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DfE launches review of how it works with academy trusts

The Department for Education has today (29 June) launched a review of how it works with academy trusts. The review will look at the standards trusts are held to, and the thresholds at which the government uses its powers to intervene in rare cases of underperformance, helping minimise trust failure and retain parents' confidence.

It will also look at how the Government supports the growth of what it calls "existing strong trusts" and the creation of new "strong trusts", helping trusts improve schools. The Government intends for all schools to be in or joining strong academy trusts by 2030. The review will conclude by the end of 2022, and is intended to give clarity on how the powers in the Schools Bill, currently going through parliament, will be applied.

The review will be chaired by the Schools Minister Baroness Barran, and be directly informed by an Expert Advisory Group including the Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman, Confederation of School Trusts Chief Executive Leora Cruddas and LSE Professor of Political Science and Public Policy Martin Lodge, alongside further representatives from the academy trust sector to be confirmed shortly.

The review will look at how to retain and maximise academy trusts' innovation, and reduce regulatory burdens, by producing clear standards that are transparently enforced. It will look at improving how intervention works against the new standards, by producing proportionate thresholds for the use of new powers in the Schools Bill for intervention in academy trusts themselves, and focusing government action on preventing failure before it occurs.

It will consider how to commission new academy trusts and the expansion of existing trusts, helping make sure there are no 'cold spots' of the country where a school does not have an option to join a strong trust that is a good fit for its needs.

The review will also build on the definition of a strong trust set out in the Schools White Paper – providing a high quality and inclusive education across their schools, improving their schools' standards, maintaining their schools' strong local identities, developing their workforce, and displaying strong financial management.

In this issue

Trusts

FE jobs

School places

Performance tables

Ofsted

Child development

Tutors

Teacher's pay

Teacher recruitment

Psychological health

Middle leaders

SEND

Schools Bill

Reviving arts education and celebrating Children's Art Week

By Joanna Middleburgh

Head of Art at Kings InterHigh, Inspired Online Schools

Over recent years, arts education in schools has been considered a luxury. Classes have slowly eroded, as the curriculum has been crammed with the core subjects. In July 2021, a report in the *Guardian* stated that schools in England face a “creativity crisis” with the number of creative arts students and teachers down by as much as a fifth. Added to this, one in seven music teachers and one in eight art and design teachers have left the profession.

Publicly, the arts are seen as ‘lovely’, but not essential

The tragedy of this is the arts help learners develop many cross-curricula and life skills, including problem-solving, motor skills, language skills, social and emotional development, decision-making, risk-taking, critical thinking and inventiveness. It provides students, especially those with special educational needs, with the ability to present difficult concepts visually, making them easier to understand.

Added to this, numerous research papers highlight the power of art to support the development of mathematical skills. Art can be linked to Leonardo Da Vinci’s ‘golden ratio’ or the Fibonacci sequence, or even using musical notes to teach fractions.



Year 11 student Esmée Lynch-Morrison’s adaptation of Vashti Harrison’s artwork.

The power of art prevails across all aspects of learning. It can be included in writing, performing a play about a particular historic topic, used to create a visual representation of global cultures, or applied to an artwork such as Henri Moore’s WWI drawings to understand the topic in context, all to strengthen the skills and understanding of students.

Uniquely, we offer two modes in our arts curriculum: excellence and academic achievement, or creativity for fun, therapy, or expression. Art can be highly beneficial to overcoming emotional trauma and with the recent mental health crisis, a saying from Thomas Merton springs to mind: “art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time”.

When I first arrived at King’s InterHigh in 2019, I worked to develop the art department. Being a virtual school, the estimated demand was low. However, the unique nature of virtual art education had a real impact on the students. Despite not having accessibility to resources such as lino cutting tools and inks for intaglio printmaking, they responded to a new freedom of creativity, by applying their own resources to their work. The more opportunities we offered to be creative, the more students joined our art department. What makes our current team of 18 teachers so brilliant is that we all have different specialities and approaches. We learn from one other and share ideas.

As leaders in virtual asynchronous and synchronous art education, we constantly devise new and

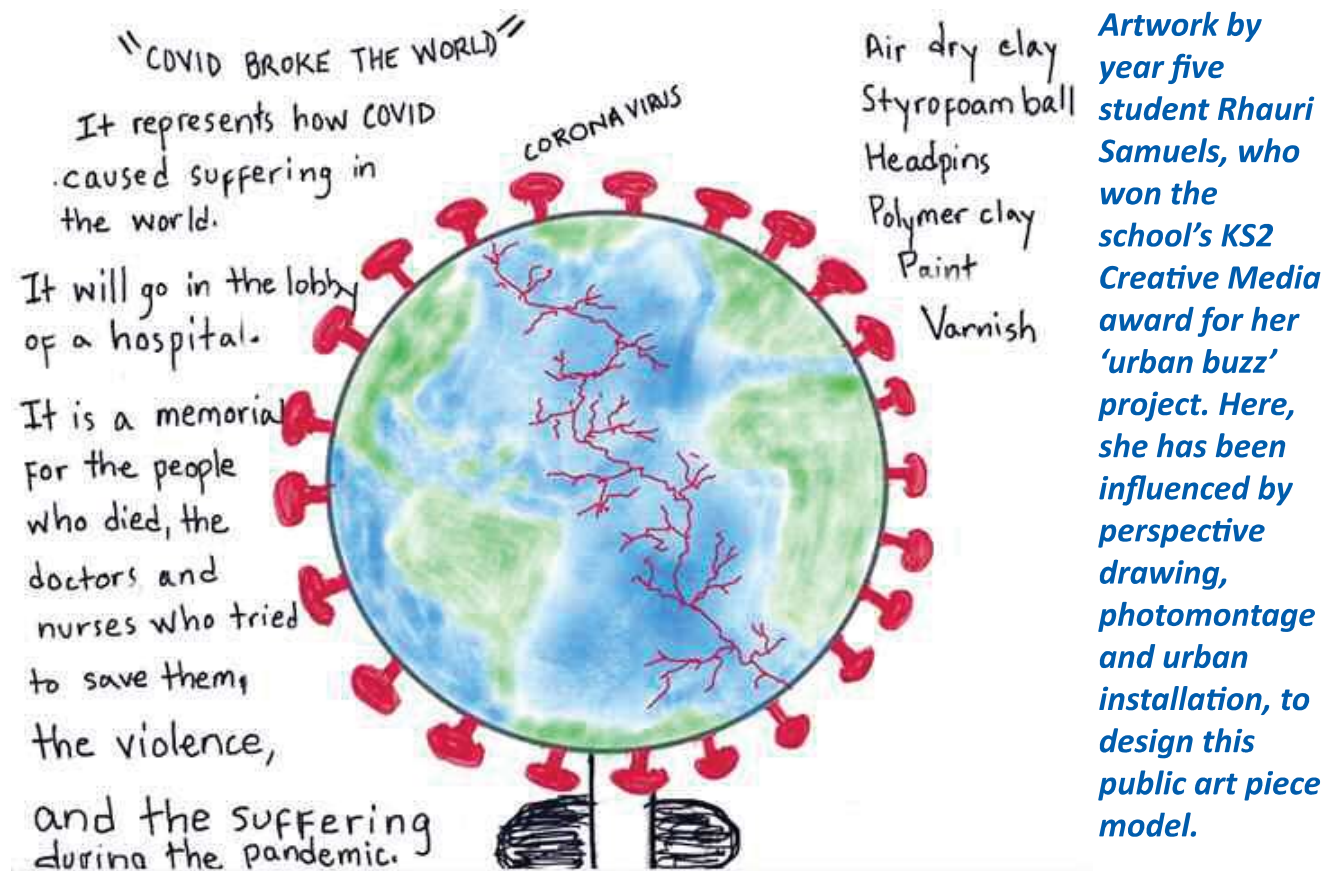
(Continued on page 23.)

(Continued from page 22.)

exciting cross-curricula ways to engage and interest our students. Each unit of work has been written by our team as project-based learning.

Our cross-curricula art student community attends regular online and virtual reality festivals, exhibitions, competitions and events. Giving them opportunities to use their voice is key. The Design Me a Winner Project is one example. Students were given a mock design brief by the Tate Modern Merchandising Team to create a new hypothetical product for the Tate shop in London; the responses were amazing!

Our celebration of Children's Art Week this year is another example. Because it falls after the end of our school term, we will be collecting art contributions from our 1,700 art students over the summer holidays to showcase in a Virtual Reality exhibition space and blog in September. Everyone is creative in one way or another, even if they don't realise it. My job is to unlock their potential and give them confidence to express this in ways that suit them.



One powerful example of the impact of art was a comment by one student during our KS4 Futurescapes project that was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. "As a person of colour, I was not aware that every artist I had been inspired by was white; which limited my relatability to them. Now I am aware of this, I have loved being able to apply diversity to my own work. Implementing different ethnicities to my pieces is something that I will definitely continue to do."

I firmly believe art should be viewed as a core subject in every curriculum. It connects different subjects in many ways and creates a richer and more meaningful learning experience. As the world becomes more and more technological and digitally focused, I feel art will provide a grounding and stabilising effect for students. Art education provides the skills needed to navigate an unknown and complex future.

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