

# SMALL GRAINS

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**YEAR 1 REPORT**  
**APRIL 2023-APRIL 2024**

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## WRITTEN BY

KATE ROMANO, CEO  
STAPLEFORD GRANARY

Stapleford Granary is wholly owned and operated by  
The Association for Cultural Exchange, registered charity 279567  
[www.acecx.org](http://www.acecx.org)





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**GRANARY**  
MUSIC • ART • CULTURE

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# ABOUT SMALL GRAINS



What happens when an arts centre works closely with a primary school?

We placed this simple question at the heart of a new pilot programme. Every week, classes from Stapleford Primary School walk from the school to Stapleford Granary to experience artistic and creative projects closely aligned with cultural events at the Granary.

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## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN ARTS CENTRE WORKS CLOSELY WITH A PRIMARY SCHOOL?

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Through this pilot year, we hoped to learn how regular cultural interaction with Stapleford Granary benefits pupils at the school, and better understand the unique educational role of an arts centre in our community.

The programme is wholly funded by The Association for Cultural Exchange, the charity who own and operate Stapleford Granary.

# WHO TOOK PART?

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## THE PARTNERS

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**Stapleford Granary** is the arts centre home of The Association for Cultural Exchange (a registered charity) whose aim is to foster cultural understanding through education. We aspire to be a unique, inspiring environment for experiencing music and art, underpinned by our 'culturally curious' approach. We believe that the arts enrich lives and provide a foundation upon which we can better understand, respect and value one another.

**Stapleford Primary School** is located less than a mile from the Granary. It is part of Anglian Learning, a successful multi-academy trust of 16 academies in East Anglia, recognised for the value it places on the arts. Stapleford Primary School is a single form entry school with 214 children on roll. School characteristics include above average for SEND support (Special Educational Needs & Disability, 14%) and EAL (English as an Additional Language, 16%) and below average EHC (Education Health Care Plan, 1.4%) and FSM (Free School Meals, 12%). The school has held previous Artsmark Awards and delivered Arts Award, testament to the value they place on creativity and cultural learning. In 2022 they were rated Good by Ofsted.

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## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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The name of the programme - **Small Grains** - references the historical function of the Granary (a place where 'small grains' were held and cared for) with a nod to 'small gains theory' (small improvements across a number of different areas lead to more significant and noticeable gains overall).

# OPENING THOUGHTS



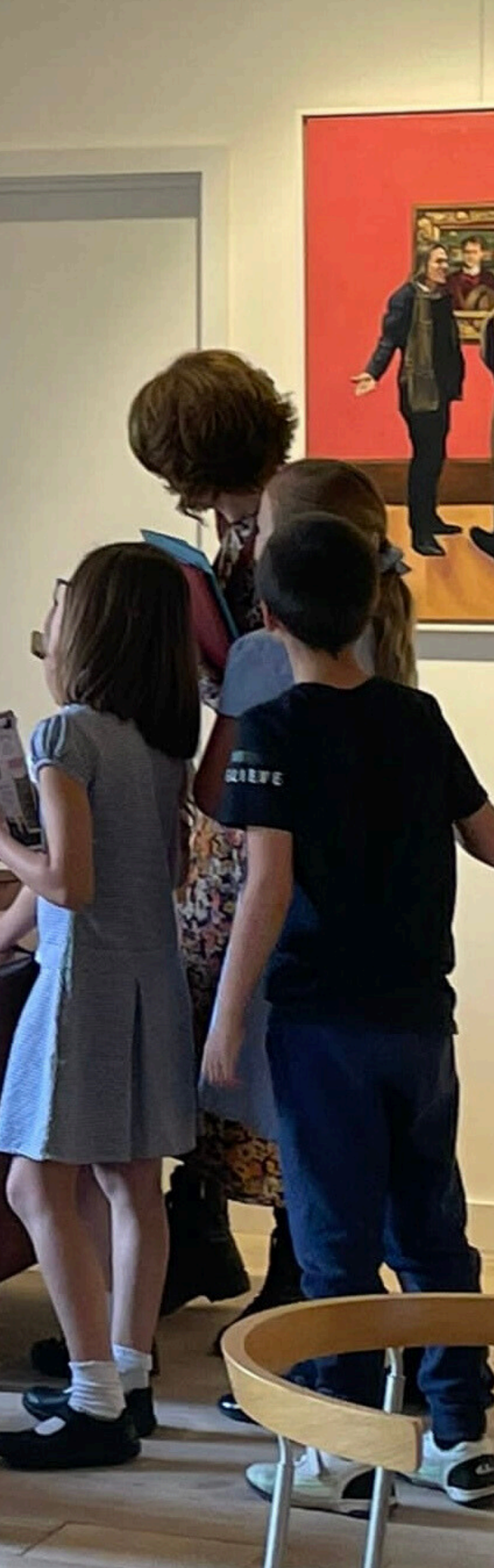
**KATE ROMANO, CEO  
STAPLEFORD GRANARY**

'We went into this with an open mind, hoping we could provide something of value to the children and the school, and inform our understanding about the role of an arts centre in a community. One year on, the programme has strengthened my belief that there is a golden window of opportunity to introduce the wonder and significance of the arts to children, at an age when they are so receptive to new ideas and their imagination knows no limits. I hope that by experiencing the arts in 'real life' at the Granary, we can deepen the impact of arts teaching at Stapleford Primary School, empowering this generation of young people with the confidence, curiosity and creativity that a lifelong love of the arts brings.'



**LAURA RAWLINGS,  
HEADTEACHER  
STAPLEFORD PRIMARY  
SCHOOL**

'Our school is a vibrant and innovative place, where pupils demonstrate a thirst for learning, where curiosity is nurtured and where we help pupils to strive for excellence in a caring, supportive and stimulating environment. We are passionate about the arts and always keen to develop our established offer and curriculum design through collaboration and partnerships to facilitate a richer provision. The opportunity to work with Stapleford Granary was wholeheartedly welcomed and testament to the value we place on creativity and cultural learning. As a school community, we have embraced Small Grains and pupils have demonstrated growth mindsets as they have been inspired, motivated and educated.'



# WHAT WE DID

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## THE PROCESS

Over 12 months, Stapleford Granary devised a series of what we hoped would be inspiring and participatory projects based around the constantly changing cultural programme at the Granary. Highly varied, these included watching theatrical shows, listening to live music, singing, playing rhythm games, meeting artists and experts, looking at exhibitions, painting, sketching, printing, model making and exploring the world around us. We delivered each project to every year group; children took part according to their own learning styles, pace and interest.

All of the projects took place around our regular activities, allowing children to mix with visitors and artists, and experience the daily operations of a vibrant arts centre. Hands-on sessions involving paint, clay, modelling and printing were held in a variety of rooms including Studio 4 (art studio), the Orchard Room and various multi-purpose spaces around the site. Singing and musical activities took place in the concert hall, taking advantage of the fine acoustic and Steinway piano.

## THE EVALUATION

Much of the evaluation has been based on observation and stories of positive change from the two partners, shared through a continual verbal and written dialogue. Kate Romano has been a constant presence in all sessions, enabling her to track changes and make notes of engagement, comments and behaviours. We also include feedback from teachers, parents and visitors in our evaluation. Stapleford Primary School recorded a Pupil Voice session in December 2023. Kate held evaluation sessions with year 2 and 4 in April 2024 at the school.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

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When creating the programme, Kate set out some general principles which she felt would help to create an effective and meaningful experience. They drew upon her own observations of running the Granary, her career background in the arts, education and research, and her childhood memories of museum and gallery visiting.

They were:

- Continuity, routine and pattern would provide an important structural framework (regularity of sessions, pattern of visits, familiar faces and names)
- Artistic and pedagogical variation would be introduced into this structural framework
- Each visit would have 2-3 complementary elements; a whole-class talking / questioning section, a hands-on 'doing' section and an independent looking / listening section
- There would be no curriculum and no assessment. Whilst there would inevitably be links to the school curriculum, these were not planned or intentionally built into the projects
- Free flowing child-led conversation would be encouraged to generate confidence building and a 'no-right-and-no-wrong' environment
- The activities would replicate the 'real life' environment of the arts centre as closely as possible, by presenting the Granary's changing cultural offer in bite-sized chunks
- Children's visits would mix with the visiting public

## OUR PROJECTS (OVER 12 MONTHS)

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### **Shadows, Shapes & Patterns**

Exhibition, silhouette making, Peter & the Wolf shadow puppetry

### **Blue Dog: Mythical Creatures**

Exhibition & imaginary worlds

**Singing** Greatest Showman with live musicians

### **Naomi Tomkys Storied Places**

Exhibition, sketching & 'putting myself in the picture'

### **Music, pattern & rhythm games**

Music by Steve Reich with live performers

### **Bird watercolours** with artist

Karen Jinks, bird song & making bird feeders

### **Gail Brodholt London Linocuts**

Exhibition, print making & perspective

### **Christmas Tree Collaboration**

'PoeTree' & Curious Creatures

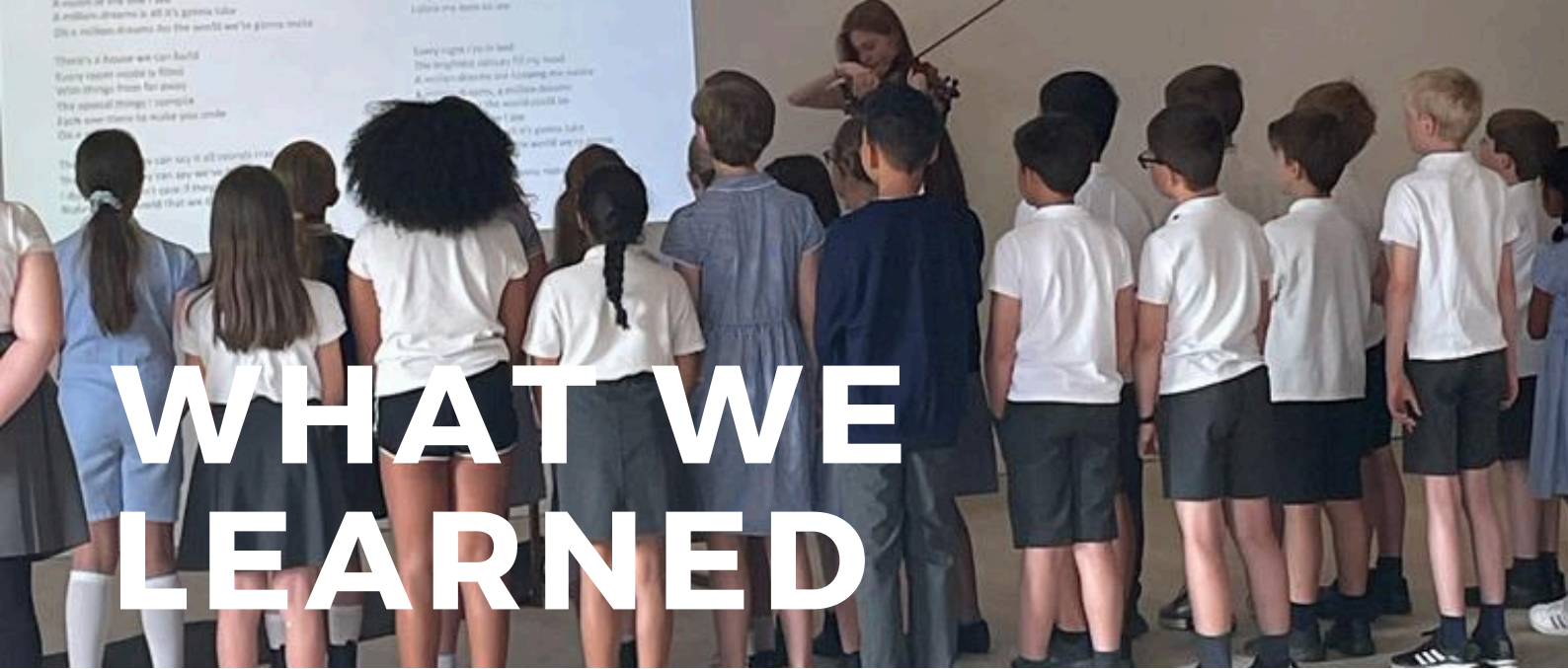
### **Singing** Goodbye Yellow Brick

Road with live musicians

### **Dinosaur Discovery Days** with

palaeontologist Dr Mike Romano, fossil printing & clay dinosaurs

**Big Sing** in school assembly



## OBSERVATIONS FROM STAPLEFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Highest school attendance levels on Granary visit days since the start of the pilot
- Animated child-initiated conversations about art and *'more singing in the playground'*
- Reports of art-based conversations initiated in the home from the start, noting later on that take-homes (bird feeders, art work etc) encouraged conversation about the arts and the programme amongst parents / carers
- Children able to articulate what it means to be curious (the 'Blue Dog Effect')
- Positive reports of engagement, particularly noting how well children with special educational needs and the youngest children have responded. Observations around pupils with SEN feeling a sense of 'belonging' at the Granary, perhaps seeing it as a home-from-home
- Increased interest amongst pupils in taking up a musical instrument after hearing and seeing musical instruments played live
- Staff showing increased confidence to take on arts-based and creative work in the classroom, commenting on how they had learned from seeing *'how things were set up'* at the Granary
- Parents and carers who accompany children on the visits say it has changed their perception of art and music
- Increased parental / carer engagement in the arts in school, including attending art displays which include Granary creative work and conversations about the Small Grains programme

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**'FROM THE START, THERE WERE ANIMATED CHILD-LED DISCUSSIONS ABOUT ART... AND MORE SINGING IN THE PLAYGROUND' - TEACHER FEEDBACK**

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# WHAT WE LEARNED

## OBSERVATIONS FROM STAPLEFORD GRANARY

- Enjoyment, engagement and excitement at the visits; a high degree of expectation that each visit will be interesting and inspiring (*'magical'*)
- Strong focus, enthusiasm, participation and attention, especially when stories are told connected to art and music. Children come in ready to listen and learn
- A very high degree of content retention (for example, recalling musical tunes 12 months later, stories, characters in shows, techniques) and applying this knowledge elsewhere as a reference point or technical skill
- Identifying strong musical and artistic talent in children, including those with SEN, through the projects
- Children becoming more confident and articulate in their communication about the arts
- A deepening sense of pride in, and ownership of, 'our arts centre' and what 'we' do here
- An increasing free-thinking, can-do approach to the arts, with children independently adapting experiences to their interests and strengths, and addressing their own curiosity
- Stories from parents / carers, who say that given the choice, their children ask to come to the Granary over other activities
- Members of the public planning their visits to coincide with school visits; they tell us that it has 'opened their eyes' to the arts by hearing the children talk freely, uninhibitedly and imaginatively about art
- Children coming to the Granary with parents / carers and grandparents, leading them to paintings or sculpture and telling them about the stories and techniques behind the artwork
- Some teaching staff, teaching assistants and parent helpers have told us how the visits have shown them what an arts centre is for, and how much more comfortable they feel visiting an arts centre

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**'I WISH WE'D HAD SOMETHING LIKE THIS WHEN I WAS A CHILD... I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO FEARFUL OF THE ARTS'  
- PARENT HELPER**

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# HOW CAN AN ARTS CENTRE EDUCATE?

This section of the report expands on our general observations, drawing in feedback given by pupils in their own words and the results of primary research undertaken at the school by Kate Romano in April 2024. We present here a short summary; a full paper is available. Challenges and flaws in the research methods are also noted in the full paper and how this was taken into account when drawing conclusions.

## THE RESEARCH

We have gathered and documented evidence to enable us to better understand how children see the role of an arts centre in their lives. We seek to use this knowledge to create memorable and meaningful visitor experiences here at the Granary and to enable us to fulfil the educational role of our charity in effective, relevant and creative ways.

Kate's primary research involved a series of short in-class exercises with year 2 and year 4 where pupils were asked to identify a wide range of places they went to and then group these places in a variety of ways (for example, a way that 'made sense to them', like / dislike, fun / not fun, learning / non-learning). Children were also asked to describe the Granary in 3 words and recall the 3 favourite things they had experienced here. The exercises were slightly adapted for each year group.

## 'A FUN PLACE IN WHICH TO LEARN'

Virtually all of the pupils see the Granary as a learning environment within a positive 'fun' context. They also enjoy school ('fun and learning') but there was not an immediate and direct correlation between school and the Granary. This is surprising given that Granary trips are a scheduled part of the school day and teachers visit with classes. As the exercises progressively explored connections in greater depth, a pattern emerged of the Granary being more closely linked with museums, concerts, theatres, libraries and clubs. Perhaps this indicates that pupils identify (consciously or subconsciously) a different type of learning in these places, compared to learning in school.

What do children recall and value the most? Hands-on experiential learning is certainly memorable. The children enjoyed clay, painting, printing and modelling. But many of the children gave examples of meeting artists and professionals in their top three memorable things. Learning about dinosaurs was an unsurprising stand-out favourite, but learning about perspective in art also featured strongly and pupils had distinct recollections of paintings they had seen and music they had heard which had clearly captured their imagination.



### **'A PLACE OF STORIES'**

Many of the children recalled our Gateways (Blue Dog, the leaf sculpture, the story of Brunelleschi etc) Each project is designed around an initial 'gateway'; an artistic idea or object connected to a story. It could be a painting, a sculpture, a person or a piece of music. We do this to prevent things from being overwhelming and to provide a 'way in' to the art we are introducing children to, giving them a reference point from which to make connections. It is also a method we use in our wider promotion, often focussing on the less well-known aspects of our artistic programming. Such is the strength of this approach that we frequently hear the children (and other visitors) relaying the same stories to their families and friends on subsequent visits,

### **'A MAGIC PLACE'**

We have long suspected that there is something special about the Granary building - its structure, history, beauty and design - that puts people in a 'mood to marvel', as expressed by Bruno Bettelheim (1980, Children, Curiosity and Museums). This has been borne out through Small Grains, with children calling it '*the magic place*' and expressing excited anticipation at what will be waiting for them each visit. This sense of eager expectation puts children in a frame of mind to learn and absorb. It also seems to spark imagination, with children keen to share their own creative and fantastical ideas about art.

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**'A PLACE TO EXPECT RARE EXPERIENCES AND PREPARE US TO BE READY FOR THEM, TO GIVE US THE FEELING THAT BEYOND THE ENTRANCES AND STAIRHALLS MARVELLOUS THINGS ARE WAITING FOR US'**

**- BRUNO BETTELHEIM, CHILDREN, CURIOSITY AND MUSEUMS, 1980**

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### **'A SAFE PLACE'**

We were struck by a number of children describing the Granary as a 'safe' place, and also a 'quiet' place. It isn't especially quiet, but they may be referring to a general sense of calm and reassurance connected to the routine and regularity of the visits. They may feel they 'have a voice' at the Granary because there is a lot of free-flowing child-led discussion. 'Safe' and 'quiet' might also be associated with the lack of assessment or deadlines and the invitation for children to engage at a level that suits them, a principle that underpins every project. We have noticed that the majority of children have a strong sense of pride in their self-sufficiency, whether creating things individually or in a group.



## 'A CULTURE OF HALF TEACHING'

Children across all year groups (reception to year 6) had clear recollections of many of the project details, even those at the very start of the year. Following our premise of presenting bite-sized chunks of our public cultural programme to the children, we made very few age-related adjustments to the content of each project, allowing children to respond at their own pace and level. Our evaluation suggests that there was not a significant difference in detail recall between the age groups. This is perhaps not surprising, given the high level of mixed sensory stimulation across each project, and the timeless / ageless appeal of the projects.

However, what was striking was how many of the children also recounted their own imaginary, emotional and individual responses when asked what they remembered. Examples included describing their feelings about projects, wondering if Blue Dog (a sculpture) was *'happy in the world we had created for him'*; asking what happened to paintings after they left the Granary (*'who is looking at them now?'*) and recalling dramatic musical details (a child sang part of the 'scary wolf theme' from Peter and the Wolf).

Bettelheim quotes the German art historian Erwin Panofsky (see right) and suggests that

this could be the [museum's] greatest value to the child, irrespective of what the content may be: to stimulate imagination, to arouse curiosity, to enable a chance to admire and develop a feeling of awe, *'because a world that is not full of wonders is one hardly worth the effort of growing up in'*.

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**'I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT A CHILD OR AN ADOLESCENT SHOULD BE TAUGHT ONLY THAT WHICH THEY CAN FULLY UNDERSTAND. IT IS, ON THE CONTRARY, THE HALF-DIGESTED PHRASE, THE HALF-PLACED PROPER NAME, THE HALF-UNDERSTOOD VERSE, REMEMBERED FOR SOUND AND RHYTHM RATHER THAN MEANING, WHICH PERSISTS IN THE MEMORY, CAPTURES THE IMAGINATION'.**

**- ERWIN PANOFSKY, MEANING IN THE VISUAL ARTS, 1939**

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# CLOSING THOUGHTS

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We are seeing the powerful effects of regular interaction between an arts centre and a primary school, and we see its impact stretching across the community.

We have furthered our understanding of the unique learning environment that an arts centre can be, and the transformative results of working in partnership with a school who care about the arts. We are delighted that the relationship with the Granary has supported Stapleford Primary School's work with Arts Award and their journey to ArtsMark; and that the school is gaining even wider recognition for the emphasis it places on the arts.

Our charity's founder, Philip Brooke Barnes believed in lifelong learning and cultural understanding. Small Grains aims to give children the opportunity to be inspired and stimulated by the arts in their earliest years. In turn, observing and understanding how children engage with the programme informs and shapes the ways in which we present the arts to them. We see creativity, self-expression, problem-solving, perseverance, and a curiosity and thirst for knowledge which the arts uniquely nourishes.

Our Small Grains programme is a step towards creating the kind of cultural future we want. It is founded on the belief that culture is rooted in real life, and that art becomes meaningful not because it 'is' art, but because it is brought to life by the constantly shifting imaginations of those who experience it. As we continue our hugely rewarding journey with Stapleford Primary School into a second year, we'll also be looking at ways in which we can nurture cultural education beyond early years, expanding the Small Grains principles into secondary schools and beyond.

**Kate Romano, CEO of Stapleford Granary & Small Grains creator**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## THANK YOU

The trustees of The Association for Cultural Exchange

### THE GRANARY TEAM

Kate Romano  
Jessica Henry  
Olivia Trezise  
Chloe Chapman

### VISITING ARTISTS / EXPERTS

Naomi Tomkys  
Karen Jinks  
Michael Romano

STAPLEFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Laura Rawlings

Katie Street

All teachers and support staff

Parent / carer helpers

And of course, the children of Stapleford Primary School who make Small Grains the endlessly joyful, fascinating experience it is

All images taken by Kate Romano



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