

Music and Education – Evidence Gathering

Bethan Jenkins – Head of Music, Lewis School Pengam

My name is Beth Jenkins and I am the Head of Music at Lewis School Pengam. I have taught Music at this school since September 2000 and have a wealth of experience delivering this subject to a varied valleys community of all boys.

At Lewis School Pengam, we focus our Music Curriculum on Rock and Pop rather than the more traditional Classical genre. The engagement of all boys is always a challenge and this ‘hook’ of a Rock and Pop curriculum enables us to accomplish this. As a result we have a very successful department with a Best Practice mention in the current Estyn Creativity in the Arts document (May 2016) alongside continued success at GCSE and BTEC Music Technology (pre 16) with pass rates of 95% and 100% respectively.

As a Head of Department, I have led our school’s Lead Creative School Programme which has just been awarded Best Practice by the Arts Council of Wales. I am also an Arts Champion for the South East Wales Arts Network and have been actively involved in delivering CPD training to other Music teachers in the region. I have also been selected to represent the EAS as part of the non-Core Lead GCSE Programme for the changes to our current GCSE Specification and I am working in collaboration with GWE to develop these resources.

I am a passionate advocate of music education and feel very strongly that in Wales we are not giving fair opportunities to all our pupils. There is a well established framework of training for young people who wish gain further skills in Classical Music, for example the National Youth Ensembles, training at the RWCMD, competitions that focus purely on classical traditions (Rotary, Gregynog) however this field is very much under developed for the Rock and Pop sector. I find it difficult to believe that we are not encouraging this industry in our schools as it has been well documented that the Creative Industries are one of the fastest growing economies in the UK. Here in Wales we pride ourselves on our Culture and Heritage and surely we should be aiming to preserve this in its current form for future generations.

This argument was highlighted only recently after a former pupil, Alex Stacey, returned from a trip to LA after signing his publishing deal with APG (Warner Group). He was asked by Ryan Tedder (frontman of One Republic and co-writer for Beyoncé and Adele) “what academy did he train at, was it the Brit School?”. His success is quite phenomenal in comparison with the young people from the Brit School who have had constant contact with industry professionals on a day to day basis. However, it must be mentioned that Alex did have support, as a result of a school based initiative, headed by Grammy Award winning songwriter, Amy Wadge.

I believe that we need to discuss the following:

- Rock and Pop tuition (ages 11–18) to rival the delivery of the Brit School provision
- Development of all Wales programmes for rock and pop ensembles to engage more young people at a higher level
- Opportunities for pupils to partake in national ‘competitions’ that actively encourage all forms of Rock and Pop, for example, Songwriting, DJing, Beatboxing
- Promotion of apprenticeships in the Creative Industries within Wales to enable another option post 16/18
- More creative industry based work in schools to encourage and prove to pupils and their families that working in this sector is a viable profession

This is only a short précis of the Music Department at Lewis School Pengam but I hope that it is evident that we have a passion to engage more young people in the Creative Industries. These views are also fully supported by our Headteacher, Christopher Parry. I would welcome a conversation to expand on these points.