

A.N.D

A new direction for arts,
culture and young london

CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON

SIX STORIES OF CREATIVITY AND PARTNERSHIP

COLUMBIA PRIMARY SCHOOL
GALLIONS PRIMARY SCHOOL
ISLINGTON ARTS AND MEDIA SCHOOL
LAURISTON PRIMARY SCHOOL
STORMONT HOUSE SCHOOL
THOMAS TALLIS SCHOOL

SARAH B DAVIES

CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON GALLIONS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Gallions Primary School is a larger than average school in an area of very high economic disadvantage in the London Borough of Newham. A high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school opened in September 1999 to serve its immediate local community and participated in the Creative Partnerships programme from 2002 until 2008. Since its involvement in Creative Partnerships, the school continues to commit resources to fund arts partnerships in the delivery of an arts based curriculum.

Gallions' Headteacher, Paul Jackson, tells the story of the school's Creative Partnerships experience and its progression since.



IMAGES

All images courtesy
of Gallions
Primary School

About the school prior to Creative Partnerships

Gallions opened in 1999 with the ambition and commitment to teach through the creative arts; music, dance, drama and art. However, as a new school with so many priorities, it was difficult to find funding and time to engage with artists straight away. Creative Partnerships was a perfect match – it had the funding and the process in place to help us to achieve our goal and support our work with artists. We were one of the original Creative Partnerships schools in London, but as the programme evolved we didn't achieve School of Creativity status and so left the programme in 2008, although we were still interested in how creativity could be embedded. I initially started at the school as a class teacher. From a teacher's perspective Creative Partnerships seemed to be a great opportunity to learn more about the arts and work with artists who wanted to learn how to interact with children. In 2009 I became full time headteacher after job sharing the headship for two years, and I felt strongly that it was important to be an advocate for the arts and their impact on pupils' learning.

Projects and Partnerships

The relationships that we developed with practitioners during Creative Partnerships have been the real success of the programme. In 2004 our children worked with etching artist Alison Neville on a local area study, travelling the DLR together and sketching everything they saw. They then went back to the artist's studio and watched her processes of working. The impact of watching this process on the pupils' learning was far greater than any other local area study could have been – they developed historical learning, knowledge of process and new language. This led us to develop other similar projects.

We also worked with a composer and a set designer who worked across all classes in the school. The success of this project was that it wasn't 'off the shelf' – instead children had a chance to work alongside professionals, develop their own skills and see a project all the way through from beginning to end.

We developed long-term relationships with these practitioners; their confidence grew each time they came back, and each project became better.

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Change and Impact

When the school first opened, behaviour and attitudes to learning were poor. We opened from reception to Year 5, so many of the pupils had already had experience of education elsewhere. We were determined that the curriculum would excite and engage them. Throughout the process of Creative Partnerships we learned how to work with artists, and we became more confident to do so. We also learned that one-off projects are not sustainable. Since then the school has grown larger and larger and our ethos has become stronger. We are now thinking more strategically: what do we want to expose children to? **We've developed many other partnership projects and there are no limits to our ambition.** In 2010, as a result of our commitment to embedding creativity, I was given the opportunity to be involved in the World Creativity Forum in Oklahoma with A New Direction and other Creative Partnerships schools, despite no longer being part of the programme.

Now that the arts are embedded it feels like a pleasurable school with exciting activities and an engaging curriculum on offer. Our staff respond well to this enjoyable environment and find greater satisfaction in teaching. Our vision is shared at the interview stage for prospective staff, ensuring that new teachers share a commitment to this approach. As a school we are now creating networks and sharing our processes; we host conference days where schools across the UK and beyond that are interested in observing our creative approach come and visit us. Our projects have involved the local community which has had a positive impact but there is still more work to do here.

It is difficult to measure the success of our approach; a lot of our evidence is anecdotal.

We do know that when the creative approach is taught well, children's academic work improves. We incorporate a number of initiatives in the school, such as an artist in residence programme, music programme (with every child from Years 2-6 playing a string instrument) and Philosophy 4 Children – we wouldn't want to exclude any of these but we do not have the hard data to determine which of these elements individually are helping children to achieve most, although our pupils' attendance has improved which could be seen as a measure of motivation and engagement.

We are convinced that children benefit from meeting people who aren't teachers and **we believe that our arts-based curriculum comes to life with regular contact with arts practitioners.** Many of the practitioners we worked with during Creative Partnerships have remained valuable contacts, such as Alison Neville who over time gained a greater awareness of what the school was trying to achieve. We've also realised that there are many other artists we can work with and we have utilised obscure pots of funding to engage new practitioners, so where some relationships may have ended we've started valuable new ones. We are proud of our partnerships and we publicise how many artists and partners we've worked with on our website and in our prospectus (over 120 since 2000). However, the learning goes both ways; as a school we've discovered that we have a lot to offer artists too and our partners are learning from us as much as we learn from them. We have skills that arts organisations can learn from: we've established a successful organisation from scratch, not as project managers but as teachers and governors. We've developed systems and put them in place and where some practitioners find it hard to engage with children, we have a great deal of expertise to share.



Looking forward

Paul Jackson was asked to use his learning and experience of creative approaches and partnership working to advise other schools that are interested in similar work.

On what is critical to making creative programmes work in a school setting:

- leadership and the belief from the top that it will make a difference. If they don't believe in it, it will not work
- staff buy in. This worked straight away at Gallions because we started with a new school, but in other cases this may not be the school's vision
- persuasion. Show good practice examples and use leadership skills to bring people on side
- hold on to the belief. Believe you can make a difference to those you have responsibility for regardless of the obstacles that will be presented on the way.

Recommendations and suggestions to schools seeking out new creative partnerships:

- don't let funding become a barrier. At Gallions we've made creative programmes and partnerships a priority in our budget – be creative about how you enable creativity!
- spend time assessing the situation, getting to know the school and staff and slowly winning the staff round
- articulate your vision and get people to see why embedding creativity might be effective
- find other school examples where the creative approach has worked;
- if you want it to happen you can make it happen; make sacrifices and make it work.

School links and project examples

www.gallions.newham.sch.uk

[Lessons from America, 2004](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/lessons-from-america)

www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/lessons-from-america

[Creative Partnerships Mentoring Programme, 2004-5](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/creative-partnerships-mentoring-programme)

www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/creative-partnerships-mentoring-programme



A New Direction

A New Direction connects children, young people and education with the best of arts and culture in London.

We believe that together we can make London the best city in the world for young people's cultural and creative development. We campaign for the value of arts and culture to the lives of all young Londoners. We promote practical ways that schools and other institutions can develop cultural opportunities. We work with arts and cultural partners to ensure the highest quality in work with children and young people.

www.anewdirection.org.uk

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