

To whom it may concern

## **Re. Embracing Arts**

St Nicholas School is a special needs school for children and young people with profound, severe and complex needs, located in Canterbury, Kent. We currently have over 350 pupils on roll, making us one of the largest special needs schools in the area.

Embracing Arts have worked with St Nicholas School for approximately 4 years, delivering engaging and inspiring theatrical experiences for our children and young people. Our partnership has included specially commissioned workshops for groups of students as well as their annual Christmas show.

Embracing Arts routinely work with children with the most complex learning needs and those who are most difficult to engage in learning experiences. This includes:

- children with complex Autism,
- children with significant health needs and life limiting conditions,
- children with significant social, emotional and mental health needs
- children who are pre-verbal and who use alternative communication systems.

All the Embracing Arts practitioners who have visited the school show an excellent understanding of the learning needs of the children and a never ending supply of creative ideas to inspire and engage. Through participation in sessions children are provided with a safe and truly inclusive space where they can express themselves creatively and build confidence in themselves as learners. Each child is recognised as an individual and through the practitioners skilled work is given the opportunity to express themselves in their own way.

The annual Embracing Arts Christmas show is always a highlight of the school's festive season. The company provide an experience that is truly inclusive and accepting of the children's differences and individual needs. Many young people within the school struggle to access traditional pantomimes and Christmas performances- even those that are billed as inclusive. The Embracing Arts performance/ performers show an excellent awareness of the importance of sensory issues, use of language, seating arrangements/ proximity to performance and engagement, that can make a theatrical experience meaningful and truly memorable for the children at St Nicholas School.

Yours faithfully

Dave Jenner  
Assistant Headteacher



I am a big believer everyone should have access to art, no matter who you are or what challenges you face, and Embracing Arts workshops really bring some enjoyment to everyone's day.

Embracing Arts understand all the unique needs of our families and creates activities that are fun in an accessible environment. They treat everyone as a person, not a patient.

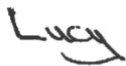
Many of the children we care for wouldn't be able to visit performances anywhere else in the community, so having visits from Embracing Arts enables families to create precious memories together. Most of our children can't just go to see a show at the local theatre or centre. There is often lots of queuing, that many of the children we support can't cope with, especially if there is a large crowd or too much noise. Then there's the worry the performers might not understand how to engage with their child who doesn't speak, or who might react in ways the performers aren't used to. Things like this can make what is a fun activity for most families into something difficult – even sad – for families whose children have complex needs. But Embracing Arts always ensure they adapt their workshops to make sure families can relax and enjoy themselves, knowing no one's going to stare because they're different. If their child is making a noise because they're excited, no one's going to glare at them, because everyone understands each other's challenges.

Our families know performance art always cheers them up. The beautiful moment their child can smile and laugh during a session after such hard times is magical.

We hope this letter shows an insight to the need for Embracing Arts work and the difference it makes to our families across Essex.

Kind regards,

Lucy Smith  
CYP activities and Events Coordinator



Every one of us  
Making every day count.

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Registered address: 226 Priory Crescent, Southend on Sea, Essex, SS2 6PR.  
Company number 2805007 | VAT Registration Number 194 8870 48 | Registered Charity Number 1022119

**Melissa Morton-Turner MSc**  
**Senior Registered Nurse**

**T:** 0208 8599818

**M:** 07764273505

**W:** [www.demelza.org.uk](http://www.demelza.org.uk)

I am a senior nurse for Demelza Children's Hospice in Southeast London. I have worked there for over fourteen years. I have worked within both our hospice sites in Southeast London and in Kent and both sites have benefited greatly from the Christmas for Kids shows in the past. I write this letter wholeheartedly supporting their application for funding so they can continue bringing their work to audiences like us.

Audiences like us are children with life limited and life threatened conditions, are children who are wheelchair users, are children that could be zero to eighteen years of age, children who may not tolerate sitting in their wheelchairs anymore and who need to lay down for comfort and need to be in their beds, children who may shout out or have a seizure and may scream, children who maybe close to the end of their life and require symptom management from nurses immediately while having their family around them so they don't miss a precious minute left with their child while making a precious memory watching a Christmas show altogether as a family in the comfort of a children's hospice. These children can not go to a theatre to watch a live children's show. But Christmas for Kids can come to our children's hospices and fill them with fun, music and Christmas wishes and life and make this happen.

It is such a magical, lovely show and theatre company who tour around and visit Children's hospices and perform live in the hospice day rooms to our children in their beds, wheelchairs, buggies, comfy indoor supportive chairs with their parents and siblings experiencing live theatre possibly for the first and only time they will in their lives. Christmas for Kids provides a professional live show of music and unique, trained, and talented, sensory, magical storytelling in a gentle well thought out manner for children and their families, with the help of props and sensory communication and signing.

My greatest memory of the Christmas for Kids show at the Southeast London hospice is with two end of life children, one in their buggy and one in their bed, in the day room experiencing the wonderful show, surrounded by their siblings and parents, with several other children and their families there too. All the children had little finger lights on their pointing fingers making a wish that the little puppet's letter to Father Christmas in the show gets all the way to Father Christmas in time for Christmas. I'm also sure that there were many other wishes being made by the children and their families in the audience that Christmas.

The Christmas for Kids shows touch the hearts of everyone who watches them. They are funny, interesting, sensory and heartfelt storytelling with songs and dressing up which makes all the kids laugh.

Each year the filmed version of the show is available online in addition which is great as well. This is a fantastic reach out from the company to our children living in isolation or as another means for the children to watch the show any other time in December leading up not Christmas from the comfort of their own homes or in the hospice. The in-house show is unforgettable, and those families will have those precious memories forever. So will I. Magical.

The company is always sensitive to our children's needs in their audience and just carry on professionally and include the children during the show where possible. Thank you so much.

I sincerely hope they will be successful in their funding application with you.

Kind regards,  
Melissa Morton-Turner  
**Senior Registered Nurse**  
**Demelza Hospice Care for Children**  
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