

NEW/ADVENTURES

CYGNET SCHOOL

Nurturing Young Talent for a Diverse Dance Future



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**MARLOWE
THEATRE**



Canterbury
Christ Church
University



Sidney De Haan
FUNDATION



The evaluation was undertaken by Professor Angela Pickard between September 2021- July 2024. She is Professor of Dance Education and Director of the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health at Canterbury Christ Church University.

Contact: angela.pickard@canterbury.ac.uk

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CYGNET SCHOOL EVALUATION



CONTEXT

About New Adventures

New Adventures is considered to be the most successful dance company in the UK, reaching wide and varied audiences. The company is known for creating narrative works that challenge stereotypes and have positively impacted public perception of what is possible in dance. The company is led by celebrated choreographer and director, Sir Matthew Bourne.

New Adventures holds a global reputation for spearheading the discovery, development and platforming of new dance talent within contemporary ballet and dance theatre. Alongside a record of artistic excellence in the training and coaching of dancers, *New Adventures* has a reputation for inclusive and diverse talent discovery and development work, working with and uncovering talent within traditionally excluded and under-served groups of young people in diverse communities and locations.

About Cygnet School

Cygnet School is a pioneering pre-vocational dance training programme for young people, created and led by *New Adventures* with partner organisation *The Marlowe Theatre*. The project is supported by *The Dorfman Foundation* and *The Noel Coward Foundation*.

Why Cygnet School?

Adolescent young people in the UK today are experiencing daily barriers and challenges that include low levels of mental and social wellbeing and social inequalities. The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have exacerbated these challenges over time. It is suggested that about 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8-25 years in the UK, had a probable mental health challenge in 2023 (NHS England, 2023). Physical activity, including dance, is fundamental to the healthy development of children and young people, contributing to physical health, mental well-being, and social development (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020).



Dance as an artistic experience creates sensory, aesthetic, symbolic worlds through imagery, and is a means of inventing and creating narratives. Engaging in an artistic dance experience is felt through the kinaesthesia, or awareness of the body, through sensations in the joints, muscles and tendons, rather than just through visual perception. Aesthetic awareness enables exploration of context, purpose, relevance, form and content throughout the medium of dance. Dance can enable young people to explore and express through movement, find their creative voice and connect with a community of people with a shared interest.

Many young people may be passionate about dance and would like to do more, but socio-economic disadvantage can be a significant barrier to accessing high quality dance training. In addition, social variables within families and schools, such as transport, work, families balancing extra-curricular activities of siblings, childcare, geography, varying expected time commitments at school, relationships with, and value placed on the dance by parents/carers, teachers, social relationships with friends and peers, culture and gender, all play a part in determining whether young people access and are able to commit to dance (Pickard, 2021).

Current talent development schemes may exclude under-represented and under-served groups; those with lower socio-economic status and those living in areas where dance schemes do not exist. Dance has the power to change lives and a positive impact on the life of one person can be perpetuating across generations.

In addition, there is a lack of progression routes particularly for contemporary dance in the UK, for those that have an interest in dance, and therefore there is a gap between school-based, participatory or community dance, and those who progress as aspiring dancers to talent development training, potentially onto vocational training and into the profession.

A key aim of *Cygnets School* is to recruit a diverse range of dancers who may otherwise have barriers to access the arts/dance. *New Adventures* as a company is committed to the promotion of equal opportunities irrespective of race, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief, or gender.

Cygnets School Began

Cygnets School began in 2021 as a response to the above issues including a lack of diverse representation, and to provide a much-needed pathway between *New Adventures* existing participation work, further talent development opportunities e.g. Dance Centres of Advanced Training (CAT), and National Youth Dance Company, and vocational training, towards the profession. *New Adventures* also noticed that there was a paucity of dance training opportunities in the South-East of England and particularly in Kent for young, talented dancers.



Cygnets School has brought together young dancers to explore the unique aspects of *New Adventures*' work, style and training. *Cygnets* focus on technique, storytelling and creativity, physicality, expression, gesture and character relationships. *Cygnets* also see *New Adventures* professional company perform on stage at Sadler's Wells and The Marlowe theatre, and gain insight into the inner workings of theatres and the dance/wider arts industry, learning about different career pathways in the arts. They also experience workshops, in, for example, voice, music/sound and acting, led by guest artists.

Cygnets School has lifted a significant economic barrier as there are no costs to participate in *Cygnets School*, with all food, travel and accommodation costs covered. This also extends to parents and carers who need to travel and stay with the *Cygnets* on each training weekend. *Cygnets* are also provided with T-shirts to wear at each weekend and during the summer residency, and a water bottle.

Evolution

Cygnets School has continued to evolve over the three years of the evaluation. Learnings from the pilot (year one) informed the planning of year two of *Cygnets School*, with the second year of the programme beginning in September 2022. Learnings from year two informed the third year of *Cygnets School* that began in September 2023- July 2024.

This report shares the details of a three-year evaluation of *Cygnets School* between 2021-2024.

CYGNET SCHOOL

Vision

New Adventures is committed to supporting the next generation of dancers and artists, and in diversifying the dance landscape through investing in the future of dance. Cygnet School aims to provide holistic social, technical, creative and artistic dance experiences and opportunities for young people, through the work and methodology of *New Adventures* unique storytelling style.

The vision of Cygnet School is to:

- Open access and participation to a **world of adventures, joy, wonder, connection** and **creativity**.
- Create a safe, fun, dance environment to develop **a sense of belonging and community**, particularly for young people from diverse and under-served communities.

Values

New Adventures and Cygnet School have four values:

- Joy
- Connection
- Wonder
- Creativity



Aims

The aims of Cygnet School are to:

- 1 Recruit a diverse range of participants who may otherwise have barriers to access the arts/dance.
- 2 Increase the profile of *New Adventures* and the talent pool of young dancers in Kent and the South-East.
- 3 Provide a professional, age-appropriate environment for creative and talent development in dance.
- 4 Develop a workforce of teaching artist(s) to work with young people.
- 5 Build new audiences as the cygnets and their families and friends.
- 6 Create a strong partnership with Cygnet School resident home: *The Marlowe Theatre*.

Facilitation

The cygnets are taught and mentored by leading dancers and artists from *New Adventures* (pilot year: Kerry Biggin and Paul Smethurst) and year 2 and 3: Glenn Graham and Sophia Hurdley, with Associate artist: Grace Black throughout all three years. In year 3 Isaac Peter Bowry also joined the team after chaperoning the summer residency. Kerry Biggin continued to have a connection with Cygnet School throughout the three years, and particularly during the summer residency each year. More discussion of *New Adventures* methods and cygnet-centred pedagogy can be found later in this report in the discussion of themes.

A talent development producer from *New Adventures* manages the programme (initially Niesha Holder in the pilot year and first term of year one, Leah Fox from January 2022 and Sian Brackett-Hayes began shadowing in July 2024). The talent development manager regularly communicates with the cygnets and their families (parent/carer) and is also available at every monthly session, throughout the summer residency and via e-mail and 'phone in-between Cygnet School sessions.

Structure

The cygnets meet monthly between September-June at their partner home, *The Marlowe Theatre* in Canterbury, Kent, in the South East of England. Each month, the cygnets participate in a check in/meet and greet, followed by a game, contemporary and ballet technique classes, and fitness and body conditioning. They learn and explore *New Adventures* repertory and engage in creative improvisations, creations and choreography. The cygnets engage with a range of genres of music such as pop, jazz, swing and classical.



The days are structured so the cygnets can work together as a group (company) as well as individually. Further, there are opportunities for cygnets to engage with different company guest artists through workshops, watch performances and learn about the many other roles and careers that are possible within the arts. Importantly, reflection and evaluation are embedded into the programme as part of a plenary session.

In addition, the cygnets participate in a week-long summer residency in July, that concludes with a public performance for an invited audience at *The Marlowe Theatre*. At the end of the year, the cygnets receive a certificate and can continue onto the next year of the programme, until the end of the school year when they turn 18 years. There are also potential opportunities for alumni cygnets to return as chaperones for the summer residency.



Kit

Every cygnet is given two *New Adventures/Cygnet School* T-shirts to wear at the monthly sessions and summer residency. In the pilot year all cygnets were also provided with yoga mats, blocks, and therabands.

FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The Evaluation: Design and Methods

The evaluation was longitudinal, over 3-years, engaged 26 cygnets and 10 *New Adventures* artists/managers, involved 360 hours of observations, and participatory activities, focus groups, reflective journals, photos, documentary films and questionnaires.

The evaluation had three phrases.



Diagram 1: Process and focus of the evaluation

Participants

26 cygnets were involved in the study.

Cohort	Year	Retention	Number of cygnets in the cohort and study
1	September 2021 - July 2022	12 cygnets joined	12
	September 2021	1 cygnet left	11
	July 2022	3 cygnets left	8
2	September 2022	8 cygnets continued from cohort 1 8 cygnets joined	16
	January/February 2023	4 cygnets left 1 cygnet joined	13
	July 2023	3 cygnets left	10
3	September 2023 - July 2024	11 cygnets continued from cohort 1 and 2 3 new cygnets joined	14
	January 2024	2 cygnets joined	16
	July 2024	2 cygnets left	14

Table 1: Summary of recruitment of dancers across three years of Cygnet School

Methods

The mixed methods included cygnet-centred participatory, qualitative and quantitative methods, to gather a range of feedback data are outlined in the table below.

Monthly field visits (e.g. theatre(s) and studio(s).

Observation of:

- Welcome: meet and greet, learning environment, games.
- Provision: content, materials and resources inc. sound/music, pedagogy, technique classes, fitness/body conditioning, repertory, creative tasks, improvisations, choreography, guest artist workshops, ‘shine a light’ talks.
- Engagement: cygnets responses to provision as individuals and as a group, sense of achievement, autonomy, belonging, creativity and community.
- Progress: cygnets creative and technical development, ways cygnets support, value and challenge each other, features of the learning/enabling environment.
- Feed-back, feed-forward, balance of support and challenge.

Observations of the monthly and summer residencies programme content and performances, the cygnets, and *New Adventures* artists, were undertaken throughout each year of the programme. This equated to 45 days (360 hours) of observations.



The cygnets participated in a timetabled reflective plenary/ evaluation session at the end of each monthly cygnet day, and as part of the summer residency. This included oral feedback to set prompts or questions, as focus groups, and/or responses to themes from the day using participatory methods such as post-it note activities, one-word reflections, mood charts and peer to peer knowledge exchange. From year 2, the cygnets had a reflective journal to note down ideas and responses. Once a year the cygnets engaged in a questionnaire about their overall experiences of *Cygnet School*. The cygnets also engaged in regular goal-setting activities individually, as part of a small group and in a 1-1 with a teaching artist.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS YEAR 1 (PILOT)

Pilot: Year 1 Testing (R and D) and Implementation

Participatory and qualitative methods were used to review the pilot year as the testing phase, or research and development, and review of the implementation of Cygnet School.

Areas of focus were:

- Recruitment
- Social and emotional connection
- Structure and provision
- Team-teaching
- Partnerships
- Cygnet progress
- Learnings
- Challenges in the pilot year

The importance of reflection and knowledge exchange was embedded into the programme, as the young people informed future planning. A Youth, Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach was utilised using an Action Research Cycle.

Recruitment

Cygnets School began as a pilot year in 2021 (year one) with an invited cohort of twelve dancers, to provide a much-needed pathway between *New Adventures*' participation work and talent development opportunities. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on recruitment activity, the team approached young people who had participated in a range of projects with *New Adventures* in previous years to join Cygnets School. Participants had been involved with dancers in residence at a primary school, Civil Blood with Studio 3 Arts, Dance United Yorkshire and Curtain Raiser programmes.

The first cohort were aged between 13 and 17 years with one cygnet (with a learning disability) aged 24 years.

One cygnet chose not to continue with the programme after the first session, due to other school and sporting demands, so 11 young people aged 13– 24 continued from areas across the UK including Bradford, Essex, Surrey, and London.

“We all relate to each other. We can all work well together.”



The *Cygnets School* pilot began at a time when the global population has been affected by lockdowns and social restriction, and there was some ongoing disruption due to Covid-19 to everyday life. There was also still an expectation for the wearing of facemasks in public places, and regular handwashing/sanitising.

“For me, it’s like a family. Like a wolf-pack. They are stronger together, but we all have our own unique place in here, and as a whole it makes it so much stronger as a unit.”



Social and Emotional Connection

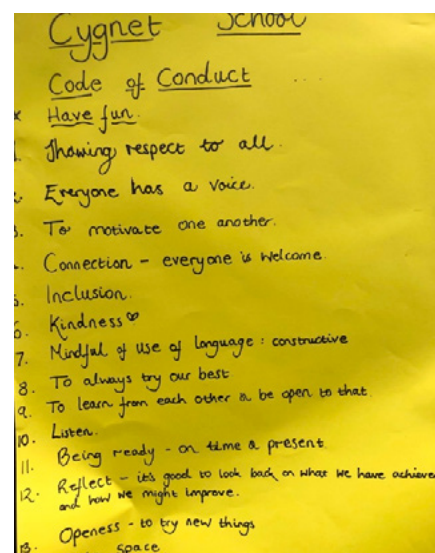
The cygnet project team were mindful of the social and psychological impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had had on, in particular, young people. The pilot year offered a unique and significant opportunity for the young people to engage together socially in a group and meet new people, make friends, (re)build social and communication skills as well as develop confidence in new social situations.

The content of each monthly session included an emphasis on a welcoming learning environment with motivational quotations on the walls for the cygnets to read when they arrived.

This was appreciated by the cygnets and made them feel at ease as soon as they arrived in the studio. Group games focused on, for example, observation, listening, team working, bonding, supporting others and joy, and these fully engaged the young people.

In recognition of social and emotional needs, a quiet space was also available, separate to the studio, for any cygnet who needed a moment or longer, to process information, or decompress if the lengthy day in the studio environment and the wealth of material/content, became overwhelming in any way. This was a helpful addition to Cygnet School and enabled the cygnets to begin to get to know themselves as learners, notice how they were feeling, and have some autonomy. The quiet space was only used on a few occasions, but it was still an important part of the learning environment for psychological safety and emotional regulation. Having lunch together was also significant socially, as the group were able to connect and chat, forming connections and friendships. The no phone policy in the studio and for the first half an hour at lunchtime, was also viewed as a positive by the cygnets as it encouraged them to prioritise important socialising, and conversations.

Overall, an emphasis on the social, emotional, connection and joy of moving together, as part of the implementation phase of Cygnet School, including important circle check-ins, “icebreakers” and games, have become core components of future Cygnet School days, beyond the pilot year. The group were brought together from around the country and developed as a diverse and connected dance community. Building a sense of belonging for the cygnets is a core feature of Cygnet School and this is a powerful motivator for the cygnets. More on the theme of belonging is discussed later in this report.



“I feel like I’m being seen and as part of a community here.”

“I love the music choices; it gets us moving.”

Structure and Provision

Coming together for one day once a month on a Sunday was deemed a manageable time to commit to by the cygnets, alongside their secondary education. It is also manageable for parents/carers to plan, organise and potentially support/travel with the young people.

The residential week was planned for the beginning of the summer holidays, and again, was seen as an appropriate time and something to immediately look forward to for the cygnets, after finishing secondary school for the holidays. The cygnets enjoyed staying in halls of residence at Canterbury Christ Church University, engaging in social and historical activities in Canterbury and preparing for the end of residency performance.

The Cygnet School days each month and during the residency were well-organised and planned, and the team were mindful of individual, and group needs and differentiated within the sessions as appropriate. The content of each cygnet day in the pilot year, included contemporary technique class, fitness, body conditioning, *New Adventures* repertory and creative work.

Inspiring and creating a future generation of theatre and dance lovers is embedded in Cygnet School. The cygnets had a backstage tour of the Marlowe Theatre. They met and talked to the stage crew and learnt how a team of people offstage help create the work onstage. This was hugely valuable for them to begin getting an insight to different roles within the arts industry and discover how a career in dance and the performing arts can evolve. Cygnet School also saw productions at The Marlowe during their monthly days, where parents and carers were also welcomed with free tickets, so they could share in this experience.

“I love how the teachers here respect our boundaries. Some teachers are toxic and yet here, I feel that all are intuitive and see how far to push us.”

“We are all from different places, but we all have a combined love and interest in dance. Here there is a mixed group, and this will lead to greater, diverse artists and stories in the future.”



Team-Teaching

A key feature of Cygnet School and *New Adventures* working, is team-teaching. For the *New Adventures* team, this is a habitual, taken-for-granted, professional way of working. Yet, this is unique practice, and it was deemed very powerful to have two artists working with the group at any one time, plus support artists as one cygnet confirmed:

Cygnet: “I feel so special here because this is renowned company and the artists, who are performing with Matthew Bourne, are also teaching us. They give so much time and energy and I am so grateful. I love the, occasionally, different perspectives and ideas on things from each team member, and I love how we see Paul and Kerry working out problems together- that is so powerful and teaches us all a lot.”

“Everyone can relate to everyone.”

“I really like how encouraging you are all here.”

Partnerships

Strong partnerships were developed in this pilot year with *The Marlowe Theatre*, the resident home of Cygnet School. *The Marlowe Theatre* has supported with arrival and registration of cygnets at stage door, liaison regarding the studio space, and provision of fruit during the breaks and the lunches.

The Marlowe Theatre also provided free tickets for the cygnets to see performances.

In addition, undergraduate students in their third year and studying Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Hons) Dance Education, or Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Hons) Performing Arts or post-graduate students studying a Master of Arts (MA) in Arts and Cultural Management course, at Canterbury Christ Church University, were invited to assist with Cygnet School. Three students participated in the monthly days, during the second term of the pilot year. These students also assisted as chaperones during the week-long summer residency. The students worked as a team and were briefed and supported in safeguarding and the *New Adventures* policies.

“The games give us tools to make group decisions.”

This was a valuable experience for the students and gave them an insight into, for example, *New Adventures/Cygnet School* learning environment and pedagogy, time-management, observation skills, professional working, project management, safeguarding, working with adolescents and preparing for a performance.

Cygnets Progress

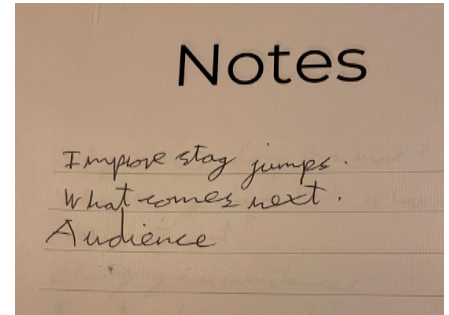
During the pilot year, the *New Adventures* team and cygnets created a strong, supportive and safe community, where the values of connection, joy, wonder (curiosity) and creativity, were embedded throughout each cygnet day and the summer residency. The cygnets were facilitated to be able to build confidence, learned to take greater risks with their bodies in space and make and articulate movement choices, as well as developing their storytelling and expression. They motivated each other to build their skills and stamina during fitness, movement articulation, to sustain movement memory during technique classes and supported each other to develop creative responses. Importantly trust was built between the cygnets and the *New Adventures* team. They all worked towards the shared vision of a final year performance.

Cygnets School facilitated opportunities through different improvisation and creative tasks for the cygnets to find their way of moving, their own movement material and to play with dance dynamics. The cygnets and artistic team supported and challenged each other to develop and extend thinking, ideas and the quality of movement. The creative tasks enabled the cygnets to bring their own personality and expression and each different idea was valued. In the pilot year, each cygnet developed a short solo, with support of the artistic team, that they performed at the final day of the summer residency.

A key area of development in the group was expression, creativity, and narrative storytelling. The cygnets learned some repertoire from *New Adventures* productions including *Swan Lake* and *Nutcracker!* Etta Murfitt (Associate Artistic Director) staged a section of *Nutcracker!* with the cygnets after they had seen the show at Sadler's Wells Theatre, so they were able to relate with and connect to the work as they had seen the full production context.

During this pilot year, the cygnets experienced an important sense of belonging, built trust and developed their knowledge through the performances that they watched at *The Marlowe Theatre*, Sadler's Wells Theatre and The Royal Albert Hall, and developed greater awareness of professional dance and arts worlds and careers.

**"I have widened
my vocabulary."**



**"Easier to learn
things quicker now."**

**"This has made me
feel less nervous
about things."**

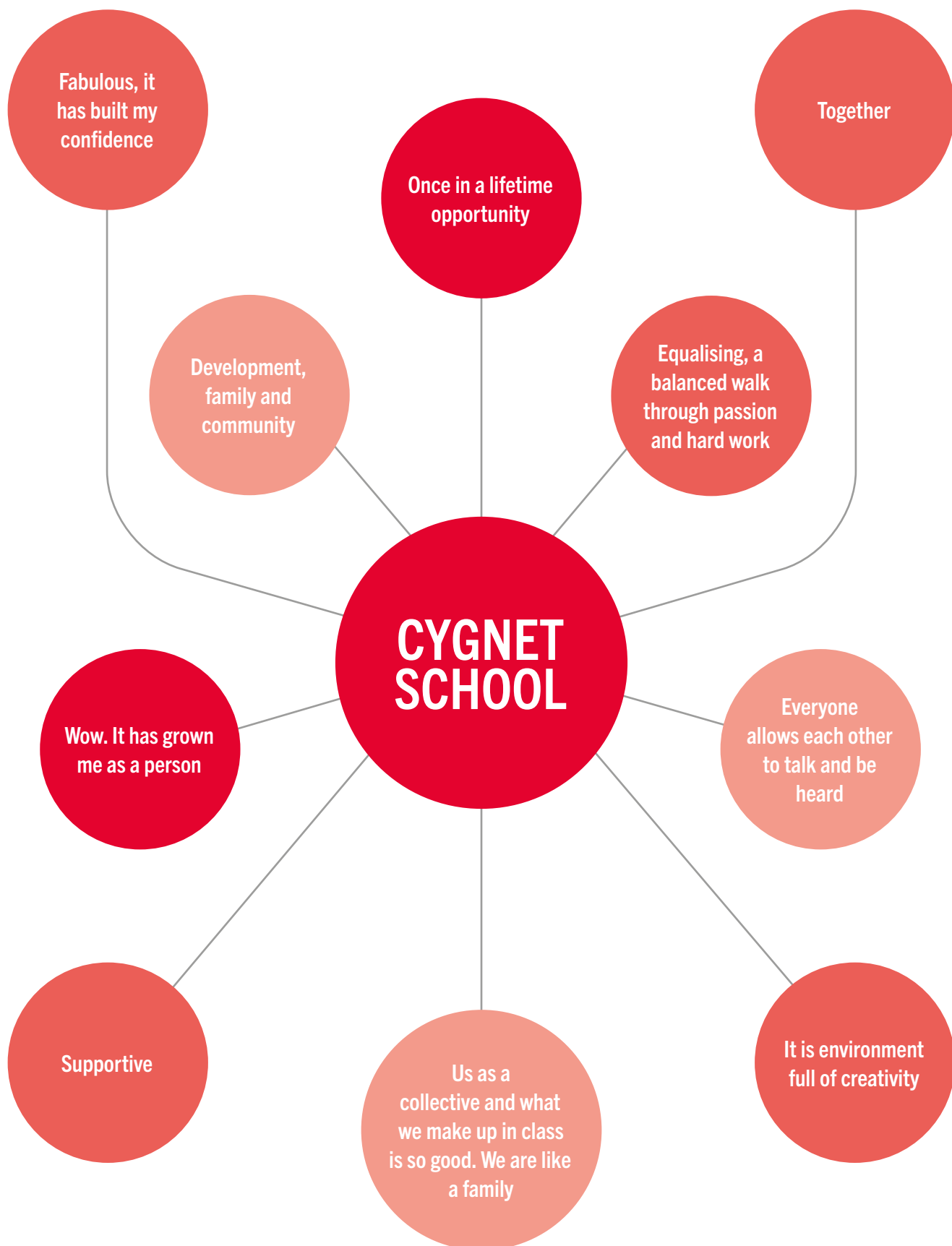


Diagram 2: Some key words and phrases that the cygnets associated with Cygnet School

Learnings

This pilot year was about nurturing and creating the Cygnet School learning and artistic environment. Particular focus was on the structure, in terms of lengths of sessions and days, as well as pace, particularly for an adolescent group, as well as how the cygnets responded to the content. Through observing and listening to the cygnets, an adjustment to reduce the length of the day was made in the second year. This was to account for travel time and homework in preparation for the Monday school day.

Further, during the second year, greater emphasis was placed on learning set technique class material, exploring repertory through expression, acting and creative tasks, and developing performance skills.

Reflection on the pilot year also led to more communication with parents/carers and cygnets about the Cygnet School. A questionnaire was developed for completion at the start of the year. Prior to each monthly session, a structured e-mail with the schedule of the day and preparation needed for each cygnet day was sent to each parent/carer. In addition, resources were developed as recordings of repertory in the pilot year, to full breakdown of contemporary and ballet classes, repertory and creative tasks as well as signposting to other resources by year 3.

Angela: What would you change about Cygnet School?

Cygnet: “We could have a booklet and make notes in it with pictures as a cygnet resource book. We could then do it at home. I use the videos but sometimes you need your own notes.”

Challenges in the Pilot Year

Challenges related to the transition phase post Covid-19 lockdowns, the prevalence of colds/flu amongst the cygnets, and reoccurrence of a milder strain of Covid-19, all impacted attendance. Severe weather and some weekend engineering works impacted on travel that resulted in some hybrid sessions, some cygnets having to arrive late or leave early and one session having to be cancelled. There was evidence of social anxiety, low confidence, and low stamina and fitness levels amongst some cygnets at the start of Cygnet School. This may have been due to the disruption to expected age-related social development and reduced physical activity levels, due to the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns.

The Cygnet School team were able to navigate these challenges, respond and adapt to the group needs. It was therefore appropriate to prioritise social and emotional connection, add fitness into the sessions and give time and space to narrative and creative work. The Cygnet School team were patient and nurtured the cygnets with a careful balance of support and challenge.

Angela: In what ways have you improved?

Cygnet: “I like the fitness sessions; I am improving as I am getting less tired the more I do it.”

Cygnet: “Definitely creative. At first, I didn’t know where to start and I worried because everyone else seemed to have loads of ideas. Now I have lots of ideas and this is because I think I have used the pictures, and some starting points of movements from the rep.”

REFLECTIONS AS ACTION RESEARCH

Each cygnet day concluded with a *New Adventures* team debrief, and this included Angela Pickard as the evaluator. This became a time for an important check-in, reflections, knowledge exchange and problem-solving about the structure, material and content, approach to delivery/teaching and learning (pedagogy), as well as feedback about individual cygnet development. The team invested time and energy into getting to know each cygnet's strengths and challenges, socially, emotionally and physically, and showed care and concern for each individual as well as for the group.

Observations from each of the days and knowledge exchange from the evaluator, also formed a core part of these debrief and reflection sessions and these also informed the planning of future sessions/days.



Areas of reflections included, for example, exploring ways of breaking down phrases of movement and repertory, how to build and sustain motivation and stamina in fitness tasks, ways to enable the cygnets to retain learned movement and material developed in creative tasks, ideas for developing creative responses and choreography, expression and storytelling, as well as pastoral issues.

This process of de-brief, and observation and reflection in and on action, became a monthly action research cycle as plan, act (teach/deliver), observe (review with cygnets), and reflect (debrief), informing future Cygnet School planning and action. Evaluator observations, cygnet feedback via participatory activities, qualitative and quantitative methods all therefore fed into the evolution of Cygnet School:

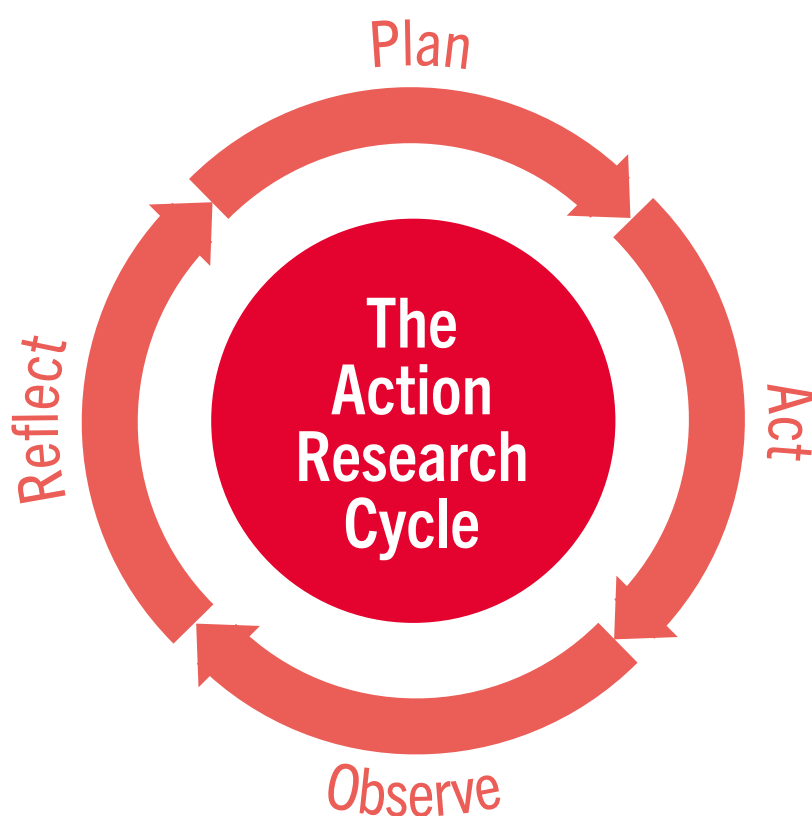


Diagram 3: The Action Research Cycle

Much was learned about what worked, and how and why it worked for the cygnets from the cygnets themselves. *Cygnet School* evolved across the three years of the evaluation.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS YEAR 2: OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Recruitment

An experience day (audition) was developed to recruit new cygnets into year two. The experience days were held in London and Kent and attracted a diverse range of dancers. The *New Adventures* team were mindful to ensure that marketing material and invitations were sent to many schools and those from under-represented and underserved communities. The following inclusive criteria were used by the team to consider who to invite to join Cygnet School from the experience days:

- **Raw aptitude for dance**
- **A passion for movement,**
- **A spark of creativity,**
- **A keenness to connect with others**
- **From a background that is underrepresented in the sector**

The year 2 cohort started in September 2022 and included 8 cygnets continuing from the pilot cohort and 7 new cygnets. However, due to school/examination commitments, 3 cygnets left Cygnet School at the end of term one in January, 1 new cygnet joined in February and these 13 cygnets continued until the end of the year.



Structure and Provision

Glenn Graham from *New Adventures* led this cohort of Cygnet School with Kerry Biggin, and later Sophia Hurdley joined as a teaching artist. The talent development producer was Leah Fox, and Associate artist Grace Black.

The structure of each cygnet day was e-mailed to the parent/ carer of the cygnet each month so that they were involved with Cygnet School too:

Table 3: Example of a daily schedule

Sunday 20th March		
Times	Activity	Description
9.30am	NA Team Arrive	
10.15am	cygnets Arrive	
10.30am -12.30pm	Studio	Welcome, Fitness (Kerry) & Class (Glenn)
12.30pm - 1.30pm	Lunch	
1.30pm - 2.45pm	Studio	Game (Sophia) & Creative task (Sam & Nandu) & 1-1 PDP meetings
2.45pm - 3pm		Creative Task Sharing
3pm - 4pm		Carrie Sports Psychology Session
4pm - 4.30pm		Angela Evaluation Session
4.30pm	cygnets Depart	
4.30pm - 6pm	NA Team Debrief	

Further, a parent/carers for each cygnet was invited and given a free ticket to watch a performance with their cygnet at *The Marlowe Theatre*.

Angela: How have you changed/improved since starting at *Cygnets School*?

Cygnets: “I feel I now have more inner confidence in myself, and I am not frightened to try something, even if it is challenging, I will give it a go and keep trying, and I am finding my ideas and ways of moving and expressing, because I have this opportunity, that is so special.”

This year saw the introduction of ballet (with Sophia) as well as continuation of contemporary, as part of the provision of technique. There were also more guest artists leading sessions, focussed on, for example, health and wellbeing of dancers, musicality and improvisation, commercial and swing dance. The cygnets had a series of ‘shine a light’ talks to understand how a theatre works, from backstage to front of house. In addition, the cygnets visited another theatre in Essex, did a curtain raiser for Doorstep Duets and watched performances at *The Marlowe Theatre*. The cygnets focussed on *Sleeping Beauty* repertoire and worked more in pairs and a larger ensemble, as well as individually.

During the summer residency, the cygnets engaged in social activities such as going to the cinema, craft activities, a quiz and having a tour of Canterbury Cathedral.

This year introduced a reflective journal for each cygnets, which they used for notes, reflections, questions and goal setting, and this proved valuable as the reflective and participatory plenary sessions became further embedded into the cygnets programme.

This year saw greater technical development of the cygnets, alongside helping them find their creative confidence and voice.

The cygnets engaged with repertoire from *New Adventures* *Sleeping Beauty* and developed creative choreography for the end of year performance. The public performance was well attended with 201 audience members and was longer in duration this year, with more material from technique classes, the repertoire and creative work

“I get to watch performances at the theatre that I would never be able to afford to do.”

Outcomes

Observations and feedback from the participatory, qualitative, quantitative methods and the reflections (Action Research cycles), evidenced that the all the cygnets had improved and progressed to varying degrees in:

Technique (Contemporary and Ballet) and Repertory

- greater awareness of body/physicality/ presence and ability in space,
- movement articulation and accuracy,
- habits in the body,
- extensions and lines,
- use of breath,
- gaining greater flow in movement,
- posture and alignment in ballet,
- efficiency in changing direction,
- applying appropriate pace of movement,
- transferring weight,
- spatial awareness, using space effectively, particularly for travelling,
- awareness/cues from other dancers,
- turning,
- using feet (pointing/extending)
- applying plie for jumps,
- supporting peers,
- self-sufficiency/independent practice.

Movement/Muscle Memory

- increased pace of picking up movement/ choreography,
- retaining movement/choreography,
- re-producing movement/choreography with accuracy each session,
- increased confidence and perseverance,
- increased resilience when movement material is new/challenging,
- asking more questions/answering/clarifying,
- supporting peers,
- independent practice,
- performance skills (eye line, engagement with audience, joy, working as a company).

Body Conditioning and Fitness

- stamina/reduced fatigue,
- core stability,
- flexibility,
- range of motion,
- weight-bearing/balance,
- jump height.

Musical Awareness

- beat,
- rhythms,
- musical intervals,
- pauses,
- stillness,
- pace,
- engagement,
- counting/patterns.

Creativity

- able to create alone and with others,
- openness to new experiences/ideas (wonder, curiosity),
- increased enthusiasm to begin new creative tasks,
- sustained commitment and motivation during tasks/problem-solving,
- trying out different ideas, selecting, rejecting, editing,
- cognitive flexibility (holding different ideas, thinking beyond the literal),
- imaginative responses (beyond individual favourite movements),
- increased complexity in choreography,
- applying narrative/storytelling techniques and dynamics,
- performance skills/expression through body and face,
- questioning/answering.

Development of Self and Community

- increased calmness, focus and concentration,
- shared interest in dance and reaching high standards for performance,
- acceptance, belonging and identity as cygnets/dancers (enabling, cygnet-centred and psychological safe environment),
- increased sense of joy, fun and humour the more the group become connected in and outside the studio,
- more sophisticated and in-depth reflections,
- increased self-awareness and emotional regulation,
- increased self-awareness evident in goal setting.

Responding to Challenge/Feedback

- greater evidence of listening to and applying feedback from *New Adventures* team,
- asking for help from each other, including associate artist(s), student assistants as well as the *New Adventures* team,
- peer to peer and group leadership/feedback from cygnets to each other,
- greater depth of reflection.

Engaging with and Responding to Guest Speakers/Artists

- increased confidence, focus and concentration,
- asking/answering questions'
- supporting each other,
- connection, community and company,
- enthused to try something new in a supportive environment.

Table 4: Holistic Improvement and progression outcomes year 2

Future Workforce Development

Two student assistants (one undergraduate and one postgraduate from Canterbury Christ Church University) gained much from their experiences, including knowledge, skills and understanding about New Adventures as a company, the Cygnet School enabling pedagogy and working with and supporting young people.

One student commented:

“I feel so lucky because I have followed *New Adventures* since my GCSE in Dance, and now I am learning from these amazing dancers and artists, who are performing in the company, as well as leading and teaching Cygnet School. It is wonderful how the cygnets are taught by high quality professionals as role-models and that Etta and Neil take the time to truly engage with the cygnets during performance week. The cygnets have benefited from all of these wonderful people working with them who really know the industry. I have learned so much about how to build a welcoming place for young people to learn and maintain motivation, like the playlist and music choices. I am so thankful to have had this year-long opportunity.”

Further, the second student assistant added:

“I agree that this has been such an enriching experience for me. I want to teach young people in the future and have been able to see how the pedagogy used here really works for the cygnets. The *New Adventures* team know each cygnet so well that they know how to nurture them as dancers but also as confident, creatives who can interact with different people and reflect deeply about their development as dancers and as people. I feel that this group can all be their individual selves and are so kind supportive of each other, and this is a reflection of the positive space they are in and hopefully how they are inside and outside the studio.”

Some cygnets also taught and facilitated some creative tasks enabling them to develop communication, observation and artistic skills.

Learnings

Focus on individual cygnet technical, expression and performance skills, as well as the development of cygnets as a community, formed the key foci for reflections, learning and the continued action research. The values of joy, wonder, connection, and creativity were emphasised, Sense of belonging, connection and community continued to develop through building trust. Each cygnet day began with a welcome; an acknowledgement of each cygnet that demonstrated that each individual is valued. Games that also built trust, were embedded in the structure and provision of each day and the residency. There was greater emphasis on technique (particularly with more focus on ballet than previously), repertory and developing the creative voices of the cygnets.



Maintaining the joy throughout the sessions, including during the summer residency performance week, ways of breaking down and building up movement, emphasising individual and creative movement and expression. This prioritised giving space and time for cygnets to embody movement and practice independently or as a group, support for emotional regulation as appropriate, space, time and encouragement for questions/answers and clarifications from cygnets. These were all discussions that were had as part of the plenary reflection sessions and team debriefs.

As the group are adolescents, all growing and changing, and managing heavy physical and cognitive workloads, through their school and home lives, it was noticeable that some of the cygnets had low energy levels at the beginning of cygnet school days, and sometimes expressed tiredness and fatigue. There were also some cygnets who came with injuries from their school or extra-curricular dance or sport activities.

An important learning was to raise energy levels through music choices and moderate to vigorous pace. This was found to enable the group to have fun and find the joy and connection together.

During the residency week, it was also noticeable how the connection the cygnets had made together, enabled humour, support and challenge with each other, as they worked towards the performance. Some cygnets showed leadership skills during this week.

An action for year 3 was to add a mid-point residential training weekend (Saturday and Sunday) with a social event, so that newly recruited cygnets could bond more with continuing cygnets, and so that the cygnets could gain sustained time to work together on the repertory work particularly, across the 2 days.

Challenges

There was some travel disruption this year due to train strikes. However, this was carefully managed, and no Cygnet School time was lost.

Time was a challenge however, because the performance was more ambitious this year. It was a careful balance to challenge the cygnets, but not overwhelm them. This was achieved through everyone- artists and cygnets, motivated through a shared vision to achieve a high-quality performance. The cygnets were supported and challenged by the artistic team, the student assistants, and each other. There was noticeable, positive, transformations in confidence and expression for example due to the strong bonds held within the group.



Impact

- The *New Adventures* team and wider workforce are positive role models for the cygnets and for the student assistants. The *New Adventures* team demonstrate, for example, working as a team, reflection on and in action, creativity and problem-solving.
- The sense of belonging and enabling environment and pedagogy of Cygnet School, has nurtured the cygnets. It provides a safe and positive place where the cygnets, as adolescent young people, can share their interest and talent in dance, be accepted and be themselves, and have time and space to explore and find their identity(ies) and creative voice. Cygnet School is transformative:
- The Cygnet School's values-led and cygnet-centred approach is evidenced to be of high quality where the cygnets have made strong progress in technique, repertory, body conditioning and fitness, musical awareness, movement/muscle memory, creativity, engaging with and responding to guest speakers/artists, responding to challenge/feedback and development of self and community.
- The cygnets have gained a wider understanding of how the dance/arts industry works through different theatre visits and tours, backstage and lighting talks and 'Shine a Light' series of careers in theatre.
- Guest artists have engaged the cygnets in gaining more holistic understanding of their physical and psychological self through talks on aspects of health and wellbeing, self-care, positive self-talk and motivation for example. These are important tools for longevity in a dance career.



“In my school, it’s hard to talk about my love of dance and performance. But *Cygnets School* gives me an outlet to be creative and develop myself with like-minded people, which is important to me as dance is so intertwined with my identity.”

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS YEAR 3: SUSTAINED IMPACT

During year 3, the cygnets continued to meet monthly. A trip to another venue in Essex to engage in a commercial workshop with a teacher from Laine Theatre School, an exchange between another Kent based youth company: Jasmin Vardimon in Ashford, and a mid-point training weekend was introduced, that enabled the cygnets to experience two consecutive days together. These enhancements to the programme broadened the cygnets' experiences. The midpoint training weekend was successful and also included a social event, that was seeing a performance of Edward Scissorhands in the evening- the repertory the cygnets were focusing on for the year.

The cygnets continued to make strong progress technically, creatively and also enhanced their performance skills this year.

There were three key principles that underpin the values of joy, wonder, connection and creativity, and were evidenced as sustained impact of Cygnet School as a talent development programme for adolescent young people. These enable the cygnets to thrive. These are:

- Belonging and Community
- Reflective Practice
- Enabling Learning Environment and Pedagogy



Belonging and Community

A sense of belonging and community is significant for motivation, social and emotional wellbeing and artistic growth. Belonging and community enhances motivation, emotional well-being, and artistic growth, while fostering a collaborative learning environment. Through observations, participatory activities, qualitative reflections and group discussions, key themes emerged as: **sense of self** and **sense of community** that are supported through the values of **connection, joy, wonder** and **creativity**.

Sense of Self

All the cygnets are adolescents and adolescence is a time of self-discovery. Cygnet School nurtures individual physical and emotional development and self-expression. This is fostered through the cygnet staff team noticing and engaging with each individual as 1-1 verbal exchanges, 1-1 feedback that nurtures technical and creative development, and through individual goal setting. Individual self-discovery, physical, and emotional development are also encouraged through celebrating achievements and progression in contemporary and ballet techniques, creative dance and narrative storytelling using *New Adventures* repertory, experimenting through acting improvisations, use of facial expressions, use of gesture and exploration of use of dynamics through movement and expression of meanings.

‘Because everyone has the same interest in dance, I can be myself and enjoy what I do without worrying about what people think, or what they are going to say. I don’t say I dance at school because I have been bullied as a boy who dances, but here I can relax and be myself.’

Finding individual creativity is valued, as each cygnet can experiment with their own physicality and emotion, in order to make choices and select/reject their movement material in their responses, phrase and choreography development. Such provision supports the cygnets to thrive because they can explore their potential, convey emotions, experiences and narratives, often in a non-verbal way. This enables the adolescent dancers to explore and embrace their individuality, build confidence, creativity, and choices, and this is nurturing a sense of self awareness and authenticity.

A positive self-perception or sense of self is important to building self-esteem, this means feeling confident in who we are and in our abilities. Positive self-esteem, builds resilience to manage uncertainty without worrying about what other people think, or if we make mistakes, because we accept ourselves just the way we are, without judgment. It also reinforces the belief that we are worthy and deserving of positive experiences and relationships.



Sense of Community

Cygnets School facilitates opportunities to meet new friends from a range of different schools and diverse backgrounds and supports the building of new bonds and deep friendships. Each Cygnets School day continued to begin with a check-in that brings all the group together in a circle and enables each individual to connect and share something, orally or physically, with the group in the circle. These are usually fun activities such as 'pass the movement', 'how are you feeling on a scale of 1-9,' a 'highlight of the month' or this time is used as a vehicle for individual or group goal setting.

'This is one of the few places where I find myself relaxing when I walk through the door. There are not the same pressures as there are in my school.'

Fostering a sense of humour and encouraging laughter is important and unique in Cygnets School. This supports joy as a core value that underpins Cygnets School. Sense of humour and laughter should not be under-estimated as this engages the cygnets in developing deeper trust, empathy and social bonds.

'I love that we can truly relax and be ourselves here and laugh together, it is so fun. I am not able to play and find my silliness at school but this really helps me feel safe and happy.'

An environment of peer support and opportunities for the cygnets to support and challenge each other, is fostered during technique classes and often through small group sharing, creative tasks, peer to peer teaching and learning or whole group travelling across the floor, for example. Collective expression through the collaborative processes involved in developing repertory and choreography enables communication, co-operation and connection, through a shared purpose. As the cygnets work together towards a common goal, they develop bonds built on mutual respect and trust. This connection instils a sense of acceptance for each other without negative judgment, and safety within the group to make mistakes and problem-solve, which further cements community cohesion.

'It has a good vibe here, it's like a family'

A sense of community is also developed outside the studio within the lunchtimes where there is much conversation and laughter, and through the social events, such as seeing a performance or doing an escape room together. This provides social support and togetherness.

'I love it when Glenn turns up the volume on the tunes, I can lose myself in the music and the movement.'

Further, the cygnets have opportunities to work with teachers and dancers from other dance contexts such as Laine Theatre School and Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company. The cygnets build their knowledge and repertoire of different dance forms alongside ballet and contemporary, such as social dancing as swing and jive, physical theatre and commercial. These opportunities enable cygnets to build further experiences and resilience when meeting new dance material and people.

The Cygnet School residency week gives a true insight into professional, company working, where the cygnets again feel at the centre of the work and valued. *New Adventures* artists work closely with the cygnets individually and as a group to nurture their talent and enable all to achieve high standards of performance. Each cygnet is seen as an individual and as a member of the cygnets. Performing together for the public performance at the end of the residency week, is a celebration of achievement and supports the formation of identity as a dancer for the young people.

'It is a great opportunity to work with the JV dancers. It is completely different to what I have done before and I would not have the chance to do it if it wasn't for cygnet school.'

In addition, the cygnets also see the artists who are teaching them performing in currently touring *New Adventures* shows, such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Edward Scissorhands*. Members of the artistic team at *New Adventures* also commit to nurturing the performance skills of the cygnets during their residency week. Time spent with professional, knowledgeable, company artists and directors, enables the young dancers to feel inspired and cements a sense of community in Cygnet School, but also to *New Adventures* as a company.



‘Everyone is kind here and wants to get to know you as you. Having feedback from Etta and Neil was amazing as they are so knowledgeable and it is so wonderful to be noticed by them. This is an amazing opportunity.’



Image 1: Word cloud above generated from post-it note reflection: What do you gain from coming to Cygnet School?

Identity Development

The facilitation of positive peer interactions empowers cygnets to form meaningful connections as a company of dancers and bond with each other. This is achieved through a careful balance of focussed work and space and time for social opportunities and this builds confidence, acceptance, belonging and motivation.

The cygnets have become a strong group of individuals, creative dancers and a community group with a sense of belonging. They attach importance to being part of Cygnet School because it offers a means of clarifying self-identity through physical, social and artistic endeavour.

‘I can be myself here. We are all different but we have things in common and we are stronger when we come together.’

Reflective Practice

Structured reflection activities are integrated into the Cygnet School provision. The regular individual and group reflection in plenary sessions, has enabled the cygnets to enhance, for example, their self-awareness, technical progression, and artistic expression. This again is unique to Cygnet School.

‘At first, I was not keen on reflecting because I did not know what to write down in my notes, but actually I have realised that it is really helpful. I like the different activities we do: post-it notes, numbers from 1-10, bullet points, goal-setting, group discussions and mood charts. Now I can go over everything in my mind and this has really helped me remember what we have done. I then think about something I have enjoyed, and something I have done well and something I want to improve on.’

Talent development in dance requires more than physical training; it necessitates critical thinking, self-assessment, and emotional intelligence.

Reflection, both individual and collective, is a powerful tool that enables the cygnets to process, organise, and internalise their learning. Goal setting is helpful for applying new learning, refining ideas and artistry, and developing emotional regulation and resilience. Reflection fosters personal and artistic growth among the adolescent dancers.

The commitment to reflection in Cygnet School enables cygnets to:

- **Assess their progress:** Understanding strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Deepen artistic expression and performance skills:** Connecting emotions and personal experiences to movement and developing audience engagement.
- **Develop problem-solving skills and emotional regulation:** Analysing technical and creative challenges and finding solutions.
- **Foster autonomy:** Encouraging the dancers to take ownership of their own learning.
- **Enhance collaboration:** Promoting constructive peer feedback and shared learning.



Self -Awareness and Personal Growth

Through regular self-reflection over time, the cygnets have developed and demonstrated greater awareness of their physical abilities, artistic strengths, and emotional responses. They have become more confident individually and as a group in evaluating their progress and setting personal and group goals.

'I enjoy it when we talk to each other about what we have done and how we are doing. I like it when we offer each other advice too in the reflections.'

Emotional Resilience

Reflective practice has helped the dancers navigate setbacks, injuries, and performance anxiety both individually, and as a group. The trust that has been built means that cygnets can share how they are feeling with each other, and the artistic team. They all support and nurture each other and have a shared motivation to challenge each other to achieve a high quality performance. By verbalising their struggles, they have built resilience and maintained motivation.

'I was struggling to pick up the movement and was getting frustrated and upset with myself. But once I reflected, I realised that I have the control and strategies to succeed. It really helped that we had a conversation that everyone learns differently in the process, but we can get to the same performance.'



Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Through reflective discussions, the cygnets have learned to analyse feedback given by the teaching team and their peers. The cygnets have shown how they can apply their learning effectively. They also developed creative solutions to technical and artistic challenges.

'I feel we are in a safe space so can share what is going well or not so well. Together we can analyse and work things out.'

Peer Support and Collaborative Learning

The cygnets have become more confident at leading and participating in group reflections, and this has encouraged a culture of constructive feedback. The cygnets value feedback and reflection together as a company. Each cygnet respects each other and is able to learn from each other, and this continues to build a supportive learning environment.

'I love the music for the classes. It is a great playlist that helps us forget we might be tired because it's a Sunday! The tunes make us want to move!'

Benefits of Integrating Reflection in Cygnet School

Reflective practice is an important life skill and important inside and outside of Cygnet School. In relation to their development as dancers over time, reflective practice offers:

- **Enhanced Performance:** Regular self-assessment leads to more refined technique and artistry.
- **Increased Engagement:** Dancers feel more connected to Cygnet School and shared purpose.
- **Stronger Physical and Mental Wellbeing:** Reflection provides a space for dancers to understand their bodies and express their emotions as well as develop coping strategies.
- **Greater Independence:** Encourages self-directed learning and responsibility for personal growth.

‘At school I am constantly worrying about how I look and what I do, but at Cygnet School I feel free and I can be me and it feels like being at my dance home.’

Enabling Learning Environment and Pedagogy

Cygnet School offers a holistic approach that integrates physical training, emotional support, and cognitive engagement. Adolescence is a critical period for dancers, as it marks significant physical, psychological, and social changes. An enabling environment combined with student-centred pedagogy ensures that young dancers receive the necessary support to sustain motivation and thrive. These are the conditions that support an enabling learning environment:

- Psychological and emotional safety,
- Student centred pedagogy
- Balance of Support and Challenge
- Content Design

Psychological and Emotional Safety

A positive, inclusive, and encouraging environment enhances confidence and motivation to engage and learn. The cygnets are supported to take creative risks and develop emotional regulation and resilience. This area of provision is significant as it enables the sense of belonging and community to thrive.

‘When I feel people believes in me and encourage me, I feel like I can push myself beyond my limits without fear of failure.’

Emotional well-being is enhanced when constructive feedback is given, that emphasises progress, and recognises individual and group achievements.

‘I love Glenn and Sophia’s enthusiasm and when they offer ways we can improve, we all listen and try hard to apply. Grace is kind and always helps too if we forget.’

Student-Centred Pedagogy

Cygnets School is facilitated by the Cygnets School producer, by experienced dance artists and current company members from *New Adventures*.

'I can have a conversation with the adults here. They really care about us and how we develop. They push but it is done in a really careful way so we don't feel worried or as though we are not good enough.'

'I used to feel myself becoming very anxious when I could not pick up movement quickly or remember the order of movements, but here, I just relax and take time out to practice and assimilate for a bit and then I'm back in and flying with it.'

Teaching is cygnets-centred and utilises continuity and progression through a careful balance of support and challenge. Relationships between the cygnets team and the cygnets is friendly and nurturing, but also professional. The teaching team give carefully thought-through, constructive feedback to the whole group and individuals. The teaching team know each cygnets well, and this supports a personalised learning approach that caters to different needs. The inquiry-based and reflective teaching methods encourage self-awareness and autonomy.

'Having a say in how I learn helps me stay excited about cygnets.'

The cygnets are actively engaged in their learning process and demonstrate motivation and long-term commitment.

'When we get to set our own goals, I feel more responsible for my progress and push myself harder,'



Balance of Support and Challenge

Effective talent development requires a balance between encouragement and constructive challenge to sustain motivation. The teaching team set high, but achievable expectations and this helps build resilience and perseverance.

‘I can see when we are all pushing each other in a supportive way, even when we are tired in residency week. We have a shared goal- to create and perform well and our friendships and sense of humour keeps the balance.’

The strong mentorship fosters technical and artistic growth, and peer collaboration enhances social belonging and motivation.

Content Design

The structure and content of the Cygnet School programme has evolved and been informed by the Youth Participatory Action Research, the regular reflective practice embedded into each Cygnet School session, and the de-briefs after each cygnet day. This commitment to maintaining a cygnet-centred content design has positively impacted cygnet engagement, progress, sustained motivation, confidence and transformation change.

‘Having our teachers, composers, and drama coaches to help us with motivation makes me feel so special because we are being taught by such great people.’

The content includes technical skills, repertoire, creative and narrative exploration, and opportunities for independent choreography. There is flexibility according to the cygnet need, for example if they need to go over a phrase of movement then time will be given to this, or if they are tired, then a game will be brought in to re-energise.

‘I feel inspired when we have a mix of dance styles and creative projects where we can express our own style.’

This sense of autonomy builds an environment of trust, independent thinking, choice, ownership, freedom and professional working.

‘As soon as I arrive at The Marlowe, I feel joy in my heart. Although I am tired, I am ready to be present and dance at Cygnet School!’

CYGNET SCHOOL MODEL OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT

This model of talent development, **the 10 C's**, shows the combination of factors that work together, and create the enabling learning and artistic environment that is *Cygnnet School*.

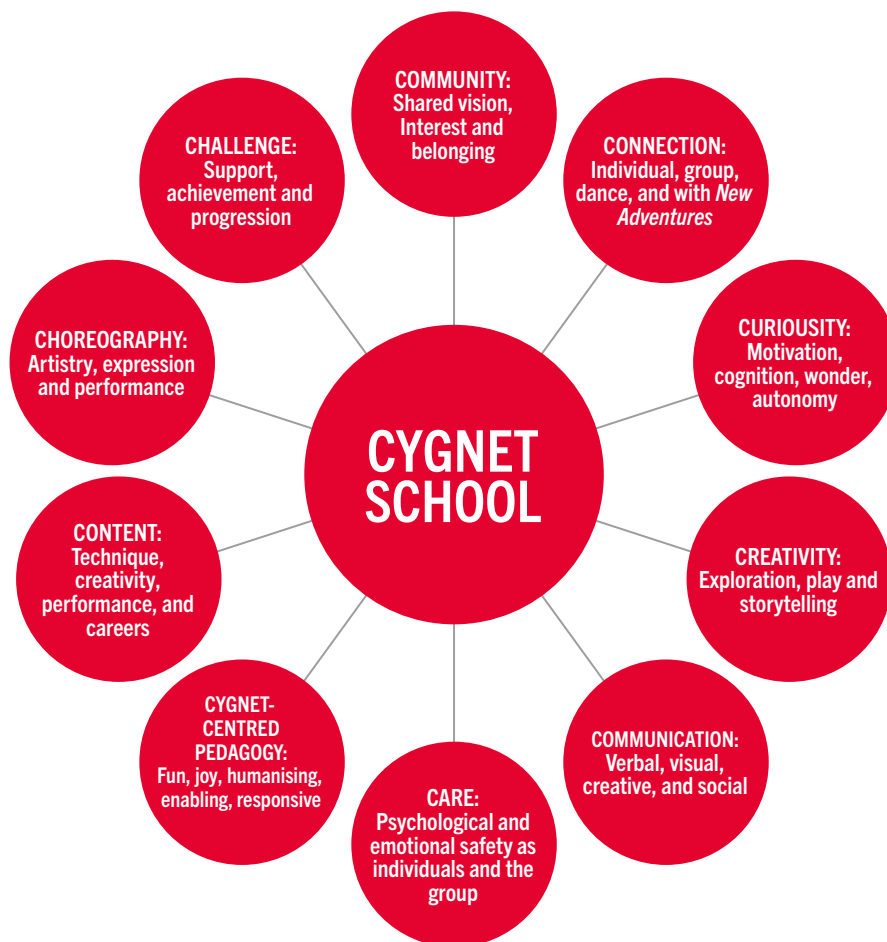


Diagram 4: Cygnnet School Model of Talent Development

This model was developed from the evaluation and represents conditions for holistic development of adolescent dancers. Drawn from the findings of the evaluation, the model has embedded the vision and values of *Cygnnet School*.

Summary

Cygnets School is a unique and leading talent development programme for young people.

The vision of *Cygnets School* is to:

- Open access and participation to a **world of adventures, joy, wonder, connection and creativity**.
- Create a safe, fun, dance environment to develop a **sense of belonging and community**, particularly for young people from diverse and under-served communities.

Cygnets School has realised its vision.

“the best thing about *Cygnets School* is the people- everyone. Everyone who helps us and everyone who is a cygnet. We take ourselves seriously but we have real fun, laughter and joy, and are motivated to achieve great things.”

“the values of joy, wonder, connection and creativity are embedded in all we do here”

The aims of *Cygnets School* are to:

- 1 Recruit a diverse range of participants who may otherwise have barriers to access the arts/dance.
- 2 Increase the profile of *New Adventures* and the talent pool of young dancers in Kent and the South-East.
- 3 Provide a professional, age-appropriate environment for creative and talent development in dance.
- 4 Develop a workforce of teaching artist(s) to work with young people.
- 5 Build new audiences as the cygnets and their families and friends.
- 6 Create a strong partnership with *Cygnets School* resident home: *The Marlowe Theatre*.

Cygnets School has achieved its aims.

“We love having the cygnets with us at *The Marlowe Theatre*. *New Adventures* and *Cygnets School* share our vision and mission to support and nurture young people in Kent and to develop Kent as a performing arts hub.”

Headlines

- ***Cygnets School* has enabled young people, from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, to access, participate and sustain engagement in dance, and have their talent nurtured, through the fully funded programme.**
- ***Cygnets School*, through its values of joy, wonder, connection and creativity, and its emphasis on trust, belonging, community and humour, understands what works to sustain motivation with adolescent young people.**
- ***Cygnets School*, by embedding reflective practice into each cygnets day and summer residency, has enabled cygnets to understand themselves and others as dancers. This has enhanced their critical thinking, performance, physical and mental wellbeing, greater emotional regulation, autonomy and independence.**
- ***Cygnets School* demonstrates a professional, enabling learning and artistic environment and pedagogy, where cygnets can thrive.**
- ***Cygnets School* is a learning and evolving programme nurturing young, talented dancers through observations, support, challenge and listening to the young people (cygnets) involved.**

Recommendations

Cygnets School is a pioneering, pre-vocational talent development programme that has evolved over 3-years through commitment to learning from the young people (cygnets) involved.

The programme is rooted in *New Adventures* methodology including building technique, storytelling, creativity, physicality, expression, gesture, character relationships and professional working.

Cygnets School is a unique dance talent development programme and an example of excellence.

The recommendations below are to continue to build on the best practices and to share the joy, wonder, connection and creativity with others.

Theme	Recommendation	Intended Impact
Progression Routes	Continue to develop individual pathways into vocational training and careers. Consider potential for national roll out across UK.	Increased transition into professional dance and related sectors.
Community Outreach	Continue to expand recruitment and accessibility for underrepresented groups through participation workshops and experience/taster days.	Greater diversity and equity of access.
Alumni Engagement	Maintain connection with alumni network for chaperoning.	Ongoing support, stronger community, and role modelling.
Creative Leadership	Continue to integrate choreography and cygnets-led teaching/creative sessions.	Foster leadership, ownership, and creative autonomy.
Visibility and Advocacy	Consider a UK tour. Share success stories. Continue to involve cygnets in advocacy and promotion.	Raise profile, diversify recruitment, influence sector and policy, inspire others.
Reflection and goal setting	Continue to embed reflection tools and engagement in goal setting.	Holistic development, autonomy and ownership of learning for young people.
Dissemination	Continue researcher/evaluator in residence to capture, disseminate and publish learning and dance and impact.	Inform best practice across the dance and youth arts sectors. Greater funding routes.
Enabling Pedagogy	Continue to embed values-led and cygnets-centred teaching strategies.	Confident and resilient dancers.

Table 5: Recommendations

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I feel a part of the *New Adventures* family!

Contact

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Angela.pickard@canterbury.ac.uk



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