

# The Royal Free Hospital Children's School

## A case study of Artsmark in a hospital school

### Who we are

The Royal Free Hospital Children's School (RFHCS) is a community school for pupils aged 5 to 16. We provide education for children who are in-patients on the paediatric wards at the Royal Free or with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Eating Disorder Service. We also manage the delivery of medical needs outreach teaching for Camden and have a GCSE Day school programme for children with mental health challenges in years 10 and 11.

The Royal Free is a leading practice school for mental health and wellbeing. It operates within a multidisciplinary framework, working closely with a range of professionals including doctors, CAMHS workers, and other agencies.

### How Artsmark has worked for us

Artsmark has been a key factor in our school's development. It has been an intrinsic part of our ethos and practice for many years now and continues to be an invaluable part of our work as a trauma informed hospital school.

The entire Artsmark process makes us actively and continuously self reflective. Creative opportunities can provide a level of manageable challenge and an opportunity for self expression for young people who

have missed a significant amount of time at school. The framework is clear and precise and permits us to explore our different areas of work to ensure we are growing and always striving for improvement.

Artsmark has highlighted our strengths and unique expertise as an alternative provision setting but it also allows us to constantly identify opportunities to develop further.

Artsmark informs many areas of our school improvement plan, which now prioritises and embraces cross-curricular developments designed to stretch the abilities of students and enable personal progression.



## Inspiring others

We were delighted to achieve the Artsmark Platinum award, and we always strive to maintain a high standard in all areas of our creative provision.

Artsmark has led us to take part in conversations and interviews discussing the practicalities of implementing the arts in a specialist setting. For example, we were invited to be part of a podcast with Camden Spark, our Local Cultural Education Partnership. We share resources and good practice with various schools and our senior leaders actively promote the arts in governing body and multidisciplinary meetings. All these opportunities are strengthening our platform in the borough to help inspire other hospital schools to join the Artsmark community.

## Building creative partnerships

Fundamentally, Artsmark fosters connection. It's encouraged us to form new partnerships with various organisations, schools, and institutions, using the arts as a catalyst to work with vulnerable young people.



Our long-term collaboration with musician Matt Smith has developed across many areas of the school, including the Eating Disorder Intensive Service where he facilitated a pupil-led radio play, based on the theme of Aladdin. The young people worked together on all aspects of the production, including scriptwriting, creating music, sound recording, editing and acting.

Our music provision has strengthened the mental health of our children and has benefited the musicians involved. As Matt says, *"My work in the Royal Free has led me to become increasingly creative and adaptable in my practice."*

## The whole child

On a daily basis, the Arts Lead and SENDCo take part in the morning safety 'huddles' in the hospital; involving doctors, nurses, and CAMHS therapists. They discuss the needs of the patients, which can then be considered as we get to know the young people individually to find out about their interests. These meetings are also an opportunity for our Arts Lead to share the patients' positive creative experiences and help medical staff to form a picture of the whole child.



## Advocating for pupil voice

A central component of Artsmark is the importance of pupil voice. We have increasingly involved our young people in decision-making and curriculum planning. Our half-termly 'pupil voice' meetings are opportunities for them to share concerns and ideas with the whole school. Students have become ambassadors for their arts provision, which in turn has a positive effect on their mental health, wellbeing, and confidence, boosting progress and academic attainment.

## Family wellbeing

Supporting the wellbeing of parents and carers is integral to our ethos and practice. We have recently developed our online parents' group, a bespoke programme of one hour zoom sessions. They are led by two of our staff and our drama therapist, who delivers activities based on sound, music, storytelling and imaginative play. The sessions offer a safe space where parents can express themselves in a creative way, whilst talking through some of the emotional challenges they experience supporting children with a variety of complex needs.

In these sessions, parents also benefit from being able to talk directly with each other, sharing some of the difficulties they face as well as providing each other with empathetic and supportive advice. Many parents tell us how valuable and beneficial to their overall wellbeing they find these sessions. Seeking to involve all parents in supporting their child's

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<https://www.artsmark.org.uk/support-specialist-settings>

education has become central to our equalities policy. The arts strengthen our relationship with parents.

## What we recommend

Staying connected and maintaining existing partnerships fosters a culture of community, which opens the door to opportunities for creative collaborations and diverse arts and cultural experiences. We believe that prioritising pupil voice should be at the heart of the Artsmark journey. Involving young people in decision-making and curriculum planning allows them to be ambassadors for their art provision and promotes authenticity.

Often, schools designate one key member of staff to oversee the Artsmark journey. However, embodying a whole school approach is crucial to ensuring cross-curricular opportunities are driving and developing art provision. Allocating different responsibilities to different staff members ensures various aspects of the Artsmark Framework are being targeted.

Staying reflective and proactive; consistently keeping an eye on the Artsmark Framework helps audit current provision at the start of your journey and revisiting it throughout helps monitor goals and evaluate progress. Finally, never forget the 'why' – enriching the lives of young people with arts and culture underpins Artsmark values.

