

**A.N.D**

A new direction for arts,  
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# **CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON**

## **SIX STORIES OF CREATIVITY AND PARTNERSHIP**

**COLUMBIA PRIMARY SCHOOL**  
**GALLIONS PRIMARY SCHOOL**  
**ISLINGTON ARTS AND MEDIA SCHOOL**  
**LAURISTON PRIMARY SCHOOL**  
**STORMONT HOUSE SCHOOL**  
**THOMAS TALLIS SCHOOL**

**SARAH B DAVIES**

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# CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON

## THOMAS TALLIS SCHOOL

Thomas Tallis School is a large secondary school based in the London Borough of Greenwich. It is a Specialist Arts College and has also gained Leading Edge status. The school has units for students with hearing impairment and students with speech and language difficulties. Ofsted rated the school as good in 2010. Thomas Tallis School was involved in the Creative Partnerships programme from the pilot phase in 2002 to 2011.

In 2008 the school was awarded School of Creativity status for its capacity to provide innovative leadership and support to schools. Since the end of Creative Partnerships in 2011 the school remains committed to creative learning through inter-disciplinary partnerships and continues to value placing students at the heart of partnership.

Director of Arts, Creativity and Communications, Jon Nicholls, tells the story of Thomas Tallis School's Creative Partnerships experience and its progression since.

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**IMAGES**

All photographs by  
Billy Rowlinson,  
([www.billyrowlinson.co.uk](http://www.billyrowlinson.co.uk)).  
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## About the school prior to Creative Partnerships

Having been a specialist arts college since 1998 we were keen to explore ways of promoting creativity across the curriculum – rather than just in the arts – as an agent in school improvement benefitting creative learning across the whole curriculum. Some of us were frustrated by the artificial barriers between different subjects and the way that schools had traditionally organised the curriculum. Creative Partnerships offered the opportunity to challenge some of these orthodoxies. **We felt that pedagogy linked to creative learning and inter-disciplinary conversations between different subject areas (e.g. science and art) would have benefits for learners and teachers.**

We were selected by the Local Authority to be part of the initial Creative Partnerships pilot in 2002 based, I think, on our experience as a specialist arts college. Our bid to become a School of Creativity in 2008 emphasised the role of students as creative agents and the many successful projects and partnerships that had taken place across the curriculum. Apart from the additional funds, we were keen to take advantage of the status to connect with other like-minded schools in order to form a network across the UK.

## Projects and Partnerships

We were already experienced in negotiating our own partnerships with practitioners, but could see that the Creative Agent role was a beneficial one. We used our Agent's skills in providing a critical perspective and encouragement for our plans. Creative Partnerships' emphasis on young people's agency was also important for us, forcing us to consider ways in which pupil voice could be enhanced through creative learning. We created new student governors and included students on our Action Research Groups. We were also influenced by the Sorrell Foundation's 'Joinedupdesignforschools' model in which students take on the role of client for large-scale design projects. Becoming a School of Creativity coincided with our Building Schools for the Future (BSF) project, so much of the work we did was focused on the design of our new school and how to celebrate the culture of our existing building. I think the emphasis on community engagement was also important.

However, the programme was nationwide and as such came with a sometimes frustrating level of paperwork. Budgetary restrictions from the funders limited what partnerships we could form with the arts sector, meaning that creative learning was still seen by many people in and out of school as an arts-based initiative. This was something we wanted to get away from and we aimed to explore a more interdisciplinary approach. In this sense our most successful partnership has been with the Helen Storey Foundation and with Helen herself. We have undertaken several well-documented projects with her that set a benchmark for critical enquiry and interdisciplinary creativity. Her thinking equally inspired students and colleagues; and the projects themselves were incredibly ambitious and forward-looking.

## Change and Impact

Since Creative Partnerships ended we remain committed to supporting interdisciplinary creativity and have maintained a dedicated source of funding that colleagues can bid for to continue experimenting with creative learning.

**We maintain a view that creative learning experiments are an important part of school culture and that good ideas can come from anywhere.** Our new school has attempted to embody the spirit of Creative Partnerships and our School of Creativity status in its design and interior decoration. Whilst our focus now is very much on responding to the Gove agenda of performance in the core subjects and EBacc subjects, we have maintained a rich arts curriculum, have just attained Artsmark Gold status and we are looking at expanding our use of the Arts Award qualification.

I think our commitment to creative learning has always been pragmatic. We are hesitant about making excessive claims for what we were able to achieve. However, I am especially proud of our support of our family of schools and local community groups during the Creative Partnerships years. Recent changes in the school may have resulted in a perceived loss of community engagement and I think this is because we were previously doing so much to build bridges with local people, parents, carers and colleagues in other schools. I hope that we can begin to rebuild these relationships now that we are in our new building.

Those practitioners with whom we have worked over the years have really inspired us. Despite the lack of funding currently we are hoping to maintain partnerships where they can add value and provide our students with a cultural entitlement befitting an Artsmark Gold school. I feel the best partnerships have been long standing because this ensures a kind of cultural sympathy between the partners. Wherever possible we have attempted to ensure that students are at the centre of the partnership and that the tasks have been related to real need – e.g. BSF. How I think I'd measure the success of this is related to the school's ability to take risks, try something new without the fear of failure and in encouraging young people to take a lead role.



## Looking forward

Jon Nicholls was asked to use his learning and experience of creative approaches and partnership working to advise other schools that are interested in similar work.

### **On what is critical to making creative programmes work in a school setting:**

- a willingness on the part of leadership to accept that not every experiment will be a conventional success or yield immediate results in terms of attainment
- an acceptance that creative learning contributes to community engagement and the wellbeing of those in the institution
- some seed funding to ensure that teachers and students can step outside the existing paradigm and play with new materials, techniques and processes. There will always need to be support for meetings and related training
- someone in a relatively senior position who is committed to supporting and arguing for the development of such projects (possibly playing the role of Creative Agent) and who doesn't mind taking responsibility for calculated risks
- the support of parents and carers for the school's ethos
- thoughtful and pragmatic partnership organisations that understand the constraints of working in schools.

### **Recommendations and suggestions to schools seeking out new creative partnerships:**

- contact your nearest Creative Partnerships school and talk with the Co-ordinator
- develop a social media strategy so that you can reach out to schools all over the world that are committed to this type of learning (e.g. Oklahoma, Singapore, Taiwan)
- invite your local cultural and learning providers into school for an open discussion about how you might work more effectively together (e.g. work experience, cultural entitlement/enrichment, Saturday schools and holiday activities, cultural celebrations such as Black History Month, The Big Draw)
- create an Action Research Group with a mixture of staff, students and possibly parents, carers and governors to investigate how to build more opportunities for creative learning
- write a collaborative manifesto for creative learning and launch to the whole community
- dedicate space on your school website, VLE and intranet for sharing best practice in creative learning
- carve out a small budget to support cross-curricular creative learning programmes (linked to CPD and appraisal processes)
- set up a government sponsored summer school with a focus on creative learning as a transition project for Year 6.

## School links and project examples:

[www.thomastallis.co.uk](http://www.thomastallis.co.uk)

[Teacher Exchange project](#)

[www.helenstoreyfoundation.org/pro4.htm](http://www.helenstoreyfoundation.org/pro4.htm)

[Eye & I project](#)

[www.helenstoreyfoundation.org/pro5.htm](http://www.helenstoreyfoundation.org/pro5.htm)

[Wonderland project](#)

[www.helenstoreyfoundation.org/pro7.htm](http://www.helenstoreyfoundation.org/pro7.htm)

[Creative Tallis](#)

[www.creativetallis.com/creative-learning.html](http://www.creativetallis.com/creative-learning.html)

[Tallis Graphics Blog](#)

[www.tallisgraphics.tumblr.com](http://www.tallisgraphics.tumblr.com)

[Tallis Uniform Blog](#)

[www.talisuniform.tumblr.com](http://www.talisuniform.tumblr.com)

[Creativity World Forum website](#)

[www.creativepioneers.weebly.com](http://www.creativepioneers.weebly.com)



## A New Direction

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We believe that together we can make London the best city in the world for young people's cultural and creative development. We campaign for the value of arts and culture to the lives of all young Londoners. We promote practical ways that schools and other institutions can develop cultural opportunities. We work with arts and cultural partners to ensure the highest quality in work with children and young people.

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