

A New Direction Schools Forum January 2014. *New National Curriculum: Opportunities for Arts and Culture?*

At the first AND Schools Forum of 2014, held on 29 January at Sadler's Wells, teachers explored a wide range of questions around the new National Curriculum, and around broader issues of how to nurture arts-led creative teaching and learning.

Teachers generated questions during the session via two linked exercises. First, teachers were asked in table groups to list any questions they had about what the National Curriculum might mean for the arts, culture and creativity-driven teaching and learning in their schools. These questions ranged from the very technical ("How can I implement Arts Award in an International Baccalaureate school?") to the very broad ("How can we encourage teachers to become more creative?")

Using a silent discussion exercise, each table group then generated a single, 'big picture' question to which others in the room were asked to reply using Open Space methodology, which encourages a free-flowing exchange of dialogue and ideas. The following is an edited version of the six 'big picture' questions the Schools Forum teachers came up with, along with responses generated in the Open Space activity.

A New Direction has access to a variety of models and research documents that could help teachers build and deliver a stronger case for the arts. For more information, see <http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/research-resources>.

Below are the 'big picture' questions selected for discussion, together with teachers' answers. Additional notes and signposting added by A New Direction are indicated using an arrow (→).

1) How do we maintain a high quality (arts) provision and creative ethos if the arts are not valued in the overall judgment process?

- Arts education supports achievement in all subjects and is research and evidence based.
- Make some musical/artistic noise to keep your voice heard!
- Ensure that the arts are included in the school improvement plan and in its vision/aims.
- Raise the profile of school arts by highlighting examples of success elsewhere – a networking opportunity with schools in the local area.
- Ensure that student and parent voices are heard... what do they want/need?
- Make sure the arts are visible on the school website.
- Use the wider community: get them involved in leading art-based work to help build awareness of creative processes within the school environment.
- Do termly art projects, swapping responsibility around year groups and classes.
- Work in a cross-curricular way!

→ Achieving Artsmark demonstrates that your school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and enables students to engage through creative learning. Ofsted is a supporter of Artsmark (see below).

2) Why does creativity have to be a separate issue in the National Curriculum and would Ofsted penalise and downgrade schools if they pursue creativity?

- ...not if your SATS are good or if you teach through the Creative Curriculum.
- All subjects should be creative with imaginative planning!
- Wouldn't Ofsted downgrade a school with no creativity?
- We need to make a distinction between creative subjects, like those in the arts, and teaching creatively. We should always be doing the latter!
- Don't get side-tracked: Ofsted is looking for a strong pupil offer. That means an offer for all pupils, and that includes the arts.

→ There is nothing in the new National Curriculum to suggest that creativity is a separate issue or that schools would be penalised for teaching creatively. It's worth taking a look at the National Curriculum in England Framework Document¹, which states that:

*"The national curriculum is just one element in the education of every child. There is time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year to range beyond the national curriculum specifications. **The national curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons to promote the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as part of the wider school curriculum.**"* (Section 3, Aims)

And

*"**Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society [...]**"* (Section 2, The school curriculum in England).

Maintained schools must teach the statutory elements of the curriculum, but it is up to schools to decide how to teach it – this means you can teach creatively, and through creative/cultural subjects if you wish. Arts and cultural learning contribute to the cultural element of 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils', and as such will be included in the Ofsted inspection framework.

It's also worth noting that the School Inspection Handbook, December 2013² states:

"Evidence of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can be found, for example, where pupils:

- *develop an appreciation of theatre, music, art and literature*
- *[...]*
- *respond positively to a range of artistic, sporting and other cultural opportunities"*

¹ The national curriculum in England Framework document:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/260388/MASTER_final_national_curriculum_11_9_13_2.pdf

² Ofsted School Inspection Handbook, December 2013 <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-inspection-handbook>

3) How can we develop and encourage early career teachers & all staff to be creative?

- Allow and encourage teachers to take risks – you can learn just as much through something not going as planned as you can from success
- More emphasis on creativity in IT courses (very little guidance)
- Whole-school staff training. Early teachers can see others being enthused by creative practice and have a go for themselves.
- Opportunities to work collaboratively in with arts practitioners in the classroom and at their own level.
- Let them enjoy what they teach!
- Provide good CPD.
- Have a sharing good practice staff meeting once a term – these often produce creative ideas.
- Visit other schools/departments. Build partnerships.
- Look to EYFS as a model.
- Lead by example: show how children are engaged and learning ‘takes off’ through the arts!
- Provide mentors who are creative leaders in the arts; do team teaching.
- Recognise that creativity does not just mean talent or skill in an arts subject. Look for alternatives, e.g., P4C (Philosophy for Children).
- Provide a framework for creative lessons so that for those it doesn’t come to naturally there is support and guidance.

4) How can teachers fight to help improve and create a more creative curriculum within their own school, and in a wider context?

- Get support from outside agencies or individuals, like artists in residence (or A New Direction!)
- Trips and projects are useful starting points. This helps to show children, parents and teachers that you can build a career in the arts.
- Establish relationships beyond the school with creative projects, e.g., a project with a local residential home.
- Happy children = better behaviour + better achievement.
- Work to ensure that the leadership team buys into a belief in the value of the arts and leads everyone else.
- Showcase successes: creative subjects are the best PR for schools.
- Whole staff ownership of the new curriculum, with all staff involved in changes and ideas listened to.
- Success stories from elsewhere – as with any question like this, show the evidence of benefits.
- Don’t all teachers want a better curriculum or the best curriculum? Show the benefits of creativity in that context.
- Student council, student voices, newsletters...get the word out! Show, show, show.

5) How can Arts Award be used to develop, strengthen and secure our expressive arts curriculum and engage with pupils, parents and staff?

- Arts Award engages schools in a creative journey like no other and everyone loves and enjoys it.
- Arts Award provides a great framework for staff training.
- Parents get excited about the measurable achievement in Arts Award... make sure everyone on your SMT knows about this!
- Give Arts Award a high profile within the school SMT.

→ Arts Award provides a flexible framework to accredit the work that young people are doing in schools either during curriculum time or through extra-curricular activities. Accreditation could be a means of strengthening your expressive arts curriculum.

Schools can use the opportunities that Arts Award provides to provide progression for students (through different levels) and give them the opportunity to develop their creativity and leadership. Training teachers to work as advisers, supporting young people through this process, supports teachers' professional development.

Arts Award can be used to engage with pupils, parents, and staff through participating in arts activities, experiencing arts events, being inspired by artists and sharing their arts skills with others. Sharing events are excellent opportunities to provide many points of contact between the school and parents.

6) How can we motivate and encourage risk-taking amongst staff who are feeling overwhelmed with the changes of the national curriculum? How to enthuse rather than overwhelm?

- Link with other schools; find strength in numbers.
- Encourage sharing of best practice.
- Reward and praise good creative practice.
- Create extra time in schedules for teachers to explore creative practice.
- Provide teachers with the necessary support/management so they can voice concerns and ideas.
- Offer INSET days where teachers can say openly what's worked and what hasn't.
- Note the similarities with the 'old' curriculum that can be built upon and used, rather than reinventing the wheel.
- Have confidence in what already works well.
- Involve all staff and pupils in rewriting the school curriculum. Value everyone's ideas.