

Core Purpose of Nethergate Academy

'To enable every individual to achieve personal wellbeing and a place of value in society through education and promotion of equality'



Communication and Engagement



Personal Safety



Emotional Wellbeing



Independence

Nethergate Academy Key Curriculum Drivers

Aspect: The Arts

Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts

Why do the Arts have importance within our curriculum at Nethergate?

The arts celebrate life and who we are.

Authentic arts experiences promote a sense of self and affirm our place in the world.

Every day at Nethergate we invite our children to engage with creative activities. These experiences enable them to express, explore and communicate their individual needs, ideas and viewpoints. When young people participate in open-ended creative experiences, it helps them to develop a connection between their 'inside' world and the 'outside' world. The arts offer a valuable, creative and supportive space where our young people are free to develop personal identity and a sense of belonging.

How do the Arts link to Nethergate's key curriculum drivers?

- **Communication and engagement:**

The arts curriculum at Nethergate is not a series of topics, it can be described as a 'web of activities' through which we encourage our children to energetically and creatively explore their world and convey their ideas. At Nethergate, the process of exploration is valued as much as the outcome. Everyone is encouraged to understand that final artworks have been created through a meaningful investigation. We present open-ended tasks which invite interpretation and innovation. The best education happens when children fully participate and are 'present' in their learning experiences. We plan activities to inspire interest, and fuel children's curiosity and excitement so that they embark on their own learning journeys and explore things for themselves.

Taking part in a rich and varied range of arts activities, supports young people to express themselves. Our students might communicate through dance, showing how they feel and what they mean, by using their bodies. Drama helps to develop variety and fluency in verbal and non-verbal communication. Through drama, children can explore the power and meaning of actions, sounds and speech. Research suggests that music is strongly linked to speech and language acquisition. In fact, some developmental neuroscientists conclude that it is more useful to think of spoken language as a special form of music (Brandt, Gebrian & Slevc, 2012).

All Key Stages at Nethergate make full use of picture-books and age-appropriate illustrated stories. The wealth of beautiful literature available is used as a launch pad for arts encounters that require personal interpretation and response. Through drawings and paintings, young people can 'tell stories' by creating pictorial representations of objects or by using symbols to express emotions and ideas. The arts enable everyone to express and communicate feelings, ideas, concepts, and insights that might be tricky or impossible to express in other ways.

- **Personal safety:**

Teaching young people how to use equipment and tools safely is a fundamental part of any practical lesson. We are mindful of each child's developmental level and individual needs, assessing and providing individual support around these. Adults explicitly model and promote discussion about safe, co-operative and non-discriminatory working

practices. The nature of arts activities and everyone's unique needs mean that each child is following their own learning pathway. Organisation, ground rules and advice enable everyone to explore their own artistic abilities in an effective, safe and socially acceptable way. We engage children in discussions about adequate space, clear traffic-ways and safe, efficient workspaces. We involve our young people in labelling products, cupboards and containers and we include them in keeping our resources and environment safe, tidy and accessible.

As well as considering physical safety, we ensure that our learning spaces are an emotionally safe environment, offering countless opportunities for children to explore their world through arts games, encounters with art-forms and sensory activities.

- **Emotional well-being:**

When young people make art and take part in performances, the experience provides opportunities to build confidence, tolerance, self-discipline and self-regulation. Good quality arts experiences allow children to experience delight as they develop new skills with arts materials and explore sensory processes. Engaging with intriguing, stretching but achievable arts activities allows people to experience what is described as the psychological state of 'flow'. This is when a person is completely involved in an activity for its own sake, experiencing feelings of serenity, personal control, and they lose self-consciousness. (Csikszentmihalyi 2013)

At Nethergate we ensure that the arts experiences we offer include personally meaningful content. Young people can explore and communicate their views, emotions and feelings by creating artworks. This occurs across the full range of abilities and ages. One child may make a visual statement about their opinions on climate change, whilst another might represent how they feel when they are outside in the rain. The arts allow young people to have a 'voice' and this self-validation gives them confidence in their feelings, their ideas, and themselves.

At Nethergate we make it clear that we really value creative participation, as a result this often includes the whole-school community. For example, a theme such as Children's Mental Health Awareness Week will see all children exploring the issues through arts activities. An assembly will set the scene, asking questions and setting challenges, later on, another assembly will celebrate and share the students' creative achievements. There may be a coffee morning arranged, when parents, carers and staff can meet and discuss the issues. The children will bake, create posters and artworks and help to decorate the meeting room. Later we will create a display in a public part of the building to explicitly mark the events. Research has shown that well-being is fostered in schools where creative engagement is highly valued (McLellan et al. 2012).

- **Independence:**

Independence and personal identity are bound together. A concept of self involves developing an understanding of the boundaries that separate us from other people. At Nethergate, we aim to support our children to gain a sense of their own uniqueness, while at the same time helping them to understand how they are connected to others. Working as part of a group can offer a greater sense of self and therefore of independence. Art-forms and art projects can often be collaborative and so build on social awareness, confidence and trust. Young people develop socially as they sing or dance with others, share and discuss ideas, work together or share resources. Even the simple act of taking turns with equipment and activities offers opportunities for social development, which in turn presents an affirmation of self and of independence.

A person's independence increases as their personal identity becomes more secure. Identity combines the physical, psychological, spiritual, social and cultural self. Engaging with, and creating, art allows young people to explore such concepts in safe and pleasurable way. This can occur across ages and abilities, for example, one child may create a large-scale detailed plan of an imaginary building that includes rooms for her ideas, hobbies, dreams and fears. Whilst another child may choose to print with his hands, mixing paint in different shades of his favourite colour.

Independence also involves supporting children on their journey to adulthood. In practical arts activities we involve pupils in a 'full-circle' approach. They are included in the preparation, clean up and storage as well as the act of creation. Engaging children with these stages is a necessary part of the experience; routines, skills and expectations are established which can then be transferred to other aspects of life such as preparing food in a kitchen or putting clothes away after they have been washed.

How do we ensure that there is progression within the Arts curriculum at Nethergate?

The arts curriculum across our school is centred on artistic expression in order to develop children's capacities. At Nethergate, across all key stages we use an arts enriched approach where different arts areas are used as tools for learning across subject areas. The arts are well-integrated, and children's understanding and capabilities within the arts are developed with as much consideration as that given to learning in other areas. The arts permeate the school and the students have daily exposure to the world of arts and arts based activities. We use a spiral approach to learning. Our students acquire layers of skills and understanding, and by revisiting concepts in different ways they are encouraged to build increasing capabilities in a continuing cycle over time.

How do the Arts contribute to my child achieving their EHCP targets?

The positive impact of arts education for young people with additional and complex needs has been explored elsewhere on this web page. It is useful to consider the five developmental areas which are included in each child's EHCP document and suggest how some specific activities might support particular needs:

Sensory and physical health

Creative arts activities have been shown to support physical development (Fiske 1999). Encountering, touching and exploring different art materials develops young people's fine-motor-skills. When a child models with clay they find that there is a resistance to the material which then works the small muscles of their hands and builds on their muscular and skeletal structures in their hands. This then helps to improve hand endurance, dexterity, balance, mobility and stability. Hand-eye co-ordination is developed through the focussed act of making something with clay and tools. Visual-motor integration, which is the important starting point for handwriting, grows from hand-eye coordination.

Kinaesthetic arts activities such as dance and drama help young people to gain physical control, mobility, strength, posture, balance and endurance. As children use their bodies to move from place to place, they develop body awareness, which is powerfully linked to body image, self-esteem, confidence and sense of self (Gallahue & Ozmun, 2005).

Cognition and Learning

When young people are given a stimulus, for example some fabric and a hat in a drama session and they go on to make a creative response, they are responding 'right now', and such sensory responses require a considerable application of cognition and thinking.

Arts activities have been shown to support cognitive development. The type of arts program offered at Nethergate is known to yield rich and complex learning opportunities that encourage conceptual and cognitive development for all young people (Baker 2013). When they are learning through the arts; children visualise, deduce, problem-solve and improvise. They think resourcefully and symbolically; they devise ways of communicating ideas, feelings and perceptions. Through the arts they can construct and inhabit imagined spaces, they use imagination and they convey their intentions.

Communication and Interaction

When a child makes a painting in a classroom they interact with the adults and peers around them (through speech or signing). There are many opportunities for them to develop their receptive language skills by following instructions and understanding questions. Through painting young people can demonstrate their understanding of increasingly complex concepts, from colours, sizes or shapes through to more difficult ideas such as emotions, the passage of time or narratives. As a child paints they can explore their expressive language skills, they might describe what they are doing, explain their ideas or indeed, ask for help. Painting as part of a group provides 'natural' opportunities for a child to develop their social communication and interaction skills. They take turns, ask for help, offer help, compliment their peers, and share their experiences.

Social and Emotional Health and Well-being

When a child uses a chime to make music with other children in a shared space, they become part of the social makeup of the group and part of a creative learning community. When a child contributes to our communal 'Big Sing' singing and signing assembly, they feel valued for who they are and in turn, value the contribution that others make. Singing is a universal human behaviour which has been shown to contribute to social bonding. Research has demonstrated that the 'feel good' oxytocin and β -endorphins levels rise in people's bodies when they sing together. (Pierce, Launay Dunbar 2015)

Independence and Preparation for the Future

When a child is asked to design and construct a musical instrument from cardboard, rubber bands, sticks and string she is being encouraged to take risks and engage with an open-ended creative activity. She will need to be open to new experiences, accept failures, build on successes and ask for advice. Such a project is also a good way to explore sustainable living practices, it models avoiding wasteful use of materials and resources, disposing of rubbish appropriately and recycling.

Our classrooms are organised so that arts resources are readily available including recycled items, ensuring that there are opportunities for young people to work independently and over time on such projects. Arts activities at every developmental level invite children to be imaginative, inventive and expressive. We encourage everyone to push boundaries and take risks. Through appropriate challenge we promote the development of personal agency, feelings of self-confidence and of self-worth.

A final word about how the Arts support our pupil's individual needs and disabilities.

At Nethergate arts activities are devised to be appropriate for every one of our diverse students. By ensuring full access to the arts, we encourage each child to develop as an individual, and also, to develop their identity within our school community. Each child's growing sense of their unique individuality can be encouraged by taking part in relevant creative activities. We also support students to embrace the rights of others to be individuals too. Through the arts we can learn how to exist alongside and work collaboratively with, people who are different to ourselves. We ensure that we provide a creative learning environment where young people are encouraged to express their own feelings, thoughts, experiences and ideas. We provide accessible open-ended challenges that allow everyone to create their own responses within the framework of their capabilities. The arts enable our children to express their individualism.

The arts promote self-regulatory behaviours, this is because creative activities involve experimentation, practise and rehearsal. When children think and act creatively, they will trial and reject different possibilities, these actions require a level of concentration, perseverance and patience.

We include learning opportunities that require children to work co-operatively with others for the group's benefit. We ensure that we have constructive conversations about the work of others, as well as reflecting on individual experiences. These discussions will vary according to a child's ability and developmental stage. They might be responses or opinions expressed about a peer's work through Makaton, or they may be extended dialogues about a renowned artwork as part of a wider project.

Creative activities are a rich and accessible means of expression and communication. For all of our learners, the arts are a satisfying way of exploring their inner and exterior worlds.

We value equal opportunity very highly. We consider each child's ability to access a task and we support them to engage fully with arts activities. We also make certain that we use diverse artists and artworks as role-models and inspiration.

The arts can support children to fulfil their physical capabilities. There is a strong link between activities such as dancing and the development of learning, when a child makes a movement across their body it helps to develop the neural pathways connecting the hemispheres of their brain. When children engage in kinaesthetic art forms such as dance and drama more of their brain is engaged than 'what we typically use for seatwork' (Jenson 2001). Research shows that kinaesthetic art forms contribute to the development and enhancement of critical neurobiological systems including cognition, emotions, immunity, circulation and perception of movement.