



partnerships for schools

This case study looks at how culture and personalised learning are at the centre of Addington Special School's mission to help improve the enjoyment and achievement of its pupils.

Key project information

School: Addington Special School

Age range: 2-19

No. of students: Up to 202

Location: Suburban

School type: Community School

Specialism: Music, Cognition and Learning

Free school meals: 23 per cent

Ofsted: Outstanding, Spring 2008

Local authority: Wokingham

Cultural learning and Every Child Matters

Background

Addington Special School in Wokingham is a high performing specialist music school. Up to 202 pupils aged between two and 19 years of age attend this school in a new building¹. Pupils have moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Many pupils also have associated sensory, motor and behaviour difficulties. Over a third of the pupils have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis and increasing numbers of pupils have complex medical issues in addition to their learning challenges.

Young people enter the school with their own attainment levels and needs, and often need to be supported through a different progression pathway than young people in mainstream schools.

The school has invested in high-quality cultural teaching and learning through the development of a highly skilled workforce. Focused assessment enables Addington to set targets and track pupils, showing a clear correlation between cultural learning and achievement against a range of outcomes from attainment and progress to personal and emotional development.

Project description

Music is used across the whole curriculum, and is a particularly effective learning tool for PMLD pupils who respond to a more sensory-based curriculum. All cultural learning is differentiated and progressed using established techniques like assessment for learning (AFL)². Individual education plan (IEP) targets reflect social and emotional development where appropriate.

The school has developed its own expectations of pupil progress and assessment based on the P scales³ and national curriculum criteria. The indicators are significantly higher than Ofsted expectations and in 2007-2008, an average of 74 per cent of students across the whole school made an expected or better than expected progress across all curriculum areas.

This high level of expectation is supported by high quality teaching and learning. The school employs 125 staff and makes significant ongoing investment in their professional development, applying for example, the TeamTeach⁴ approach consistently. As a result of their music specialism, Addington employs a second specialist music teacher and a music teacher assistant. There are seven peripatetic music teachers, a DJ practitioner, a drama teacher and music therapist, all of whom are employed on a part-

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time basis. These professionals have considerable expertise, for example the Head of Music recently contributed to a research project entitled, *'Sounds of Intent'* based at the Institute of Education, which explored alternative approaches to musical assessment of pupils with learning difficulties.

Drama has proven to be an effective learning medium for many pupils at Addington with PMLD and SLD who favour kinaesthetic and visual learning approaches. Formative and summative evaluation, dip sampling⁵ and use of peer and self assessment ensure that the progress of every pupil is robustly reflected and supported by teacher observation, video recordings and photographic evidence.

The newly equipped sensory theatre will support the progression of drama and is hoped to be one of the most creative and successful learning spaces in the new school. Technology is used to control the environment and it can be configured flexibly to create curriculum journeys. The sensory theatre space can be set up to recreate environments from woodlands, underworld sea life, beaches to outer space, using specialist equipment from light and sound, to fog, bubble and smell machines. Real props like sand and coconuts enhance the curriculum themed journeys and the staging is retained as the same 'environment' for a few weeks so that pupils with profound needs can benefit from revisiting familiar environments.

Cultural learning for social benefits

Cultural learning is valued in its own right and helps the school to meet its social outcomes through integration of resources and collaborations between schools. Key Stage 3 students join mainstream art classes using specialist art resources at nearby Maiden Erleigh School. This has led to many evidenced social benefits such as increased understanding and mutual respect between the young people. For Addington pupils self esteem and confidence is raised through recognising their ability in comparison to

their mainstream peers, having a positive effect on their work and commitment to learning.

Addington also works with disaffected students from two other local schools. This has positive benefits as young people are given key tasks and supervised responsibility. These tasks have allowed them to make positive contributions especially in relation to their Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), significantly altering the perception of the contribution they can make to society.

Ian Ayre, Deputy Headteacher at Addington, said: "These young people came into our school to work alongside pupils of different ages focusing on art and musical activities. This has been very beneficial to their self-esteem as they have proved to be very supportive of our pupils, helping them to complete their work."

Addington has developed its extended services and community role through partnerships with the cultural sector. At a strategic level, the school has seen the value in training and supporting its music service, Berkshire Maestros, in teaching and learning approaches, so that pupils with learning difficulties can fully access peripatetic music provision. Significantly, most pupils now in receipt of music lessons do so with parents paying voluntarily, having had the first year's lessons free of charge. Subsidy is provided to make this opportunity available for pupils with disabilities without financial risk and the high participation retention rate shows that this has been a success.



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A mixture of social and economic backgrounds is reflected at Addington. Twenty-two per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, while eight per cent of pupils have English as a second language. Cultural learning is delivered through themed topics which embrace the different global communities that Addington serves. Historically, this has ranged from musical residencies focusing on the texture of the Indonesian gamelan to the vibrancy, colour and complexity of the kora and West African percussive instruments of Senegal. Staff training is always built in to projects to help sustain and contextualise this cultural learning.

At Addington, culture contributes explicitly to the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcome of enjoy and achieve. Their Proms Festival brings together pupils from Addington and other schools with professional musicians to celebrate music of different genres. They perform, sing, play, listen, dance, explore new opportunities, learn new skills and enjoy the community spirit engendered by the event. All participants involved in the week-long event have the opportunity to showcase their achievements. Bands from partner schools have proved particularly popular.

The school has built a good reputation for having a positive ethos where the pupils achievements are acknowledged, respected and celebrated by their peers, staff, parents and wider community. There is active participation in regional festivals too, with Addington pupils joining the massed junior schools' choir concert at the professional venue Hexagon in Reading, where pupils gave a Soundbeam demonstration. Sound beams and large tactile responsive percussion instruments, using mechanisms such as resonance boards, allow all pupils to make music, even with very limited mobility.

Student participation in culture is supported through opportunities for students to engage in out-of-hours projects and activities. Young people build their skills and independence particularly in endeavours to raise their own achievement and standards in music. The enjoyment of music is perceived to have a wide

range of impacts including a contribution to a healthy lifestyle. For example, a pupil who willingly engages in the act of holding a violin in order to play can encourage the young person to adopt an upright stance, and in doing so, can support their physiotherapy programme.

Designed for culture

The new school design has incorporated good cultural resources including a dance studio, sensory pool, sensory rooms, performance spaces and a music room. A combination of digital technology and natural materials is evident throughout the school and provides a harmonious blend of calm and

stimulation. All areas of the school are colour coded in pastel shades and are supported by musical signifiers, where classes play music at specific times of the day to support pupils understanding of activity to time and task. For example, specific music is played to indicate circle time.

This attention to design detail has created a school that can use culture to even greater effect, maximising cultural learning and achievement. It also provides the opportunity to improve upon its wide ranging partnerships to support the personal and emotional development of its pupils through the use of more sophisticated spaces to learn, share and celebrate learning in.



Key lessons learned

- Cultural learning is valued in developing the potential of every child and young person. This is achieved through investment in skilled staff, leadership, appropriate resources and a shared ethos to cultural learning.
- Addington has high expectations and has combined conventional assessment methods, curricula and pedagogy to develop appropriate personalised learning.

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Conditions of success

- The school sets ambitious targets for its learners and supports them through differentiated programmes of cultural learning.
- The school has invested in specialist staff and whole school teaching and learning strategies support pupils effectively and consistently in their cultural learning.
- Culture is valued and developed as an integral component of the enjoyment and achievement of its pupils.
- Pupils are given extensive opportunities to share, learn and celebrate with others in their wider local, regional and global community through the use of culture in general and music in particular.
- Pupils have access to high quality instrumental music teaching covering a wide range of musical instruments and vocal tuition through pro-active partnership development and leadership by the school.
- Extra curricular cultural offerings are valued by the learners and assessed by the evaluation of take up and commitment to completing courses.

Key contacts

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References

1. New build funded by Wokingham local authority and a DCSF grant.
2. Assessment for learning involves using assessment in the classroom to raise pupils' achievement. It is based on the idea that pupils will improve most if they understand the aim of their learning, where they are in relation to this aim and how they can achieve the aim (or close the gap in their knowledge).
3. P scales are assessment criteria that have been developed to help assess pupils with special educational needs (SEN) who are working below level 1 of the National Curriculum.
4. TeamTeach is a holistic approach promoting positive behaviour and de-escalation skills.
5. Dip sampling is where a small sample of pupils are assessed (often qualitatively) at key stages of their learning.