

Drama performances to address violence – Cadbury-Blue

A collaboration between West Midlands schools officers and a performing arts course at a sixth form college, resulting in an educational live performance addressing the dangers of criminality.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence (other) Community engagement
Organisation	West Midlands Police
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Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police Education
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2021
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Children and young people
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Aim

To contribute to protecting young people from criminal behaviour through education and raising awareness.

Intended outcome

To raise awareness and highlight the dangers of criminality among young people aged 11–14, measured through student and teacher feedback.

Description

Live theatre performances to discuss topics relevant to young people are popular within schools. However, not all schools can afford to hire theatre companies to provide this input, with some schools reporting this can cost up to £3000 to deliver to their students. By collaborating with a local college, West Midlands school officers have been able to create and deliver relevant theatre inputs to schools for free.

A school intervention and protection officer contacted the BTEC Performing Arts course at the local sixth form college. The officer asked if they wanted to be involved in delivering performances to key stage 3 students on knife crime and joint enterprise (the prosecution of all members of a group due to the actions of the group as a whole), as these were identified as key issues facing young people in Birmingham at the time.

The performing arts students were given six weeks, half a term, to develop their performance. Once a week a schools officer would visit the Performing Arts students at college to monitor what was involved in the delivery and ensure it was suitable for key stage 3 students. For example, advising the students that fight scenes/other distressing scenes should be 'off-set' to be less graphic. Key stage 3 teachers were also invited to the dress rehearsals to make sure they felt the content was suitable for their students.

In the next college term, the performances took place across two secondary schools, with over 900 children seeing it. The performances were 30 minutes long. The students ran everything in the performance apart from the lighting. A schools intervention and protection officer in uniform managed the lighting during the performances. This was identified as an impactful way to increase police presence in schools in a comfortable and positive way.

Due to the success of this input, schools have continued asking for it. The initiative is now in its second year. The sixth form students are now given the opportunity to decide on what topics they want to cover, based on what they believe is relevant to young people today. These topics have ranged from bullying to gang issues. This project has now been embedded into the performing arts course, therefore college performing art students also receive grades towards their Theatre in Education syllabus.

Overall impact

- Positive reviews from both students within the schools and school staff. The decision to collaborate with the local college allowed for the input to be free to schools. This was greatly appreciated by the staff at these schools.
- A positive impact has been indicated through positive verbal feedback from teachers and students. The students are also seen to engage well with the content and can be heard discussing the topics after the performance.

Learning

The inputs must be closely monitored so they are suitable and safe for the students. This is ensured by:

- Weekly visits to the college by the schools officer to make sure the performance is suitable for the key stage 3 students and the sensitive topics addressed.
- An opportunity for teachers to watch a dress rehearsal of the performance to provide feedback and ensure the input is appropriate for their students. This is also beneficial in giving teachers a full understanding of the content to make sure they complete appropriate safeguarding to students.
- The performance is scripted so the input sticks to the agreed topics and style.

A barrier is getting the performances written and ready in time and to fit in with schools' busy curriculum. To overcome this, it is important to have a good understanding of school term times and begin talking to colleges and schools early in the academic year.

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