

Creative Classrooms

A creative journey

As part of Culture Bridge North East's (CBNE) Creative Classrooms programme we visited Hotspur Primary School where we spoke to Jack Gardner, Arts Lead, about his creative journey. The school as a whole values the arts immensely using them throughout the curriculum. Jack has undertaken a number of CPD opportunities as well as the chance to use his expertise to experiment with arts projects, which have been very successful.



Hotspur Primary School





About the school

Hotspur Primary School is based in Heaton, Newcastle, and currently has 457 pupils. The school draws children and families from wonderfully diverse backgrounds making it a truly inclusive learning environment. The teaching staff are very passionate about cultural and creative learning and put an emphasis on ensuring that all of their pupils can experience as many different activities and opportunities as possible.

Who did we meet at the school?

- Jack Gardner, Arts Lead
- Miles Wallis-Clarke, Head Teacher



What made you take an interest in arts and culture?

I've been interested in arts and culture for as long as I can remember. It goes back to my primary school experience where learning came through the arts. In secondary school my interest in arts and drama flourished and later I went to Bretton Hall, an arts campus, where I studied theatre and performance. After graduating I discovered my real interest was in how the arts can affect people and empower lives.

Hotspur Primary School has given me the best working experience with unprecedented opportunities and has safeguarded the arts against adversity. We've created a fortress where the arts are valued and taught across the school with bespoke projects, which are constantly rolling.



What things enabled you to begin and then maintain your professional development journey?

The values of our head teacher, Miles Wallis Clarke, are shared throughout the school. I think that is very important. I've been given many CPD opportunities including completing the Cultural Leadership in Education (CLE) programme developed by Culture Bridge North East and Newcastle University and most recently I finished my NPQML course at Newcastle University, which has enabled me to take on my current position as arts leader.

I've also had numerous opportunities to lead whole school arts projects as well as the freedom to experiment and try different arts techniques in the classroom. As part of the Shakespeare Schools Foundation programme, I've directed productions of *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Northern Stage. We have also put on the first known primary school production of *Richard II* chosen as many of the streets surrounding our school are named after characters within the play. I have also directed whole school projects including *132 Malcolm Street*, which was the basis of my CLE project and *Utopia Week*, which was for my NPQML qualification.





Why should schools have a cultural / arts lead?

Miles Wallis-Clarke explains: "It's really important to have an arts lead, to be able to give the children these experiences. More recently, we've focussed a lot on explicitly learning through the arts and not just in the arts. Being aware of that distinction, arts can be a great vehicle for the rest of the curriculum, particularly some of the less tangible topics. Learning about history through pictures and in many other ways, the arts illuminate all subjects."

"It's also a great way to develop skills such as performance. Getting up in front of people and talking is a skill needed in many jobs or just going for an interview. It's about having confidence in yourself."

"As a school we focus on mental health and supporting resilience and singing is a big part of this in terms of wellbeing. For all of those reasons art and culture should be in school. It creates a sense of belonging and adds colour to everything we do. It is collaborative and everyone at primary school has an equal chance."

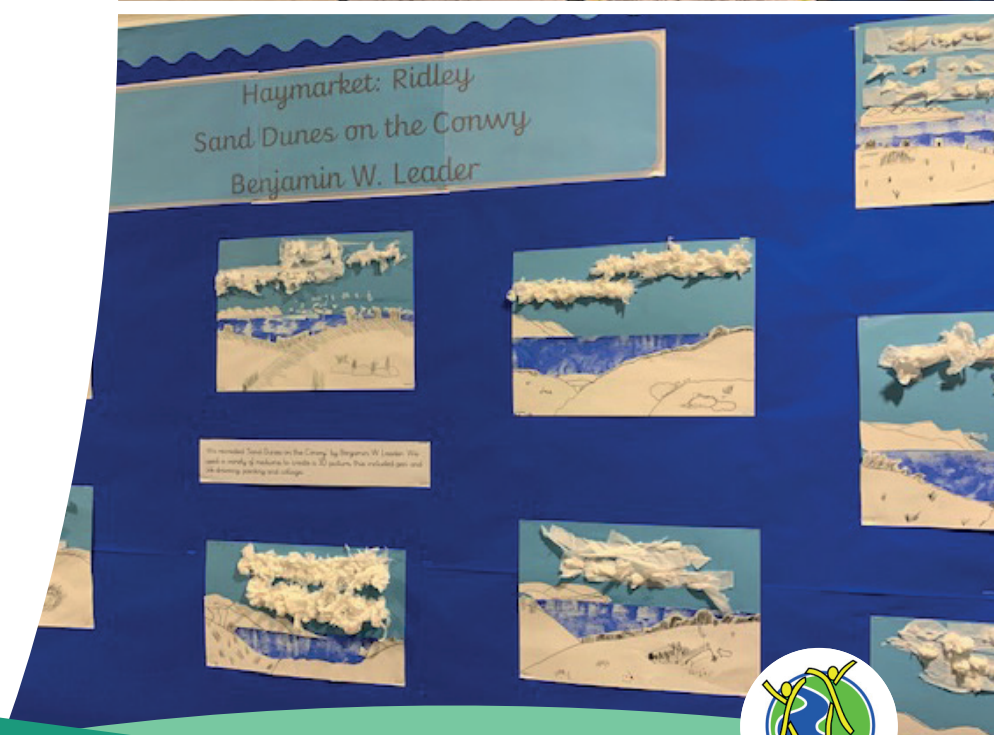
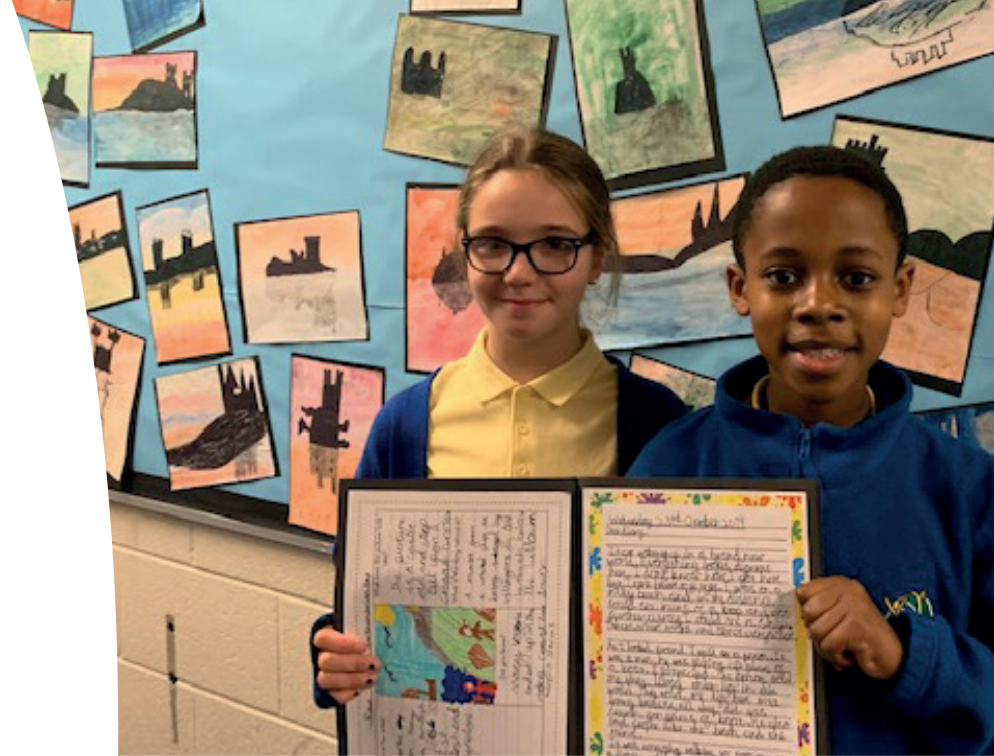


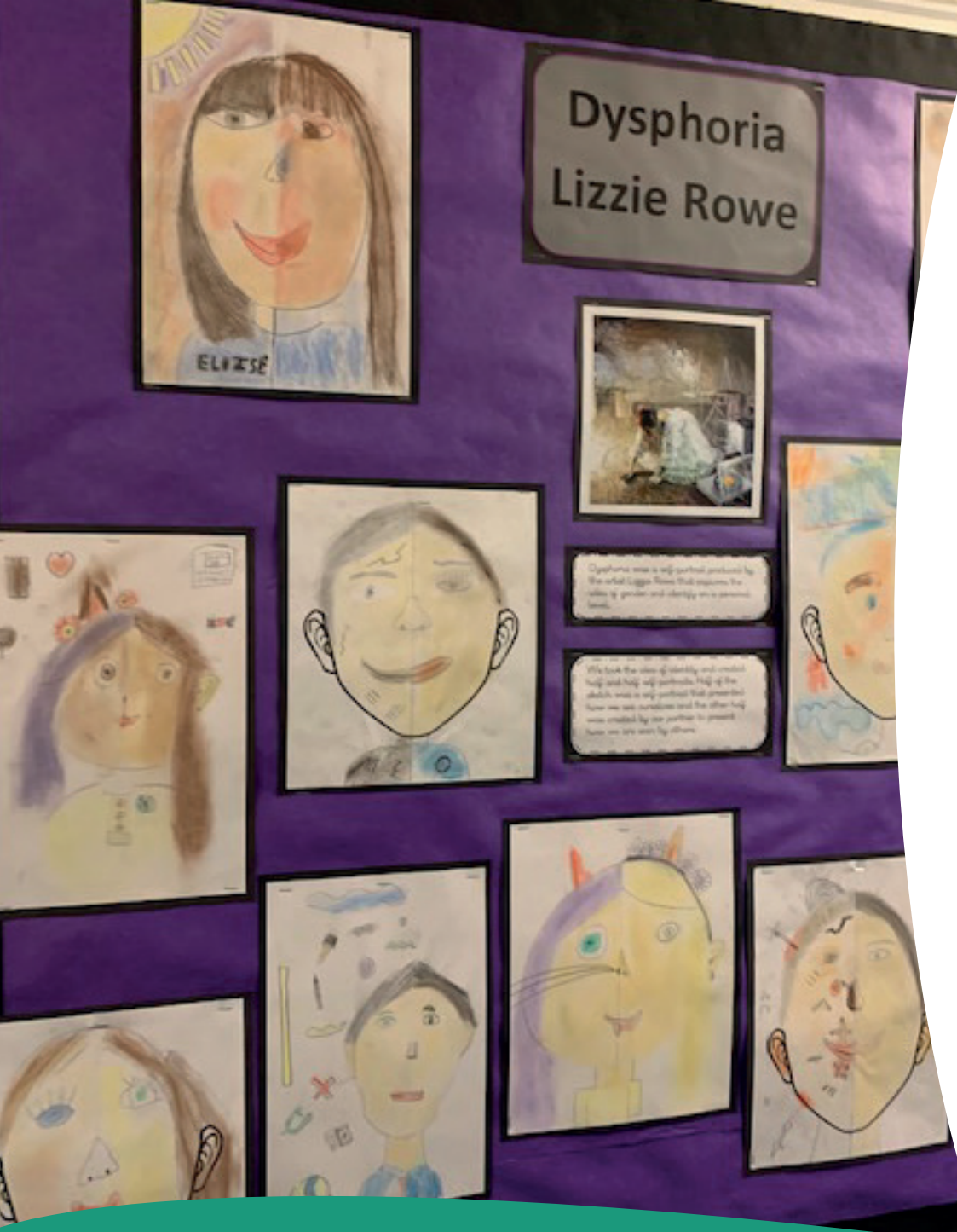
What impact has your creative learning had on the children and school?

Our most recent project was called Utopia Week. The aim was to create an enriching experience for children across the school to improve wellbeing and raise attainment through a creative experience. Six children were chosen to help lead the project with the premise to create a cross-curriculum, whole school experience for everyone. The project was based upon the Margaret Cavendish's 1666 utopian novel 'The Blazing World.' It was chosen as Margaret Cavendish was the Duchess of Newcastle, a proto-feminist and by writing 'The Blazing World' was responsible for writing arguably the first ever Science Fiction novel. Year 6 worked with Newcastle University students who delivered talks on feminism, women's writing, science fiction, utopias and Margaret Cavendish. It was then their job to go round and deliver those talks to the rest of the school.

We have 15 family groups, comprising a mixed group of children from reception up to year 6. We had an actor, play Margaret Cavendish, arrive at school through a portal and explain to the children that her home of the Blazing World, home to many anthropomorphic animals had fallen from being a utopia into a dystopia. The children were then given a task to research different animals from the Blazing World within their family group and create banners, flags, hats and models that celebrated their animal. At the end of the week Margaret Cavendish reappeared to return the children to the Blazing World and restore utopia. The six children who helped lead the project then led a procession through school grounds which included a flat-bed truck turned into a steam-punk ship with Margaret Cavendish, numerous flags, banners, models of animals and all of the family groups. The whole project had a festival feel, a sense of community and joyousness, something the children will remember forever.

The children who led the procession were so engaged and enthused, they were able to overcome barriers of learning and have since made academic progress.





What have the school and children been able to do because of your expertise?

We've been able to improve attainment and wellbeing, with a focus on oracy. I don't like the idea that Shakespeare is held up as something worthy, it shouldn't just be for certain people. Some schools see it as a bit of a barrier, but we like to make it for everyone. I get a great buzz, knowing the journey the children have been on and seeing them up on stage delivering their lines with vigour and passion.



How could your school's experience be replicated?

All areas have a wealth of history and culture and something that makes it unique and interesting. We were able to tap into this via our 132 Malcolm Street project. We looked at the history of Hotspur and what used to be there before the school. We researched census forms and maps, and found out who lived in this area 100 years ago. We discovered a couple called Christine and Joseph Shell.

We created a film, using student actors, who played the parts of the Shells, the actors visited the school and the children were able to tell them about where they used to live.

Each year group also researched a different decade, met local historians and brought in artefacts connected with that time. We turned the school gym into a mini museum to display them. This project could be reproduced as scratch beneath the surface and you'll find every school has a rich history on the ground that they were built upon.



How has your creative learning journey made your job more enjoyable?

I'm very lucky to be able to work on these projects. It's what I care about and what I'm most passionate about. I love working on whole school experiences and doing something the children will always remember.



Where will your journey take you next?

It was a great pleasure to speak at CBNEs Imagine If conference. I hope to be able to do this more and talk about what I do.

My future plans in school include working with a local organisation, Shoe Tree Arts, to put together some events surrounding the anniversary of the Newcastle Corn Riots. The children will re-enact the protests and work with Newcastle University to create a podcast. I'm also very passionate about a new project called Hotspur Arts Lab, which is inspired by the Arts Labs of the 1960s. It will be an extra-curriculum club where children can go and create art. It will be about experimenting, making mistakes and trying new things with no end project.





How is learning funded?

Miles explains: "Funding comes from our main school budget. If you value something, you then have to put money into it. If it's at the heart of the curriculum you then need to spend on it. We invested in specialists for example, in dance and music. Our primary school role is to help children understand what it is that they enjoy and what they're good at. They can then go into secondary education with a different outlook. You need to be willing to commit time and financial resource, however it doesn't all have to cost."



What would your advice be for other schools wanting their staff to start a creative professional development journey?

"If you're starting from scratch, take a group of staff on a journey. Value it, make it flexible and make it happen."



Creative Classrooms

Find out more at
www.culturebridgenortheast.org.uk/creative-classrooms