



partnerships for schools

This case study shows how culture can play a crucial role in supporting Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning. A stimulating arts curriculum, cultural interventions and participation in cultural learning schemes are noted to have positive effects on the behaviour, relationships and engagement of students, improving their learning and development.

Key project information

School: Birmingham Behaviour Support Service

Age range: 5-16

No. of students: Variable

Location: Urban (9 centres)

School type: Pupil Referral Unit

Free school meals: 70 per cent

Ofsted: Good, March 2008

Local authority: Birmingham

Culture supporting Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

Background

The Behaviour Support Service (BSS) operates nine teaching centres which are spread across the Birmingham conurbation. The centres link geographically with Birmingham's six networks of schools. Children and young people are allocated places at the centres according to their school network to minimise travel and to ensure students are within communities near to their homes. This arrangement means that each of the centres has its own culture relating to the locality. Across the service pupils reflect the make-up of a large multicultural city, but are generally from the more socially deprived areas of Birmingham. Centres are primary or secondary focused.

Pupils referred to BSS can have a range of behavioural problems that can be expressed as disruption and aggression or can cause withdrawn behaviour or refusal to attend school. A lack of engagement is a strong characteristic, often accompanied by low self-esteem and poor academic ability. The aim of the service is to re-engage these

disaffected students and ultimately reintegrate them into mainstream provision.

Like all Children's Services BSS has as its key outcomes those from *Every Child Matters* (ECM). In Birmingham, the Brighter Future programme running through Children's Services ensures that all centres work towards pupils being:

- Literate and numerate
- Well behaved
- Socially literate
- Physically healthy
- Emotionally healthy
- Skilled for the jobs market

A key measure of success for BSS is that pupils are successfully reintegrated into mainstream provision and are able to cope socially, emotionally and academically with their new education setting. Programmes for pupils broadly follow the national curriculum, with a strong emphasis on the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). When students arrive at the centre they are given a baseline

Culture supporting Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

assessment: Pupil Attitude to School and Self (PASS). This includes areas such as feelings about school, perceived learning capability and attitude to teachers. The PASS is used to track their learning journey back to mainstream provision.

All nine centres have completed a review of their arts education provision as part of an Artsmark¹ award. This has provided useful insight into strengths and development needs relating to cultural learning in all nine centres. Generally students have had little or no prior engagement with the arts. The arts curriculum is perceived as a key way of helping students to develop a sense of self worth.

Issue-based work

Issue-based work aims to raise awareness of key agendas through the arts. The emphasis is not so much on arts skills, as on students having the opportunity to explore a relevant topic and express their ideas about it. This work helps students to build relationships with each other and staff and is perceived to be vital if they are to re-enter the mainstream system.



Topics and themes identified in the curriculum reflect student's interests as well as allowing them to explore the issues that affect them, their lives and communities. Performing and Visual arts are embedded in the curriculum. Starting points for projects have come from youth crime statistics, domestic abuse, anti-violence campaigns and sexual health issues. Young people excluded from school/society often lack social understanding and acceptance of diversity, so by incorporating the SEAL outcomes into engaging, creative and relevant schemes of work, students have a much greater opportunity to learn and develop the transferable skills to succeed in and beyond the classroom. Issue-based work can be seen to develop transferable skills and attitudes.

Caroline Scotcher, an Advanced Skills Teacher, at BSS says: "It's about breaking down the 'I can't do it' – overcoming the fear of failure, not belonging, showing themselves up".

Cultural Partners

The service is committed to working in partnership with a range of cultural organisations. The rationale for this is:

- To increase pupils' achievement, enjoyment and interest through activities and experiences beyond school and home life**

Cultural Partners can extend learning and build on what is provided as part of the curriculum. For example, a partnership involving a music company, Blue Whale at the Birmingham Custard Factory, offered access to music technology and professional equipment and skills.
- To raise standards by increasing pupils' self-esteem, confidence, interpersonal skills and abilities**

Working with professional partners can impact on student's behaviour and ability to form healthy relationships and help them to develop skills which are transferable to other aspects of life and education. Students are able to develop social skills, self-esteem and confidence. They can experience real work and put their learning into a context.

Culture supporting Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

Successful engagement in a graffiti workshop enabled students to produce graffiti on canvas or board as an art form rather than an antisocial act of vandalism, and to understand the difference between the two. A project at Creative Alliance Media Box was about designing bill boards on the theme of media stereotyping of young people. This work was part of a region-wide competition which was won by a group of students from one of the centres.

- To enrich the curriculum and offer experiences beyond those possible with the service's resources, staffing and accommodation**
 Where staff in a particular centre do not have skills to deliver a curriculum area, they will take learning outside the classroom using outside providers. For example, dance has been delivered to all students through a project using an arts organisation, DanceXchange. This partnership is ongoing and strategic. Drumming workshops are popular with pupils of all ages and have led to opportunities to demonstrate excellent behaviour in public during performances.

Conditions for success

- Flexibility.** The service has a responsive and reflective approach to the curriculum, which is not prescriptive. Use is made of themes which address issues of concern to the students and learning outside the classroom through projects delivered by cultural partners. The City of Birmingham is enthusiastic about representing itself through the arts and culture, which is reflected by the service.

A six week theme about Birmingham covers all aspects of the curriculum and enables students to focus on the rich ethnic diversity and artistic culture within the City, and discover the range of cultural offers. The transient nature of the student population makes examination entry difficult for many students who are not at the centres for long enough to complete a course. Alternative approaches, such as Arts Awards² are used. The Arts Awards scheme is ideally suited to BSS students providing motivation, incentive and positive



encouragement as part of the curriculum. The study of a hero or heroine is used for students to look at positive role models.

- Relationships.** There is a maximum of eight students in each group and this enables staff to relate on an individual level to each student. Consequences such as being withdrawn from working with a cultural partner are rarely used to discipline bad behaviour. The emphasis is put on resolving issues and staff model calm behaviour and appropriate conflict resolution.
- Personalised learning.** The pupils have individual programmes designed to address their specific needs both socially, emotionally and academically. In order to engage students back into learning success is 'value led' and geared to what the pupils value.

Inclusion

Opportunities are available to all students. Because the service is large, centres do not become isolated and co-operate to share skills, expertise and good practice. A teacher responsible for art oversees the curriculum and opportunities across all centres.

Culture supporting Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

There is also an element of healthy competition between centres, which motivates staff to provide new opportunities and share ideas and resources.

- **Aim high.** The predominant ethos within the service is to encourage a climate of risk taking without blame if things go wrong. The cycle of, Plan – Do – Review supports the principle for pupils of learning from disappointment and mistakes. Recent service involvement with a scheme to train creative practitioners to work with schools is an example of BSS being able to take on projects when the outcomes are not predictable. Throughout their programmes pupils are encouraged to take on new challenges and to reflect on their own learning.
- **Celebrate success.** Students often find accepting praise difficult. The arts can give disaffected pupils with low academic ability the chance to enjoy success, express themselves and achieve positive outcomes. Self esteem is often raised in the process as pupils are proud of what they have achieved and often want to take finished pieces home. It gives staff a legitimate opportunity to praise pupils for their effort and to celebrate success by awarding certificates and mounting displays as a visual reminder of what engagement can lead to. Winning the poster competition was a great boost for students as their work appeared on a city centre billboard. A past student, Matt Windle, was recently selected to be Birmingham City Council's Young Poet Laureate. As part of this role he came back to perform for his former teachers.

Potential pitfalls

- The service has a very transient body of pupils who are sometimes unlikely to achieve qualifications that demand long term commitment.
- Sustaining partnerships with the cultural sector requires funding. Applications are made for the work to Birmingham City Council, Arts Council and other bodies. This is time consuming and can make planning difficult.

Key contact

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References

1. Artsmark is a national award scheme that recognises schools with a high level of provision in the arts.
2. Arts Award is a national qualification which supports young people to develop as artists and arts leaders. Young people aged between 11-25 can achieve Arts Awards at levels 1, 2 and 3 on the national qualifications framework.