

**Let's Get Messy 2025**  
**Arts interventions project at Dibden Park School**  
**May and July 2025**

**The Project**

In May 2025, mural artist Emily Wakefield was commissioned as part of the Let's Get Messy project delivered by Wakey Wakey ARTS, to deliver an 'arts intervention' to young people with high Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) at a New Forest independent school.

Through our arts interventions, we aim to improve social skills/confidence, self-esteem, technical skills, mental health, sense of self and engagement with education. There were additional aims identified by the Clinical team at the school, who saw a need for a wider range of activities to support many aspects.

Place-making, belonging and ownership for the young people (Clinical Psychologist), the chance to offer new ways of connecting and communicating with each other (Speech and Language Therapist), and the opportunity for young people to explore sensory preferences and to work on their fine motor skills (Occupational Therapist).

At the point of delivery, there were 39 young people aged 8-16yrs on roll (with some unable to come onto site), all had an education, health and care plan, and all were considered to be some of the most socially-disadvantaged young people in the county.

Every member of staff knows young people by their initials, and every movement a young person makes between rooms is recorded on radios. Staff are calm and collected on the whole, and respectful of young people and their experiences. We were working with a relatively small sample of students, but we were still pleasantly surprised by how encouraging the staff were and as a result how much success we had getting young people who we had just met to complete evaluation forms and to try new things. They weren't afraid to get stuck in, and they also did not seem to have any inclination to hinder each other's work. From our experience, this feels unique to this site.

The structure of the project included four days of workshops with Emily, in which students learnt about the technical aspects of creating a mural: design, bringing together multiple elements to form one piece of art, colour-mixing and shading.



They each designed and decorated pre-cut MDF fish of different sizes, a group turtle, two jellyfish, and small card rocks with messages of hope and positivity chosen by them.



As well as delivering the workshops, Emily laid the foundation of the mural within the reception area, by adding foaming waves, seaweed and bubbles which the sea creatures and rocks would be added to on the final day. This generated visible excitement and a greater understanding of the project from those passing by.



The four day mural workshops were supported by Project Assistant Charley Flexman (a young Producer from Bournemouth), Wakey Wakey ARTS lead Claire Reilly, and representative from Culture in Common Jemma Corbin.

As part of the project, six students from within the key stage two area of the school also attended a cultural trip to Southampton City Art Gallery, as well as the SeaCity Museum. There, they learnt about historical portrait artists and took part in discussions about sculptures and sculptors, with guide and workshop leader (and previous long-term Art Teacher): Amy Morris.



They also took part in a workshop, making clay heads by following step-by-step instructions as a group. This tested their ability to self-manage as they waited for one another (resisting the urge to keep fiddling with their art) or raced to keep up with one another (resisting the temptation to panic or be reckless).



Some students were moments away from crushing their clay heads with frustration but all six of them achieved wonderfully diverse results and were noticeably proud of what they had achieved.

Before making the return trip, students soaked up local history at the SeaCity Museum. Some tried on hats, and others tinkered with very old arcade games. All had a mid-afternoon

ice-cream, made a purchase in the shop, and had time to run and play within a secure patch of grass that we stumbled across.



Across the arts interventions week, there was engagement from 18 different young people, with some returning multiple times to the art room. We witnessed some lovely moments, which were observed by school staff:

*A hasn't been in the school building at all and has only been able to achieve two hours of online learning for about a term. This is his third lesson ever in school and despite some resistance, he engaged fully and painted a fish.*

We worked with upwards of 15 different school staff who understood and valued the project, role-modelled participation and who supported us to manoeuvre safely around the school. The staff team worked seamlessly together and seemed to have a very positive impact on the young people who they appear to know well.

We ended the momentous week by gathering in the reception area to say our 'goodbyes' and final 'well done's', knowing that the students were truly delighted and proud of their accomplishments. In the true spirit of these young people, their pre-occupied minds and a slick and urgent taxi-calling process though, it was unclear whether they'd even registered our presence!

#### **Evaluation methods:**

Evaluation methods included a baseline and end measure questionnaire for students, an interview with the Artist and general anecdotal feedback from staff, students and visitors to the site.

Unfortunately, due to the timetable of the arts interventions week (and the amount of tutor groups there are that cannot be mixed) we were not able to achieve two full days' of art workshops with each young person as desired. Instead, they dropped in during slots

pre-booked by their tutors - with spontaneous arrivals sometimes occurring which we tried to accommodate with space/resources where it was safe to keep them engaged.

Students left the room when they had completed their work (often with no advance warning). Because of this, and the fact that the majority of young people hadn't experienced much contact time with us yet, it didn't feel appropriate to introduce the end measure questionnaire at the end of the arts interventions week<sup>1</sup>, or to introduce the Arts Award qualification either.

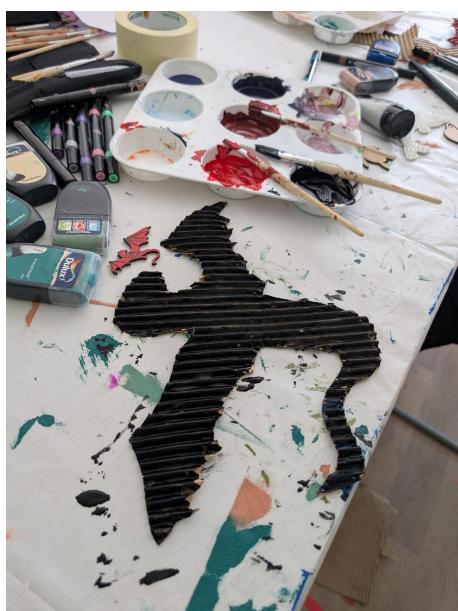
It was agreed that we would return to the school in the summer months to deliver workshops which would generate material for the 'wellbeing nooks' situated on the first floor. We also agreed to support the delivery of Arts Awards with the six primary-aged young people who attended the trip with us.

### **Project extension:**

On 8th July, Claire returned to the site to deliver further workshops for those who showed interest in supporting the 'wellbeing nooks' project, and to complete a refurbishment of the windowsills on the first floor which are deep enough for comfortable seating and for some sensory elements to be applied. This was achieved due to underspend from the Go & See trip (approved by Jemma).

There were five timetabled sessions lasting 40 minutes each, and students had consulted with Occupational Therapist Laura Davies to choose themes for the nooks: Space, Dragons and Sea.

Due to time constraints, the purpose for the spaces and the priority for students to have decision-making power, we agreed that these spaces would be much more raw than the art created for the reception area, with 'shiny', 'fluffy' and 'ribbed' materials to touch, and the walls adorned with more pre-cut MDF shapes painted and coloured by students using an autism-friendly palette selected by the clinical team.



<sup>1</sup> Some young people had only seen us once, and therefore had only just completed their baseline measure questionnaire.

The workshops were a brilliant success, with eight students signing up to participate and choosing which themes to contribute to. All students present showed warmth and familiarity following the mural project, and completed the end measure questionnaire willingly. By the end of the day, all three nooks were painted in teal, mint green or duck egg blue with help from Therapies Assistant Mim.

Unfortunately, an incident on site late-afternoon hampered our ability to complete the nooks with the materials, or to seek out extra students to complete the questionnaire. We did however gift Primary School lead Tracy with 15 Discover Arts Award booklets as she'd like to do it with her whole year group in the Autumn.

N.b. Following a revisit to the site in August, student art work has now been incorporated into the 'wellbeing nooks' to create a calming, sensory environment for the students to take a break in.



#### **Next steps/additional outcomes:**

- We will return in Autumn term to support the delivery and moderation of Arts Awards for the new intake of Primary School children, using booklets, pre-existing materials leftover from other projects and underspend for the certification.
- There has also been a request from Teaching Assistant Holly for pocket-sized lesson plans for her to deliver to students in the absence of an art teacher (although one has now been recruited - start date unknown). We have reached out to Amy Morris from the gallery to support with providing these.
- There has been a request from Primary School lead for a trip to a Pottery Cafe following the success of the clay heads workshop.
- Jubilee School (a sister school of Dibden Park School in Waterlooville) has booked their own Let's Get Messy arts interventions project to complete an outdoor mural in their playground in the Autumn term. This will be completed by Emily alongside a small group of 'Arts Award' students.
- Emily completed her first education workshops and is now keen to do more. Using funding from the school, we were able to cover Emily's DBS check to enable her to diversify her work.

### Overall:

Across the workshops, trip and extended project, we had engagement with 18 different young people, accumulating 60 learning hours, and worked with over 15 members of staff, many who took part in the workshops too and who created artwork for the walls.



All young people were aged between 10-15 years old.

An assortment of feedback follows:

'We have lovely feedback from visitors when they come onto site, saying how welcoming it is here!' - Member of the reception team.

'I didn't know that white and red made pink but now I do!' - Young person

'I keep forgetting where I am [when doing my fish]' - Member of staff

One member of staff on the trip has lived in Southampton for 7 years and has never been to the gallery and said they were looking forward to it! - Observation from Wakey Wakey ARTS

'Thank you so much for this! It's been incredible to see the pride and sense of community that has burst out of this project. It's exactly what we needed...I'm looking forward to you coming back <3...This project has been sensational in so many ways.' - Headteacher

The Artist was asked: **Have you learnt anything during this project?** She answered: 'Lots! Mainly to do with varying personalities/behaviours of children and how they might like to be communicated with i.e, not being too full on and letting them relax into the space before throwing things at them. I also learnt that things don't always go to plan in terms of timings and how quickly people can get through certain tasks so to always have some back up ideas for when people finish early for example.'

We also asked **If you could sum the project up in three words, what would they be?** and Emily answered: 'Challenging, worthy, inspiring'.

The Artist made observations about students who she made particular progress with. She reported that 'M wandered in hesitantly at the beginning of the week and looked really nervous to get involved. She left the room without participating but her teacher said they may be back later in the week - whilst I was in reception on Thursday, M and her mum came into school and I got chatting to her Mum who said that M had been telling her all about the project, which I was quite shocked at because I didn't think she was interested. M ended up painting her own fish on Friday and when she came down to reception, after they had all been stuck, she seemed really happy with herself and her fish!'

Another student has excelled in all areas according to scores in their baseline and end measure questionnaires. Their confidence was seen to have doubled, and when asked 'do you like yourself?' they changed their previous answer of 'sometimes' to 'most of the time'.

When scoring how well their mind feels out of 10 (1 is low and 10 is high), they moved from a 2 to a 7.

Of the students who answered questions directly from Culture in Common, when asked **How much did you enjoy this project?** Choose a number from 1 to 10, where 1 = "Not at all" and 10 = "I loved it!", 50% selected 10/10, with the remaining 50% ranging from 4-7.

When asked if **doing this project makes you want to do more creative activities in the future?**, over half of the young people agreed that it did.

Ideas from young people for future projects include painting a dragon mural, doing something with penguins, creating a landscape and making things.

Finally, when asked **How much did this project help you feel creative?** Choose a number from 1 to 10, where 1 = "Not at all" and 10 = "I got to be super creative!", 63% voted 8 or above.

N.b. there was not an opportunity to set context for the end measure, and so it was unclear whether the young people were judging just the wellbeing nooks project, or the project in its entirety. Additionally, some members of staff scribed for young people, with one colleague choosing to skip questions that they felt might trigger the young person rather than giving the young person the opportunity to answer or not answer for themselves. This is an issue in general with this client group, as it is a fine balance between keeping them engaged in the 'paperwork' and making it as accessible as possible, and not leading them or making assumptions.

Overall, we are thrilled with how the project has gone and are also really pleased with the blossoming relationship with school staff and students. This was an unexpected outcome. We hope to continue the relationship, and to support Emily to continue delivering education workshops for the young people who need it most.

We're really grateful to the Culture in Common team for allowing us to reach so many young people who don't have exposure to art, or a regular creative outlet, as part of their educational experience. It feels that on many levels it has made a positive impact and that staff and students have learnt from one another in this shared experience. This is just the start of the incorporation of art as an additional wellbeing tool within the setting.

To that end, we asked Emily **What will be your takeaway from participating in the project?** 'That art seems to have the most calming effect on children with behavioural needs. It was so lovely to see them all in the zone momentarily whilst painting.'

And from Clinical Psychologist who invited Wakey Wakey ARTS into the setting: 'We have been absolutely blown away by how fantastic this project has been for our students; we are so grateful! Thank you 😊 😊 😊 😊'.