

OUR SCHOOL IS ALIVE... WITH THE SOUND OF MUSIC

ARK CONWAY PRIMARY ACADEMY LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM

ABOUT OUR SCHOOL

ARK Conway Primary Academy is a one form entry, mixed, non-selective, non-denominational primary school. The academy opened in September 2011 as a free school and part of the ARK Schools Academy chain. There is a maximum class size of 30 pupils and at full capacity, 210 pupils will attend the school. The school was highly oversubscribed for the academic year 2012-2013 with over 120 pupils applying for just 30 places and over 30% of these being first choice applications.

We are a local school and serve a diverse local population. Whilst the numbers at ARK Conway are still relatively small, we have a wide range of culture and ethnicity in our school. The school is situated in the Wormholt or 'Flowers' estate in West London and many of our pupils come from the Old Oak, White City or Wormholt estates, which are areas of low income housing.

We are an academy with a performing arts specialism. Our vision is to inspire excellence and this is just as valid in the arts as it is in reading, writing and mathematics. We are not a 'one size fits all' academy and one of our strengths is the strong links we have developed with the local community. We have partnerships with local artists, the local theatre, local musicians to name but a few.

We were inspected by Ofsted in July 2013 and were rated 'Outstanding' in all areas. We were also the first free school to attain an 'Outstanding' judgment.

"High quality teaching inspires and motivates all pupils to try their very best". Ofsted 2013



OUR APPROACH TO ARTS AND CULTURE

As a free school, we have been allowed the freedom to create a curriculum that inspires and excites. A focus on culture and the arts has been developed by the school's leadership. It was made clear when the school vision was first shared with parents that inspiring excellence encompasses all areas: the arts and sports alongside the sciences and more academic subjects.

One of the areas in which we have a significant focus is music. We have a range of musical initiatives; one example is 'Composer of the Week.' We discuss a different composer each week and listen to their music in the communal areas around the school. We also use song throughout lessons to transition between whole class teaching and independent work. This ensures no learning time is lost; it provides continuity between classrooms and is a supportive scaffold for teachers to help them manage different parts of the lesson. The recent Ofsted report recognised the school's use of song, stating that the routine of using rhymes and chants was an enjoyable and important part of

the learning in class and proved very successful in building pupils' self confidence.

We have also employed a resident musician who delivers weekly ukulele master classes. All our pupils learn the ukulele from Reception (4 years old). We provide the highest quality teaching for pupils and staff by employing an in-house musician. Last year he led the sessions in Reception, alongside the teacher. The teacher knew the class dynamic well and was able to manage the class, whilst the musician brought the knowledge and skills of teaching the ukulele. This partnership strengthened the teacher's own musicianship and her understanding of the strategies and structure of how to teach the ukulele. She recognises that working alongside an expert has greatly increased her confidence in teaching the ukulele, and she has been able to develop her own skills as a ukulele player.

We also offer optional piano and cornet lessons, and the opportunity to perform at an annual Music



Gala at the Barbican Theatre. This provides pupils additional performance opportunities beyond the school gate. There is a cost to additional music lessons, but equality of opportunity is provided through the school's family fund, ensuring that any child who wishes to take up additional music lessons has the opportunity to do so. In 2013, 65% of the school performed at the ARK Schools Music Gala.

FEATURED PROJECT

A School-wide Focus on Music: Composer of the Week

ARK Conway's focus on arts and culture includes utilising music throughout the school day. This involves using song throughout lessons, a resident musician and learning instruments, in addition to the Composer of the Week initiative.

The focus on composers encourages children to listen to a range of different styles of music, different sounds and reflect upon the different emotional response. One composer selected for Composer of the Week was Johann Strauss II, best known for his waltzes. During a celebration assembly the school's song was rearranged and sung in the style of a waltz much to the enjoyment of the children who talked about the difference in sound and feel of the music. One child commented: "It (Waltz) makes you want to dance from side to side."

Parents appreciate the 'extraordinary array' of musical opportunities on offer:

"My six year old will point out the current or previous composers' music on a radio or television advert and is now educating me about music!"

IMPACT

While it is difficult to measure the impact of any one of these elements upon other areas of learning, as a school we are starting to explore the connections between music and early phonological development.

We have a very high focus on music and whilst there is an obvious connection with mathematics (patterns and sequencing) it was in an OECD report that we learnt about the direct link with phonics. Intuitively it makes sense that developing pupils' listening skills through music will impact on their phonological development.

In 2012/13, 100% of our pupils passed their Year 1 phonics screening test. 100% of pupils are on track to pass the reading check this academic year too.

100% of our current Year 2 pupils are on track to achieve a level 2a or above at the end of Key Stage reading SATs.

We have also seen the impact that our curriculum enriched with the arts has upon pupils' attendance. Our school attendance for our first two years of opening averaged 97.2%. This is a high level of attendance when compared to the national average of 95.8%.

The Ofsted inspector from our inspection in July was impressed by the school's commitment to providing a rigorous, well-balanced curriculum. The inspection report commended the school for

its wealth of high-quality learning experiences, which included arts and music opportunities.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

As a founding Headteacher I have been able to develop and grow the school around the values and educational vision that I hold. Prior to teaching I worked in lighting design and music and so I was keen to employ my passion for the arts at ARK Conway. Whilst it may be very difficult to fully accredit the arts for high academic attainment and excellent attendance, I know that they are an essential part of our school ethos.

I certainly don't claim to have reinvented the wheel and there is nothing we do that other schools can't or don't do. However, my recommendations to others would include initiatives such as:

- Composer of the week (our composers have included Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saens, Vivaldi, Holst, Bach, Brahms, Mozart, Strauss, Ravel, Chopin)
- Teaching your staff to learn an instrument such as the ukulele – then getting them to teach the pupils from an early age
- Using experts to work alongside and 'up-skill' staff
- Making singing and songs part of the school day, assemblies, lessons, transitions at every possible opportunity

We are two years in and each year the vision evolves and grows. The arts are an excellent way to encourage creativity and inspire children to ask 'why not?' rather than just the question 'why?'

www.arkconwayprimary.org

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Images courtesy of the Ark Conway Primary Academy