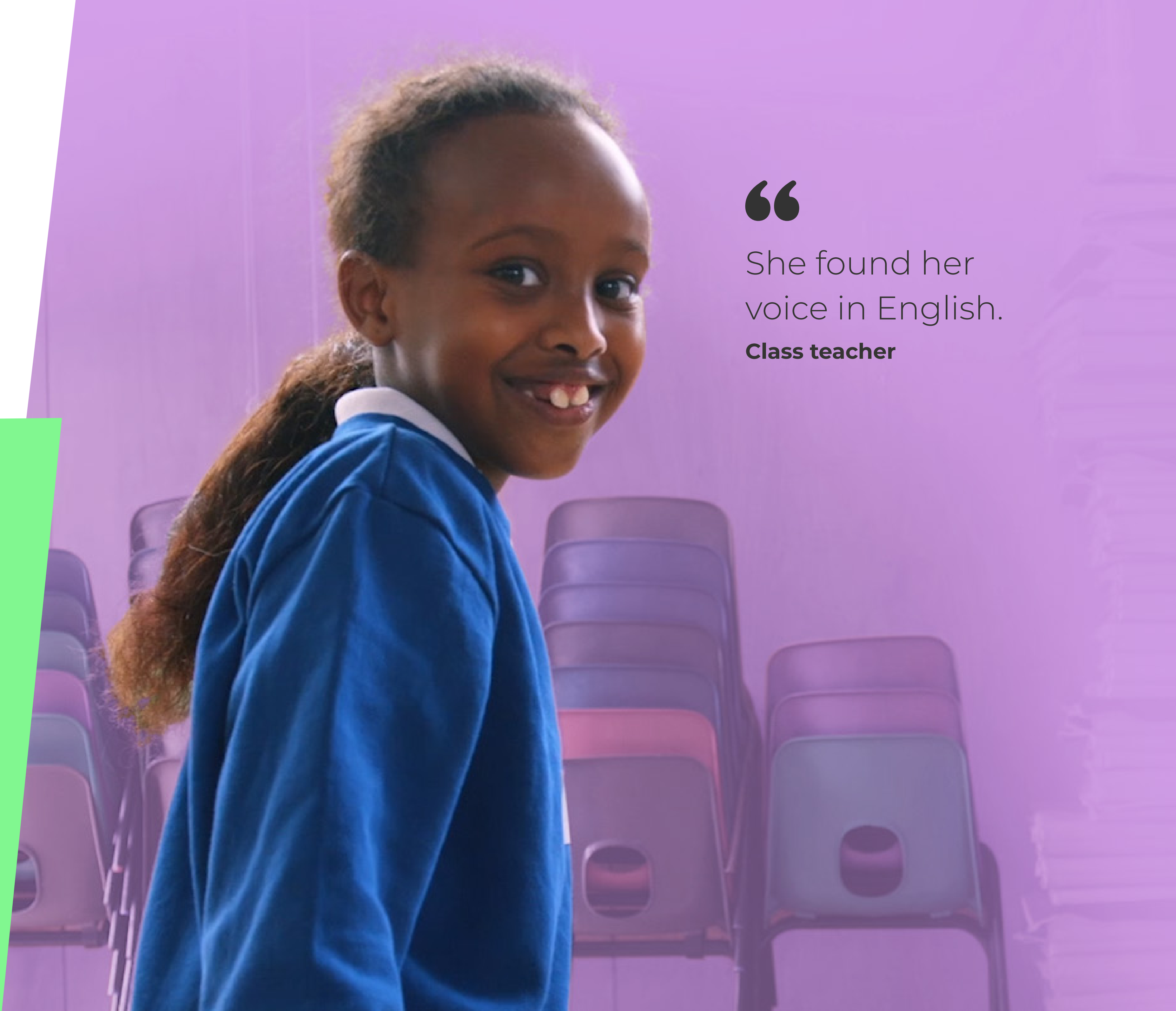
What changed

Her teacher observed greater confidence, participation and willingness to ask for help.

“

She found her voice in English.

Class teacher



The reluctant dancer claimed the stage

A story of confidence extending
beyond the session



“

It's your time to shine.
I will copy you.

Class teacher

Before

“I'm not doing this.
I'm not dancing.
I don't want to do this.
I can't do this.”

After

She took her teacher's hand and went to the front of the group. She began participating enthusiastically, demonstrating new moves and teaching dance routines to her younger siblings.

The Famous Five began to imagine differently

A story of possibility

A group of boys known for confrontation and repetitive play began to imagine themselves as explorers during a curriculum-linked drama activity.

For their teacher, the significance was not simply that they were playing. It was that they were beginning to imagine beyond familiar patterns.

“

Our children were starting to believe in themselves. They had embodied it.

That's the change I saw in them.

Class teacher



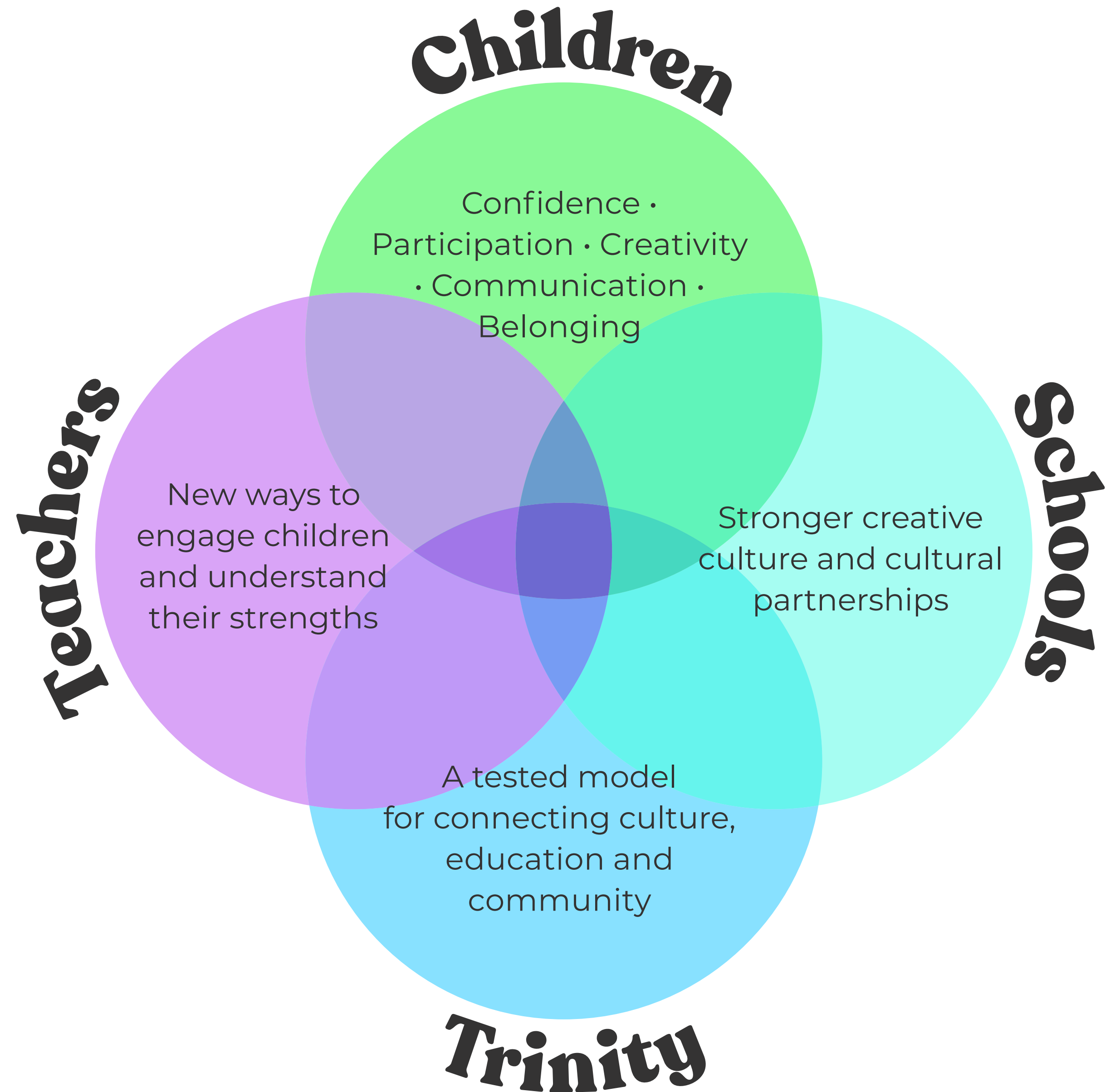
The change was bigger than the sessions

Impact was visible at several levels

“

It is creating community bonds and legacy between Trinity, these three primary schools – including the children and their teachers – and the children’s loved ones and carers.

Dr Furaha Asani, PHF Impact Consultant



What we learned

The conditions mattered



1. Long-term engagement creates depth.
2. Relationships are foundational.
3. Creativity needs structure.
4. Curriculum connection creates relevance.
5. Inclusion requires flexibility.
6. Reflection and adaptation improve practice.

“

The programme demonstrated that arts-based learning works most effectively when it is embedded within school life and developed collaboratively with teachers, artists and children.

Legacy

The Cultural Alliance proved that sustained partnership matters

It showed that Trinity can work alongside schools to understand need, build trust and adapt creative practice.

It created relationships, knowledge and credibility.

“

The most important legacy is what becomes possible when children are given time, trust and creative space.

The next step is to build on those foundations – moving from a single programme to an ongoing partnership model in which Trinity becomes a trusted and valued arts partner for local schools.

- Children who have experienced new ways to participate, express themselves and succeed.
- Teachers who have seen creativity unlock learning and confidence.
- Schools with stronger relationships to artists and cultural organisations.
- A model for Trinity's role as a cultural connector.
- Learning that can inform future work across Bristol and beyond.

The next chapter: from delivery partner to trusted arts partner

1. We understand the need

Trinity continues to work with schools to identify where creative practice can make a difference.

- Supporting children struggling with confidence, communication or belonging.
- Creating new ways to engage pupils who are not thriving through conventional approaches.
- Helping schools respond creatively to their local context and environment.

The intervention starts with the school's need; not with a pre-designed arts product.

2. We co-design the response

Through continued conversations with school leaders, teachers and pupils, Trinity develop a programme of creative provision that is shaped around the priorities identified.

- Targeted drama, dance or music interventions.
- Dedicated arts provision for specific groups of pupils.
- 1-2-1 music lessons and group arts activities.
- Creative responses to particular curriculum themes or challenges.
- Artist residencies, performances and celebration.
- Opportunities for children to access Trinity as a community arts hub.

3. We are becoming a trusted local arts partner

The Cultural Alliance is the beginning of a trusted, active partnership between Trinity and our local schools.

- A trusted creative resource for schools.
- A community arts hub for engagement.
- A source of specialist artists and practitioners.
- A partner in designing creative responses to local challenges.
- A bridge between children, schools, families and the wider cultural life of Bristol.

It's not the end of the story. It is the foundation on which a longer-term model of school partnership can be built.

The legacy is possibility

The Cultural Alliance was built through partnership working

A foundation of trust, shared learning and possibility. The next chapter is about putting that trust to work.

A long-term relationship between Trinity and the schools at the heart of our community.

“

What happens when children are given time, trust and creative space to find new ways of learning, expressing themselves and seeing themselves?

What happens when the adults around them believe those possibilities matter?



Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by a partnership

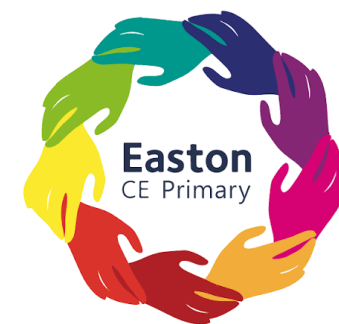
To all our partners who support us

Thank you!

Funder



Schools



Creative partners



Evaluation and critical friends

Dr Harriet Hand and
Dr Furaha Asani

Sarah Franke, Cultural Alliance
Project Manager, The Trinity team,
alongside the artists, practitioners,
teachers, support staff, children,
families and communities who
shaped the work.