

ARTS & WELLBEING

The Deputy Head of Pastoral at Emanuel School discusses the impact that the arts generate in school co-curricular programmes



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teacher is often advised when interviewing for a post at a school that they are interviewing the school as much as they are being interviewed for the role. Finding an institution that truly shares your values can be a disheartening exercise in compromise. Having taught Drama for over 15 years, there was little doubt in my mind that my next post would be at a school that shared my belief in the importance of the creative arts – not merely as an annual showpiece, but as a cherished and embedded element within the curriculum. This means Drama is an accessible outlet for all pupils, not just those with the confidence to get involved. This ethos is at the very heart of Emanuel: whether it is Art, Music or Drama, pupils are given a chance to explore each within timetabled lessons and through myriad co-curricular opportunities.

What continues to fascinate me is that the creative arts, far from providing a distraction from the core curriculum, prove to be some of the most enriching, invigorating and pastorally beneficial of our pupils' experiences. Moreover, the All-Parliamentary Group's 2017 report, 'Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing' concluded, among other



TOP & RIGH
Participating in creative arts helps pupils to strengthen wellbeing

“We understand the important role creative arts play in developing character, resilience and self-esteem”



things, that the arts can help to keep us well. So how do we see this in action at Emanuel? The outstanding Year 9 drummer I speak to talks animatedly of how playing each day is both a literal and metaphorical release after a busy day. And she also talks of the community she has established through being involved in groups and bands at the school. She says to me, “they’re like a second family”.

This theme of support is echoed by our talented drama students. The lead of the senior play, who is in the midst of drama school applications, shares with me, “you spend so long with this group of people, you can’t help but become close and call on each other for advice”. Informal peer mentoring takes place across year groups without teacher direction and the community becomes closer and stronger through a collective experience. The cast talk about the thrill of rising to the

challenge and performing in front of a live audience as the weeks of rehearsals come to climax. One pupil proudly reels off his school acting CV starting with Year 6 and 7 plays, junior and senior musicals and a successful run at the Edinburgh Fringe. The tangible sense of achievement provided by these opportunities should never be underestimated.

“I like the fact that at end of it all I get to show my parents and friends something I have created”, a Year 11 Art student tells me as we sit in one of the many bright studio spaces in the impressive Dacre building, home to the creative arts at Emanuel. His art classes, though challenging, provide a restorative pause in a busy week.

A final word from a somewhat reticent boy in my Year 8 drama class who I regularly encourage to be brave, alongside creative and committed: “Even though it’s quite scary and I don’t always want to do it, I feel really proud of myself after each lesson”. This weekly immersion in the creative arts is key to our approach, as Clare Fearnley, Head of Drama, describes. She says: “While we are delighted for our pupils who have appeared in Netflix series, BBC dramas and on the West End, it is our focus on the day-to-day transformative impact of the arts for all pupils that often proves most inspirational for me”.

We understand the important role the creative arts play in developing character, resilience, self-esteem, friendships and helping students to find balance in their studies. It is why opportunities for all to enjoy them remain at Emanuel School. 🎭



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