

Art of the matter

Are Britain's specialist 'art colleges' elitist? Children discuss what art means to them, and whether there's a place for specialising at school.

Art of the Matter

 The

Home secretary David Blunkett recently visited Firth Park Community College in Sheffield to celebrate its newly acquired status as a specialist centre for the arts. This week Sheffield journalists from Children's Express ask: how relevant are the arts to young people?

This term Sheffield's Firth Park Community College is celebrating its designation as a specialist arts college. Hard evidence shows that children who have the opportunity to take part in the arts are more ambitious for themselves.

This follows the Government's investment - £279m nationwide - into a national arts programme.

Specialist art colleges are showing improved exam results. They introduce new art subjects to the curriculum, increase the provision of existing art subject and have to demonstrate to the Government they are working with other schools and the community within their specialist subject areas. At Firth Park the subjects are art, drama, music and expressive arts.

Some people feel the arts are a waste of time and students will not benefit from them in later life. After all, isn't school meant to be about algebra and history? "I think that art should be something you learn about outside of school, along with knitting and other hobbies," argues Jenny Matthews, 16, of Beighton.

But most people agree the arts are important. The United Nations General Assembly has championed the right of children to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

On National Children's Art Day in June, Children's Express journalists spoke to celebrities like BBC presenter James Naughtie, comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar, actress Juliet Stevenson and actor ad comic Griff Rhys Jones and politicians like Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, about the importance of the arts.

Tessa Jowell said: "Hard evidence shows that children who have the opportunity to take part in the arts are more ambitious for themselves. They also tend to do better at school. To go to the theatre or do artistic things enables you to understand things in a different way."

Film director Baz Luhrmann - famous for Moulin Rouge and Romeo and Juliet - said: "We cannot live without young people connecting with the arts. Who are we and what are we about? We can find a lot of those answers in our great songs, stories, dance and music."

But Sue Mia, a team leader with Sheffield Futures Arts and Media Project, which offers arts as part of the youth service, says schools such as Firth Park and High Storrs should not be given specialist status.

Instead, all schools should have wide and equal opportunities for creativity. "We have found through the Arts and Media Project that people who think they are uncreative in fact are not - they express creativity in different ways, such as rapping or DJ-ing.

"Every child should have the right to access the arts, not just the better ones. The government should spend more money on the wider aspects of the arts instead of just narrow opportunities such as drawing or playing an instrument."

Pupils have their say

Briony Nicholls, 15, Grimesthorpe

At Firth Park, all year 9 students choose three options for their final two years at secondary school. I chose drama, music and expressive arts. I felt I would do better in these subjects because they were very practical, not just testing what you can do with pen and paper.

Working within the arts has given me confidence in myself and encouraged me to work within groups of people. I have weekly brass lessons and can now read music and play the trumpet. When I leave I'd like to study music and theatre studies and go on to work in the theatre.

Sarah Cook, 13, Firth Park

I've become increasingly confident in many aspects of the arts, particularly in drama and music. It's a good idea for colleges like Firth Park to become specialist arts colleges. They become valuable assets to the community and, yes, more money should be given to the arts in schools, as they're very popular and enjoyable subjects.

Samantha Rowberry, 14, Firth Park

In the arts, you get to express yourself, develop your own ideas and use your initiative, so I get a lot out of them, both personally and academically.

At least one arts subject should be compulsory for GCSE. Watching and taking part in the arts builds confidence not just in performance, but also in basic communication.

Stars have their say

Griff Rhys Jones, actor

The arts are the best entertainment human beings have ever produced. You also learn about discipline, you learn by working together in a team and that is the best experience you can get as a child.

Juliet Stevenson, actress

Children should be given lots of opportunities in the arts and should have fun doing it. I'm very sad that so much drama and music has come out of the school syllabus. Any campaign to draw attention to this and make it possible for children to have access to the arts is a very good thing.

This story was produced by Saarah Choudhury, 16, Wei Jun Chung, Lucy Taylor, Jasmine Stewart and Rachel Walmsley, all 15, and Erin Heenan and Shannon Carr, 13. It was published in the [Sheffield Star](#).

0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

Built on [Cubik](#)

©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#)