



QUINTON HOUSE SCHOOL

The importance of arts in developing the whole child

Headteacher of Quinton House School, Catherine Cozens, weighs the importance of the arts in education.

Tracking pupils' academic progress is relatively easy. There are endless assessments to test ability, learning style and perceived capability. But few teachers would agree that grades alone assess all of a child's potential. The question begs, how can teachers understand the pupil behind the grade?

The creative arts – music, drama and art – offer a glimpse into pupils' personalities. The arts are inclusive. They don't need to be musical, dramatical or artistic. They simply need to take part. Few subjects are built on the premise of collaboration and teamwork in the same way as the arts. When pupils come together as part of a music ensemble, dance group or theatre troupe they learn how to channel their creative energies constructively, to work together and support one another. And though pupils may not realise it, caught in the flurry of rehearsals, they are equipping themselves with essential life skills. To be able to foster a sense of camaraderie and support with pupils of different year groups is an indispensable skill for pupils to possess, particularly in their future working lives, when they must learn to work with a variety of individuals. We don't pass through our working lives in a solitary fashion and neither should we expect our children to do so.

For talented musicians, actors and artists, the arts can do more than just develop their interpersonal skills, they instil a firm sense of dedication. At the heart of success lies hard work and commitment. And plenty of it. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell argues that it takes 10,000 hours of "deliberate practice" for anyone to become world-class in any skill. Even if pupils are aiming to be good rather than world-class, they have to invest the time and effort to succeed. Rehearsals for music groups and theatre troupes typically occur outside of school hours so pupils need to manage their time effectively to ensure not only their own success but also the success of the group at large.

Perhaps the biggest benefit pupils gain from the arts is the opportunity to express themselves. In an age when increasing numbers of children suffer from mental health issues caused by technology overconsumption, the creative arts can provide a constructive outlet for their anxieties. It's vital that pupils take a break from academic routine and are encouraged to use their imaginations. Whether they have landed the lead role in a school production or are assisting with it, pupils get a much-needed boost to their self-esteem. Yes, it might be daunting at first but pupils come out the other end more resilient, with an even greater belief in their own potential.

In my 25 years of teaching, I've witnessed countless success stories of what can happen when pupils immerse themselves in the arts. Pupils who join a new school midterm and struggle to "fit in" typically find their niche when they involve themselves in the arts. Shy and socially awkward characters blossom in drama lessons – it gives them the opportunity to 'hide' behind a character. Eventually these strategies spill over into the real world – and by playing a confident character, they become one. Likewise, for pupils for whom English is not their first language, drama provides an outlet through which they can communicate through physical theatre styles, such as mime and freeze frames. Language need not be an impediment.



QUINTON HOUSE SCHOOL

It's not hard to see how every pupil can in some way, shape, or form benefit from participating in the arts. But it is essential that schools cover a wide spectrum of artistic pursuits in order to reflect a broad range of interests. At Quinton House School, art encompasses all mediums and styles - from Modigliani's bold use of colour to depict individual personalities to Morandi's hatching, stippling and blending techniques to convey still life. Likewise, with music, not every child wants to learn to play the violin or the piano, so why not offer African drumming as an alternative? The benefits of learning to play an instrument are far-reaching and extensive, engaging almost every area of the brain; training it to become a more effective problem-solving tool.

The arts therefore, should be at the heart of every school's curriculum – to help pupils develop, express and create. Be ready to listen to your pupils, their suggestions, ideas and interests. After all, a school without the arts would leave very incomplete pupils.

Quinton House School is an independent non-selective school for girls and boys aged 2 to 18, offering a Nursery, Junior School, Senior School and Sixth Form set in 31 acres of picturesque grounds at Upton in Northampton. Established in 1946, the continued success of pupils is a result of high aspirations, hard work, traditional values and a tailored programme of individualised learning.