# PRIMARY TAKE THE LEAD AT THE OLD VIC

**EVALUATION 2025–2026**

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**PRIMARY TAKE THE LEAD**

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# EDUCATION & COMMUNITY AT THE OLD VIC

**Our renowned education and community projects inspire learning and connection. Each year we work with over 9,000 people of all ages, from five to 100+, in London and beyond, as well as a further 25,000 through our online learning platform, The Hub. We reach people at all stages of life to support skills development, employment prospects and wellbeing.**

Our programmes build community cohesion, open up access to the arts and develop the emerging theatre professionals of tomorrow. We do this through a range of initiatives, including free theatre tickets, workshops delivered at The Old Vic, in schools, in the community and online, and through innovative employability and training programmes.

Our programmes are free to access and focus on engaging with communities who are underrepresented in the theatre industry, or who have limited access to it.

**‘Thank you so much for letting us be a part. I really enjoyed The Old Vic’**
Primary Take the Lead Student

# PRIMARY TAKE THE LEAD

**Primary Take the Lead is created for Year Six students and draws on The Old Vic’s expertise as a theatrical institution to support young people’s development. It enables students to take ownership over their next steps, including supporting them with the transition from primary to secondary education. Using theatre techniques and drama practices the project enables students to develop five core skills: self-belief, communication, teamwork, problem solving and self-management.**

The project is based on our highly successful Take the Lead programme for secondary and sixth form students. **Find out more about Take the Lead for older students**.

**The programme consists of:**

— A launch workshop for teachers with start-up activities for students
— A one-day workshop for Year Six students
— A follow-up CPD workshop for teachers
— Supporting resources to extend the learning in the classroom and support students with the transition from primary to secondary education.

**Primary Take the Lead has three key aims:**

— To use theatre techniques to support personal development of participants with a particular focus on managing change and transition
— To enhance the wellbeing of participants through engaging with creative activities and connections between each other and The Old Vic
— To offer primary schools supported access to theatre, with a focus on those who experience barriers to access.

This year we increased the number of participating groups from 10 to 19.

**‘Super! Provided children with key transitional skills’**
Primary Take the Lead Teacher

## RECRUITMENT AND CRITERIA

Applications for the programme opened in Feb 2026 for four weeks and were open to all state primary schools based within the M25.

Teachers were asked to complete a short online application form and each school could apply for a maximum of four Year Six classes to take part in the project (depending on their school's form entry size).

The programme aimed to work with young people who have limited access to the arts, with particular interest in working with young people who are from backgrounds underrepresented in theatre, such as young people from Global Majority backgrounds, young people with access requirements and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

# PROGRAMME

The application form asked teachers why they wanted to take part and how their students would benefit from participating.

We advertised Primary Take the Lead on The Old Vic website. The Education & Community team conducted targeted outreach to primary schools across London. We also shared the opportunity via The Old Vic's Take Part mailing list. We received applications from **47 primary schools** across **18 different London boroughs**.

We selected **14 primary schools**, totalling **19 groups** and **485 students** to take part:

— **Allenby Primary School** (Ealing)
— **Ark John Archer Primary Academy** (Wandsworth)
— **Clifton Primary School** (Ealing)
— **Dairy Meadows Primary and Nursery School** (Ealing)
— **Goose Green Primary School** (Southwark)
— **John Stainer Community Primary School** (Lewisham)
— **Kilburn Park School Foundation** (Brent)
— **Launcelot Primary School and Nursery** (Lewisham)
— **Streatham Wells Primary School** (Lambeth)
— **St Andrew's CE Primary School** (Lambeth)
— **St Helen's Catholic Primary School** (Lambeth)
— **St Jude's Primary School** (Southwark)
— **St Saviour's CE Primary School** (Westminster)
— **Vauxhall Primary School** (Lambeth).

**'Overall, I loved this experience, and I hope I come here again'**
Primary Take the Lead Student

## DELIVERY

Three experienced facilitators attended two days of training before delivering the 19 student workshops. They were supported throughout by the Education Manager.

**Student workshops**
The student workshops took place between Fri 05 Jun–Fri 17 Jul 2026 at The Old Vic in our new Clore Learning Centre with a few additional workshops hosted in schools. Using theatre techniques and drama practices the one-off workshop enabled students to explore the theme of transition and change.

The workshop consisted of a session in the morning focusing on drama techniques, including vocal and physical warm-ups, improvisation and devising, while exploring the five core skills. This was followed by a workshop in the afternoon, which gave participants a series of challenges to overcome using the five core skills. This included an interactive storytelling session, where students performed in front of their peers.

**‘This has been an amazing experience’**
Primary Take the Lead Teacher

**Teacher CPD**
The final teacher CPD took place following the student workshops and was held at The Old Vic. The session consisted of exploring practical follow-up exercises that teachers might wish to deliver to their students after the workshop, as a way of incorporating more drama into their classrooms.

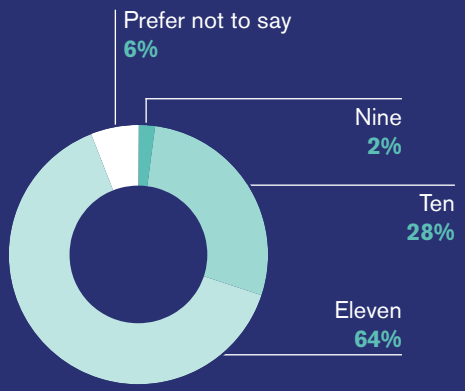
**Moving Schools handbook**
To further support students, they also received our Moving Schools handbook, created with input from two local secondary schools. The handbook offered:

— A reminder of the ways of working from the workshop (Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Curious)
— A reminder of the five core skills and how these could be used when moving to secondary school (self-belief, communication, teamwork, problem solving and self-management)
— Advice from a secondary school headteacher, a Year Seven teacher and Year Seven students
— Ideas and suggestions on how to make new friends (including conversation starters)
— Exercises for calming anxiety and nerves
— Suggestions on what to do if worried about something regarding moving school.

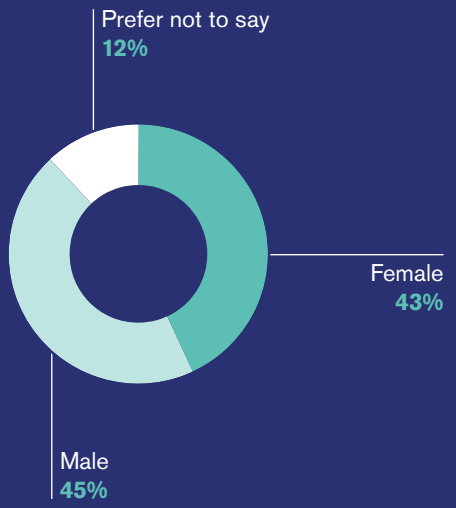
Due to public transport strike disruption the **Launch workshop for teachers** unfortunately had to be cancelled. Content was instead incorporated into the teacher CPD (Continuing Professional Development).

Teachers were asked to complete Equal Opportunities Monitoring Forms on behalf of the students taking part in the workshop.

## AGE




## GENDER




## ETHNICITY

**1% Arab**

**1% Asian or Asian British: Bangladesh**

**17% Asian or Asian British: Indian**

**5% Asian or Asian British: Pakistani**

**2% Asian or Asian British: Other**

**13% Black or Black British: African**

**8% Black or Black British: Caribbean**

**5% Black or Black British: Other**

**3% Latin American**

**2% Mixed: Asian and White**

**4% Mixed: Black African and White**

**3% Mixed: Black Caribbean and White**

**1% Mixed: Middle East and North Africa**

**4% Mixed: Other**

**13% White: British, English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish**

**3% White: Other**

**3% None of the above background**

**12% Prefer not to say**

**Other** (Teachers specified: Afghan, Albanian, Asian and black, Black Sierra Leonean, Black North American, Egyptian, Malaysian, Vietnamese, white Eastern European, White European, White and Indian)

## DISABILITY

**12%**
**Yes**

**12%**
**Prefer not to say**

**of the students who took part across the schools were considered to have a disability including:**

**Learning, concentrating or remembering** (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia)

**Mental health** (e.g. anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder)

**Mobility** (e.g. difficulty walking short distances, climbing stairs, lifting and carrying)

**Social or behavioural issues**
(e.g. neuro diverse conditions such as autism, attention deficit disorder or asperger's syndrome)

**Stamina or breathing difficulty**

**Vision** (e.g. blindness or partial sight)

**Other** (Teachers specified: moderate learning difficulty, specific learning needs, speech and language)

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS

**49%**
**Yes**

**51%**
**No**

**'This is the most fun workshop I have ever been to'**
Primary Take the Lead Student

# STUDENT INFORMATION

# STUDENT OUTCOMES

## ENGAGEMENT

**Have you been to The Old Vic before?**

**90%**

**No**

**10%**

**Yes**

## WORKSHOP

**Having taken part in this workshop, I now feel confident with my…**

### TEAMWORK SKILLS

**83%**

**of students strongly agreed or agreed**

### SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

**70%**

**of students strongly agreed or agreed**

### COMMUNICATION SKILLS

**76%**

**of students strongly agreed or agreed**

### SELF-BELIEF SKILLS

**70%**

**of students strongly agreed or agreed**

### PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

**75%**

**of students strongly agreed or agreed**

**‘I really loved that I felt included and I had lots of fun’**
Primary Take the Lead Student



## WORKSHOP

**95%**

**strongly agreed or agreed that the workshop leaders were excellent**

**88%**

**strongly agreed or agreed that overall, this workshop was excellent**

**Talking part in this workshop made me feel…**
(able to select more than one response)

| | |
|---|---|
| **HAPPY** | **45%** |
| **CONFIDENT** | **43%** |
| **INCLUDED** | **41%** |
| **INSPIRED** | **40%** |
| **PROUD** | **29%** |
| **EXCITED** | **22%** |

## SKILLS

**Have you developed any other skills during this workshop?**
(selection of answers shared)

- **Acting/Performing**
- **Bravery**
- **Confidence**
- **Creativity**
- **Decision making**
- **Expression**
- **Imagination**
- **Kindness**
- **Leadership**
- **Listening**
- **Making friends**
- **Oracy/Talking**
- **Patience**
- **Presenting**
- **Resilience**
- **Respect**
- **Sharing ideas**
- **Speaking up**
- **Social**
- **Taking turns**
- **Testing myself**
- **Trying new things**
- **Trust**
- **Working with others**

## PROJECT

# 100%

of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that:

Overall, this project was excellent.

## SUPPORT

Is drama well supported in your school?

62%

Yes

38%

No

Below were some of their reasons:

‘Drama is valued at our school and provides the children with opportunities to develop confidence’

‘Implemented in the English curriculum and encouraged through extra events and clubs’

‘Creative drama elements are used in English lessons’

‘Not explicitly taught but through English occasionally’

‘Not much opportunity for the children to experience drama. I would love this to be a bigger focus’

‘Lack of teacher CPD, time in curriculum’

‘We try our best in difficult circumstances’

‘I feel teachers are a bit frightened of doing drama!’

**‘It was a wonderful experience’**
Primary Take the Lead Teacher



# TEACHER OUTCOMES

## QUALITY AND IMPACT

# 100%

of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that:

As a result of this project, my students have learnt something new about communication

As a result of this project, my students have learnt something new about self-belief

This project has had a positive impact on my students’ confidence

This project has had a positive impact on my students’ wellbeing.

# 94%

of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that:

As a result of this project, my students have learnt something new about self-management.

# 88%

of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that:

As a result of this project, my students have learnt something new about problem solving

As a result of this project, my students have learnt something new about teamwork

This project has had a positive impact on my students’ move to secondary school.

## STUDENTS' NEEDS

# 100%

**of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that:**

**The workshop leaders adapted to my group/students' needs.**

**Below were some of their reasons:**

**'Lots of accessible actions, movements etc. so all children could follow'**

**'Leaders were patient and ensured all pupils were included in the tasks'**

**'Were able to cater/encourage more reluctant children'**

**'The quiet adaptions and support for individual children were subtle and really sensitively done'**

**'Adaptable and brilliant with the children'**

**'The leaders quite quickly got to know my pupils and managed and challenged their expectations well'**

**'Very supportive to all and very respectful to all students'**

**'Really engaged the children and were patient with a bit of disruption'**

**'Leaders were excellent and great at pupil engagement'**

**'They showed active listening and the children felt respected'.**

# TEACHER OUTCOMES

# TEACHER OUTCOMES

## INSPIRATION

**Complete this sentence, this project has inspired my students to...**

be confident learners who show kindness to each other and support.

understand how to deal with and adapt to changes in their lives.

be more confident and work collaboratively.

use the skills they already know and learnt today to use every day into secondary school.

express themselves and work with different pupils.

get out of their comfort zone, have more confidence.

come together and problem solve in a different type of situation.

work collaboratively with all members, they have learnt about being kind to themselves with self-affirmations and have had the chance to problem solve in a creative way.

build inner strength.

be brave and try new things.

use their imagination and build confidence.

be creative.

**'Today has been absolutely brilliant, thank you'**
Primary Take the Lead Teacher

**'Would be great to do it again! Today kept all students engaged and involved... All students got a lot out of today!'**
Primary Take the Lead Teacher

## PROJECT

**What did your students find most useful and why?**

'Creative teamwork opportunities'

'Working with others who they don't normally work with'

'The practical workshops and performances activities were most valuable'

'To all work collaboratively and support one another'

'They were all involved, feeling comfortable to show their new skills'

'Self-affirmation mantra, helps them to reflect and ground themselves'

'Supported to use creativity and new ideas'

'Working together and taking onboard others' ideas'

'They loved working to create the story together and seeing all their work come together'

'Bring them out of their shells, self-confidence'.

## SCALE

**Teachers were asked on a scale of 0–100, how likely they would recommend this project to a colleague. The average score was:**

**Teachers were asked on a scale of 0–100, to what extent they felt that The Old Vic is an inclusive environment. The average score was:**

# CASE STUDY
# GREG

**Greg is a deputy head teacher who participated in the Primary Take the Lead programme. The students who took part were aged 10–11 and were transitioning from primary to secondary school.**

Greg has been teaching for over 20 years and has held school leadership roles for eight years. When asked what made him want to participate in the programme, he emphasised that he was, '*really, really passionate about children being able to find their voice*'. He explained that it was important to find an organisation, '*who had a similar passion for drama, who had a similar passion for those creative games that can unlock children's thinking*'. As a school, they '*don't have enough time to fit as many drama opportunities into the curriculum*' as they would like to.

Greg went on to describe the impact that the programme, and the visit to The Old Vic, had on his students. He explained that '*some of our children haven't gone into central London before. Some of our children haven't actually visited a theatre before. So, all of that is helping raise that cultural capital gap*'. He also highlighted the importance of the facilitators running the workshops, noting that they reflected the '*makeup of the school so the children could see themselves in the facilitator*', which in turn enabled the students to '*work together and play those drama games and explore stories. Putting those skills into use in another setting*' which helps '*breed confidence*' in the students.

When asked what he found most useful about the programme, Greg shared that '*the children were so enthralled they didn't actually realise what they were doing was introducing, finding a problem, solving that problem and evaluating that problem*', all of which aligns with the skills the children are taught through the school curriculum. He went on to say that this is something he will '*definitely*' take into his own '*practice*', by making his lessons a '*little bit more interactive*' for his students.

Greg also highlighted that schools often have limited time to adequately support Year Six students as they prepare for the transition to secondary school. He explained that this programme is '*devoted to transitions*' and to '*ensuring that our children are able to be confident in finding their own voice*' when moving to secondary school, while also ensuring that '*they have a core set of values*'.

Among those values, Greg identified the programme's three Bs as particularly memorable: '*Be Kind, Be Brave and Be Curious*'. He emphasised the significance of these values, explaining that throughout the transition the students can, '*go back to and think about*' these values. He added, '*and if they can actually channel their inner, "be kind, be brave, be curious". And if they know they've had an experience where they've had to work with different people and had to find their voice, that can only hold them in really good stead for the future*' and moving onto the next stage of their academic journey.

The programme was particularly important in building students' confidence and helping them recognise that they had a voice. Greg explained that teaching the students that '*everyone's opinion has weight*' was especially poignant because a large percentage of the students '*live in houses in multiple occupancy*', and many are '*the only English speakers in the family*'. As a result, they may not yet have '*found their voice'* or developed confidence, so '*having this opportunity to bring themselves out of themselves, was just really, really important*'.

Overall, Greg felt it was clear to see that '*there's a lot of heart and soul*' that goes into the workshops. He said that you can tell how '*passionate*' all of the staff facilitating and taking part in the programme are, and he emphasised that it was a '*really professionally run day*'. Greg also reflected that having the programme take place at The Old Vic was '*fantastic*', explaining that the opportunity for students to go into the theatre and work in that space really '*raises those aspirations*' for students.

Ultimately, Greg '*would wholeheartedly recommend*' the programme to others because it is '*a unique opportunity*' that gave the '*children something to take away with them. It gave them a skill, it gave them that opportunity for self-reflection, and a space to work on their teamwork skills. That can sometimes be so difficult to fit into the curriculum*'.

## TRANSITION

**To use theatre techniques to support personal development of participants with a particular focus on managing change and transition.**

Primary Take the Lead uses theatre and drama as a vehicle to explore students' own personal growth, develop their ability to navigate change, adapt to new environments, collaborate effectively with their peers, strengthen key life skills, and overcome challenges with confidence and resilience.
One student mentioned, '*I enjoyed teamworking because we get to communicate to each other*', whilst another added, '*I really developed creativity and I thought outside the box*'.

During the workshop, students worked in teams to solve a series of problems, aiding them in the creation of a new story which explored the theme of change and transition. The workshop culminated in this new story being acted out by each member of the group. Using drama and theatre provided the students with an opportunity for creativity and self-expression, '*we got to use our imagination and creativity*', with one student adding they developed their creativity by '*letting my imagination go wild*'.

The Cultural Learning Alliance's Capabilities Framework, successfully evidence how **arts education can support young people's development of skills and qualities, aiding their learning, wellbeing and future lives**.
The workshops gave students the opportunity to experience theatre as a creative tool for learning: '*I've learnt how to be more kind, brave and curious*' with another sharing, '*I've developed skills that made me feel included*'.

The programme supports students with their upcoming transition from primary to secondary education. Students learnt how to apply different skills when navigating change, empowering them to succeed and thrive in their futures. When we asked teachers if the project had supported their pupils with the move to secondary school, 88% agreed or strongly agreed. Additionally, 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their students learned something new about self-belief and communication.
One teacher reflected on the programme, '*tasks that involved problem solving such as secret codes to build communication skills and teamwork. These are transferable skills for high school*', with another adding, '*The variety of ways they were encouraged to problem solve and push themselves, thinking about change without it being explicit about secondary school*'.



## WELLBEING

**To enhance the wellbeing of participants through engaging with creative activities and connections between each other and The Old Vic.**

According to research conducted by Mentally Healthy Schools **more than one in 10 primary school children aged five to 10 has an identifiable mental health condition, that's around three children in every class**. When asked if this project had a positive impact on their students' wellbeing, 100% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed, with one stating, '*They were able to talk maturely and sensibly about how to deal with change and other difficult situations*'. 100% of teachers also agreed the project had a positive impact on their students' confidence, saying it had inspired their students to '*use their imagination and build confidence*'.

When the students were asked to choose words to describe how the workshop made them feel, the highest selected were '*happy*', '*confident*' and '*included*', as one student mentioned, '*I now feel confident in myself*' with another adding how the workshop '*helped me to be confident and always believe in myself*'. Students were also asked to share other skills developed during the workshop, their answers included, '*bravery*', '*creativity*', '*kindness*', '*resilience*', '*respect*' and '*trust*'.

A study commissioned by the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) demonstrates **the positive impact the arts and culture can have on the wellbeing of individuals, '*from reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety to boosting productivity and quality of life*'**.
The study highlights how engaging in '*arts activities can improve children's self-esteem*'. One teacher shared how their students benefited from the day away from school in a new and creative environment, '*pupils have said that being able to use their imagination in a freer setting has helped and have shown that they can use it in multiple settings*', with students also adding, '*This was one of the best trips of my life*'.

**'It was very nice and I had a lot of fun expressing myself'**
Primary Take the Lead Student

## ACCESS TO THEATRE

**To offer primary schools supported access to theatre, with a focus on those who experience barriers to access.**

Primary Take the Lead aims to engage young people who have limited access to the arts and come from backgrounds typically underrepresented in theatre or who might experience barriers to access. This year, the programme successfully reached these groups, with **49% of selected students eligible for free school meals, compared with a national average of 26.5%**. Furthermore, **69% of participants were from the Global Majority, significantly higher than the national average of 38.9%**.

The Cultural Learning Alliance's Report Card 2026 highlights the **growing financial challenges facing state primary schools and families**. The report found that 34% of school leaders reported cutting back on extra-curricular activities due to funding constraints, while 57% of parents from working class communities said they could not afford educational trips and outings for their children outside of school.

# IMPACT

To address these barriers, we doubled the number of groups participating in the programme this year, significantly increasing our reach and impact. We also delivered the programme at the theatre for the first time in our newly opened Clore Learning Centre, providing schools with a funded trip. The new workshop setting was warmly received, with one teacher commenting that, '*The layout is inviting and staff very welcoming*', while a Year Six student described '*The Old Vic theatre is the best theatre in the world!*'. By offering London primary schools this free cultural capital experience, we enhanced both the impact and appeal of the programme, whilst also increasing access to theatre and breaking down financial barriers for schools and young people. These amendments to the programme were reflected in the positive feedback from teachers, who rated their likelihood of recommending the project to a colleague at 99 out of 100.

Teachers who participated in the programme also reported that it supported not only their pupils, but their own professional development as educational practitioners. One stated it was, '*great to practise drama exercises that we could actually use and also to talk about how they could be adapted*', with another adding, '*reminded me of the value and use of drama*'. One teacher explained how they plan to embed the learning from the teacher CPD into their classroom in the future, '*I found it useful acting out the exercises — it helps me to understand how I'm going to implement it with my students*', and another mentioned '*I really enjoyed the session and came away with some great ideas that I'll be taking into my own teaching*'.

Feedback from teachers and schools on the project was overwhelmingly positive, with many stating they would like to take part on the project again, '*would love to work with The Old Vic during any future opportunities*'. When asked whether the workshop had provided them with new drama activities to try with their students, 100% agreed or strongly agreed. Furthermore, 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher CPD was excellent.

**'100 for recommending — no brainer — supports all areas of curriculum'**
Primary Take the Lead Teacher

# IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

## THEATRE TOUR

To develop the offering, we would like to include a theatre tour as part of the student workshop experience. Providing every young person on the programme the opportunity to explore the auditorium and connect their learning in the workshop space to the wider theatre building. Experiencing the theatre first-hand would aim to deepen the students' understanding of the arts, enrich their cultural capital and help them to identify the breadth of opportunities available within the creative sector.

## TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

Our teacher engagement events faced several challenges this year, including periods of extreme hot weather and public transport disruption, contributing to cancellations and lower attendance levels. Feedback highlighted that after-school events are often difficult for teachers to prioritise alongside their existing responsibilities, suggesting that alternative formats and timings may improve future engagement.

We propose combining the programme launch event and CPD session into a single full-day workshop for all participating teachers. We will schedule this approximately one month before the first student workshop, helping to build teacher engagement and investment in the programme from the outset, while also aiming to improve attendance. The revised timeline would also provide teachers with sufficient opportunity to deliver preparatory classroom activities and strengthen connections between the curriculum and programme content. It would also offer greater flexibility to respond to any unforeseen disruptions, allowing sessions to be rescheduled more easily if necessary.

**'Thank you so much for having us. We made many memories'**

Primary Take the Lead Student

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