

SPOTLIGHT ON MUSIC EDUCATION

Arts education in secondary schools: effects and effectiveness

CONTROVERSIAL new research highlights vital effects of learning in the arts

*The **Teachers** section of the **MusicEd Website** has been featuring the interim findings of this important research project: we now have the promised **final** report.*

New findings show that there is a remarkable range of positive effects and many substantial learning outcomes to be gained from a good quality arts education including contributions to improve and develop children's personal, social, creative and artistic skills and abilities. At the same time however, many pupils are leaving schools feeling that their arts experiences at school have had little impact on them. For example, almost two-thirds (63%) of a sample of school leavers indicated that they had learnt very little from music while they were at secondary school. (Those findings are a cause for concern and call for careful consideration. But we must not lose sight of much praiseworthy policy and practice all over the country. So when you have read this story, click on the [Teachers](#) section and read our LEA Music Awards report)

The full results are set out in a report published on 10 October 2000: "***Arts education in secondary schools: effects and effectiveness***".

The report presents the results of an important three-year study into the effects and effectiveness of an arts education in English and Welsh secondary schools. Launched by the **RSA** in 1997, the research was conducted by the **NFER**. The main sponsors of the research were the **Arts Council of England** and the **Local Government Association**.

Evidence was collected through case studies of five secondary schools with a reputation of excellence in arts provision, analyses of wider-ranging information compiled through NFER's QUASE project, questionnaires completed by 2,269 Year 11 pupils in 22

schools and interviews with a cross-section of 20 employers and their employees. The report provides the most extensive evidence to date about the role of the arts in education. Key findings follow:

- The effects from the arts experienced by pupils in the case study schools included a heightened sense of enjoyment and fulfilment; an increase in knowledge and skills associated with the particular art forms; advances in personal and social development; development of creativity and thinking skills and the enrichment of communication and expressive skills.
- A range of in and out of school factors were identified which contribute to effective teaching and learning in the arts. Individual teacher factors are more important determinants of effectiveness than whole-school factors. For example effective teachers provided highly supportive, but challenging classroom environments in which pupils felt encouraged and safe to take creative risks. The importance of parental support is also highly significant.
- Pupils from the case study schools volunteered accounts of arts-based learning that had transferred to other subjects. Findings from the wider sample however, showed there was no sound evidence to support the claim that the arts boost general academic performance at GCSE.
- Art was perceived as most likely to have an impact on pupils. Each of the main art forms generate distinctive effects. To achieve the full canon of effects from the arts, all of the art forms need to be provided in the school curriculum. Dance and drama registered an impressive range of outcomes but both lack status within the National Curriculum. There is cause for concern about the current condition of music in English and Welsh secondary schools. While benefiting from a similar status to that of art, it attracted the highest number of 'no impact' responses, registered a more limited range of outcomes compared with art and drama, had very low numbers enrolling for it at Key Stage 4 and pupil enjoyment, relevance, skill development and expressive dimensions were often absent. Despite the important part that music plays in young people's lives,

as it is taught in secondary schools, it is perceived by the pupils to be out of touch with, and not accessible to, the majority of young people.

The report shows that the arts are important in education for themselves, for what they set out to do, and the different ways in which they do it. Individual art forms differ from each other intrinsically, and in the learning outcomes they generate and are not interchangeable. A curriculum lacking in sufficient access to the individual arts subjects would lead many pupils to experience greater tedium, disengagement and ultimately greater disaffection at school.

Dr. John Harland, NFER Project Director and co-author of the report said: “The study is one of the most detailed pieces of research into arts education ever undertaken in this country. It offers teachers, advisers and policy-makers a wealth of information on what young people gain - and what they don't gain - from engaging in the arts at secondary schools. It also provides some revealing illustrations of effective teaching practices in the four main artforms.

“Overall, there is a pressing case for reversing the trend toward selective policies that extend inequalities between schools and which result largely in only the best schools for the arts becoming even better. Policies are required that seek improvements across the board and might include strategies that encourage schools with demonstrable strengths in achieving high-quality outcomes in arts education to aid and support developments in schools without those strengths.”

The full report of this study, *Arts Education in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness* by John Harland, Kay Kinder, Pippa Lord, Alison Stott, Ian Schagen, Jo Haynes with Linda Cusworth, Richard White and Riana Paola is available from The Publications Unit, The Library, NFER, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough SL1 2DQ on 01753 574123 price £24.

Research aims:

The aims of the study were to investigate the range of outcomes attributable to arts education in secondary schools, in particular the hypothesis that engagement in the arts can boost general academic performance; and analyse the key factors and processes that

may bring about these effects, including the identification and portrayal of particularly effective practices.

Background to the project:

In 1996, the RSA launched *The Arts Matter* programme and lecture series. Its ruling hypothesis was that the arts matter because they are about serious business, central to civilised living, and not merely entertaining distractions to be bolted on to the margins of our main concerns and actions. The lively and challenging debates initiated by the programme highlighted the urgent need to complement its advocacy of the arts with a concerted, objective, and authoritative enquiry into the effects and effectiveness of arts education in schools, and particularly secondary schools.

In 1997, the RSA, through *The Arts Matter* programme's steering group, brought together a diverse group of organisations to co-fund this research study commissioned from the NFER. The sponsors were the Arts Council of England and the Local Government Association, together with Arts & Business, BT, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Comino Foundation, Crayola Ltd, NFER and Powys and Wigan LEAs.

For further information on the research findings and its methods contact Val Hincks, NFER press office on 01753 747145 or e-mail v.hincks@nfer.ac.uk