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The journey to excellence in art, craft and design: Battyeford CofE Primary School

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Brief description

A primary school that uses art, craft and design very effectively to improve pupils' self-confidence and creativity, and raises achievement across the curriculum.

Overview – the school's message

'Before we placed art, craft and design at the heart of what we do, pupils' achievements were above average, but there was not enough "wow" or "awe and wonder" in what they did. Compliant and hard-working pupils have transformed into creative, enthusiastic, self-confident, discerning and highly able pupils; not only in art, craft and design but also in other subjects. Their communication and cooperative skills are exceptional because of the way they are encouraged to work together, talk about their work and make decisions based on their developing understanding of materials, forms and genre across all dimensions of the subject. Our school is a vibrant community, not least due to high-quality teaching and the excellent partnerships with artists, craftworkers, designers, local galleries and parents'.

Diane Pyatt, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Through a clear vision and passion for the subject of art, craft and design, high-quality teaching and strong partnerships with creative practitioners and arts organisations, this primary school is successfully:

- developing pupils' creativity and independence
- increasing their self-esteem and confidence, and invigorating their enthusiasm for learning

- raising pupils' achievements in art, craft and design, and across the curriculum.

Making the change

Upon her appointment, the headteacher, with support from the governing body, was determined to develop pupils' creativity through the art, craft and design curriculum as a means to inspire pupils, raise aspirations and achievements in this and other subjects. She also wanted to involve parents, carers and the local community more fully in the life of the school. With this in mind, a full-time specialist artist teacher was appointed, with an additional brief to use her prior arts-development knowledge, to create more community and family involvement through her subject specialism. This represented a significant financial investment and a risk. Standards at that time were above average but not outstanding and the headteacher believed that more of the same would not raise achievements further. She felt the school needed to be innovative and use art, craft and design as the hook to captivate pupils' interest, excitement and motivation in order to develop their innovation, imagination, achievements, and creativity as well as encouraging them to speak for themselves and articulate their views confidently. This vision was successfully shared with all staff who were as enthusiastic as the headteacher about the proposed leap into a new future.

The curriculum was reviewed to ensure that pupils had enough time to develop their work and ideas using longer sessions and special days and weeks. The subject was placed at the heart of new half-termly themes that pupils themselves had been involved in developing. Associated schemes of work for the subject are used as a vehicle for cross-curricular activities. They include the work of many internationally renowned historical and contemporary artists as well as local artists and creative practitioners. They also make use of galleries, art venues and aspects of local environment which the pupils study, research, work with or visit over each half-term.



Year 5 pupils' work

Creative outcomes

The fundamental priority is to ensure that pupils are given access to a wide range of processes, materials and media to empower them to explore and develop their own skills, creativity and independence. Pupils work across two- and three-dimensional work and in digital media from their earliest years in school. By coaching and training staff and creative practitioners who also work alongside the specialist teacher, visiting craftworkers', artists' and teachers' skills and confidence develop successfully alongside the pupils. Adults develop their knowledge of pupils' learning in art, craft and design through a variety of contexts and processes, maximising quality outcomes through open-ended, yet well-planned, learning opportunities. By the time pupils reach the end of Key Stage 1, they are already accomplished in developing their own ideas, choosing materials and resources, making decisions and working confidently in teams, on their own or on whole-class projects. The

outstanding teaching of the key elements of art, craft and design means that pupils can articulate their knowledge for example of 'tone', 'line', 'form', and 'contrast' in the correct context. The art classroom is full of the 'language' of process, and thinking skills are used effectively to draw out and enable pupils to practise their ideas orally. As one Year 1 pupil eloquently explained to her friend, 'Tone is like when you have a pencil, one colour, and you press really hard it gives you a dark shade, then you press down light and you get a lighter shade and then it's all the shades in between.'



Examples of pupils' sketchbooks

Pupils are successfully encouraged to regularly record in sketchbooks, to develop ideas, reflect on their work and practise skills. They excel in the subject; their achievements are mostly above expected levels and even the lowest achievers reach at least average standards.

As a result, pupils' achievements and the value placed upon their opinions, their communication and team-working skills are also often outstanding. They are afforded many opportunities to work together, to express their views and feelings about their own work, that of their peers and the artists

and craft workers with whom they come into contact. By the time they leave for secondary school, many are beginning to act and think like artists, and have a good understanding of the value of art, craft and design to the cultural and creative economy locally and further afield. Indeed a number of pupils expressed their views that they too want to become artists when they leave school. A comment made by one pupil echoed that of many when she said; 'To sum up what art means to our school? It means everything. It's just a big part of our whole community, everybody loves it, everyone is inspired by all the experiences we have and every one looks forward to it. We have art here, in the classroom and outside and in other places like the West Yorkshire Print Workshop. We work with some of the best craftworkers and artists who come to our school and all this is just so inspiring.'



Work inspired by Hockney

Partnerships

The new specialist teacher's leadership role has expanded beyond the school's horizons. She has become an advanced skills teacher with a remit across the local authority. Part of her role includes outreach into other schools but she also brings staff to share the art outcomes of pupils at Battyeford Primary School, to see and learn from pupils' high-calibre work first-hand. Pupils therefore, notice many adults coming to see their vibrant displays in corridors and classrooms. Their work is also displayed in the local gallery where it is seen by parents, visiting members of the community, pupils from other schools and other artists and craftworkers. Pupils comment on how this makes them feel very important and they know their work is valued in their own school community and across the local area.



*Battyeford CofE Primary School
A display of Nursery pupils' feltmaking work*

The specialist art teacher's previous role as an Arts Education Officer meant that she had a very good understanding of the local artistic, craft working and cultural community and the benefits they can bring to pupils' experiences and achievements. Upon appointment, she contacted all the local galleries, art venues, craft workers and artists she could find. As a result, a wide range of resources and experts was soon fully engaged with her innovative approach. Contracted artists and craftworkers work alongside teachers, helping them to improve their own skills and confidence in the wide range of opportunities that pupils experience.

Her role also involves the coordination of the local 'Adopt an Artist' after-school programme which involves Battyeford Primary School and supports seven other local primary schools' participation in this innovative project. The programme culminates in pupils presenting their achievements professionally in an annual exhibition at the West Yorkshire Print Workshop. Recently pupils were taught techniques such as sculpture, wirework, felt making and collage, working with Mirfield artists Samantha Bryan, Helaina Sharpley, Catherine Green and Michael Barrett, studio holders and members of the West Yorkshire Print Workshop. The local press praised and photographed their work and said, 'This is an exciting opportunity for all involved, teachers benefit from informal training from creative practitioners, pupils from the expert guidance and inspiration of local artists, and the artists benefit through enriching their work experience in an educational setting'.



Catherine Green's Workshop

As part of a year-long Creative Partnerships learning programme, pupils took part in a project with mixed-media artist Gaye Chorlton to create Szopki, which are elaborate miniature buildings traditional in Krakow, Poland, using inspiration from a visit to Mirfield's Ladywood and the College of the Resurrection. These too were reported in the press because of their quality and innovative nature.



The Szopki project

The benefits of this work are not just for the pupils and staff. The artist Catherine Green who works with pupils developing textiles commented on the mutual benefits of the experience, saying, 'Benefits include pupils' ability to see contemporary artists making a living through art, craft or design. It has given me the confidence to transfer my skills and enthusiasm to children. They are great ambassadors for art and craft to their families,

who in turn are widening their access to arts in the local community, such as the facilities available in the West Yorkshire Print Workshop. It also broadens the curriculum because artists bring their own specialist skills, ways of working and different materials for pupils to experiment with and explore'.

Long-term partner, West Yorkshire Print Workshop, has noticed many benefits. Pam Lonsdale, the Centre Manager, said, 'The annual *Adopt an Artist* exhibition has become the pinnacle of our burgeoning education work. This exhibition, curated and coordinated by Natalie, has improved our visitor numbers, attracted new audiences and expanded our database to develop local pupil and family involvement in our own school holiday education programmes. More than that, the fact that Natalie has brought on board our studio members

and artists into her schemes has enabled them to develop economic stability and broadened their expertise in the field of education. Without doubt, our relationship with the school and the resultant education connections have acted as a lever to attract external funding and interest from new artist practitioners looking to become studio holders within our premises.'

The headteacher's passion and drive to raise achievement in the subject have been successful. The staff and the governing body have effectively transformed the vision to develop stronger partnerships with parents and carers into reality. Their involvement in the school and in their children's learning is increasing through a range of art-based family projects. For example, successful funding bids from the local Creative Partnership programme provided opportunities for parents, carers and pupils to visit Chester Zoo with practitioner Samantha Bryan to seek inspiration for a large-scale sculptural project inspired by the exotic animals. Parents, carers and children worked alongside each other with the practitioner to develop their own fantasy creatures using different animal body parts as a starting point. They tracked their experiences in a journal and their collective achievements were exhibited at West Yorkshire Print Workshop as well as at a high-profile event in school.



The Fantasy Animals project

Detailed responses from participating parents and carers summarise how much they valued the opportunities to work creatively with their children, without distraction. Some commented on the unexpected benefits to themselves. One said, 'I did not know how creative I was!' Another commented, 'the project has definitely brought out my creative side, which has been dormant for many years'.

When reflecting on the journey the school has made since developing its vision to raise pupils' aspirations, creativity and achievement through high-quality teaching and partnership working in art, craft and design, the headteacher comments, 'Sometimes it's worth taking the risk and believing in your team and your children. The outcomes are more than we could ever have expected. Not just in terms of the great achievements of the children and the fantastic partnerships with artists, craftworkers and parents, but fundamentally with pupils' greater confidence, and raised self-esteem, in this vibrant and exciting school community.'

The school's background

[Battleyford CofE \(VC\) Primary School](#) is a larger than average primary school in the small town of Mirfield, edging on to the conurbations of West Yorkshire. The school is in close proximity to nationally recognised galleries such as the Hepworth Wakefield, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and more locally the West Yorkshire Print Workshop and Huddersfield Art Gallery. Pupils take advantage of these galleries and art spaces through visits and also from working with their artists in residence and with a wide range of contemporary artists and craftworkers in school.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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