



Artsmark Overview, Guidance and FAQs

Introduction

This document is designed to help interested schools understand Arts Council England's expectations for the scheme. It clearly describes each stage of the Artsmark process, explains any paperwork that is required at each stage, and also deals with some frequently asked questions that may help clarify for schools new milestone moments and how they might stay engaged with this national initiative long term.

What's new?

Artsmark is a progressive scheme, one that seeks to help improve education and the life chances of children and young people through an enriched and enlivened arts and cultural offer in schools right across the country. It does this by reframing the scheme so that the arts are embedded within a broader school strategy and in this way the arts form one of several key levers for improvement. Artsmark will make the arts a vital driver within school by:

- connecting arts-rich schools locally, regionally and nationally via inspiring Artsmark events
- offering guidance and support for arts planning and evaluation using Arts Council England's Quality Principles
- reflecting on practice with schools through the support and expertise of Arts Council England's local Bridge organisations
- opening access to exceptional resources as well as networks of the country's most treasured cultural organisations

How does Artsmark work in practice?

Artsmark has been redesigned, by schools for schools, to make it relevant and straightforward.

There are a handful of simple steps that delineate the new Artsmark Award. Engaging with the award could not be simpler:

1. Schools are able to [register](#) to the Artsmark Award online.
2. Schools undertake a *Self-Assessment* exercise using the Artsmark Self-Assessment tool. This will give a school a general sense of its 'start point' in terms of arts capacity and quality of provision.
3. Schools attend a *Development Day* which is run by their local Bridge organisation. At this event they begin high level planning for the arts in their school by drafting an

Artsmark Statement of Commitment.

4. Back at school the *Statement of Commitment* is finalised and signed off by the head teacher and chair of governors. The Statement of Commitment will be the key arts planning document and will tie arts provision to overarching aims in the School's strategy – as evidenced in School Improvement or Development Plans (SIP/SDP).
5. More detailed planning of arts provision can begin with reference to the *Artsmark Planning Guidance*. This template helps to ensure that all arts projects, all cross-curricular, extra-curricular work and subject specific offers (Music, Art, Dance and Drama for example) are of the highest quality.
6. Artsmark schools will be able to access additional support and networking opportunities throughout their Artsmark journey between their Statement of Commitment and completion of their Case Study. This will help them reflect on planning, or to consider impacts and effects once a cycle of arts activity has ended.
7. Schools can make ongoing changes and improvements to their arts offer by being introduced to cultural organisations and having access to additional provision and assistance designed to raise the bar for the arts locally, regionally and nationally.
8. Finally, schools will write up their learning using a template designed to capture their *Artsmark Case Study*. This will be informed by consideration of the Quality Principles and the use of compelling evidence – increased participation, increased attainment, improved well-being, whatever the original drivers were, as stated in the Statement of Commitment /School Improvement Plan. Arts Council England will reflect on the Case Study evaluative report against the original Statement of Commitment to assess distance travelled and will award a 'level' of Artsmark which the school can hold for two years until their award expires. Schools can renew their Artsmark registration to continue to stretch their plans and ambitions at any point after being awarded.

Artsmark: The Paperwork

The new Artsmark is a much lighter touch scheme than its predecessor. There is no longer an initial audit process in order to have your school's provision assessed. Nor is there a long and extensive application form to complete.

There is some paperwork, however. It has been designed to act as a staged framework for planning, reflecting and recording. It is simple, straightforward to understand and should be an aid to the delivery of arts activity in classrooms, rather than an additional bureaucratic burden.

In the section that follows the stages outlined above which have an element of paperwork associated with them are described in greater detail.

If you use this guidance document as an aid to completing the paperwork as each stage of the Artsmark process is reached, we are confident you will be able to find added value in the templates and frameworks provided, while Arts Council England will receive easy-to-interpret feedback on your school's progression. In this way, the stages that enhance your planning and reflection simultaneously assist Arts Council when it comes to a final level being awarded to your school.

Arts Council England Quality Principles

The Quality Principles are a key element of Artsmark and are central to all of the work the Arts Council England oversee with children and young people.

You can find out more and learn about the research underpinning them on the [Artsmark website](#).

You will notice in the stages set out below describing paperwork and templates that the Quality Principles are a constant feature and act as a touchstone concept for the new award. It will be important for you to use them as a reference point and guide at all stages in the process and when you reflect back your plans or your learning it will help you to consider them as a means of structuring your writing, particularly for those elements you submit to the Artsmark team.

Artsmark Self-Assessment

The Self-Assessment process is a reflective activity. Artsmark schools have found it useful to complete this activity as a workshop or structured meeting with appropriate colleagues.

This assessment is for your own benefit and will strengthen your Artsmark planning down the line, but you do not have to share it with Arts Council England.

To complete Artsmark Self-Assessment you will need:

- the Self-Assessment tool
- the Arts Council England Quality Principles
- key school staff and colleagues (*optional*)

By following the instructions and guidance within these documents you will be able to come to a clear view about your schools overall provision and form a general sense of what your current 'Artsmark level' might be. This will be the platform from which you will plan.

In order for this stage to work well you should keep in mind:

- It is better to be realistic about capacity and forward planning. This starts by reflecting on current status in ways that accurately reflect arts provision in your school. Artsmark is a long term scheme that schools can be part of continuously, so make goals realistic by reflecting your position with honesty and accuracy.
- Artsmark will require senior staff and governor buy in. This is the stage that engagement can begin. Where possible, make this assessment exercise part of a wider staff/governor activity so that you can look back over past provision and plan for the future in a collegiate way.
- Artsmark is interested in improving quality over time. Use the Quality Principles to assess how strongly they feature in your current provision and consider ways you might prioritise their introduction in keeping with broader school priorities. Artsmark

aims to keep in step with your school's broader improvement strategy – you can make it flex in that regard so that the pace of change and the scale of improvements for the arts is something to consider during the Self-Assessment phase.

Artsmark Statement of Commitment

Having gauged your school's current levels of provision you will begin to work on your Statement of Commitment. This high level plan is the roadmap showing the broad direction of travel for the arts in your school. For this to work in the terms Artsmark is conceived, it cannot function in isolation. Arts Council England expect it to have a 'live and ongoing' relationship to your School Improvement Plan or School Development Plan (SIP/SDP) and expect to see explicit commitment to the Arts within your SIP/SDP or to be 'working towards' that whenever it is next revised.

The Statement of Commitment is a key document in the new Artsmark programme and is part of your formal submission to Arts Council England. It shows your overall plan for the arts and will be used a reference point against your Case Study when it is time to level your school's progress particularly in relation to distance travelled since setting your objective (of which more is said below).

You will need:

- the Statement of Commitment template
- the Self-Assessment tool
- the Arts Council England Quality Principles

By using these documents together you are expected to set out in the Statement of Commitment your current and future vision for the arts in your school. You should also be able to clearly articulate how the arts will make a contribution to the areas of priority within your SIP/SDP. Remember to reference the Quality Principles and show how they are embedded in ambitions and plans. It is with reference to these that your final Artsmark level will be decided.

For this stage to work well it is important to keep in mind:

- The SIP/SDP (or equivalent) sets the priorities for your school-by-school.
- The Statement of Commitment should show how the arts will be a contributor to you achieving the SIP/SDP priorities.
- How you describe the success of Artsmark later on in your school journey begins here – the outcomes and the evidence you will be looking for are contained in your SIP/SDP and you MUST relate your Statement of Commitment to those.
- We encourage the use of free text for each answer rather than a direct insertion of a diagram/ table. It is important to keep within the word limits for each question to clearly and concisely articulate your plans and ambitions to the Arts Council. Increased length causes school's plans and objectives to become too descriptive and confused in terms of a school's aims.

- The Levelling panel are unable to take images and external links used for reference into consideration when reviewing documentation.

Planning Guidance

Although Arts Council England does not ask to see your specific activity plans, it does provide guidance to help inform their development. And of course, since the overall Artsmark level is awarded to your school after the submission of your Artsmark Case Study it is in your interests to make use of the guidance or to show how your current approach to planning mirrors the principles contained within it. Ensuring the planning for work in school is of the highest quality will feed through to that final evaluative report and enhance the story your school can tell.

The planning guidance is to be used in ways that best suit you. It should inform your existing processes and planning cycles but you do not need to share this more detailed planning with Arts Council England.

You will need:

- your Statement of Commitment (*for reference*)
- the Arts Council England Quality Principles and Planning guidance

By relating the planning guidance and Quality Principles back to the Statement of Commitment any new provision you plan with a strong arts element will be informed by aspects and considerations identified through research as being the most important predictors of high quality successful work.

For this stage to work well it is important to keep in mind:

- Use *all* of the Quality Principles as a touchstone for planning. It may not always be possible to feel you have incorporated them all and to the level you would like to, but knowing where the gaps are is as important as knowing where you are doing things well.
- The importance of planning for evaluation of impact – include explicit reference to success criteria and evidence of impact in your plans because it will make writing up the Artsmark Case Study of your school much easier at the next stage.
- For example, if you are intending to see improvements in well-being and confidence among pupils, what will be sufficient evidence to know that has or has not happened?
- It is not enough to refer *only* to your own observations and use anecdote
- Can you go a stage further? *Is it possible to devise a simple 10 minute questionnaire for children or find one online that might confirm objectives have been achieved?*
- Could you have a *project de-brief with a sub-set of pupils* and write up notes from your structured conversation?

- Evaluating impact spontaneously rarely works well. *Plan for the pause for reflection you know you and your children deserve* to take stock and understand impacts.
- *Impacts on subject attainment should be reflected in the usual curriculum levelling process* and fed back in the final Artsmark Case Study
- If you need to be accountable to your SIP/SDP and your arts provision directly links back to that, you should always be able to show progress and find evidence of impact. *Having a sense of connection between SIP/SDP – Statement of Commitment and lesson or project planning is key to demonstrating success later so factor that in now.*

Artsmark Case Study

This template is designed to help you showcase your school's achievements and to give a sense of the distance travelled in terms of your Artsmark journey. It references back to your SIP/SDP, your Artsmark Statement of Commitment and is underpinned by the Quality Principles, so if you have been using the templates and frameworks in the prior stages it should now pay off as you begin to consider impacts and effects.

Along with your original Statement of Commitment, your Artsmark Case Study is a key document in the Artsmark journey and will be shared with Arts Council England.

You will need:

- Artsmark Case Study template
- your School Statement of Commitment
- your School Improvement/Development Plan (or equivalent)
- the Arts Council Quality Principles
- for reference, examples of your Artsmark inspired lesson plans, projects or schemes of work
- evidence of impact – referencing back to your planning document and your Statement of Commitment, you should have been working to stated success criteria and had a feel for what success would look like and what evidence would assure you it had been secured. Now is the time to include that evidence in the narrative of your school's Artsmark journey

Once you have completed this evaluative template you are ready to submit the report to the Artsmark team and your school will be 'levelled' Silver, Gold or Platinum.

For this stage to work well it is important to keep in mind:

- The Artsmark Case Study template makes it easier for Arts Council England to receive your evidence so *stick to the framework and respect the word limits*. If you improvise around the form your Case Study takes at this stage you risk decoupling it from your earlier planning and making it difficult for the Artsmark team to interpret.

- The importance of offering evidence for your assertions. If you planned for evaluation at prior stages you will have examples of impact and effect to hand – *use the most compelling evidence* you can and avoid over-reliance on anecdote. It will make your narrative more plausible and make the work of the Artsmark team much easier.
- Your school will be levelled against what you have achieved with regard to arts provision, not against what you still intend to do. Place the emphasis on what you have achieved rather than your future plans. If you are part way through your overall journey for the arts it is better to make that distinction clear in your write-up and so avoid unnecessary follow up questions. Those aspects that remain 'works in progress' can form the basis for your future Artsmark reapplication and do not need to be the main focus of your report.
- We encourage the use of free text for each answer rather than a direct insertion of a diagram/ table. It is important to keep within the word limits for each question to clearly and concisely articulate your plans and ambitions to the Arts Council. Increased length causes school's plans and objectives to become too descriptive and confused in terms of a school's aims.
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Appendices

[Artsmark Self-Assessment tool](#)

[Arts Council England Quality Principles and Planning Guidance](#)

[Artsmark Statement of Commitment template](#)

[Artsmark Case Study template](#)

[FAQs](#)