



# Drama: a guide for governing boards

Providing high quality drama  
education in schools



<b>Foreword</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The characteristics of high quality drama education</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How to support and influence drama education in your school</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>How to monitor progress, impact and outcomes</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Further information and support</b>	<b>12</b>

### **Acknowledgements**

This guide has been developed through collaboration between the National Governance Association, Arts Council England and written by education consultant Susie Ferguson on behalf of the Theatre Education Forum.

### **Arts Council England**

We are the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

### **National Governance Association**

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.



# Foreword

Those of us who govern champion the right of children and young people to a high quality and wide-ranging education, ensuring their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The value of creative education in the lives of our young people – and the important role that subjects such as art and design, dance, drama and music have to play alongside English, maths and science – has never been more apparent as we begin to recover from the educational, social and health impacts of Covid-19.

Throughout lockdown, pupils faced huge upheavals in their day to day lives. But we also saw the positive power of creativity in supporting their learning, mental health and resilience. Now, as we begin to consider post-pandemic life, we need to ensure that high quality cultural education opportunities are available to every child, no matter what their background. These opportunities should be both formal and informal, in the classroom as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, and outside the classroom too. This is a matter of fairness and opportunity for all children.

As school governors and trustees, we have the chance to advocate for the right of all young people to benefit from high quality cultural education and to be creative through their study of subjects such as art and design, dance, drama and music. We know that this isn't always the case and it's why we encourage governors and trustees to champion cultural education in their schools, so that we can do

our best to ensure quality arts education for all. Literacy, numeracy and creativity are the three pillars of a strong educational offer.

These cultural education subjects encourage pupils to express themselves, to build confidence and to develop creative thinking skills, unlocking young people's potential and preparing them to succeed in life. Schools remain the single most important place where children can access great cultural experiences, which is why we've worked in collaboration with the NGA and subject specialists to refresh our guides for school governors. We hope these resources will inspire you to develop your understanding of how cultural education subjects can change the lives of children and young people and that they will support you in your role.

**Dr Darren Henley OBE**

Chief Executive, Arts Council England



Photo © Polka Theatre After School Club & Ali Wright

**This guide is part of a collection developed to support governing boards. The collection also covers art and design, music and dance and includes an introductory guide to arts, culture and creativity.**

**The collection is available via the [National Governance Association](#) and [Arts Council England](#) websites.**

# Introduction

**Storytelling is a fundamental part of human nature and so it can be used to support teaching and learning across the curriculum. Drama allows pupils and their teachers to encourage diversity, inclusion, tolerance and acceptance, as well as exploring the perspectives and experiences of cultures from around the world.**

**This guide has been developed to help governing boards support and champion drama in their schools and trusts. Drama has the potential to benefit so many aspects of school life. Governors and trustees can help to ensure that all pupils explore the rich creative opportunities that high quality drama education offers.**

Drama is also uniquely placed to engage parents, carers and other stakeholders to actively participate in the sharing and celebration of pupils' work and progress, through performances, trips and extra-curricular activities.

The breadth of content, challenge and opportunities for creativity and self-expression



Photo © Havelock Academy & Mark Savage

that drama offers make it one of the most popular subjects at both primary and secondary level. The study of drama falls within the national curriculum for English and it can be studied as a discreet subject at examination level in key stages 3 and 4.

Drama is utilised throughout key stage 1 and 2 to underpin the development of reading and writing: the national curriculum framework acknowledges the fundamental role that spoken language plays in pupils' cognitive, social and linguistic development across the whole curriculum.

At primary level, pupils adopt, create and portray a range of roles in storytelling and drama, and have the opportunity to create scripts for each other. They are also encouraged to improvise and devise their own original performances. Involvement in drama activities can be particularly effective at improving social skills and group cohesion. Participating in school plays is also an integral and memorable part of the primary school experience.

At secondary level, drama continues to support spoken language development in the form of presentations, debates, role play, and work on scripted and original performances. The process of rehearsal, refinement, and evaluative response underpins the development of social and academic skills across the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities such as school plays.

The current Ofsted inspection framework places strong emphasis on the need for pupils to develop the cultural capital required to succeed in life. The framework also demands that pupils be exposed to a curriculum which caters for their interests and aspirations. Drama supports pupils in their development of academic, social and personal skills which underpin their school education and further progression.



## The benefits of drama education

### 1. Whole school improvement

Where drama is valued and embedded across the curriculum and beyond, it can have a positive and measurable impact on pupil outcomes, particularly where used as a tool to improve and invigorate teaching. Drama provides all pupils the opportunity to flourish and find methods of self-expression.

### 2. Inclusion and diversity

Drama supports and encourages personal expression and the exploration of a wide range of cultures, experiences, perspectives, and the world in which we live.

### 3. Building skills for life

Drama allows pupils to develop transferable skills in leadership, communication, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. At examination level, drama offers pupils, of all abilities and interests, a range of opportunities in subject-specific skills including performance, design and technical roles.

The demands of theatre provide exceptional links to science, technology, engineering and maths, given the technical and innovative nature of contemporary theatre practice.

### 4. Cultural experiences

As audiences and participants in drama-based activities, young people develop a lifelong appreciation and understanding of drama and theatre and its interplay with other art forms. Participation in drama activities increases pupils' cultural capital and helps them succeed in life.

### 5. Mental health and wellbeing

Involvement in drama activities can have a positive effect on the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and the wider school community. It creates cohesion and facilitates relationships across year groups and subject areas. By creating space for self-expression and the exploration of emotions, involvement in drama enables pupils to develop empathy, confidence, enhanced communication skills and an understanding of what it means to be a valued member of society.



Photo © Theatre Peckham, Robin Hood & Suzi Corker

# The characteristics of high quality drama education

**High quality drama education extends skills and understanding through discussion, rehearsal and refinement, verbal, physical and written expression, and regular opportunities for pupils to share their work.**

The drama curriculum should help pupils to develop skills in:

- creating
- performing
- experience of watching performances
- evaluating their own work and that of others

Pupils should develop the ability to articulate their own responses to the drama and theatre they see.

While contexts may differ, all governing boards can use the following characteristics as a benchmark when discussing the quality and impact of drama education in their school or trust:

## A consistent and valued part of the curriculum

- Drama is embedded in the curriculum, both in the delivery of English and as a subject in its own right.
- Delivery is regular and consistent throughout the academic year. Where arts subjects share curriculum time at key stage 3, the curriculum is coordinated and coherent to enable teachers to build on prior knowledge to adequately prepare for the demands of key stage 4.
- Pupils have regular and sustained opportunities to engage with professional practice through workshops, talks, theatre visits and extra-curricular activities.
- Extra-curricular activities work in conjunction with curriculum-based

activities, rather than as a replacement for them.

- Whole school events such as productions utilise the skills of stakeholders in other subject areas such as art and design, dance, music, technology and business studies.
- Theatre visits and activities occur during curriculum time, rather than solely as voluntarily staffed evening visits.

## Helping pupils to understand the world around them

Opportunities for role play, story-based activities, and the development of their own narrative performances allow pupils of all abilities to explore and engage with the world around them. Referring to drama they have seen elsewhere, such as through television, film and media, informs and inspires their own creative responses.



Photo © Fertile Ground & Renaud Wisser



- Pupils in all key stages are exposed to the works of a wide range of playwrights, performing artists (individuals and companies), directors and designers which reflect the diversity of the world in which we live.
- Pupils can make connections between different styles and genres, helping them to develop cultural, contextual and historical knowledge.
- Drama specialists assist other subject areas in using effective drama techniques to deliver curriculum content. This includes statutory areas such as personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education as well as national curriculum subjects.
- Drama is used as a tool to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils, making a tangible contribution to school ethos.
- Challenging and engaging practical lessons are supported by appropriate recorded and written teaching resources.

### Pupils showcase their work and experience performances

Opportunities to perform can include:

- **Performing to other class members** – sharing learning and demonstrating skills to peers and teachers. Pupils develop confidence in performance, public speaking and oracy.
- **Whole school events** – school productions, end of year celebration assemblies, arts evenings and events with partnership schools are all excellent ways for pupils to contribute to short and long-term projects.
- **Collaboration with professional theatre companies and institutions** – pupils often share their work as the culmination of workshops or courses. These performances might take place in school or in a professional performance space.

Pupils should have regular opportunities to experience drama and theatre as an audience member as well as a performer, designer, director or technician. This could include:



Photo © Theatre Peckham, Robin Hood & Suzi Corker

- **Visits** to theatre groups, local drama companies and local, regional or national performance venues.
- **Recordings of professional performances via online platforms** – many are free and can be shared by several departments to reduce costs and encourage all subject areas to use drama as a teaching tool.
- **Assemblies and showcases** – exposure to the work of their peers can encourage aspiration and ambition for pupils.

### Pupils explore career opportunities

Drama requires pupils to develop transferable skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, inter-personal skills, resilience, and self-regulation. Skills formed in the study of drama build strong foundations for career and employment areas beyond theatre.

The UK's growing creative industries sector demands a wide range of specialisms, including design, craft and engineering; digital and broadcast; marketing, education, finance and human resources.

The range of employment opportunities can be made clear from primary level onwards when discussing aspirations and ambitions. The roles and responsibilities in the theatre industry can be increasingly explored at key stages 3, 4 and 5.

### Information about exams

Drama and theatre are studied at GCSE, A Level and BTEC and require an equally high standard of both written skills and practical ability. In addition to written examinations, assessment options include performance, or design for set, costume, puppetry, lighting and/or sound.

# How to support and influence drama education in your school

**There are many ways that governing boards, working at a strategic level, can make their ambition for all pupils to receive an excellent drama education a reality.**

## Make drama part of your vision and strategy

By making the provision of quality cultural education for every pupil part of the vision and strategy, the governing board are making a powerful statement to pupils, staff, parents and the wider community about the value of creativity.

## Prioritise teacher skills, knowledge and confidence

Drama is an ever-evolving art form, with innovation and creativity being at the heart of professional performances and productions. Drama teachers require ongoing professional development to ensure that their classroom practice reflects the innovation and contemporary practice of the professional theatre industry.

Non-specialist teachers delivering drama lessons require guidance, support and professional development to ensure consistency for all pupils. This should include regular opportunities for teachers to develop and extend practice in response to the innovations of theatre practice.

Governing boards should ensure that curriculum delivery is supported by ongoing and adequately funded staff CPD.

## High quality CPD through external partnerships

Schools can utilise a variety of training opportunities beyond one-off courses. Developing strong relationships with local, regional and national theatre institutions is highly beneficial: many institutions offer free or subsidised training opportunities for teachers and other staff members.

CPD should provide teachers with the skills to sustain and develop a curriculum after the training event itself has ended. Ongoing relationships with theatre professionals are one way that this can be achieved.

## How to find partners

Arts Council England fund a network of bridge organisations to connect schools and the cultural sector. Each Bridge has a database of organisations that schools can use to search for partners to work with. Visit [Bridge Organisations Art Council England](#) to find your local Bridge and access their database.

High quality CPD is often provided by local and regional theatres and is an excellent way to build sustained relationships with venues in your area. Opportunities for training and development are also offered by touring companies and large-scale theatres and companies who work on a national scale.

Exam boards also provide teacher training and standardisation material.



## Ensure appropriate space and resources

The governing board is responsible for ensuring that the school or trust has sufficient resources in place to deliver their curriculum.

- Schools often have a dedicated drama space, particularly at secondary level where qualifications require specific equipment and resources.
- Drama can be delivered well and safely in shared teaching spaces (such as school halls), but the busy school environment can make considerable demands on their availability. Effective booking systems and maintenance are essential. At secondary level, drama should be timetabled in a dedicated space wherever possible.
- Where changes and additions are being made to buildings and teaching spaces, it is important to involve subject specialists in identifying needs and opportunities to provide appropriate learning environments.

- Drama departments must have dedicated and protected time to support additional rehearsals for practical exam work, as well as to mark and internally standardise assessments.

### Artsmark Award: a tool to help you embed creativity

Artsmark is the only creative quality standard for schools and education settings, and is accredited by Arts Council England. Artsmark helps schools develop and celebrate their commitment to arts and cultural education.

Embed creativity across your whole curriculum and address school improvement priorities using Artsmark's flexible framework.

Find out more at [www.artsmark.org.uk](http://www.artsmark.org.uk)

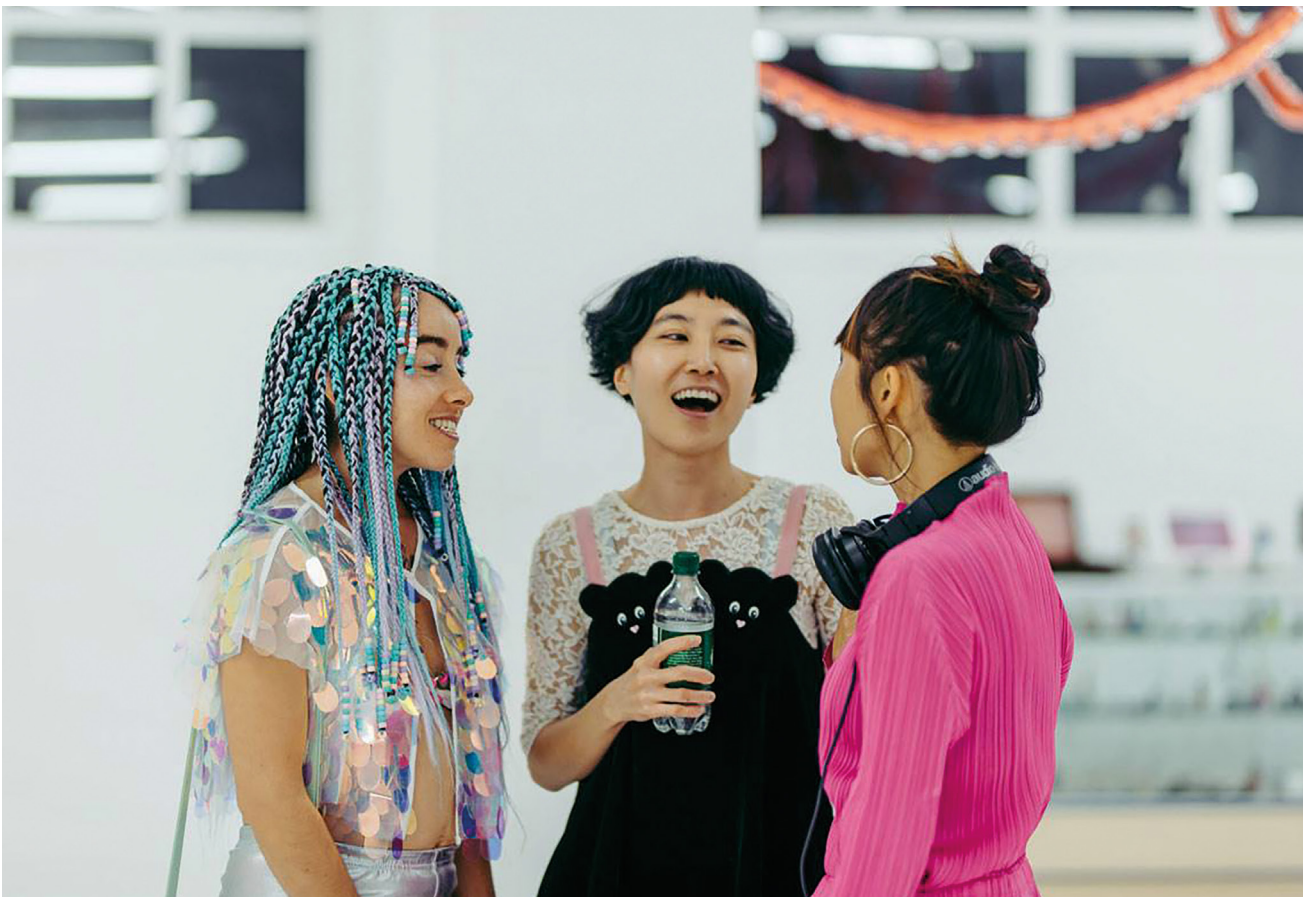


Photo © I am my own primal parent, Karst & Dom Moore

# How to monitor progress, impact and outcomes

**There is a range of data and information which allows those governing to build a comprehensive picture of how their vision for drama education is being implemented. Some of this information will be quantitative and some will extend beyond what is easily quantifiable.**

Sources of information could include:

Source	Description
<b>Governance monitoring visits</b>	An opportunity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• see how drama is used to deliver curriculum content as well as being taught as a discrete subject</li><li>• see the diversity of content in drama and the way in which it supports pupils' social, moral and personal development</li><li>• see the environment in which drama lessons are delivered</li></ul>
<b>Headteacher and senior leader reports</b>	Reports by senior leaders provide an overview of progress which can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• progress made towards strategic priorities</li><li>• details of partnerships with professional organisations, specialists, other schools, and identification of future partnerships</li></ul>
<b>Case studies</b>	Case studies allow subject leads and senior leaders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• highlight the impact of drama activities on individuals or small groups of pupils where statistical data may not fully reflect progress or engagement in school activities</li><li>• identify how additional funding such as pupil premium can be used to widen access to drama activities</li></ul>
<b>Attending rehearsals and performances</b>	Allows governors and trustees to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• see the outcomes of work that pupils have produced in curricular and extra-curricular settings</li><li>• see the process and progress that occurs during the audition and/or rehearsal period</li></ul>

## Presentations and reports by subject leads

Presentations during governing board or committee meetings can provide:

- up-to-date information on examination requirements
- analysis of formal examination results
- evaluations of external enrichment opportunities and their impact on teaching and learning
- identification of CPD needs
- strategic planning for resources and ongoing curriculum developments

## Pupil and parent voice

Talking to pupils, parents and other stakeholders can enable governing boards to:

- gain an overview of how the drama curriculum represents and caters for all pupils
- understand the barriers to participation (such as economic, social, and cultural)
- appreciate ways in which drama contributes to the wider ethos of the school, for example when used in transition activities between primary and secondary school
- learn about parental involvement, such as support for school productions and trips and attendance at performances

## Data

Data is a valuable and consistent measure of progress and success. Relevant data might include:

- engagement with enrichment activities such as drama clubs and theatre trips
- uptake at examination level
- data which analyses outcomes and patterns of involvement for specific cohorts such as pupils with special educational needs or disability or for whom English is an additional language



Photo © National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, Victoria's Knickers Rehearsal & Helen Murray



## Questions that governing boards can ask about drama education:

The following are examples of the type of questions that governors and trustees might ask about drama education in their school or trust. Consider how you might use these examples to construct your own questions, specific to your context and the issue you are discussing.

- Are teachers (drama specialists and non-specialists) given the professional support and CPD needed to deliver a high quality drama education?
- What opportunities do pupils have to experience drama and theatre as an audience member?
- Does our drama curriculum reflect diversity in the texts, practitioners and theatrical styles that are studied, as appropriate to the needs of our pupils and their age group?
- Do all pupils have regular opportunities to engage in drama activities (curricular, extra-curricular and with professional partnerships and networks) which enrich their lives and improve their cultural capital?
- Do pupils receive accurate and up to date advice about the range of careers in drama in line with the Gatsby benchmarks of **good career guidance**?



Photo © The Border R&D at The Brit School & Jack Barnes

# Further information and support

## National Governance Association

- [Cultural education guides for governing boards](#) including dance, music, and art, craft and design.
- Learning Link [Arts and cultural education e-learning module](#)
- [Guide to Being Strategic](#) for governing boards and school leaders
- [Guidance and tools](#) to support governance monitoring visits
- [Providing an effective careers programme: the role of governing boards](#)
- [Additional curriculum resources](#)

## Organisations providing drama CPD and resources

- [Open drama UK](#) – a platform for teachers, theatre practitioners & industry experts to advance, improve and benefit young people through drama.
- [National drama](#), the UK's leading professional association for drama teachers and theatre educators, is dedicated to ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to learn about and through drama.



Photo © Polka Theatre, In the Winter Wood & The Other Richard

# Developed in collaboration with Theatre Education Forum:

Northern Stage

Get Into Theatre/The Stage

Half Moon Theatre

Sheffield Theatres

Theatre Royal Stratford East

Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Trestle Theatre Company

Chichester Festival Theatre

Wiltshire Creative

Nottingham Playhouse

The Watermill Theatre

The Bristol Hippodrome - ATG

Fevered Sleep

Octagon Theatre Bolton

Almeida Theatre

New Wolsey Theatre

Candoco Dance Company

Cast

Theatre Royal Plymouth

Young Vic

Wiltshire Creative

Bristol Old Vic

Clod Ensemble

HOME

Harrogate Theatre

Theatre Royal Bath/The Egg Theatre

Everyman Theatre

Oxford Playhouse

Brighton Dome and Festival

Royal Court Theatre

Sloane Square, London

Nuffield Southampton Theatres

The Theatre, Chipping Norton

Mousetrap Theatre Projects

Live Theatre

Kings Theatre Trust Ltd

Belgrade Theatre

National Theatre

Aylesbury Waterside Theatre

Leeds Playhouse

Leeds Heritage Theatres

Royal Exchange Theatre

Exeter Northcott Theatre

King Street

Live Theatre, Newcastle

The Kings Theatre

National Theatre

Theatre Royal Bath

Chichester Festival Theatre

Leeds Playhouse

Lyric Hammersmith

Storyhouse



Birmingham Hippodrome  
Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall  
Nottingham  
Leeds Grand Theatre & Opera House Ltd  
(Leeds Grand Theatre; City Varieties Music  
Hall and Hyde Park Picture House)  
The Theatre Chipping Norton  
Royal & Derngate, Northampton  
Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh  
Donmar Warehouse  
Warwick Arts Centre  
Z-arts  
Wiltshire Creative  
HQ Theatres and Hospitality  
Theatre Royal Bath  
Curve Theatre  
Northern Stage  
Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds  
Oxford Playhouse  
Reading Rep  
Mousetrap Theatre Projects  
Royal Shakespeare Company  
York Theatre Royal  
Theatre Royal Plymouth  
Polka Theatre  
Belgrade Theatre  
Complicite  
The Guildhall Trust  
The Birmingham Rep Theatre  
New Vic Theatre  
Hull Truck Theatre  
Mayflower Theatre  
Oxford Playhouse  
240 The Broadway  
Wimbledon  
Oxford Playhouse  
Bush Theatre  
Corn Exchange Newbury  
Stoke Theatres (ATG)  
Reading Rep Theatre  
Travelling Light Theatre Company  
The National Theatre  
New Wolsey Theatre  
The Herd Theatre  
Queen's Theatre Hornchurch  
Kings Theatre Portsmouth  
Royal Exchange Theatre  
Watford Palace Theatre  
Birmingham Hippodrome  
Dukes Theatre Lancaster  
Southwark Playhouse  
Play to the Crowd, Winchester



Arts Council England  
The Hive  
49 Lever Street  
Manchester  
M1 1FN

**Website** [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

**Email** [enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk)

**Textphone** 020 7973 6564

Arts Council England is the trading name of The Arts Council of England.  
Charity registration number 1036733.

You can get this document in Braille, in large print, on audio CD, and in various electronic formats. Please contact us if you need any of these.

We are committed to being open and accessible. We welcome all comments on our work.

© Arts Council England, 2022