

# Creative practical learning through the arts supports the core curriculum

## The Derby High School, Bury



<http://thederbyhighschool.co.uk>

### Compiled with the help of:

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Students in Year 9



### Headlines

- Resilience
- Students as leaders
- Cultural capital



### About the school

The Derby High School is a mixed, 11-16 community school located in Bury, Greater Manchester.



### Making learning whole

Practical learning underpins The Derby High School's (TDHS) aims and ethos of creating a RESILIENT school grounded in the 7Rs: 'We ensure our students are Ready, Respectful, Resourceful, Reasonable, Responsible, create the Right Impression and, most importantly, are Resilient.'<sup>1</sup> The Derby High School Resilience Curriculum<sup>2</sup> is based on 10 principles that underpin opportunities to engage in practical learning in all areas of the curriculum.

A further important locus for practical learning at TDHS is a commitment to 'teaching for creativity' with the use of creative pedagogies that enable young people to experience real world learning and become more aware of their own potential. The school's membership of the North West Comino Creative Consortium (NWCCC), a regional partnership of six schools supported by the Comino Foundation<sup>3</sup>, has supported a rich co-creation of learning opportunities and experiences.

TDHS is also participating in Make it Open<sup>4</sup>, a European project exploring various formats of open schooling. There is a collaboration between schools and their local communities

to expand education beyond school walls and to prepare young people for a rapidly changing world.



### Embedding practical learning in the curriculum

Rather than narrowing the curriculum to focus on delivering the core curriculum, TDHS culture emphasises the value of practical learning. This influences teachers' thinking on how practical learning might be harnessed through cross-curricular teaching. In particular, Arts are showcased to provide a vehicle to deliver other areas of the curriculum. Pedagogies normally associated with the Arts classroom provide inspiration for other subjects in order to remove barriers experienced by some children in accessing what are sometimes regarded as more 'academic' subjects.

Drama lessons have been used to support students' ability to recall texts needed for English Literature GCSE. In the KS3 Drama curriculum, Lynn Provoost, Assistant Headteacher for Arts and Sports, Personal Development and Partnerships, describes how:

**'Working with colleagues from the English faculty we created poems within poems for each of the anthology poems. Then, within the drama curriculum, we make sure that one of our schemes of learning centres around those poems.'**

Lynn Provoost

**R**= REAL WORLD  
**E**= ENGAGING & ENRICHING  
**S**= SKILLS FOR LIFE  
**I** = INCLUSIVE  
**L** = LEADERSHIP  
**I** = INDEPENDENCE  
**E** = ENCOURAGES REFLECTION  
**N**= NEXT STEPS  
**C**= CHALLENGE  
**E** = ETHICS & EMPATHY

By the time the students reach Year 11, they are able to recall the poems, leading to exam success:

**'The English department have seen a significant increase in their grades.'** Lynn Provoost

At Key Stage 4, student groups across the Arts curriculum in Drama, Media and Dance form companies. They have a contract, are employed by the school, and are given real world briefs, such as designing and delivering a performance for primary

school students on road safety education.

**'Wherever possible, we try to make learning real. Instead of just telling students about the effects, we want to be able to show them, we want them to be able to explore, investigate and make informed decisions for themselves.'** Lynn Provoost

Students are involved as co-creators in some of the cross-curricular

schemes of learning. Year 9 Lead Learner students co-created a scheme of learning between personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and science. Based on the topic of illicit drugs, students prepared and taught a science lesson on the effects of smoking cannabis on the lungs by leading students in dissecting a sheep's lung. The Year 9 students also designed experiments to help students understand if drugs might have been used to spike their drinks.

The value of this practical approach in making learning more meaningful for all students was endorsed by the Lead Learner students who were involved in creating these lessons.

**'It taught the students how drugs can impact your life so much when you don't even know what you're doing is wrong until you have the effects of it later on. That was very important.'** Year 9 student

In the longer term, the aim is to encourage more teachers to engage with cross-curricular learning. To do this, it is important to maximise potential links between subjects in the national curriculum that have not yet been exploited. This strategy should enable teachers to find sufficient 'hidden' curriculum time for practical learning. It will, at the same time, introduce content that will be more engaging for students. For example:

**'Take the Science team into PE lessons and have them team-**

**teach science through the core PE curriculum. We are currently exploring this in PE at the moment; because children are passionate about PE, they can relate what they need to know for their science exams. They have a different level of confidence in their PE lessons if they enjoy and are passionate about sport; they do not experience the same barriers in their PE lessons.'**

Lynn Provoost



### Learning for the real world

TDHS aims to enable all students to access the curriculum and achieve a worthwhile education in a way that suits their abilities.

**'The priority for us, with students at our school, is making sure that we equip them with the skills to go into the workforce and to be happy, healthy and successful.'**

Lynn Provoost

This means that a significant amount of authentic learning happens outside school. In order to have time to plan their PSHE/science lessons, 16 Year 9 students went to a local theatre for a day. They met with an expert on combatting illicit drug use, the former Superintendent of Bury Police. They interviewed her about her experience of drugs and the consequences of getting involved with illicit drugs. The students used that research to plan drama lessons to teach their peers. The students not only learnt

about the topic of illicit drugs, they also learnt how to investigate, how to interview a professional and how to do research. At the start of the day, they were feeling rather overwhelmed. By the end of it:

**‘Every single child was able to take something really important away from the experience; knowledge and skills which they will use time and time again.’**

Lynn Provoost

This more work-like environment, in a space very different to the normal classroom, where the students themselves were responsible for organising the structure for the day’s activities, led to greater awareness of their own potential.

**‘It was different from the school environment, and I think we’ve got a lot more done than what we usually do.’** Year 9 student

Another driver for practical learning at TDHS is a desire to promote the acquisition of cultural capital, by ensuring that all students are familiar with the heritage of the surrounding area. Projects created in partnership with industry, educational and cultural organisations aim to establish:

**‘...partnerships in our community where we not only co-create with the learners but also co-create with cultural venues such as The Met arts venue, Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre, East Lancashire Railway; with local businesses, Newtons of Bury,**

**or with charities such as Bury Hospice and Bury Cancer Support Centre.’**

Lynn Provoost

### **Using a full range of teaching methods**

Establishing all these practical learning experiences within the curriculum involves creativity, planning and hard work on the part of TDHS teachers but they are determined to make it work.

**‘It really helps to have the support of my colleagues on the leadership team. The Headteacher is determined to make a difference to the lives of our young people. She believes that the distinctive experiences that we offer for our students enable them to leave the school as confident, well-rounded and forward thinking young people, equipped to make an impact on their own, and others’, lives.’**

Lynn Provoost

Factors helping TDHS teachers take the initiative include regular CPD sessions. The timetable is organised so that the school day finishes every other Thursday at 2.35pm. That enables students to have time for enrichment and staff to have CPD time.

**‘So again, it’s being very creative with the school day to allow us to have this RESILIENCE R Time session every Thursday and also to allow us to have teacher training.’**

Lynn Provoost

Another important factor is belonging to a supportive network of schools that can offer advice and encouragement. For TDHS, this network is provided by being part of the Comino ‘family’. This facilitates visits to see how things work in other schools and to have conversations with people who:

**‘...always provide a platform to showcase our work, and they make lots of the projects possible. They remove lots of barriers’**

Lynn Provoost

### **Cultivating learner agency**

TDHS believes that co-creating learning experiences with students works well to empower them to take ownership of their learning, as well as preparing them for the world of work. Furthermore, these experiences have to be inclusive.

**‘I firmly believe in experiences for all. So whenever we design in any sort of experience, we try to work out how we’re going to get every single child in the year, or in the school, to have that experience.’**

Lynn Provoost

Every year group has a year group offer. Year 7 is about belonging and making children feel part of the school community. In Year 8, we want to create a sense of excitement; it is the changemaker

year, giving students the belief that they have the power to be changemakers and to take action. In Year 9, we focus on a sense of responsibility, as all students embark on the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Years 10 and 11 are about developing a sense of ownership and preparing students for success as they participate in work experience, prepare for exams, and begin their transition to college.

Form tutors have a responsibility from Year 7 onwards to find out what each child’s aspiration is for the future and to understand the importance of that wish in the child’s life. Then the school:

**‘Works with their passions, to create a pathway to their chosen career.’**

Lynn Provoost

The value of practical learning for supporting student agency was evident in the Year 9 students’ involvement in the illicit drugs co-creation learning scheme. They believed that student peer learning was valuable for generating interest in this important topic. Hearing something from your peers, who are closer to these issues in the real world, was more valid.

**‘It was an effective tool to use, so students can actually understand why drugs are bad for you. Instead of just listening to people who don’t really know... so we know, kind of, the peer pressure and why we might have to take drugs, so they understand where**



**'we're coming from, and I think it helped them a lot.'**

Year 9 student

Practical learning as experienced by the Year 9s also facilitates the development of valuable skills, such as interviewing skills, research skills, managing their time, coping with unseen challenges and gaining confidence in dealing with novel situations.

**'I think students get more experience and skills that they might not have learned before and I think it just helps them to understand what they're doing more.'**

Year 9 student

The value of these skills in the real world and for their future employment was also recognised.

**'I know these skills will help me in the future. For example, communication skills, I'm going to need to use these skills in my future career, but also in the real world, we might have to use these skills at any time.'**

Year 9 student

Empowering students to become leaders of the future is a theme of THDS<sup>5</sup> and the students' gains through practical learning within the curriculum are matched by those from enrichment activities. Here, their leadership skills in particular are enhanced through activities such as leading fundraising for charities.

**'We lead a club called ETHOS... we're working on a big day where we can help raise money and make it more aware to students and carers and parents. We're going to be bringing friends from The Derby and parents and students in for a special event which we have planned.'**

Year 9 students



### Tracking learner progression

TDHS is one of the most successful secondary schools in Bury, judging by its 2019 exam results. However, in keeping with its assertion that education is about much more than just exam success, coupled with a desire to ensure that every TDHS student benefits from the wide range of enrichment opportunities, TDHS has launched the Derby Diploma<sup>6</sup>. TDHS students will build a portfolio of evidence of their personal development, both during PSHE curriculum time and through enrichment activities. Through the Derby Diploma, students will understand the importance of:

**'Cultural capital, and that it's just not enough to leave with academic qualifications. It is the personal profile that they're leaving us with that is as important, if not more so.'**

Lynn Provoost



## Endnotes

1. <http://thederbyhighschool.co.uk/mission-statement>
2. <http://thederbyhighschool.co.uk/our-curriculum>
3. <https://cominofoundation.org.uk/our-work/social-opportunity>
4. <https://makeitopen.eu/open-schooling-join-the-learning-programme-designed-by-teachers-for-teachers>
5. <http://thederbyhighschool.co.uk/student-leadership>
6. <http://thederbyhighschool.co.uk/the-derby-diploma>