

State of the Arts

Championing Cultural Capital in Milton Keynes & Northamptonshire



A national network...should be established, in which schools collaborate in establishing and sustaining the conditions required for nurturing creativity in the classroom.

- *Recommendation 1, Durham Commission, 2019*

Like their colleagues across the country, headteachers in Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire understand the value of the arts and creativity within the curriculum. They share the view that children deserve a rich experience of the arts and culture, and that this experience is valuable both for its own aesthetic and for the personal development it encourages.

But all headteachers also have to make difficult decisions, particularly in response to the factors which constrain them: finance, accountability and capacity. There have been numerous reports of schools in which the curriculum has been reduced due to the impact of these constraints, either by design (for example narrower curriculum structures more heavily focussed towards the EBacc accountability measure) or default (for example difficulties in appointing suitably skilled teachers).

Amanda Spielman, Head of Ofsted, recognises the importance of accountability: *'I've seen at very close quarters how the pressures of accountability influence what schools do, and how they lead to trade-offs with what people do.'* (Guardian, 09/01/17)

Ofsted's latest Education Inspection Framework requires inspectors to consider the extent to which *'leaders...construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners...the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life'*. (Ofsted EIF, May 2019)

This report describes aspects of the arts provision in six schools in Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes, in order to encourage and support headteachers to develop this area, and to provide examples of, and share effective practice within, mainstream settings. It also seeks to further a discussion concerning the nature of cultural capital, and the extent to which this is shaped by the local geographical, demographic and social context.

Report compiled by Shenley Brook End School for Artswork, as part of the Championing Cultural Capital: Senior Leaders Advocacy for Arts, Cultural and Creative Practice project



Two Mile Ash School, Milton Keynes

Developing character and confidence through performance

The verb “to perform” derives from the old French word “parfourmir” meaning “to furnish through to completion”. Two Mile Ash School (TMA) makes extensive use of performance to help pupils develop their character and confidence as they develop through the school and into young people.

TMA is a large school for children in years 3 to 6. In each year group, children take part in a performance combining dance, drama and music as a core part of the curriculum. In addition, the school stages an annual whole-school performance, alongside a wide range of other performing and competitive opportunities, such as the MAT dance showcase.



Performing helps us boost our confidence which transfers to other areas. You can show teachers what you are made of.”

“The arts subjects help you express yourself. Through art you can show who you really are – smiling whilst doing.”

Teachers describe eloquently how the arts subjects help children to develop their character, including through developing children’s expressive skills, oracy and sense of self-esteem. They have observed a positive impact on pupils’ engagement in these parts of the curriculum, and this has had a knock-on effect on behaviour in

general. Pupils also describe this effect.

Sequencing the curriculum

Inspiration days, involving art, DT, music and dance, are used each term to inspire and enthuse the children. For example, to support



It is important to enjoy your learning. It doesn’t matter what role you have [in a production], as long as you are trying to do your best.”

a World War 2 theme, pupils might learn Lindy Hop in dance. The skills and knowledge milestones for each year group are carefully identified, with progression clearly planned between the year groups. Associated specific assessment criteria at basic, advancing and deep level are used to track pupils’ progress.

The level of challenge children experience in this respect is high. Teachers use subject-specific vocabulary, for example the names of the instruments used in a samba ensemble, and the milestones are ambitious for all pupils.

The school’s focus on performance helps children develop a growth mindset, learning through making mistakes and demonstrating resilience. Children are taught to think about

how they learn through a focus on meta-cognition, and the school uses the arts subjects effectively as a vehicle for this learning.

Effective learning is dependent on strong teaching, and TMA is fortunate to have a highly committed team of passionate people in the arts subjects. They

believe that enjoyment creates engagement, which is clearly demonstrated when children perform. The atmosphere is one of celebration, with success being rewarded through the headteacher’s termly Performing Arts Award. Celebration also underwrites learning through performance, with the process and

stages of production recognised.

Pupils at TMA are have developed the confidence that the good work begun in them will carry on to completion wherever their individual paths may lead.



The school wants us to be confident individuals and independent learners. The arts give us experience of skills for the future.”

“I was a bit worried about joining the school, but performing has helped me develop my confidence.”





Green Park School, Newport Pagnell

Metacognition through music

"We are a school that takes risks." The headteacher of Green Park School, a primary school in a diverse community close to the M1, was explaining the reasons behind the school's unusually strong emphasis on music as a vehicle to connect many aspects of the curriculum. The school has recognised the cultural deficit experienced by children across all demographics within the school, and is seeking to widen children's experiences through a focus on developing cultural capital.



Music helps you relax. It brings your heartbeat down to slow your pace."

"When I'm hyper, music helps me get rid of my energy."

"Music releases happy hormones and helps you with your concentration."

Alongside this drive, the school recognises a wide range of benefits which the children experience through the arts. The arts have enabled children who may have weaker skills to value expression and develop their oracy. The arts have helped children improve their emotional health and increase self-confidence. The arts have helped reduce the pressure for children to express themselves loudly, and have had a corresponding positive impact on behaviour. The arts have also made learning more engaging.

Through each of these themes, pupils are using music to help understand themselves better and develop their metacognition and self-regulation.

Musical intersections

The curriculum at Green Park offers a range of intersections between music and pupils wider



When they sing with us they express themselves and become more confident. Some children are talking more because they have become more confident"

"Music makes other people enjoy themselves, and [being a singing leader] makes me feel good about myself."

experiences. Year 4 pupils, for example, currently engage in a whole class "Bollywood Brass" project, funded by the school and expertly facilitated by a visiting teacher from the local music hub. Pupils not only develop practical technical performing and listening skills, they also work collaboratively with expression, leadership and self-control. Other opportunities for performance

are also encouraged, for example Rocksteady.

The school has found that some pupils are reluctant singers across all age groups, but has sought to encourage a culture of kindness through regular participation in singing for all, and with staff joining in and modelling the expectations. Year 6 pupils act as singing leaders at lunchtimes to gather younger pupils together, and to model and grow the culture.

A third, and less common, intersection between the curriculum and music is the use of

the Kodaly method with year 5 and 6 pupils.

Kodaly method

Kodaly was an early 20th century, Hungarian musicologist who developed a sequential approach to teaching music in the classroom. The school has invested in training a skilled teacher in this approach. Pupils demonstrate excellent

understanding of musical concepts, for example the differences between beat, rhythm and metre. Through this mastery approach, pupils develop their understanding and skills together, and enjoy the problem-solving and collaborative nature of the activities. They speak with precision (for example, "He was 2 beats out"), and enjoy their learning. The initiative is in an early stage in the school, but initial impact on self-regulation, evident in other lessons, is promising.

Green Park has made a multi-faceted approach to music central to its provision. Through this approach children are enjoying their learning and developing a wide range of skills alongside an appreciation for and understanding of cultural capital. The headteacher believes that the arts make life more enjoyable, and that there is a difference between existing and living. In the words of one pupil:



It's important to have fun. It doesn't matter what style of music you play. Music keeps you happy."



Road Primary School Northamptonshire

Learning through infectious creativity

Enter the headteacher's office in Road Primary School and you find yourself in an Aladdin's cave. Alongside posters and memorabilia from Watford FC, you will find two guitars and a saxophone, a phrenologist's skull, inspirational quotes aplenty and a Dali-esque clock, languidly melting across the radiator. In the centre of the meeting table proudly sits a chess set, mid-game.

Mark Currell, the headteacher, believes that pupils deserve a rich, broad, creative experience in their mainstream curriculum, and that their experience in school should be as creative and exciting as



The arts grow your imagination and help you think differently. We like creativity for the sake of it."

"School wants us to be successful in life – to have a positive mindset, to have optimism and develop the school's values. You don't need good grades...KS2 tests are so teachers know our strengths and weaknesses."

the world around them. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the opportunities they have to learn through creativity, and also about the wide range of resources and activities available to them. They also understand that the arts build their imaginations and creativity.

Underpinning values

This is not, however, a school well-endowed with facilities or financial capital. Its strength lies

in the way its values (Resilience, Optimism, Ambition, Dedication and Empathy) thread through the curriculum. Pupils describe how the arts help them develop these qualities, and recognise that they learn through play.



The arts give you an opportunity to practice, to improve the quality of your work"

"Arts help you take your mind off something and develop confidence within yourself"

Rather, according to pupils, the school's capital grows through the creativity and commitment of members of staff. Adults are prepared to try out new, creative ideas (they loved maths escape room teacher competition) and pupils recognise that this creativity spreads across the school.

Fostering a positive climate

Pupils understand that, by thinking carefully about their work, the arts can help them develop resilience and produce work of higher quality. By placing a high value on arts subjects, pupils could easily recognise each other's strengths.

Pupils in the school also understand the way in which arts

activities can encourage positive relationships and wellbeing.

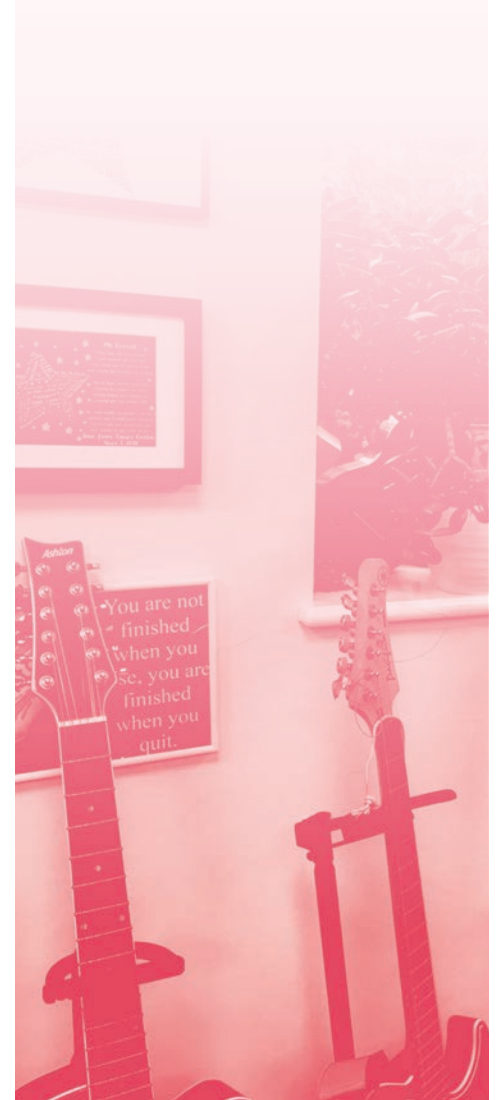
One pupil explained how the school had encouraged drawing as a mechanism for expressing emotions and to experience empathy with each other:

Road Primary School has fostered a culture of optimism and empathy. It has done this without resorting to high-cost or high-impact initiatives or interventions,

but though prioritising ambition, creativity and excellence in the eclectic, day-to-day learning pupils experience both in the school and in any visits to the headteacher's office.



I was almost at breaking point in my confidence. I learnt to improve [my confidence] through art. I drew my emotions – how I felt at that time. I learnt not to suffer in silence."





Wollaston School, Northamptonshire

Establishing an inclusive culture in the arts

“We want to be fearlessly creative.” The practice of many schools seems to be driven by a culture of fear – fear of falling standards, fear of accountability, fear of losing control. Wollaston School performing arts team have established a culture in which students feel safe, included and challenged, and in which they can express themselves creatively without fear.

This culture is championed by the headteacher, who is fully



Arts are given a high profile within the school. There is support not competition. There is room for everyone in the arts.”

committed to giving every student high quality experiences and opportunities through the arts. Curriculum time for art, dance, drama and music at KS3 is above average with each subject taught by specialist teachers. At KS4 and KS5 arts subjects are very popular, (more than 10% take dance GCSE, and more than 20% Y11 take drama) with several students taking more than one subject. The EBacc bucket is not full for some students, the school is committed to its breadth of offer in this regard.

There is also a commitment to academic rigour, with all subjects leading to GCSEs and A levels rather than vocational equivalents. Students have a high regard for

this provision, which they see as rigorous and challenging. A key driver for the school is to provide students with the opportunities which will enable them to be successful alongside enjoying their learning. Arts subjects are as valuable in the curriculum as any others.



Teachers are good at pushing us. They get involved and demonstrate what to do.”

We see the work teachers put in, and that makes us work harder. They find a way to involve everyone.”

Within the performing arts team, the head of faculty has developed a culture in which students can try out ideas and make mistakes. Students understand that creativity is contagious. They are ambitious for each other and themselves and celebrate when others succeed. All students perform, although they are also given the opportunity to contribute to performance in other creative ways e.g. lighting and costume design.

Building the team

Teachers and team members are excellent role models. They ooze enthusiasm, act as role models both as practising artists and as learners, and are a highly flexible and mobile team, supporting each other regularly through sharing good practice, innovation and challenge. The leadership they demonstrate osmoses through to the students, many of whom act as mentors, teachers and coaches for younger students. Staff prioritise getting to know the students well.

The school has a an unusually high proportion of leaders in pastoral/student support roles from within the performing arts

team, including three heads of year, an assistant headteacher and the head himself. It is perhaps no surprise that the school has continued to be shaped in the image of its leaders, and that the overarching impression many visitors to the school retain is that of a happy, inclusive, caring environment that encourages creativity without fear.

Wollaston School benefits from excellent resources within the faculty. In this area students build their own teams in a supportive, family-like atmosphere. Students are also aware of the qualities they develop through engaging with performing arts. There is a strong understanding amongst students of the positive role the arts play in improving their mental health. The emphasis here is on wellbeing, rather than therapy.

Wollaston students demonstrate genuine honesty and enthusiasm for the performing arts, which they perceive as central to their development. They also demonstrate the fearless creativity which their teachers embody. They were also unequivocal in their advice for other school leaders: “Give us the best environment possible, give us the best opportunity, give us support.”



When you come to the PA block everything changes. There is a friendly atmosphere.”

“The arts help you to become more confident, develop presentation skills, deal with difficult situations and express yourself.”



5 Dimensions Trust, Milton Keynes

Ensuring effective transition through the arts

Children and young people are constantly experiencing change. This change takes many forms, including relationships and routines, learning and life. The two secondary schools in 5 Dimensions Trust in Milton Keynes help students navigate many of the changes they face, and make effective use of arts and creative subjects as part of this process.

Creativity Carousel

Year 7 students at The Hazeley Academy come from many



The arts help you be confident you can do it. Through drama I am able to express myself and have freedom. The arts build character and are about you being you – the best version of yourself. Creativity is going outside the box – doing what you want to do in order to solve problems.”

different primary schools and bring with them a wide range of experiences in the arts subjects. During the transition to secondary school, students often experience a bewildering range of subjects, teachers, rooms and routines with which to become familiar, and for many this new learning culture can slow the rate of progress.

In order to mitigate this impact, the year 7 curriculum at Hazeley includes a creativity carousel. Art, music, drama and design technology are studied in rotation, with each student taking just one of these subjects

for a block of time (10 hours a week for a 6 week block). Student very appreciate the carousel structure, and enjoy the opportunity to take the same subject several times per week.

Hazeley's values of “Character, Confidence and Creativity” are well known by the students, and they recognise how the creativity carousel enables them to demonstrate and develop these values as they make the change from primary to secondary education.



The carousel is good because it gives you one creative subject to focus on, and you don't have to learn lots of things at the same time. Longer lessons make the quality of work better.”

Towards the end of the year the best of the arts projects in year 7 are celebrated through a creativity showcase, which gives the students an audience so that work becomes even more meaningful. By the end of the year, students are ready for a more widespread curriculum experience in year 8.

Bridging Year

At Shenley Brook End School, students in year 9 have chosen some of the subjects they study, following guidance from the school. Rather than begin their GCSE courses early, students use year 9 to deepen and broaden their curriculum experience through the school's Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge (ASK) framework.

Attitudes are common across all subjects, and are defined as curiosity, creativity, cooperation, commitment and consistency. The arts subject allow students to

strengthen each of these attitudes within a positive, supportive and challenging environment, so that they are ready to develop their subject specific skills.

Teachers describe how students develop their subject knowledge through their skills including critical analysis, mood, process, technical skills, rather than the other way around. Within this ASK framework, students recognise that creative thinking is not just the domain of arts, and that thinking beyond box is crucial in finding creative solutions to range of issues from poetry to fractals.

Progression to further education and employment

Both secondary schools in 5 Dimensions Trust have an excellent record of students leaving at the age of 18 to continue studies in the arts and creative subjects in further education or employment. At this level teachers act as facilitators and coaches for practising student artists, who are encouraged to work within their own space using a choice of media in a very personalised way.

Educators in Milton Keynes recognise need for creative and transferable skills, and that strong local networks help share good practice. They also make strong use of the local environment and employment opportunities to help students make the transition to further study and the local marketplace.



The blocks of lessons helped me to get to know new people better. We had to work together and became friends.”

Arts-Rich Schools

In January 2020 the RSA published Art-rich schools, a set of 8 case studies describing schools which particularly invest in the arts. The report identifies the following common features of arts-rich schools:

1. Giving the arts high status in the school
2. Creating dedicated arts spaces
3. Developing a range of partnerships
4. Maintaining curriculum breadth at secondary school
5. Staffing the arts in primary schools
6. Timetabling to put arts at the centre of school life

The case studies in this report from schools in Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire share all of these strands, and a strong commitment to the arts from the headteacher seems to be essential for the arts to flourish.

To the right are some recommendations that have been made by headteachers of the schools in this report.

Headteacher's Tips

- Value the arts. Value relationships. Take time to connect to others. Share the passion and support all staff to walk the walk around the school with a shared understanding of the value of the arts-in all its forms.
- Create excitement around the school and value the contributions of children and adults-informally and more formally (in assemblies and the like). Talk excitedly about the arts and be passionate about the emotive and empathetic nature of the work done. Use technology to share.
- Put some money where your mouth is and create opportunities, invest time and some money with resourcing and putting on events. With collaboration with others schools and settings pulling together performance, showcases and productions can be lower on cost and bigger on impact.
- Look for opportunities to build the arts into as many curriculum areas as possible - they enrich what the children are learning and help them to make links to deepen their knowledge
- Enthuse your staff through high quality CPD that can be shared in a practical way so it impacts on practise
- Stand firm on your beliefs and create a culture that place the arts as a high priority in your school - get the buy in from everybody by sharing the research and by modelling your own enthusiasm and commitment
- Ensure that your timetable gives all students an opportunity to explore the arts and that the KS4 curriculum routes enable maximum choice for arts subjects, even at the expense of the EBacc where appropriate.
- Engage students in as many authentic practical experiences as possible; opportunities to perform, exhibit, projects to achieve, as well as authentic external experiences through trips and visits.
- Ensure your staff team know how important the arts is in the school and that the senior team and governing body have a strong commitment to it.