



# Curious Minds

## Wigan Borough Dance Festival

2024 Evaluation

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# 1. Introduction

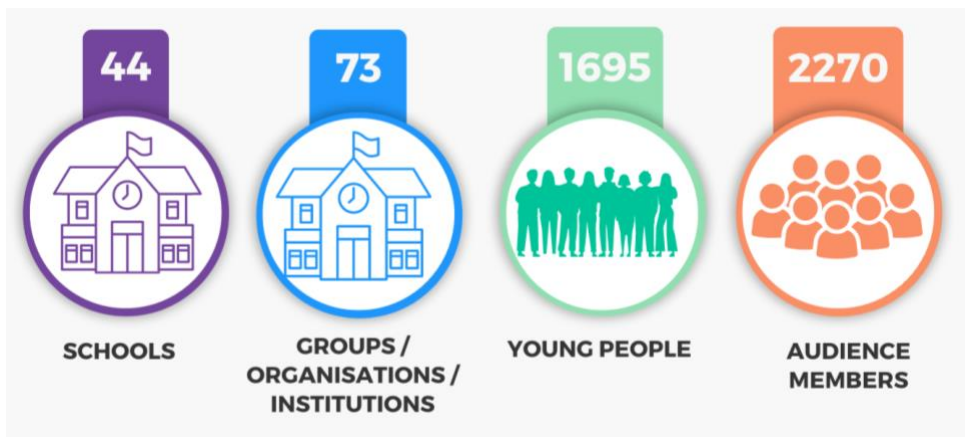
## Wigan Borough Dance Festival

Wigan Borough Dance Festival has become one of the biggest events in Wigan’s Cultural Calendar and it returned to The Edge Conference Centre in March 2024. This evaluation analyses data collected from audiences, teachers, children and young people. Case studies were collected from a community group and dancers.

# 2. Summary

## Reach

The impact of Wigan Dance Festival can be summarised with the following numbers:



## Quality

Wigan Dance Festival was rated highly against Arts Council England’s recommended metrics for quality, and audiences strongly agreed they had had a good time. They felt strongly the Festival was well thought through and put together and that they would come to an event like this again.

Audiences also agreed that the Festival made them feel proud of their cultural life and community and that it was an important addition to the cultural life of the area.

When asked to provide more detail, audiences reported features that made the Festival a good experience were the supportive and inclusive character of the event, the atmosphere bristling with joy and excitement, an overall sense of pride, and general excellence.

Young people agreed and remarked on the excitement of being in a professional venue, spending the day there and watching the tech-run and lighting.

Schools reported sessions that were high quality, well-pitched, engaging and inclusive of all abilities. Most schools agreed that the Festival was something they could not offer from within their own resources and capacity.

## Impact

### Audiences

Wigan Dance Festival made a difference to how its audience feels about Wigan; surveys said people felt proud of their place, culture and community. It also developed their cultural capital; eight out of ten people said they felt they would visit a similar event in future.

### Schools

The Festival reached schools in the most deprived areas of the country (66% in IMD 1-3). Of the Greater Manchester schools taking part, 78% represented areas in the highest indices for multiple domains of deprivation (IMD 1-3). Overall, 25% of schools were from areas ranked first for deprivation nationally (IMD 1).

Schools surveyed said that they would not be able to provide something similar to the Wigan Dance Festival offer from within their own staff and resources.

### Children

The impact of the Festival for children is significant. Schools told us that children have limited opportunities to access art and culture outside of school. For 90% of schools surveyed this was their children's first experience of art and culture. Teachers told us that the Festival raised aspirations for their children and generated pride and self-esteem.

In addition, pupils had improved their physical dance skills, positively changed their attitudes and behaviours towards dance and learned more about the artform.

For children taking part in the evaluation, 70% said this was their very first experience of dance.

## Legacy for Wigan

Taken together, the pride, cultural capital, raised aspirations and love of dance generated by the Festival can be expected to make an increasingly significant difference to the cultural life of Wigan with each iteration, creating dancers, audiences, cultural capital in schools and a sense of ownership and ease within cultural venues for children and families.

# 3. Methodology

## Methods

Evaluation data were collected from attendees at the event (n=66) and in 10 creative sessions with young people after the event (n=140). A survey was distributed to schools achieving a 27% sample (n=11). These datasets were triangulated with three in-depth interviews producing illustrative case studies.



## 4. Audience Survey

A survey was distributed to audience members at the end of the event via a QR code. The survey achieved a sample of 66 responses, and answers were given to questions about the quality of the event, the experience of audience members and feedback for how to improve next time. The responses are taken in turn in the discussion that follows.



### Quality

Using the Culture Counts Impact and Insights dimensions, the audience rated the quality of Wigan Dance Festival highly against the metrics selected. The Festival was enjoyable, well put together, and introduced audiences to something new, whetting their appetite for more. It also generated pride in Wigan's culture and community.

Against all selected metrics over 50% of audience members rated themselves in strong agreement, with enjoyment, appetite to return and pride in community felt most strongly (71% of respondents).







## Experience

Audience members were asked to describe what they enjoyed most about the Festival and their responses were categorised using the following themes:

supportive  
inclusive  
enjoyment  
excellent

atmosphere

pride

Audience members commented on features such as enjoying watching up and coming talent, seeing the joy on faces of performers, and seeing everyone coming together in their enjoyment of dance, “my daughter who has special needs was part of the show”, “communities coming together (it was) very inclusive”, “Seeing all the schools participating and hearing all the children supporting each other from other schools.” Several remarked on the atmosphere or ‘vibe’ of happiness and excitement, “everyone on stage was so happy and buzzing”. They remarked on the variety of acts and abilities, and their pleasure in watching their own children dance.

They described a ‘wholesome’ experience that was inspiring “It made me fall back in love with dance.” Audience members described pride, “seeing all the kids beaming with pride during their performances.”

“

**Watching lots of great talent in our small town of Wigan: proud moment.**

Survey respondent

“

**The atmosphere was amazing. Everyone was welcomed.**

Survey respondent



## Improvements

Audience members were invited to share their thoughts on what could be improved next time, and their comments were categorised to the following themes:



Their ideas for improvement related to making the day and event shorter and making the experience of meeting the schools and collecting children afterwards more structured. This would make it easier to find one another and help parents spend less time exposed to the elements; there were references to being out in the rain.

Seats were tightly packed, although audience members liked that seats were allocated. Several commented that they had an obscured view or were close to the speakers and uncomfortable. There were references to the muddy car park and limited parking spaces.

Audience members also suggested improving the Festival with more rehearsal time, less adult contemporary dance and more choreography from non-dance schools. There were comments about having more food and drink vendors and several mentioned that the Festival could be improved by making a professionally filmed video available to capture the memory.

“

**It was absolutely  
fabulous as it was!**

Survey respondent

## Case Study: Harry Cunliffe, WN Dance

Harry is a former student of Fred Longworth High school, which has been involved in Wigan Dance Festival since it first began. After seeing Harry perform as a pupil, WigLe Dance invited Harry to join WN Dance Company.

WN Dance is an exciting concept that brings together talented young people and professional performers to create and perform new dance works made in and for the Wigan Borough.

Harry performed with WN during the Fire Within launch of Wigan's Cultural Strategy when WN devised and performed 'We Are Flame'. Since then, Harry has worked with WN on a number of projects including the Dance Festival.

### IMPACT

Harry danced as a child but during the pandemic he 'fell out of love' with dance. "If it wasn't for (WigLe Dance) I don't think I'd still be dancing today. At the moment I'm at Wigan and Leigh College in my last year studying BTec Dance. I've just got into a dance academy in Leicester, so I'm going to dance at university now!"

The Festival was a gateway for Harry to begin mapping his career: "It's helped me to choose my own pathway, because I've been exposed to so many different opportunities, I've identified what's best for me. The insight that the (WN professional dancers) have given me on what training I might be doing if I did follow a particular path, has allowed me to dictate my own pathway. Now I know what's best for me. So meeting these people and knowing what the next step for me was, was really important."

"It has given me a platform to perform. Before the Dance Festival, I really wasn't getting dance opportunities performance-wise. It reminded me what it's like to be on stage and I think it does for every single child that takes part in it. It really gives you that opportunity to perform."

## 5. Schools' evaluation

Teachers were invited to share their experience of the Festival in a questionnaire after the event. There were eleven responses.

### Quality

Alongside the Dance Festival, 55% had received workshop delivery in school. Dance performances had been put together by teachers (27%), teaching assistants (27%), dance professionals (27%) and by visiting sports coaches (2%)

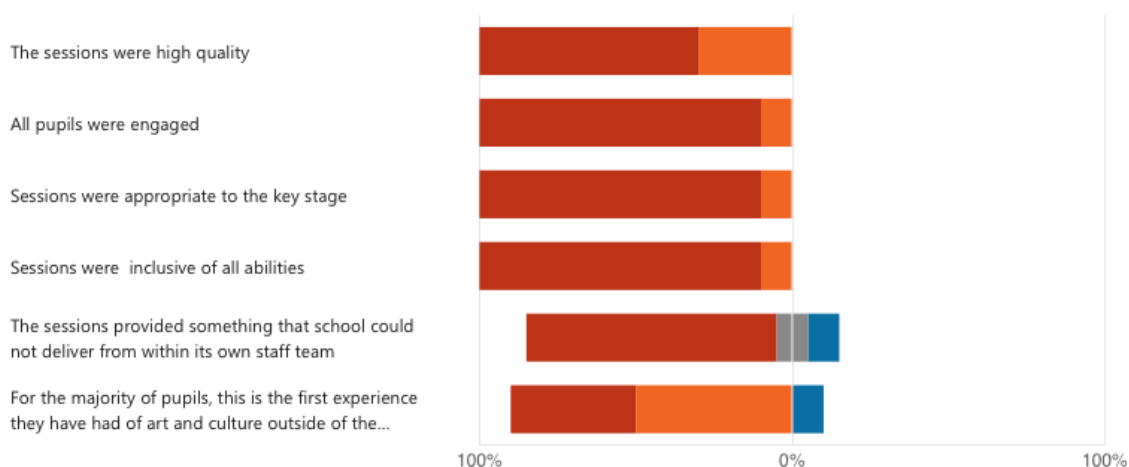
<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Teacher	3
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Teaching Assistant	3
<span style="color: green;">●</span> External visiting dance artist	3
<span style="color: red;">●</span> External visiting sports coach	2



Most respondents (45%) had dedicated 5 or 6 hours to workshops in preparation for the Festival and one had dedicated 16 hours.

Schools were invited to rate the quality of the experience against the following metrics. Whilst 80% of schools felt the Festival provided something they could not offer from within their staff team, 10% disagreed. Teachers were asked to assess whether this was their pupil's first experience of art and culture outside of the curriculum and 90% agreed, with 50% in strong agreement.

■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ Neutral  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree



## Impact

Schools surveyed shared the following data about their participating young people:



238 pupils took part in workshops & performances



12% of pupils have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)



26% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals



27% of pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium



9% of pupils speak English as a Second or Other Language

Schools participating were in some of the most deprived in the country, 66% are in the most deprived areas in the country (IMD 1-3) and 25% are ranked in the 1<sup>st</sup> decile nationally across multiple domains of deprivation (IMD 1). For the schools surveyed, this was particularly stark in relation to health inequalities where seven of the eleven schools surveyed were ranked first for disadvantage.

66%



Schools in the most  
deprived areas in the  
country (IMD 1-3)

25%



Schools in areas  
ranked 1st for  
deprivation (IMD 1)

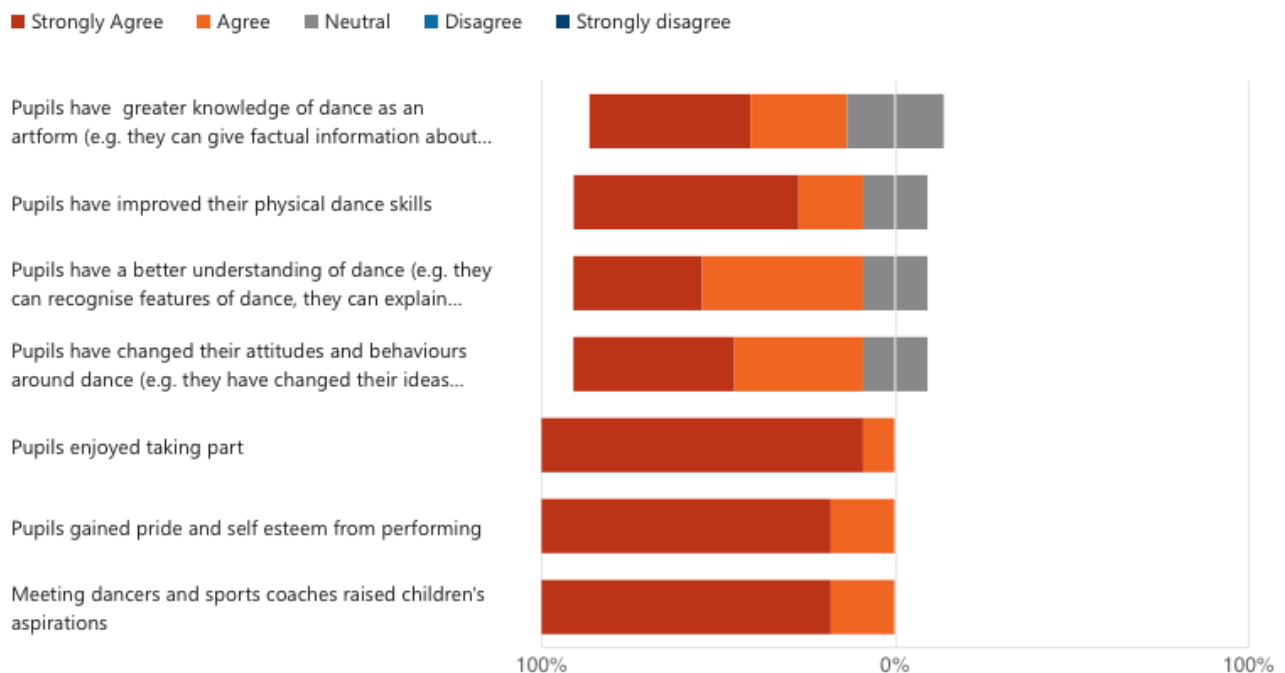
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The children have  
limited opportunities  
to access art and  
culture outside of  
school

Survey respondent

Teachers were asked about the impact of the Festival for their pupils. There was strong agreement that the Festival raised aspirations and generated pride and self-esteem; children enjoyed taking part.

Teachers strongly agreed that pupils had improved their physical dance skills, had changed attitudes and behaviours towards dance and had learned more about dance as an artform.



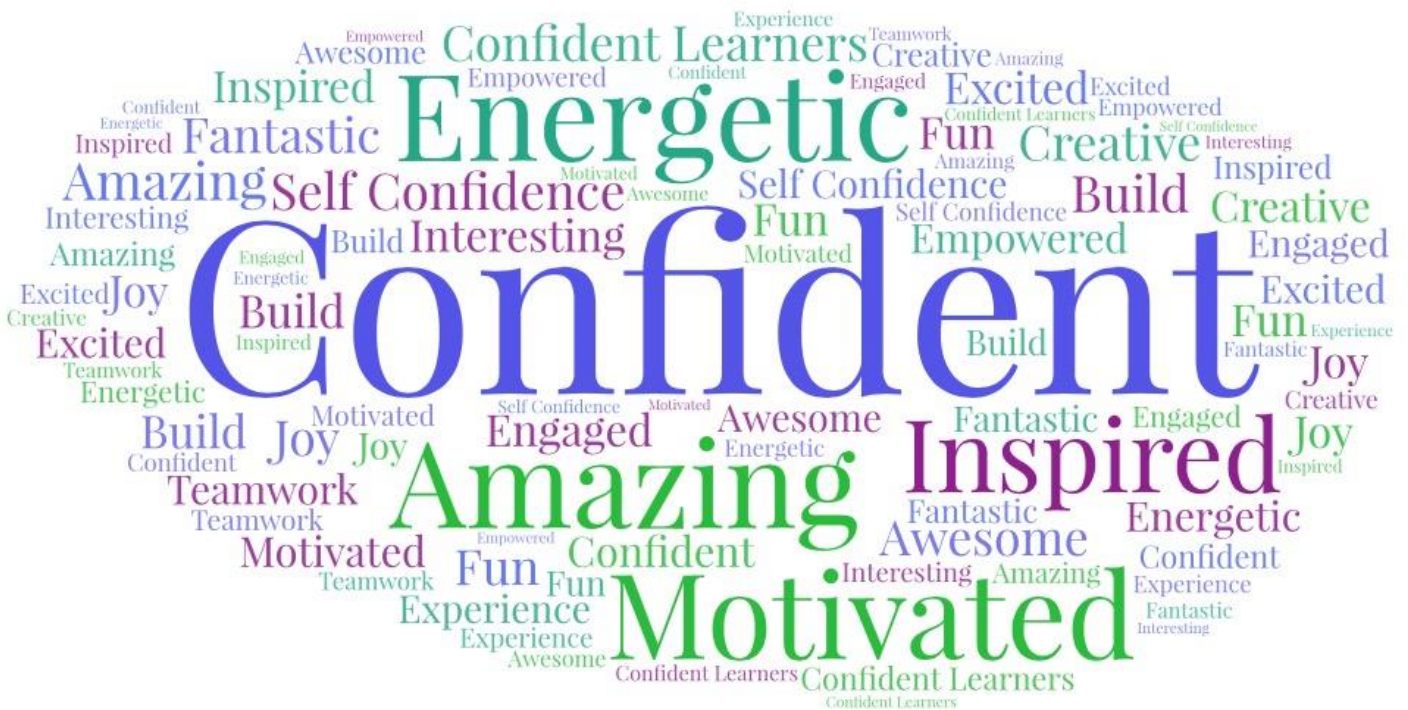
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**The dance festival is like no other in Wigan. The pupils are inspired by the coaches and continually practicing outside of the sessions. The day itself is a great opportunity for the children to meet others from other schools and practice their social skills in a safe environment. They rarely leave Platt Bridge so this opportunity helps them as citizens as well as dancers.**

Survey respondent



Asked to describe their experience in three words, survey respondents said:



“

The impact of this festival could not be expressed enough in words. The experience that our pupils received taking part in the dance festival is above and beyond anything we could organise just as one school. The children and parents look forward to the event every year and every year it never fails to impress. Our pupils gain dance experience but for us, the impact is seen on them socialising with the coaches, the other pupils and the smiles on their faces when they realise what they have been working towards and achieve by the end of it. It is one of the best offers in Wigan for cultural capital.

Survey respondent

## 6. Pupil's evaluation

Creative evaluation was conducted with young people as part of workshop sessions.



**70% of pupils were experiencing dance for the first time**

Young people described some of their highlights which included:

- Enjoying watching other schools perform and supporting one another with high fives on the walkways. Having family come to watch.
- The support and enthusiasm of the staff from WigLe dance.
- Watching WN Dance Company perform
- Being around their friends and helping one another. Seeing everyone have their chance to shine.
- The energy of the carnival workshop.
- Learning new styles of dance and wanting to dance every day.
- Going outside of their comfort zone, partner work and working as a team.
- Practicing on the stage, seeing the tech run and all the lights and spending the day at the venue.
- Performing in costume on stage. Gaining confidence from learning dance steps, musicality and the size of the audience. They especially liked learning the finale and then performing on the stage with everyone at the end.

Feedback for improvement related to the overwhelming nature of the loud music and lights.

Young people suggested a dress rehearsal on a different day so that those who were nervous had time to visualise and prepare. They commented on the time they had spent waiting around and the crowding. They felt the merchandise was expensive.

“

**It was so exciting and so fun to do the show.**

**I really enjoyed watching other schools and being able to cheer them on in the audience**

Young people during evaluation workshops



## Case Study: Everything Human Rights

Everything Human Rights is a Community Group offering services that promote wellbeing and integration of migrant ethnic minorities living in Wigan borough. The group works with children and young people and the whole family unit, focusing not just on community integration, but cohesion within the different generations of a family.

The group was approached to take part in Wigan Dance Festival and the group leader Farai Nhakaniso said the young people “jumped at it”.

### Impact for Young People

Young people formed new friendships over the five or six weeks of rehearsals and Farai saw their confidence and happiness grow. On videos of rehearsals “you can actually see the progression of confidence; you can see the smiles on their faces.” Young people supported one another, and young leaders began to emerge.

“There were two kids that had just arrived in the UK, they were struggling to make friends, speaking English confidently and (then just) watching them blossom through the whole period and seeing them on stage, and their parents being there....”

### Impact for parents

Parents became more supportive: “It ignited interest within the young people *and* their parents” Young people used their parents’ mobile phones to watch dance videos when rehearsing and this was really effective for parental engagement. As a result, parents are more engaged with the wider youth-work of Everything Human Rights.

### Developing the community group

The Festival showcased the work of Everything Human Rights and what it offers: “We had more enquiries, more people within the ethnic minority who were at the event, but didn’t know about our organisation, or didn’t know about the youth group element, they came afterwards asking for details.”

## 7. Support for the Festival

“

*It is so important for the community and to allow the young people to get involved. They had so much pride and joy at the performances*

*It was empowering for the children to be able to be part of something they wouldn't usually necessarily do in normal circumstances. It gave my child a real sense of togetherness and increased her confidence significantly. She was so proud to be part of it.*

*It makes you proud to be a part of something so moving and uplifting for all dancers and families.*

*The Festival showed off the diversity of our town. It was needed to uplift the community and show everyone that Wigan has such talented young people.*

*This is a wonderful opportunity for our pupils to showcase their newly developed skills and improved confidence. The sessions have brought so much joy and excitement and the children are thrilled to be part of the dance Festival.*

*This is an opportunity for our pupils to partake in workshops and perform that they may not otherwise have.*

*This has raised aspiration for our pupils. They have worked hard in the run up to the event to feel prepared and dancing on that stage gave them confidence and made them feel amazing.*

*The Festival allows our children to have a once in a lifetime opportunity to take part in a real show/theatre-like performance that they have not had to pay for. Many of them cannot go to dance outside of school and we run a lunch time club for them to have this opportunity. Representing their school and being part of a team really strengthens their bonds in school, their sense of self-esteem and boosts their confidence.*

## 8. Conclusions

Wigan Borough Dance Festival has reached schools in some of the most deprived areas in the country where teachers say children have very few opportunities to engage with art and culture. Wigan Dance Festival gives children what, for most, is their first experience of art, culture and dance outside of the classroom. Meeting professional dancers and having a 'behind the scenes' experience of a cultural venue, has raised the aspirations of young people. For individual young people like Harry Cunliffe, it has opened the door to a dance career.

The Festival experience has had an impact young people's knowledge and understanding of dance as an artform. They have developed their dance skills and the Festival has positively affected their attitudes towards dance. Young people were more confident as a result of taking part in the Festival; taking part increased their sense of pride and self-esteem. In some cases, this is profound, for example, young people who were new arrivals in the UK made friendships and a sense of community by taking part in the Festival. Young leaders emerged and young people felt rewarded by the inclusive and supportive atmosphere at the Festival in which young people from different schools encouraged and congratulated one another.

The Festival makes its audience proud of Wigan, its community and its culture. It develops audiences, for example, most survey respondents said they would go to a similar event in future. Taken together, the pride, cultural capital, raised aspirations and love of dance generated by the Festival can be expected to make an increasingly significant difference to the cultural life of Wigan with each iteration. In a context in which schools confirm that a similar offer would be impossible to deliver from within their own resource and capacity, the impact of Wigan Dance Festival is significant.

Wigan Borough Dance Festival is reaching some of the most deprived areas of the country and children who are least engaged with art and culture. Through its work, it is creating the next generation of dancers. Families taking part are more eager to engage with art and culture, as a result Wigan Dance Festival is developing audiences and providing inspiring – and sometimes transformative – cultural experiences for Wigan's children and young people.

