

Stage Swap: full first draft for review

UKRI Contracts for Innovation, “Innovation in Play to Improve Child Outcomes” (competition 2573). Drafted from Abi’s voice notes, for Abi and Luke to rewrite in their own words.

Key facts

- **Deadline:** Wednesday 28 Oct 2026, 11:00. Target: rewrite by 21 Oct, submit 27 Oct. Abi submits in IFS.
- **Lead applicant:** MLOPS CONSULTING LTD (12615486), VAT registered. Abi is project lead on a fixed-term, part-time MLops contract (3 days/week).
- **Project:** 1 Feb 2027 – 31 Jan 2028. 100% funded. **Draft budget £330,741 ex VAT / £396,889 inc VAT.**
- **Web app for school staff:** marketplace for schools to find and pair with each other, guided session runner, swap organiser, before/after evaluation. Sold to secondary and primary heads, trusts and councils (Cluster licence about £2,500/yr; prices to test).
- **Pilot:** 3 pairs of primaries (each pair feeds one secondary), free opt-in after-school drama for Year 6. Two cohorts, about 180 children.
- **Out of scope:** apps or platforms as the way children play, and any AI. Our toolkit is used by adults; children only do short iPad check-ins.

HOW TO READ THIS

- Each answer shows its word count against the limit. Small grey text is the question and how it's scored.
- **[TBC]** highlights facts only Abi or Luke can fill in. The full list is in “Open items”.
- After the answers: **Research**, a table of what we found and where it changed the bid, then the five raw research reports in full with sources. The three appendix PDFs (theory of change, project plan, costs) are at the very end, exactly as they would be uploaded.
- Innovate UK warns that AI-sounding answers score badly. Please rewrite in your own voice and add real stories.

Project details: summary, public description, location

Project title: Stage Swap: child-led drama exchanges between paired schools to support the move to secondary [TBC: final name]

Start date: 1 February 2027. **Duration:** 12 months.

How did you hear about the competition? [TBC: Abi]

When was your organisation established? 21 May 2020

Organisation's primary focus: Software development and digital services [TBC: pick the closest IFS option]

Project and scope summary

Max 800 words. Not scored, but read first by UKRI's internal scope check, so it must show theme alignment and measurable child outcomes clearly.

Answer: 800 / 800 words

Many Year 6 children worry about moving to secondary school: losing friends, getting lost, not knowing anyone. For children in areas of socio-economic deprivation, these worries often come with fewer chances to take part in rich, creative play outside school. In Lawrence Hill, Bristol, 57.7% of children live in poverty after housing costs, and 41% of pupils at the local secondary are persistently absent. Most children's drama is paid-for, "quite expensive" and run by drama professionals.

Stage Swap uses freely chosen, child-led amateur dramatics to tackle both problems at once.

WHAT HAPPENS

We pair two primary schools from different Bristol communities whose pupils go on to the same secondary school. Clubs start after National Offer Day, so places go first to children offered that secondary. Each school runs a free, opt-in after-school drama club for Year 6 for a term. The children own the whole creative process. They choose the story and change it until it is theirs, write the scenes, make props and costumes, choreograph and direct. They can weave in their own lives and neighbourhood if they want to. It is play for the sake of play, "doing something for the love of it, not because you're good at it": the focus is the experience, not the product.

At the end of term the schools swap. Each group travels to its partner school and performs for them, and watches their show in return. A joint finale is held at the secondary school both groups will move to, and families are invited. By September, children arrive in Year 7 already knowing faces from the other school, having played and performed with them, and having been inside their new building.

Families are part of it. Parents and carers join family sessions to make props, come to the swap performances and the finale, and take home games, scenes and songs so the play continues at home.

THE WEB APP FOR SCHOOLS

So that any school can do this, MLops will build a web app for school staff. Children never have accounts and never play on a screen. It has four parts:

- Discover and pair: a marketplace where primaries find partner schools that share a destination secondary, and secondaries invite all their feeders.
- Run: a guided session runner, with step-by-step plans, staff onboarding and how-to videos, so teachers and teaching assistants without drama training can lead the club.
- Organise: consent, registers, safeguarding, and planning for the swaps and finale.
- Evaluate: short before/after check-ins. Children spend a few minutes on a shared iPad with a facilitator, and parents and staff add short reports.

HOW WE WILL KNOW IT WORKS

These measure wellbeing, transition worries, speech, language and communication, confidence, belonging and family play, at baseline, after the performances and about six weeks into Year 7. With consent, secondaries share Year 7 attendance. A comparison group from similar non-participating schools and an anthropological case-study strand show what changes and why. The app turns this into impact reports for heads, governors, pupil premium statements and funding bids. It uses no AI.

PHASE 1 SCOPE

Over 12 months (February 2027 to January 2028) MLOPS CONSULTING LTD will:

- co-design the model with children, families, teachers and community partners (months 1-2);
- pilot it with 3 school pairs (6 primaries, 3 secondaries, up to 90 children) in the summer term 2027, followed up after the move to Year 7;
- refine the model and run it again with the next Year 6 in autumn 2027, co-delivered by community groups in Easton and Barton Hill and trained UWE students. This tests whether non-specialists can deliver it;
- produce an independent evaluation of child-level outcomes for about 180 children;
- build the web app from alpha to v1.0, opening the pairing marketplace to schools beyond the pilot;
- produce a playbook and a facilitator training pack;
- produce a Phase 2 scale-up and commercial plan based on market validation with schools, trusts and councils.

THEMES

- Primarily Play and Key Life Transitions.
- Also Expanding Access to Play: free and in areas of deprivation.
- Empowering Caregivers, Educators and Communities: families, community groups, student facilitators.
- Systems and Service Innovation: a new partnership model between schools, community organisations and a university.

OUTCOMES WE EXPECT

- Fewer transition worries.
- More cross-school friendships before Year 7.
- Improved wellbeing, confidence and communication.
- A stronger sense of belonging to school and community.
- More family play at home.
- An evidenced model that schools and communities can run themselves.

The project is led by Abi [surname TBC], who has run children's amateur dramatics clubs and works in a Bristol school [TBC]. MLOPS CONSULTING LTD, a Bristol software company, builds the web app and leads commercialisation through licences sold to secondary and primary

heads, trusts and councils.

Public description

Max 400 words. Published if funded. Plain English, no confidential detail.

Answer: 358 / 400 words

Stage Swap helps children get ready for secondary school through play.

We pair two primary schools from different communities in Bristol whose pupils will go on to the same secondary school. In each school, Year 6 children can join a free after-school drama club. The children are in charge. They decide what their show is about, write it, make the props and costumes, and direct it themselves. It is about having fun and making something together, not about being good at acting.

Each group makes its own show, and can bring in their own lives and neighbourhood. At the end of term, the two schools swap: each group visits the other school to perform and to watch. Then everyone comes together for a final show at the secondary school they will move to, and families are invited. When the children start Year 7, they already know faces from the other school and have been inside their new building.

Parents and carers can join family sessions to make props, come to the shows, and take home games and songs to play together at home.

To understand what difference this makes, children, parents and facilitators answer a few short questions before and after the shows and again once the children have started Year 7. The questions cover how children feel, how worried they are about the move, how they communicate, their confidence and their friendships. Children answer on a shared tablet with an adult, but the play itself never involves a screen. A web app for school staff helps schools find a partner school, guides staff through running each session, handles planning, safety and consent, and turns the answers into reports schools can use.

In 2027 we will run Stage Swap with about 180 children in six Bristol primary schools and three secondary schools, working with local community drama groups and university students. We will then open the web app, guide and training so that schools anywhere can find a partner and run it themselves.

Stage Swap is led by Abi [surname TBC], who has run children's drama clubs in Bristol, together with MLOPS CONSULTING LTD, a Bristol software company.

Applicant location and subcontractors

Max 400 words.

Answer: 207 / 400 words

The lead applicant is MLOPS CONSULTING LTD (company number 12615486), registered at 8 Randall Road, Bristol BS8 4TP. All project work will take place in Bristol, England, in 6 partner primary schools and 3 secondary schools (candidate cluster: City Academy Bristol with Barton Hill Academy and Whitehall Primary; others TBC), community venues in Easton and Barton Hill, and MLOps' Bristol base. All funding will be spent in the UK.

Subcontractors (specialist skills only):

- Evaluation partner [TBC: name, location], UK. Independent evaluation design, ethics review, data analysis and final evaluation report. About 45 days, £34,800.
- Travelling Light Theatre Company, Barton Hill, Bristol [TBC: to be confirmed]. Community co-design, venue and co-delivery of the second cohort. About 30 days, £8,000.
- Threefold Children's Theatre, Easton Community Centre, Bristol [TBC: to be confirmed]. Community co-design, venue and co-delivery of the second cohort. About 30 days, £8,000.
- Neuroscience-of-play advisor [TBC: name], UK. Expert advice on the theory of change, outcome measures and session design. 10 days, £5,000.

UWE [TBC] is an unpaid partner for recruiting student facilitators, who are employed by MLOps as sessional staff.

All subcontractors will be contracted by MLOps on terms that assign project outputs to MLOps and meet the contract's IP and safeguarding requirements.

Questions 1-6 (not scored)

Q1: Themes (select one or more)

Tick:

- ☒ Play and Key Life Transitions (primary theme)
- ☒ Expanding Access to Play
- ☒ Empowering Caregivers, Educators and Communities
- ☒ Systems and Service Innovation
- ☐ Enhancing the Quality of Play Experiences. This is optional. Arguably it also fits (imaginative, social, physical play), but ticking four keeps the focus clear. [TBC: Abi to decide]

Q2: Animal testing

No.

Q3: Permits and licences

Yes. No statutory permits are needed. Before work starts, everyone working with children will have enhanced DBS checks, and ethics approval for the evaluation will be in place or applied for (month 1). If IFS treats ethics approval as a permit, choose "In process of being applied for".

[TBC: Abi to choose; "Yes" is the simplest accurate answer]

Q4: International collaboration

Answer: 75 / 400 words

This project does not involve any international collaboration or engagement. All project co-leads, collaborators and subcontractors are based in the United Kingdom.

Subcontractors and service providers:

- an evaluation partner [TBC: name], UK;
- two community arts/drama organisations in Bristol, UK (Easton and Barton Hill) [TBC: names];
- a neuroscience-of-play advisor [TBC: name], UK;
- an unpaid university partner (University of the West of England, Bristol) [TBC].

The toolkit will be hosted on UK-based infrastructure.

Q5: Export licence

No.

Q6: Trusted Research and Innovation

Answer: 169 / 400 words

We have considered UKRI's Trusted Research and Innovation Principles. Our project does not relate to them in any significant way.

- Dual-use applications: none. The project develops a community drama programme for children and a simple web toolkit for organising sessions and measuring wellbeing outcomes. It has no military or security application.
- National Security and Investment Act: the project is not relevant to any of the 17 sensitive areas. It does not involve advanced materials, AI, computing hardware, cryptography, data infrastructure, defence or any other listed area. The toolkit is a standard web application that stores pseudonymised programme data, and it uses no AI.
- Export controls: no export control licence is required under the academic export control guidance, and none has been applied for.
- UK Strategic Export Control List: no items, software or substances on the list are involved.

All project data, including children's data, will be stored on UK-hosted infrastructure in line with UK GDPR. Access is role-based and limited to the UK project team.

Q7. Proposed idea

QUESTION: How does the project meet the challenge described in the competition scope?

Provide a description of your proposed idea. Include a description of the current state of development or readiness of the idea. You must submit a clear theory of change, highlighting how the play intervention will lead to improved children's learning and development outcomes (as/in the appendix). Up to 600 words + mandatory 2-page PDF appendix.

CRITERION: How well does the proposal meet the challenge?

9-10 BAND: clear description and compelling evidence to show how the idea will meet the challenge.

APPENDIX: appendices/q07-theory-of-change.pdf

Answer: 597 / 600 words

Stage Swap [working name, TBC] helps Year 6 children get ready for secondary school through free, child-led amateur dramatics with the children they will move up with. A web app for school staff lets any school find a partner, run the programme and evidence its impact.

THE NEED

- About a third of 10-11 year olds are quite or very worried about moving up, and poorer children worry more (Moore et al., 2021).
- Losing friends is the main worry right through Year 7, and only 38% keep the same best friend (Rice et al., 2015).
- Absence rises from Year 6 to Year 7 (DfE, 2025).
- Disadvantaged pupils are far less likely to do extra-curricular activities (46% vs 66%; Sutton Trust, 2024), and most children's drama is, in Abi's words, "quite expensive" and "run by drama people".
- In Lawrence Hill (Barton Hill), 57.7% of children live in poverty after housing costs, the highest in Bristol (JSNA 2026). At the local secondary, City Academy, 41% of pupils are persistently absent, against 23% nationally (DfE, 2024/25).
- In Bristol's most deprived areas only 45% feel they belong to their neighbourhood (65% citywide), and 56% agree that people from different backgrounds get on (Quality of Life 2024/25). Bristol's Belonging Strategy prioritises educational transitions.

THE PLAY

- We pair two primaries from contrasting neighbourhoods that send pupils to the same secondary. For example, Barton Hill Academy (74% free school meals, 82% EAL) and Whitehall Primary (23%, 15%), both sending pupils to City Academy Bristol [TBC: not yet approached].
- Clubs start after National Offer Day (1 March), so places go first to children offered the host secondary.
- Each school runs a free, opt-in after-school club for a term: play "for the love of it, not because you're good at it".
- Children choose a story and change it until it is theirs. They write, make props, choreograph and direct. In one of Abi's clubs the children made "a girl power Cinderella" with two massive dance numbers.
- The groups swap, performing at each other's school, then hold a joint finale with families at the secondary.
- They start Year 7 knowing faces and the building.

THE WEB APP (STAFF ONLY; CHILDREN NEVER PLAY ON IT)

- Discover and pair: a marketplace where schools find partners with the same destination secondary.
- Run: step-by-step sessions, onboarding and videos, so staff without drama training can lead.
- Organise: consent, registers, safeguarding, swaps.
- Evaluate: a few minutes of check-ins on a shared iPad, plus parent and staff surveys, before and after. These produce impact reports for heads, governors, pupil premium reporting and funding bids.

No AI.

FAMILIES

Family sessions, performances, and games and songs to take home, so play continues at home.

THEORY OF CHANGE (APPENDIX)

- Owning the play builds confidence and communication. Oral language approaches add six months' progress, and arts participation three (EEF).
- Performing for future classmates gives the play a real purpose. Weeks of contact mean familiar faces in September.
- Activities linking primary and secondary schools are associated with lower school anxiety (Rice et al., 2015).
- Expected outcomes: fewer worries, and better wellbeing, belonging, communication and Year 7 attendance.

READINESS

- The play model comes from Abi's clubs [TBC: years, children] and her school work [TBC: role].
- Possible partners include Travelling Light (Barton Hill) and Threefold child-led theatre (Easton) [TBC: confirm].
- Phase 1 pilots 3 Bristol clusters in summer 2027, followed into Year 7, and a partner-led second cohort. The web app is built alongside and opened to other schools.

Q8. Technical project summary

QUESTION: What are the main technical challenges that you are addressing? Explain: how you will address the challenge; what the innovation is; the main technical deliverables; the R&D that will prove the scientific, environmental and commercial merit; what might be achieved by deploying the innovation. Up to 600 words.

CRITERION: How valid is the technical approach?

9-10 BAND: valid, highly relevant; confidence that technical deliverables are achievable.

Answer: 552 / 600 words

We are tackling four main challenges.

- DESIGNING CHILD-LED DRAMA AS A TRANSITION INTERVENTION

Children's drama and transition days both exist, but separately. We need the mix of session structure, child ownership, swap format and finale that builds friendships across schools while keeping play freely chosen.

- Co-design in months 1-2.
- Cohort 1 (summer 2027): 3 clusters, 6 primaries, up to 90 Year 6 children, followed into Year 7. Abi leads 2 clubs and coaches the facilitators leading the other 4.
- A WEB APP THAT LETS ANY SCHOOL DO IT

Schools can't easily find a suitable partner, run creative play without specialists, coordinate swaps, or evidence impact. We will build a tablet-first web app for staff. Children never have accounts or play on it. It has four modules:

- Discovery and pairing marketplace. School profiles are pre-filled from public DfE school data; schools search a map and get transparent, rule-based suggestions (shared destination secondary, travel time, contrasting neighbourhoods). Secondaries can invite all their feeders at once.
- Guided session runner. 12 step-by-step session plans, onboarding, short how-to videos, prep checklists and fidelity self-checks.
- Organiser. Consent, registers, sign-out, a safeguarding log, and swap and finale planning.
- Evaluation. Before/after check-ins and impact reports.

Releases:

- discovery (month 1);
- alpha (month 2): consent, registers, check-ins;
- beta (month 4): session runner and organiser;
- release 2 (month 7): marketplace, opened to non-pilot schools;
- v1.0 (month 11): impact reports, trust/council admin, licensing and billing.

It uses UK hosting, pseudonymised records, single sign-on and role-based access. It follows the ICO Children's Code, and has a DPIA, a penetration test, an accessibility audit and Cyber Essentials. There is no AI or machine learning.

- MEASURING CHILD-LEVEL OUTCOMES LIGHTLY AND RELIABLY

Children complete a few minutes of facilitator-led check-ins on a shared iPad, using validated measures:

- wellbeing: the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (validated for ages 8-15; Liddle and Carter, 2015);
- transition worries: the School Concerns Questionnaire (validated with Year 6-7 pupils; Rice et al., 2011);
- school belonging: the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale (PSSM);
- communication: no short validated staff rating exists for this age, so we will develop and test one with the evaluation partner.

Parents report family play. Secondaries share Year 7 attendance, with consent. Measures are taken at baseline, after the performances, and six weeks into Year 7. A comparison group of similar schools gives indicative effect sizes, using mixed-effects models. Anthropological case studies explain why change happens.

- REPLICATION WITHOUT SPECIALISTS

Cohort 2 (autumn 2027) is paired through the marketplace and run by community partners and students using the session runner. It tests fidelity, attendance and pre/post outcomes; transition follow-up falls in Phase 2.

INNOVATION

Self-serve school pairing around the move to secondary, delivered through child-led play, with guided delivery and built-in evidence.

DELIVERABLES

- D1: Playbook (v1 month 6, v2 month 12).
- D2: Web app v1.0 (month 11).
- D3: Validated check-in set and an independent evaluation (month 12).
- D4: Training pack.
- D5: Phase 2 and go-to-market plan.

MERIT

- Scientific: change against the comparison group.
- Commercial: at least 10 non-pilot schools pairing themselves, plus pricing tests.
- Environmental: shared coaches, reusable props.

DEPLOYMENT

Any secondary and its feeders could run Stage Swap each summer, self-serve, with evidence of impact.

Q9. State of the art and IP

QUESTION: Are similar products currently available in the market? How is your proposed project differentiated? Include: existing IP; its significance to freedom to operate; novel concepts; new approaches; new tools. How you would handle IP issues during the project; subcontractor freedom to operate. Up to 400 words.

CRITERIA: how innovative; how much it develops/employs novel concepts, approaches, methodologies or tools; understanding of relevant IP and freedom to operate.

9-10 BAND: highly innovative; strong understanding of nearest state of the art.

Answer: 356 / 400 words

NEAREST STATE OF THE ART

- School linking. The Linking Network pairs classes from different communities in curriculum time (about 26,000 children, 545 schools a year). In Bristol, Bridges for Communities runs it free to schools. It shows that contact between schools builds cohesion, but it is teacher-led, isn't designed around transition, and doesn't pair schools by destination secondary.
- Transition drama. Projects such as Half Moon's, the Belgrade's "Big School" and In2 in Darlington (music, with feeder primaries and their secondary) are delivered by professionals within single schools or clusters. They are not child-devised.
- School drama festivals: Shakespeare Schools Festival, National Theatre Connections, Primary Shakespeare Company. Schools perform scripted work alongside each other, but are not paired deliberately.
- Children's drama classes. Commercial classes cost £276-£372 a term. Subsidised youth theatres (e.g. Travelling Light, about £58) are excellent but limited in reach.
- Software. Impact tools (Upshot from £1,200 a year; Makerble; ImpactEd) measure outcomes, but none pairs schools, guides sessions or handles swap logistics.

WHAT IS NEW

No offer we could find combines all four of these:

- Pairing primaries from different communities because they send children to the same secondary, recruiting after National Offer Day.
- Free, opt-in, child-devised play instead of a script or curriculum.
- A reciprocal swap plus a finale at the destination secondary.
- A staff-only web app: a pairing marketplace with transparent matching on public school data, a guided session runner for non-specialists, logistics, and before/after evidence, with no AI.

Stage Swap complements school linking rather than duplicating it. We will coordinate with Bridges for Communities.

IP AND FREEDOM TO OPERATE

- Background IP: Abi's facilitation approach, licensed to MLops. MLops brings software know-how.
- Freedom to operate: we will search for patents and trade marks, including "Stage Swap" [TBC: result]. Drama methods aren't patentable, and the app uses standard open-source components (permissive licences, logged).
- Foreground IP: the app, playbook, training and check-in configuration vest in MLops, with the public-sector licence the contract requires. Validated scales are used under their own licences.
- Subcontractors assign their outputs to MLops.
- Children's scripts and performances remain theirs.

Q10. Project plan and methodology

QUESTION: Describe your project plan and identify the main milestones. Comprehensive, practical plan for phase 1. Evidence the solution works, can become a viable product and achieve benefits.

Must: resources; success criteria; project management processes; plan for technical and commercial feasibility; main technical, commercial and environmental risks + mitigation; plan for working prototype/service/trial; safeguarding plans and protocols with children and families; IP handling.

Milestones: clear, SMART, linked to deliverables and payments, monthly payment schedule.

Up to 400 words + mandatory PDF appendix (Gantt), 2 A4 pages.

CRITERIA: feasibility plan; management plan; risks and their management; milestones and evaluation; strong safeguarding.

APPENDIX: appendices/q10-project-plan.pdf (Gantt, 12 milestones with deliverables/success criteria/costs, risk register)

Answer: 400 / 400 words

PLAN

12 monthly milestones (appendix: Gantt, milestones, risk register).

- Months 1-2: mobilise and co-design. Team, safeguarding, DPIA, ethics, 3 signed pairs, co-design, head and staff user research.
- Months 3-6, cohort 1: recruited after National Offer Day (priority to children offered the host secondary); 12 weekly after-school sessions in 6 primaries (up to 90 children), avoiding SATs week; swaps and finales in early July.
- Months 8-11: cohort 2, a partner-led replicability test; cohort 1 followed up in Year 7.
- Month 7: learning review. Month 12: evaluation, playbook v2, training pack, Phase 2 and go-to-market plan.
- Web app (two-week sprints, staff testing): alpha month 2 (consent, registers, check-ins); beta month 4 (session runner, organiser); release 2 month 7 (pairing marketplace, opened to non-pilot schools); v1.0 month 11 (impact reports, licensing, billing, pen test, accessibility audit).

RESOURCES

MLops team (Abi, Luke, developer, coordinator, research assistant, ~20 sessional facilitators); specialist subcontractors (evaluation, community partners, advisor); iPads, hosting, materials, coaches.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- At least 75 children per cohort; 75% attendance; 80% check-ins completed.
- Indicative improvements in transition worries, wellbeing and communication against comparison schools.
- Cohort 2 delivered at 80% or more fidelity.
- At least 10 non-pilot schools pair through the marketplace; pricing feedback from 10 or more organisations; 3 letters of intent.

MANAGEMENT

Weekly team; monthly milestone, risk and budget review; quarterly advisory group.

KEY RISKS

- Ethics taking 2-3 months: apply month 1; case studies from month 4.
- Drop-out: tasters, snacks, a performance goal, families.
- App seen as an 'online platform': staff-only, no child accounts, play face to face.
- Marketplace cold start: seeded with pilot clusters; secondary 'cluster invites'.
- School recruitment: [TBC: letters of intent]; reserve schools.
- Environmental: shared coaches, reusable props.
- Abi's capacity and conflict of interest: [TBC: employer agreement]; another facilitator leads any club at her school.

SAFEGUARDING

- Abi is Designated Safeguarding Lead [TBC: Level 3 training]; the coordinator is deputy.
- Enhanced DBS for all; at least 2 adults and a named school staff link; Keeping Children Safe in Education and school procedures.
- Written consent covers participation, photos and travel.
- Trip risk assessments, ratios of at least 1:8; sign-out to named adults; same-day incident escalation.
- The app follows the ICO Children's Code: no child accounts or messaging, pseudonymised records, DPIA before launch.

IP

Outputs vest in MLops through employment and subcontract terms.

Q11. Technical team and expertise

QUESTION: Who is in the technical team? What expertise do they offer? Brief description incl.

subcontractors. Describe how each organisation has the skills, capabilities and experience to deliver the intended benefits, and how much time (days) each will spend. Up to 400 words.

CRITERION: Does the applicant have the skills, capabilities and experience to deliver the intended benefits?

9-10 BAND: relevant skills/expertise/experience give full confidence, incl. achieving commercial potential.

Answer: 394 / 400 words

LEAD APPLICANT: MLOPS CONSULTING LTD

A Bristol software company, trading since 2020, with strong reserves to cash-flow monthly payments in arrears. [TBC: previous Innovate UK project, if any.] MLOps employs the core team on fixed-term contracts, so it does most of the work.

ABI [SURNAME TBC]: PROJECT LEAD, LEAD FACILITATOR, DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD (140 DAYS)

- Abi created the model and has run children's amateur dramatics clubs [TBC: how many, years, where].
- She works in a Bristol school [TBC: role, years], so she knows Year 6 transition, school safeguarding and how heads decide.
- She has community links in Easton [TBC] and a background in anthropology [TBC], which shapes the case studies.
- She owns the session content and co-leads sales to heads.

LUKE MARSDEN: PRODUCT, TECHNICAL AND COMMERCIAL LEAD (100 DAYS)

- Director of MLOps. [TBC: 2-3 lines of track record building, shipping and selling software products.]
- Leads the web app architecture, the back end and security, pricing and billing, and the go-to-market and Phase 2 plan.

NEW FIXED-TERM HIRES (recruited December 2026 to January 2027)

- Full-stack developer / UX designer, 0.8 FTE from month 2 (170 days). Builds the marketplace, session runner and evaluation with Luke, and runs usability testing with staff.
- Project coordinator and deputy safeguarding lead (135 days). School liaison, consent, DBS checks and monitoring evidence.
- Research and fieldwork assistant (105 days). Check-ins, observation, data management and head interviews.

SESSIONAL FACILITATORS (ABOUT 1,460 HOURS)

UWE and University of Bristol drama, education and applied theatre students and local artists, trained through the app and coached by Abi [TBC].

SPECIALIST SUBCONTRACTORS

- Evaluation partner [TBC: name and track record] (about 45 days). Design, ethics, analysis and an independent report.
- Community drama partners [TBC: to confirm]: Travelling Light Theatre (Barton Hill youth theatre) and Threefold child-led theatre (Easton) (about 30 days each). Co-design, venues and co-delivery of cohort 2.
- Neuroscience-of-play advisor [TBC: name] (10 days). Theory of change and measures.
- External penetration testing and accessibility audit.

ADVISORY GROUP (UNPAID)

Partner heads and a transition lead [TBC]; also our first customer panel.

SKILLS GAPS AND HOW WE COVER THEM

- MLOps is new to education: Abi, the schools and the partners bring that.
- Independent evaluation is subcontracted.
- Luke and Abi lead founder-led sales to heads and trusts, informed by the interviews and pricing tests.

Q12. Costs and value for money

QUESTION: How much will the project cost (incl. VAT if applicable) and how does it represent value for money for the team and the taxpayer? Costs must match the finance summary. Fair market value, no profit. Up to 400 words + optional 2-page PDF appendix (cost breakdown).

CRITERION: Are the budget and costs realistic, justified and appropriate for the aims and methods?

APPENDIX: appendices/q12-costs.pdf. Figures generated by budget.py; keep in sync with finances.md.

Answer: 352 / 400 words

TOTAL COST

£330,741 excluding VAT, plus £66,148 VAT, so £396,889 including VAT. MLOPS CONSULTING LTD is VAT registered. All costs are at cost, with no profit. The appendix gives a line-by-line breakdown.

BY CATEGORY (EXCLUDING VAT)

- Labour £195,614 (59%);
- Abi, project lead (0.6 FTE);
- Luke, product and technical lead (100 days at cost);
- a full-stack developer/UX designer (0.8 FTE, 10 months) to build the web app;
- a coordinator (0.6 FTE);
- a research assistant (0.5 FTE, 10 months);
- sessional facilitators (about 1,460 hours).
- Overheads £19,561: 10% of labour.
- Materials £16,200: iPads, props, snacks, family packs, UK hosting.
- Subcontractors £55,800 (17%), specialist skills only: independent evaluation £34,800; two community partners £16,000; play advisor £5,000.
- Travel and subsistence £1,800.
- Other £41,766:
- coaches for 24 trips, and family sessions;
- DBS checks and safeguarding training;
- penetration test, accessibility audit and Cyber Essentials;
- staff how-to videos;
- insurance and legal;
- SEND support;
- head interviews and pricing tests;
- co-design vouchers;
- accountancy.

R&D SHARE

Non-R&D costs come to about £16,816: market validation, accountancy, insurance, legal and 15 of Luke's commercial days. That makes about 95% R&D: co-designing, prototyping, piloting and evaluating the programme and web app.

VALUE FOR MONEY

- The full cost per child is about £1,837 excluding VAT, for about 180 children. Most of it buys reusable assets: the web app, the check-in set, the playbook, training and independent evidence.
- Direct delivery costs are about £310 per child per term, below commercial children's drama classes in Bristol (£276-£372 a term), and free to families.
- Once built, the web app lets schools pair and run Stage Swap themselves at licence prices of about £450 per school per year [TBC: tested in months 9-11], instead of needing funded delivery.
- The budget is lean: part-time and sessional staff, 6 iPads, partner venues.
- Luke's £480/day is cost, with no margin [TBC: salary basis].

PHASE 2 (INDICATIVE)

About [TBC: £0.8m-£1.2m] over two years to scale the marketplace across Bristol and two further cities, moving towards self-funding from licence income.

Q13. Commercial potential

QUESTION: Timescales; commercial potential for a marketable product/process/service; delivery plan; route to market; competitive advantage vs existing solutions; existing commercial relationships; future potential across public/private sectors and international markets. Up to 400 words.

CRITERIA: clear commercial potential; clear plan to deliver and route to market; significance of competitive advantage over nearest available solutions.

Answer: 398 / 400 words

THE PRODUCT

A service schools run themselves through a staff web app: pairing marketplace, guided sessions, swap organiser, impact reports. Children never play on screens.

WHO BUYS, AND WHY

- Secondary headteachers (via the pastoral deputy or transition lead): our first target. They own transition, feel Year 7 dips, hold transition budgets, and bring 4-8 feeders.
- Primary headteachers and business managers: enrichment and pupil premium budgets; our reports support required pupil premium statements.
- Trusts and councils buy for many schools; community groups use it to deliver and evidence grant work.

PRICING (TO BE TESTED IN PHASE 1) [TBC]

- Free: profile, discovery, pairing (grows the network).
- School: about £450 per year excluding VAT, comparable to Boxall Profile Online (£325-£650) and under heads' spending limits.
- Cluster (a secondary and up to 6 feeders): about £2,500 per year (about £357 per school). This is the core revenue.
- Trust/council from about £350 per school; community groups about £15 a month; add-ons: training days, facilitator delivery (revenue share).

MARKET AND POLICY

- England has 3,458 state secondaries, 16,712 primaries, and about 640,000 Year 6 pupils moving up each year (DfE, 2026). At about £2,500 per cluster, that is roughly £8.5m a year.
- Policy: government says "too many children find the transition hard" and is creating a KS3 Alliance on transition (Curriculum and Assessment Review response, 2025); the 2026 Enrichment Framework names arts and culture; pupil premium (£1,515 per primary pupil) can fund "arts participation" with reported impact.

REACHING HEADS

Pilot clusters as referees; in-app cluster invites (each secondary recruits its feeders); trust and council partnerships, starting in Bristol [TBC]; heads' networks and conferences; shareable impact reports; community arts partners as local channels.

Founder-led sales (Luke, Abi) until a Phase 2 partnerships hire. We pitch in autumn, when schools write their pupil premium strategies, and deliver after National Offer Day.

TIMESCALES

- Months 9-11: 20+ head interviews; pricing tests with 10+ organisations; 10+ non-pilot schools pairing via the marketplace.
- 2028: Phase 2 across Bristol and two cities, with paying clusters (illustrative: 15).
- 2029-30: national rollout (illustrative: 200 clusters, about £500k a year).

We will work with UKRI and DfE colleagues on wider adoption.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Alternatives each do part (Q9); none pairs schools for transition, guides child-led play and evidences results in one place. Marketplace network effects and accumulating evidence make it harder to copy.

Finances and payment milestones

Generated by `python3 budget.py --md > application/finances.md`. Edit budget.py, not this file.

Organisation: MLOPS CONSULTING LTD, company number 12615486, 8 Randall Road, Bristol BS8 4TP. Micro/small company, 1 employee (director). Turnover: [TBC: Luke].

Project location postcode: BS8 4TP (registered office). Delivery is across Bristol [TBC: postcode of main delivery area].

VAT registered: YES. In IFS, enter every cost **excluding VAT**. IFS adds 20%. Check the total including VAT is £500,000 or less: IFS does not validate it.

Project costs by IFS category (excluding VAT)

Category / item	£
Labour	195,614
Abi [surname TBC]: project lead & lead facilitator, 0.6 FTE x 12 months (£48,000 FTE + 22% on-costs)	35,136
Luke Marsden: product & technical lead, web app architecture & build, 100 days at £480/day (cost, no profit)	48,000
Project coordinator & deputy safeguarding lead: new fixed-term hire, 0.6 FTE x 12 months (£32,000 FTE + on-costs)	23,424
Research & fieldwork assistant (case studies, data collection): fixed-term hire, 0.5 FTE x 10 months (£32,000 FTE + on-costs)	16,267
Full-stack developer / UX designer: fixed-term hire, 0.8 FTE x 10 months (£50,000 FTE + on-costs)	40,667
Sessional facilitators: UWE students & community artists, ~1,460 hours at £22/hr incl. on-costs (144 club sessions x 2 facilitators, 18 performances, training)	32,120
Overheads	19,561
10% of labour costs (office, IT, finance, HR & payroll admin)	19,561
Materials	16,200
6 iPads + protective cases for children's check-ins	2,700
Props, costume & set materials (12 school groups x £300)	3,600
Healthy snacks at every club session (144 x £25)	3,600
Play-at-home family packs (180 packs)	2,700
Web app hosting (UK region), data storage & software services (12 months)	3,600
Subcontractors	55,800
Evaluation partner: evaluation design, ethics review, analysis, independent report (~45 days)	34,800
Community partners: Easton & Barton Hill groups (co-design, venues, co-delivery of cohort 2), 2 x £8,000	16,000
Neuroscience-of-play advisor: 10 days at £500	5,000
Travel & subsistence	1,800
Staff local travel & subsistence (Bristol)	1,800
Other	41,766
Coach/minibus hire: 12 swap trips + 12 finale trips (24 x £450)	10,800
Family sessions & refreshments; community venue hire for cohort 2 finales	4,000
Enhanced DBS checks (30) & safeguarding training (Level 3 DSL + team)	3,850
Insurance top-up (public liability for out-of-hours clubs)	1,500
Data protection impact assessment & contract/legal advice	1,800
Accessibility & SEND support (extra support hours, adapted materials)	2,500
Market validation: head/transition-lead interviews, pricing & adoption workshops	4,000
Family and child co-design participation vouchers	2,000
Accountancy for monthly milestone claims & payroll	2,316
Web app security & accessibility: penetration test, WCAG 2.2 AA audit, Cyber Essentials	6,500
Staff how-to videos for the guided session runner (production)	2,500
Total excluding VAT	330,741
VAT (20%, added by IFS)	66,148
Total including VAT	396,889

Labour 59%, subcontractors 17%: the lead applicant does the majority of the work.

Labour days

Person / role	Days
Abi [surname TBC]	140
Luke Marsden	100
Project coordinator & deputy safeguarding lead	135
Research & fieldwork assistant (case studies, data collection)	105
Full-stack developer / UX designer	170

Payment milestones (enter each one separately in IFS; do not cluster)

- M1 Mobilise: Feb 2027: £23,200 ex VAT (£27,840 inc VAT)**
- Deliverables:** Core team in post; safeguarding policy, DPIA and ethics application submitted; signed agreements with 3 school pairs (6 primaries, 3 secondaries) and 2 community partners
 - Success criteria:** 3 pair agreements signed; safeguarding policy approved by partner schools; ethics application acknowledged; 100% of staff enhanced-DBS checked
- M2 Co-design and web app alpha: Mar 2027: £26,500 ex VAT (£31,800 inc VAT)**
- Deliverables:** 6 co-design workshops (children, parents, teachers); user research with 6 heads/transition leads and 10 staff; check-in set v1 piloted; web app alpha (school/staff accounts, consent, registers, safeguarding log, iPad check-ins)
 - Success criteria:** At least 60 participants in co-design; check-in completed in 5 minutes or less by at least 90% of pilot children; alpha passes DPIA review and is used to consent at least 75 families

M3 Training and cohort 1 launch: Apr 2027: £29,800 ex VAT (£35,760 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Facilitator training (at least 12 facilitators); cohort 1 recruitment; baseline check-ins; clubs launched in 6 primaries
- **Success criteria:** At least 12 facilitators trained; at least 75 children enrolled (70% of 108 places); baseline completed for at least 90% of enrolled children and a comparison group

M4 Cohort 1 delivery and web app beta: May 2027: £29,800 ex VAT (£35,760 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Sessions 1-6 delivered in all 6 schools; web app beta: guided session runner (12 sessions, staff onboarding, how-to videos), swap and finale organiser, dashboards; first case-study fieldwork
- **Success criteria:** 36 sessions delivered; average attendance at least 75%; session runner used in every session; at least 1 case-study observation per school

M5 Cohort 1 devising complete: Jun 2027: £29,800 ex VAT (£35,760 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Sessions 7-12 delivered; 6 child-devised pieces ready; first swap performances held
- **Success criteria:** 72 cohort 1 sessions delivered in total; 6 pieces devised by children; at least 3 swap performances held

M6 Swaps, finales and playbook v1: Jul 2027: £33,100 ex VAT (£39,720 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** All 6 swap performances and 3 finales at the host secondaries; post-performance check-ins (children, parents, facilitators); playbook v1
- **Success criteria:** 9 performances held; at least 100 family members attend; post-measures for at least 80% of participants; playbook v1 published to partners

M7 Learning review and school-pairing marketplace: Aug 2027: £23,200 ex VAT (£27,840 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Interim evaluation note; revised model and playbook; web app release 2: school discovery and pairing marketplace (profiles, map/search, rule-based suggestions, cluster invites); cohort 2 facilitator training through the app
- **Success criteria:** Interim note reviewed by advisory group; at least 5 model changes logged with rationale; at least 10 facilitators onboarded; cohort 2 pairs agreed through the marketplace

M8 Cohort 2 launch (partner-led replicability test): Sep 2027: £29,800 ex VAT (£35,760 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Cohort 2 (new Year 6) recruitment and baseline; clubs launched, co-delivered by community partners and students (replicability test)
- **Success criteria:** At least 75 children enrolled; baseline for at least 90%; at least 50% of sessions led by non-specialist facilitators

M9 Year 7 follow-up and market validation: Oct 2027: £26,500 ex VAT (£31,800 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Cohort 1 follow-up check-ins about 6 weeks into Year 7; case-study interviews; at least 20 head/transition-lead interviews; marketplace opened to schools outside the pilot
- **Success criteria:** Follow-up completed for at least 70% of cohort 1; at least 6 case studies drafted; at least 10 non-pilot schools create profiles and request a pairing

M10 Cohort 2 swaps and pricing tests: Nov 2027: £26,500 ex VAT (£31,800 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Cohort 2 sessions completed and swap performances held; pricing tests of School, Cluster and Trust/Council tiers with prospective customers
- **Success criteria:** 72 cohort 2 sessions delivered; 6 swap performances; fidelity at least 80% against playbook; pricing feedback from at least 10 organisations

M11 Cohort 2 finales and web app v1.0: Dec 2027: £26,500 ex VAT (£31,800 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** 3 cohort 2 finales in community venues with families; cohort 2 post-measures; web app v1.0: impact reports and exports, trust/council admin, licences and billing, accessibility audit, pen test, Cyber Essentials
- **Success criteria:** 3 finales held; post-measures for at least 80%; v1.0 used by at least 15 facilitators with at least 80% rating it useful; impact report for every school; no high-severity pen-test findings open

M12 Final evaluation and Phase 2 plan: Jan 2028: £26,041 ex VAT (£31,249 inc VAT)

- **Deliverables:** Independent evaluation report; playbook v2; facilitator training pack; Phase 2 scale-up, go-to-market and pricing plan; close-out report
- **Success criteria:** All deliverables accepted at final monitoring meeting; evaluation reports child-level outcomes against comparison group; at least 3 letters of intent to buy a Cluster or Trust/Council licence

Milestones total: £330,741 excluding VAT, matching the total project cost.

Web app development plan (internal, feeds Q8, Q10, Q13)

Internal working document. It feeds Q8 (technical), Q9 (innovation), Q10 (plan), Q11 (team), Q12 (costs) and Q13 (commercial).

What it is

A web app **for school staff and facilitators**. It does four jobs:

- **Discover and pair.** It is a marketplace where primary and secondary schools find each other and agree a Stage Swap pairing.
- **Run the sessions.** It guides staff, step by step, through running the 12-session programme, even if they have no drama background.
- **Organise the swaps.** It handles consent, registers, safeguarding, and the logistics of the swap performances and the finale.
- **Evaluate before and after.** It runs short pre/post check-ins and turns them into impact reports for heads, governors, trusts, councils and funders.

Scope guardrail. The competition excludes "online platforms" *as the way children experience play*. It allows tech for "administration, monitoring, communication, evaluation, safeguarding or operational delivery". So:

- Children never have accounts and never play on a screen. The play is face to face.
- The only time a child touches it is a few minutes of check-in questions on a shared iPad, led by a facilitator.
- There is no AI anywhere. Pairing suggestions are transparent rules, not machine learning.

Users

User	Needs
Primary headteacher / Year 6 lead	Find a partner school with the same destination secondary. Sign up easily. Show impact to governors and in pupil premium reporting.
Secondary transition lead / head of Year 7	Invite and coordinate feeder primaries. Host finales. See which incoming pupils took part.
Facilitator (teacher, TA, community artist, student)	Know exactly what to do each week. Take the register. Run check-ins. Log safeguarding concerns.
Parent / carer	Give consent. Get dates for performances and family sessions. Get play-at-home ideas. Answer a short survey. (Web forms only, no account needed.)
Trust / council / community group admin	Run many pairs. See aggregated impact. Manage licences.

Core features by module

1. School discovery and pairing (the marketplace)

- **School profiles:** pre-filled from public DfE school data (name, phase, location, size). Schools add their destination secondaries, Year 6 numbers, preferred club day and term, and accessibility needs.
- **Discovery:** map and search for nearby schools, filtered by shared destination secondary, distance and availability.
- **Pairing suggestions:** transparent rules. A shared destination secondary is required; other factors are travel time and "different communities" (contrasting neighbourhood deprivation deciles). Schools can see why each match is suggested.
- **Pairing workflow:** request, accept, then a signed pairing agreement covering dates, roles and data-sharing. Secondaries can invite all their feeders at once (a "cluster invite").
- **Messaging between staff only**, for coordination. There is no messaging with or between children.

2. Guided session runner

- A 12-week programme. Each session has a plan with timings, warm-ups, devising prompts that keep the children in charge, facilitator tips, and short how-to videos for staff.
- Prep checklists and a materials list. Today's plan is shown on a tablet, so staff can use it in the room.
- Progress tracking per group, and fidelity self-checks.
- **Staff onboarding:** self-paced training modules (about 2 hours) before a school starts, plus "ask Abi" coaching slots.

3. Swap and finale organiser

- Shared calendar for the pair.
- Venue, transport and timing planner, with risk-assessment and coach-booking checklists.
- Family invitations and attendance.

4. Consent, registers and safeguarding

- Digital parental consent: taking part, photos/video, travel, data.
- Registers and sign-out to named adults.
- Incident and concern log that escalates to the school's DSL.
- Records of staff DBS checks and training.

5. Evaluation before and after

- **Child check-ins** on a shared iPad in "facilitator mode": baseline, after the performances, and a Year 7 follow-up. Large, friendly visual scales, about 5 minutes.
- Short parent and facilitator surveys.
- Comparison-school mode (check-ins only).
- Dashboards and one-click **impact reports** per school, pair, cluster, trust or council. These can be exported for governors, pupil premium statements, Ofsted conversations and funding bids.

6. Accounts, licences and billing (v1.0)

- Organisation hierarchy: trust or council, then cluster, school and group.
- Roles and permissions.
- Licence management and subscription billing, ready for after the project.

Architecture and approach

- Responsive web app, tablet-first for use in the room, and accessible to WCAG 2.2 AA. [TBC: Luke's preferred stack. Proposed: TypeScript/React front end, a typed API service, PostgreSQL.]

- **UK hosting** (e.g. a UK cloud region), with encryption in transit and at rest, and daily backups.
- **Data protection by design:**
 - a DPIA before any child data is collected;
 - pseudonymised child records (first name and initial, school ID);
 - data minimisation and role-based access;
 - retention limits;
 - compliance with the ICO Children's Code;
 - schools are data controllers and MLops is the processor, under a data processing agreement.
- **Security:** Cyber Essentials certification and an independent penetration test before v1.0.
- **Single sign-on** with school Google or Microsoft accounts, to reduce passwords.
- Open data used: DfE school data (locations, phase) and deprivation indices, for discovery and pairing rules.
- **No AI or machine learning** anywhere in the product.

Build plan (aligned to the payment milestones)

Release	Month	Contents	Tested with
Discovery	M1	User research with 6 heads or transition leads and 10 staff; service blueprint; clickable prototype; DPIA	Pilot schools
Alpha	M2	School and staff accounts, consent forms, registers, safeguarding log, iPad check-ins	Cohort 1 set-up and baseline
Beta	M4	Guided session runner (12 sessions), staff onboarding, swap and finale organiser, dashboards	Cohort 1 delivery (6 schools)
Release 2	M7	Discovery and pairing marketplace (profiles, map/search, rule-based suggestions, request/accept, cluster invites), staff messaging	Cohort 2 recruitment, plus at least 10 market-validation schools pairing themselves
v1.0	M11	Impact reports and exports, trust/council admin, licences and billing, accessibility audit, pen test, Cyber Essentials	Cohort 2, partners, pricing-test customers

Ways of working:

- Two-week sprints.
- Fortnightly show-and-tell with Abi and facilitators.
- Usability testing at each release.
- Analytics on product use, not on children.

Success measures for the app (Phase 1)

- At least 15 facilitators run sessions with the session runner; at least 80% rate it useful.
- At least 80% check-in completion; child check-ins take 6 minutes or less.
- At least 10 schools outside the pilot create profiles and request a pairing through the marketplace (release 2).
- Median time from a school signing up to an agreed pairing is 14 days or less.
- Impact reports produced for every pilot school, with at least 3 used in a real report or funding bid.
- No serious data incidents; pen test has no high-severity findings outstanding at v1.0.

Team and effort

- **Luke Marsden** (MLops director): product and technical lead, architecture, back end, security, pricing and billing. 100 days.
- **Full-stack developer / UX designer** (fixed-term MLops hire): 0.8 FTE from month 2 to month 11, about 170 days.
- **Abi and facilitators:** session content, video scripts, user testing.
- **External:** penetration test, accessibility audit, Cyber Essentials (in the "Other" costs).

Risks specific to the web app

Risk	Mitigation
Seen as an "online platform" and so out of scope	Always described as a staff tool; no child accounts; play is face to face; this guardrail is stated in Q7, Q8 and Q9
Schools won't adopt yet another system	Single sign-on; pre-filled profiles; tablet-first, room-ready plans; paper fallback
Not enough schools for the marketplace to work (cold start)	Seed with pilot clusters; secondary-led "cluster invites"; council and trust partnerships
Child data risk	DPIA, pseudonymisation, UK hosting, ICO Children's Code, pen test
Scope creep	Fixed release plan tied to milestones; features beyond v1.0 parked for Phase 2

Customers, go-to-market and monetisation (internal, feeds Q13)

Internal working document. It feeds Q13 (commercial potential), Q12 (value for money) and Q11 (who leads sales). Prices and numbers are **hypotheses to test in Phase 1** and are marked [TBC].

1. Who the customer is

Role	Who	Why they care	What they need from us
Economic buyer, route 1	Secondary headteacher (often via the deputy head for pastoral or the head of Year 7 / transition lead)	Owens transition. Year 7 attendance, behaviour and wellbeing dips land on them. They have an existing transition budget and want feeders working together	A ready-made, evidenced transition programme for all their feeders, and a report on incoming pupils
Economic buyer, route 2	Primary headteacher (with the school business manager signing off spend)	Year 6 wellbeing and transition worries; enrichment for disadvantaged pupils; must show pupil premium impact	A free or low-cost way to join, minimal staff burden, and an impact report for governors and pupil premium statements
Champion / user	Year 6 teacher, enrichment lead, TA, or a community artist working with the school	Wants something fun that works and is easy to run	The guided session runner, materials, a partner school, and coaching
Multi-school buyer	Multi-academy trust CEO or director of education; local authority transition, inclusion or early-help lead	Consistent transition across many schools; evidence for boards and commissioners	Licences for many schools, aggregate dashboards, training
Community buyer	Community arts and play groups; funders	Deliver in schools; win grants	Low-cost access, and impact reports for bids

Who we sell to first: secondary heads and transition leads, because one secondary brings 4-8 feeder primaries. Primary heads join through the cluster, and the marketplace lets them find partners themselves.

2. How schools pay

Typical budgets [TBC: validate in interviews]:

- secondary transition and pastoral budgets;
- pupil premium** (schools must publish how it is spent and its impact, which our impact reports support);
- primary enrichment and extra-curricular budgets;
- trust central budgets;
- council transition and early-help funds;
- community groups' grant funding.

Buying cycle: secondary places are offered on **1 March** (National Offer Day), so delivery runs from the spring term. Pitch in the **autumn**, when schools write their pupil premium strategies (published by 31 December). Small purchases under about £1,000 can be approved by a headteacher; larger ones need the school business manager or trust sign-off. So pricing per school should sit under the headteacher's sign-off threshold.

3. Product tiers and pricing (hypotheses to test)

Tier	Who	Includes	Price [TBC]
Free	Any school	School profile; discovery and pairing marketplace; sample session	£0 (builds the network)
School	A primary taking part	Guided 12-session programme, staff onboarding, swap/finalise organiser, consent and registers, check-ins, impact report	~£450 per school per year
Cluster	A secondary plus up to 6 feeders	All school features for the cluster, cluster dashboard, Year 7 follow-up, finale hosting kit	~£2,500 per cluster per year
Trust / council	MATs, local authorities	Multiple clusters, aggregate reporting, admin, priority support	Volume pricing from ~£350 per school per year
Community	Arts and play groups delivering in schools or the community	Session runner and impact reports	~£15 per month
Add-ons	Any	Live facilitator training days; delivery by trained local facilitators (partner network, with a revenue share)	~£600 per training day; delivery quoted per term

The main way we make money is the annual **Cluster** and **Trust/Council** licences. The free tier and "cluster invites" make the marketplace grow, and add-ons create income for local facilitators.

Price comparators (verified, see context/research/market.md)

- Boxall Profile Online: £325-£650 a year.
- Upshot impact tool: from £1,200 a year.
- External drama workshop days: £300-£625.
- Transition days: £597-£625.
- Thrive training: £1,780 per place.
- Commercial children's drama classes in Bristol: £276-£372 per child per term.
- Typical headteacher spending authority: £1,500-£10,000, so £450 per school and £2,500 per cluster fall under approval triggers.

Research suggestions to consider:

- a smaller cluster tier (~£1,500 for 3 schools);
- minimum sizes for trust and council deals;
- community tier at ~£25 a month.

Policy support

- DfE response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review (Nov 2025): "too many children find the transition hard"; an oracy framework, an enrichment entitlement and a KS3 Alliance on transition.
- Enrichment Framework (June 2026): arts and culture are a core category, Ofsted considers enrichment, and there is £132.5m of "Every Child Can" funding.
- Pupil premium (£1,515 per primary pupil in 2025-26; £1,550 in 2026-27) can fund "arts participation", attendance and wellbeing.

4. How we reach headteachers

- Bristol reference clusters (2027).** The 3 pilot clusters become case studies and referees, with heads speaking for us.

- **Secondary-led cluster invites.** Inside the product, one secondary invites its feeders, so every sale brings in about 5 more schools.
- **Trusts and the council.** Each trust or council deal reaches many schools. In Bristol:
 - trusts: Cabot Learning Federation (City Academy), E-ACT (Barton Hill Academy), Lighthouse Schools Partnership (Easton CofE), Amplify Education (Trinity, Orchard);
 - Bristol City Council's Belonging Strategy, which names transition as a priority;
 - the Bristol Education Partnership.
- **Headteacher networks.** Local heads' cluster meetings, regional primary and secondary heads' associations, and union and leadership conferences (e.g. NAHT events, the Schools & Academies Show) [TBC: pick 2].
- **Evidence-led content.** Each school's impact report is shareable, and the independent Phase 1 evaluation is published. Short case studies for governors and pupil premium reviewers.
- **Partners as channels.** Community arts organisations, youth theatres and university drama departments deliver Stage Swap in their area and recommend the licence.
- **DfE / UKRI.** We will work with them on wider adoption after Phase 1, as the competition requires.

Sales motion: founder-led sales by Luke and Abi in 2027–28, with a part-time schools partnership manager from Phase 2. The aim is to keep customer acquisition cost low through clusters and trusts rather than school-by-school selling.

5. Market size (rough)

- England has **3,458 state-funded secondaries and 16,712 primaries**, with about **640,000 Year 6 pupils** moving up each year. Free school meal eligibility peaks in Year 6 at 31.6% (DfE, Schools, pupils and their characteristics, January 2026; see [context/research/market.md](#)).
- At about £2,500 per cluster per year, the market is roughly **£8.5m a year** for clusters in England alone. That excludes Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and international licensing, and other transitions (starting school, moving into sixth form) or other face-to-face play programmes using the same app.

6. Illustrative revenue path [TBC: replace with tested numbers]

Year	Clusters (paying)	Approx. schools	Annual recurring revenue
2028 (Phase 2, Bristol + 2 cities)	15	~100	~£40k (plus Phase 2 funding)
2029	60	~400	~£160k
2030	200	~1,300	~£500k

Gross margin is high, because the main running costs are hosting, support and content. Delivery add-ons are low-margin but grow the facilitator network.

7. What Phase 1 must prove (market validation, months 9–11)

- At least 20 interviews with secondary and primary heads and transition leads: problem, budget, who buys, and when.
- Pricing tests with at least 10 schools, trusts and councils (willingness to pay at each tier).
- At least 10 schools outside the pilot sign up free and request a pairing through the marketplace (release 2).
- At least 3 letters of intent to buy a Cluster or Trust/Council licence in 2028.
- A Phase 2 plan naming at least 3 adopting organisations.

8. Competitive landscape (customer view)

Alternative	Why heads choose it	Why Stage Swap wins
Doing nothing beyond transition days	Free and familiar	Short, adult-led sessions; no relationships built; no evidence
The Linking Network (about 26,000 children, 545 schools a year; free in Bristol via Bridges for Communities)	Established, free, values-led	Teacher-led classroom linking in curriculum time, not built around the move to a shared secondary or child-led play. We position as complementary and will coordinate with Bridges
Paid drama clubs and youth theatre	High quality	Cost; selective; not linked to transition
Generic survey and impact tools	Already licensed	Not tied to delivery; no pairing; no child-friendly check-ins

Project Impact

This is a questionnaire in IFS about the organisation and the expected impact on the economy, society and environment. The exact questions only appear once the application is started in IFS. These are prepared answers to likely questions, to adapt in the form. [TBC: Abi, paste the actual questions here once the application is started in IFS, so we can tailor the answers]

About the organisation

- MLOPS CONSULTING LTD, incorporated 21 May 2020, England & Wales, company number 12615486.
- 1 employee (the director) before the project. The project creates 3 fixed-term part-time roles (coordinator, research assistant, designer/developer), plus Abi's role and about 20 sessional facilitator roles.
- Turnover: [TBC: Luke].
- Has the business received public funding before? Yes, an Innovate UK grant [TBC: details].

Expected impact

- *Social*: about 180 Year 6 children, plus their families, in Bristol communities experiencing socio-economic deprivation. Expected effects: smoother transition to secondary, better wellbeing, more confidence and communication, and stronger belonging and community cohesion. Families do more play at home.
- *Economic*: new jobs during the project. Phase 2 and commercialisation would bring new revenue from school, trust and local authority licences. A trained facilitator workforce, built with universities.
- *Environmental*: small. Performances are local, travel is on foot or by shared coach, props and materials are reused, and the hardware footprint is minimal (6 iPads).
- *Equality, diversity and inclusion*: free provision targeted at areas of deprivation, with SEND support and adapted materials budgeted. Clubs are opt-in, and children of all abilities and confidence levels are welcome.
- *Knowledge sharing*: core session ideas are shared openly with publicly funded settings, while training and the toolkit are licensed. Evaluation findings will be shared with UKRI, the DfE, schools and community partners.

Open items and submission checklist

Deadline: Wednesday 28 October 2026, 11:00 UK time. Target: rewrite done by **21 Oct**, final checks **26 Oct**, submit **27 Oct**.

1. Gaps to fill (search the files for TBC)

Abi

- ☐ Your surname, and the name (is "Stage Swap" OK?).
- ☐ Your experience: how many amateur dramatics clubs, for how many years, where. Your school role. Your work in areas of deprivation (the voice-note transcript was unclear here). Your master's title and institution. (Q7, Q11, project summary, Q7 appendix)
- ☐ 1-2 named examples of local or national children's drama groups or transition programmes, so Q9 shows we know the "state of the art".
- ☐ **Schools:** the 3 pairs (6 primaries that feed 3 secondaries) and their postcodes, plus reserve schools. Ideally a letter of support from each (template: letter-of-support-template.md). Rough target: letters by 23 Oct.
- ☐ **Partners:** names of the Easton and Barton Hill groups. Confirm they're happy to co-design and co-deliver cohort 2 for about £8,000 each.
- ☐ **UWE:** a contact for recruiting student facilitators.
- ☐ **Neuroscience-of-play advisor:** name, a one-line bio, and agreement to 10 days at £500/day.
- ☐ **Evaluation partner:** a university team or independent evaluator. Ideally someone with ethics approval routes for child research. The budget is £34,800 for about 45 days.
- ☐ Hannah: does she want to be named on the advisory group?
- ☐ Q1 themes: also tick "Enhancing the Quality of Play"? Q3 permits: "Yes" or "In process"?
- ☐ "How did you hear about the competition?" (project details).
- ☐ Rewrite every answer in your own voice. Innovate UK warns that AI-sounding text loses marks. Use your stories, e.g. the girl power Cinderella, and what changed for children in your clubs.

Luke

- ☐ MLops turnover for the last financial year (IFS organisation details).
- ☐ Your 2-3 line track record for Q11, and details of the previous Innovate UK project (name, year).
- ☐ Confirm the day rate charged at cost (£480/day) and 90 days.
- ☐ Review the IFS terms and conditions as MLops director. They are non-negotiable.
- ☐ Confirm the salary assumptions: Abi £48k FTE pro rata 0.6; coordinator and research assistant £32k; designer/developer £48k; 22% on-costs.

Both

- ☐ Is the budget of £330,741 ex-VAT (£396,889 inc VAT) OK? It rose from £349,920 inc VAT to resource the web app build (developer 0.8 FTE x 10 months, Luke 100 days, pen test, accessibility audit, videos). Edit budget.py, then run `python3 budget.py --md > application/finances.md` and `python3 appendices/build.py` so every figure stays in sync. **Q12 quotes figures by hand, so update it too.**
- ☐ Check the outcome measures with the evaluation partner and advisor (Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale, School Concerns Questionnaire, etc.).
- ☒ Evidence citations verified and added (see context/research/evidence.md).
- ☒ £310 per child checked: below commercial Bristol drama classes (£276-£372 a term).

From the research (07 Oct, see context/research/)

- ☐ **Candidate clusters to approach:**
- A:** City Academy Bristol (Cabot Learning Federation) with Barton Hill Academy (E-ACT; 74% free school meals, 82% EAL, IMD decile 1) and **Whitehall Primary** (23% free school meals, 15% EAL, decile 6). This is the genuinely contrasting pair. Easton CofE is too similar to Barton Hill (55% / 87%, decile 1). See context/research/socioeconomic.md.
- B:** Trinity Academy with Stoke Park Primary (its designated feeder) plus one more.
- C:** Orchard School with Little Mead (decile 3) and Horfield CofE (decile 8). Good contrast.
- B's two primaries are both about 31% free school meals, so a weak contrast.
- Bristol secondaries mostly have no formal feeders (each primary supplies about 10-13% of a secondary's Year 7), so we recruit after **National Offer Day (1 March)** and give priority to children offered the host secondary. Check with each school how many of their Year 6 usually go there.
- ☐ **Partners:** contact Travelling Light Theatre (Barton Hill: youth@travellinglighttheatre.org.uk) and Threefold Children's Theatre (Easton Community Centre: contact@upourstreet.org.uk). These are most likely the groups Abi found. Also consider acta (Lockleaze Kids Theatre) and Felix Road Adventure Playground (play expertise).
- ☐ **Bridges for Communities** runs The Linking Network in Bristol, free to schools. Contact them, position Stage Swap as complementary, and ideally get a supportive line.
- ☐ **Bristol City Council:** the Belonging Strategy names "improving educational transition points". Ask for a letter of support.
- ☐ **Students:** UWE volunteering team (volunteering@uwe.ac.uk) and the University of Bristol applied theatre unit.
- ☐ **Measures:** a short validated staff-rated communication scale for ages 10-11 wasn't found. Ask the evaluation partner (or consider ImpactEd's validated measures).
- ☐ **Do not cite** the government screen-time guidance (March 2026) for Year 6: it covers under-5s only.

Scope check with Innovate UK (do this first, this week)

The web app is now central to the bid, and the competition excludes "online platforms" as the way children play. Ask Innovate UK to confirm the scope **in writing** before we finalise. They answer scope questions at support@iuk.ukri.org / 0300 321 4357. Draft email:

> Subject: Scope query: competition 2573, Cfl Innovation in play to improve child outcomes

>

> Hello, we are preparing an application to competition 2573 and would be grateful for confirmation on scope.

> Our intervention is face-to-face, child-led drama play: Year 6 children in two paired primary schools devise their own performances in free after-school clubs, then perform for each other and at the secondary school they will both attend, to support the primary-to-secondary transition. Children never use a screen to play.

> To make this replicable, we would also build a web application used **only by school staff and facilitators**. It helps schools find and pair with a partner school, guides staff through running each session, manages consent, registers and safeguarding, and collects short before/after wellbeing questionnaires (children answer a few questions on a shared tablet with an adult). It uses no AI.

> Could you confirm that this staff-facing tool falls within the competition's allowance for technology that supports "administration, monitoring, communication, evaluation, safeguarding or operational delivery", and is not considered an excluded "online platform"?

> Many thanks, Abi [surname], on behalf of MLOPS CONSULTING LTD

Added after the assessor-style review (07 Oct)

- ☐ **Feeder share:** for each pair, roughly what share of each primary's Year 6 goes on to the host secondary? Ideally pick pairs where most do. (Q7)
- ☒ **Need data:** done. Lawrence Hill ward has 6 of 9 neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% (IMD 2025); Bristol free school meals 30.2% vs 25.7% in England.
- ☐ **Comparators in Q9:** check Shakespeare Schools Festival, National Theatre Connections, Travelling Light, Upshot, Makerble and ImpactEd are described fairly. Swap in better local examples if you know them.
- ☐ **Trade mark / name check** for "Stage Swap". (Q9)
- ☐ **Abi's employer:** agreement to the 3-day MLOps role, and whether her school would be a pilot school (conflict of interest). (Q10)
- ☐ **Safeguarding:** Abi's DSL Level 3 training (or plan to do it in month 1).
- ☐ **Phase 2 cost estimate** and scaled cost per child. (Q12)
- ☐ **Luke's day rate basis** (salary plus on-costs divided by working days). (Q12)
- ☒ **Market figures:** verified. 3,458 secondaries, 16,712 primaries, about 640,000 Year 6 pupils (DfE, 2026).
- ☐ **Named prospective customers** (2-3 schools, trusts or councils) for Q13.
- ☐ **Third pair:** which partner co-delivers it in cohort 2? (Q11)
- ☐ **Comparison schools:** 2-3 similar schools willing to do the check-ins only. (Q8)

Added for the web app and go-to-market (07 Oct, revision 2)

- ☐ **Luke:** preferred tech stack and hosting (web-app-plan.md proposes TypeScript/React, an API service, PostgreSQL, a UK cloud region).
- ☐ **Pricing hypotheses** in go-to-market.md and Q13: are about £450 per school, £2,500 per cluster, £350 per school for trusts/councils and £15/month for community groups sensible starting points?
- ☐ **Named routes to heads:** Bristol City Council / education partnership contacts, 1-2 trusts, heads' networks or conferences to target.
- ☒ **The Linking Network** comparison verified (see context/research/competitors.md).
- ☐ **Revenue path** (15 / 60 / 200 clusters): replace with your own view.
- ☐ **Budget:** accept the higher total (£396,889 inc VAT), or trim it (e.g. developer 0.6 FTE, fewer facilitator hours) back towards £350k.

2. Abi's step-by-step IFS submission checklist

- ☐ Go to the competition page, choose **Start new application**, and create an IFS account in your name.
- ☐ When asked for your organisation, choose **business** and use the **Companies House lookup for 12615486 (MLOPS CONSULTING LTD)**. You are applying on behalf of MLOps. Luke may need to confirm you're authorised to.
- ☐ **Project details:** paste the title, then the summary, public description and location from 00-project-details.md. Start date 1 Feb 2027; duration 12 months.
- ☐ **Q1-Q6:** from 01-unscored-q1-q6.md.
- ☐ **Q7-Q13:** paste the text between the markers in each qNN-*.md file. Paste plain text and check the IFS word counter agrees with ours.
- ☐ Upload the appendices:
- Q7: appendices/q07-theory-of-change.pdf (mandatory)
- Q10: appendices/q10-project-plan.pdf (mandatory)
- Q12: appendices/q12-costs.pdf (optional, recommended)
- ☐ **Finances:**
- Enter each cost line from finances.md **excluding VAT**, under the right category.
- Say **VAT registered: Yes**.
- Check IFS shows a total including VAT of **£396,889**, which is under £500,000. **IFS does not check this**.
- ☐ **Organisation details:** size (micro), turnover (from Luke), employees (1), project postcode.
- ☐ **Payment milestones:** enter all 12 **separately**, not clustered, with the deliverables, success criteria, month and cost from finances.md. Check they add up to **£291,600**.
- ☐ **Project Impact:** complete it using project-impact.md. It must be done before you can submit.
- ☐ Agree to the terms and conditions, after Luke has reviewed them.
- ☐ Do a final read of the whole application in IFS: no links anywhere, and no "TBC" left.
- ☐ **Submit by Tuesday 27 October.** If anything breaks, call Innovate UK Customer Support on **0300 321 4357** (9-12, 2-5) *before* the deadline. They can't help afterwards.
- ☐ Save the confirmation email and a PDF of the submitted application.

3. After submission

- Decision by 4 Dec 2026 (5pm). If successful, project setup must be completed within 30 days: bank details, finance checks, monitoring officer, and the contract signed by MLOps.
- Get employment contracts ready: Abi on a fixed-term, part-time contract; the coordinator, research assistant and developer as new fixed-term hires. Also subcontracts with the evaluation partner, community groups and advisor.

4. Competition "must have" checklist: where each item is evidenced

Requirement	Where	Status
Clearly identified target audience, with evidenced need	Q7 (Year 6, areas of deprivation, paid-for drama); project summary	Needs local data (see the review items above)
Clear theory of change	Q7 + Q7 appendix page 1	Done
Feasible delivery model	Q7, Q10, Q10 appendix (Gantt, milestones)	Done

Robust monitoring and evaluation of child-level outcomes, including learning	Q8 (measures incl. speech, language and communication, Year 7 attendance; comparison group), Q7 appendix page 2	Done; measures to confirm with the evaluation partner
Strong safeguarding	Q10, Q10 risk register	Done; MLops safeguarding policy to be written in month 1
Established partnerships for testing, delivery and scaling	Q7, Q11, Q13, location section	Weak until letters arrive. Schools, Easton/Barton Hill groups, UWE
Tangible output (tool, framework, service model)	Q8 deliverables D1-D5; web-app-plan.md	Done
Credible route to market / embedding	Q13, go-to-market.md (headteacher buyers, cluster licences, channels)	Done; pricing to test
Readiness to work with delivery partners	Q11, Q13	Done
Commitment to work with UKRI and the DfE on adoption	Q13 ("We will work with UKRI and DfE colleagues")	Done
Not screen-based / no apps / no AI	Q7, Q8, project summary, public description	Done; toolkit is adult-facing, iPad check-ins only, "uses no AI"
Freely chosen play	Q7 (opt-in, child-led), Q7 appendix	Done
Home learning environment	Q7 (family sessions, games/songs to take home, family play as headline outcome), Q7 appendix	Done; strengthened after review
≥50% R&D	Q12 ("about 90% R&D")	Done
Lead applicant does most of the work	finances (labour 58%, subcontractors 19%)	Done

Letter of support template

Letters are not a required upload, but the competition wants "established partnerships". A short letter from each school or partner lets us say "confirmed" in Q7, Q10, Q11 and Q13 rather than "identified". Abi can send this to headteachers and partner organisations and ask them to adapt it, put it on letterhead and sign it. **We need them by 23 October 2026.**

The application can't contain links, and there may be no upload slot for letters. If there isn't one, we quote them in the answers (e.g. "6 primaries and 3 secondaries have confirmed in writing...") and keep the letters on file for project setup.

[Letterhead of school / organisation]

[Date]

To: Innovate UK / UKRI, Contracts for Innovation: Innovation in Play to Improve Child Outcomes

Letter of support: Stage Swap (lead applicant MLOPS CONSULTING LTD)

I am writing on behalf of [school / organisation name] to support the Stage Swap application led by Abi [surname] and MLOPS CONSULTING LTD.

[For a primary school:] If the project is funded, we will host a free after-school Stage Swap drama club for our Year 6 pupils in the summer term 2027 and again in the autumn term 2027. We are paired with [partner primary], and both our schools feed into [secondary school]. We will:

- provide a room and a named staff link;
- help recruit children and families;
- take part in the swap performance with our partner school;
- support the short wellbeing and transition check-ins.

[For a secondary school:] If the project is funded, we will host the joint finale performances for our feeder primaries [names] in July and December 2027, and support the follow-up check-ins with participating pupils in their first term of Year 7.

[For a community organisation:] If the project is funded, we will take part in co-designing the programme, provide [venue / facilitators], and co-deliver the second cohort in autumn 2027 as a subcontractor.

We support this project because [one or two sentences in your own words, e.g. why transition is a priority for our pupils, or why free creative play matters in our community].

Yours faithfully,

[Name]

[Role]

[School / organisation, address]

[Contact email / phone]

Research: what we found and how it changed the bid

Method. On 7 Oct 2026, five research agents searched the web separately on five topics: the evidence base, competitors, market and pricing, Bristol pilot clusters, and socioeconomic data. They used official sources where possible (DfE, ONS, Bristol City Council, EEF, peer-reviewed papers) and tagged each finding by confidence. Their raw output follows this section, unedited. Two other inputs were Chrome/DuckDuckGo checks of the competition pages and an assessor-style review of the draft.

Caveat. The figures have been checked against sources, but please spot-check anything you'll rely on, especially items tagged *unverified*. No schools or partner organisations have been contacted yet.

Findings that changed the bid

#	Finding (source)	What changed	Where
1	The Linking Network already pairs classes from different communities: about 26,000 children a year, free in Bristol via Bridges for Communities (competitors)	The novelty claim was narrowed to pairing by shared destination secondary , child-devised play, swap plus finale at the secondary, and the staff app. Stage Swap is positioned as complementary, and we will coordinate with Bridges	Q9, Q13, go-to-market
2	Transition drama exists (Half Moon, Belgrade "Big School", In2 Darlington), but it is delivered by professionals and is not child-devised (competitors)	Named as the nearest state of the art	Q9
3	Bristol secondaries mostly have no formal feeder primaries; each primary supplies about 10–13% of a Year 7 intake (bristol-pilot)	Clubs recruit after National Offer Day (1 March) , with priority to children offered the host secondary	Q7, Q10, summary
4	Year 6 children learn their secondary on 1 March, so the autumn cohort can't be a transition cohort (market)	Cohort 2 is a partner-led replicability test ; transition follow-up only for cohort 1	Q8, Q10, Q7 appendix
5	Barton Hill Academy (74% free school meals, 82% EAL, IMD decile 1) and Easton CoFE (55%, 87%, decile 1) are not contrasting. Whitehall Primary (23%, 15%, decile 6) is (socioeconomic)	Candidate cluster A changed to City Academy with Barton Hill Academy and Whitehall Primary	Q7, summary, Q7 appendix, OPEN-ITEMS
6	57.7% child poverty after housing costs in Lawrence Hill; 40.8% persistent absence at City Academy vs 23.4% England; the most deprived areas feel less belonging (45% vs 65%) (socioeconomic)	Used as the evidence of need	Q7, summary, Q7 appendix table
7	About a third of 10–11 year olds are worried about transition (Moore et al., 2021); only 38% keep their best friend (Rice et al., 2015); absence rises from Year 6 to 7 (DfE) (evidence)	Replaced the "[TBC: reference]" placeholders	Q7, Q7 appendix
8	EEF: arts participation +3 months; oral language +6 months (evidence)	Theory of change and evidence section	Q7, Q7 appendix
9	Disadvantaged pupils do fewer extra-curricular activities (46% vs 66%; Sutton Trust 2024) (evidence)	Need	Q7, Q7 appendix
10	Validated measures: Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (ages 8–15), School Concerns Questionnaire (Year 6–7), PSSM belonging scale. No validated short staff-rated communication scale for this age (evidence)	Measures named; the communication measure is to be developed with the evaluation partner	Q8, Q7 appendix
11	The government screen-time guidance (March 2026) covers under-5s only (evidence)	Not cited for Year 6	(removed risk)
12	3,458 state secondaries, 16,712 primaries, about 640,000 Year 6 pupils (DfE 2026) (market)	Market size: about £8.5m a year in cluster licences	Q13, go-to-market
13	Pupil premium (£1,515 per primary pupil) can fund "arts participation"; the curriculum review response promises a KS3 transition alliance; the 2026 Enrichment Framework (market)	"Policy support" in Q13; pitch timing set to autumn	Q13, go-to-market
14	Comparators: Boxall Profile Online £325–£650 a year; Upshot from £1,200 a year; drama days £300–£625; head spending authority £1,500–£10,000 (market, competitors)	£450 per school and £2,500 per cluster confirmed as plausible	Q13, go-to-market
15	Commercial children's drama classes in Bristol cost £276–£372 a term; subsidised youth theatre is about £58 (competitors)	£310 per child delivery cost benchmarked	Q12, Q9
16	Likely partners: Travelling Light Theatre (Barton Hill), Threefold Children's Theatre (Easton); UWE volunteering; Playing Out / Felix Road (bristol-pilot, competitors)	Named as partners to confirm	Q11, location, OPEN-ITEMS
17	Bristol's Belonging Strategy names educational transitions as a priority (bristol-pilot)	Need and route to the council	Q7, go-to-market
18	Innovate UK answers scope questions (support@iuk.ukri.org) (competition pages)	Draft scope-query email about the staff-only web app	OPEN-ITEMS

Raw research files (below, in full)

- evidence.md: transition research, EEF, drama and play evidence, measures, screen guidance, access gaps.
- competitors.md: school linking, drama festivals, transition drama, Bristol youth theatre, software and prices.
- market.md: DfE school counts, admissions timing, pupil premium, policy, procurement, price comparators.
- bristol-pilot.md: deprivation, candidate clusters and trusts, transition initiatives, partner groups, universities, play organisations.
- socioeconomic.md: school-level free school meals, EAL and absence data, ward child poverty, Bristol vs England, belonging data, contrast within pairs.

Raw research 1: evidence base and measures

Tags: [VP] = checked against the primary source text. [VS] = checked against a reliable secondary summary or abstract only. [U] = not verified.

1. Primary to secondary transition

- **STARS (UCL) report.** Rice, F., Frederickson, N., Shelton, K., McManus, C., Riglin, L. & Ng-Knight, T. (2015). *Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school*. Nuffield Foundation/UCL. https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/STARS_report.pdf [VP]
- The study followed about 2,000 pupils in South-East England from the end of Year 6 to the end of Year 7.
- "Moving from primary to secondary school involves a degree of apprehension for most pupils... A significant minority... experience... lower grades, poor attendance and increased anxiety."
- The top concerns were getting lost, being bullied, discipline and detentions, homework, and losing old friends. Worry about getting lost faded in the first term. Worry about friends, homework and discipline "did not go down until the end of year 7."
- Friendships changed a lot. "Only 38% of pupils kept the same best friend", and this fell to 28% by the end of Year 7. Losing old friends was pupils' "main concern" throughout Year 7.
- The report defines success as (1) academic and behavioural involvement and (2) "feeling a sense of belonging to school". Pupils with high concerns "do less well".
- Primary-school strategies that build links and continuity with the secondary school (for example, bridging units) were "related to lower school anxiety".
- **Rice et al. (2021).** "Pupil mental health, concerns and expectations about secondary school as predictors of adjustment...". *School Mental Health*, 13, 279–298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-021-09415-z> [VS: abstract via Crossref] Pupils' concerns about secondary school were "specifically associated with loneliness" at the end of Year 7.
- **Moore, G., Angel, L., Brown, R., van Godwin, J., Hallingberg, B. & Rice, F. (2021).** "Socio-economic status, mental health difficulties and feelings about transition to secondary school among 10–11 year olds in Wales". *Child Indicators Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-021-09815-2> [VS: abstract]
- In a national sample of 2,218 children, "about a third... reported being quite or very worried".
- The main worries were bullying and the effect on existing friendships.
- "Children from poorer backgrounds... were significantly more likely to report worries."
- **Evangelou, M., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008).** *What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school?* DCSF Research Brief RB019. <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/8618/7/DCSF-RB019.pdf> [VP]
- 84% of pupils felt prepared and 16% did not.
- "Worrying about whether they can make friends" was associated with a poor transition.
- Moving with primary friends and the friendliness of older pupils helped.
- Of low-SES children, 58% "did not settle in very well", compared with 39% of high-SES children.
- **West, P., Sweeting, H. & Young, R. (2010).** "Transition matters...". *Research Papers in Education*, 25(1), 21–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520802308677> [VS] A poorer transition predicted more depression and lower attainment at age 15, with smaller effects still visible at 18/19.
- **Zhou, M. et al. (2026).** "Well-being decline during adolescence: school transition as a predominant driver beyond age progression". *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.70154> [VS: abstract]
- The study had 20,910 participants and was carried out in South Australia.
- Wellbeing fell in every domain after transition, the fall lasted more than 2 years, and it was "largely attributable to the school transition rather than age".
- **Year 7 attendance (DfE, 2025).** *Pupil absence in schools in England 2024/25*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2024-25> [VP]
- Absence rose by 0.99 percentage points from Year 6 to Year 7 (2022/23 to 2023/24) and by 0.66 pp (2023/24 to 2024/25). By contrast, "during transitions between primary year groups, the absence rate drops."
- The Year 7 absence rate was 6.94% in 2023/24.
- **Beynon, K. (2025).** "The relationship between absence in Year 6 and Year 7". FFT Education Datalab. <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2025/07/the-relationship-between-absence-in-year-6-and-year-7/> [VP] Year 6 and Year 7 absence correlate at $r = 0.63$. Pupils with 13% or more absence in Year 6 were "more likely than not to be persistently absent in Year 7."

2. EEF evidence

- **EEF Teaching & Learning Toolkit, "Arts participation"** (updated July 2021). <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/arts-participation> [VP]
- Rating: **+3 months; very low cost; moderate evidence; 80 studies.** The entry covers "dance, drama, music..." and includes after-school clubs.
- "Wider benefits such as more positive attitudes to learning and increased well-being have also consistently been reported."
- Extra-curricular arts "can be subject to financial barriers for pupils from deprived backgrounds."
- **EEF Toolkit, "Oral language interventions"** (updated May 2025). <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions> [VP]
- Rating: **+6 months; very low cost; high/extensive evidence; 188 studies.**
- "The higher the proportion of disadvantaged pupils taking part, the more effective."
- "Some studies report improved pupil attitudes, attention, self-regulation or confidence."
- Caveat: the impact figure is mainly measured on reading, and "formal public speaking... not explicitly the focus".
- **EEF/RSA "Learning about Culture", Speech Bubbles trial** (drama and storytelling at KS1; UCL IOE/BIT; completed 2021). <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/speech-bubbles> [VP]
- The result was **–1 month** on reading in an RCT of 1,006 pupils.
- This is honest context: drama aimed at attainment has mixed RCT evidence, which is why Stage Swap targets wellbeing and transition outcomes instead.
- I found **no EEF trial of a drama-based transition programme [U]**.

3. Drama and social play at ages 10–11

- **van Berkel, A.J.M. & Bosman, A.M.T. (2023).** "Sociable in someone else's shoes: A review of drama as social skills training for elementary school children". *IJRES*, 9(1), 165–187. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijres.3037> [VP]
- This meta-analysis found an average effect of $d = 1.174$ on social skills, and 0.830 for children over 10.
- It also cites Batdı & Elaldı (2020), which found $d = 0.93$, with "the highest effect size... in primary school" for social communication skills.
- The authors say "more empirical research... is needed". Most of the studies are small and Turkish.
- **Frydman, J.S. et al. (2023).** Scoping review of school-based drama therapy for socio-emotional skills (early childhood). *Early Childhood Education Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-023-01471-1> [VS] Of 16 studies, the authors describe the evidence as "emerging".
- **Systematic review of dramatherapy for 8–18-year-olds** (2023). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10501692/> [VS: authors not confirmed] It included 15 papers, only 3 of which were controlled. Pre/post effect sizes ranged from $d = 0.17$ to more than 2.

4. Measures for ages 10–11

- **Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale.** Liddle, I. & Carter, G.F.A. (2015). *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(2), 174-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2015.1008409> [VS]
- The validation sample was 1,849 children aged 8-15.
- The scale has 12 scored items (range 12-60) plus 3 social-desirability items.
- $\alpha = .82$; one-week test-retest $r = .75$; correlation with WHO-5 $r = .74$.
- Caveat: an Irish validation (2026) found poor 10-week test-retest reliability (ICC .35-.38). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-026-00300-1> [VS]
- **School Concerns Questionnaire.** Thomasson, R., Field, L., O'Donnell, C. & Woods, S. (2006), Buckinghamshire County Council. [VS: original not seen]
- Validated by Rice, F., Frederickson, N. & Seymour, J. (2011), *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709910X519333> [VS: abstract]
- The sample was 147 Year 6 and 263 Year 7 pupils.
- The authors call it "a simple to complete, reliable, and valid tool".
- **School belonging: PSSM-P (9 items).**
- Wagle, R. et al. (2018). *School Psychology International*, 39(6), 568-586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034318803670> [VP] The scale was unidimensional in primary samples from the US, UK and China.
- Castro-Kemp, S. et al. (2020). *School Mental Health*, 12, 284-295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-019-09349-7> [VS] The sample was 522 London primary pupils. The authors note that permission from Goodenow may be needed.
- **Teacher-rated transition and belonging: START (4 items).** This is a parent/teacher measure from STARS (Rice et al., 2015; 2021). Year 6 teacher ratings predicted Year 7 adjustment [VP].
- **Teacher-rated speech, language and communication**
- Progression Tools for ages 9-10 and 11-12 (The Communication Trust / Speech and Language UK). These are teacher-friendly but **I found no published psychometric validation [U]**.
- Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit (Mercer, Warwick & Ahmed, 2017, *Learning and Instruction*, 48, 51-60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2016.10.005>) was developed and validated for ages 11-12 [VS]. It is task-based, not a short rating scale.
- **I could not verify a short validated teacher-rated oracy scale for 10-11-year-olds.**

5. Screen guidance and declining play

- **DfE/DHSC (26 Mar 2026).** "New screen time guidance for parents of under-5s". <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-screen-time-guidance-for-parents-of-under-5s> [VP]
- Under-2s: avoid screens except for shared activities. Ages 2-5: no more than 1 hour a day.
- "98% of two-year-olds watching screens every day."
- The DfE blog adds that screens "can crowd out... physical play, creative activities and time spent talking with parents." <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/new-advice-for-parents-on-screen-time-for-young-children>
- The guidance is informed by the EYSTAG report (Viner & de Souza, co-chairs). **This guidance covers under-5s only, not Year 6.**
- **Raising the Nation Play Commission / Centre for Young Lives (June 2025).** *Everything to Play For*. <https://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/news-centre/everything-to-play-for> [VS: press release]
- "Outdoor play has declined by 50% in a generation."
- 55% of parents say their youngest child plays outside less than they did.

6. Unequal access to arts and extra-curricular activities

- **Sutton Trust (Montacute, Holt-White & Carter, Sept 2024).** *Life Lessons 2024*. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Life-Lessons-2024-1.pdf> [VP] Disadvantaged pupils were "less likely to take up extra-curricular activities..." (46% compared to 66%)."
- **Sutton Trust (2014).** *Extra-curricular inequality*. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/enrichment-brief-private-tuition-extracurricular-activities/> [VS]
- Participation was 84% in social groups ABC1 and 69% in C2DE.
- Dance or drama was 15% overall.
- **Mak, H.W. & Fancourt, D. (2021).** *PLOS ONE*, 16(2), e0246936. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246936> [VS: abstract] In DCMS Taking Part data, there is a "social gradient across all three activities [incl. performing arts] for out-of-school engagement, but not for in-school."
- **Cultural Learning Alliance (2025).** *Report Card 2025*. https://media.museumsassociation.org/app/uploads/2025/04/01074603/Cultural-Learning-Alliance_Report-Card-2025.pdf [VS] Among 11-19-year-olds, 56% in the two most deprived fifths get creative or cultural extra-curricular opportunities, compared with 76% in the most affluent fifth (DCMS youth survey).

Ready-to-use sentences for the bid

- Most Year 6 pupils feel apprehensive about secondary school, and losing old friends remains their main worry throughout Year 7 (Rice et al., 2015).
- Only 38% of pupils keep the same best friend across the move to secondary school (Rice et al., 2015).
- About a third of 10-11-year-olds are quite or very worried about transition, and children from poorer backgrounds worry more (Moore et al., 2021).
- A difficult transition predicts more depression and lower attainment years later (West et al., 2010), and the drop in wellbeing after transition can last more than two years (Zhou et al., 2026).
- In England, absence rises at the move from Year 6 to Year 7, whereas it falls between primary year groups (DfE, 2025).
- Activities that link primary and secondary schools are associated with lower school anxiety (Rice et al., 2015).
- Arts participation, including drama, adds an average of three months' progress at very low cost, with consistently reported wellbeing benefits (EEF, 2021).
- Oral language approaches add six months' progress and work best where more disadvantaged pupils take part (EEF, 2025).
- Drama-based programmes show large effects on primary-age children's social skills (van Berkel & Bosman, 2023).
- Disadvantaged pupils are much less likely to take part in extra-curricular activities (46% vs 66%) (Sutton Trust, 2024).

Raw research 2: competitors and novelty

Researched 7 Oct 2026 using web search and fetches of the pages linked below. The figures come from those pages. Prices may be out of date. **[unverified]** marks claims we could not check against a primary source.

Comparison table

Offer	What it is	Pairs schools?	Child-led?	Transition-focused?	Measures outcomes?	Cost to schools/families	Source
The Linking Network: Schools Linking (national)	Year-long, curriculum-time pairing of two classes from demographically different schools. Built on intergroup contact theory.	Yes (class to class)	No: teacher-led lessons on identity, diversity, community and equality	No	Yes: NFER evaluation for DfE (2011), Coventry University (2017-18), annual impact reports	Varies by area. Often free to schools through DfE, MHCLG and Pears funding	thelinkingnetwork.org.uk
Bristol School Linking (Bridges for Communities, part of The Linking Network)	The same model in Bristol since Nov 2020. Years 4, 5 and 8. Visits to Arncliffe, SS Great Britain and RWA.	Yes	No	No	Teacher feedback, plus the network's evaluation	Free apart from coach travel	bridgesforcommunities.com/programmes/bristol-school-linking/
Coram Shakespeare Schools Festival	Schools perform abridged Shakespeare in professional theatres alongside other local schools. Ages 8-18.	No (schools share a venue only)	No: abridged scripts, directed by teachers	No	Some impact reporting [unverified detail]	About £1,139 + VAT per state school (2020-era figure). Film festival £199 + VAT	shakespeareschools.org
Primary Shakespeare Company (London)	Practitioners work with primary schools. Each school performs one act of a play at a shared festival. About 150 Year 6 pupils at the Harrow venue.	Clusters schools for one show	No	No (Year 6, but not about transition)	[unverified]	[not found]	primaryshakespearecompany.org
National Theatre Connections	New plays performed by youth companies and schools at partner theatres, then at the NT.	No	Partly (youth companies stage commissioned scripts)	No	[unverified]	[not found]	nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/young-people/connections/
NT Let's Play	Free scripted plays, CPD and toolkits for state primaries	No	No (scripted)	No	[unverified]	Free to state primaries	nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/primary/lets-play/
Half Moon Theatre: Year 6 Transitions (London)	5 weeks of drama in the summer term. Pupils' stories are made into forum theatre by professional staff.	No (separate primaries)	Partly	Yes	Yes: Tower Hamlets evaluation report	[not found]	halfmoon.org.uk/creative-learning/early-years-primary/year-6-transitions/
Others delivered by professionals: Shakespeare's Globe Transition Project (with a new Year 7 cohort), Theatre Peckham Positive Transitions (4 Southwark primaries), Bigfoot Arts Transition Play in a Day	Single-school transition drama or creative workshops	No	Partly	Yes	Mostly [unverified]	Funded or paid	shakespearesglobe.com; theatrepeckham.co.uk; bigfootartseducation.co.uk
Belgrade Theatre "Big	Actors tour a transition play	No	No (children watch)	Yes	Yes: teacher-	[not found]	school-education.ec.europa.eu (article)

School" (Coventry)	to about 35 primaries each June, reaching about 1,800 children				reported evaluation [dated]		
In2 music project (Darlington, 2020)	Back Chat Brass worked with Year 6 pupils from 4 feeder primaries and Year 7 pupils at their secondary	Feeder cluster (4 primaries and 1 secondary)	No	Yes	Yes: Ward et al. 2021, <i>Arts Education Policy Review</i>	Council-funded	tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10632913.2021.1903640
Creative Youth Network (Bristol)	Alternative learning provision, including transition support from Year 6 up, for pupils at risk of exclusion. 77 pupils in 19 schools in 2024.	No	Partly	Partly	Arts Award	Commissioned	creativyouthnetwork.org.uk
Travelling Light Youth Theatre (Barton Hill)	4 weekly groups for ages 6-16 at Wellspring Settlement. Also "Play in a Week" devised projects for schools.	No	Partly	No	[unverified]	£58 per term (8 sessions). Bursaries available. Louder Than Words is free.	travellinglighttheatre.org.uk/projects/youth-theatre
Threefold (Easton Community Centre / Eastside Community Trust)	Co-created community youth theatre: Company 1 for ages 7-10, Company 2 for 10-12, Company 3 for 13-17	No	Yes ("over to you", co-created)	No	[unverified]	Pay what you can	threefoldtheatre.co.uk
Bristol Old Vic Young Company	Weekly classes. Separate free tour of plays to 19 secondary schools.	No	Partly	No	[unverified]	Junior: £100 per 10-week term. Senior: £110. 50% and 100% bursaries.	bristololdvic.org.uk/take-part/young-company/fees-bursaries
Tobacco Factory Young Theatre Makers	Weekly groups for Reception to Year 13	No	Partly	No	[unverified]	Year 3-4 group, summer 2026: £115, or £90 pay what you can	tobaccofactorytheatres.com
Stagecoach (Bristol)	Commercial weekend school covering singing, dance and drama	No	No	No	No	Main Stages £372 per term (national price)	stagecoach.co.uk/performing-art-classes/main-stages/
Pauline Quirke Academy (Bristol: Cotham, Ashton Park)	Commercial weekend academy	No	No	No	No	About £92 per month, so about £276 per 3 months (third-party listing)	happity.co.uk/pauline-quirke-academy-of-performing-arts/bristol
Upshot	Online monitoring, evaluation and learning system for sport, youth and community groups. Used by more than 1,400 organisations.	No	n/a	n/a	Yes (generic)	From £1,200 a year + VAT, plus setup. Consultancy £595 a day.	upshot.org.uk; hub.sported.org.uk
Makerble	CRM, surveys and impact dashboards. "Distance travelled" pre/post scoring.	No	n/a	n/a	Yes (generic)	Free tier. Starter £24.75 a month. Setup £400 a day.	about.makerble.com
Evidence for Learning (SEND assessment app, £595-£1,295 a year); Arbor clubs module	Not comparable: neither pairs schools nor measures outcomes	No	n/a	n/a	No	As stated	evidenceforlearning.net/pricing/

(club booking and payment inside the MIS)							
ImpactEd School Impact Platform	Validated pupil measures (wellbeing, self-efficacy, school engagement) with national benchmarks	No	n/a	n/a	Yes (school-focused)	No published price	impactedgroup.uk
British Council Partner Finder; Global School Alliance PartnerFinder	Databases for finding <i>international</i> partner schools	Yes (international)	n/a	No	No	Free	school-partner-finder.britishcouncil.org

Notes

1. The Linking Network. Started in Bradford. It now reaches about 26,000 children a year in about 25 local authority areas (890 classes, 545 schools). It runs **in curriculum time**, using resourced lessons on identity, diversity, community and equality, with two or three meetings between the linked classes. A local coordinator makes the matches; there is no self-service platform. NFER's evaluation for DfE (2011) found that the impact depends on how often classes meet (two or more meetings a year works best), with gains in respect for others, self-confidence and self-efficacy. **Bristol has its own programme, run by Bridges for Communities:** 9 links (18 classes, 13 schools) in 2024-25, free apart from travel. This is the nearest comparator.

2. Drama festivals. Coram SSF, Primary Shakespeare Company, NT Connections and NT Let's Play all give children an experience of performing alongside other schools. All of them use **given scripts**, most are **teacher-directed in curriculum time or rehearsal time**, and none pairs schools on purpose or targets transition. SSF reports more than 9,000 young people from 380+ schools in 2022-23. NT Connections reports 260+ companies and 6,000+ young people a year.

3. Transition through drama or arts. Several exist, but each is **single-school or delivered by professionals**: Half Moon, Belgrade Big School, Globe, Theatre Peckham, Bigfoot and Ava Hunt (Derbyshire, cited in the 2025 *Education* 3-13 paper). The closest structurally is **In2 (Darlington)**, which brought 4 feeder primaries together with their secondary through music led by professional musicians. It ran for 7 weeks, was not child-led and did not pair communities on purpose. We found **no Bristol arts-based Year 6 to Year 7 transition programme**. Bristol has non-arts transition work: Creative Youth Network ALP, and Bristol Connect, a new Bristol Education Partnership pilot that uses sixth-form mentors.

4. Bristol price benchmark. Commercial classes cost about £276-£372 a term (Stagecoach Main Stages £372, PQA about £276 for three months). Subsidised venue groups cost far less (Travelling Light £58, Bristol Old Vic £100-£110, Tobacco Factory £90-£115). **"About £310 per child per term" is a fair figure for commercial provision only.** We should say "commercial drama classes in Bristol cost £276-£372 a term" and acknowledge that subsidised options exist.

5. Software. None of these tools combines school-to-school discovery and pairing with delivery support and outcome measurement. Partner finders cover international partnerships only. MIS club modules handle bookings. Upshot, Makerble and ImpactEd measure outcomes but neither pair schools nor guide sessions. ImpactEd's validated wellbeing and self-efficacy measures could be **used inside** our evaluation rather than treated as a competitor.

Implications for our novelty claim

What is genuinely new, as far as we could find:

- Pairing schools **for transition**: two primaries from different communities that feed the *same* secondary, so that friendships and familiarity carry into Year 7. Linking Network pairs are not chosen by shared destination secondary, and transition is not its aim.
- Child-led, devised** drama as the activity. Festivals use scripts. Transition projects are delivered by professionals or are watched rather than made by children.
- Free, opt-in and after school**, run by non-specialist school staff with guided sessions, so it can grow without paying for professional practitioners.
- A **reciprocal swap**: each school performs for the other, then both perform at a joint finale at the receiving secondary.
- A staff-only tool that combines pairing, session guidance, swap logistics and pre/post evaluation. Children never use the app, so it stays within the competition rules.

Where we overlap, and should say so openly:

- Pairing schools from different communities is **established practice** (Linking Network, including Bristol). We should cite it as evidence that contact works, and describe Stage Swap as **complementary**: a play-based, transition-focused, extracurricular strand. We could also offer to work with Bridges for Communities rather than appear to duplicate them.
- Drama for transition exists (Half Moon, Belgrade, In2 and others). We are new in combining it with pairing and making it child-led.
- Outcome measurement tools exist. We are not claiming a new measurement method.

Suggested wording for Q9: "The nearest state of the art is structured school linking (The Linking Network, including Bristol School Linking), which pairs classes from different communities in curriculum time to build cohesion, together with transition drama projects (e.g. Half Moon, Belgrade 'Big School', In2 Darlington), which professionals deliver within one school or one cluster. No existing offer we could identify combines (a) pairing primaries from different communities *because they feed the same secondary*, (b) free, opt-in, child-led devised play in place of a script or curriculum, (c) a reciprocal performance swap and a finale held at the destination secondary, and (d) staff-facing tools that let non-specialist staff run it and measure transition outcomes. Stage Swap complements rather than duplicates linking programmes, and we will seek to co-ordinate with Bridges for Communities in Bristol." Avoid saying "first ever" or "no one pairs schools".

Candidate Easton/Barton Hill partner groups

- Travelling Light Theatre Company (Barton Hill).** High confidence that this is the group Abi meant. It is a children's theatre charity based at Wellspring Settlement, 43 Ducie Road, BS5 OAX, and has been active locally for 25 years. Its youth theatre covers ages 6-16, and it also runs Louder Than Words, "Play in a Week" devised projects for schools, and holiday provision for children in Barton Hill and Lawrence Hill who get free school meals. Contact: youth@travellinglighttheatre.org.uk, 07305 008789.
- Threefold Children's Theatre (Easton Community Centre, run with Eastside Community Trust).** High confidence that it exists, medium confidence that it is "the" group. It is co-created and child-centred (which fits our child-led approach) and charges pay what you can. Wednesdays 3.30-6pm, Kilburn Street, BS5 6AW. Contact: contact@upourstreet.org.uk, 0117 954 1409.
- Eastside Community Trust / Felix Road Adventure Playground.** Medium confidence as a partner. It is a play charity (not drama) serving Easton and Lawrence Hill and could provide play expertise and a community venue.
- Bridges for Communities (Bristol School Linking).** Not a drama group, but a strategic partner and the comparator we most need to reference.
- Baggator (Easton). Low confidence: its income has fallen to about £18k and its registered address has moved to BS7.

Raw research 3: market, customers and pricing

Researched 7 October 2026. Confidence: **High** means a primary or official source was checked directly. **Medium** means a reputable secondary source or a vendor page that was only partly checked. **Unverified** means it should not be quoted.

1. England school market size

Figure	Value	Source	Confidence
State-funded primary schools (Jan 2026)	16,712 (8,162 academies, 8,550 LA-maintained)	DfE, <i>Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2025/26</i> (published 4 June 2026). National figures pulled from the "School characteristics by year, sex and attendance pattern" dataset via the EES API. https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2025-26	High
State-funded secondary schools (includes middle-deemed-secondary)	3,458 (2,901 academies, 557 maintained)	Same	High
Total schools, all types	24,499	Same	High
Year 6 pupils in state-funded primary schools	621,641 (plus 19,884 in secondary/middle schools, so about 641,500 state-funded; 653,758 across all school types)	Same dataset (EES API, NAT level, 2025/26)	High
Free school meals eligibility	26.5% of all pupils. It peaks at 31.6% in Year 6	Same release	High
Academy share	48.8% of primaries and 83.9% of secondaries are academies or free schools. Academies make up 48.2% of all schools and teach 60.4% of pupils	Same release	High
Multi-academy trusts	"More than 1,300 MATs running nearly 11,300 academies". A typical MAT has about 10 schools	Tes MAT Tracker (analysis of DfE data, 2026): https://www.tes.com/magazine/leadership/data/mat-tracker-map-of-multi-academy-trusts	Medium. This is not a DfE publication. The exact share of schools in MATs was not verified from DfE data, but most academies are in MATs.

Derived figure (our arithmetic): there are about 3,460 secondaries and about 4.8 primaries per secondary. That makes roughly 3,400 natural clusters of one secondary plus its feeder primaries. An average primary has about 37 pupils in Year 6.

2. Admissions timing

- In England, applications for Year 7 close on **31 October** and offers arrive on **National Offer Day, 1 March** (or the next working day). For example, the 2026 entry round closed on 31 Oct 2025 and offers came on 2 March 2026. The 2027 round closes on 31 Oct 2026 and offers come on 1 March 2027. Sources: Waltham Forest <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/schools-education-and-learning/apply-school-place/apply-secondary-school/national-offer-day-secondary> and Sutton <https://www.sutton.gov.uk/w/applying-for-secondary-school-entry>. **Confidence: High** (statutory coordinated admissions dates, confirmed by several LAs).
- Implication:** in the autumn term of Year 6, pupils have only applied and do not yet know their secondary. Allocations are confirmed from March. Exchanges with a *specific* secondary therefore work best in spring term 2 and summer (March to July). Autumn activity has to be framed as "visiting a local secondary".

3. Pupil premium

- 2025-26 rates:** £1,515 per primary FSM/Ever-6 pupil and £1,075 per secondary pupil. Looked-after and previously looked-after children attract £2,630. The total is about £3bn. Sources: Written Ministerial Statement HCWS532, 18 March 2025, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-03-18/hcws532>, and Commons Library SN06700, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06700/>. **High.**
- 2026-27 rates:** £1,550 primary, £1,100 secondary, £2,690 for LAC/PLAC. Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium>. **High.**
- Accountability:** schools must publish a strategy statement using the DfE template **by 31 December** each year. It has to explain the outcomes achieved for disadvantaged pupils in the previous year, and spending must fall within the "menu of approaches". **High.**
- Menu of approaches:** the "wider strategies" section of *Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders* (updated 24 Aug 2026) explicitly lists "*enrichment such as extracurricular and co-curricular activities, including ... arts participation and developing wider life skills*". It also lists "*supporting pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs*" and "*supporting attendance*". Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/using-pupil-premium-guidance-for-school-leaders>. **High. Transition is not a named item.** It has to be justified under enrichment, SEMH and attendance. Some LA guidance on pupil premium plus does name Y6 to Y7 transitions (e.g. NE Lincs, July 2025). **Medium.**

4. Policy tailwinds

- Enrichment Framework (DfE, 15 June 2026):** non-statutory, with 8 benchmarks across 5 categories, one of which is **arts and culture**. Ofsted will consider a school's enrichment offer under personal development, and parents will see each school's offer on new "school profiles". Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-enrichment-framework-for-schools-and-colleges>. **High.** Ofsted has said schools need not meet it to reach "expected standard". **Medium.**
- "Every Child Can" (DfE/DCMS, 13 June 2026):** £132.5m funded by dormant assets, aiming to "halve the participation gap". It includes a £22.5m Enrichment Expansion Programme for 400 schools in the most deprived areas. Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/every-child-to-get-access-to-enriching-activities-to-build-skills-and-confidence-for-life>. **High.**
- Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review (Nov 2025)** (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b2a4a14b040dfe82922ea/Government_response_to_the_Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review.pdf). **High.** It commits to:
 - a new **primary oracy framework** and a secondary oracy, reading and writing framework;
 - an **enrichment entitlement for every child**;
 - a discrete drama section in KS3 English, describing drama as "helping pupils to find their voice";
 - a new **KS3 Alliance** (part of RISE) to address "the critical transition from primary".

It also states that "too many children find the transition hard, with sharp increases in disengagement and non-attendance", and that disadvantaged pupils are about 10 months behind at KS2 but 19.1 months behind by KS4.

- Attendance:** *Working together to improve school attendance* has been statutory since 19 Aug 2024 and was updated July 2026. Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>. **High.**

- **Opportunity Mission "Best Start in Life"**: this focuses on early years (ages 0 to 5). **Not relevant. Do not cite.**

5. Procurement thresholds

- DfE's SFVS guidance says governors set delegation limits that "vary according to the school's size". No national figure exists. Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs-checklist-guidance>. **High.**
- The NGA procurement guide (Sept 2026) gives an example: "the headteacher of a medium-sized primary school might be able to spend £10,000 without board approval". Source: <https://www.nga.org.uk/media/vd0asprs/nga-procurement-guide-20260925.pdf>. **Medium** (seen via search snippet).
- Real school and trust policies set lower limits:
- Stour Academy Trust: headteacher up to **£3,000**.
- A Norfolk primary: governors approve items over **£3,500**.
- Parwich (Derbyshire): no 3 quotes needed under **£1,500**.
- A 2022 trust summary: 2 oral quotes needed at **£1,000 to £3,000**.
- Common pattern: one quote (verbal or web) under about £3,000 to £5,000.

Medium.

- **Conclusion:** a price under about £1,000 is below the quote or approval trigger in almost every scheme. A cluster deal of about £2,500 usually still sits within one budget holder's authority, often with one or two quotes.

6. Comparator prices

Comparator	Published price	Source	Confidence
Boxall Profile Online (SEMH assessment; includes a "Transitions Passport" on PRO plans)	Primary £325/yr, Primary PRO £475. Secondary £500, Secondary PRO £650 (ex VAT). Trust pricing on application	https://www.boxallprofile.org/pricing/	High
Thrive Approach	Licensed Practitioner training £1,780 + VAT per place. Thrive-Online from £450 + VAT/yr (scaled by roll)	https://www.thriveapproach.com/become-a-thrive-licensed-practitioner	Medium
Edurio surveys	Quote only. About £250 to £1,000 per school per year (third-party estimate)	https://edtechimpact.com/products/edurio/	Medium/low
Wellbeing surveys	SCARF survey £50 to £75 + VAT. My Health My School £259 + VAT. CORC staff survey £330 to £440 + VAT	coramscarf.org.uk/wellbeing-survey ; schoolwellbeing.co.uk ; corc.uk.net	Medium
Upshot (impact platform used by community and arts groups)	From £1,200/yr + VAT, plus £1,200 setup	upshot.org.uk (via search; pricing page URL not confirmed)	Medium
Drama in schools	Sheffield Theatres: £300 + VAT per day, £900 + VAT for a 4-week project. Mercury Theatre: £370 + VAT per day. Drama and Co: full day from £500	https://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/get-involved/schools/for-primary-schools-2025 ; mercurytheatre.co.uk/taking-part/education/school-workshops/	High (Sheffield) / Medium
Y6 to Y7 transition days	Problem Solving Company from £625/day. Hyett STEM transition from £597/day ex VAT. Anna Freud "Moving Up!" is free	theproblemsolvingcompany.co.uk/year-6-7-team-building-transition-activity-days/ ; hyetteducation.com/transition-days	Medium
The Linking Network	No published fee. It is largely subsidised by DfE, MHCLG and Pears, and Bristol's programme is free	thelinkingnetwork.org.uk	Medium
Voice 21 membership	Core fee not published. An extra Oracy Champion costs £700	voice21.org/membership-2/	Medium

ImpactEd does not publish prices.

7. Market size

- "UK schools already spend around £900 million a year on educational technology" (UK government). Source: <https://www.business.gov.uk/invest-in-uk/investment/sectors/edtech/>. **Medium:** undated and repeated widely.
- BESA/Naace (2023) put average edtech budgets at about £19,000 per primary and £84,000 per secondary. BESA also reported in early 2025 that many schools planned to cut edtech spending. Source: <https://www.besa.org.uk/news/edtech-leadership-briefing-paper/>. **Medium.**
- No credible figure was found for spending on enrichment or transition.
- A **serviceable addressable market** (our estimate): about 3,400 clusters × £2,500 ≈ £8.5m/yr, or about 20,170 schools × £450 ≈ £9m/yr.

Implications for pricing and go-to-market

- **The £450/school price is plausible.** It sits between Boxall's primary (£325) and secondary (£500) tiers. It is about the cost of one external drama day (£300 to £625) and below Thrive's annual costs. It is about 30% of a single primary pupil premium pupil (£1,515), and an average primary has roughly 11 PP-eligible Year 6 pupils (31.6% of 37). Price ex VAT, as all comparators do.
- **The cluster price of £2,500 works out at about £357/school** across 7 schools. This is good value and stays within typical headteacher authority. Consider tiers:
- "Cluster S": secondary plus up to 3 feeders, about £1,500
- "Cluster L": secondary plus up to 6 feeders, £2,500

Feeder numbers vary (about 4.8 on average).

- **Trust/LA price of £350/school is fine.** Add a floor, for example a minimum of 3 clusters. Boxall and Edurio both use POA trust pricing with multi-year options. A 3-year price lock is a known lever.
- **Community group price of £15/month (£180/yr) is far below Upshot (£1,200+).** Consider £25/month, or keep £15 as a deliberate low-barrier tier.
- **Selling calendar:**
- Primaries write pupil premium statements by 31 Dec, so pitch in the autumn term.
- Delivery runs after 1 March offers.
- The renewal moment is the July impact report.
- **Messaging:** lead with enrichment (Enrichment Framework benchmark, arts and culture, Ofsted personal development), oracy, and the CAR transition concern. Frame transition spending under pupil premium "enrichment", "SEMH" and "attendance", because transition itself is not a named menu item.
- **Free tier:** the Linking Network and Anna Freud are free and subsidised, so the free tier is necessary to compete. Paid value must be the organiser, evaluation and impact reports, which are pupil-premium-evidence ready.

Ready-to-use sentences for Q13

- England has 16,712 state-funded primaries and 3,458 secondaries, and about 640,000 Year 6 pupils move school every September (DfE, 2026).
- Free school meal eligibility peaks in Year 6 at 31.6%, the exact cohort Stage Swap serves (DfE, 2026).

- Year 6 pupils do not learn their secondary school until National Offer Day on 1 March. Stage Swap therefore runs from spring, after allocations, when pairing a feeder with its actual secondary becomes possible.
- The government acknowledges that "too many children find the transition hard, with sharp increases in disengagement and non-attendance", and is creating a KS3 Alliance focused on the transition from primary (DfE response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, 2025).
- The 2026 Enrichment Framework names arts and culture as a core category, Ofsted now considers enrichment under personal development, and £132.5m "Every Child Can" funding targets the participation gap (DfE/DCMS, 2026).
- Pupil premium (£1,515 per primary pupil in 2025-26) can explicitly fund "arts participation" and support for attendance and wellbeing. Schools must report outcomes annually, and our impact reports are built to meet that need (DfE pupil premium guidance, 2026).
- At £450 per school per year, Stage Swap costs less than one external drama workshop day and sits alongside established tools such as Boxall Profile Online (£325 to £500), well within headteacher spending authority.
- A secondary and up to six feeders can join for £2,500, about £357 per school, so one transition lead can bring a whole local cluster.

Raw research 4: Bristol pilot clusters and partners

Researched 7 Oct 2026. Confidence ratings: **H** = official or primary source; **M** = reliable secondary source or my own analysis of official data; **L** = indicative only or needs checking.

1. Deprivation data

IMD 2025 has been published (MHCLG, 30 Oct 2025). Use it rather than IMD 2019.

Measure	Figure	Source	Conf.
Bristol LSOAs in England's most deprived 10%	30 in 2025 (41 in 2019), including 2 in the most deprived 1% (Hartcliffe)	BCC Deprivation Headlines 2025 (https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/10257-deprivation-headlines-2025/file)	H
Residents living in the most deprived 10%	11% (53,100 people), including 13,500 children (16% of all children) . The figure was 15% in 2019.	same	H
Children living in income-deprived families	37% in 2025 (21% in 2019). The two editions use different indicators, so treat the change with care.	same	H
Lawrence Hill ward (Barton Hill, St Philips, parts of Easton)	6 of 9 LSOAs in the national most deprived 10%. "Easton Road" LSOA is ranked 998/33,755 (top 3%) and "Barton Hill" 1,730. 8 of 9 LSOAs are in IDACI decile 1. In 2019 the figure was 7 of 9.	BCC IoD2025 data file (https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/10437-indices-of-deprivation-data-file/file) (my analysis); BCC evidence to Parliament (2019) (https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/107036/html/)	H/M
Barton Hill LSOA	Has become <i>more</i> deprived since 2019 (rank 2,023 → 1,730)	Headlines 2025, Fig 4	H
Easton ward	0 of 7 LSOAs in decile 1. The most deprived is St Marks Road (decile 2). Easton's poorest streets are counted in Lawrence Hill ward.	data file	M
Lockleaze ward	0 of 7 LSOAs in decile 1. Lockleaze South and Filton Avenue North are decile 2. Lockleaze South dropped out of the most deprived 10% in 2025.	data file; Headlines Fig 4	M
Hartcliffe & Withywood	9 of 12 LSOAs in decile 1. Bishport Avenue is the most deprived LSOA in Bristol (rank 211).	data file	H
Filwood	5 of 8 in decile 1	data file	M
Southmead	1 of 7 in decile 1 (best rank 1,177)	data file	M
Avonmouth & Lawrence Weston	2 of 13 in decile 1	data file	M
Free school meals, January 2025	Bristol 30.2% (19,186 pupils) vs England 25.7%	DfE Schools, pupils & characteristics 2024/25 (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25); Bristol World (https://www.bristolworld.com/news/department-for-education-data-reveals-total-number-of-children-eligible-for-free-school-meals-in-bristol-5165310)	H/M

Note: the 2019 report is available as Deprivation in Bristol 2019 (<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/1905-deprivation-in-bristol-2019/file>).

2. Candidate clusters

Key finding: most Bristol secondaries have no formal feeder schools. Cabot Learning Federation (CLF) says it "does not operate a feeder primary academy policy" (City Academy admissions policy 2022 (<https://cityacademybristol.clf.uk/wp-content/uploads/CAB-Admissions-Policy-for-September-2022.pdf>), s.12). The links below are mostly *de facto*. They come from Good Schools Guide (GSG) Year 7 intake data, averaged over 2020–22 unless stated. Trinity Academy is the only school here with a *designated* feeder primary.

Secondary	Trust	Candidate primaries	Neighbourhoods	Evidence of feeder link	Conf.
A. City Academy Bristol , Russell Town Ave, BS5 9JH	CLF	Barton Hill Academy (E-ACT) + Easton CofE Primary (Lighthouse Schools Partnership since Jan 2025). Alternatives: Whitehall Primary (LA-maintained) or May Park (Excalibur).	Barton Hill (estate and tower blocks, IMD decile 1) vs Easton (Victorian terraces, mixed decile 1–3). Whitehall is decile 6 and May Park is Eastville.	GSG Y7 intake: Barton Hill 13%, Whitehall 12%, Bannerman Rd 10%, Easton CofE 10%, May Park 9% (GSG (https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/uk-schools/profile/the-city-academy-bristol/)). There is no formal feeder policy.	M (de facto)
B. Trinity Academy , Lockleaze, BS7 9BY	Amplify Education (formerly Cathedral Schools Trust; merged with TiLA in 2026)	Stoke Park Primary (Lockleaze, same trust) + St Werburgh's Primary (St Werburghs, Amplify) or Filton Avenue Primary (Horfield/Lockleaze border, Amplify)	Lockleaze estate (decile 2–3) vs St Werburghs (inner-city, mixed)	Stoke Park is a designated feeder in the 2026/27 and 2027/28 admission arrangements (BCC copy (https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/4071-cst-trinity-admissions/fil)). GSG 2023–25: Stoke Park 13%, Filton Ave ~18% (unclear figure), St Werburgh's 2%. The second primary is weak, so check with the school.	H for Stoke Park; L for the second primary
C. Orchard School Bristol , Horfield, BS7 0XZ	Amplify Education	Little Mead Primary Academy (Southmead, Amplify) + Horfield CofE Primary (Lighthouse)	Southmead estate (some LSOAs in decile 1) vs Horfield (less deprived)	GSG: Filton Ave 22%, Horfield CofE 12%, Fonthill 11%, Little Mead 9%, Badocks Wood 8% (GSG (https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/sc-hools/orchard-school-bristol-bs7-0xz-1)). Admission is by priority area, not by feeder school.	M
Reserve: Oasis Academy John Williams , Hengrove	Oasis Community Learning	Knowle Park Primary (Knowle West/Filwood) + West Town Lane (Brislington)	Filwood (decile 1) vs Brislington	GSG: Knowle Park 17%, Perry Court 15%, Ilminster Ave 14%, West Town Lane 11% (GSG (https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/uk-schools/profile/oasis-academy-john-williams)). The new Oasis Daventry Road school may change intake patterns.	M
Reserve: Fairfield High , Horfield	Excalibur Academies Trust	Glenfrome (Eastville) + Sefton Park (Ashley Down)	Mixed vs affluent	GSG: St Werburgh's 13%, Glenfrome 12%, Brunel Field 11%, Ashley Down 11%, Sefton Park 10%. Fairfield specialises in performing arts.	M

Not suitable: Bridge Learning Campus (Amplify) and E-ACT Bristol Academy South (formerly Merchants') in Hartcliffe/Withywood are all-through schools. About 83% of Merchants' Year 7 came from its own primary phase, so there is no cross-community pair. Bristol Brunel Academy (CLF) draws from St George, Hillfields and Kingswood (S. Glos), but its contrast is weaker.

Recommended pilot: Cluster A, because it matches the lead's Easton/Barton Hill area and partners. **Cluster B** is second, because it is the only one with a verified designated feeder.

3. Transition initiatives and who to approach

- **Bristol Belonging Strategy ("Belonging in Education")**: One City / BCC. A stated priority is "Improving educational transition points so that children and young people can form an early sense of belonging." PDF (https://www.bristolonecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/3-Belonging-Strategy-Belonging-in-Education_weba_v2.pdf) (H)
- **BCC "Y6 to Y7 Positive Transition Guidance"**: this has been shared with all Bristol schools but is not public. The related Year R→KS1 guidance names Lesley O'Hagan, Belonging and Attendance Officer, BCC, as a contact. Her post may have changed. PDF (<https://www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Positive-Transitions-into-KS1.pdf>) (M)
- **Bristol Education Partnership**: hosted by Bristol Charities (info@bristolcharities.org.uk). Members include state and independent schools, UoB, UWE and BCC, and Bridge Learning Campus takes part. Bristol Charities (<https://bristolcharities.org.uk/building-belonging-the-bristol-education-partnership-pride-network/>), ISC Schools Together (<https://www.schoolstogether.org/formal-partnerships/bristol-education-partnership/>) (M)
- **Learning City Partnership**: sits within BCC Employment, Skills & Learning. No current named contact found. (L)
- **Trust-level contacts**: CLF, Amplify Education and E-ACT. The transition or inclusion lead at each secondary is the practical first contact.

4. Community drama partners (Easton, Barton Hill, Lockleaze)

Group	What they run	Contact	Conf.
Travelling Light Theatre , Wellspring Settlement, 43 Ducie Rd, BS5 0AX	Children's theatre company with four weekly youth theatres (ages 6–16, £58/term). Also runs Louder Than Words (free group for D/deaf and disabled young people, 7–16), a holiday programme for FSM children in Lawrence Hill ward, and Winter Lights (700+ attendees). The youth theatre began on the City Academy site.	travellinglighttheatre.org.uk/for-young-people (https://www.travellinglighttheatre.org.uk/for-young-people)	H
Wellspring Settlement (formerly Barton Hill Settlement)	East Central Family Hub. Swannery Youth Club runs a session for ages 8–11 on Thursdays. Youth contact: Luis Dias.	wellspringsettlement.org.uk/support/family-and-youth (http://wellspringsettlement.org.uk/support/family-and-youth/)	H
Threefold Theatre , Easton Community Centre	Child-led youth theatre where children write, direct and design. Runs on Wednesdays 3.30–6pm in three companies (7–10, 10–12, 13–17). Founders are Alice and Manu Wrench; Alice is a former drama teacher. This is the closest fit to the "child-led" model.	threefoldtheatre.co.uk (https://www.threefoldtheatre.co.uk/)	H
Eastside Community Trust	Runs Easton Community Centre and Felix Road Adventure Playground	eastsidecommunitytrust.org.uk (https://eastsidecommunitytrust.org.uk/our-places/easton-community-centre/)	H
acta Community Theatre (Lockleaze)	Lockleaze Kids Theatre (ages 5–9; has used Stoke Park Primary) and Lockleaze Youth Theatre (secondary age, free). Funded by Children in Need. Session details are from 2023/24.	acta-bristol.com Lockleaze Youth Theatre (https://acta-bristol.com/get-involved/groups/lockleaze-youth-theatre/); info@acta-bristol.com	M

5. Universities (student facilitators)

- **UWE Bristol**: BA Drama, Acting & Performance (W490) (<https://courses.uwe.ac.uk/W490/drama-acting-and-performance>). There is no dedicated applied theatre degree, but the course timetable allows for placements and volunteering. The BA Education (<https://courses.uwe.ac.uk/X304/education>) includes a Year 2 school or organisation placement and links to more than 250 schools. **Main route**: UWE Civic & Community Engagement Team (volunteering@uwe.ac.uk). Registered charities and not-for-profits can post roles there for free, and short commitments of 2–3 months recruit best. Recruiting volunteers (<https://www.uwe.ac.uk/businesses-and-employers/recruiting-talent/recruiting-volunteers>) (H)
- **University of Bristol**: Department of Theatre runs an Applied Theatre unit (THTR20002) (<https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/UnitDetails.jsa?ayrCode=23/24&unitCode=THTR20002>) that covers facilitation in community and educational settings. Final-year industrial placements have included Travelling Light. The Widening Participation Student Engagement Programme offers student volunteers. Outreach (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/outreach/current-students/>) (M)

6. Play organisations

- **Playing Out**: founded in Bristol in 2009 (Alice Ferguson and Amy Rose). Bristol introduced the UK's first Temporary Play Street Order. It is a CIC, not a charity. playingout.net Bristol case study (<https://playingout.net/play-streets/info-for-councils/case-studies/bristol-case-study>) (H)
- **Bristol Play and Youth Alliance / Children and Young People's Network** (formerly Playful Bristol): co-wrote the Playful Bristol and Youth Work Alliance Strategy 2023–25, written after BCC cut play funding in 2018. playfulbristol.org (<https://playfulbristol.org/>), strategy PDF ([https://static1.squarespace.com/static/66ff8cd6bdd0fd38628eaa10/t/670257cd0f58754aff3d7dc0/1728206798116/Playful+Bristol+and+Youth+Work+Alliance+Combined+Strategy+2023-24+\(August+2023\)+\(2\).pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/66ff8cd6bdd0fd38628eaa10/t/670257cd0f58754aff3d7dc0/1728206798116/Playful+Bristol+and+Youth+Work+Alliance+Combined+Strategy+2023-24+(August+2023)+(2).pdf)) (M)
- **Adventure playgrounds** (four in January 2026: Felix Road, The Ranch in Southmead, The Vench (Lockleaze; confirm), St Agnes): **Felix Road (Easton)** is free, open access for ages 8–14, has a stage, and is run by Eastside Community Trust. Bristol Cable Jan 2026 (<https://thebristolcable.org/2026/01/bristol-adventure-playgrounds-tour/>), The Vench (<https://thevench.co.uk/>) (M)
- Bristol Playbus closed in 2019. Do not cite it.

Ready-to-use sentences for Q7/Q11/Q13

- Lawrence Hill, home to Barton Hill and much of Easton, is one of Bristol's most deprived wards: six of its nine neighbourhoods are in England's most deprived 10% (IMD 2025), and eight are in the bottom decile for child income deprivation.
- Across Bristol, 37% of children now live in income-deprived families and 30.2% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, against 25.7% nationally.
- Barton Hill is one of the few Bristol neighbourhoods that became relatively more deprived between 2019 and 2025.
- Stage Swap pairs primaries from contrasting neighbourhoods that already send many of their pupils to the same secondary. For example, Barton Hill Academy and Easton CofE Primary each supply around a tenth of City Academy Bristol's Year 7 intake.
- Bristol's Belonging Strategy names "improving educational transition points" as a city priority, and Stage Swap offers a child-led, play-based way to deliver it.
- We will build on established local expertise, including Travelling Light's youth theatre in Barton Hill, Threefold's child-led theatre at Easton Community Centre and acta's work in Lockleaze.
- Student facilitators will be recruited through UWE Bristol's Civic and Community Engagement volunteering service and University of Bristol theatre students trained in applied theatre.
- Bristol is the home city of Playing Out and of the UK's first play street order, and we will draw on that play heritage and on the city's adventure playground network.

Raw research 5: socioeconomic data

Researched 7 Oct 2026. This extends bristol-pilot.md and does not repeat it. Every figure was taken from the source listed (numbered sources [S1]-[S11] are at the end). Where I calculated a figure myself from official data, it is marked *calc*. Nothing here is estimated or made up.

(a) School data

The first four data columns are from the **January 2026 school census** [S1, S2]. KS2 results and the last four columns are from **2024/25** [S3, S4]. The Ofsted column comes from [S5].

School (URN)	Trust	Ward (LSOA)	On roll	Y6 / Y7 Jan 26	FSM now	EAL	White British	FSM6 (24/25)	EHCP / SEN support	Overall / persistent absence 24/25	KS2 RWM 2025 (disadv. / other)	Ofsted
City Academy (144509)	CLF	Easton (Chelsea Park)	977	Y7 173	47.8%	43.9%	19.2%	50.9%	4.7% / 20.9%	12.4% / 40.8%	-	Inspected Nov 2024 (2024 framework, no overall grade); Good in 2019
Barton Hill Academy (151299)	E-ACT	Lawrence Hill (Newtown)	275	Y6 31	73.8%	82.2%	11.6% (Black African 53.5%)	80.9%	4.9% / 19.3%	5.6% / 17.2%	56% (supp.)	Requires Improvement, Apr 2024 (predecessor URN 141191); no report yet under the new URN
Easton CofE (141110)	Lighthouse	Lawrence Hill (St Judes)	386	Y6 43	55.2%	87.0%	1.3% (Black African 60.9%)	58.9%	4.5% / 14.3%	7.0% / 22.4%	52% (35 / 79)	Apr 2025: Quality of education RI, Behaviour Good
Whitehall (109132)	LA-maintained	Easton (Whitehall)	602	Y6 87	23.1%	15.1%	51.2%	24.8%	1.9% / 18.2%	6.6% / 18.7%	52% (29 / 66)	Good, Mar 2024
May Park (146964)	Excalibur	Eastville (Greenbank)	446	Y6 43	30.9%	48.9%	24.9%	33.0%	5.8% / 15.6%	8.4% / 31.0%	60% (41 / 69)	RI, Nov 2023
Bannerman Rd (139050)	E-ACT	Lawrence Hill (Easton Road)	401	Y6 52	53.1%	77.8%	8.5%	56.2%	1.4% / 19.6%	5.7% / 16.5%	58% (52 / 71)	Good, Jul 2022
Trinity Academy (147072)	Amplify	Lockleaze (Lockleaze South)	1,062	Y7 183	33.2%	18.1%	45.3%	35.6%	3.9% / 14.2%	9.9% / 27.2%	-	Good, Jan 2024
Stoke Park (146261)	Amplify	Lockleaze (Lockleaze South)	215	Y6 30	31.2%	35.8%	53.5%	36.5%	4.1% / 14.9%	7.0% / 23.5%	39% (43 / 36)	Good, Oct 2023
St Werburgh's (148679)	Amplify	Ashley (Mina Road)	387	Y6 54	30.5%	29.7%	40.6%	35.0%	3.8% / 19.1%	6.2% / 16.8%	56% (33 / 77)	Good, Jul 2024
Filton Avenue (138668)	Amplify	Lockleaze (Filton Ave South)	568	Y6 77	41.7%	34.2%	45.6%	39.1%	3.2% / 16.8%	7.6% / 21.7%	65% (54 / 73)	Inspected Jul 2026 under report-card framework (grades not checked)
Orchard School (138448)	Amplify	Horfield (Sheridan Road)	942	Y7 183	43.4%	33.1%	48.7%	44.7%	2.5% / 24.3%	10.4% / 26.7%	-	Inspected Mar 2025 (no overall grade); Good in 2015
Little Mead (138900)	Amplify	Southmead (Southmead North)	435	Y6 59	30.6%	46.2%	37.0%	29.4%	3.1% / 17.2%	6.2% / 20.1%	39% (18 / 53)	Inspected Jan 2026 under report-card framework (grades not checked)
Horfield CofE (151920; was 109143)	Lighthouse	Horfield (Manor Farm)	357	Y6 60	17.4%	24.4%	58.0%	14.5%	2.1% / 15.3%	5.4% / 12.8%	63% (42 / 68)	RI, Apr 2024 (predecessor); became an academy Aug 2025
<i>England (state-funded)</i>					26.5%	<i>primary</i> 23.4% / <i>secondary</i> 19.2%		<i>primary</i> 26.3% / <i>secondary</i> 28.9%	<i>primary</i> 3.5% / 15.0%; <i>secondary</i> 3.1% / 13.4%	<i>primary</i> 5.2% / 13.0%; <i>secondary</i> 8.4% / 23.4%	62% (47 / 69)	

Notes:

- The four columns FSM6, EHCP / SEN support, absence and KS2 are 2024/25 figures, taken from the Compare School Performance (CSP) absence and pupil population pages [S3]. Barton Hill's FSM6 is reported under its current URN. Horfield CofE's figures are for its predecessor school (URN 109143).
- Year 6 counts are the 2025/26 Year 6 cohort. Each primary's 2026/27 cohort will be a similar size, but check with the school.
- Absence is for the whole school and all year groups. **There is no published Year 7 figure for individual schools or LAs.**

(b) Ward and neighbourhood data

Ward	IMD 2025: LSOAs by decile (1 = most deprived 10%) [S6]	Children in income-deprived families (IDACI 2025, weighted) <i>calc</i> [S6]	Child poverty AHC 2024/25 (DWP) [S7]	Not White British / Black (Census 2021) [S8]	Social rented [S8]
Lawrence Hill	1,1,1,1,1,1,2,5,5	73%	57.7% (highest ward in Bristol)	67.9% / 33.3%	44.3%
Easton	2,3,3,3,4,4,6	39%	16.9–30.4% band	44.1% / 10.8%	11.9%
Eastville	2,3,3,3,4,5,6,8	41%	16.9–30.4% band	45.0% / 11.1%	15.4%
Lockleaze	2,2,3,3,3,5,6	46%	30.6–44.1% band	41.0% / 12.3%	26.5%
Southmead	1,2,2,3,3,3,6	47%	30.6–44.1% band	34.7% / 7.2%	33.8%
Horfield	2,3,5,6,8,8,8	32%	16.9–30.4% band	29.7% / 5.3%	19.3%

Ashley	2,2,2,3,5,5,5,7,8,9	35%	16.9–30.4% band	41.6% / 13.9%	21.1%
Bristol	30 LSOAs in decile 1	37%	25.6% (UK 26.0%)	28.4% / 5.9% (England 26.5% / 4.2%)	18.7% (England 17.1%)

Ward bands. The DWP gives an exact ward figure only for Lawrence Hill. For the other wards, the JSNA map shows a band, and the figure is in that range.

Languages. Census main-language data is only published at LA level. Bristol's most common non-English language is Somali (0.7% of residents) [S8]. For language mix at school level, use the EAL figures in table (a).

Life expectancy. Men in Bristol's most deprived areas live **10.5 years** less than men in the least deprived areas; for women the gap is **7.3 years** (2022–24, Slope Index of Inequality) [S9].

Quality of Life 2024/25 compares residents in Bristol's 10% most deprived areas with the city average [S10]:

Measure	Most deprived 10%	Bristol
Feel they belong to their neighbourhood	45%	65%
Agree people from different backgrounds get on well together	56%	73%
Take part in cultural activities at least monthly	27% (down from 31%)	36%
Satisfied with outdoor events	36%	49%

Two equalities findings are relevant:

- 21.4% of Muslim residents and 20.3% of Black residents don't take part in cultural activities because they "don't feel welcome", compared with 5.3% of all residents.
- 45.4% of Black residents lack the information to get involved in cultural activity.

(c) Bristol vs England

Measure	Bristol	England	Source
Pupils eligible for FSM, Jan 2026	31.0% (19,517)	26.5%	[S2]
Child poverty after housing costs, 2023/24 (End Child Poverty)	35.4% (34,236)	UK 31%	[S11]
Child poverty after housing costs, 2024/25 (DWP, under-16s)	25.6%	UK 26.0%	[S7]
KS2 RWM expected standard, 2026 (provisional)	60%	63%	[S4]
Disadvantaged vs others at KS2, 2026 (provisional)	41% vs 71% (gap 30 pts)	48% vs 70% (gap 22 pts)	[S4]
Disadvantaged vs others at KS2, 2025 (final)	41% vs 69% (gap 28 pts)	48% vs 70% (gap 22 pts)	[S4]
Persistent absence in secondary schools, 2024/25	29.3%	23.4%	[S3]
Overall absence in secondary schools, 2024/25	10.3%	8.4%	[S3]
Persistent absence in primary schools, 2024/25	15.9%	13.0%	[S3]
Monthly cultural participation, most deprived vs all residents	27% vs 36%	n/a	[S10]

The End Child Poverty and DWP figures use different methods, so quote one and name it. End Child Poverty is the figure funders usually expect.

(d) Contrast within each pair

Cluster A (City Academy). Barton Hill and Easton CofE are not contrasting communities. Both schools sit in Lawrence Hill LSOAs in IMD decile 1. Both have 55–74% FSM, 82–87% EAL and a majority of Black African pupils (mainly Somali heritage), and both have fewer than 12% White British pupils. They are two similar communities about a mile apart.

Whitehall Primary (Easton ward, Whitehall LSOA) is the genuine contrast:

	Barton Hill	Whitehall
IMD decile	1	6
Children in income-deprived families	73%	23%
FSM	74%	23%
EAL	82%	15%
White British pupils	12%	51%
Social renting in the LSOA	64% (tower blocks and estate)	7% (68% owner-occupied terraces)

Whitehall already supplies about 12% of City Academy's Year 7 (GSG figure; see bristol-pilot.md), and its Year 6 of 87 is the largest of any candidate primary.

Recommendation: pair Barton Hill (or Easton CofE) with Whitehall.

Cluster B (Trinity). Stoke Park and St Werburgh's show only a weak contrast on income: FSM is 31% at both, and their LSOAs are in IMD deciles 2 and 5. They differ more in ethnicity, with 54% White British pupils at Stoke Park against 41% at St Werburgh's. Filton Avenue is closer to Stoke Park than to St Werburgh's on every measure. This cluster is best described as "estate vs inner-city", not "rich vs poor".

Cluster C (Orchard). This is a clear contrast:

	Little Mead (Southmead North)	Horfield CofE (Manor Farm)
IMD decile	3	8
Children in income-deprived families	44%	18%
FSM6	29%	14%
EAL	46%	24%
White British pupils	37%	58%
Social renting in the LSOA	29%	11%
KS2 RWM, 2025	39%	63%

(e) Ready-to-use sentences for Q7 / project summary

- In Lawrence Hill, home to Barton Hill, 57.7% of children live in relative poverty after housing costs, the highest rate of any Bristol ward (DWP via Bristol JSNA 2026).
- At Barton Hill Academy, 74% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 82% speak English as an additional language. At Whitehall Primary, in neighbouring Easton ward, the figures are 23% and 15%, yet both schools feed the same secondary (DfE school census, January 2026).
- City Academy Bristol has a persistent absence rate of 41%, against 23% nationally (DfE, 2024/25).
- In Bristol, only 41% of disadvantaged pupils reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at age 11, compared with 71% of their peers. That 30-point gap is wider than the national gap of 22 points (DfE KS2 2026, provisional).
- Residents of Bristol's most deprived areas are much less likely to feel they belong to their neighbourhood (45% vs 65%) or to agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together (56% vs 73%) (Bristol Quality of Life 2024/25).
- Only 27% of residents in Bristol's most deprived areas take part in cultural activities monthly, against 36% citywide. One in five Muslim and Black residents say they stay away because they "don't feel welcome" (Quality of Life 2024/25).

- Over a third of Bristol's children (35.4%) live in poverty after housing costs, above the UK rate of 31% (End Child Poverty 2025).
- Men in Bristol's most deprived neighbourhoods live 10.5 fewer years than men in the least deprived neighbourhoods (Bristol JSNA 2026/27).

(f) Compact table for Q7 appendix

Indicator	Barton Hill Academy	Whitehall Primary	City Academy (shared secondary)	Bristol	England
Free school meals (Jan 2026)	73.8%	23.1%	47.8%	31.0%	26.5%
English as an additional language	82.2%	15.1%	43.9%	-	23% (primary)
White British pupils	11.6%	51.2%	19.2%	-	-
IMD 2025 decile of school neighbourhood	1	6	4	-	-
Child poverty after housing costs	57.7% (Lawrence Hill ward)	16.9–30.4% (Easton ward band)	-	35.4% (ECP)	31% (UK)
Persistent absence (2024/25)	17.2%	18.7%	40.8%	29.3% (secondary)	23.4% (secondary)
KS2: disadvantaged vs others meeting expected standard	suppressed	29% vs 66%	-	41% vs 71%	48% vs 70%
Residents who feel they belong to their neighbourhood	45% (most deprived areas)	-	-	65%	-

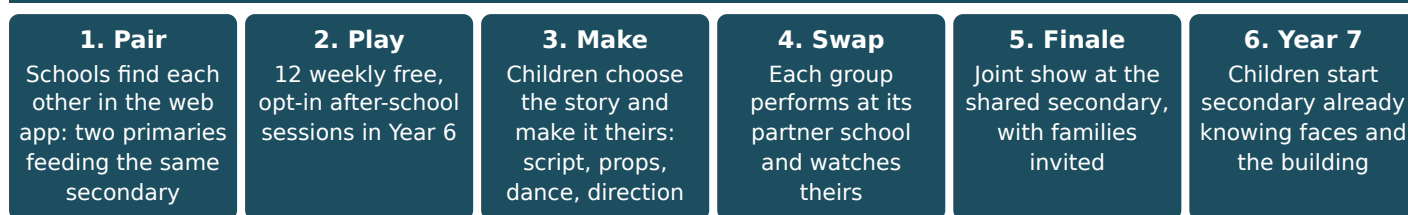
Sources

- [S1] Get Information About Schools, all-establishments extract, downloaded 7 Oct 2026 (census 15 Jan 2026): <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Downloads>
- [S2] DfE, Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2025/26 (published 4 Jun 2026), school-level and FSM data sets: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>
- [S3] DfE Compare School Performance, absence and pupil population pages (2024/25), e.g. <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/144509/the-city-academy-bristol/absence-and-pupil-population>. Bristol KS2 download: <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/download-data>
- [S4] DfE, Key stage 2 attainment 2025/26 (published 10 Sep 2026), "Attainment by region, local authority and pupil characteristics": <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment>
- [S5] Ofsted reports, <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/{URN}> and [/provider/23/{URN}](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/23/{URN}) for secondaries (accessed 7 Oct 2026)
- [S6] Bristol City Council, IoD2025 data file: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/10437-indices-of-deprivation-data-file/file>. Ward figures weight each LSOA's IDACI rate by its number of children (*calc*).
- [S7] Bristol JSNA 2026/27, Child Poverty (April 2026; DWP Children in Low Income Families 2024/25): <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/1534-jsna-child-poverty/file>
- [S8] ONS Census 2021, TS021 ethnic group, TS054 tenure and TS024 language, via Nomis: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021
- [S9] Bristol JSNA 2026/27, Life expectancy: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/1566-jsna-2020-21-life-expectancy>
- [S10] Bristol Quality of Life 2024/25 final report (June 2025): <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/9607-quality-of-life-2024-to-25-final-report/file>
- [S11] End Child Poverty / Loughborough CRSP, local child poverty 2023/24 (data tables, May 2025): https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Child-poverty-AHC-2015-2024_final.xlsx

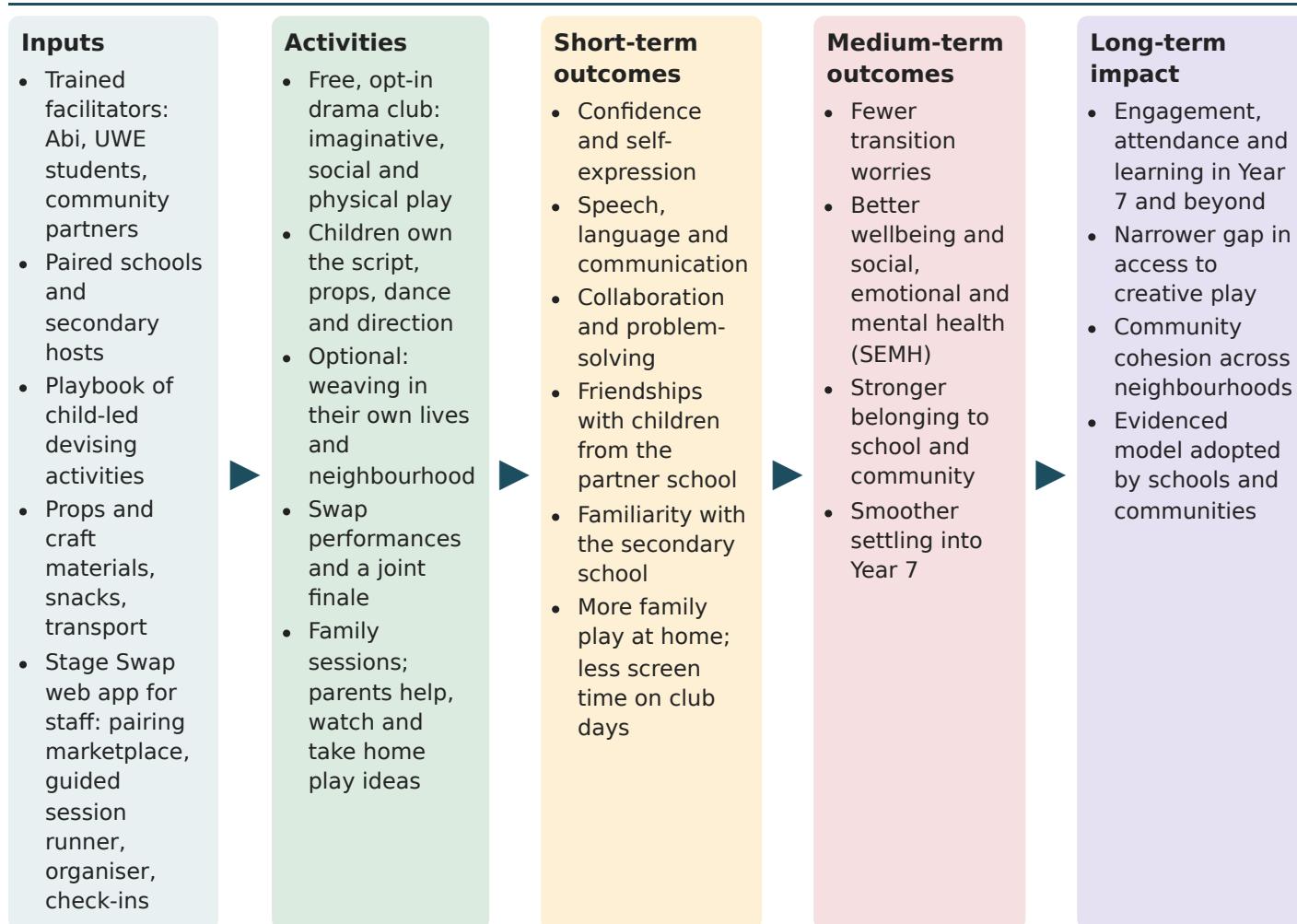
Stage Swap: theory of change

Appendix to Q7. How child-led drama exchanges between paired schools lead to better learning and development outcomes.

How a Stage Swap term works



Theory of change



Why it works (mechanisms)

Mechanism	What happens
Ownership	The play is freely chosen and personally directed. Children decide the story, so they are intrinsically motivated. In Abi's last group the children asked for "a girl power Cinderella" with two big dance numbers, and made it.
Real audience, real purpose	Performing your own story for children you will soon share a school with makes the play matter. It builds confidence through a shared success.
Familiar faces	Children play, make and perform together for weeks before the move, so in September they know faces. Worry about friendships is one of the most common Year 6 transition concerns.
Familiar place	The finale takes place in the secondary school, so the building is already known.
Family and community	Parents help make, watch and play at home, which extends play into the home learning environment. Communities see and value each other's stories.

Key assumptions we will test: children opt in and keep attending, with a target of 75% or more; schools provide space and a staff link; non-specialist facilitators can deliver to the playbook; light check-ins are reliable for 10-11 year olds.

How we will measure child-level outcomes

Check-ins at baseline, after the performances, and about 6 weeks into Year 7. Children answer a few minutes of questions on a shared iPad with a facilitator; there is no play on screens. A comparison group of Year 6 pupils at similar non-participating schools gives indicative effect sizes. Cohort 2 (autumn 2027) has no transition follow-up within Phase 1.

Outcome	Measure (to finalise with the evaluation partner)	Who reports	Expected change
Wellbeing / SEMH	Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (validated ages 8–15; Liddle & Carter, 2015)	Child	Higher wellbeing than the comparison group at follow-up
Transition worries	School Concerns Questionnaire (validated with Year 6–7 pupils; Rice et al., 2011)	Child	Fewer and less intense worries before and after the move
Friendships across schools	Number of children known at the new secondary	Child	More known peers on arrival in Year 7
Speech, language and communication	Short staff-rated communication observation, developed and tested with the evaluation partner (no validated short tool exists for this age)	Facilitator, teacher	Improvement from baseline to after the performances
Confidence	Short self-rating items	Child, parent	Improvement from baseline to after the performances
Engagement in Year 7	Autumn-term attendance, shared by secondaries with consent	School data	Attendance at or above the comparison group
Belonging and community cohesion	Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) plus community belonging items	Child, parent	Stronger sense of belonging to school and local area
Family play and screen time	Short parent report	Parent	More shared play at home; less screen time on club days
How and why change happens	Anthropological case studies: observation and short conversations in every pair	Researcher	How and why change happens, and for whom
Delivery and replicability	Attendance, retention, fidelity to playbook, cohort 1 (specialist-led) compared with cohort 2 (partner-led)	Toolkit data	Cohort 2 reaches at least 80% fidelity with similar outcomes

Who we serve: candidate cluster A (Bristol)

Indicator	Barton Hill Academy	Whitehall Primary	City Academy (shared secondary)	Bristol	England
Free school meals (Jan 2026)	73.8%	23.1%	47.8%	31.0%	26.5%
English as an additional language	82.2%	15.1%	43.9%	–	23% (primary)
IMD 2025 decile of neighbourhood	1	6	4	–	–
Child poverty after housing costs	57.7% (Lawrence Hill)	17–30% (Easton band)	–	35.4%	31% (UK)
Persistent absence (2024/25)	17.2%	18.7%	40.8%	29.3% (secondary)	23.4% (secondary)
KS2 expected standard: disadvantaged vs others	–	29% vs 66%	–	41% vs 71%	48% vs 70%

Sources: DfE school census Jan 2026; DfE absence 2024/25; DfE KS2 2026 (provisional); Bristol JSNA 2026/27 (DWP); End Child Poverty 2025; IMD 2025. Schools not yet approached.

The evidence behind the approach

- Arts participation, including drama, adds an average of three months' progress at very low cost, with consistently reported wellbeing benefits (EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit, 2021). Oral language approaches add six months, and more where disadvantaged pupils take part (EEF, 2025).
- About a third of 10–11 year olds are quite or very worried about transition, and poorer children worry more (Moore et al., 2021). Losing friends is the main worry through Year 7, only 38% keep the same best friend, and activities linking primary and secondary schools are associated with lower school anxiety (Rice et al., 2015, UCL STARS). Absence rises from Year 6 to Year 7 (DfE, 2025).
- Drama-based programmes show large effects on primary-age children's social skills (van Berkel & Bosman, 2023). Disadvantaged pupils are much less likely to take part in extra-curricular activities (46% vs 66%; Sutton Trust, 2024). In Lawrence Hill ward, 6 of 9 neighbourhoods are in England's most deprived 10% (IMD 2025).
- Abi's own experience running children's amateur dramatics clubs [TBC: years, settings, what changed for the children].

Stage Swap: project plan (Feb 2027 - Jan 2028)

Appendix to Q10. Gantt chart, risk register and payment milestones. Cohort 1 runs in the 2027 summer term so children can be followed up after they move to Year 7 in September; cohort 2 is the next Year 6, in the autumn term.

Work package	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
WP1 Mobilise: team, safeguarding, DPIA, ethics, school pairs												
WP2 Co-design with children, families, teachers												
WP3 Facilitator training (cohort 1, cohort 2)												
WP4 Cohort 1 clubs: 6 primaries, 12 sessions												
WP4 Cohort 1 swaps and finales at secondaries												
WP5 Learning review; model and playbook v2												
WP6 Cohort 2: partner-led replicability test												
WP7a Web app: user research, prototype, alpha (consent, registers, check-ins)												
WP7b Web app beta: guided session runner, onboarding, organiser												
WP7c Web app release 2: school discovery and pairing marketplace												
WP7d Web app v1.0: impact reports, licensing, billing, security, accessibility												
WP8 Evaluation: baselines, post-measures, Year 7 follow-up, report												
WP8 Anthropological case studies												
WP9 Go-to-market: head interviews, non-pilot schools on marketplace, pricing tests												
WP10 Final outputs and Phase 2 plan												
Payment milestones	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12

Risk register

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation (reflected in the plan)
Fewer schools sign up than planned	Med	High	Letters of intent sought before submission [TBC]; Abi's school networks; reserve schools; recruitment starts in month 1
Children drop out of an opt-in club	Med	Med	In-school taster sessions; free snacks; a performance goal; family involvement; attendance tracked weekly in the toolkit
Safeguarding incident	Low	High	DSL and deputy; enhanced DBS checks; always 2+ adults; school procedures; trip risk assessments, ratio of at least 1:8; sign-out to named adults; same-day reporting
Ethics approval takes 2-3 months	Med	Med	Apply in month 1 through the evaluation partner; case studies start in month 4; service-evaluation fallback for quantitative measures
Low check-in completion or data quality	Med	Med	Short iPad check-ins piloted in month 2; facilitator-led; paper backup; completion monitored on a dashboard
Web app not adopted by staff	Low	Med	Co-designed with staff; single sign-on; releases in months 2, 4, 7 and 11; paper fallback; usability tests
Web app seen as an 'online platform' (out of scope)	Low	High	Staff-only tool; no child accounts; play always face to face; stated clearly in every answer
Marketplace cold start: too few schools to pair	Med	Med	Seeded with pilot clusters; secondary 'cluster invites' bring feeders; council and trust partners
School calendar squeezes cohort 1 (Easter, SATs in May, July residential and transition days)	Med	Med	Clubs start after Easter; no sessions in SATs week; swaps and finales in early July, agreed with schools in month 1
Hires not in post by February (decision 4 Dec)	Med	Med	Recruit Dec-Jan; Abi and community partners cover; developer can start in month 2
Project lead's school role (capacity, conflict of interest)	Med	Med	[TBC: employer agreement]; fixed 3 days a week; if her school takes part, another facilitator leads that club
Data protection breach	Low	High	DPIA before launch; pseudonymised IDs; UK hosting; role-based access; no child accounts or messaging
Dependence on the project lead	Med	High	Coordinator as deputy; playbook written from month 6; cohort 2 led by partners
Schools or councils unwilling to pay	Med	Med	Pricing tests with at least 10 organisations from month 9; free and low tiers; evidence-led sales
Environmental impact of travel	Low	Low	Pairs chosen to be local; walking or shared coaches; reusable props; minimal hardware

Management: Abi leads weekly team meetings; a monthly milestone, risk and budget review with Luke (MLops director) prepares evidence for the monitoring meeting; a quarterly advisory group of headteachers, community partners and the play advisor.

Payment milestones

Milestone	Deliverables	Success criteria	£ ex VAT
M1 Mobilise Feb 2027	Core team in post; safeguarding policy, DPIA and ethics application submitted; signed agreements with 3 school pairs (6 primaries, 3 secondaries) and 2 community partners	3 pair agreements signed; safeguarding policy approved by partner schools; ethics application acknowledged; 100% of staff enhanced-DBS checked	23,200
M2 Co-design and web app alpha Mar 2027	6 co-design workshops (children, parents, teachers); user research with 6 heads/transition leads and 10 staff; check-in set v1 piloted; web app alpha (school/staff accounts, consent, registers, safeguarding log, iPad check-ins)	At least 60 participants in co-design; check-in completed in 5 minutes or less by at least 90% of pilot children; alpha passes DPIA review and is used to consent at least 75 families	26,500
M3 Training and cohort 1 launch Apr 2027	Facilitator training (at least 12 facilitators); cohort 1 recruitment; baseline check-ins; clubs launched in 6 primaries	At least 12 facilitators trained; at least 75 children enrolled (70% of 108 places); baseline completed for at least 90% of enrolled children and a comparison group	29,800
M4 Cohort 1 delivery and web app beta May 2027	Sessions 1-6 delivered in all 6 schools; web app beta: guided session runner (12 sessions, staff onboarding, how-to videos), swap and finale organiser, dashboards; first case-study fieldwork	36 sessions delivered; average attendance at least 75%; session runner used in every session; at least 1 case-study observation per school	29,800
M5 Cohort 1 devising complete Jun 2027	Sessions 7-12 delivered; 6 child-devised pieces ready; first swap performances held	72 cohort 1 sessions delivered in total; 6 pieces devised by children; at least 3 swap performances held	29,800
M6 Swaps, finales and playbook v1 Jul 2027	All 6 swap performances and 3 finales at the host secondaries; post-performance check-ins (children, parents, facilitators); playbook v1	9 performances held; at least 100 family members attend; post-measures for at least 80% of participants; playbook v1 published to partners	33,100
M7 Learning review and school-pairing marketplace Aug 2027	Interim evaluation note; revised model and playbook; web app release 2: school discovery and pairing marketplace (profiles, map/search, rule-based suggestions, cluster invites); cohort 2 facilitator training through the app	Interim note reviewed by advisory group; at least 5 model changes logged with rationale; at least 10 facilitators onboarded; cohort 2 pairs agreed through the marketplace	23,200
M8 Cohort 2 launch (partner-led replicability test) Sep 2027	Cohort 2 (new Year 6) recruitment and baseline; clubs launched, co-delivered by community partners and students (replicability test)	At least 75 children enrolled; baseline for at least 90%; at least 50% of sessions led by non-specialist facilitators	29,800
M9 Year 7 follow-up and market validation Oct 2027	Cohort 1 follow-up check-ins about 6 weeks into Year 7; case-study interviews; at least 20 head/transition-lead interviews; marketplace opened to schools outside the pilot	Follow-up completed for at least 70% of cohort 1; at least 6 case studies drafted; at least 10 non-pilot schools create profiles and request a pairing	26,500
M10 Cohort 2 swaps and pricing tests Nov 2027	Cohort 2 sessions completed and swap performances held; pricing tests of School, Cluster and Trust/Council tiers with prospective customers	72 cohort 2 sessions delivered; 6 swap performances; fidelity at least 80% against playbook; pricing feedback from at least 10 organisations	26,500
M11 Cohort 2 finales and web app v1.0 Dec 2027	3 cohort 2 finales in community venues with families; cohort 2 post-measures; web app v1.0: impact reports and exports, trust/council admin, licences and billing, accessibility audit, pen test, Cyber Essentials	3 finales held; post-measures for at least 80%; v1.0 used by at least 15 facilitators with at least 80% rating it useful; impact report for every school; no high-severity pen-test findings open	26,500
M12 Final evaluation and Phase 2 plan Jan 2028	Independent evaluation report; playbook v2; facilitator training pack; Phase 2 scale-up, go-to-market and pricing plan; close-out report	All deliverables accepted at final monitoring meeting; evaluation reports child-level outcomes against comparison group; at least 3 letters of intent to buy a Cluster or Trust/Council licence	26,041
Total (paid monthly in arrears on evidence of completion)			330,741

Stage Swap: cost breakdown

Appendix to Q12. All costs are at cost with no profit. Labour 59%, subcontractors 17% (specialist skills only). Payment is monthly in arrears against 12 milestones (see the Q10 appendix).

Category / item	£ ex VAT
Labour	195,614
Abi [surname TBC]: project lead & lead facilitator, 0.6 FTE x 12 months (£48,000 FTE + 22% on-costs)	35,136
Luke Marsden: product & technical lead, web app architecture & build, 100 days at £480/day (cost, no profit)	48,000
Project coordinator & deputy safeguarding lead: new fixed-term hire, 0.6 FTE x 12 months (£32,000 FTE + on-costs)	23,424
Research & fieldwork assistant (case studies, data collection): fixed-term hire, 0.5 FTE x 10 months (£32,000 FTE + on-costs)	16,267
Full-stack developer / UX designer: fixed-term hire, 0.8 FTE x 10 months (£50,000 FTE + on-costs)	40,667
Sessional facilitators: UWE students & community artists, ~1,460 hours at £22/hr incl. on-costs (144 club sessions x 2 facilitators, 18 performances, training)	32,120
Overheads	19,561
10% of labour costs (office, IT, finance, HR & payroll admin)	19,561
Materials	16,200
6 iPads + protective cases for children's check-ins	2,700
Props, costume & set materials (12 school groups x £300)	3,600
Healthy snacks at every club session (144 x £25)	3,600
Play-at-home family packs (180 packs)	2,700
Web app hosting (UK region), data storage & software services (12 months)	3,600
Subcontractors	55,800
Evaluation partner: evaluation design, ethics review, analysis, independent report (~45 days)	34,800
Community partners: Easton & Barton Hill groups (co-design, venues, co-delivery of cohort 2), 2 x £8,000	16,000
Neuroscience-of-play advisor: 10 days at £500	5,000
Travel & subsistence	1,800
Staff local travel & subsistence (Bristol)	1,800
Other	41,766
Coach/minibus hire: 12 swap trips + 12 finale trips (24 x £450)	10,800
Family sessions & refreshments; community venue hire for cohort 2 finales	4,000
Enhanced DBS checks (30) & safeguarding training (Level 3 DSL + team)	3,850
Insurance top-up (public liability for out-of-hours clubs)	1,500
Data protection impact assessment & contract/legal advice	1,800
Accessibility & SEND support (extra support hours, adapted materials)	2,500
Market validation: head/transition-lead interviews, pricing & adoption workshops	4,000
Family and child co-design participation vouchers	2,000
Accountancy for monthly milestone claims & payroll	2,316
Web app security & accessibility: penetration test, WCAG 2.2 AA audit, Cyber Essentials	6,500
Staff how-to videos for the guided session runner (production)	2,500
Total excluding VAT	330,741
VAT at 20% (MLOPS CONSULTING LTD is VAT registered)	66,148
Total including VAT	396,889

Labour days

Person / role	Days
Abi [surname TBC]	140
Luke Marsden	100
Project coordinator & deputy safeguarding lead	135
Research & fieldwork assistant (case studies, data collection)	105

Full-stack developer / UX designer	170
Sessional facilitators (UWE students and community artists)	~1,460 hours

Salaries are benchmarked to Bristol education and charity-sector rates, and on-costs are 22% (employer NI and pension). Luke's time is charged at cost. Direct delivery costs (facilitators, materials, snacks, transport, venues) are about £56,000, roughly £310 per child, for about 180 children.