



Rye Hills Academy - Case Study
#SECONDARIESCREATE

RYE HILLS

As part of Culture Bridge North East (CBNE) secondary school #Secondariescreate focus we visited Rye Hills Academy to observe some of the different creative lessons they deliver along with interviewing the pupils and teaching staff to see all of the incredibly creative and cultural work that is being developed. We also wanted to understand some of the current challenges of delivering a diverse creative curriculum to 11-18-year-olds.

About the school?

Rye Hills Academy is based in Redcar and has around 900 pupils; it's one of the only secondary schools in Redcar that provides weekly timetabled lessons in art, music and drama right throughout KS3 and offers drama, performing arts, music, art, and photography at KS4. Their main focus is to deliver high-quality arts education day-in-day-out, and the teachers here work together and support each other to ensure that pupils can access a wide range of creative opportunities ensuring that each pupil is as successful as possible.

The creative teaching team consists of:

- Angela Rose, Lead Practitioner for Teaching and Learning and Teacher of Drama
- Jenni Wilkinson – Subject Leader for Drama
- Kay Parker – Subject Leader for Music
- Tyrone Coomber, Teacher of Music
- Lucy Williamson, Subject Leader for Art
- Lindsey Mills, Teacher of Art

How does the school champion the arts?

Rye Hills Academy is full of creative and passionate teachers that offer extra-curricular activities such as after-school drama activities, music groups, theatre and gallery visits, extra-curricular school productions and concerts allowing pupils to be creative not just in lesson times but throughout their school journey.





What problems have you encountered teaching creative subjects at a secondary school level?

Pupil numbers

Pupil numbers are a real issue for Rye Hills when there is a sudden decline for a particular year group it has a significant impact on school funding. This is always a worry for the creative subjects as often the budgets for these practical lessons are low and there are concerns over the potential of creative subjects being cut from the curriculum, which has happened in other schools facing similar funding issues.

Funding

Funding and obtaining grants and knowing where they are able to access funds was also an issue that was raised, thankfully CBNE can help Rye Hills with learning about and gaining access to funds for creative and cultural projects. If you'd like to learn more about this there is a link at the end of this case study.

Pressure of grades

At the secondary school level the main focus has to be GCSEs and A-level outcomes and so if you are working on extra-curricular creative work with young people, sometimes attendance can be an issue, as near exam time pupils will prioritise revision and may invest extra tutoring, reducing the time they have to spend on extra-curricular projects.



Can you share some success stories?

Like many schools, a few pupils that attend Rye Hills Academy have had troubled backgrounds and one particular 14-year-old boy, struggled with his behaviour in school, but since he started playing the drums and realised that he is a talented musician his behaviour and relationships with the teaching staff have significantly improved.

The young person has also learned a great deal from taking part in the peer assessments that the school recommends. In one peer assessment, the teen was struggling to understand a particular music project and became angry but when his peer explained to him that it's okay not to understand everything, as no one understands everything the 14-year-old felt reassured.

The peer assessment resonated with this young person and resulted in the teenager setting his own goal of staying calm in lessons and giving himself the time to learn new things. Since the music staff shared their insights, other teachers have worked with the same pupil, and his overall attitude is extremely positive, he is now able to control his emotions which has enabled him to positively engage in his learning.



What's the teaching style at Rye Hills Academy?

As you can imagine styles vary from teacher-to-teacher but what we did discover was that all of the teachers had gained the respect and gratitude of their pupils. Because the teaching staff give their pupils more autonomy the staff have built up trust, understanding and a desire to impress. This, in turn, has led the young people to genuinely care about the creative work they produce.

All of the students we met were inspiring, enthusiastic and expressive with a real understanding of the world around them. We were also impressed by the amount of freedom the young people are given by staff while at the same time, the team set very firm boundaries, this caused every individual to feel truly valued.



What are your plans for 2019?

Rye Hills plans to continue teaching a wide variety of creative subjects that inspire their pupils and show them that the arts can help them to develop so many other skills such as time management, team building, public speaking, creative and critical thinking, and improved coordination. All of these skills will benefit the young people who step through their doors whether they decide to take a creative based GCSE / A-level or not.

The school is also planning on beginning their Artsmark journey, and two of the teaching staff are looking into completing a drama therapy and/or Art Therapy course, as supporting the mental health of their pupils is always a priority for the Rye Hills teaching staff.

Angela Rose is also completing a research project with Culture Bridge North East looking at creative learning and the creative opportunities available for school pupils within the Redcar & Cleveland area. As part of this research, Angela is meeting with many teachers to find out how CBNE can better support, fund and encourage schools to invest and develop their creative and cultural offer.

How do you work as a team?

Each department has its own key focus, but the creative faculty regularly gets together to share ideas, insights and pupil success stories. They also work on projects within the school that includes all departments such as school productions. This type of event is a chance for the art department to design and make the sets, props and costumes at the same time the drama department can direct and choreograph the performances and organise technical elements such as sound and lighting, leaving the music department to rehearse and perform the songs.

Multi-discipline projects like this showcase the vast creative talent on offer here and show the dedication of the teaching staff who give up their free time to ensure that the pupils are part of an extraordinary performance, as the timetable does not allow time to develop and perfect these large-scale-productions in lesson time, yet it provides pupils with an additional opportunity to put their classroom learning into practice within a different creative context.





Why is creative learning so important?

Because the teaching staff give their pupils more autonomy the staff have built up trust, understanding and a desire to impress. This, in turn, has led the young people to genuinely care about the creative work they produce. All of the pupils we met were inspiring, enthusiastic and expressive with a real understanding of the world around them.

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The teachers of Rye Hills Academy told us that they believe creative learning is fundamental, especially as computers and technology surge. The modern world needs creative, divergent thinkers as creative thinking is the key to keeping a young person's mind open and without innovative thought where will our scientists and technologists be?

Rye Hills have personally seen what a powerful impact the arts can have on young people such as allowing them to explore, play and try new things. The arts have also created a whole host of new opportunities for many of their SEND students, and it generally boosts the confidence of shy pupils along with having a positive effect on teenagers with behavioural issues, allowing them to find a focus and a joy of learning within the school system, sometimes for the first time.

All of the teachers here have made it clear that for many pupils when it comes to creative learning, it's not all about the outcome it's more about the incredible journey that each individual is taken on by investing in the arts themselves.

As well as speaking to the teachers we also talked to some of the pupils, and they had some very insightful comments about the impact creative learning had had on them, and we'd like to share these with you now.



Feedback from the pupils

Drama

- ‘Acting has helped my self-confidence, and I’m not afraid to speak up in other lessons now.’
- ‘When I first had to do drama, I was terrified but, now it’s my favourite lesson. I made my very first friends at this school by taking drama classes.’

Art

- ‘I like that in art you can think about what you want to do and create something that is original.’
- ‘I can express my feelings by drawing, but I struggle when I have to use words.’

Music

- ‘Miss doesn’t just teach us how to sing and play instruments she teaches us how to answer questions, so we do better in other lessons and revising is easier.’



Find out more

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Cultural organisational newsletter >> [CLICK HERE](#)

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