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Making art, craft and design education relevant to life and work: Cheslyn Hay Sport and Community High School

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Brief description

The art, craft and design department at the school makes strong links with the creative industries and cultural sector in order to prepare students for a range of subject-related career options and enrichment opportunities.

Overview – the school's message

'Art, craft and design has an important place at Cheslyn Hay High because it develops students' understanding of how the subject influences every aspect of life. In their art, craft and design lessons, students are inspired to challenge themselves, reflect not only on their work but on their emotional responses, and then aspire to be the best they can. Art, craft and design education at Cheslyn Hay supports, reflects and most importantly embeds our ethos of high aspirations and achievement for all.'



Nicky Crookshank, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Setting and sustaining high expectations

Students' work in art, craft and design is a distinctive feature of Cheslyn Hay High School. The school's reputation in this area is well established and has flourished throughout the development of the school, judged **outstanding** in October 2011. While students' achievements in other subjects have continuously risen, their performance in art, craft and design has remained higher still.

The department is led by an inspirational subject leader and is supported expertly by talented staff who are specialists in their own disciplines. The teaching team successfully develops students' ability to record, analyse and collate ideas, and express them through the development of perception and communication. Approaches used by the staff reflect accurately the aims of the department.



'Art, craft and design is a language and a means of expression, and is vital to the cultural background of any society'.

'Underpinning our philosophy is the need to contextualise students' art, craft and design education'.

'The art, craft and design experience is about beginning a journey and on the way allowing students to respond individually to the influences around them'.

Edana Gerrard-Morgan, Head of Department

Bridging education and employment

Projects relate directly to art, craft and design in contemporary life. From Year 7, the culture of being an artist, craftmaker or designer is promoted through working routines, including students' use of workbooks. The curriculum is further enriched by the work of creative practitioners whose current work students are able to see develop. Assessments and the choice of examinations emphasise the importance of applying subject knowledge, understanding and skills. The high proportion of students who continue into subject-related education, training and employment shows how well the department achieves its aims. Students agree; for example, one successful student comments:



'The vocational aspect of the courses was the selling point for me, especially due to my intention to focus on a career in art and design. The applied advanced double A-level vocational course provided an exceptional learning curve. The mixture of 12 challenging and exciting modules, both in 2D and 3D was combined with three externally examined modules based on the working world. The course prepared me to be knowledgeable, efficient, confident to experiment and pursue my own personal practice. The double A* results achieved helped me to gain a scholarship to study art and media at Leeds University. The course is exactly what a young and aspiring art and design student needs.'

Russel Bagnall, former student

‘My art and design education certainly plays a major part when I market and promote my business.’

Sean Maddocks, former pupil - now Managing Director, Elite Vehicle Installations Ltd



Students are encouraged to make links to strengthen their learning:

‘Networking with artists, agencies and industries that employ creative practitioners helps to reinforce the department’s philosophy. Links made by students between their projects and their work in other subjects also encourages ideas and concepts to develop in a well-informed way’.

Edana Gerrard-Morgan, Head of Department

Professionalism and purpose

The importance of a broad art, craft and design curriculum in engaging girls and boys equally well has been a recurring theme in the last two Ofsted subject reports: *Drawing together: art, craft and design 2005-8* and *Making a mark: art, craft and design 2008-11*.



A contributory factor is students’ awareness of different applications of art, craft and design to everyday life, a feature of the course that motivates girls and boys at Cheslyn Hay High School.

The department has developed a very popular course that secures high achievement by creating real opportunities for girls and boys to experience being an artist, craftmaker or designer professionally. The development of students’ research and critical skills is a high priority, evident in workbooks that bulge with cuttings, drawings, experiments and notes and the use of ‘profile sheets’ that enable students to monitor their own progress.

‘I am currently at U.C.E London studying fashion and promotion. I feel well-equipped, having completed the advanced applied art and design course at Cheslyn Hay. I work on a vintage stall in Brick Lane and have a work placement set up in Paris.’

Callum Corcoran, former student

One project enabled the students specialising in ceramics to redesign an outside seating area at the school. This involved collaboration between students, a practising designer and a local brick manufacturer. In preparing their designs, students were encouraged to think in



three-dimensions by drawing on their previous experience of sculpture and ceramics. They gained an insight into collaborative design in response to a commission when their individual ideas for the new seating area were presented, evaluated and eventually combined.



A practising designer helped the students refine their design. The department grasps opportunities to work with local industries, in this case an industrial brick maker whose processes were used to construct and fire the seating unit.

Central to the success of the project was the skilled project management by the teacher specialising in ceramics, Reina Guttridge. Her strong

and sustained links with contemporary practice, wide subject knowledge and effective use of continuing professional development created the conditions for the project to succeed. Because students' knowledge, understanding and skills had been developed systematically, they were confident in expressing very creative ideas uninhibited by practical constraints.



The involvement of a local brick manufacturer deepened students' subject knowledge and skills further. Their existing skills in ceramics were applied by sculpting a particular part of the seat in clay. Their skills were extended when they made moulds for casting at the brickworks. The impact of their group work when assembled together was stunning and has remained a talking point at the school. The seating area is both practical and sculptural. It complements the department's focus on 'creating for a purpose'.



'The project exemplifies the philosophy of the course: students are involved in the complete

process, exploring concepts and processes that impact on society'.

Edana Gerrard-Morgan, Head of Department

Networking and national initiatives

By embracing the Crafts Council 'Firing Up' initiative, designed to reinvigorate the use of kilns in schools across England, the department is working with five other schools, Wolverhampton University and Stoke University to develop more community-based ceramics projects. Although the projects are not dependent on local resources, they capitalise on historical connections to the ceramics industry in a way that contextual opportunities are all too often missed by schools.

The expressive dimension of students' work is



not compromised by the focus on applied art, craft and design at the school. The following quotation from the journal of a sixth-form student captures the personal value of the subject:

‘This subject helps me express so much that I struggle to speak aloud.’

Georgina Bradley, student

Students are taught how to communicate through drawing in a range of two-, three-dimensional and digital media. They learn how other artists, craftmakers and designers communicate through visits to art galleries, museums, degree shows, and through creative practitioners who provide workshops and who visit the school’s exhibitions. The students take responsibility for exhibitions, learning how to arrange, catalogue, promote and manage a show or sale of their work. Expectations are high. As one student summed up:



‘One thing I really love about this course is the fact that you can wake up in the morning knowing that a challenge is guaranteed.’

Danielle Higgs, student

Rigour and review

Systematic assessment contributes to the business-like ethos of the department. This starts



early with an evaluation of students’ prior experiences and skills on entry. It is followed by continuous use of a core assessment tool that includes a focus on the personal qualities valued in the creative industries. By the sixth form, it is common for students to contribute to reviews by a ‘panel of critics’ which supports the development of their critical skills and ability to reach a consensus, as part of a team. Because contact with those working in or with the creative industries is

frequent, feedback to students involves a wide range of views.

‘Whenever I visited the art and design department at Cheslyn Hay it felt like visiting an art school due to the dedication and professionalism of the staff, who generated tremendous enthusiasm for the subject among their students and their work of outstanding quality and immense breadth. As Head of Ceramics and Design at the university I led a summer school in ceramics. The Cheslyn Hay students worked tirelessly for six days and produced a substantial body of finished pieces. Other course leaders shared my confidence in the work ethic and foundation in the fundamentals of art and design established at the school.’

John Webber, Staffordshire University

The school's background

[Cheslyn Hay High School](#) is a large, oversubscribed 11 to 18 school serving Cheslyn Hay and the surrounding area in South Staffordshire, near Walsall. The school provides a range of facilities and activities for the community related to the specialist sports status the school has held since 2003. Additional information can be found on the school's website.

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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