

Practical learning for lifelong learning

Woodfield School, London



www.woodfield.brent.sch.uk

Compiled with the help of:

Deborah Wood, Deputy Headteacher

January O'Donnell, Assistant Headteacher

Deepa Vekaria, Head of Art and Technology

Saphira Hussain, Head of Maths and the Financial Education programme

Jo Emmerson, Head of English and Drama

Pupils in Years 7, 10 and 11¹



Headlines

- Deeper learning
- Cultural capital
- Focus on the arts



About the school

Woodfield School is a mixed secondary special school located in London that educates pupils who have moderate, severe and complex difficulties.

The school arranges programmes of work in accordance with each pupil's education, health and care plan (EHCP). It aims to develop independence and the skills needed for learning and life. Woodfield School is part of Compass Learning Partnership Multi Academy Trust.

Woodfield School is also a senior partner and a hub leader in the Challenge Partnership², a group of over 500 schools in England committed to collaboration to improve pupil achievement and success.



Making learning whole

Woodfield School (Woodfield) provides a practical and engaging curriculum that aims to develop pupils' skills for independence, in preparation for an active role in society.

Practical learning supports the school's ethos of 'creating a community of lifelong learners'³. Woodfield teachers believe that the context in which knowledge can be applied is critical for embedding deep learning.

'If we want to ensure that deeper knowledge is happening, you have to apply it to various different situations in different contexts, and pupils need to be able to do that to live meaningful, purposeful lives and to be successful people.'

Deborah Wood



Embedding practical learning in the curriculum

This case study demonstrates how Woodfield prepares pupils for life beyond school. It focuses on two areas of the curriculum within which practical learning has been embedded; financial education and arts education. In both areas, Woodfield has designed schemes of work and activities that support pupils to develop through a graduated programme where they are applying their knowledge and skills in increasingly complex practical situations:

'... in the classroom and then within the school and then within the local community, so it builds up.' January O'Donnell

In the area of financial education⁴, Woodfield is accredited as a Centre of Excellence in Financial Education, an initiative supported by Young Enterprise⁵.

In arts education, an important launch-pad for innovation was Woodfield's participation in the Make Your Future⁶ programme

organised by the Crafts Council, starting in 2016 and running for three years. The programme provided CPD workshops for teachers in collaboration with higher education institutions, one of which was Central St Martins School of Art in London. Art and D&T teachers worked with expert practitioners and professional makers to learn new craft skills, enrich their own creative practices and bring new approaches into the classroom. This learning was brought back into the school and Woodfield subsequently achieved the Artsmark Gold Award⁷ for their provision.

The concept of a knowledge-rich curriculum at Woodfield is complex. The curriculum does include teaching pupils about, for example, Shakespeare and Queen Victoria, but Woodfield is located in one of the poorest London boroughs, so teachers believe it is important to fill in the gaps in pupils' prior knowledge. This might often be taken for granted in other schools. It does this by developing pupils' knowledge about their community, how to use technology to research knowledge, and how the world works. This is often referred to by Woodfield teachers as ensuring that pupils develop their cultural capital.

'We take them to, for example, a place of worship and then we're learning about Christianity. They have something to reference in their mind, 'OK, yes, well I was in the church and

'I'm learning about that'; not all pupils have that prior knowledge, so we need to make sure we give it to them, which is also cultural capital.'

Deborah Wood



Learning for the real world

For the majority of Woodfield's pupils, traditional classroom teaching is unlikely to help them to fully understand or to generalise learning. So, embedding knowledge and skills into contextualised practical learning scenarios is common practice at Woodfield. Examples include, cooking a meal and using the calculation of portion size to introduce the concept of division, or putting pupils in a situation where they have to use money, rather than just talking to them about financial education.

'For us it's about ensuring that the knowledge and skills that we are trying to teach are understood in a functional way, while making it a bit more explicit as to why we need to learn these skills.'

Deborah Wood

This is the case with financial education that is embedded in subjects across the curriculum. In maths, after learning to recognise denominations of coins and notes in class, more contextual information is introduced as pupils practice using money in a mock shop in the

classroom, with life-sized empty packages that have prices on them. This is before undertaking financial education projects when students go into the community to make purchases in local shops and cafés. Pupils retain more information after engaging in such practical activities. By engaging in social activities pupils are encouraged to build on their social skills and learn to compromise with each other.

'I have seen that, as pupils want to be successful, they show empathy towards others in their group and want to complete the task as a team.'

Saphira Hussain

Pupils also engage in enterprise projects when they create and sell artefacts in Summer and Christmas fairs. This practical learning experience has been supported by their practical learning in art. During this, they have designed the publicity material for the events and made the articles to sell.

Some of these articles for sale are ceramic mugs that are designed and made by pupils.

The Make Your Future workshops attended by Woodfield teachers at Central St Martins School of Art focused on working with clay. Teachers became more confident at teaching using clay as a material, and the artists who came into the school to work with pupils were inspirational.

'The artists that we had working with our school, they were just so amazing. They were adapting to the needs of our pupils, to our school, and our kids still remember the artists who worked with us on that project.'

Deepa Vekaria

Using clay in art classes also helps form memorable experiences for Woodfield pupils, with one Year 7 capturing the holistic nature of the learning:

'Clay in art is whole body listening and concentration'

Year 7 pupil

A partnership with Camden Art Centre, developed through the 'Get the Message' project, enabled pupils to create artwork in a real studio environment alongside experts. As well as successfully engaging with the wider community, pupils developed a sense of curiosity and confidence to express themselves and gain pride in their achievements.

These partnerships and high quality CPD provided the impetus for more cross-curricular practical learning through art at Woodfield. This led to a number of collaborative practices between subjects that have resulted in meaningful creative displays produced by pupils, such as humanities displays. Another successful initiative involved organising whole school assemblies using art, dance, drama and music. Pupils play a major role in the organisation of these events which develops their leadership skills

and their empathy in working with younger pupils. These assemblies also provide a space for teachers to observe how the arts can be used in their subject to engage pupils. Deepa Vekaria encouraged teachers to attend the assemblies and show them that they do not have to be an accomplished artist to bring art into their classroom.

'I just wanted them to know that it was totally open, to give them that opportunity, to give it a go, see if it works. I wanted them to feel comfortable to come out of their comfort zone, I wanted to create that atmosphere for them.'

Deepa Vekaria

Drama and English learning are often linked through physical activities. Pupils engage in role plays, singing and signing to understand emotions expressed through the selected text.

'I often link the drama text with English to help with the learning, so that they're learning through doing. If they might not quite be understanding the text that they're learning or writing about, they're learning it through acting it out'

Jo Emmerson

Using a full range of teaching methods

Woodfield 'strives to ensure that the curriculum is individualised,

meaningful and appropriate for all pupils'⁸. A recent change, continued from the pandemic period, to make teachers class-based and teach all subjects, has been welcomed.

'It was originally a way of keeping safe during the pandemic but now it's permanent. I think the good thing is having autonomy over your timetable. So, you're not having to quickly finish when the bell goes, and the pupils go on somewhere else, so that you can be more flexible to enable the learners to get the best out of everything.'

Jo Emmerson

Within those classrooms, teachers stress the importance of creating safe spaces for learning, not just from a health and safety perspective, but also making pupils feel emotionally safe:

'There needs to be an understanding that the classroom is a safe space to express yourself in whichever way you feel comfortable with.'

Jo Emmerson

Teacher modelling is important to enable pupils to accept that making mistakes is all part of learning. In that way they are open about acknowledging their own mistakes, because:

'You have to create that atmosphere of respect,

kindness, validation and I think that's the starting point, because once you have established that, then the pupils feel happier too.'

Jo Emmerson

Cultivating learner agency

Practical learning is fundamental to developing Woodfield pupils' belief in themselves and their capacity to solve problems. Often, children with special needs may have low self-esteem, having so often been told that things are beyond their reach.

'[Practical learning] touches upon so many different skills, so as well as helping pupils learn the specific thing that we're trying to help them learn, it's touching upon their confidence skills, their ability to work together, their thinking skills, creativity.'

Jo Emmerson

Pupils' enjoyment of learning is established and reinforced through practical learning.

'By doing things in a practical, more fun way, they enjoy their learning. The teachers are modelling the enjoyment of learning as well, and that really impacts on the information they retain, the memories they have, and their emotional mental health.'

Deborah Wood

Pupils enjoy practical learning and recognise they are learning essential living skills.

'In cooking, I wash, dry, clean tables and make pizza, salad and other food recipes.'

Year 7 pupil

The same pupil sums up what many pupils wrote about how they feel when learning through practical activities:

'Happy, excited, confident, proud of myself.'

Year 7 pupil

Older pupils recognise the independence, creativity and social skills they are developing through practical learning.

'I like cooking to develop independence, I like painting because I get to explore my own ideas and I like music because I want to develop my skills.'

Year 10/11 pupil

They experience pride when learning successfully:

'I feel happy that I am developing skills and I feel proud when I learn something new.'

Year 10/11 Pupil

And they frequently say that practical learning is important for their sense of wellbeing:

'Practical lessons make me calm.'

Year 10/11 pupil

Tracking learner progression

A cross-school approach is used at Woodfield to evidence pupil progress and achievement through an online app provided by Evidence for Learning⁹. Photos and videos that capture learning moments can be uploaded and shared with learners and their families. Teachers record pupils' level of fluency, degree of independence, the ability to apply the knowledge and skills in different contexts, and the ability to maintain a skill. Parents also have space to comment. An annual learner profile builds up to a record of learning from Years 7 to 14. Woodfield teachers find this a valuable method for tracking their pupils' progress.

'Because the majority of our pupils don't necessarily have a book that you can mark, you can take pictures and videos of their learning and show progress that way.'

Deborah Wood

It also provides a common framework and language for assessment.

'I think it's a really nice way of working together as a school, making sure we're all on the same page and it's a nice way of evidencing and showcasing what they've achieved.'

Jo Emmerson



Endnotes

1. Feedback was collected from pupils by Woodfield teachers who translated the research questions into Communicate in Print questions and supported pupils as they gave their answers.
2. www.challengepartners.org
3. www.woodfield.brent.sch.uk/page/?title=About+our+School&pid=12
4. www.woodfield.brent.sch.uk/page/?title=Financial+Education&pid=296
5. www.young-enterprise.org.uk/centres-of-excellence
6. www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/education/make-your-future
7. www.artsmark.org.uk/about/what-artsmark
8. [Curriculum – Woodfield School](#)
9. www.evidenceforlearning.net