

darts



Teacher Case Study

Inspiring Leaders, Creative Learners

Gemma Holland – Lakeside Primary

Programme Background

Inspiring Leaders, Creative Learners is darts' partnership with the Rose Learning Trust and nine primary schools, funded for its first two years by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Teacher Development Fund. The programme supported teacher development and pupil learning through co-delivered creative lessons and dedicated CPDL at The Point.

Across 1,198 creative sessions, teachers experienced major increases in confidence, creative practice and willingness to take risks. All participating teachers now use more creative techniques and have seen improvements in pupils' confidence, collaboration and information retention. The programme also influenced whole-school culture, with Headteachers adapting assessment approaches, embedding creative topics and establishing a Creative Champions model.

It created a strong cross-school network through whole-cohort CPDL days, sustained artist-teacher collaboration and regular Trust-wide leadership meetings, with this community continuing through the new Creative Champions who meet each half term.

Inspiring Leaders, Creative Learners strengthened professional relationships, built pride and confidence among teachers and demonstrated how creativity can meaningfully transform teaching and learning when embedded through long-term, collaborative CPDL.

Gemma's Story

Gemma has been teaching for 24 years and joined Inspiring Leaders, Creative Learners after initially feeling unsure about it. She never considered herself a drama person and admits that the thought of taking part made her nervous.

"I was a bit dubious when I first heard about it. Getting stuck in felt scary"

Two years later, the thing she talks about most is the change she has seen in herself.

"This programme has transformed my teaching and improved my confidence. It has had the biggest positive impact on me as a person and a teacher."

Working closely with darts artist Emma Liversidge (darts artist) helped Gemma find a new way of teaching that felt natural and exciting. She saw how creative approaches broke down barriers for pupils who were still feeling the impact of the pandemic. Children who previously struggled with writing or full sentences suddenly found their voice.

"They can reel off facts now. They remember everything because they haven't had to hit a hurdle straight away"

Learning became more accessible, and pupils began to thrive.

Before the programme, Gemma worried that some children were being set up to fail when asked to answer in full sentences before they felt ready. The artists encouraged her to focus on how children speak before how they write. That small shift made a big difference. Her class grew more confident, their language developed and the quality of their writing followed naturally.

“It changed the way I teach and the way they learn”

Creativity is now the foundation of Gemma's classroom. It has become part of everyday teaching at her school too, where she now leads CPD sessions herself. She has seen a ripple effect travel through the whole staff team.

“Teachers are confident and passionate. They know this works.”

Parents tell her that children come home excited to talk about what they have learned, and the school's curriculum lead has made embedding creativity a priority. The school is now working towards its Platinum Arts Award.

Gemma is clear that the artists have played a huge role in this shift. Alongside Emma, she speaks with real admiration about Verity Richards (darts artist) and Sarah Eastaff (darts' Director of Creative Learning).

“They believe that we can do it, so we do. They lead us so well and it has had such a positive impact.”

She describes the work at The Point and the network sessions as energising and felt supported at every step through thoughtful communication and the way pupil progress was tracked.

“It was always just right and never too much.”

She remembers joining the programme feeling hesitant, yet she ended it standing proudly at the celebration event, “singing without a care.” Her partnership with Emma has been central to that journey. “There is never any judgement. We are on the same wavelength,” she said, reflecting on how much that trust mattered.

If Gemma were to sum up Inspiring Leaders, Creative Learners, she would call it “amazing” and “so beneficial.” She believes it has been exactly what her pupils needed. Having once attended darts activities with her own children, she now sees the organisation's impact in a new light.

“They work so hard to create opportunities for everyone in Doncaster.”

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