



The Valley School

Arts Award Good Practice Centre 2014-15

Context

The Valley School in Stevenage have been running Arts Award for over two years, and so far 50 young people have achieved awards.

Students at The Valley School are aged between 11-16 years old and all have statements of special educational needs, with a range of moderate learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorders and speech, language and communication needs.

Literacy and communication are areas that many students at The Valley School find challenging, so Arts Award is used as a way of recognising students' abilities in the arts.



Approach

Bronze Arts Award is offered to all Year 9 students, with Silver Arts Award as an option in Years 10 and 11. The school plans to expand this to offer Arts Award Discover and Explore as well as Gold Arts Award in the future.

Students work towards their award through the school curriculum. There is also a whole-school arts week in October, a musical production in May and various arts activities and visits throughout the year. Students make choices about which art form to specialise in and the school has facilitated awards through art and design, technical theatre, music, media arts and film production.

All Year 9 students achieved their Bronze Arts Award through an annual whole-school cross-curricular creative and performing arts week. As part of this, the school worked with ten professional artists and four other schools, as well as artists within the school community.

During the week, students saw a different performance in the school hall each morning, allowing students who would not be able to attend an external performance due to their needs, to participate fully.

For Bronze **Part A (explore the arts as a participant)**, students were involved in a range of arts workshops including photography, dance, drama, singing, instrumental work and painting. They planned what they wanted to learn through the workshop with guidance, and evaluated how successful they had been afterwards.

For **Part B (explore the arts as an audience member)**, students reviewed each of the morning's performances. They carried their own booklets with a space for each workshop and performance to be reviewed briefly. After the arts week, they chose one of the performances to reflect on in more detail.



Part C (arts inspiration) was completed after arts week, when students created a project based on an artist they discovered during the week. They were also given the opportunity to plan and deliver their own workshops in small groups, in an arts discipline they enjoyed during the week for **Part D (arts skills share)**. With support, students identified parts of the workshops that they enjoyed, and worked with adults to recreate this. They then delivered their workshop to younger students.

The Valley School works with Mousetrap Theatre, who provide subsidised tickets for performances and workshops. A number of community artists also provide opportunities, helping students understand that art is everywhere. An established working relationship with Peter Keegan, an artist specialising in portraiture, supports students to produce high quality art.

There are plans to introduce Arts Award Discover and Explore for Key Stage 3 and to encourage more able students to work towards their Gold Arts Award at Key Stage 4. The Valley School would also like to work with other special schools to deliver more collaborative Arts Award projects.

Impact

Arts Award has been part of transforming the way students see themselves as learners in the arts; by seeing what they are able to achieve without being limited by their difficulties/perceived difficulties. As a result, the school now has a high participation rate in extra-curricular activities and a huge proportion of Key Stage 4 pupils choose to develop their arts learning through Silver Arts Award, having completed Bronze in Year 9.

One young man was very disengaged from learning at Key Stage 3 and suffered with extremely low self esteem. As part of his Arts Award, he began guitar lessons at school. He went on to perform in front of the entire school community; something he was not able to do as part of his everyday school activities. He achieved his Bronze Award and continued to develop his skills through Silver. He will leave school with this Level 2 qualification as the highest he has achieved.

Comments

'Arts Award is amazing! I am a singer and it helped me sing more clearly and be a good leader.'

Sam, Silver Arts Award achiever

'I really enjoyed Bronze Arts Award and I can't wait to do my Silver. I found coming up with ideas hard but I think I am better at it now.'

CJ, Bronze Arts Award achiever

'Arts Award has transformed the experience of learning for our pupils. The clarity of direction and the support for effective learning has allowed many of them to achieve beyond what they thought possible. Pupils are able to articulate their learning, their next steps and how they will overcome barriers to achieve them. They have been enabled to perform with ever-increasing confidence and skill.

The arts have an outstanding impact in our school and allow us to celebrate diversity and success in a variety of ways throughout each year. Working towards a recognised accreditation has given an increased focus and celebration. Our pupils are enriched, empowered and rewarded by the experience.'

Corina Foster, Deputy Headteacher

'Arts Award helps to address whole school priorities such as attainment by providing a framework for progress and assessment in the Performing Arts. It also leads to a recognised external accreditation.'

Helen Holford, Governor

'I initially became an Arts Award adviser to offer our pupils the opportunity to gain an accredited qualification in the arts. It has, however, become much more than this. Arts Award allows our pupils to plan their own progress in arts disciplines that motivate them and see that they can be successful learners. It has broadened our students' horizons about what art is and has allowed them to work towards a meaningful qualification that recognises their achievements in the arts, regardless of their needs. It has increased motivation across our curriculum; as soon as our students achieve their Bronze they are asking when they can start Silver!'

Felicity Kirk, Learning Leader - Creative and Performing Arts

November 2014