

RISE

A review of the pilot project by Dr Susanne Burns and Northern Ballet,
with findings from Dr Louise McDowell, University of Leeds.



“I have seen an improvement in confidence and pride from many students. The way in which the children carry themselves following the sessions is different: children hold their heads higher and walk with more confidence and purpose. Many of the girls have commented on how they feel more graceful. Seeing this positive view of their bodies is fantastic.” Teacher

RISE: THE PROJECT AND ITS IMPACT

Northern Ballet wanted to test a new way of working with local schools that would be long term and more rooted in their local community. It would use ballet, creative dance and performance to address issues affecting quality of life, pupil well-being, resilience, confidence, communication, self-expression and self-esteem. Raising aspirations and improving life chances for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils was an aspiration shared with head teachers and senior leaders who were interested in how engagement in dance activities could impact on these areas of concern.

Project Aims:

- To work with children and young people at KS2 who live in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation;
- To provide access to high quality dance provision for children and young people in Year 5 on a regular basis;
- To maximise the impact of the project by working with teachers to co-plan, share best practice and offer CPD;
- To support the school's PHSE curriculum through ballet, creative dance and performance;
- To develop the skills and knowledge of the dance practitioners in dance and wellbeing;
- To develop Northern Ballet's evidence base and cultivate new partnerships;
- To advocate for a rich cultural education in all schools.

The Rise programme has had a significant impact on schools, teachers and families. Particularly in Year Two, teachers commented on the important role Rise had played when the children had returned to full time schooling after the lockdowns and school closures of 2020/21.

"The Rise project allowed me as a teacher to see strengths I didn't know my children had and it was interesting to see how quickly they adapted and changed throughout the project."

Teacher

Teachers commented on the impact it had on parents and carers.

"We were surprised by the support from parents and carers for different aspects of working with Northern Ballet. Children have been very enthusiastic about taking part which may have influenced parental support. With very few exceptions parents have not needed to be prompted to provide permissions when needed and without exception they paid their contribution toward the cost of the coach for the theatre visit. The final session was attended by many parents/ carers, including some that are usually reluctant to attend any events."

Teacher

There was also significant impact on the teachers themselves who mentioned personal enjoyment, the ability to observe their class being taught by someone else and the changing nature of the roles they played in the sessions.

"I can't believe the impact that it has had on all children - even those who we were concerned might not participate or enjoy the programme. The impact it has had on them has been exceptional and we can see changes in them because of it."

Teacher

Rise is a primary age dance in education project which launched in September 2019 as a two-year pilot research project involving five schools in West Yorkshire. Home to some of the poorest areas in the UK, many children grow up in low-income households and are more likely to have poor physical health, experience mental health problems, have a low sense of well-being and underachieve at school. The Green Paper, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision* (2017) found that one in ten children and young people (around 850,000) are living with a diagnosable mental health condition. A diagnosable mental health condition can have a devastating impact on children and young peoples' physical and psychosocial health and well-being. The challenge of living with a mental health condition often extends into a person's adult life, with half of all mental health conditions beginning before the age of 14. (Dr Louise McDowell, Rise Research Report).

Initially framed as a pilot project testing and exploring assumptions, the programme has now completed its initial pilot phase. This review seeks to summarise the programme of work, its impact and outcomes, and to inform the development of the programme into the longer term as it is rolled out to more schools in the region. It draws on extensive evaluation carried out by the Northern Ballet team and the teachers in the schools over a two-year period but also draws on the work of Dr Louise McDowell, an academic researcher from the University of Leeds, who worked with the team to measure its impact in one of the schools.

A major priority for the Learning team is developing a stronger evidence base for their work and Rise was therefore designed to work in partnership with an academic to develop this deeper understanding of impact and outcomes.

The aims of the academic study were twofold:

- To explore the impact of two 10-week dance interventions (Rise) delivered over two years, on four key indicators: resilience, body confidence, self-expression and communication skills of children living in deprived inner-city communities in West Yorkshire.
- To obtain impact data regarding the efficacy of the dance intervention (Rise) as a strategy for enhancing resilience, body confidence, communication skills and self-expression of children from the perspective of schoolteachers.

Teachers provided feedback on how they felt the project had generated outcomes relating to the four key indicators, as well as in relation to how it has enhanced or supported other key skills or areas of work within school. Children also commented on how the work has impacted on them and we use their own words to demonstrate this.

Dr McDowell has created a full report on the activity delivered, some of the findings are shared in this review.



KEY OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS

RESILIENCE

Teacher Feedback

"After lockdown concentration span and stamina of pupils was challenging, this improved through each workshop and contributed to other work in school. Children were increasingly more willing to take on and use points of development as their confidence grew week by week."

"The children have shown resilience, especially during the second half of the project when their skills grew. One boy has practiced dancing in the playground every morning to master his ballet positions."

Research Summary*

Teacher's data suggests a perceived increase in pupils' resilience levels in 100% of pupils in Year One, and a slightly lowered level of 75% of pupils in Year Two.

In the words of the pupils

"I felt like I was a proper dancer and that I put the dance together well but there were a few things that I could improve."

"I didn't used [sic] to move or do exercise or play out. Rise made me realise that sometimes it can help to forget about the bad things."

"This project has made me feel more stable and has made me improve in my emotions and actions."

BODY CONFIDENCE

Teacher Feedback

"Our PSHE scheme of work in school discusses body image and body confidence during the summer term. Some children referenced Northern Ballet in discussions. Some children discussed how their opinions about themselves had changed."

"This has been a big positive of the sessions. Students have told me they feel more graceful and elegant. They hold themselves with more poise and confidence."

Research Summary

Teacher's data suggests a perceived increase in pupils' body confidence in 85% of pupils in Year One, and a slightly lowered level of 75% of pupils in Year Two.

In the words of the pupils

"I enjoyed doing partner work and performing it in front of the class."

"Before I started [the project] I was very insecure about dancing in front of other people. After I feel more open to dance in front of others. Thanks to NB I can show people what I can do!"

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Teacher Feedback

"Work in class has been ongoing but the consistent high expectations of children in Rise workshops has continued to encourage children to explain ideas more clearly but also for peers to watch and listen with respect and care."

"A noticeable improvement was observed in how children cooperated and interacted together as the project progressed."

"Children have worked with pupils who they would not always work with in class. Two girls did a beautiful dance together and this has helped their friendship develop outside of the sessions."

Research Summary

Teacher's data suggests a perceived increase in pupils' communication levels in 92% of pupils in Year One, and a slightly lowered level of 79% of pupils in Year Two.

In the words of the pupils

"I really enjoyed doing the partner work. I liked it as it felt it brought us together."

"When I was Bruno in the dance we did, I felt really upset when I saw my partner moving. He made me believe he was the other boy who was trapped behind the fence. I've never felt emotion because of dance or [a] TV show before. I think I was lucky to work with somebody who could do that."

SELF-EXPRESSION

Teacher Feedback

"Some children were very shy and tried to avoid being noticed at first. Some children were very reserved in the movements they were willing to make. This changed throughout Rise and all children were confidently expressing themselves by the final performance."

Research Summary

Teacher's data suggests a perceived increase in pupils' self-expression levels in 88% of pupils in Year One, and a slightly lowered level of 75% of pupils in Year Two.

In the words of the pupils

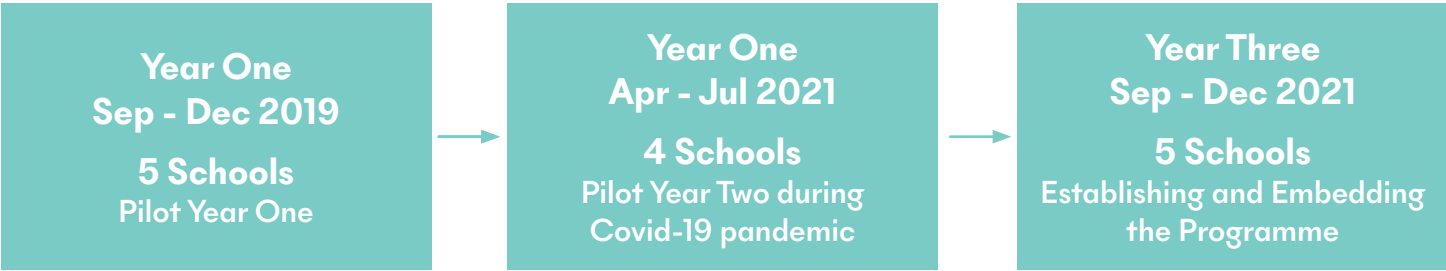
"This session has made me disclose my true self."

"I discovered a calm way to move my body and energetically. The best thing was creating new dances I have never expressed myself in that way before. I especially loved letting go of my creativity and creating dances."

"Before Rise started, I felt a bit unsure about if I would like dancing and doing ballet. During Rise I discovered that dancing and ballet is telling a story through your movements, and I really liked developing how I used my movements and facial expressions."

*based on in depth research in 1 school. Year Two findings were impacted by the affect of Covid-19 on pupils

PROJECT DESCRIPTION



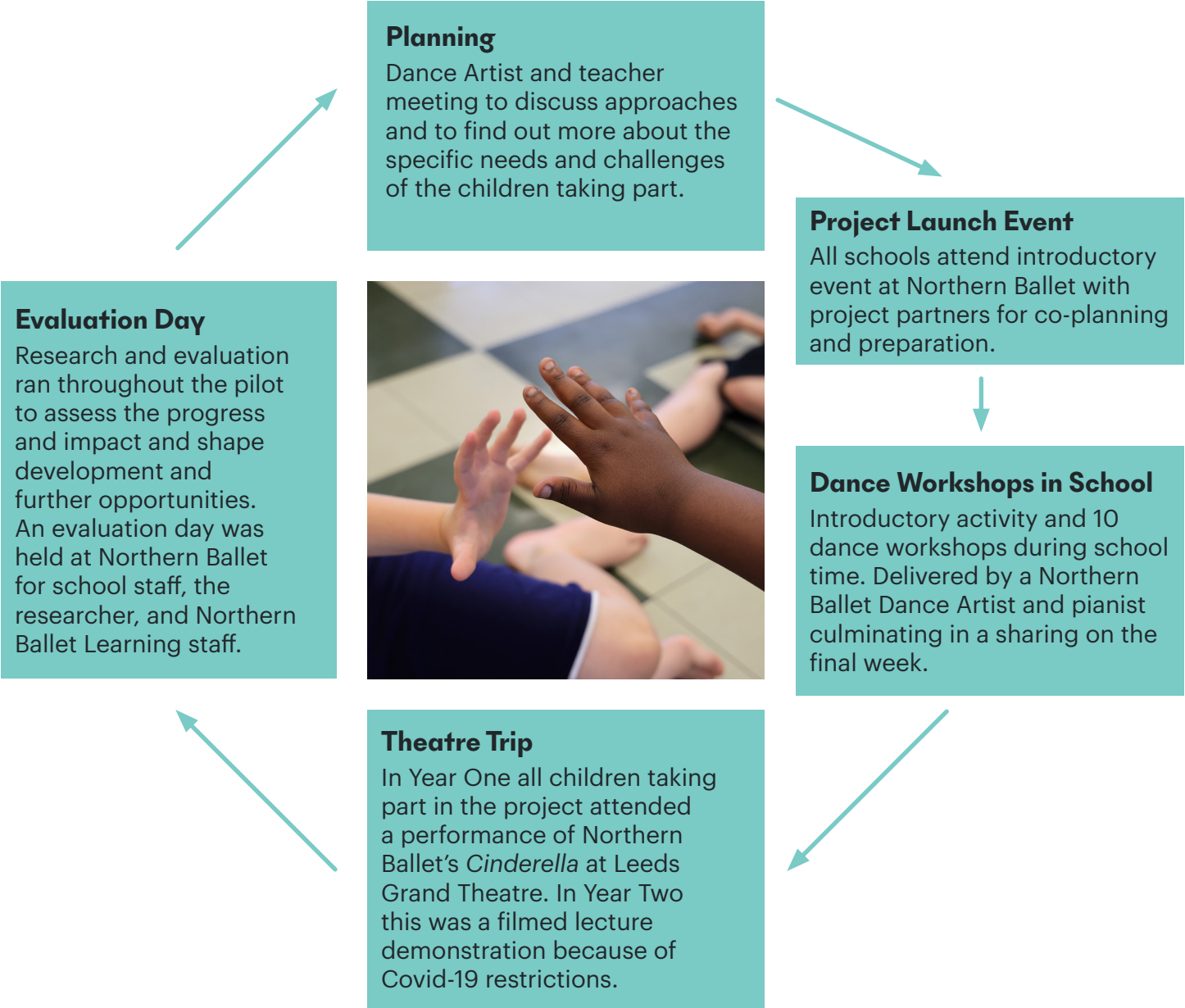
The shape of the project was the same in all schools yet the actual delivery was adapted to meet the challenges and needs of the different contexts. Each project took place over a ten-week period as weekly one-hour sessions at each school. The children explored Northern Ballet productions, ballet technique and creative work. Each group had a ‘sharing’ in the last week where they could share their work with other students and teachers as well as families.

“We have observed changes and progress with all children over the last 10 weeks. Some have significantly developed their understanding and skills of dance and others the accompanying benefits of the arts such as the social and emotional progress and impacts. In an ideal world we would be able to experience the Rise project through the whole year, as the impact would be immense I believe! However, in order for us to maintain and develop a broad and balanced curriculum 10 weeks seems to be effective and appropriate.”
Teacher

The Impact of Covid-19

The delivery of Year Two was originally intended to begin in September 2020. Due to the impact of Covid-19, consultation with the participating schools led to an agreement to postpone delivery until spring/summer 2021. Learning from Year One was incorporated into Year Two where possible and adaptations were made where necessary to adhere to Covid-19 restrictions. For example, a theatre visit was not possible –instead a unique streamed event for pupils was developed which engaged the Company dancers demonstrating their daily training exercises, performing excerpts from classical ballet productions and providing a Q&A session with pupils. This gave pupils an insight into how their in-school activity connected with the professional dancers to inspire them to continue to dance, be creative and seek to watch professional dance following the project.

“Without doubt, Rise has supported us to re-build our classroom community in Year 5. Some children who had become quieter and lost confidence in the periods away from school have shown a growth in confidence during workshops. This is reflected in other areas of school life too.”
Teacher



Teachers were supported with the provision of resources to enable them to embed the work into the curriculum and have the opportunity to extend the work beyond the 10-week project. The Good Practice Guide, produced by Northern Ballet was found to be a useful tool and a poster was produced and used to support CPD sessions at the end of Year Two. Teachers mentioned learning more about the basic language and principles of dance, how to use dance in the wider curriculum and how to use it to develop positive well-being and mental health outcomes.

“The intention is not to say that they should become dance teachers but rather to give them the confidence to use the skills they already have to work with narrative, movement words, images and music.”
Dance Practitioner

“How can we feed it into what we are already doing so it is not a drop in but a set of tools that we can continue to use?”
Teacher

IMPACT ON NORTHERN BALLET

The Learning team at Northern Ballet is well established and provides resources, training, talks and workshops as well as a range of projects and direct provision to schools and communities in Yorkshire and around the UK. The Company is committed to enabling access to creative opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to join in and learn about dance.

The project impacted the Company in a number of ways:

Involvement of the Performing Company in Rise

The involvement of the Company of dancers in education projects is often a challenge because of touring commitments and in Year One of Rise this took the form of pupils attending a performance in the theatre. The visit had a massive impact on the children and their families and the Company loved the spontaneity of the children's reactions. The Covid-19 pandemic opened up the possibility of a new approach in Year Two. The decision was taken to produce a film.



"It was an ambitious thing to do to put repertoire on film and we had to be pragmatic about what was possible to achieve within the timescale and without much lead in time. There were artistic compromises but it was a great opportunity to give young [Company] dancers the chance to dive into the repertoire and take on solos and work. The film was designed for context and it was nice to work with [Northern Ballet Dance Education Officer] Keisha on creating a resource that will last beyond the project."

Northern Ballet Team Member

"Working to the same goal but involving the whole organisation raised the profile of our Learning work internally. It can feel separate from the Company and our aims are not necessarily understood by the Company in any deep way. This was an opportunity to address that in some small way and we can build on it."

Northern Ballet Team Member

Engaging with the artistic side of the Company has raised the profile of the work of the Learning team within the Company and this presents opportunities for repositioning Learning within the Company and for further connectivity and shared developments.

Generating Local Impact

The major drive behind Arts Council England's strategy *Let's Create* is local place based impact and Rise has presented Northern Ballet with the opportunity to develop a model for a way of working in a specific locality that is more impactful and sustained. Investing in the same group of children over time, in the same artists to develop more evidenced-based working practices and approaches and developing longer term partnerships with schools and Higher Education partners has brought significant benefits. These learnings can now be applied to both rolling out the Rise model to other schools and localities as well as beyond Rise.

Partnership Working

"We have built a partnership up with Northern Ballet over a number of years, first as part of the START project and now Rise. In that time we have had children before the project not wanting to take part, predominantly boys, because they 'won't like ballet', this always changes by the end of the project, as it did this year."

Teacher

"Prior to Rise, our work with schools was quite light touch. Loyal schools would come back year after year but this has opened up a new way of working, more of a two-way process – 'we're not doing this to you but with you'."

Northern Ballet Team Member

Opportunities have been highlighted above for Northern Ballet as a Company as well as for the learning function within it.

The learning from Rise is rich, deep and significantly more extensive than this short summary review can represent. Following on from the pilot Northern Ballet are using this evidence-based learning to develop their practice and in particular, work with schools.



Acknowledgement:

This review has been produced and edited by Dr Susanne Burns working with the Northern Ballet team. Data has been collected by the team throughout the two-year period of the project and has been supported by Dr Louise McDowell who worked intensively in one of the schools to gather evidence. The report draws on this data as well as some primary research carried out in July 2021 with the artists, the teachers and the Northern Ballet team to create opportunities for reflection. The author is grateful for the generosity and openness of the teachers and artists in reflecting on this programme of work. Where possible their words have been used throughout.



If you would like to know more about Rise, take part with your school or if you would like to receive a copy of the full research report by Dr Louise McDowell, please contact the Learning Team:

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northernballet.com/join-in/schools

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