

## Coombeshead College is large 11–18 Comprehensive school with Media Arts Status in Newton Abbot, Devon.

### What did the school want to achieve?

Three large curriculum areas decided to dedicate the whole first term to working together – The Expressive Arts – art, photography, music, drama and dance and humanities – geography, history, citizenship and beliefs and values and English and media. We wanted to concentrate on the following aims:

- To give students a greater sense of their personal, local, national and international sense of identity and raise their aspirations
- To explore a more consistent, collaborative approach to teaching and learning
- Explore new media, technologies across all subjects and embedding this in the curriculum.

As part of the media status it was also decided to explore and develop new technologies – digital art, photography, animation, video and ICT in creating exciting outcomes, not just within the arts but across all subjects areas enabling staff to gain extra CPD and make the best use of the facilities available in school.

### How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

'Impact days' are now a regular feature of the school calendar and with one featuring in late November of the first term we decided to use this as an event to head towards in our classroom teaching and use it as a celebration.

Teachers wanted to create a 'deeper learning experience' by creating a more cross curricular approach in their planning and delivery.

To break down the compartmentalisation of subjects and the 50 minute KS3 lesson time, students were given Identity folders in which all work from the various subject areas was collected. These developed into portfolios of work that could be drawn from by various staff in each subject, e.g. a local folk story created in English could then be used as the starting point for the Year 7 Choir, and a map of the school journey in geography could then be used as the inspiration for a memory box or digital collage in art. The aim of these

portfolios was that each student had a collaborative body of work that could be viewed, assessed by groups of staff from across the curriculum.

The Impact day in late November enabled teachers to work alongside visiting artists working in a variety of digital media delivering a series of workshops. Students created music, raps, animations, films, digital art, a 'Big Draw!' event, dance, drama, installation, and e-portfolios and profile pages using rafi.ki – an online learning community. They were given a much longer period of time to work on a larger, more ambitious scale, and in a variety of learning styles and had access to spend the whole day on activities, working individually, collaboratively in smaller and large groups.

The work from this day was then presented to the public as an exhibition and performance the following evening showcasing all of the work which had been created.

### How well did the school achieve these aims?

The amount of work achieved by the Year 7 groups by the end of their first term at Coombeshead College was phenomenal. The collective lesson time of all the participating subjects added together created a 'greater sense of purpose' for the Year 7 working a large scale project. Many staff across the various departments collaborated in PPA time and after school keeping a continuous dialogue 'live' about the project and helping maintain the momentum and drive needed on such a task. Students and staff learnt a great deal about each other in lessons and on the impact day.

The large maps created showing the location where students, parents and grandparents came from sparked lively and curious debate giving us all a sense our place in the world. Student's personal videos of their journeys to school gave an insight into the lives of those we teach and showed them in a fresher way as people. The innovative approach to combining work from the student portfolios into films, animations, sound, exhibition, installation propelled the work to a new audience. Exhibitions and performances of this nature are usually for GCSE and A-level pupils; however the resulting work was of a very high standard with every single Year 7 (240) having work included somewhere

and over three quarters of them having an active role in various performances on the night. Parents were able to see and enjoy their students work in an interactive and visual way, discussing work with teachers.

Many staff who worked within their departments now had reason to work collaboratively and form new working relationships and friendships.

As the first large scale 'new curriculum' project Coombeshead and all its stakeholders has seen Identity as being a huge success, with students and staff already talking about 'next year'.

### Next steps ?

Is this a box ticked? We've done the 'new curriculum' so lets get back to our separate departments and old ways of working. Not at all, the first step has opened our eyes to a different way of working and although successful there is still a lot to be learnt. We have already started the review and evaluation of this first term and are now discussing how we can improve upon this. The learning curve is steep but for it to be worthwhile it has to be.

**Sam Eyre** is a South-West RSA and Subject Leader for Photography and Art Teacher at Coombeshead College and

**Richard Marks** is Head of Expressive Arts at Coombeshead College

