

Case study: The Oaks Secondary School

Designing a curriculum around film: cinema-going and after school

The Oaks in Durham is a Secondary Special School (11–19) catering for students with a range of learning difficulties, and a small minority of students with autism, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school is rated outstanding by Ofsted. It offers a sixth form for young people with severe learning difficulties as they cannot normally attend other colleges. Some 42% of the students are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. The school runs a special unit of work related to the watching and dissecting of films under the AQA Unit Award Scheme which is for recording achievement that gives students recognition for completing short units of work. Students write about their experiences of going to the cinema as part of the unit, as well as actively engaging with online film reviews.

Films screened in the after school film club include *A Room for Romeo Brass*, *Looking for Eric* and *Tokyo Godfathers*.

The Oaks School was named FILMCLUB of the Year at the First Light Awards ceremony at London's Odeon Leicester Square in March 2011.

“Students in the school make excellent progress in their personal development, as a result of an excellent curriculum, extended by high quality partnerships, and the many opportunities to be enterprising and creative.”

Ofsted Report 2010, which judged the school to be outstanding

Impact on students

The Oaks is a Special Educational Needs school, teaching young people with mild to profound disabilities. The school uses film as part of its enrichment activities. Students with different learning disabilities can mix and socialise, learning new social skills. Pupils have become more confident in mixing with other students.

Many of the pupils have also come from deprived and abusive backgrounds, with many in care. The school provides a club for pupils to watch age-appropriate films, and many pupils have gained confidence from the provision of this opportunity to watch films in a social setting.

Furthermore, some of the young people have never watched a black and white film, but are now big fans (especially of Norman Wisdom). In general, the young people have responded to classic films in positive ways.

“An impressive feature of the outstanding curriculum is extensive enrichment in the form of clubs.”

Ofsted Report 2010

Writing film reviews

Writing reviews of films can help to improve literacy and IT skills. Students write reviews to the best of their ability – using vocabulary and adjectives that they would not normally use in the classroom. One boy was so motivated by watching films that he began to write film reviews at home on his own initiative. He was recognised for his work and given an Assembly Award.

Teachers' pedagogic practice

Teachers put in extraordinary energy, commitment and dedication running two weekly film clubs, introducing diverse films to the students, helping them to discuss and dissect the films.

"We are all delighted to have won this award. Members of our film club have not only enjoyed watching the films, but have also valued the time spent discussing them with friends and sharing ideas and preferences."

Head teacher at the Oaks

"I was very happy to present an award to The Oaks, because films are a very important part of our lives, to tell great stories... Film is inspirational and you see people from different parts of the world, not as dissimilar to you as you perhaps thought."

Actor Dougray Scott (*Mission Impossible 2, Desperate Housewives, Ever After*)
who presented the FILMCLUB of the Year award

Summary of the benefits of using film in education

- Improves literacy and IT skills
- Encourages good behaviour
- Provides a time and space to socialise and learn new social skills
- Gains qualification through writing reviews
- Offers young people a chance to broaden their cultural horizons

Facts and Figures

- Type of school: Special
- Mixed gender 11–19
- 235 pupils (33 in sixth form)



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