



Students won first prize in the local show with a sustainable project focused on creating an igloo out of milk bottles.

CONNECT THE DOTS

Linking Arts to other subject areas can help students' take a more creative approach to learning. Exploring scientific concepts through music, visual art, or performance also develops essential skills such as collaboration and communication.

EMMA DAVIES

IN an age where innovation is high on the agenda, Ananda Marga River School in Queensland is ahead of the curve.

Art at Ananda Marga – a compulsory subject – incorporates a revolutionary pedagogical approach to develop problem solving abilities, critical thinking skills, and innovative ideas that can be transferred to other subject areas.

"We follow a neo-humanist curriculum and neo-humanist education which looks at all layers of human development and gives a high consideration to the Arts as a forum of channelling students' creativity and their sense of wellbeing," Principal Anne Donoghoe said.

"We have an early childhood centre to year six, and every class has an hour art lesson each week; a quality art lesson with a specialist art teacher which goes above what happens in classrooms."

The key point of difference is the school uses art to closely align, compliment, and deepen the children's learning in the

classroom.

Arts and Cultural Studies teacher Alieta Belle said teachers at the school value art as another pedagogy, and so she works with classroom teachers to find out the main focus for the term.

"For example, in year four they are studying the history of ancient Egypt so in art we incorporate it. I was focusing on clay, so we made clay pendants with themes inspired from Egypt," she said.

"Art and science work really well together. Art and history work really well together. It's not just a tokenistic way of doing art – it's a way to imbed the knowledge the kids are learning in the classroom."

Ms Belle said that while guidelines exist for the students, art allows them to be innovative, experiment, and to test their creative ideas.

"If children are too used to being sat down and taught a particular way of doing things then they are not really innovating," she said.

"Art in itself is not just that old fashioned idea of drawing an apple that's in front of you and drawing it well – it's also about conceptual ideas and design."

There's also plenty of room for

collaboration with local artists, art shows, galleries and even parents.

"One of the Arts subject areas is Media Arts and we entered our children's work in child-created film festivals, which we've had success in," Ms Belle said.

"Last year there was an environmental documentary competition for young people and our kids decided to make a film about fungi. We supported them to do that and they won the competition," she said.

"They are having actual, real life success. Their film about fungi is getting screened daily at the local environmental centre."

Ms Donoghoe stressed that art is an integral part of student learning and meets all the outcomes of the Australian Curriculum.

"We really see the value of art throughout the whole school and curriculum," she said.

"Not only are we talking about developing innovation and creativity, it also helps with students social and emotional development."

"Schools are cutting back on the Arts because there's so much pressure to go to the academia – maths and literacy – but I think we're realising (and there's a lot of research to back this up) is that the more

children are exposed to art in the curriculum the more their maths and literacy abilities increase alongside their sense of wellbeing," Ms Donoghoe said.

Ms Belle said there has been a history of leaving the Arts out, and while there are many teachers delivering arts classes in schools they are not necessarily arts specialists.

"Because art is recognised by ACARA as a subject we really do need the teachers who are delivering art – who don't necessarily have training in art – to go to professional development so that they are not giving out colouring in sheets or teaching a very old, outdated view of what art is," she said.

"They need support, and I think one good avenue for professional development would be for teachers to go to their local galleries and go directly to artists."

"Teachers know how to teach, they just need to get good, quality skills from people in specialist fields to increase their knowledge," Ms Belle said.

"In the changing future children are going to need those conceptual and creative skills that come from the Arts."



Every class has a dedicated hour long art lesson each week.



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