

# The Arts in Schools

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## *Why the arts matter in our education system*

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### Foreword

I can't imagine a truly great school that hasn't got a vibrant culture of the arts at its core. Drama, music, art, dance: these have long been subjects at the beating heart of the UK's education system, much envied internationally, much cherished nationally.

And now they are under threat.

The arts in schools aren't just an extra-curricular embellishment. They are where pupils from all backgrounds find new ways of expressing themselves and of understanding the world. The arts are what distinguish human beings from robots. And now is precisely the time when we need to be giving them more, not less, emphasis.

Yet a combination of factors are placing the arts under threat. There's a general narrowing of the curriculum, driven in too many cases by accountability measures which don't exactly dismiss arts subjects but do appear to shift them to the less significant margins of a school's curriculum offer.

And then there's funding, where – if you're a head or chair of governors needing to make drastic savings – you'll do the only thing you can do: cut courses and increase class sizes. That makes arts subjects vulnerable, and ASCL's survey with the BBC in December 2017 showed bleakly that 90% of school leaders had reduced arts provision in their schools over the past two years.

This matters, because it's not simply a funding issue: much more significantly, it's about social mobility.

Many young people come to music or dance or drama or art because of what happens in their school. A teacher spots a spark of talent. They chivy and nudge and quietly inspire. This matters especially to the child from a background where such activities rarely feature – where classical music, challenging drama, ambitious dance, unorthodox art and design would never otherwise be encountered.

These are the children who most need schools with a commitment to the arts. They need teachers who create opportunities for that heady mix of self-expression, creativity, rigour and self-discipline that come from the creative arts.

These aren't woolly soft subjects. They are what make us distinctively human. And they should be a birthright for every child from every background. We must make the case for the arts in schools, show that they go way beyond extra-curricular activities, and do all we can to fight to retain them in our classrooms.

#### **Geoff Barton**

General Secretary

Association of School and College Leaders

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# An arts-rich education contributes to the development of all aspects of a child's powers and personality; a school that is rich in the arts enhances the life chances of a child.

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## The educational value

Children thrive in schools where the arts are at the heart of a broad and balanced curriculum. Children who study the arts do better; they are more likely to attend university, and are more employable (CLA, 2017).

Studying the arts can improve a young person's cognitive abilities by up to 17%, and contribute to raising young people's attainment in Maths and English – particularly for children from low-income backgrounds (CLA, 2017).

Arts subjects are a vital part of a balanced curriculum. They are academically rigorous, and of equal weight, status, value and importance to other subjects. They are as essential as literacy and numeracy in equipping children with the skills for life, and the creativity to contribute to the building of a successful nation.

**'Creativity and the arts are so powerful to young hearts and minds and can be their salvation ... They are inclusive, can communicate in a universal language, and can change lives for the better.'**

Wendy Rawlinson, Headteacher, Queen Victoria School, Dudley, Platinum Artsmark School

**'Participation in school is critical to fulfilling children's entitlement to arts and culture, with many young people only getting access to cultural learning activities such as music and theatre during school hours.'**

Londesborough, et al. (2017) *Learning About Culture Programme Prospectus* RSA Action and Research Centre

## The social value

Every child should have access to the benefits that arts and culture bring. The arts are a positive force in society: children who feel ownership of the arts feel more confidence in their ability to create, challenge and explore, to be part of society, and to make change happen. Access to the arts is access to our national life.

Equality of access should be unaffected by income, ethnicity, gender, disability, or location. This is a social justice issue: a wealth of research shows that children with an arts deficit are disadvantaged educationally and economically, while their more fortunate peers are more resilient, healthier, do better in school, are more likely to go on to higher education, to get a job and to keep it (CLA, 2017). Participation in the arts can fuel social mobility.

The arts also create a culture of citizenship, tolerance and empathy. Children who engage in the arts are more likely to volunteer and to vote (CLA, 2017). Studies have shown that children who take part in regular arts activities show significant improvement in social cohesion, cooperation and pro-social attitudes<sup>1</sup>.

**'Arts participation and access is a vital factor in the successful development of children and young people as strong, confident learners who are able to contribute to the world around them.'**

Wayne Norrie, Chief Executive, Greenwood Academies Trust, Nottingham

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## The personal value

The arts make us happier and healthier, and equip us with essential strengths. They help us to create our own value systems and focus a child's engagement with the world. Through studying the arts, young people co-operate with each other, think, question and collaborate; they learn teamwork, independence and leadership.

The arts give children a creative outlet to explore and express their emotions, affording them ways of coping with life's challenges. They can help in reducing stress, building resilience, raising self-esteem and developing social skills.

The arts can make a powerful contribution to a child's health and wellbeing. Music, plays, dance, literature, visual art and film act as anchors for our existence, an affirmation of our humanity. We owe it to future generations to ensure they experience an education that offers them the whole of life and culture: head, heart and soul.

**'Participation in a world where complex disabilities present barriers is a challenge, but one that can be supported by embracing the unique opportunities provided by the arts. Music enables us to work with students who have profound learning disabilities as active participants; music holds staff and learners together in a shared moment to really connect.'**

Zoe Evans, Headteacher, Rosewood Free School, Southampton

## The economic value

The arts are vital for a vibrant creative industry and to build an innovative, creative workforce. Our creative industries are world-leading, contributing billions to our economy and accounting for millions of jobs; they are of central importance to our economic progress. An arts-rich education is crucial in ensuring the ongoing success of our arts organisations, creative businesses and artist-entrepreneurs.

It is essential that we nurture the inventive problem-solvers we will need in the future. An education that combines the arts with science, technology, engineering and maths will prepare our young people for the changing needs of the labour market. Leading employers from across the creative industries and beyond are calling for a workforce with both creative and scientific skills.

Creative jobs are resistant to automation, so are less likely to disappear in a world where work will be increasingly automated (Bakhshi, et al. 2015 & 2017). Our schools have to equip children and young people with the skills necessary to build the future: we need to invest more, not less, in the creative and imaginative skills of our young people. Our economy will be strengthened by them.

**'... in whatever way you construct your list of 21st Century Skills, you will always come across creativity – creating new value ... bringing together the processes of creating, of making, of bringing into being, and formulating, and looking for outcomes that are innovative, fresh, original ... this is all about imagination, inquisitiveness, collaboration, self-discipline.'**

Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Special Adviser on Education Policy, OECD, speaking at the Durham Conference on Creativity, 4 September 2017

‘Art transforms lives as well as being a vital part of our economy. It is incredible to see how it can change a child, unlocking their talent, building resilience, confidence and communication skills. These are skills needed for any job. The arts need to be integrated into the [school] curriculum, not just seen as a nice thing to do.’

Andria Zafirakou, 2018 Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Prize Winner and Art & Textiles Teacher, Alperton Community School, *The Times*, 3 April 2018

## Evidence

1. Participation in structured arts activities can increase cognitive abilities by 17%.
2. Learning through arts and culture can improve attainment in Maths and English.
3. Learning through arts and culture develops skills and behaviour that lead children to do better in school.
4. Students from low-income families who take part in arts activities at school are three times more likely to get a degree.
5. Employability of students who study arts subjects is higher and they are more likely to stay in employment.
6. Students from low-income families who engage in the arts at school are twice as likely to volunteer.
7. Students from low-income families who engage in the arts at school are 20% more likely to vote as young adults.
8. Young offenders who take part in arts activities are 18% less likely to re-offend.
9. Children who take part in arts activities in the home during their early years are ahead in reading and Maths at age nine.
10. People who take part in the arts are 38% more likely to report good health.

[www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence](http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence)

## References

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- Full references available: [www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/briefings](http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/briefings)
- This is one of a series of CLA Briefing Papers available on the CLA website:
- No. 1 STEAM:** Why STEM can only take us so far
- No. 2 Employability & Enterprise:** Why the arts make us more employable, and why the creative industries are our economic life raft
- No. 3 Arts, Health & Wellbeing:** Why the arts make us happier and healthier

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