

**chichester
festival
theatre**

**Festival Fridays
2024-25**

Evaluation and Impact Report



Introduction

Now in its sixth year, Festival Fridays is an alternative education setting at Chichester Festival Theatre, providing a creative learning intervention for students across the Chichester district.

The Festival Fridays programme supports Year 5 students (ages 9–10) who are at risk of disengaging from formal education. It offers an alternative, creative curriculum designed to reignite their enjoyment of learning and support their transition to secondary school at age 11. The programme runs over three, 10-week terms, with students spending approximately 20% of their Year 5 timetable at Chichester Festival Theatre.



Festival Fridays offers young people a rich and varied learning experience, with a strong emphasis on developing literacy, communication, and social skills, as well as building resilience, self-esteem, and confidence. These outcomes are supported through a wide range of creative activities, including storytelling, role play, improvisation, working with text, puppetry, prop-making, music, and movement.

The programme encourages students to develop their own voice, enjoy positive relationships with peers, work collaboratively, grow trust and mutual respect, alongside developing a deeper, more positive relationship with learning. We want the young people to flourish creatively whilst gaining vital life skills.

Our story this year

Our Young People

This year, a cohort of students from eight local schools participated in the Festival Fridays programme.

Prior to the programme's launch, Angela, (Festival Fridays Programme Lead), liaised with teachers and parents to gain a clear understanding of each student's individual needs and goals. This collaborative approach ensures that the programme is designed to be fully accessible and enables every child to succeed.

Our students this year have a range of additional needs, including Autism, Sensory Processing Disorder, Global Developmental Delay, ADHD, and Pathological Demand Avoidance.

Our Team

The Festival Fridays team is led by Angela Watkins and Liam Wright, and supported by Kyle Neale, and Ella Bassett. Alongside the core team who work with the children each week, a number of additional specialist practitioners delivered workshops throughout the year: Cathy Burton, Sam Harrison, Harry Handy, Luke Osbourne, Freddy Lyons, and Jo Blossom.

We were also pleased to launch a new partnership with Chichester University. As part of this collaboration, trainee teachers spent a day engaging with our students—both delivering workshops and gaining valuable insight into how alternative provision works and the positive impact it can have on young people.

Our Approach

This year we re-developed the Festival Fridays (FF) creative curriculum to align more closely with National Curriculum guidance. The programme included learning across a broad range of subjects, including History, Art & Design, Physical Education, Writing, Reading and Speaking and Listening. This curriculum was aimed to strengthen the links between FF and the children's school based learning. All sessions were linked to NC objectives and were delivered practically and creatively, incorporating drama, storytelling, music and movement. (see summary Pg 3-4).

The FF team used a range of strategies and teaching techniques to engage learners and respond to their individual needs. They introduced 'Teacher-in-role', immersing children in imagined historical experiences to enhance learning. They also implemented a carousel of activities, each aligned with the term's theme. This approach supported more personalised learning, allowing leaders to work with pupils in small groups and keep sessions brief to sustain focus and engagement.

A key development this year was the introduction of individual LAMDA qualifications (London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art). Students performed poems from memory for the Introductory Stage 2 poetry exam, developing a range of oracy skills including vocal clarity, diction, listening, projection, timing and expression.

Creative Learning

Term 1

Legends and Adventures

The first half term focused on building a foundation for the year, developing group cohesion, confidence, and communication through ensemble games and storytelling techniques (mime, narration, tableaux). A cross-curricular Viking topic introduced historical enquiry using drama and artefact exploration. The second half-term centred on cultural stories and creative performance. Students explored poetry, art, and music using the productions *Hey! Christmas Tree* and *Cinderella* as inspiration.

Core skills

The following skills underpin all learning across the year:

<i>Communication and social skills</i>	<i>Concentration</i>
<i>Kindness</i>	<i>Problem solving</i>
<i>Critical thinking</i>	<i>Creativity and imagination</i>
<i>Resilience</i>	<i>Relationships</i>
<i>Empathy and trust</i>	<i>Self-expression</i>
<i>Confidence and self-esteem</i>	<i>Listening and responding</i>
<i>Teamwork and collaboration</i>	<i>Self-discipline</i>
	<i>Leadership</i>

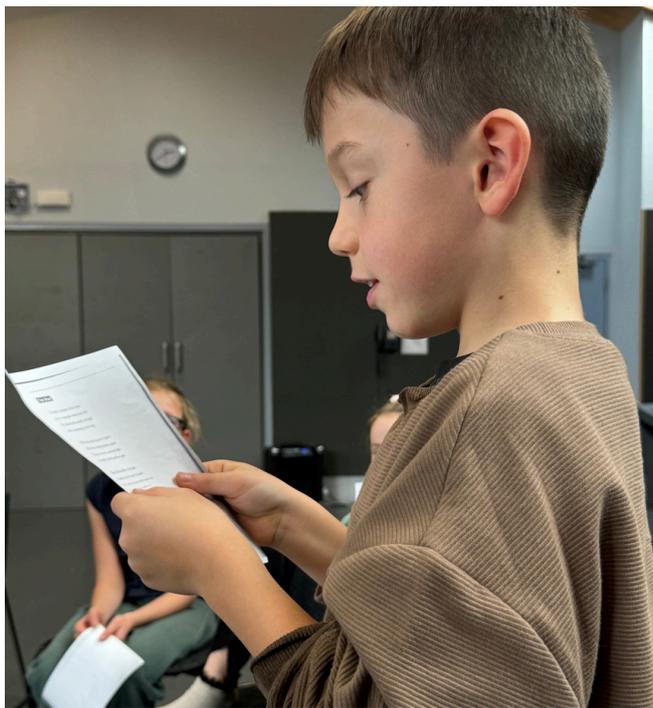


Term 2

The Greatest Show

In the first half of the term, students explored puppetry and storytelling techniques, constructed their own puppets, and collaborated to reimagine their own versions of Cinderella through performance. The second half of the term was based on a rotating carousel of Poetry (LAMDA), singing, and circus skills to develop students' oracy, performance skills, focus, and coordination.

Afternoon workshops included dance, clowning, mime, and cultural storytelling, as well as a workshop and performance from Culture Spark.



Term 3

Poetry and Performance

In the first half of the term, the children explored group performance through the poem 'Words and Your Heart' combining voice work with movement and mime. They also took part in a circus-themed day led by a specialist practitioner, and participated in a day of 'This is Me' workshops delivered in collaboration with students from the University of Chichester. These experiences provided the creative foundation for the children's end-of-term performance.

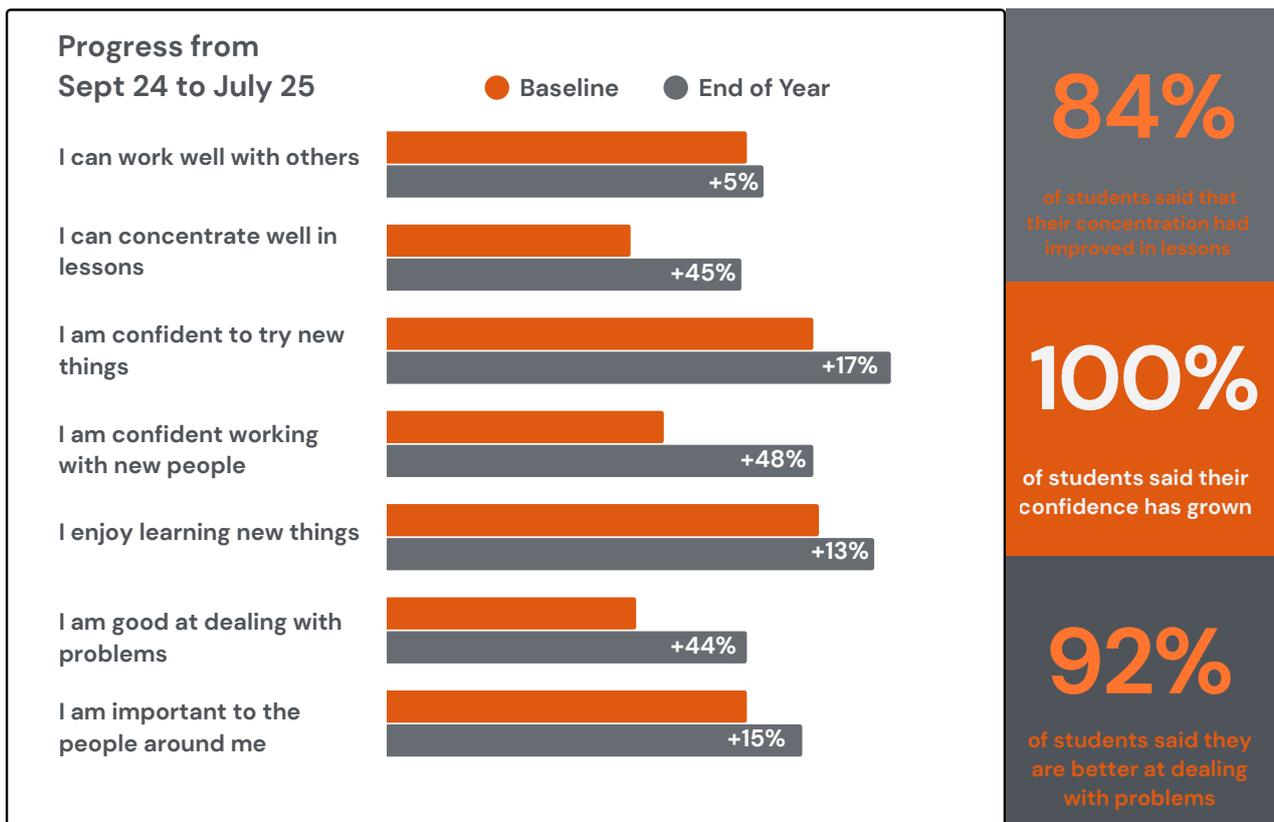
The term concluded with LAMDA exams and a final sharing event, celebrating the children's achievements across the year.



Impact and Outcomes

'Learning feels like fun here and you don't know you are learning.' Robyn

The graph below summarises the students' self-assessment from the beginning of the programme (baseline) to the end of the year (July 25) This data is based on responses from all students.



100% of students were awarded a **DISTINCTION** in their LAMDA exams

'Festival Fridays has helped me to be braver at school. I feel happy when I am at Festival Fridays because I have friends and everything is fun. My reading at school has got better and I can read in front of people now.' (Ivy)

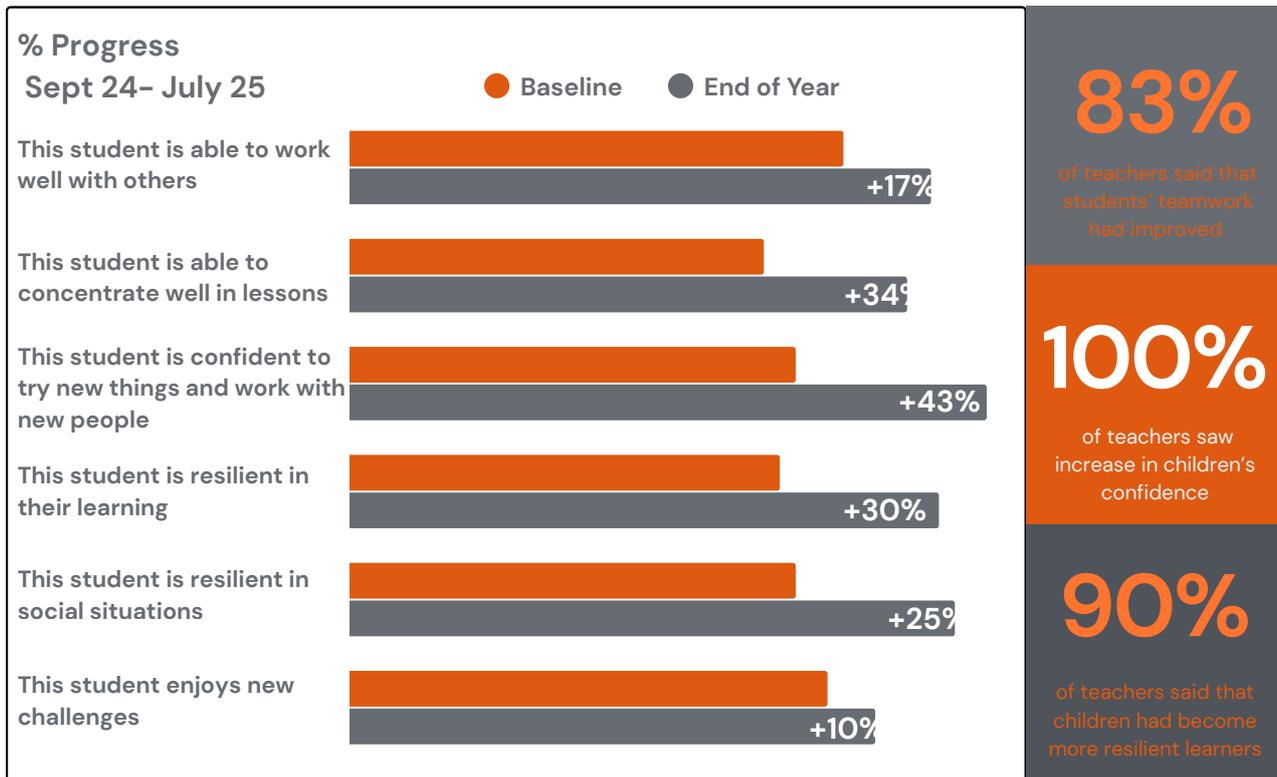
'I find it hard not to fidget in class and I have to sit for a long time staring at a screen. At Festival Fridays I can talk to people and move around and that is better. I can learn more here.' (Oakley)

'I have got better at controlling my emotions and Festival Fridays helps because of the people and it's fun. I am able to stay in class more now and I feel a bit happier in lessons.' (Louis)

Feedback from Schools

'Bella has blossomed at CFT'. (Headteacher – Fishbourne Primary School)

The graph below summarises teachers' assessment from the beginning of the programme (baseline) to the end of the year (July 25) This data is based on responses from 7 teachers.



80% of teachers have seen better than expected improvement in children's Speaking and Listening skills

'The sharing was absolutely fantastic! I had tears in my eyes. Louis and I have had some tough times together and it was so wonderful to see him so confident and perform with energy. I thought the show was really special and something for us to share with others and help him to share as well. Thanks to everyone who has worked so hard on this.' (Teacher)

Bella has felt a sense of belonging during her sessions and ALWAYS talks very positively about her experiences at FF. Being able to find her tribe and establish herself with a new cohort, away from the classroom has been a source of encouragement for her.' (Teacher)

'Thank you so much for this amazing experience. We have definitely seen Louis more able to regulate and able to take things at a slightly slower pace. He still has his wobbles but now he is able to control his emotions more easily.' (Headteacher)

Feedback from Parents

'We can't thank the team and Angela enough for creating a wonderful nurturing environment to allow the children to flourish'. (Parent)

'I think Festival Fridays has reset her approach to learning. Rather than feeling anxious about facing things that she finds hard, Olive is now showing resilience and a confident positive approach to challenges. We have noticed it and her teachers have noticed it too. It's made such a difference to our whole family.' (Parent)

'Robyn was finding attending school extremely difficult and her attendance dropped rapidly because of her low self esteem and anxiety around her reading and writing challenges. Since attending festival Fridays she has become more resilient and her attendance has dramatically improved. We feel that it is because she has had Festival Fridays each week to look forward to and knowing that she is going to a place that she enjoys and thrives in.' (Parent)

'Myself, husband and younger daughter loved watching the sharing show. It was quite emotional seeing how wonderfully the children worked together, how confident our daughter was to speak, sing & perform in front of an audience. We felt incredibly proud watching her.' (Parent)

'Festival Fridays has given Ivy the confidence to do anything and actually believe in herself. Now she knows she can do it, it seems less scary for her. Building new friendships and being more social has definitely helped her through this process- having adults she can trust to help her along was amazing. (Parent)



Reflections from Festival Friday Leaders

“When young people are given the freedom to step out of traditional learning and into immersive, creative experiences, they begin to find their voices, grow in confidence, and truly come alive. It’s in those moments of play, imagination, and hands-on learning that real transformation happens.” – Kyle Neale

‘This year has been really positive, largely because of the structure provided by the curriculum—it gave us a clear framework and objectives to work toward each day. Highlights included the Viking topic, which the children were deeply engaged in, especially the Viking Day and building their shields. It was immersive and memorable—Eric the Viking still comes up in conversation, and the students are still unsure if he was real! That kind of learning has been transformative; teaching in role has brought real joy and engagement. In terms of this cohort, the challenges were less about behaviour (unlike previous years) and more about supporting their individual learning needs. We’ve focused on building their self-esteem and helping them discover their strengths. They’ve all achieved things they didn’t think they could, like the LAMDA exam, which was a proud moment for everyone. We also hosted student teachers from Chichester University for a day, which was powerful. I’d love to build on that, training future teachers could be a great way to extend the reach of our approach sustainably.’ – Angela Watkins

‘This year’s group presented a wide range of individual and neurodivergent needs, which required a more tailored, responsive approach. It’s been inspiring to watch their growth in confidence, communication, and emotional awareness— especially as they learned to navigate challenges, support one another, and develop resilience. The consistency of the programme, combined with creative and immersive learning, has created real and lasting impact’– Liam Wright

‘Although I joined partway through the programme, the progress I witnessed was incredible, especially among some of the quieter participants. For example, Ayla, who barely spoke at the beginning and used to wear headphones and avoid engagement, is now raising her hand in class and lifting others up, something even her teachers have noted with pride. Watching the children gain confidence, particularly through performing their poems, was a highlight. The joy and pride they felt in their achievements, and their ability to overcome challenges they never thought possible, was truly powerful. It’s the kind of growth you don’t often see in a typical school setting.’ – Ella Bassett

Partnership with Chichester University

'Today has made me want to promote creative arts in all aspects of learning to unlock children's creativity and potential.' Student Teacher

This year we welcomed students from Chichester University to spend a day with the Festival Fridays team and work with the children. They had the opportunity to observe the learning, work alongside the FF team and lead workshops with the children. This was an invaluable opportunity for the students to not only to see how alternative school provision works, but also a chance to see how creative learning can have a profound impact on children who find everyday school life challenging. This collaboration was a powerful way to reinforce to the teachers of tomorrow how important it is to ensure creativity and the arts are a central part of curriculum planning in schools.

Feedback from Student teachers

100% of student teachers believe that creative/ performing arts are an essential part of the school curriculum

'Creativity in schools is VITAL. What children gain from the Arts is so important and are things they can take with them throughout their lives. Creativity and Performing Arts are accessible to all and can give children confidence across all subjects and gives children a sense of purpose and achievement.'

'I have learnt how engaged children can be in an alternative setting and how beneficial it is for the children to be immersed in the performing arts. Providing children with an alternative space where they can attend, feel safe and express themselves is key in building confidence.'

100% of student teachers said that their experience with Festival Fridays will influence their teaching practice.

'Seeing the impact creativity can have on children's confidence, self-esteem, social skills and how much the children engage and enjoy it, makes me want to include lots of creativity in the classroom.'

'Today I saw first hand the benefits of children engaging in the Arts. I definitely want to be an avocate for performing Arts in school by leading extra-curricular clubs and incorporating drama and dance in all subjects.'

Conclusion and Next Steps

Festival Fridays has had another very successful year – the feedback and reflections collected from the students, staff, teachers, headteachers and parents are overwhelmingly positive and clearly demonstrate the impact that the programme has had on the learning and development of Festival Friday participants.

This year has seen the introduction of a new creative curriculum aligned more closely to National Curriculum objectives. This has not led to any changes in the creative approach, but has made more explicit links between learning at Festival Fridays and the children’s learning in school. The feedback from this has been very positive, and the outcomes have been strong. This year **80%** of the teachers who responded to the survey, reported that students had **made more than expected progress** in **Speaking and Listening**. This is a significant increase on last year where only **12%** of teachers reported strong progress in this area.

It is also notable that children **84%** of children said that their concentration in lessons had improved and **77%** of teachers reported the same.

This year, LAMDA was introduced into the FF curriculum, with all children taking individual exams in July. **Every child was awarded a Distinction** – this is a significant achievement, especially considering that many were reluctant to speak aloud in front of others at the start of the year. When asked what they had improved on this year, many children said they had become braver as a result of taking their LAMDA exams. The experience was very positive and certainly will have helped build their resilience. For some, simply completing the exam had seemed impossible at first, so their success brought them a well earned sense of pride.

This year’s partnership with Chichester University was very successful and something we would like to continue to develop next year. The students reported that the experience had been extremely beneficial and has influenced their educational philosophy in terms of the importance of creativity in the curriculum. We hope that they will take this forward and be advocates of the Arts in their own schools and throughout their teaching careers.

As always at CFT we are committed to further strengthening and developing Festival Fridays, building on the successes of this year. Some of the steps we would like to take next year include:

- Continued partnership with Chichester University – extending the opportunities to include a longer module of work across a term.
- Building on the Literacy successes this year, we will undertake a Shakespeare project where children get to experience Shakespeare taught with a practical and creative approach.
- Introduce LAMDA at an earlier stage – exams to be completed at the end of term 2
- Develop more use of Teacher-in- role in other curriculum areas
- See a performance of *Stories in the dust* in the Minerva (exploring climate change) and participate in a workshop with the cast/ creative team.
- Develop teacher CPD – obligation for all schools to send a teacher/TA to spend one day with us per term.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who have supported the Festival Fridays programme. This work would not be possible without our amazing partners and supporters.

The Festival Fridays programme is generously supported by The Vernon Ellis Foundation, Katherine Slay, The Hobhouse Trust and all those who donated via The Big Give.

