

BEATING THE DRUM WITH UNIVERSITIES TO BRING SUCCESS AND CONFIDENCE

ST PAUL'S WAY TRUST SCHOOL LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

ABOUT OUR SCHOOL

St Paul's Way Trust School (SPWTS) is a mixed comprehensive 11-18 secondary school. It offers an inspirational education for every child and opportunities that are second to none. The school has undergone a remarkable transformation in standards since 2009 when it was deemed 'inadequate' by Ofsted. In March 2010, the school's Governance model changed to a Foundation Trust, and in January 2011, it moved into a brand new building. Exam results have improved rapidly and significantly. In 2013, Ofsted judged the school as 'outstanding' in every category. Fundamental change is having long lasting impact, not only for the children in the school, but also for families within the local community.

The school receives unfailing support from its Trust partners (including Queen Mary, University of London, King's College London, Catlin Group Ltd, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, NHS Tower Hamlets, University of East London and University of Warwick) to explore varied and vibrant curricular opportunities in the arts. The University Trust partners have helped shape the school's practice and research and it is through a unique relationship with these institutions that SPWTS is able to provide an exciting and relevant learning experience.

As a Trust School, we are very involved with the local authority, but our Trust partners and Trustees help to create the vision for the school. Being universities, they take an aspirational view and are a conduit and route into higher education. They



also help us develop the links that we have. We call ourselves 'a University School in the Heart of East London'. Students' aspirations are raised due to our partnership with universities and the constant stream of visitors who further enhance our work. The vision and ethos of the school has empowered every child within it, allowing them 'to learn who they can be'.

OUR APPROACH TO ARTS AND CULTURE

Arts and culture play a large part in SPWTS's vision. We have a long-standing tradition of visual arts, dating from the specialist school focus; it is still one of our specialisms. Our university connections provide the school with opportunities to explore arts initiatives. For example, through our links with the University of East London, our young people worked on a mural project with a local artist, Frank Creber, for a new building in the local area – Ronnie Scott's house. We also have a tradition of working with university

undergraduates, for example in gifted and talented workshops and at KS3.

Our main over-arching view is to encourage students to perform and give them opportunities for performance. The link with Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL) has brought us into contact with the People's Palace Project (PPP), the art and social justice research centre based in the drama department at QMUL. PPP has been instrumental in empowering the performing arts side of the Faculty. They are really interested in the transformative power of the arts and their role in enabling students to increase attainment and allow them to build their own cultural capital.

The partnership with PPP has led to a number of large scale initiatives for the school. In 2010 a highly successful drumming project was developed in conjunction with the Barbican/Guildhall's Creative Learning Team and Sylvan Baker, Associate Director for PPP, which continues today. Additionally PPP has enabled the school to introduce a six-week digital workshop programme in VJing with PPP Associate Artist Gary Stewart and emerging artist Daniel Johnson-Matheison.

We are also working with PPP and undergraduate students from the drama department at QMUL to support the development of drama in school through an after school club for older students. This club will teach SPWTS students to lead drama workshops, as part of a wider project to eventually facilitate older students leading drama workshops in our feeder primary schools.

All of our current projects with PPP/ QMUL are supporting us to stage the 'The Dream Collector', an original piece commissioned from professional playwright Fin Kennedy, who also works with nearby Mulberry School for Girls. Working with Fin on the play has acted as a pathway to a partnership project between the two schools and is one of the ways in which we have been able to use creative collaborations to extend our thinking and practice in drama and performance in school.



FEATURED PROJECT

Drumming for Change: A partnership project

St Paul's Way Trust School partnered with the People's Palace Project (PPP) and the Barbican Centre to develop a school drumming initiative in 2010. This project has grown in strength year on year with the school taking greater control and over 100 students taking part every week.

In April 2011, students from the drumming group had the opportunity to work directly with Brazilian artists from AfroReggae as part of 'Cultural Warriors', a PPP programme that brought practitioners from Rio de Janeiro to work directly with young artists in the UK. From there, the school took on the management and development of the project and drummers performed at Queen Mary, University of London in September 2011 as part of the EU Researchers night, alongside 'Beat This' - a disabled artist drumming project, part of the Lawnmowers Independent Theatre company in Gateshead. Working with 'Beat This' created opportunities for the school to involve some of its students with hearing impairments in the arts activity, allowing them to witness artists with disabilities in a range leadership roles.

The school now funds the drumming group and finds opportunities for the group to perform in a range of venues. It was part of the Olympic Opening Ceremony in 2012 and they have also performed at the Barbican Centre as well as undertaking school and community performances.

IMPACT

Establishing a Faculty structure three years ago enabled the development and enhancement of links between higher education institutions and the school. Our tradition of working with universities and undergraduates has become an over-arching way of working and has had a significant impact on the school. This has led to research being undertaken by QMUL on the school and its arts initiatives. The ongoing success of the drumming project, the after school drama workshops and the digital projects all demonstrate the benefits of artistic collaboration and allow both the school and university to offer developmental pathways to their students. Through these initiatives, a number of positive outcomes for students have been observed.

We have seen an improvement in drama skills that are both fun and transferable to lessons across the curriculum. Drama and performance has led to improved confidence in those taking part. Additionally, 'The Dream Collector' drama project, with multiple inputs from the artists and Mulberry School, has been important for group cohesion; it has also provided a 'safe space' and opportunities to support creative endeavours. Those students less interested in performing are involved in other facets of the project and can also enjoy drama by working in behind the scenes activities.

After three years, the drumming project is now an important part of school life. Every week over 100 students are involved, from 11 through to 18 years of age. Enthusiasm for drumming has meant that students have seized the initiative to establish an offshoot of the afterschool club, called 'Epiphany Drummers', who are taking part in The eXceL Project (XLP) showcase final this year.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

St Paul's Way Trust School has benefitted significantly from its partnerships with universities. We have found that higher education institutions can act as brokers and facilitators in cultural engagement. They can also help to link other organisations with schools. It is necessary for schools to work hard to keep these sorts of connections going.

Having undergraduates in the school has really helped and they are keen to come into the school – we have them in all the time. They act as role models for students considering higher education



and are mentoring the sixth form students. Having undergraduates around definitely helps in career aspirations; we have observed that when our students see others similar to them pursuing careers in the arts they recognise the validity of that career choice. This is particularly relevant in the Bangladeshi community. It is sometimes quite challenging to convince parents that the arts are a viable career for their children. The more artistic collaborations, workshops and performances we have, the more it encourages parents, especially when they see their children gaining so much from the work.

www.spwt.net

People's Palace Project

www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk

Fin Kennedy, playwright

www.finkennedy.co.uk

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Images courtesy of St Paul's Way Trust School

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