

Cultural Services & Special Educational Needs

In 2010 the Department for Children, Families and Schools found that 20.9% of all school pupils have some form of special educational needs (SEN). Of all pupils permanently excluded from school 70% are pupils with SEN.

Young people with SEN often find themselves disengaged within a school environment. This in turn creates barriers to relationships and learning. Pupils with SEN are more likely to truant and be excluded than their peers, and more at risk of becoming NEET - not in education, employment or training. However, with appropriate support, and access to opportunities to learn and work, most young people with SEN can go on to fulfil their potential at school, in work and in society.

Cultural services have a long and documented track record of encouraging engagement, removing barriers and providing progression pathways for young people with special needs through partnerships with public and third-sector provision, delivery of positive activities and supplementary support. Through art, culture and sport young people can be inspired to read, create and participate, acquiring and improving skills and abilities of all kinds along the way.

Contribution to wider aims & objectives:

Culture, arts and sport can meet a wide range of key local authority impacts, including:

- Academic participation & achievement of SEN pupils
- Attainment gap between SEN & non-SEN pupils
- NEET
- Educational attainment & progression
- Participation in learning, including diplomas & apprenticeships
- Participation & achievement gaps for young people from low income backgrounds
- Participation in positive activities
- Skills gaps in the workforce
- Emotional health & well-being of young people
- Youth offending, crime & anti-social behaviour
- Child poverty

Case study 1 - Young Cultural Creators: creating confidence among young people and families

The Young Cultural Creators project saw students from Southwark's Inclusive Learning Service working with a local performance poet, Matt Burke (aka Shortman), to produce and perform their own work inspired by the Cuming Museum collection. A performance of the group's work was held at Peckham Library with an audience that included friends, family and Southwark Council staff.

Targeted at young people outside mainstream education, the Young Cultural Creators project was designed to inspire young people with SEN to read and create, improving communication and expression and making participants and their families more confident in their use of libraries, museums and galleries. The project also strengthened the skills and awareness of professionals from the partner organisations.

The project demonstrated that working with children likely to exhibit more challenging behaviour requires small groups (staff found that groups of five were most effective) and a flexible attitude to

scheduling, but it also showed the huge impact that cultural projects can have on young people with SEN. "[I have learned] how to write from scratch and be more loud and confident," said one participant. "[I learned] confidence in speech in front of crowds," said another. Teachers reported that games that helped develop thinking and concentration skills were the most popularly received among pupils.



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Case Study 2 - Museums supporting SEN - a decade of success

Since the mid-1990s the Geffrye Museum has built experience and expertise in working with individuals, units, schools and specialist providers dealing with young people with SEN. With visits from SEN school groups increasing, the Museum developed an inspirational 10-week curriculum project for year 11 pupils of the Horizon School. The scheme ran for six years and created a model of good practice to show how museums and schools can establish a genuinely collaborative partnership to provide educational opportunities for young people with SEN.

This relationship between the Geffrye and the Horizon has continued with the museum taking year 11 work placements, an after-school club for years 9 and 10 and the creation of a scheme in which a post-year 11 graduate is trained to return to the museum to help deliver the after-school club. Horizon pupils now have a formal progression route through years 9, 10 and 11 that provides different types of contact with the museum at different stages. Each year the Geffrye apprenticeship scheme takes school-leavers who have been involved with the museum's projects, providing practical experience and great opportunities to increase confidence and social skills.

The Geffrye-Horizon partnership is hugely popular with pupils.

One of the Horizon teachers commented, "Students who have communication problems got on well with museum staff, including the attendants... They seemed like a class of friends, which is not the way they behave at school."



"I'll write more and do more drawing. The thing I will get better at in the future is seeing different things. Most of the time I'm stuck indoors, but I will go to more museums."

Geffrye Museum SEN project participant

Recommendations for taking this work forward in your borough

Share local knowledge – conversations between Children's Services, Connexions, Preventative Engagement Teams and Cultural Services will help establish which local cultural partners have experience of working with young people who are NEET, or at risk of becoming so. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and Arts Council England can also provide such information.

Think differently – cultural partners are well positioned to offer innovative approaches and design services to help Local Authorities address their priorities in supporting at risk young people who have struggled in formal learning, reducing participation barriers by providing a safe environment to find new confidence, interests, talents and skills, and activities and opportunities to flourish and progress.

Take the long view – projects for vulnerable young people always meet challenges along the way, but flexible, resilient partnerships with shared goals and a long-term vision can reap enormous benefits. Providing young people with a platform to re-engage with work or training can save many from a heightened risk of long-term worklessness, offending behaviour, teen pregnancy and ill-health, with the potential to alleviate pressure on associated long-term Local Authority and central government budgets.

Celebrate - and build upon - success – learners and communities alike are inspired, brought together and encouraged to participate further by the achievements of such activity, whilst the successes of initial partnerships can provide a platform for collaborations between multiple boroughs, cultural organisations, education institutions and the third sector.

Working with Children's Services is a strand of the London Cultural Improvement Programme. For additional case-studies, references for figures and a range of supplementary materials to accompany this document, visit: www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/networks/lcip/wwcs.htm or contact project manager John McMahon: john.mcmahon@mla.gov.uk / 0207 273 1404

The Audit Commission have published guidance for Local Authorities on targeting NEET and associated groups. These can be found at: www.audit-commission.gov.uk/health/nationalstudies/againsttheodds/Pages/targetedbriefingsforpractitioners_copy.aspx