

Artsmark in Rural Schools: Whitehaven and Copeland Research Project

Join this fully funded research initiative and shape future arts opportunities for schools in rural settings

Schools in rural and isolated communities face unique barriers to accessing a broad and integrated arts and cultural offer for pupils. Curious Minds and Arts Council England want to address these issues and explore innovative new ways of supporting schools to offer outstanding creative opportunities throughout the curriculum.

If your school is based within the Whitehaven and Copeland area of Cumbria, an exciting opportunity will soon be coming to your area!

Funded by the Arts Council England (ACE), [Curious Minds](#) is delivering an innovative pilot project which will use the [Artsmark Framework](#)* as a tool to plan and test bespoke arts-based activity for pupils in a way that is flexible to the needs of individual schools.

We are looking for 4 Whitehaven and Copeland based schools to take part, which will each receive a funded package of specialist support from Curious Minds and local arts partners, as well as a £2000 budget to commission activities for their students.

The project will explore in detail the challenges experienced by schools in rural settings when it comes to arts and cultural education, as well as testing new ways of responding to these challenges to improve provision using the Artsmark Framework as developmental tool.

In addition, participating schools will receive support and guidance on how to authentically develop and embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in their provision by drawing on the expertise of our local delivery partner, Anti-Racist Cumbria (ARC).

Project schools do not have to be registered as Artsmark schools to participate. We welcome interest from any education settings **based in Whitehaven and Copeland.**

**[Artsmark](#) is the only creative quality standard for schools and education settings in England and is accredited by ACE. Its flexible framework supports settings to embed and celebrate arts, culture and creativity for all children and young people.*

Why are we doing this project?

As the Cultural Education landscape continues to evolve and change, the Arts Council is exploring how the Artsmark Framework can best support all schools to develop their arts and cultural offer.

Artsmark understands that rural settings often face extra challenges when it comes to providing their pupils a broad and balanced range of high-quality arts and cultural experiences. To develop Artsmark in a way that reaches all types of settings, the Arts Council is keen to understand how the Artsmark Framework can support schools in a place-based way, with a specific focus on rural and semi-rural schools.

The findings and outcomes from this pilot project will inform the evolution of the Artsmark programme.

Key Elements of the Project

This project will take an action research* based approach. Using parts of the Artsmark Framework as a vehicle for exploration, participating schools will:

- Identify and unpick existing barriers and challenges that prevent or limit rural/semi-rural schools' engagement in high quality arts & cultural education and activities.
- Plan and deliver arts-based interventions that respond directly to schools' identified barriers and challenges.
- Find ways of working that harness cultural learning as a powerful conduit for anti-racism and inclusion in schools and communities, for example by collaborating with a diverse range of artists and cultural organisations.
- Explore how schools can increase pupils' exposure to culturally diverse experiences that are purposeful, inclusive and relevant.

**Action research is a way of working that investigates problems or challenges whilst at the same time taking action to solve the problem. It often involves collaboration and includes reflection/analysis of the outcomes and impact of the action taken.*

Project Schools' Commitment

To be eligible to participate in this project, schools must be able to commit to planning and delivering arts and cultural based interventions (through action research) that respond to their identified challenges. Each setting will be given £2,000 for their activity. In addition, schools will:

- Join Curious Minds on an induction day. This will bring together participating schools and key partners to provide an overview of the project and introduce action-research based working.
- Undertake Arts & Cultural & Anti-racist audits to review schools' existing provision, identify gaps in knowledge/offer and areas for development.

- Attend additional CPD with [Anti Racist Cumbria](#) to upskill teachers' knowledge and understanding in delivering arts and cultural activity through an anti-racist lens.
- Join Curious Minds at online support sessions to check-in on project progress.
- Attend a sharing day with all other participating schools to reflect and celebrate activity delivery, outcomes and learning.
- Complete associated project evaluation and case studies.

Schools must be available to join Curious Minds on the following project dates:

Date	Session	Location & Time
July TBC between school and Curious Minds	Onboarding phone conversation including introduction to Arts & Cultural audit	Phone. Convenient time to be arranged between school and Curious Minds
19/09/24	Project Induction Day	In-person, full day
SEP TBC	Anti-Racist Cumbria CPD Session (including anti-racist audit)	In-person day
13/11/24	Support Session to Explore Audit Findings	16:00 – 17:30 online via Zoom
16/01/25	Action Research Intervention Planning Day	In-person, full day
26/02/25	Action Research Network Check-in (for arts and cultural intervention plans & activity)	16:00 – 17:30 online via Zoom
26/03/25	Action Research Network Check-in (for arts and cultural intervention plans & activity)	16:00 – 17:30 online via Zoom
24/04/25	Action Research Network Check-in (for arts and cultural intervention plans & activity)	16:00 – 17:30 online via Zoom
21/05/25	Action Research Network Check-in (for arts and cultural intervention plans & activity)	16:00 – 17:30 online via Zoom
05/06/25	Project Sharing Day	In person, full day
31/07/25	Project Evaluation and Case Studies complete	N/A
July (date tbc)	Anti Racist Cumbria Summit	In person, full day

[How to Express Interest](#)

We are delighted to welcome expressions of interest to join us on this exciting journey. If your setting can commit to all compulsory dates for this project and would like to submit an expression of interest, please complete the form via the following link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/fk9kEzxS9X>

The deadline for expressions of interest is: 24/06/24 at 17:00.

For a further conversation with us about the project, you can get in touch with:

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