

Passport to the MAC

Reducing the cost of school visits



Image courtesy of The MAC, Belfast

Author: Melissa McMinn
The MAC, Belfast



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“We’re committed to providing opportunities for the next generation of artists and audiences to be inspired by the arts.”

Melissa McMinn

The MAC, Belfast



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Passport to the MAC

Reducing the cost of school visits

We launched Passport to the MAC in June 2013, a year after the MAC opened, to make it more affordable for primary schools to visit the venue.

The MAC is committed to providing opportunities for the next generation of artists and audiences to be inspired by the arts. Primary school visits play a key part in that so we wanted them to feel welcome at the MAC.

After various conversations with teachers, we identified that schools wanted to bring children to the MAC but finances were an issue. The cost of transporting a group to the theatre was putting teachers off.

We already offered a 20% discount off child price tickets for schools but we wanted to do more to remove the financial pressure. We took the teachers' feedback and used it to develop Passport to the MAC.



What is Passport to the MAC?

Passport to the MAC is a simple rewards scheme for primary schools.

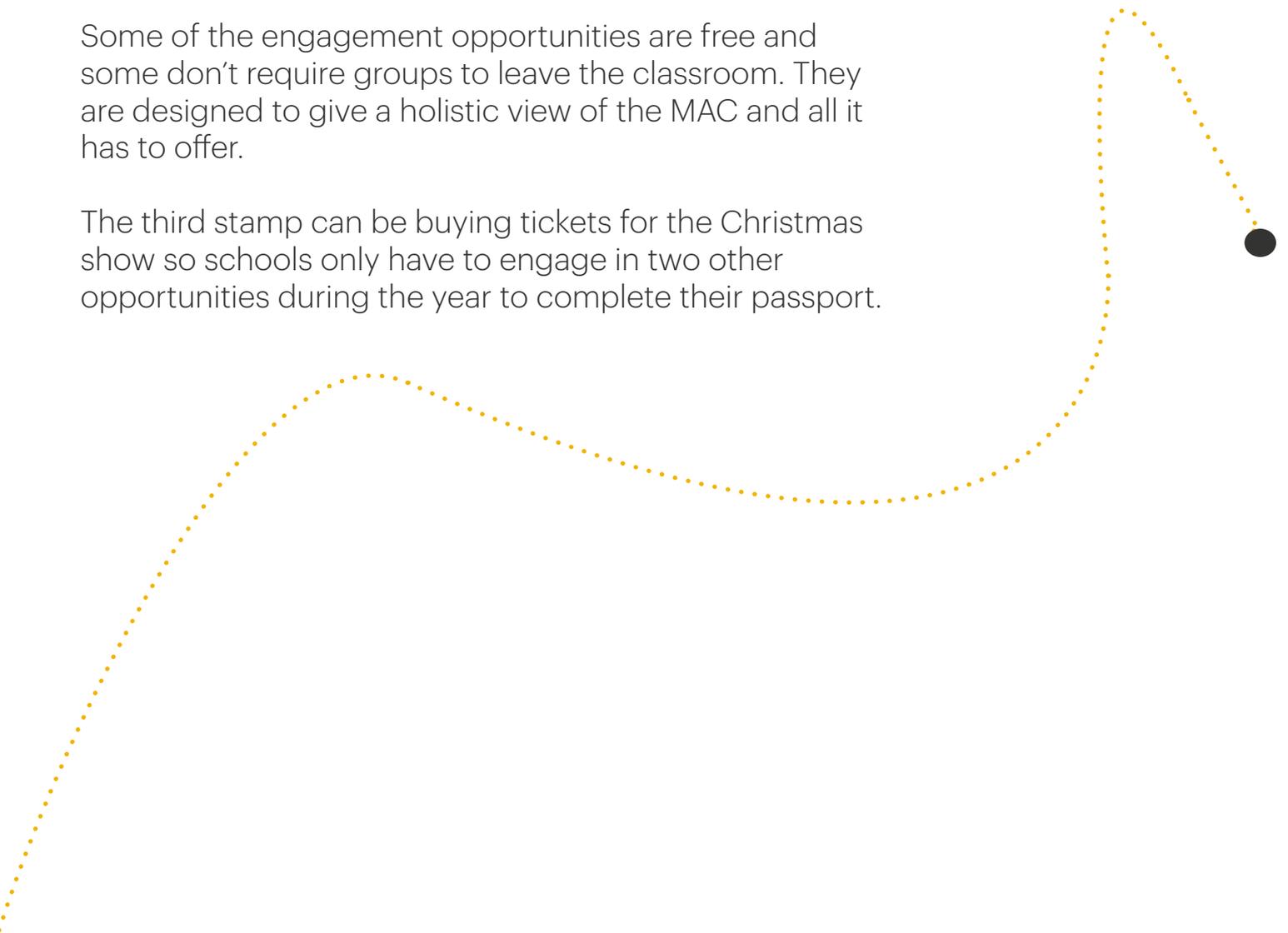
Schools are issued with an A6 passport containing three spots. Each time the school engages with the MAC, they receive a stamp in their passport. Once they have collected three stamps, they are entitled to up to £350 towards transport to the MAC for the Christmas show. The offer is subject to availability and administered on a first come first served basis.

Engagement with the MAC could include:

- a visit to the gallery
- a bespoke workshop at the school
- buying performance tickets
- taking part in the Masterpiece for the MAC art competition

Some of the engagement opportunities are free and some don't require groups to leave the classroom. They are designed to give a holistic view of the MAC and all it has to offer.

The third stamp can be buying tickets for the Christmas show so schools only have to engage in two other opportunities during the year to complete their passport.



Administering the scheme

The MAC marketing and learning and participation teams work together to promote and administer the scheme.

We book all of the transport and work with schools to identify local companies if they are travelling from outside Belfast.

Removing the administrative process and financial pressure for schools ensures that they can relax and enjoy their visit to the MAC.

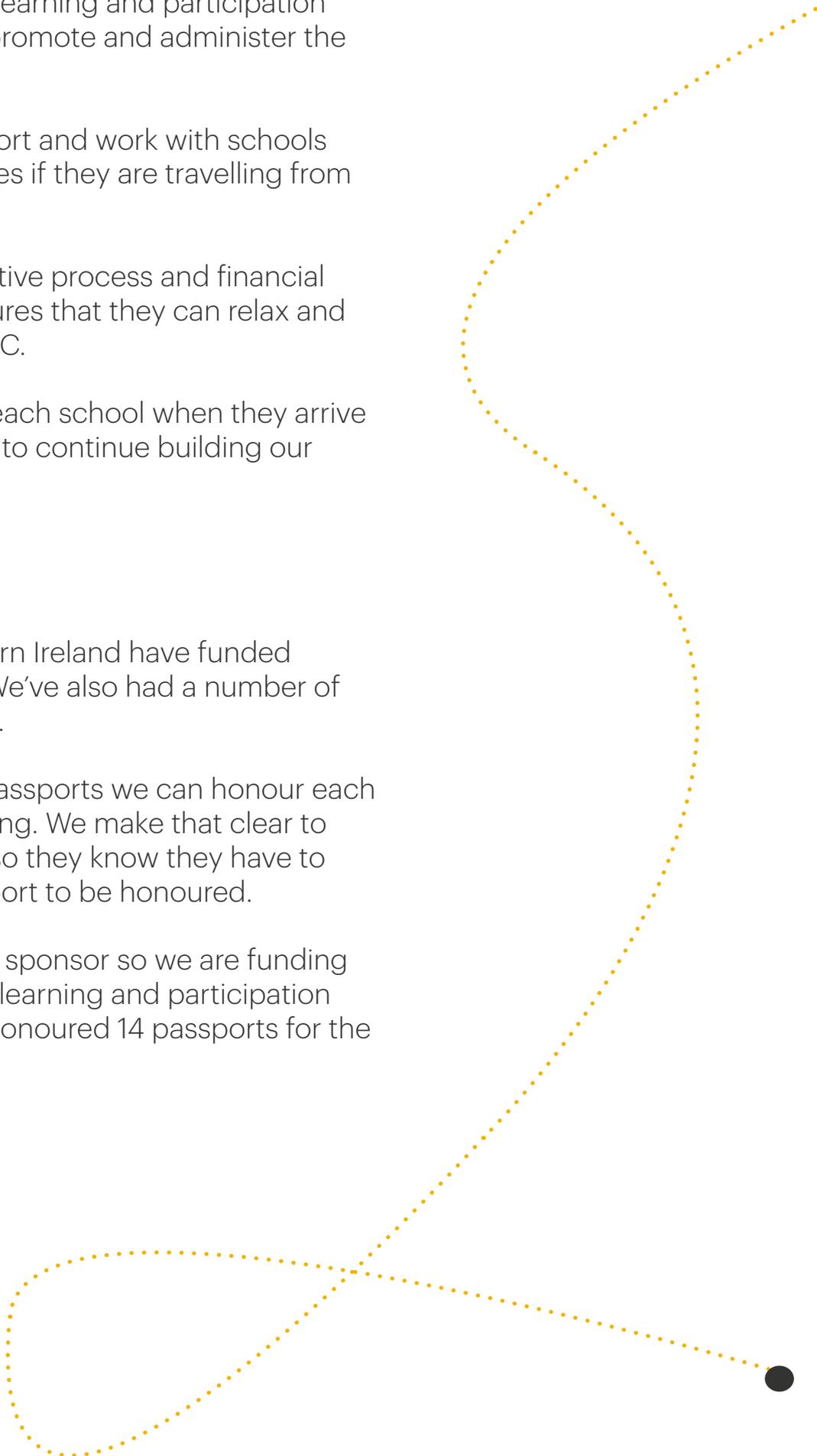
We also meet and greet each school when they arrive and use that opportunity to continue building our relationship with them.

Funding the scheme

Arts and Business Northern Ireland have funded the scheme in the past. We've also had a number of sponsors for the initiative.

We limit the number of passports we can honour each year, depending on funding. We make that clear to schools from the outset so they know they have to book early for their passport to be honoured.

This year we don't have a sponsor so we are funding the initiative through our learning and participation budget. So far, we have honoured 14 passports for the 2017 Christmas show.



Promoting the passport

We promote the passport initiative through the Schools and Communities page on the MAC website.

We then begin our schools Christmas show campaign in March with a letter to schools who have previously attended.

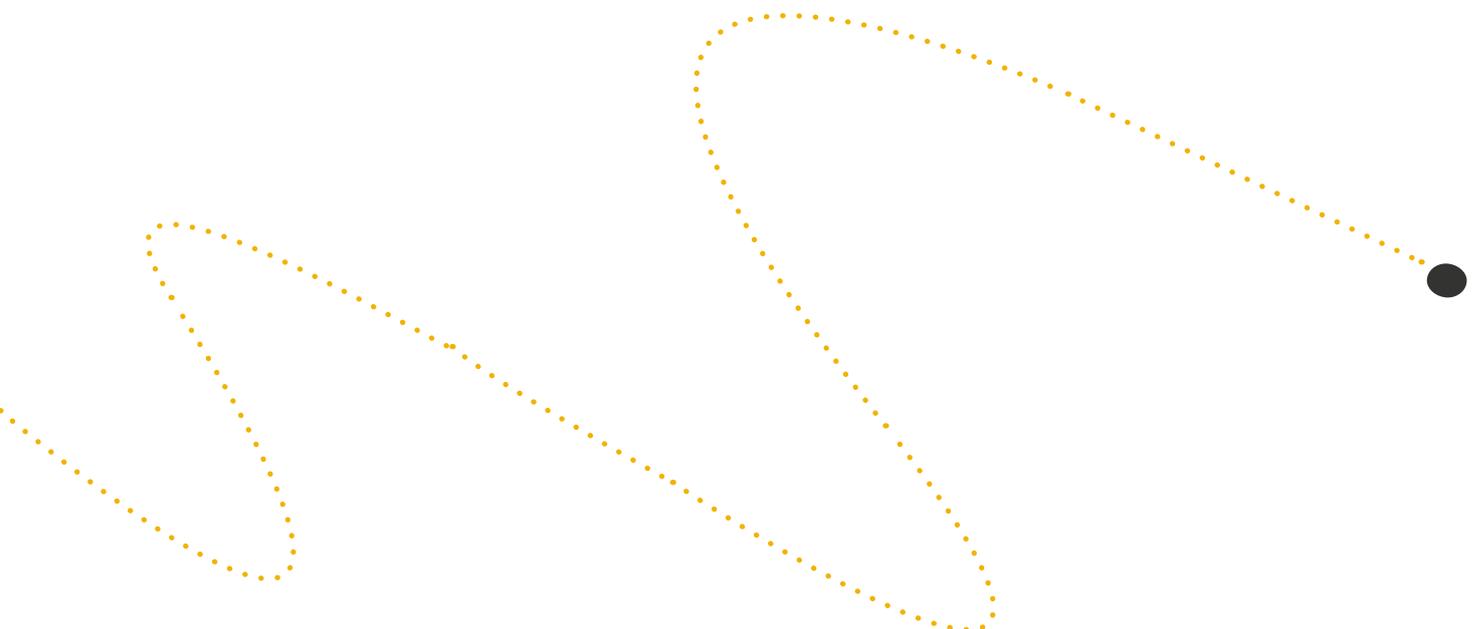
We then email all schools on our database a few weeks later and follow up with phone calls or visits from our learning and participation team.

When the MAC first opened in 2012, nine primary schools attended the Christmas show.

2016 was the fourth year we had run the Passport to the Mac initiative and 47 school groups attended the Christmas show.

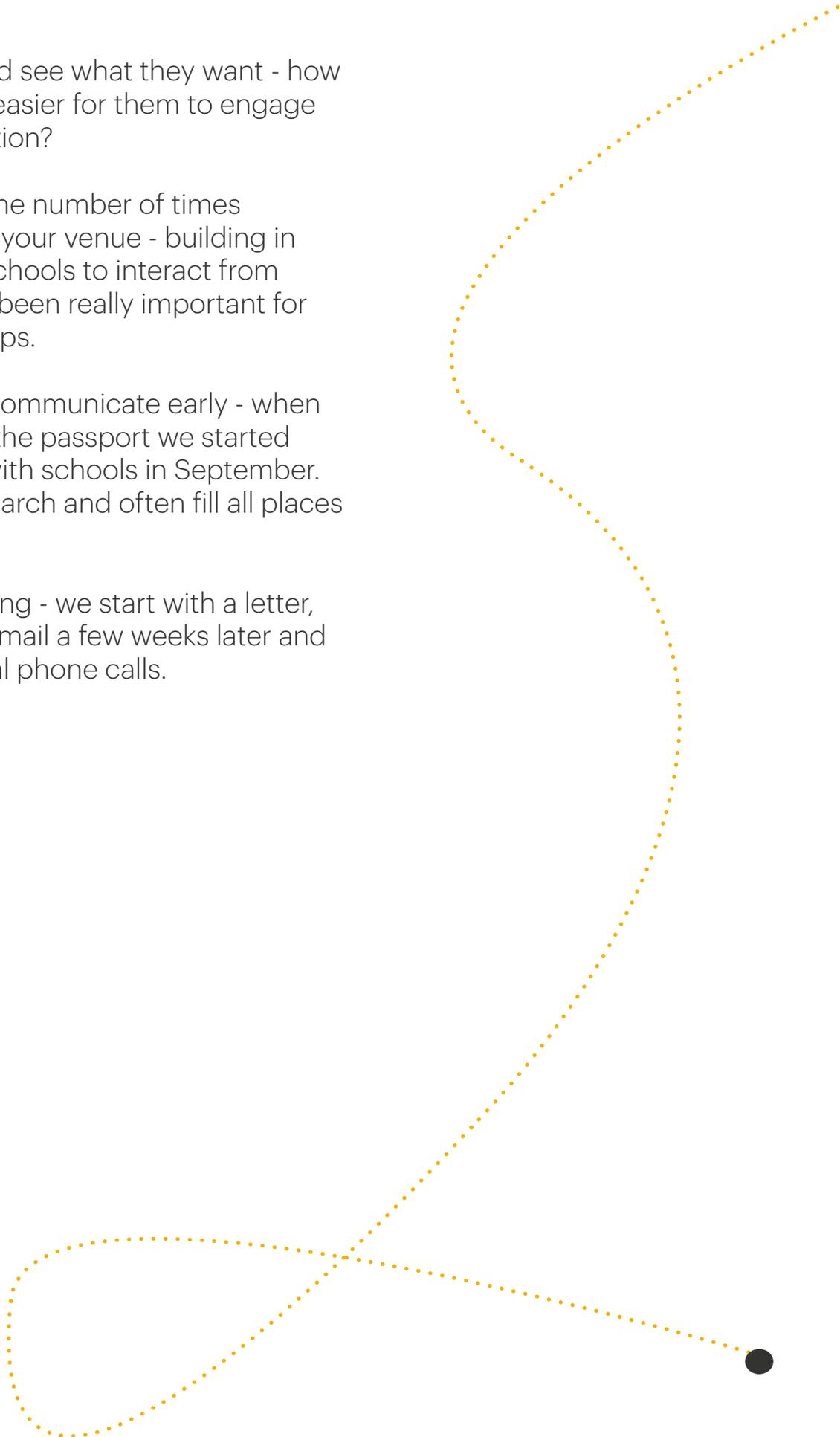
Now in our fifth year, we have 21 primary school bookings already confirmed in May, 14 of which are using the Passport to the MAC scheme.

Over the past five years, 9,649 primary school children from across Northern Ireland have benefited from free transport to the MAC through our Passport to the MAC scheme, which works to make art accessible to all children.



Recommendations

- Talk to teachers and see what they want - how could you make it easier for them to engage with your organisation?
- Be realistic about the number of times schools will attend your venue - building in opportunities for schools to interact from the classroom has been really important for building relationships.
- Don't be afraid to communicate early - when we first promoted the passport we started communications with schools in September. We now begin in March and often fill all places within one month.
- Keep communicating - we start with a letter, follow up with an email a few weeks later and then make personal phone calls.



Teachers' feedback

- Through the programme, 'Passport for the MAC' our pupils have been able to access the Christmas Show each year, something that most pupils would otherwise never experience, as many are from socially deprived backgrounds.
- We signed up to Passport to the MAC straight away. We were especially appreciative of the transport being organised. The staff from booking to our visit were excellent. Booking was painless and even when we had a change in numbers, nothing was too much bother.
- We could not have brought our children if it had not been for your passport scheme that covered the cost of the transport. Without it the whole experience would have been out of our price range. Thank you so much for everything you did to make our trip possible.
- Thank you for an outstanding trip. The Passport programme made the trip affordable for the families. Our school is located in an area of social deprivation and for us to have to load £2 or £3 more on top of the £8 cost of the show would make it not affordable. Hopefully this scheme will continue.



“Don’t be afraid to communicate with schools early. We used to contact them in September about the Christmas show. Now a lot of our school bookings are confirmed by the end of March.”

Melissa McMinn

The MAC, Belfast



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