IRL: *IN REAL LIFE*

Pilot Tour Evaluation Report

February – April 2026

Produced by Spectacle Theatre
In partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Educational Psychology Service

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Abstract

Aim: This report evaluates the impact of the pilot tour of IRL: In Real Life, a new participatory theatre programme produced by Spectacle Theatre in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) Educational Psychology Service (EPS). The programme was delivered across numerous secondary schools, a further education college, and special provision settings in Rhondda Cynon Taf between February and April 2026, as a free, one-day programme combining a participatory play with follow-up workshops and classroom resources. The aim of this evaluation is to assess whether participation in the programme produced measurable changes in young people's knowledge, understanding, and attitudes in relation to misogyny, healthy relationships, gender stereotypes, and bystander responsibility.

Method: A quantitative pre and post questionnaire approach was used. Participants completed an eight-item Likert-scale questionnaire before and after the programme on the same day. Questionnaires were administered on paper and subsequently collated and entered digitally by Spectacle staff. The primary dataset consists of 238 matched participant pairs (pre and post responses linked to the same individual) across 13 school and setting visits. A further 139 unmatched responses (93 pre-evaluation only; 46 post-evaluation only) were collected across additional visits where full matching was not possible, and these are reported separately for contextual purposes. Participants in all settings were selected by schools and settings on the basis of identified need; this should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

Findings and Conclusion: Statistically significant improvements were recorded across all eight questionnaire items (Wilcoxon signed-rank test, all $p<0.001$). The largest gains were on items addressing knowledge and conceptual understanding of misogyny: the proportion of participants scoring 4 or 5 on Q1 (knowing what the word misogyny means) rose from 18% to 50%, and on Q3 (understanding how misogyny affects boys as well as girls) from 24% to 58%. Overall, 81.9% of matched participants improved their composite score across all eight items. The findings are consistent with qualitative feedback from teaching staff, and support the conclusion that participatory theatre is an effective vehicle for developing young people's knowledge and critical thinking around gender-based harm and healthy relationships.

Welsh Context

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 establishes a statutory framework for improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Wales. Underpinning this framework is a commitment to joined-up working across public bodies, with education identified as a central vehicle for embedding whole-school approaches to emotional and mental wellbeing in children and young people.

The Curriculum for Wales, introduced in 2022, places health and wellbeing as one of six Areas of Learning and Experience. The accompanying Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Code places a statutory duty on schools to support learners in developing the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed for healthy, safe, and fulfilling relationships. Addressing misogyny, gender stereotypes, online behaviour, and bystander responsibility sits directly within this framework.

The programme also aligns with the Welsh Government's national action plan on violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence, which calls for early intervention and education as preventative tools. Participatory arts and theatre have a recognised role within Welsh education policy as methods that support emotional literacy, inclusion, and learner voice.

Local Context

RCTCBC has developed a Strategic Plan for Wellbeing in line with regional health board priorities and the Welsh Government's national framework. A key strand of this plan concerns the emotional health and wellbeing of learners, with a specific focus on whole-school approaches that create safe, inclusive environments where young people can explore sensitive issues.

Spectacle Theatre has a long-standing partnership with RCTCBC EPS, with previous programmes including In The Dark Woods (2023) and Making Monsters (2022) evaluated by the EPS and demonstrating measurable impact on pupil wellbeing, empathy, and understanding of healthy relationships. The IRL: In Real Life programme builds on this foundation, extending its focus to the specific challenges of online behaviour, peer pressure, misogyny, and gender-based harm facing secondary-age young people. Unlike previous programmes, the evaluation of IRL: In Real Life was conducted by Spectacle Theatre.

The programme was funded and supported as part of RCTCBC's commitment to providing schools with access to cultural, creative, and educational enrichment that supports the RSE Code and the Wellbeing Strategic Plan. The RCTCBC Strategic Plan for Wellbeing is currently under review.

The Programme

IRL: In Real Life

IRL: In Real Life is a participatory theatre programme written by Paul Swift and Spectacle Theatre, designed for young people aged 11 and over. It was developed in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf Educational Psychology Service and delivered as part of RCTCBC's Strategic Plan for Wellbeing.

Each visit is a one-day programme combining a one-hour participatory play with follow-up workshops and classroom resources for continued use by schools. The programme is designed to be inclusive and accessible and is delivered by trauma-informed practitioners holding enhanced DBS certificates and trained in child protection and working with vulnerable people.

The Play

> *"Have you ever done something really, really stupid? Like somebody might actually die, or something?"*

Jay is online, talking to his friends. He is worried about Nevaeh, and whether Riley is about to do something he cannot take back. Jay does not want to get involved. He is not a grass. But can he really do nothing?

Told through participatory theatre, the play puts the audience at the heart of the action. Young people are invited to make choices, challenge characters, and explore the real-world consequences of digital actions and bystander inaction. The play opens up honest, structured conversations about the issues shaping young people's lives every day.

> *"I found it really interesting the way it was portrayed as a video game, but it was like an actual story, and it was interesting to hear in the workshop bit what the other characters thought about it and see different perspectives."*

Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school

Themes

- Online behaviour and the real-world consequences of digital actions
- Bystander responsibility and peer pressure
- Healthy, respectful relationships and consent
- Gender and racial stereotypes, misogyny, and prejudice
- Body confidence and self-esteem

Alignment with the Wellbeing Framework

The programme is designed to provide opportunities for:

- Learners to recognise, understand, and speak out about discrimination and violence
- Young people to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, capabilities, and attributes needed for mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing
- Schools to access cultural, creative, and educational enrichment
- Listening to and acting upon the views of children and young people, including those with lived experience of mental health and wellbeing needs

Methods

The Pilot Tour

The IRL pilot tour ran between 23 February and 2 April 2026. In total, 23 performances and workshops were delivered across 15 venues: 20 in educational settings, 2 public evening performances (at Canolfan Olwg, Church Village, on 23 March and The Atrium, USW Cardiff, on 26 March), and an invite-only dress rehearsal at the Pop Factory, Porth.

Educational settings included 11 secondary schools, one further education college (Coleg y Cymoedd), and five special provision settings: Maesgwyn, Hen Felin, Hen Felin College, Ty Gwyn Education Centre, and Ty Coch. This breadth of settings reflects the programme's inclusive design and its aim to reach young people across a wide range of educational contexts.

Participants and Data Collection

Evaluation data was collected from participants in educational settings across the tour. Pre-evaluation questionnaires were sent in advance to participating staff to print and distribute to students before Spectacle's arrival. Post-evaluation questionnaires were completed during the visit, following the play and workshops. Both questionnaires were administered on paper. Spectacle staff subsequently collated, scanned, and entered all responses into a digital form.

Participants were not randomly selected. In each setting, schools and settings identified specific groups of pupils on the basis of need. This is noted here because it affects how findings should be interpreted: the cohort may not be representative of the wider school population, and gains may reflect the particular starting points and circumstances of the pupils selected.

Questionnaires were matched by name. Participants recorded their name on both the pre and post questionnaire, enabling pre and post responses to be linked to the same individual. Where names were absent or illegible, matching was not possible and responses were recorded as unmatched. It should be noted that the pre and post questionnaires were not physically attached to one another

at the point of distribution. This left room for error: where forms were separated, lost, or returned incomplete, matching was not possible even where a participant had completed both. Attaching pre and post forms at the point of distribution would likely have reduced the volume of unmatched data significantly, notwithstanding those cases where circumstances on the day made data collection impossible regardless.

238	331	284	13
Matched participants Pre- and post-paired responses	Total pre-evaluations Matched + unmatched	Total post-evaluations Matched + unmatched	Sessions With evaluation data

The primary analysis in this report is based on the 238 matched pairs, where a pre and post response can be attributed to the same individual. A matched pair dataset allows direct, within-individual comparison and provides the strongest basis for assessing change.

Session Overview

The table below details evaluation data availability for each of the 20 educational sessions. Sessions are listed in the order in which they were delivered.

Session	Status	Matched pairs	Unmatched	Total pre	Total post
IRL_1	Partial	3	5	8	3
IRL_2	Pending	—	—	—	—
IRL_3	Partial	0	21	21	0
IRL_4	Partial	0	13	13	0
IRL_5	Partial	0	20	0	20
IRL_6	Partial	9	20	29	10
IRL_7	Partial	15	1	15	17
IRL_8	Partial	16	14	24	22
IRL_9	Partial	14	19	28	18
IRL_10	Complete	15	0	15	15
IRL_11	Partial	16	6	18	20
IRL_12	Partial	0	2	2	0
IRL_13	Partial	21	18	29	31
IRL_14	Complete	20	0	20	20
IRL_15	Complete	29	0	29	29
IRL_16	Complete	31	0	31	31
IRL_17	Complete	27	0	27	27
IRL_18	Pending	—	—	—	—
IRL_19	Complete	22	0	22	22
IRL_20	None	—	—	—	—

Status key: Complete = all responses matched; Partial = some unmatched responses or data awaited; Pending = scanned forms not yet received; None = evaluations not completed on the day.

Unmatched and Missing Data

Unmatched responses arise for a variety of logistical reasons across the tour, including session overruns, last-minute booking changes, large group sizes, and challenges at special provision settings. A full session-by-session account of unmatched and missing data is provided in Appendix A.

Questionnaire Design

The eight questionnaire items were developed specifically for the IRL: In Real Life programme to measure knowledge, understanding, and attitudes directly related to its themes. Participants rated their agreement with each statement on a five-point scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The same eight items were used in both the pre and post questionnaire.

Q	Statement
Q1	I know what the word misogyny means
Q2	I know what a healthy relationship is
Q3	I understand how misogyny affects boys as well as girls
Q4	I notice when someone makes sexist jokes or comments
Q5	I feel confident challenging disrespectful behaviour toward girls/women
Q6	I think about how gender stereotypes limit what people can do
Q7	I understand the difference between banter and harmful comments
Q8	I know where to get help if I experience or witness misogyny

Data Analysis

Pre and post scores were compared at individual, item, and composite levels. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to assess statistical significance, as this non-parametric test is appropriate for paired ordinal data.[1] Changes in score distributions were also examined to understand the nature and direction of shift for each item. Composite scores were calculated as the mean of all eight item scores per participant.

Results

Overall Composite Scores

Across the 238 matched participants, the mean composite score (average across all eight items) rose from 3.31 to 3.93 on a five-point scale, a gain of +0.62. This improvement was consistent across the cohort: 81.9% of participants improved their composite score, 8.8% recorded no overall change, and 9.2% showed a slight decline.

3.31	3.93	81.9%	9.2%
Mean pre score Out of 5	Mean post score Out of 5	Participants improved n=195 of 238	Participants declined n=22 of 238

Participants who entered the programme with the lowest baseline scores showed the greatest gains. Those with an average pre-score of 2.0 or below (n=10) improved by an average of +1.50 points. Those with high baseline scores (average pre-score of 4.0 or above, n=51) still showed positive movement, improving by an average of +0.24 points. This pattern suggests the programme was effective across a range of starting points, reaching both those with limited prior knowledge and those who arrived with strong existing understanding.

Results by Questionnaire Item

All eight items showed statistically significant improvement (Wilcoxon signed-rank, all $p<0.001$). The table below summarises mean scores and the percentage of participants who improved on each item.

Q	Statement (abbreviated)	Pre mean	Post mean	Change	% Improved
Q1	Knows what misogyny means	2.14	3.34	+1.20	64.3%
Q2	Knows what a healthy relationship is	4.23	4.61	+0.38	34.9%
Q3	Misogyny affects boys as well as girls	2.41	3.58	+1.17	61.8%
Q4	Notices sexist jokes or comments	4.13	4.42	+0.29	33.2%
Q5	Confident challenging disrespectful behaviour	3.42	3.79	+0.37	41.2%
Q6	Thinks about gender stereotypes	3.40	3.82	+0.42	40.8%
Q7	Understands banter vs harmful comments	3.99	4.28	+0.29	34.5%
Q8	Knows where to get help	2.79	3.60	+0.81	53.4%

Knowledge of misogyny (Q1 and Q3)

The two largest gains were on Q1 and Q3, both of which address knowledge and understanding of misogyny directly. These were also the items with the lowest pre-scores across the cohort, indicating a significant knowledge gap at the point of entry that the programme directly addressed.

On Q1 (knowing what the word misogyny means), the proportion of participants scoring 1 (Strongly Disagree) fell from 47.9% to 14.3%. The proportion scoring 4 or 5 rose from 17.6% to 50.4%. The mean score rose from 2.14 to 3.34, a gain of +1.20 points. This is the single largest item-level improvement recorded.

On Q3 (understanding how misogyny affects boys as well as girls), pre-scores were similarly low, with 39.9% of participants scoring 1 and a further 13.0% scoring 2. Post-intervention, the proportion scoring 4 or 5 rose from 23.5% to 57.6%, and the mean score improved from 2.41 to 3.58, a gain of +1.17.

Together, these findings suggest that many young people arrived with limited or no prior exposure to the concept of misogyny, and that the programme was effective in building both awareness and a more nuanced understanding of how misogyny operates across genders.

Knowing where to get help (Q8)

Q8 (knowing where to get help if experiencing or witnessing misogyny) recorded the third largest improvement, with a mean gain of +0.81. Pre-scores here were notably low: 25.2% of participants scored 1, and a further 11.8% scored 2. Post-intervention, the proportion scoring 1 fell to 6.3%, and those scoring 4 or 5 rose from 28.6% to 54.2%. This represents a meaningful shift in practical knowledge of support and reporting routes, which is central to the programme's goal of empowering young people to act.

Healthy relationships and behavioural confidence (Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7)

The remaining five items showed smaller but still statistically significant improvements. Pre-scores on Q2 (knowing what a healthy relationship is), Q4 (noticing sexist jokes or comments), and Q7 (distinguishing banter from harmful comments) were already relatively high, at 4.23, 4.13, and 3.99

respectively. The ceiling effect on these items limits the possible magnitude of gain, but positive movement was still recorded.

On Q5 (confidence in challenging disrespectful behaviour), the proportion of participants scoring 4 or 5 rose from 47.1% to 63.0%. On Q6 (thinking about how gender stereotypes limit people), those scoring 4 or 5 rose from 46.6% to 63.4%. Both represent genuine shifts in attitudinal confidence rather than knowledge gain alone.

Results by Setting

Positive improvement was recorded at every setting with matched evaluation data. The table below presents results in session order. Settings with lower pre-scores tended to show the greatest absolute gains, consistent with the broader finding that the programme delivered its strongest results where knowledge gaps were most pronounced at baseline.

Session	n	Pre mean	Post mean	Change	% Improved
IRL_1	3	3.71	4.17	+0.46	100%
IRL_6	9	4.06	4.46	+0.40	67%
IRL_7	15	3.34	3.81	+0.47	73%
IRL_8	16	3.06	3.87	+0.80	88%
IRL_9	14	3.68	4.36	+0.68	86%
IRL_10	15	3.06	3.71	+0.65	80%
IRL_11	16	2.84	3.73	+0.89	88%
IRL_13	21	2.92	3.64	+0.71	95%
IRL_14	20	3.32	3.71	+0.39	65%
IRL_15	29	3.34	4.08	+0.74	90%
IRL_16	31	3.49	3.98	+0.49	71%
IRL_17	27	3.13	3.81	+0.68	78%
IRL_19	22	3.72	4.20	+0.48	95%

IRL_13 and IRL_19 both recorded the highest proportion of improving participants at 95%. IRL_15 recorded the highest absolute composite gain among larger groups (+0.74 across n=29). IRL_6, where participants already held strong baseline knowledge (pre mean 4.06), still recorded a meaningful gain of +0.40; this figure relates only to the 9 participants who experienced the full programme, as 20 who left before the workshop are not represented in the matched analysis.

IRL_1 contributed 3 matched pairs with a mean gain of +0.46 and 100% of participants improving. Given the small sample size, these figures are noted for completeness but should be interpreted with caution.

IRL_14 is a special provision setting. The composite gain there (+0.39) is lower than the tour average, which may reflect the specific needs and communication profiles of participants rather than a limitation of the programme content. The inclusive, participatory format of the programme was noted by facilitators as well-suited to these settings.

Unmatched Responses: Contextual Summary

The 93 unmatched pre-evaluations were collected primarily at sessions IRL_3, IRL_4, and IRL_6. Their mean scores by question closely mirror those of the matched cohort pre-evaluations, which

provides reassurance that the matched sample is broadly representative of the wider participant group.

The 46 unmatched post-evaluations, primarily from IRL_5, cannot be paired with pre-scores and are therefore not included in the main analysis. Their mean scores are directionally consistent with the matched post-evaluation data. No conclusions about change can be drawn from these records without corresponding pre-scores.

Qualitative Feedback

Qualitative data was collected through two channels: a written 'One Thing' evaluation questionnaire completed by attending staff, and pupil voice captured on video at one setting. At the time of this report, seven staff responses have been received from six settings. Pupil voice from a filmed session is also included. All quotes have been anonymised in line with EPS guidance.

Staff Feedback

Seven responses were received from staff across six settings. The responses are summarised thematically below, with representative quotes included for illustration.

Knowledge of misogyny and its reach

Several respondents identified misogyny as the area in which they gained most from the session, either in terms of the concept itself or in terms of how it manifests among young people.

> *"The misconceptions young people have around misogyny and how it displays."*
> **Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_15, IRL_16)**

> *"The serious effects it has."*
> **Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)**

> *"The different signs of somebody being pressured into something they don't want to do."*
> **Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)**

These responses speak directly to the most significant quantitative finding of the evaluation. The respondents identified gaps in their understanding of how misogyny presents among young people. This is consistent with the data showing that Q1 (knowledge of what misogyny means) recorded the largest single improvement across the cohort, and that 47.9% of participants scored 1 on this item before the programme.

Perspective shifts and intended actions

Respondents across settings described shifts in how they approach their professional practice as a result of the programme.

> *"Giving extra consideration over how much or little students may know about misogyny and what it means to be misogynistic."*
> **Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_15, IRL_16)**

"How I deliver my assemblies regarding related topics."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)

"The impact community members have on our young people."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)

Intended actions included explicit plans to introduce or revisit key terminology with students:

"Ensure explicit explanation to students to ensure terminology is mutually understood."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_15, IRL_16)

"Use open conversations with our pupils about hard hitting topics."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)

Intersectionality, diversity, and cultural identity

One respondent pointed to the programme's broader reach into questions of diversity and intersectionality, areas the play engages with through its treatment of racial stereotypes and prejudice.

"It was informative to learn about how different cultures are mixed in Britain and how diverse Britain really is."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_19)

"How intersectionality is present in most walks of life."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_19)

The intended action identified, re-teaching what intersectionality is and how it affects different people, mirrors the professional shift described by others. This consistency across different schools suggests the programme is prompting genuine reflection on what young people do and do not already know.

Pupil engagement and programme quality

Several respondents commented directly on the quality of the programme and the engagement it generated.

"An excellent session that was really valuable in encouraging pupils to consider others' perspectives and decision making. Thoroughly enjoyable sessions and would really like to work with Spectacle again."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_1 to IRL_4, IRL_10, IRL_11)

"The pupils really enjoyed and were engaged and well informed."
Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)

> *"I thought the workshop was really impactful and was beneficial for young people to see and conversate about."*
>
> **Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)**

One respondent from a youth provision setting offered a distinctive observation about the programme's craft:

> *"How the young people knew of the behaviours happening throughout the story, however, they did not necessarily know the words affiliated with them."*
>
> **Youth worker, RCT (IRL_7)**

> *"How a character like a dog can build in space for the audience to breathe."*
>
> **Youth worker, RCT (IRL_7)**

This observation reflects a core design principle of participatory theatre: the use of narrative distance and non-human characters to create emotional space for difficult conversations. It also echoes the quantitative finding that participants arrived with behavioural awareness but lacked conceptual vocabulary, particularly around misogyny.

Areas for development

One respondent noted that some themes, including misogyny and racism, could have been explained in more depth during the discussion, particularly for younger participants:

> *"Some of the themes such as misogyny and racism could have been explained a little more in the discussion to our pupils as they were on the younger side and didn't fully understand them."*
>
> **Secondary school teacher, RCT (IRL_13, IRL_17)**

This is consistent with the recommendation in the Lessons Learnt section that facilitators build in explicit introduction of key terminology at the start of sessions, and that pre-visit guidance to teachers flag the likely knowledge gap.

One respondent from a special provision setting noted that the programme did not add significantly to their existing knowledge, though they valued the story's approach:

> *"It's nice for kids to know that difficult situations happen and they do have a choice. They don't always have to give into pressure."*
>
> **Special provision practitioner, RCT (IRL_14)**

Pupil Voice

Pupil voice was collected across multiple sessions through two methods: video recording of a filmed session, and transcription of large-sheet hot-seating responses captured during workshops. The filmed responses are from Year 9 pupils. The hot-seating material is drawn from Year 7 and

Year 8 sessions at a second setting. Together, these provide a spread of pupil voice across year groups, settings, and session IDs. All quotes are anonymised.

Filmed session: pupil reflections

The following responses were captured on video during and after the programme at one setting.

> *"It's not the average lesson, and they show you stuff that happens, that you don't really realise happens."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

> *"It was interesting because it was teaching you a moral, but also like, telling your story at the same time, and I feel like the actors displayed that really well."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

> *"I found the workshop part really interesting because we actually got to dive a bit deeper, and we got to find out that extra bit more about what we watched."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

> *"I liked how they got some of the pupils to go up and say what they would do if they were in their shoes."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

> *"I found it really interesting the way it was portrayed as a video game, but it was like an actual story, and it was interesting to hear in the workshop bit what the other characters thought about it and see different perspectives."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

Filmed session: hot-seating in role

During the workshop at the same setting, pupils were invited to hot-seat characters from the play. The following exchanges were captured on video.

When a pupil was placed in the hot seat as Riley, classmates asked: "Why do you behave this way?" and "Why didn't you ask for help?". One pupil responded:

> *"Although I disagree with his opinions, I can understand what experiences have influenced his paranoia."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

A pupil hot-seated as Jay, asked what they thought of Riley, replied:

> *"I think he's rude, but I was too nervous to stand up to him."*
>
> **Year 9 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

The exchange on gender expectations opened up a genuine, unresolved conversation between peers. When asked why boys struggle to admit vulnerability, a Year 9 girl responded: “It’s not a bad thing to be seen as soft. They want to be protective and tough.” A Year 9 boy in the same discussion added that he thought showing softness was a bad thing. The exchange illustrates the programme opening up exactly the kind of dialogue it is designed to create.

Workshop hot-seating: transcribed responses

The following responses were transcribed from large sheets completed by Year 7 and Year 8 pupils during hot-seating workshops at a second setting. Pupils directed questions and comments to characters in the play. The responses are organised by character and demonstrate empathy, accountability, and critical engagement with the themes.

Responses directed at Riley

Across all four sessions, Riley provoked the most sustained engagement. Pupils consistently probed the roots of his behaviour rather than simply condemning it:

> *“Is he angry because of his Nan/Dad?”*
> **Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)**

> *“Are you acting this way because this is what you grew up with and you thought this was okay because the adults in your life showed these behaviours?”*
> **Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)**

> *“Why did you not want help?”*
> **Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)**

> *“Why did you make those bad decisions?”*
> **Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_1)**

Pupils also directly challenged Riley’s racist behaviour in the play, naming it explicitly:

> *“Why are you against the ‘Paki Shop’?”*
> **Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)**

This question directly confronts the racial prejudice depicted in the play. The fact that pupils named and challenged this behaviour, rather than ignoring it, reflects engagement with the programme’s themes of racial stereotyping and prejudice.

Younger pupils addressed Riley with direct appeals:

"Please be careful about what you say."
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)

"Stop being abusive."
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)

Responses directed at Jay

Pupils showed consistent empathy towards Jay, while also questioning his bystander inaction:

"Do you feel alone?"
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)

"How hard is this for you?"
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_1)

"Why didn't Jay help speak up about what Riley was gonna do?"
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)

"Did you get peer-pressured?"
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)

Younger pupils offered more direct guidance:

"Don't listen to Riley."
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)

Responses directed at Nevaeh

Pupils expressed both empathy and solidarity towards Nevaeh:

"Are you ok after what Riley done to you?"
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_4)

"I'm proud of you and remember to stand up for yourself."
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)

Others questioned why Nevaeh felt pressure to fit in, showing curiosity about the social dynamics depicted:

"Why does she feel insecure about who she is?"
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)

Responses directed at Craig

Craig's role in the play, which depicts adult abuse and grooming behaviour, prompted some of the most direct and clear-sighted responses from pupils:

"Why did you show a child pornography?"
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_4)

"Do you think it's okay to show porn to a 9 year old?"
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)

"Why did you hurt Jay's Mam?"
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_1)

These responses demonstrate that pupils recognised and named abusive behaviour clearly and without equivocation, which is a significant outcome for a programme addressing harm, exploitation, and bystander responsibility.

Responses directed at Big Darren

Big Darren's behaviour in the play, including sexual comments directed at a young girl, was challenged directly by pupils:

"Don't say that a 14 year old girl's breasts are 'Nice'."
Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)

This response shows a pupil identifying and naming sexual harassment explicitly, and setting a clear boundary on behalf of the character. It reflects exactly the kind of attitudinal confidence the programme aims to develop.

Responses directed at Kyle Coghlan

Kyle Coghlan, a teacher character in the play, prompted notably warm and empathic responses from Year 8 pupils, who recognised his supportive role:

"He cared a lot and was willing to put others first before himself."
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)

"He cared about his students."
Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)

The repeated focus on this character's care and commitment suggests that pupils valued and recognised the presence of a trusted adult figure in the story. This mirrors findings from previous Spectacle evaluations, in which the importance of trusted adults emerged as a key theme.

Responses directed at Riley's Gran

Pupils also directed empathic questions and guidance at Riley's Gran, recognising her potential role in supporting him:

> *"Did you ever take Riley because you felt bad or did you love him?"*
> **Year 8 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_3)**

> *"Spend more time with Riley."*
> **Year 7 pupil, RCT secondary school (IRL_2)**

These responses reflect an understanding that Riley's behaviour is shaped by the adults around him, and that change is possible through care and presence rather than punishment alone.

Closing reflections (filmed session)

When asked for their overall impressions at the close of the filmed session, students offered:

> *"I thought it did a really good job exploring issues that aren't widely talked about, and you did those characters justice, and kind of gave representation to people in that situation."*
> **Year 9 pupil (female), RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

> *"It made the problems more clear."*
> **Year 9 pupil (female), RCT secondary school (IRL_15)**

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

This section draws on findings from the quantitative evaluation and the staff feedback received to date. It is intended as a working summary and will be updated as further qualitative responses are gathered.

Address conceptual gaps explicitly

The most significant finding across the evaluation is how little many young people knew about misogyny before the programme. Nearly half of all participants scored 1 on Q1 (knowing what the word misogyny means) before the intervention. This is not a peripheral issue: it is the conceptual foundation on which much of the programme's content rests. Multiple staff respondents independently identified this gap and named the same intended action in response, ensuring that terminology is explicitly introduced and explained rather than assumed.

For future tours, this points to a practical recommendation: facilitators should build in a brief, explicit introduction to key terminology at the start of the session, rather than allowing the play alone to carry that work. Pre-visit guidance sent to teachers could also flag this gap and suggest that schools briefly introduce terms such as misogyny and intersectionality before Spectacle's arrival.

Expand the reach of the evaluation

The programme's impact appears broader than the eight questionnaire items capture. Staff responses point to learning around intersectionality, diversity, cultural identity, and community influence: themes the play engages with directly but which are not measured by the current instrument. Future evaluations should consider whether additional items, or a supplementary qualitative instrument, could capture this wider learning more systematically.

The pupil voice captured in this report demonstrates the value of collecting this material systematically across all settings. Future evaluations should build in a consistent method for capturing participant responses from every visit, ensuring that the breadth of pupil experience across the tour is represented in the evidence base alongside the quantitative data.

Improve data matching procedures

The volume of unmatched data in this evaluation was higher than intended. A significant contributing factor was that pre and post questionnaires were not physically attached to one another at the point of distribution. Where forms became separated during a session, matching by name alone was not sufficient to pair them reliably. Attaching pre and post forms before distribution, so that each participant holds a single booklet throughout the session, would be a straightforward improvement that should substantially reduce unmatched data on future tours. This is distinct from the data lost at IRL_6, where participants left before the workshop; that is a logistical issue that a different distribution method would not have resolved.

Plan for longitudinal follow-up

All data in this evaluation was collected on the same day as the intervention. This is standard practice for single-session programmes and does not undermine the findings, but it means we cannot say how durable the changes were. A short follow-up questionnaire administered four to six weeks after the visit, sent directly to participating schools, would provide meaningful evidence of lasting impact and significantly strengthen the case for continued investment in the programme.

Conclusion

The findings from this pilot evaluation demonstrate that IRL: In Real Life had a measurable, statistically significant positive impact on young people's knowledge, understanding, and attitudes across all eight areas assessed.

The most substantial gains were in knowledge of misogyny and its effects. These areas recorded the lowest pre-scores across the cohort, reflecting a genuine knowledge deficit among participating young people at the point of entry. The programme directly and effectively addressed this deficit. The proportion of participants who understood what misogyny means and how it affects people of all genders more than doubled over the course of a single day's intervention.

Meaningful improvements were also recorded in confidence, attitudinal awareness, and practical knowledge of support routes, including where to seek help when experiencing or witnessing misogyny. These represent not just knowledge gains but shifts in readiness and agency that extend beyond the classroom.

The consistency of improvement across all 13 sessions with evaluation data, including secondary schools, a further education college, and special provision settings, demonstrates the breadth of the programme's reach and the robustness of its inclusive design.

Limitations of this evaluation should be noted. The data represents a single measurement point, and no follow-up was taken to assess the durability of change. The questionnaire was self-reported and administered on the same day as the intervention, which may influence responses. Participants were not randomly selected but identified by settings on the basis of need. Matching was not possible for all participants, and evaluation forms from two settings remain outstanding. These limitations are common to single-session educational interventions and do not undermine the overall findings, but they do suggest that a longitudinal follow-up measurement would strengthen the evidence base for future tours.

The qualitative feedback is consistent with the quantitative findings. Staff respondents across multiple settings recognised gaps in their students' conceptual understanding and identified direct actions to address them. The pupil voice gathered reflects genuine engagement with the play's themes, including empathy, bystander responsibility, and gender expectations. As further responses are gathered, the lessons learnt section of this report will be updated accordingly.

Key Conclusions

- All eight questionnaire items showed statistically significant improvement ($p<0.001$).
- 81.9% of matched participants improved their overall score.
- The largest gains were in understanding of misogyny, including its meaning and its effects across genders.
- The programme was effective across a wide range of settings and starting points, including special provision schools and further education.
- Qualitative feedback corroborates the quantitative findings and indicates shifts in professional understanding among attending staff.
- A longitudinal follow-up measurement would strengthen the evidence base for future iterations of the programme.

About Spectacle Theatre

Spectacle Theatre Ltd, established in 1979 and based in the Rhondda, is an international award-winning company specialising in bilingual participatory arts. For over 45 years, Spectacle has worked in schools and communities across Wales and beyond, creating theatre that enables young people and adults to talk safely about sensitive issues relevant to their lives.

All work is delivered by experienced staff holding enhanced DBS certificates, trained in child protection, trauma-informed practice, and working with vulnerable people. Spectacle is a registered charity (No. 1059118) and a company limited by guarantee (No. 1555311).

For further information about IRL: In Real Life or other Spectacle Theatre programmes, please contact:

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Appendix A: Unmatched and Missing Data

Unmatched responses arise for several reasons across the tour, each of which is documented below.

At IRL_1, IRL_3, and IRL_4, sessions during the opening weeks of the tour overran and participants completed the pre-evaluation at the start of the session rather than before the visit, meaning there was insufficient time for post-evaluations in most cases. IRL_1 yielded 3 matched pairs alongside 5 unmatched pre-evaluations. IRL_3 and IRL_4 produced pre-evaluations only. Scanned copies of outstanding forms from IRL_2 are still awaited.

At IRL_6, the session was a last-minute booking arranged to replace a cancelled visit. Due to conflicting information reaching students about the session, 20 of the 29 participants present left before the workshop in order to travel home. Their pre-evaluation forms therefore have no corresponding post-evaluations. The 9 matched pairs represent participants who experienced the full programme.

At IRL_8 and IRL_9, the sessions involved large groups. A number of forms were returned unnamed or incomplete, preventing individual matching. No data has been lost; the forms exist but cannot be paired.

At IRL_5, post-evaluations were completed but no pre-evaluations are available for that session, resulting in 20 unmatched post-evaluation records.

At IRL_7, one unmatched post-evaluation record is present. This likely reflects a participant who completed a post-evaluation form but whose pre-evaluation could not be matched.

At IRL_13, 18 unmatched records are present (8 pre, 10 post). These arose from a large group session where not all forms could be paired.

At IRL_18, pre-evaluation forms were distributed in advance but challenges on the day meant they were not completed before the session. Scanned copies were to have been forwarded but have not yet been received.

At IRL_20, pre-evaluations were not completed on the day due to challenges on arrival. No evaluation data is available for this session.

At IRL_12, two pre-evaluation records are present in the data. These represent a staff member completing the questionnaire on behalf of the whole class, rather than individual participant responses, and are excluded from analysis.

[1] The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was selected in preference to a paired t-test because the questionnaire data is ordinal (responses on a 1–5 Likert scale). A paired t-test assumes interval-level measurement and an approximately normal distribution, neither of which can be assumed for Likert-scale responses. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is the standard non-parametric alternative for paired ordinal data: it assesses whether scores shifted systematically in one direction without making distributional assumptions, making it the appropriate choice for this dataset.