



CARLTON KEIGHLEY: ARTS IN A TIME OF TRANSFORMATION

Change isn't easy. It takes commitment, courage, hard work and ambition. But the rewards are great – just as change signifies an ending, it also means moving forwards. It brings excitement and new experiences. It focuses us and shapes us for the future. At Carlton Keighley, change was inevitable and necessary. “We were a school that was not improving,” explains **Enrichment & Extra-Curricular Lead, Isobel Pering**. “We needed to make some serious changes. That happened with a big turnaround in terms of the staffing and management in the school – and Burberry Inspire came in at that point as well.”

CARLTON KEIGHLEY (FORMERLY UNIVERSITY ACADEMY KEIGHLEY) PARTNER ALLOCATION:

2019 / YEAR ONE:
LEEDS PLAYHOUSE

2020 / YEAR TWO:
LEEDS YOUNG FILM

2021 / YEAR THREE:
THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD

2022 / YEAR FOUR:
NORTHERN BALLET

“ I’VE WORKED AT THIS SCHOOL FOR ABOUT TWENTY YEARS, AND THIS WILL PROBABLY BE THE FIRST TIME IN ABOUT FIFTEEN YEARS THAT WE’VE HAD THE PERFORMING ARTS CLASSES BACK ON THE CURRICULUM.

At the time of the programme’s arrival, there was just one teacher providing art and textiles. There was no Design and Technology and extremely limited opportunities for students to enjoy anything creative on the curriculum. “That was a reflection of where we were in terms of the staff that we had and the outcomes we were getting,” explains Isobel. If it seems bleak... well, that wouldn’t be entirely inaccurate. Which makes today’s picture even more startling in terms of Carlton Keighley’s transformation. “We now have performing arts on the curriculum for all our students and an exam group that are studying towards a performing arts qualification,” Isobel beams. “Also, as part of our school improvement we’re very keen to progress our after school and enrichment. So, with Leeds Playhouse came an after-school drama club which is now very well established. This year for the first time again in about twenty years, we’ve put on a school show.” So, just how has such dramatic change come about in just four years?



“I think Burberry Inspire gave us that impetus, that kick up the backside, to actually get on and do it. It gave us those relationships with creative partners who can come in and just make it happen,” she explains. “Of course, they bring funding and the resources to be able to do the trips and to help with our after-school clubs, CPD with staff and all those elements that pull this kind of curriculum together.” In a situation like Carlton Keighley’s, this feels like hitting the jackpot. In conjunction with all the necessary changes that were taking place anyway, it was a joyful opportunity to rewrite the story of the school, and hundreds of individual stories at the same time. “We’ve got a very strong ethos of ‘the whole child’ and take a holistic approach that means it’s not just those exam results,” she says. “It’s about how

students are going to be able to use these experiences and link them to transferrable skills and confidence. It’s about what they are going to be able to take forward from it.”

This holistic approach has manifested itself in a shift in attitudes, where the young people are open to new experiences that may be outside their comfort zones, as well as the opportunities they now view as available to them. A good example of how the programme shattered the student’s preconceptions came during a trip to see a performance by Northern Ballet. Their practitioner had already spent time with them, delivering workshops of a scene from the performance they were going to see. By putting the youngsters in the shoes of the dancers for a fight scene, a clever link between them and the ballet was created before they even set foot in the theatre. This also meant that while they invested them in the performance, there was also an element of surprise remaining – and the students had any negative notion of what it was to see a ballet shattered. “It wasn’t a traditional performance, more a modern production. So, I think that they were very surprised at what they saw and enjoyed it more than perhaps thought they may.” As a testament to this approach, 300 students attended, and their behaviour was exemplary. And, more importantly, they were “totally engaged and fixated with what was happening”.

This mindset shift isn’t just limited to what they see. A widespread change in what the students believe is open to them in the future is also happening. “I also think a lot of our students were quite surprised about other roles that were available – backstage roles, costume, co-ordination – all those vast number of roles that were available. It’s lots of little things like this that are about helping students to develop that confidence and build towards it,” Isobel explains. “I know that’s something the creative partners have all wanted – it’s not all front of stage and having all that confidence and ability to act and sing.” In turn, this is creating a renewed belief that they can achieve. Isobel cites an observed correlation between the increased participation in after-school clubs, such as drama, students who are involved in them and an increase in personal confidence, both in performing and within school generally.

It’s an important example of the way creative subjects can create an impact elsewhere. “There’s a lot of work to do around aspirations as well and that’s something as a school that we need to look at in creative jobs and creative sector. I’m always keen to embrace anything we can do in terms of careers provision or learning.



The employers we can bring in from that sector can help with our students understanding,” says Isobel. The school is currently working with a set designer from Northern Ballet, who is strongly supporting this message through simply showing the students what she does for a living. “She’s shown off some of her work, set design, the models, images and videos from performances she’s worked on, and you can almost see the jaws drop – that somebody is paid money to do this. They’re really enjoying working with her.”

Change and adaptability don’t always go hand in

hand, but Carlton Keighley and Burberry Inspire met with equal amounts of enthusiasm and flexibility. The school’s first arts partner, Leeds Playhouse, continues to have strong ties with Carlton Keighley, forged in the early days where they both worked together, learnt and adapted at the same time, with no prior experience to call on. All practitioners quickly understood the unique needs of the school and made the necessary adaptations to their practice in order to knit themselves perfectly into the learning structure of the young people. A good example of this was when Leeds Playhouse introduced the students to the idea of ‘radio plays’ by performing ‘Partition’ by

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Nick Ahad for them. It opened up a really interesting new approach, but also levelled the playing field for the school's visually impaired students. "All the organisations, all the partners that we've worked with, have been very much open to any adaptational changes for our students, depending on whatever needs they have," explains Isobel.

Of course, it's impossible to talk about transformation and change in the context of Burberry Inspire without mentioning the impact of Covid 19 and its effect on the school. To Isobel's mind, Carlton Keighley struck gold in having The Hepworth Wakefield as their arts partner during the pandemic, even though artists in residence wouldn't be able to work with the students in class. Carlton Keighley only have one member of staff for art, who was incredibly excited to work with arts practitioners, but it wasn't to be. However, THW's ingenious redeployment of resources into arts packs for all the students proved to be a winner. "They were amazing in terms of the provision that they put together and we did virtual lessons, fully resourced," recalls Isobel. "And so, in a lot of respects, there were really good benefits towards us actually taking that approach. Without speaking for Cathy, our

art teacher, I think she would take a lot from those sessions. Regardless of whether they happened in person or not." Some fantastic pieces of work were completed at home, despite the difficulties that schools up and down the country experienced in trying to create engagement when delivering education online. And when school reopened, Cathy continued to feel supported. "They Zoomed into our lessons, and we had them on the screen, and they provided a camera so they could see the classroom. I went round with an iPad to show the work, so it was really interactive, and it just seemed to work really nicely. We've got a really strong relationship with The Hepworth – even though we've never met them in real life."

Taking the long view, Isobel has a clear appreciation of how four years of Burberry Inspire will give the students of Carlton Keighley a fundamentally different experience going forward. It's already given rise to a wealth of new opportunities and broadened the curriculum. But it's also shown the school their potential – and what other positive changes could be put in place in the future. Isobel feels that it's time to think about what other opportunities can be arranged, "whether that's through our extra-curricular offer or people we can bring in to help our students. I've learnt that we have to invite people in from the creative sector to talk and that our students can totally surprise you. We cannot let this drop. We need to somehow think about how we can pick this up and continue. We're going to be absolutely gutted to see it go."

