



Comments

Judges for the ArtWorks awards said that the way in which children of varying ages and abilities were integrated in a shared project through different activities was impressive. They felt the pupils must have gained a very real sense of how a landscape could be designed and constructed. They were struck by the originality and quality of the final artwork, describing the project as 'a series of simple ideas yet pushed much further than one might expect'.



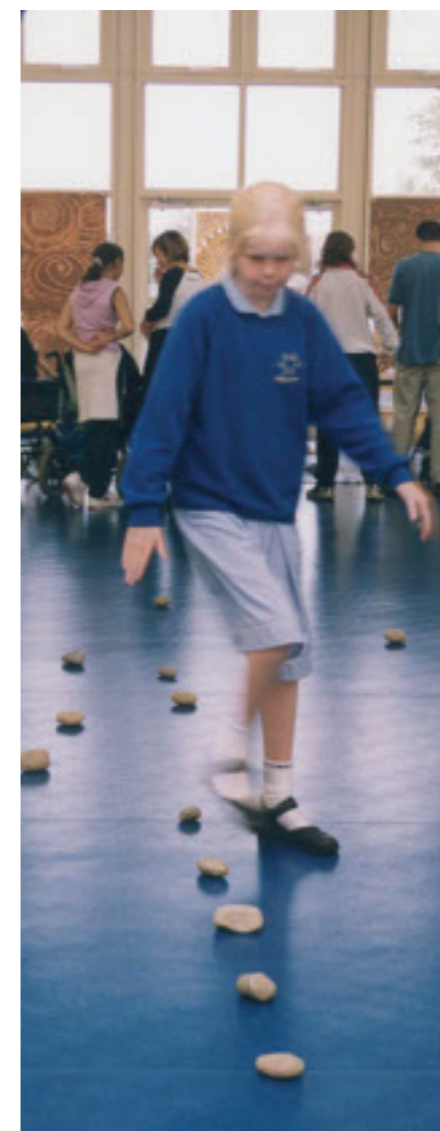
The sculpture is a testament to the artist's ability to respond to a difficult brief. It balances challenge and stimulation for children with physical disabilities and learning difficulties with safety. It is very well constructed and beautifully integrated to mitigate against vandalism. At the same time it is an imaginative landmark, benefiting both school and local community, and improving as it grows. Artists are potentially extremely vulnerable to delays and unforeseen changes, when working within the context of major construction programmes. It is imperative they are supported psychologically and financially should problems outside their control occur. It is therefore important that the client has the financial flexibility to provide this support where needed.

At The Milestone School, the sometimes fraught construction phase ultimately produced a highly successful artwork, which then went on to win a prestigious national award.

Lesley Greene
Public Art Adviser, Gloucestershire County Council



Further information on public art in Gloucestershire available from **Helen Owen**
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Case studies from across a county

Public art practice in Gloucestershire

These case studies are a response to requests from practitioners in Gloucestershire for examples of public art in practice. The studies are selected from a range of projects, and illustrate a variety of different approaches. Some were commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council; others by different commissioners, using different artists. We hope these short texts will help others to commission artists with confidence and success.

Milestone School's 'Giant Stitches'

Winner of the Clore Duffield Foundation Artworks Awards 2002

Introduction

Gloucestershire County Council operates a 'Percent for Art' policy on key capital building developments. A percentage of the capital budget for a project is used to commission new work by artists, which becomes part of the scheme, improving the built environment.

The Milestone School is the amalgamation of three special schools into one. The idea of commissioning an artist to use landscape as a sculptural opportunity came from discussions between the staff, architect and art consultant as to how to best use the 'percent for art'.

Context

The Milestone School serves children with a very wide range of mobility and learning difficulties, many severe. The County Council is committed to consultation and involvement in its percent for art policy development. In this case the staff felt strongly that the artwork should not only be pleasing for the school and the local community, but should provide physical challenge and mental stimulus for the children. A special kind of artist was required. A brief was drawn up with the staff steering group.

Artist Selection

The art consultant and architect drew on the County Council's annually advertised database to choose a long list of artists with relevant experience for this unique brief. The art consultant felt that this list still did not quite answer the requirements of the brief. She researched other artists



amongst whom was Mike Fletcher. The art consultant had worked with him on a previous commission at Sunfield Residential School for Children with Severe Learning Difficulties. Three artists were short listed and interviewed by the staff steering group. Mike Fletcher was their unanimous choice.

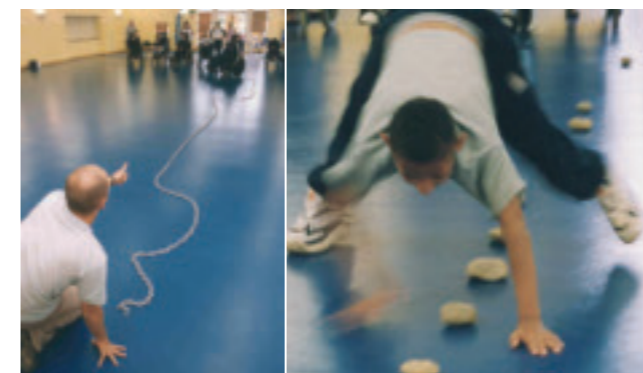
Commission Process

Mike Fletcher designed a rippling earth work along the whole length of the school frontage in front of the tarmacked playground. It consists of ridges, along which native silver birch trees are planted. These will in time enclose the sculpture, creating a raised woodland. In between the ridges, furrows carry pathways designed with images and mosaic inlays. The slopes are gentle yet accessible, creating the challenge and stimulus which the staff hoped for. The landscape is connected to the tarmac as if a giant has stitched the two areas together using the strips of concrete pathways.

Mike Fletcher presented his design ideas to a meeting of all the staff, some parents and children. His ideas were very well received. His proposal included workshops with the children to develop images for the pathways. The art into landscape activities



were carefully planned, according to the needs and abilities of the children. Children with severe learning difficulties explored pattern and texture by painting intuitively with clay slip on paper. These wonderful sensory mud drawings were displayed in the hall, enjoyed by everyone, but also provided inspiration for the artist's images, as they could be directly translated to the outdoor sculpture. Spatial arrangements were explored through scattering pebble stepping stones. This involved wheelchair users so that their practical needs could be accommodated along the pathways. The pathway forms were created by snaking chains along the hall floor. These activities "combined to provide a physical and conceptual understanding of the relationship between movement, markmaking, space, line and texture" explained staff member



Angela Cooke. Staff were involved very directly in these activities, because most of the children are cared for on a one to one basis.

Construction Problems

The "Percent for Art" was a relatively small sum (£10,000) for the scope of the commission - workshops, design development, presentations, artist's fees and materials, creating and overseeing the construction. It was therefore agreed early on that a substantial amount of unused topsoil from another part of the site would be reallocated to the earth sculpture; trees from the landscaping also reallocated, and some support would be given to the artist (earth moving etc) by the on-site construction company. Unfortunately the construction schedule was beset by delays, which had an impact on budgets. The construction company, instead of relocating the topsoil to the sculpture site, took it all away. The artist undertook a substantial part of the actual labour himself. Topsoil and trees became additional purchases, agreed over and above the "percent for art" budget. The County Council's "percent for art" is enhanced by an award from the Arts Council National Lottery and by an annual Council budget. If these sums had not been available, this project could not have been completed.

Maintenance

Maintenance recommendations have been made by the artist to the school and County Council. The school is responsible for maintenance. However the artist has suggested that, because of the scale and nature of this particular project, additional sums are held in reserve should trees die, as replacements might place an undue burden on a school's economy.



Key lessons

Artists often acquire a self-contained, self-reliant, approach to work. They are used to improvising and to dealing with practical issues as they arise. Working to other people's schedules, in an environment where there is demarcation of labour and of responsibility can be challenging.

During the arts week the children had the opportunity for some hands-on making, involving sharp cutting tools. Although the work was described as "well supervised", some concern was expressed about health and safety. The architects carried out a risk assessment on the finished work. Some artists will be trained and in the habit of conducting their own risk assessments, but this may be a training need for some.

Strengths

All those involved in this project regard it as a great success. A number of contributing factors can be identified:

- A clear, well-written brief, setting out the context and the parameters of the project but not prescribing an outcome, presenting an open opportunity for the artist.
- The school community were involved from an early stage, had a clear idea of what they wanted from the project, and were committed to making the best use of the artist. They remained proactive throughout the creative process, shaping the project in collaboration with the artist.
- The Public Art Adviser had an important role in brokering relationships and maintaining communication between diverse partners. This is particularly important when the client has had no previous experience of working with an artist. Despite the difficult context and the sometimes conflicting working cultures of the different parties in this project, it seems to have been defined by creative and friendly relationships. All those involved in the Hopebrook School project described the experience as a pleasure.

Paul Harper



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A Creative Space for Learning

Hopebrook Church of England Primary School

“Hopebrook shows that an open and risk taking approach to working with an artist can lead to a successful creative collaboration”

Lesley Greene,
Public Art Adviser, Gloucestershire County Council

Introduction

Hopebrook Church of England Primary School is a new school designed by Quattro Architects, on a new site in the centre of the village of Longhope. It is the amalgamation of two smaller schools and it has 120 pupils on roll. The artist began to work with the school in advance of the move to the new building, so that the project offered a thread of continuity during the transition. The amalgamation of two different and long established schools, with two teams of staff and two cohorts of pupils, provided a particularly sensitive context for the commission. The artwork played a significant role in establishing a coherent sense of identity and ownership of the new building.

Artist Selection

Details of the project were circulated to artists with appropriate experience drawn from the County Council's database, and through artists' networks in the Forest of Dean. In addition artists researched by the County Public Art Adviser were contacted and invited to submit.

A short list of artists was invited to present proposals to a selection group which comprised: the architect; the landscape architect; the Public Art Adviser; a school governor; the head teacher and another member of staff. Jony Easterby was selected,



having described an approach to the project, rather than a closely defined outcome.

A Creative Partnership

Working with an artist for the very first time can, in itself, seem a challenge for a school. Encouraging the school further, to be innovative and imaginative in their approach, can represent a challenge too far. In this instance however, the staff were committed to making positive use of the opportunity, not just to put a particular stamp on, and to animate a new building, but to meet the demands of the national curriculum creatively. The process of working with the artist, and the resulting artwork should have an on-going educational value. It was important that the work be interactive and that the children should have a strong sense of ownership of the artwork.

In selecting Jony Easterby the school took a creative risk. Having contributed to an inspiring brief, the school were prepared to be open as to what might happen. This suggests a recognition of, and trust in, the skills and professionalism of the artist, and establishes the ideal conditions for a successful, collaborative public art commission.

The project was characterised by good working relationships and an open dialogue from the start. Having developed an early proposal for an interactive mural, all parties subsequently agreed that the mural was not the right form for the new school. Sculptural forms would allow for more improvised play and a more open approach to interaction. For the artist it offered a more satisfying making experience. That a proposal which had been quite highly developed could be abandoned so readily speaks of a comfortable partnership and a shared vision.

Creative Learning

During a Creative Arts Week the artist devised a series of 'acoustic ecology walks'.



The children were encouraged to listen to their environment and to use recording equipment to capture personal soundscapes that evoked their particular sense of place. The children also built their own xylophones that were used to explore rhythm and the science of sound. The teachers commented that during this week of activity "there was a lot of learning going on", with all the



activity being focussed on a broad range of curriculum issues. Subjects included not only art and music, but local history, ecology, maths and science. The hybrid nature of the creative activity was further enriched with GLOSS, the County Council Arts in Education agency, contributing a dancer. For the Percent for Art Scheme, the range of practice embraced in this project was seen as innovative, extending the creative potential of public art in Gloucestershire schools. For the teaching staff, the arts week inspired new approaches and suggested new tools for teaching.



The arts week activities formed the basis for the designs for the sound garden which became the permanent legacy of the project. This consists of hollow sculptural forms carved in wood, which can be played as percussive instruments, and a tree form constructed in thick plywood. The tree represents the Blaisdon Red plums, which are a distinctive variety, local to Longhope. The tree has 'plum' inserts and pressure pads which, when struck, trigger the recordings made by the children. The sculptures present an irresistible invitation to bash out a rhythm.

The sound garden continues to be an active centre for learning. It is also a corner of the playground around which the children socialize and play collaboratively. The Head teacher sees this aspect of the work as having a crucial educational value.