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THEATRE in Education

Spotlight on Theatre in Education

A practical guide for commissioners and educators on designing and delivering impactful programmes that help young people to stay healthy, safe and well.

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About the guide

What is the guide?

This guide aims to equip you to design a quality Theatre in Education programme and to plan and manage the programme successfully, for impact. Theatre in Education is a term that refers to a popular method for enhancing knowledge and skills across a range of topics, usually within an educational setting. This guide focuses on Theatre in Education as part of a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing, which is especially relevant for exploring sensitive or complex issues that young people face.

Who is it for?

This guide is for staff in local authorities involved in planning and commissioning interventions for children's health and education. It is also for school management and teaching staff who plan or deliver Personal, Social, Health and Economic education. In line with the license terms, you can use and adapt elements of the guide for your needs.

How was the guide created?

This guide was developed by the 'Investigating the role of Theatre in Education in preventing illicit substance use' research project team. It was funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Innovation Fund for Reducing Demand for Illicit Substances (Phase 2).

The guide is based on findings from our research, which evaluated a Theatre in Education programme focused on drugs, alcohol and tobacco education and delivered in East Sussex in spring 2025. The evaluation used a 'realist' informed methodology which sought to understand how, for whom, and in what contexts the Theatre in Education intervention appeared to work. This guide also draws on learning from over five years of commissioning, implementing and learning from Theatre in Education interventions across East Sussex, covering a range of other topic areas including healthy relationships, harmful sexual behaviours, violence against women & girls, and 'County Lines' exploitative drug distribution.

The guide was created by a team including public health specialists, academic psychologists, children's services experts, and teachers. You can read more about the research supporting the guide at: eastsussex.gov.uk | theatre-in-education.

1. Making the case for Theatre in Education

What is Theatre in Education?

- Theatre in Education is the use of drama performances and techniques to aid learning and engagement, delivered by theatre companies in an education setting, and integrated into wider curriculum activities. It involves the communication of a strong message on a specific theme, often relating to social or community issues or sensitive personal topics.

- Theatre in Education programmes can vary widely. For example, a programme may be comprised of a one-off performance by a professional theatre provider and accompanying workshop, a series of workshops and performances or the co-creation of a play with young people over several weeks. The format will be determined by the curriculum, available time, budget, and available offers from theatre companies. In East Sussex, the format used has been a one-off performance plus teacher-led classroom activities before and after the performance, embedded in the whole-school approach to health and wellbeing and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education delivery. Our research showed that wrap-around classroom activities were critical to the programme. For more information about the East Sussex Healthy Schools programme visit czone.eastsussex.gov.uk | healthy-schools.

- Features of a Theatre in Education performance include: identification of a specific target audience; delivery of a strong message; focus on a relevant topic; an episodic structure so that smaller scenes can stand alone; audience participation.

- The aims of a Theatre in Education programme depend on the specific theme and the intended audience. In East Sussex, recent programmes delivered universally twice a year have reached entire year groups of secondary school pupils and have covered the topics of healthy relationships and harmful sexual behaviours, and drugs, alcohol and tobacco use. Examples of other themes used by programmes and theatre companies include road safety, knife crime, bullying, child exploitation, social media, and online safety.

Example:

East Sussex Theatre in Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco

In spring 2025, East Sussex County Council commissioned Solomon Theatre Company to tour their play 'Time Out' to 24 secondary schools across the county, primarily reaching whole year groups of year 9 pupils (13 and 14-year-olds).

The 55-minute play follows the story of two secondary school pupils who start experimenting with alcohol, vaping and drug use amid exam pressure and stresses at home. Spoken word is used for characters' 'diary' entries, and music is used to signal scene changes. The play has a strong message about the physical and mental health impacts of alcohol and drug use and vaping. It depicts the importance of young people talking to family and trusted adults for support.

Accompanying PSHE education lesson plans were developed by the council's project team and Seaford Head School, including a specialist teacher and public health staff, for delivery by teachers within standard school time. Materials were delivered in school prior to pupils watching the play, and materials for follow-up activities based on the play were also shared with teachers. Additionally, staff delivering PSHE education on drugs, alcohol and tobacco were invited to a webinar to update their knowledge prior to the programme.

The programme as a whole aimed to build pupils' knowledge and capacity to cope with challenging peer-influenced decisions and actions related to the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and to improve teachers' knowledge and skills to deliver PSHE education content on this theme.



Why use Theatre in Education?

Statutory guidance

Working with external organisations who have specialist knowledge and bring different ways of engaging with young people can enhance delivery of education on relationships, sex, physical health and mental wellbeing, according to England's statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (Department for Education, 2025).

Value for money

Evaluation of the East Sussex programme estimated that every £1 spent on the programme could bring economic benefits worth £3.10 over 20 years. This is because the programme is likely to slow down when/if young people try drugs and improve health and employment prospects in the long-term. The modelled economic benefit was also associated with a likely reduction in serious youth violence.

Effectiveness

Theatre in Education can be an effective way of engaging young people because it is a form of experiential learning that activates audience members' emotions, imaginations and senses, and supports the development of problem-solving skills. The research evaluation of the East Sussex Theatre in Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco showed that the approach supports reflection, peer discussion and skills development and is likely to directly contribute to children and young people resisting peer pressure, refusing substances, and seeking support from appropriate adults or services.

Practical application

As part of the research in East Sussex, a programme theory was developed for the Theatre in Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco use (see appendix 2). This can be used to guide practical planning and evaluation of similar programmes in other areas, ensuring the correct 'ingredients' are in place for intervention delivery with different contexts. The research showed that the programme could be well replicated in other areas of the country, based on the demographic profiles of participating pupils in East Sussex.

School contexts

- A Theatre in Education programme can be suitable method of delivery as part of Personal, Sexual, Health and Economics (PSHE) education, which seeks to equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions. Depending on the topic(s) that you select, a Theatre in Education programme may also helpfully align with statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (Department for Education, 2025).
- You should develop clear pupil learning objectives for the Theatre in Education programme, aligned with curriculum content of relevant statutory guidance. These should be as specific as possible, but might include: building pupils' knowledge of the topic(s); shifting pupils' attitudes about the topic(s); building confidence to evaluate risks and make healthy decisions; and raising awareness of available support systems and organisations relevant to the topic(s).
- As with all PSHE education, the focus and content of a Theatre in Education programme should be relevant to the lives and experiences of the young people who receive the programme. As well as consulting teachers, young people, parents and carers (see section 3), you may consider using existing data to identify issues and objectives suited to a Theatre in Education programme. For example, in East Sussex, data from the annual pupil perception survey, feedback from PSHE teachers and national data on drug and alcohol use helped to inform the design of the programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco use.
- A Theatre in Education programme will likely depend on the availability, skills and willingness of school staff to support and deliver components, such as classroom activities and dedicated PSHE education lessons. You should assess whether this is the case before commissioning a Theatre in Education programme.



2. Commissioning and managing a Theatre in Education programme

Guiding principles

In the context of diverse schools coordinating with a local authority to plan and deliver a Theatre in Education programme, it can be useful to identify and agree principles that will guide the programme. You may have established relationships and ways of working together around PSHE education support, school health, drugs prevention, and other factors to consider when agreeing your principles.

In the case of East Sussex, the council's role in supporting PSHE education is just one of the steps taken to fulfil its responsibility in improving population health and wellbeing. The local authority public health and children's services teams do so as part of commissioning of the healthy child programme, through the funding of a settings-based approach to whole-school health improvement – the East Sussex Healthy Schools programme – delivered by county's School Health Service (a team of public health practitioners, led by school nurses, who work with children, young people, families and schools).

The public health team also funds guidance and support for schools through established 'PSHE Hubs' and consultancy support, in addition to providing access to lesson plans, guidance, planning tools and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for all state funded schools in the area. Key local partnerships in East Sussex – including the local Harm to Hope Partnership (which coordinates activities to reduce drug and alcohol-related harm) and the Safeguarding Children Partnership – have provided their backing of the Theatre in Education programme.

The East Sussex Theatre in Education programme was informed by the following values and ways of working:

- **Preventative**: designing and delivering the programme as part of a wider strategy for safeguarding and health improvement, aligned with statutory relationships, sex and health education along with PSHE practice.
- **Embedded** within a **whole-school approach to health improvement** and aligned with a **spiral curriculum** approach which sees pupils developing their understanding of a topic and related skills within a supportive context and through building on and reinforcing learning over time.
- **Collaborative**: across partnerships, local authority teams and departments, and between the local authority, schools and the selected theatre provider.
- **Evidence-based:** drawing on up-to-date knowledge and recommendations for education on the selected topic(s).

- **Continuous learning:** gathering feedback from teachers and young people to understand outcomes as well as how the Theatre in Education programme can be improved.
- **Youth-centred:** ensuring (i) the voice of young people in the planning of Theatre in Education is heard, and (ii) using youth-friendly language and tools.
- **Safeguarding-minded:** designing all aspects of the programme to prevent harm, protect those at risk and in alignment with local authority and school safeguarding policies and procedures.

Selecting a theatre provider

Selecting a theatre provider to work with for your Theatre in Education programme is a key decision, and will be informed by several factors, but particularly the play's treatment of your focal subject(s). Below are some guiding questions when considering the offer of a theatre provider and developing a service specification. See appendix 1 for an example service specification outline that can be used when procuring a Theatre in Education provider.

Content

- Does the play have clear messages that align with your learning objectives and with national, local and/or school policy?
- Is the play suitable for the audience you wish to target i.e. the appropriate school year(s)?
- Is the play well researched, offering exploration of the topic(s) based on current evidence?
- Has the play been developed in collaboration with, or already been tested with, young people (or the target audience)?
- Is the theatre provider able and willing to adapt the play for your local context (based on young people's advice, teachers' recommendations, or similar)?

Inclusion

- How has the theatre provider ensured that the play is accessible for audience members with special educational needs and disabilities?
- How has the theatre provider considered equality, diversity and inclusion in the play?
- Does the theatre provider have experience in the types of educational setting involved in the programme (for example, specialist provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities)?

Logistics

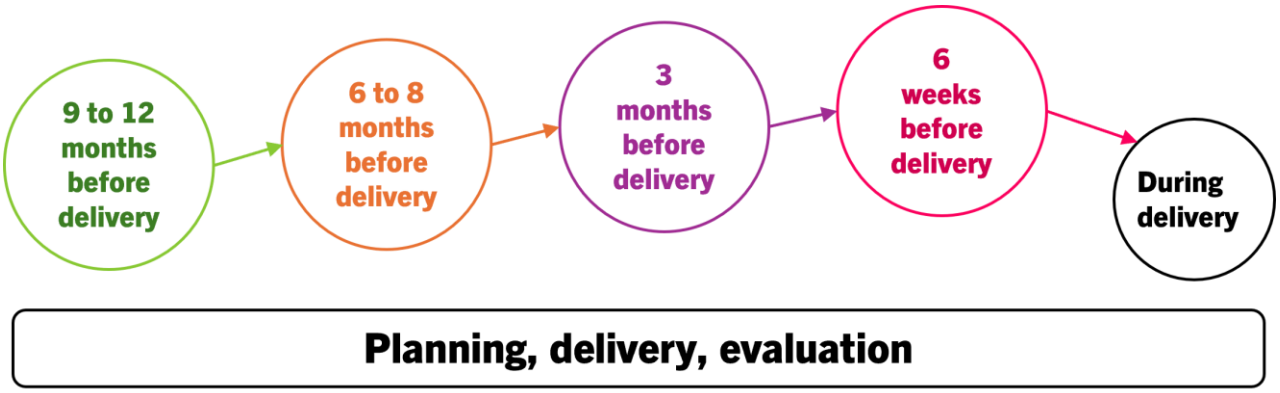
- Can the theatre provider offer a filmed version of the play if this is needed for some educational settings?
- Has the theatre provider toured the play successfully in other locations, and can they offer any references for this work?
- Can the theatre provider clearly outline all costs, equipment and information they require to manage bookings and undertake a schedule of performances?
- What expectations does the theatre provider have of schools, in terms of time, audience size, pupil supervision, hospitality, technology?

Other considerations

- How does the play fit within the spiral curriculum for PSHE provision in the school or locally?
- Does the theatre provider offer any accompanying activities such as workshops or training for teaching staff?
- Can the theatre provider offer a performance and/or other resources for parents, carers, and/or stakeholders to support their own learning and help them support young people's learning?
- Does the theatre provider have experience with, or the potential to support, monitoring and evaluation of the programme?



Planning



Deciding on the right time for delivery of Theatre in Education programme takes place is essential, so that it aligns with the curriculum, avoids inconvenient times within the school year, and so that teachers have time to plan delivery within timetables. Below is an example timeline for a commissioner to plan, deliver and evaluate a Theatre in Education programme.

9-12 months before delivery

- Gain the support of relevant partners and partnership groups
- Consider the budget you are likely to have available
- Consult PSHE education leads about suitable topics and timing for delivery to align with the curriculum
- Establish a mechanism for pupil voice
- Carry out early market engagement and appraise possible theatre provider offers
- Consider the resources you have available for evaluation and prepare the evaluation plan.

6-8 months before delivery

- Develop a service specification or agree on terms which clearly set out your aims, the required activities and outputs, and your desired outcomes
- Procure a theatre provider and agree details of the required services
- Promote the Theatre in Education programme to schools and obtain expressions of interest
- Source or develop accompanying lesson plans and classroom materials, in consultation with experts
- Plan appropriate learning or preparation for teachers to support their delivery of the programme
- Consult with PSHE education leads to integrate the programme into planned timetables
- Coordinate theatre provider and pupil voice mechanisms to update the play for local context and current school culture.

3 months before delivery

- Manage or liaise on theatre performance bookings at interested schools, ensuring spaces and timings are adequate.
- Disseminate accompanying lesson plans and resources to PSHE education leads for their adaptation
- Support schools to consult parents and carers about the proposed programme.

6 weeks before delivery

- Agree with schools how to collect information from pupils and staff before and after the programme, to understand what difference it makes.

During delivery

- Monitor performance delivery and any feedback collected by the theatre provider or direct from schools.

After delivery

- Request feedback from schools to inform future programmes.
- Lead or oversee programme evaluation and the dissemination of results.

Budget planning

£ Analysis of the East Sussex Theatre in Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco calculated that every £1 spent on the programme could bring economic benefits worth £3.10 over 20 years. Theatre in Education can be considered good value for money, potentially reaching large numbers of young people.

£ The costs involved in commissioning a Theatre in Education programme will vary according to how many educational settings are involved, what components you include in the programme, and what services you procure from external providers. We would recommend planning an allocation of around £30,000 for a programme involving 25-30 schools (not including any planning and support costs within your own organisation).

£ Some top tips for effective use of funds based on the experience of East Sussex County Council include:

- use internal expertise where you can – for example, to create lesson plans or coordinate pupil voice activities
- explore the additional activities that theatre companies may offer – for example, leading accompanying training, managing school bookings or evaluating the programme
- agree with your selected theatre provider how to handle any cancellations or unexpected changes

- establish relationships with theatre companies to create a service that works best for your context and to obtain competitive pricing
- manage communication with schools carefully to help reduce drop-out or cancellations of theatre performances.

Safeguarding and risk management

A Theatre in Education programme needs to be planned and delivered within the context of existing safeguarding policies and procedures. However, there are several aspects that may require attention during the commissioning process, due to the sensitivity of subjects being explored and the use of external providers in educational settings.

Questions to consider include:

- Are the resources and teaching materials appropriate for the age and maturity of pupils?
- Will the programme align appropriately with local schools' requirements and policies for checking external resources and allowing external visitors within the school?
- What school staff will be present during theatre performances to respond to any potential disclosures or distress?
- How will you ensure that the theatre provider is aware of school safeguarding policy and procedures and agrees to follow them?
- Can you collate and share the details of Designated Safeguarding Leads from each participating school with the theatre provider visiting them?
- Can you inform a centralised service for referrals or reports of safeguarding concerns and/or emotional and wellbeing needs?
- Does the theatre provider have an adequate child protection policy?
- Do all theatre provider actors have a current certificate from the Disclosure and Barring Service (where required)?
- Does the theatre provider complete a safety check or risk assessment for each performance space?
- Do all providers involved have appropriate insurances in place, such as professional indemnity insurance and public liability insurance?
- How will you ensure that pupils receive information about available support services at each point of the programme?

3. Involving pupils, parents and teachers

Pupil voice

- Involving young people in the planning, running and/or evaluation of a Theatre in Education programme is key to its effectiveness. It can help ensure the programme is relevant to young people's lives, culture and experiences; acknowledges or responds to other relevant risks young people face; has aesthetic appeal to support engagement, and; tackles pertinent topics. For example, in the case of the East Sussex programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco use, young people were invaluable in naming prevalent substances and the language used about them by young people in the local area.
- You may have access to existing data from young people that can directly inform your programme – for example, from previous consultations or surveys, school-level activities, and/or reports from existing youth voice forums. If you have time and budget to create new activities that involve young people in planning, running and/or evaluating a Theatre in Education programme, you might consider: involving existing youth bodies such as the Youth Council; consulting pupil bodies such as school councils; working with schools to hold pupil voice lessons; holding pupil forum events; creating a youth advisory committee; working with existing organisations or youth groups and institutions that coordinate youth research advisory groups.



Example:

The East Sussex research project's Young People's Advisory Group

To ensure the involvement of young people in the Theatre in Education research evaluation in East Sussex, a youth organisation called Priority 1-54 was engaged to recruit and coordinate a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG).

The group was intended to be a forum to oversee and advise on the project, as well as to co-lead aspects of research data collection and analysis. Priority 1-54 collaborated with three secondary schools running the Theatre in Education programme to nominate 12 pupils from years 8, 9 and 10.

YPAG meetings were grounded in the Lundy model of participation for children (Lundy, 2007) and used a range of creative methods to support young people to explore and express their views. Across six meetings, the YPAG members reviewed and shaped the Theatre in Education programme and research activities.

They made critical recommendations for the improvement of Solomon Theatre's *Time Out* play; shared their views about what was needed in PSHE education lessons on drugs, alcohol and tobacco; advised on pupil survey questions and the approach for survey administration; sense-checked the qualitative data analysis process and initial research findings, and; provided recommendations for future research.

The initial plan was to also train YPAG members to co-lead aspects of data collection, but this was ultimately not possible due to safeguarding concerns over young people visiting schools other than their own, and due to the timeline for securing necessary permissions from research ethics committees. Members of the project team attended YPAG meetings to listen directly to the young people's views, and to feedback on how the team had made changes based on the YPAG's advice.

Engaging parents and carers

- As with all PSHE education, a Theatre in Education programme should be a partnership between schools and parents & carers. Schools should be encouraged to effectively communicate with parents and carers about the programme, providing opportunities for their questions and feedback. This will help foster trust in the programme and potentially prepare and motivate parents and carers to support young people's learning; although schools will need to advise on what level of communication and engagement they have with parents and carers.
- Commissioners may be able to support schools to engage parents and carers, for example by providing a presentation of the Theatre in Education programme at a Parent Teacher Association meeting or parent-teacher evening; organising a dedicated performance of the selected play for

parents and carers; sharing information about the programme for distribution via usual school-parent communication methods, and; creating materials for pupils to take home for parents and carers as way to start conversations about the topic of your programme and thus support learning.

Inclusion

- Theatre in Education can be a particularly effective approach to engaging young people with a range of needs and abilities, thanks to its interactivity and adaptability. The experiential and multi-sensory quality of a theatre performance may mean that adjustments are required for particular audience members and settings. The sensitivity of topics often explored via Theatre in Education may also necessitate different treatment for different audiences.
- You may consider working with staff at participating specialist educational settings and other experts in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and the needs of other vulnerable groups to assess and develop any changes needed to the Theatre in Education programme to promote inclusion. This might involve inviting staff to view a live or recorded version of the play in advance and providing feedback on adaptations; consulting SEND specialists from across your participating educational settings, and/or; ensuring the representation of SEND pupils in your youth voice activities (see above, section 3).
- In the case of the East Sussex Theatre in Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco use, we engaged a specialist SEND organisation (Amaze) to watch a recording of the theatre performance and advise on adjustments; we also listened to feedback from young people such as about the volume of music. The accompanying lesson plans were also reviewed to promote relevance to a range of SEND pupils, whilst leaving it for individual teachers to use their expertise to adapt plans for their pupils and individual settings.



4. Ensuring quality

Features for impact

Based on the findings from the evaluation of the East Sussex Theatre in Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco use, the following recommendations are made. You could discuss this checklist with the theatre provider you commission and PSHE education leads in the schools delivering your Theatre in Education programme.

- ✓ **Do** portray positive behaviours in a Theatre in Education play, such as seeking help from appropriate adults and services, to support problem-solving
- ✓ **Do** ensure characters and stories are realistic, to help strengthen audience engagement
- ✓ **Do** treat the subject in a non-judgemental way, helping the audience understand risks and develop decision-making and problem-solving skills
- ✓ **Do** ensure there is time after a Theatre in Education production for reflection and discussion, to consolidate learning
- ✓ **Do** make sure that language is contemporary and youth-centred – for example, terminology for drugs and alcohol
- ✓ **Do** ensure actors performing in a Theatre in Education production can convincingly portray their characters, especially in terms of age
- ✓ **Do** use humour appropriately, to engage audience members
- ✓ **Do** make sure the use of music and sound effects are contemporary and relevant for the audience
- ✓ **Do** follow established evidence around effective prevention approaches such as avoiding the use fear tactics or involvement of recovered individuals (e.g. former drug users).

- ✗ **Do not** oversimplify issues and portray neat conclusions - this can reduce believability and limit the opportunities for learning
- ✗ **Do not** exclusively promote authorities as sources of support – consider peer support where appropriate
- ✗ **Do not** stereotype - audience members are likely to disengage
- ✗ **Do not** use fear, shock, or exaggerated stories and characters – this can have negative unintended consequences and may lead to audience members disengaging
- ✗ **Do not** overlook diverse learning needs when planning theatre performances – consider pace, timing, volume, and other features
- ✗ **Do not** treat a Theatre in Education programme as a stand-alone activity, but embed it into the planned curriculum
- ✗ **Do not** overlook the context of each school with regards to pupils' lived experiences of the theme under focus – content and performances may need to be adapted in order to be relevant.

Accompanying activities

- The additional learning package that wraps around a Theatre in Education performance is critical to its quality and impact. Classroom lessons and post-performance workshops can introduce and reinforce knowledge about legislation, risks and support options. It is therefore important that content is up-to-date, accurate, contextualised and relevant to pupils' lives.
- In order to support effective delivery, school staff may benefit from learning opportunities to build their own knowledge, confidence, and ability to explore pupils' questions and problems. This might take the form of written briefings about the Theatre in Education programme; information about existing resources on the subject(s); an online training session, and/or; an in-person preparatory session for the programme.
- It is important to signpost young people to relevant services during classroom activities and the theatre performances (see Safeguarding, section 2). You may consider encouraging schools to involve their pastoral team in the programme – for example, by presenting before or after the theatre performance.



5. Understanding outcomes

Why evaluate a Theatre in Education programme

The purpose of evaluating a Theatre in Education programme needs to be outlined at the beginning, and factored into the overall programme plan. For a local authorities and partnerships, understanding the results of the programme for pupils and teachers helps build the evidence to inform strategic decision-making. You may also be required to report on the programme's outcomes and performance to funders. Theatre companies may require this information too - for their own learning, publicity, or reporting to funders. Questions for evaluation might include:

- To what extent did the programme achieve its learning objectives? How?
- Was Theatre in Education an effective way to explore the topic(s)? In what ways?
- Did pupils value the programme? In what ways?
- Did teachers value the programme? In what ways?

How to evaluate a Theatre in Education programme

- How you evaluate your programme depends on the time and resources available. These are often limited in an educational setting, so working from the local authority level to support teachers may be welcome and may generate more information than, for example, individual school-level evaluation.
- Methods to answer your evaluation questions may include:
    - Pupil questionnaires completed before and after the programme to capture any changes in knowledge, attitudes or skills it has potentially supported
    - Pupil focus groups that enable discussion and personal insights
    - Interactive workshops that use creative and/or embodied tools to explore pupils' knowledge, attitudes or skills
    - Structured notes made by the theatre provider about performances and audience responses, which can aid understanding of how this aspect of the programme was delivered and received
    - Teacher questionnaires or interviews to capture their views and experience of the programme.
- Considerations when planning any evaluation activities and tools include: transparency about the purpose of collecting data; ensuring that participation is voluntary; ensuring confidentiality and participant anonymity; inclusion, and; sharing results with participants. You may have specialists in research or monitoring and evaluation who can support the design of evaluation activities and tools.

Example:

Evaluating the East Sussex Theatre in Education programme

As part of several Theatre in Education (TiE) programmes on different subjects, East Sussex County Council evaluated results for both pupils and teachers, based on planned learning objectives. To do this, anonymous online baseline surveys were shared with participating schools – one which asked about the existing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of pupils – and one which asked about teachers' levels of confidence and knowledge in delivering content on the subjects.

Baseline survey responses were then compared with responses to a similar survey shared after the programme delivery had completed, in order to capture any changes that might be attributed to the programme. The analysis of these results was shared with teachers and used to plan future TiE programmes and shape other content on drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

Through the 'Investigating the role of Theatre in Education in preventing illicit substance use' research project, East Sussex County Council collaborated with the University of Brighton and other partners to investigate the TiE programme more deeply. The research aimed to understand the features of TiE that contribute to effectiveness and to understand the potential health, wellbeing and economic benefits of TiE programmes.

The research used pupil and teacher surveys before and after the programme; pupil focus groups, and; interviews with parents or carers and teachers of PSHE education. Findings from the research were shared with local authorities, participating schools, national Public Health and PSHE education networks, and the public. The research contributed to the existing evidence of what works for drugs prevention among young people, helping to guide future strategies.





Appendix 1: Example Theatre in Education service specification outline

The following outline may assist with planning for the procurement of a theatre in education provider to suit local arrangements.

PART ONE: Background information

You may wish to cite relevant policy, legislation, evidence relating to your focus theme(s), and details of relevant local service provision and interdependencies. Local intelligence, such as survey data, can helpfully provide context to the issues in your area and young people's needs.

PART TWO: Specification of requirements

1. **Aims and objectives of the service**
   You may wish to include learning objectives for children and young people, any capacity building aims for school staff, and any allied objectives for the Theatre in Education programme.

2. **Service requirements**
   This will need to include the number of Theatre in Education performances and what they will involve, as well as any preparatory activities, monitoring and feedback activities.

3. **Supporting resources**
   Include detail of any expectations for input or provision of materials for promotion, parent/carer information, associated classroom activities.

4. **Responsibilities of the service provider**
   Clarify tasks such as managing performance bookings; liaison with the commissioner; delivery; monitoring and feedback; working with pupil voice mechanisms; adherence to relevant policies and procedures; reporting.

5. **Responsibilities of the commissioner**
   Clarify tasks such as promotion; liaison with schools; provision of associated learning materials; planning and sharing evaluation.

6. **Outcomes of the service: a) for children & young people, b) for schools & PSHE leads**
   You may wish to consider how you will evaluate whether the outcomes have been achieved after the programme. Outcomes for children and young people will likely need to align with statutory guidance.

7. **Service standards**
   You may wish to reference statutory guidance for relationships education, sex education and health education; NICE Public Health guidance; any desirable standards or quality expectations; requirements for participating actors and facilitators; organisational requirements for data protection, safeguarding, health and safety.

8. **Equality and diversity**
   You may wish to specify populations that the service provider may need to make specific provisions for to ensure inclusion and full participation in the programme.

9. **Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children**
   Include local policy, procedures and details of relevant organisations. You may wish to reference school processes for external visitors.

10. **Security, health and safety**
    Consider any specific considerations for your context.

11. **Community and public involvement**
    If you or individual schools have pupil voice mechanisms these may be referenced here.

12. **Managing the service**
    This section can reference elements that the service provider is legally required to comply with.

13. **Core values and principles for service provision**
    You may wish to draw on the 'Guiding principles' section above to develop key principles of working together.

PART THREE: Monitoring, price and performance

14. **Monitoring and review arrangements**
    Consider how you will oversee the service provider and monitor the programme delivery.

15. **Prices and costs**
    See 'budget planning' section of this guide.

16. **Timescales**

17. **Performance and quality indicators**
    You may wish to develop indicators or outputs which can be measured to evaluate the outcomes of the programme.

Appendix 2: Programme theory

How the East Sussex Theatre in Education programme worked in practice: This example illustrates the key ingredients, mechanisms, and outcomes identified through the evaluation of the East Sussex Theatre-in-Education programme on drugs, alcohol and tobacco education (2025).

Inputs

Financial resources:

Council's project budget

Staff time (Public Health and Children's Services)

- Health improvement specialist/commissioner
- Project officer
- Data analyst

Other partners:

- East Sussex PSHE Hub (school-to-school PSHE support provision)
- Expert PSHE and safeguarding consultancy
- Youth voice experts
- School PSHE leads and teachers
- Theatre company & cast
- School Health Service (NHS)

Implementation

- The council commissioned a TiE production for all East Sussex secondary schools.
- The PSHE Hub lead developed lesson plans (reviewed by expert PSHE consultants) to share with schools.
- Schools scheduled TiE performances and lessons within their PSHE timetables and informed parents and carers.
- The project team arranged a CPD webinar to support PSHE leads and teachers.
- Theatre company delivered productions to schools.

Mechanisms of impact

Capabilities: Learning and Skills Developed

- Becoming aware of risky-taking behaviour
- Seeing consequences play out
- Knowing how and where to seek help
- Seeing how to say "no" confidently
- Learning coping strategies for the future

Opportunities: Social and Environmental Enablers

- Opening up conversations between adults and pupils
- Learning together in an engaging, social format
- Hearing messages from relatable young actors
- Seeing examples of peer support
- Reaching quieter or less visible pupils

Motivations: Emotional and Cognitive Engagement

- Relating to believable storylines
- Feeling emotionally engaged
- Reflecting on personal choices and friendships
- Trusting the message because it's non-judgemental
- Empathising with characters in distress

Wider context and challenges:

- Budget restrictions
- Limited school time, timetabling pressures and PSHE capacity
- Peer and family influences may be stronger than school messages
- School culture and area
- Limited parent/carer engagement

Factors that support mechanisms

Capabilities: Learning and Skills Developed

- Characters or stories feel realistic
- Consequences shown clearly
- Support without fear of punishment or judgement
- Follow-up to consolidate learnt skills
- Delivered at the right time: too early (irrelevant) / late (missed prevention)

Opportunities: Social and Environmental Enablers

- Time to talk after performances
- Good room setup and space
- Actors believable for the age group
- Ensuring universal delivery so pupils are not missed

Motivations: Emotional and Cognitive Engagement

- Storyline with personal relevance
- Avoiding heavy or confusing tone
- Novelty in format and content so pupils do not experience PSHE fatigue
- Avoiding preachy or moralistic delivery
- Ensuring characters are well developed with different perspectives shown

Outcomes and impact

PSHE leads/teaching staff report:

- Confidence in discussing sensitive issues
- Supported delivery of PSHE lessons
- Active use of new lesson materials and statistics
- Integration of TiE themes into wider PSHE planning

Young people report:

- Strong emotional engagement
- Awareness of risks
- Recognition of 'red flags' in relationships
- Reflection on how peers influence choices
- An understanding of how to resist pressure
- Improved knowledge of where to seek help

Parents/carers:

- Low engagement but viewed as an important target group for future work
- No objections to the programme raised
- Need identified to build on this group's potential impact

TiE = Theatre in Education; ESCC = East Sussex County Council; CPD = Continuing Professional Development; PSHE = Personal, Social, Health and Economic education.
Mechanisms refer to how pupils engage with and respond to the TiE performance and lessons. *Factors that support mechanisms* represent facilitators which may maximise impact

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Further reading

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