

EQUALITY,
DIVERSITY &
INCLUSION
POLICY
2024-28



INTRODUCTION

The Ark is a dedicated cultural centre for children. We opened in 1995, three years after the Irish government ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of The Child* (UNCRC), recognizing the rights of children to “*participate freely in cultural life and the arts*”, The Ark was founded on the principle that children are entitled to great art made especially for them.

Our purpose is to realise children’s right to art and culture with ambition and joy. We do so by commissioning, producing and presenting fun and ambitious art for, by, with and about children from birth to age 12. Our work is also our advocacy.

We share the work of brilliant and daring Irish and international artists in our award-winning, purpose-designed home in the heart of Dublin’s Temple Bar, as well as in-person and online in schools, in libraries and in early years and care settings around Ireland. We seek to engage children in the places and spaces and on the platforms that are meaningful to them. We often work in partnership with others as artistic collaborators to advance the diversity and inclusivity of our engagement with children.

Child participation is at the heart of our practice. We work closely with our Children’s Council and have a robust model of child participation embedded across all of our programmes. Active and comprehensive consultation with children informs all our decision making.

Key to The Ark’s rights-respecting ethos is our focus on the inclusion of all children. It is for this reason that in 2018, The Ark created its first *Diversity and Inclusion Policy*. This was then reviewed and revised in 2021 and became the *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy*. This policy will now be implemented through *The Ark Strategy 2024-2028* and is synonymous with the priorities set out in the Strategy.

Fundamentally, we wish to ensure that all children have access, by whatever means, to visit, participate in and enjoy all the artistic experiences we offer and that a diverse range of artists and staff work at The Ark. This revised policy has been developed with the input of The Ark staff, artists, Children’s Council and Board.

In line with best practice, and with equality legislation including the Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015) and Equal Status Acts (2000-2015), as well as the *Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty* (Section 42 of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014*), The Ark actively seeks to ensure equality in terms of access and engagement regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, membership of the Traveller Community, socio-economic status, family or civil status, disability, or religion.

In particular, The Ark is keen to welcome children who experience barriers to arts participation and engagement, such as migrant and refugee children, and vulnerable and disadvantaged children, with their families.

POLICY CONTEXT

The Ark operates within the context of a number of national and local policies in relation to children and to arts and culture.

The focal point for us is national arts policy. The Ark cogently aligns its work with the strategic priorities of *Making Great Art Work*, the Arts Council's ten-year strategy (2016-2025), responding in particular to objectives in the priority areas of the artist, public engagement, and spatial and demographic planning.

A number of discrete Arts Council policies also guide our work, including *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, *Paying the Artist*, *Place, Space & People*, *Digital Arts*, and *Growing With The Arts*.

In the broader context of national policy in relation to children, we consider the priorities of a number of government departments and programmes.

We support the goals of the Department of Education, summarised as “quality, inclusion, collaboration and care”, as they work to achieve “an education system where every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported and nurtured to reach their full potential”. We also recognize the ambition of the Creative Ireland programme, as articulated in the Creative Youth Plan, to enable the creative potential of every child.

We operate in strong alignment with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2023-2028), *Young Ireland*, which sets out a vision for “an Ireland which fully respects and realizes the rights of children and young people, supporting them to lead fulfilling lives”. We are pleased to support the commitment made by the Department in the First 5 Implementation Plan “to advance the inclusion and participation of babies and young children in cultural life and the arts”.

Likewise, within the Young Ireland framework, we warmly welcome the spotlight on child poverty and well-being, now a discrete unit of the Department of the Taoiseach and the *From Poverty to Potential 2023-2025* programme plan.

As a Dublin-based organisation, we are also keen to respond to the priorities for children and the arts within the city as expressed in the Dublin City Development Plan (2023-2028) and Dublin City Council's Arts Plan.

THE ARK'S POLICY ON EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO US?

Our PURPOSE: To realise children's right to art and culture with ambition and joy.

Our VISION: The arts for every child.

Our MISSION: To make and share fun and ambitious art for, by, with and about children, inspiring others by what we do.

Our VALUES: Dreaming big, having fun, thinking ahead, opening hearts and minds, and showing kindness and care.

We have identified four areas of strategic priority which serve our ambition for 2028. These priorities correspond to The Ark's founding principles, are true to our purpose and work towards our vision.

1: REALISE AMBITIOUS ART FOR CHILDREN

The Ark is founded on the principle that children are entitled to great art made especially for them. Our particular focus is on enabling the widest diversity of artists to make outstanding and experimental art for children. We believe that in order to do so, we must take a proactive approach to promoting diversity across our programming, as well as finding new ways for artists to engage with diverse audiences. To measure our progress, we will also actively monitor representation and report on it annually.

Furthermore, we will continue our ongoing commitment to fair and equitable remuneration for all artists across all disciplines, by maintaining a consistent focus on best sectoral practice.

2: TRANSFORM OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILDREN

Ensuring that more children experience art is at the heart of everything we do, and their voices are critical to every element of our work. Over the next few years, we will build on our experience and achievements in opening up opportunities for children to experience art. This will involve the development and expansion of decision-making structures, including a new Advisory Group comprised of artists with disabilities. We will continue to promote participative decision-making in our work through the Children's Council. Through our Ark Access programme, we will actively seek to increase free opportunities for children to engage with The Ark, and continuously pursue collaborative partnerships that promote inclusion.

3: INFLUENCE THINKING ABOUT ART AND CHILDREN

Enhancing The Ark's infrastructure and knowledge is key to developing our organisation and our people, now and into the future. We maintain an active focus on accessibility, across our physical and digital infrastructure, and in our team's knowledge and capability.

Alongside our own work, we will also partner with all relevant stakeholders to champion access modifications to the local area, through the Temple Bar Access Alliance.

4: GROW AS AN INCLUSIVE, EFFECTIVE, SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

We are passionate about advancing children's right to art and culture. As a duty bearer, The Ark plays a key advocacy role in building awareness of this right. We do this by promoting the voice of the child, through participatory decision-making as well as our work with partners across education, media, government and the arts.

Through our programming, we seek to champion diverse narratives and experiences, in exciting new work for children that resonates with their individual perspectives. On an ongoing basis, we assess how best to research and understand our audiences, in order to promote children's engagement in the arts.

OUR PEOPLE

The Ark is a vibrant, fun and dynamic organisation, led and managed by a passionate and committed team. We wish to build a team — encompassing staff, Board, and artists — that is representative of the wide diversity of our society. In order to do so, we will continue to promote The Ark as an employer of choice for all potential employees, by effectively communicating our interest in receiving applications from a diverse pool of candidates when vacancies arise. We will also ensure that Board diversity is a priority in succession planning.

We will ensure that our marketing, advertising and other relevant materials represent and celebrate the diversity of our artists, audiences and colleagues.

THE ARK'S EDI PROMISE - HOW WILL WE IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THIS POLICY?

As with any policy, plan or strategy — ultimately its success will be determined by how effectively it is implemented and monitored. In order to ensure The Ark's EDI Policy's objectives are measured and progress monitored, we will mainstream reporting throughout all organisational meeting agendas, including team and Board meetings. Additionally, we will actively solicit feedback, insight and ideas on the policy and its progress from The Ark Children's Council and other relevant working groups or structures, as appropriate.

POLICY TIMEFRAME

The Ark's EDI Policy runs concurrently with The Ark Strategy 2024-2028, and will be reviewed in 2028, at the conclusion point of the strategy.