

Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit

A case study of Artsmark in a pupil referral unit

Who we are

Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit (MSPRU) has over 400 pupils in 26 Learning Centres across the City; some have been permanently excluded from school and others have an APX placement (an alternative to permanent exclusion). We have KS3 and KS4 Core Centres and work with a number of commissioned Alternative Providers across the City, which allows us to provide a range of small and nurturing centres for our pupils.

MSPRU's pupil population is transient. Pupils come to us at any point between Year 7 and Year 11, having found a mainstream environment too difficult to manage for a wide range of reasons. Placement in MSPRU is short compared with mainstream schools. Pupils usually have gaps in their knowledge and staff assess what support is needed and can be put into place. At MSPRU we describe our curriculum as *the totality of our pupils' experiences* during their placements with us. Creativity is a fundamental part of our curriculum. We feel that it is important to give our pupils access to high quality new experiences and opportunities which enhance their self-esteem and life skills and give them the tools they need to become healthy, safe and active citizens.

How Artsmark has worked for us

Staff commitment

We already had a member of the Senior Leadership Team who believed in the centrality of the arts and creativity, and

staff who understood the potential of our pupils. We began with an Arts Policy which articulated our vision and encompassed our academic and enrichment curriculum. Alongside this, we regularly audited our staff's skills and interests in creativity, to keep creativity at the heart of what we do, and to utilise the wealth of talent in our team. We also made every use we could of personal connections and relationships!

Once we had secured a core team, who met regularly to share good practice and ideas, we began recording activity and planning for development. We also regularly reported to Governors and secured a link governor for the arts who shared our core beliefs and was able to lend support at that level.

A flexible framework

Due to the complexity of our organisation, Artsmark's flexible framework has helped support us to make use of site-specific and city-wide activity which can be tailored to the needs of a small group or the whole school.



For example, a small year 8 group's involvement in a project with The People's History Museum, or a whole school Art Competition for our praise cards, and our BEE Proud Bee for the Bee in the City. We have also been able to identify individual pupils who have benefited from some targeted intervention to address their specific needs. Overall, this approach has allowed us to embed wellbeing through creativity as a fundamental part of our school culture.

Building creative networks and partnerships

At the start of our Artsmark journey, we capitalised on our links with the City's creative spaces and sought out any opportunity to develop partnerships with other professionals and practitioners. We are lucky to have a wealth of opportunity to tap into across the City, including Youth Arts organisations (UYAS), community radio stations and an annual celebration of culture, the Manchester Day Parade. We utilised support from creative partnerships, and identified opportunities to collaborate across the school and our commissioned providers. This has allowed us to capitalise on practitioners who know and understand us, our context and our pupils.

In 2020, two members of the PRU Arts Network Team, including the Artsmark lead, joined the Manchester Cultural Education Partnership's 'Creative Curriculum' working party. As a result of this networking opportunity, we have been presented with further opportunities to broaden our reach and share good practice, as well as tap into wider opportunities.

Advocating for cultural education

Being part of the Artsmark programme has helped bring a greater focus and strategy in identifying and resourcing artistic opportunities and programmes that will be of personal value to our students, building their resilience and fostering their creativity. Our most recent achievement of being awarded Artsmark Platinum and winning TES' Creative School of the Year 2020, has galvanised the school and has served to further highlight the vital role the arts and creativity play in recognising the talents in our pupils and their communities.



We'd recommend...

Identify and join Local Cultural Educational Partnerships (LCEPs) within your city or region and draw upon the support from their regional Culture Hub. This will open up partnership opportunities and enable you to share good practice as leaders in your community.

We found that staff contacts in other organisations such as galleries, theatres and other arts venues can often change. Therefore, make sure you keep in contact to maintain these valuable relationships, and have support for an appropriate handover so that you can continue to build your relationships with cultural organisations in your area.

Ensure buy-in from staff to participate in events and projects by being creative with incentives, for example offering time off in lieu when support is needed for out-of-hours activity.

Don't forget to make good use of your relationships with parents and invite them to participate where possible, supporting them with transport to events where you can.

For further guidance about how Artsmark can work for you please see our specialist settings guidance. <https://www.artsmark.org.uk/support-specialist-settings>

