

## Platform Portraits

### A Creative Journey with Pear Tree School

**Funding:** Avanti West Coast Project Fund

**Budget:** £2,450

**Lead:** Katie Douglas, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer (CRL)

**Artist:** Gosha Gibek



## AIMS:

At its heart, Platform Portraits was about opening up rail travel in a way that felt safe, engaging and personal. The project aimed to:

- Build confidence and familiarity with trains and stations
- Help SEND learners explore journeys through creativity and storytelling
- Encourage positive and accessible perceptions of rail travel
- Connect young people with destinations across the Avanti West Coast network
- Create opportunities for pupils to see themselves as confident future rail users

# SUMMARY:

For many young people at Pear Tree School, travel is not just about getting from A to B, as it can feel unfamiliar, unpredictable, and at times overwhelming.

## Platform Portraits set out to change that.

This creative project invited pupils to explore the world of trains, stations and journeys through something more familiar, their own experiences.

Working with artist Gosha Gibek, pupils began by talking about where they go, how they travel, and the places that matter to them. Conversations quickly filled with excitement, with stories of day trips to Blackpool, visits to parks and museums, favourite foods from Greggs or the chippy, and the simple joy of getting the bus or train with friends and family.

These conversations became the starting point for a series of creative workshops, where pupils transformed their ideas into colourful portrait artwork. Each piece reflected not just who they are, but how they connect to the world through travel.

Their artwork was later developed into professionally designed postcards, stickers, badges and notebooks, creating tangible outputs that celebrate both the young people and their experiences of travel.

**“The artwork is incredibly vibrant, and it beautifully captures the idea that journeys are best learned through experience rather than explanation”**

# PARTNERS:



Pear Tree School  
*Achieving the Best We Can in Everything We Do*

AVANTI  
WEST COAST



CRL  
Community Rail Lancashire

# OUTCOMES

Across the workshops, around 25 pupils took part in exploring travel in a new and meaningful way.

Rather than focusing on timetables or tickets, the project focused on what journeys feel like, where they lead, what you do when you get there, and why they matter. Pupils spoke about visiting places such as Blackpool, Preston and Lancaster, often linking these experiences with memorable moments such as eating out, spending time with family, or exploring somewhere new.

Trains, buses and stations became part of these conversations, not as something unfamiliar, but as everyday gateways to the places they enjoy most. This shift helped pupils feel more confident in talking about travel and more connected to the idea of using rail as part of their lives.

Through creative activities including drawing, painting and collage pupils explored trains, stations and destinations in a way that felt accessible and enjoyable. They developed confidence in expressing their ideas, while also building familiarity with the rail environment.

The project resulted in a collection of professionally designed printed materials inspired by the pupils' artwork, including postcards, stickers, badges and notebooks. These outputs celebrate both the young people and their journeys, while also offering a way to share their perspectives with a wider audience, including passengers and the local community.



# FEEDBACK:

From the very first session, it was clear that the project had struck a chord.

**“I hope you enjoyed this morning, I know the students did.”**

Pupils were eager to talk about:

- Where they travel and how they get there
- Favourite destinations and activities
- Their experiences of trains and buses

Staff observed that pupils became more confident in expressing their thoughts, particularly when conversations were rooted in real-life experiences.

There was also a strong sense of pride as artwork began to take shape, especially when pupils realised their designs would become real printed items.

# LESSONS LEARNT:

One of the strongest insights from Platform Portraits is that journeys are best understood through experience, not explanation.

For SEND learners in particular:

- Talking about destinations rather than transport systems makes rail feel more relatable
- Linking travel to enjoyable activities such as food, days out and familiar places builds positive associations
- Creative activity provides a safe way to explore unfamiliar environments

The project also reinforced the value of:

- Turning participant work into high-quality, real-world outputs
- Positioning rail as part of everyday life, not something separate or intimidating

**“It’s obvious the children truly loved being part of this project so thank you for taking it on and delivering it with such impact.”**