

Pupil Led Arts Council At Gomersal Primary School

By [Mandy Barrett](#)



At Gomersal Primary school we pride ourselves on offering a vibrant creative arts curriculum, with the firm belief that children's ideas should be at the very heart of their learning and our curriculum offer. After conducting an audit as part of our Artsmark journey, we decided to set up a pupil led Arts Council, to harness the ideas of all the children within school.

The primary aim was to gather a group of like-minded children

to enhance our arts provision, but over the past 3 years, we've achieved so much more. Our children have gained the most wonderful experiences, grasped opportunities and have developed into true ambassadors, who eloquently champion the Arts.

At the time we set up our arts council, we were discussing different careers within the arts sectors. With this in mind (unlike our elected school council) we decided to set up the arts council as a job that the children could apply for. We created a job description and pupils in Year 5 and 6 were encouraged to write letters of application, discussing their strengths, ideas and why they wanted to apply for a role. In that first year, we had 14 applications, all from girls and all were appointed. Perhaps this was a sign that our boys were reluctant to write letters and something which we considered in subsequent years.

Our first task was to set up a link with a local arts organisation. We visited the offices of The Arts Council Collection, in the grounds of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

Visiting the Longside Gallery based at the YSP enabled us to learn about [Jann Howarth's Calendula's Cloak](#). At the time, we were discussing artwork created by women and why we are able to quickly name many male artists but not as many female artists. The ACC gave us a large selection of sculptures made by female artists and we were asked to choose one piece that we'd like to see and work with. We interviewed Jann Howarth and were able to ask her many interesting questions about her work. We were given funding by Culture Street to create our video to promote working with sculpture in school.



Learning about Jann Howarth's Calendula's Cloak at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

Further to this, Natalie Walton from the Arts Council Collection came to our school with [Antony Gormley's 'Field for the British Isles'](#) to introduce our children to a piece of art and to give them further knowledge of how the ACC acquire, exhibit and look after artworks. The emphasis is that the Arts Council Collection is everyone's collection and so the art belongs to everyone. Our first group of Arts Council children were lucky enough to go behind the scenes at the Arts Council Collection and see the sculptures in storage. These children managed to see some of the sculptures brought into school. They then learnt about the sculpture, had a go at making some out of clay and then shared their experience with the rest of children in school.



Learning about Antony Gormley's 'Field for the British Isles'.

The ACC asked us to produce a promotional video for them to show how they work behind the scenes. This linked to an exhibition they were hosting at the time (which we had helped create the education packs for). We interviewed staff, found out about life working for the Arts Council Collection, worked in their gallery space and generally found out about working in the arts sector.

Making the film taught our arts council children about interviewing, researching and teambuilding, when preparing to make the video. They were also taught how to use all the equipment such as videography, using microphones, etc. This was our first major project as a school arts council, so it helped to knit our children together as a team, but also served to 'set the bar' for what we might do as a council in

the future. This greatly helped raise the number children wanting to apply for a place in the second year.



Visiting the Arts Council Collection - a national loan collection of modern and contemporary British Art, founded in 1946.



Visiting Yorkshire Sculpture Park



Learning how to use film making equipment

The children used the knowledge gained from the experience working with the Arts Council Collection to talk to other children back in school. Since then our children have written education packs to run alongside the Arts Council Collection gallery exhibitions and have formed a strong bond with staff there. This helps enormously when our children want to find out about a range of artists to discuss and embed into our art curriculum.



In the first year, our arts council team also created four suggestion boxes, each to represent the four arts subjects within school: visual art, music, dance and performing arts. The children were then divided into small subgroups, to work with the staff responsible for these subjects within school. They collected ideas from children around school that were then discussed in meetings. Any interesting ideas were then passed on to the relevant subject leaders and placed in our meeting minutes book. It's a wonderful way to find out what all children think about our arts curriculum and how they would like to improve it. During the first few months, the children also worked with a local graphic designer to create and produce a logo and brand identity for our arts council. This further developed their knowledge of careers within the arts sector.

The first year was a success and our arts council children

regularly spoke in whole school assemblies, sharing their achievements. This led to over 60 applicants (this time with an equal weighting of boys) wanting a place on the arts council in the second year. We continued to develop children's ideas through the suggestion boxes.

With a link made with our school Arts Governor (who also happens to be a radio DJ), we began fundraising to build a recording studio and radio station for use in school. This has been a wonderful project, teaching our arts council children many skills. The children bought a badge making machine, and set up their own small business in school. They set up their own stalls at our Winter and Summer fairs and sold badges and other handmade products and ran raffles throughout the year.



Working with a School Governor to fundraise for a recording studio and radio station in school



The children bought a badge making machine and sold the badges at the school Winter and Summer fairs

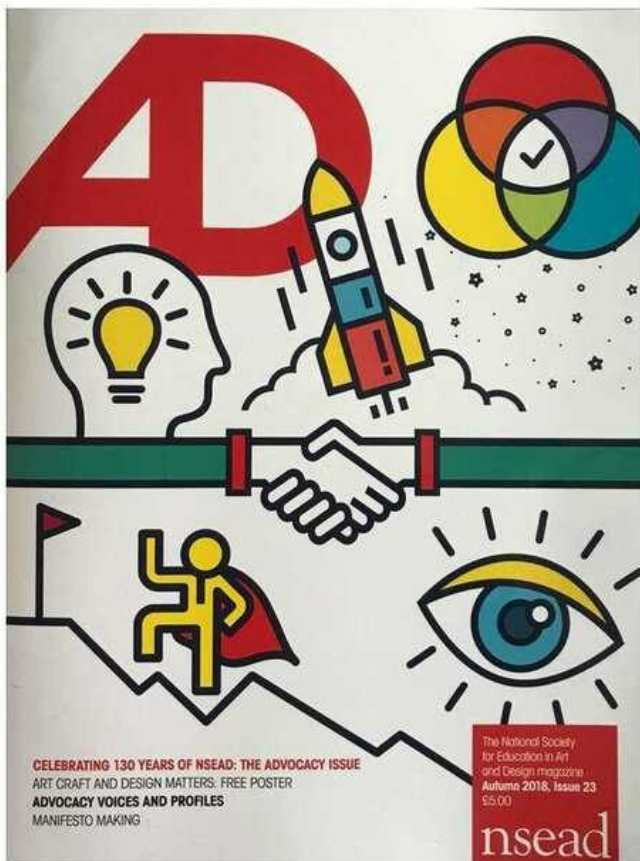
To date, they have singlehandedly raised over £1000. They are in charge of their own budget and regularly discuss how they would like to invest their money back into school in order to improve the arts subjects. Money has been spent on radio equipment, books and iPads, with a contingency always left in their account. They're frugal and wise when it comes to spending and finance discussions often form a large part of our meetings.



The children were able to purchase iPads with money generated through fundraising activity

A highlight of our second year, was receiving an invitation to make a speech in the Houses of Parliament. Our children spoke passionately about their experience in primary education and how they felt that the arts subjects are often overlooked or squeezed out of the curriculum. Throughout this process our arts council children developed a strong link with our local MP, who regularly helps to champion the arts, both within our school and in Parliament. It strengthened our children's belief that what they were doing within school, to improve the art subjects, can make a positive impact on the people around them.

The NSEAD noticed what we were achieving as an arts council (mainly due to our twitter feed and visit to the houses of parliament) They wanted us to write an article to be placed in their AD magazine to promote the use of children's voice in schools and how this might be used to form an arts council. All our arts council children were given a copy of the magazine as a memento of their year on the arts council and their visit to London.



Melanie Cox, head teacher at Gomersal Primary School in Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire; **Mandy Barrett**, specialist art teacher and SLE for art in primary education; and members of their school arts council, share why the arts matter and how a newly formed arts council has become a strong, informing and school-changing voice

Melanie Cox: Gomersal Primary School relocated to a larger building in April 2013, not only increasing the number of classrooms and pupil capacity, but gaining a purpose-built art room. In September 2014, we appointed Mandy Barrett, a specialist art teacher, to both utilise the studio space and develop a creative approach to teaching visual art across the school. Currently each key stage 2 class (ages 7-10) visits our art studio on a weekly basis, with early years and key stage 1 (ages 5-7) classes taught on a rolling programme. As a result, every child within our primary school receives quality visual art teaching and our staff receive regular training opportunities within art to subjects.

It took only a short time for the impact of this initiative to be visible across the school. Displays began to improve, not only visually but also in the quality of work that was on display. Visitors



are told to comment on the standard of writing produced and through our art blog and twice a year, people started asking to visit the school to look at the art room and learn from our creative model. Children started to talk about their love of art and parents shared with us that their children were looking forward to their art lessons.

Standards had previously dropped in the school and, while the intention was to increase the time spent on reading, writing and maths, as a school teacher, I was wholeheartedly dedicated to ensuring that our children would still access high-quality experiences across the whole curriculum. At times it felt risky, due to high-stakes accountability measures, even though I fully believed that what we were doing was right for the children.

As a head teacher, I fully believe that our commitment to a maintaining a high-quality broad curriculum, with the arts at its centre, is enabling us to grow and thrive as a successful primary school'

In fact, we didn't stop with visual art. Since September 2015 we have appointed a performing arts practitioner to also lead sessions across the whole school. We are also currently working with a local iX to create a recording studio and digital music hub. Our specialist art teacher is now an SLE in art, supporting training for teachers and initial teacher trainees. Our art and design is going from strength to strength, as Mandy leads with complete dedication and passion for the subject. In short, we are continually investing in our arts provision to enhance the curriculum and experiences for our children.

Our message about the importance of the arts is constantly reinforced. Every year a child (age 10-14) leaves our school with an Arts Award certificate, as well as their key stage 2 SATS results. We have developed links with local artists and arts organisations, and we are currently working towards gaining our Artsmark award.

As a head teacher, I fully believe that our commitment to a maintaining a high-quality broad curriculum, with the arts at its centre, is enabling us to grow and thrive as a successful primary school. Our commitment to our arts curriculum remains strong and it's exciting to think about the journey that lies ahead of us.

Mandy Barrett: For our quest to create a broad and balanced curriculum with substantial opportunities for the arts, it seemed only right to establish a pupil-run arts council. We wanted to give support only for children to play a significant role in developing the arts within the school, and to encourage pupils to contribute towards making a difference to their own education.

In May 2017, our pupils were given the opportunity to form their own arts council. We wanted to ensure our arts council would have a real status in school, so we asked for nominations. At the time, fourteen children applied, were all elected and immediately began making a difference. We formed working parties, gathered ideas and opinions, addressed issues, and began discussing why we felt the arts were important within education. Our council has created suggestions for art, dance, music and drama, giving all children within the school the opportunity to share their ideas. These ideas were discussed and fed back to the relevant subject leaders, and fully included in our meeting minutes book. The children flourished. They instantly recognised that the arts are most certainly valued within our curriculum and form a large part of our school identity.

Within a short space of time we had created a link with the Arts Council Collection (ACC) and spent a day working with members of their staff, who were based at the Longside Gallery at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Our council then interviewed ACC employees, learnt how to make a film and then began to make a video to promote within and with which to improve our own arts council, which was still very much in its infancy.

Now in its second year, and after receiving over 60 applications, its children form our current arts council. These are a mixture of new and

existing members, who bring with them a good mixture of fresh ideas and expertise learnt from the previous year. Their aim is to strengthen the arts from a pupil's perspective, with a particular focus on working towards our Artsmark award. They have created their own business plan, and through involving in a professional badge-making machine, have raised their own funds and are discussing how to spend their money to improve our arts provision.

It has not taken long for our arts council to realise that the opportunities children receive in terms of arts education varies significantly from school to school. This has been a direct result of chatting to peers while helping to run art workshops for children in local schools. As a result, our council has now not only want to improve arts education within our school, but within other schools too. 'If only every child was as lucky as me,' said William, a member of the arts council. This notion formed part of their speech delivered within Westminster during the meeting of The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design in Education, 14 March 2018. Our council spoke eloquently and bravely about their passion for improving the arts, why they believe this to be important, and their vision for the future. Their full speeches can be found at nsead.org and extracts are included below.

As a specialist art teacher working in a primary school, listening to the ideas, passion and pure enthusiasm from our art councilers fills me with absolute pride. Our children are immersed with creative opportunities and are willing and eager to make valuable changes, not only for themselves but as a legacy for others too. A pupil's voice can most definitely be a strong voice.

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Here are extracts from Gomersal's school arts council speeches:

Eva: Last year we decided to form an arts council to improve the arts even further - from a pupil's perspective - giving the children in our school a voice that we hope can shape our future learning for the good of all our school community.

Grace: We began by making a valuable link with the 'real' Arts Council Collection. We worked behind the scenes learning trade secrets and learning how to talk to each other about art and sculptures.

Mollie: To help find and develop new ideas, we have held a pupil questionnaire and created that suggestions book, one for each area of the arts that we concentrate on in school - visual art, dance, drama and music. This means that EVERY CHILD IN OUR SCHOOL HAS A VOICE AND THAT VOICE IS HEARD.

Samuel: We are aware that school budgets are not overly flexible, and in many schools this impacts on the creative subjects. So we created a business plan! As an arts council we have bought a professional badge-making machine. Raising our own funds has taught us many valuable life skills, and this is just the beginning of our business adventure. The possibilities are endless.

Harriet: We are working alongside our art teacher to use visual art as a way of promoting good wellbeing. After all, being happy in school is extremely important. Through our pupil questionnaire we discovered that many children believe coming to our art room regularly helps with stress levels, especially in year 6. During our SATS revision and test weeks we still take part in creative activities. In fact, the work in our art room seems to get better as the time of year goes on.

William: We would like to continue to set a high standard for the arts in this school. We have friends in other schools who say they only have art once a term or don't have art at all. This shocked us. How can we let this happen? Some of our children visit our school for workshops and they say how lucky we are. Shouldn't all children be as lucky as us? We do our best to learn our primary school and move onto high school, what will our choices be?

Will we still have a voice? Will the arts still be so important? We are now on a mission to make links with our local high schools. We may be young, but we have big ambitions to see change in the way the arts are currently represented in education.

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gomersalprimaryschoolart.blogspot.co.uk

Gomersal School Arts Council featured in the NSEAD magazine.

Due to our strong links with the NSEAD we were invited to run a workshop for their national conference. The aim was to share our arts practice and links with the Arts Council Collection, with teachers from all over the country. Our children planned their own workshop, choosing clay as a focus as we knew that Keith Brymer Jones (from The Great Pottery Throwdown) was the keynote speaker for the day!

Our arts council children decided what they wanted to share and produce a range of creative activities that delegates could take part in, whilst our children talked to them about our art curriculum and answered any questions they had about our school and how we have formed a link with the Arts Council Collection. We took along samples of our sketchbooks and work and put together a powerpoint presentation. Natalie Walton from the Arts Council Collection came too, to talk about our strong links with them and how we work together to enhance our arts curriculum. The children were delighted to meet Keith and sat attentively through his keynote speech.



Attending the NSEAD national conference.

Each year, our arts council goes from strength to strength, grasping new opportunities wherever it can. We have over 80 applicants each year, from children who want to make a positive impact on learning in school. We have worked with local artists to develop new schemes of work, we've led workshops for local children and for teachers at a national conference. Our radio station and recording studio is complete and our arts councillors are currently busy training other

children how to use the equipment. We have worked with famous artists and artworks to develop our knowledge and understanding. To enhance our provision we now have 16 iPads for use in our art room, and the fundraising continues. It's a pleasure to work with such passionate children.

The arts council at Gomersal is now a firmly embedded initiative within our school that I hope will continue for as long as children show an interest in being part of one. They genuinely make a positive contribution, from helping to choose art equipment to speaking in Parliament. It's important to continue to harness their passion and enthusiasm and long may it continue.

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