



Hill Mead HERALD

Theatre is at the heart of how we learn

Learning through theatre is at the heart of the Hill Mead school curriculum. Its theatre enrichment programme engages pupils from nursery to Year 6 in the theatre and dramatic arts.

The school has been involved with the National Theatre's education programmes for four years.

Head teacher Richard West says: "Through the National Theatre partnership, pupils' language skills and confidence has visibly grown."

The school was awarded a grant for its work with the National Theatre from the Lambeth-based charity, the Walcot Foundation which recently marked its 350th anniversary.

A majority of Hill Mead pupils do not



have English as their first language and 68 per cent are from low-income families.

Deputy Head Becky Lawrence says: "This immersion in theatre enables all pupils to explore rich language and new vocabulary. Projects are linked to the curriculum, providing a context and purpose for the pupils' reading, writing and learning in other subjects, particularly history and science."

Parent participation where pupils learn alongside their parents creates a joint experience of the performing arts.

"A trip to the theatre can become a normal part of the pupils' and their parents' life and learning," says Becky Lawrence.

Pupils learn all the technical aspects of putting on a show and how to write a script.

Teachers are taught how to develop acting skills.

The school also works with the Unicorn Theatre where pupils and parents learn how theatre is created, participate in story-telling and writing skills workshops and theatre visits.

The school is involved in several National Theatre projects.

Theatre First: Year 1 pupils with parent participation work on storytelling, music, drama and puppetry with theatre artists leading to a performance at the National Theatre. Parent engagement includes trips to the theatre, workshops with theatre artists and helps them work with pupils at home.

Primary Theatre: An introduction to Shakespeare, theatre and performance for Year 4 pupils alongside a creative learning programme with a focus on English. Pupils have performed *Romeo and Juliet* with National Theatre actors in school workshops to explore the play and language of Shakespeare.

Playmakers - Arthur's Quest: A programme of drama role play and writing for Year 5 or 6 that builds up to a performance of the play.

Make Theatre Days: An introduction to how theatre is made and an introduction to the backstage world. Workshops including puppet-making, performance and design skills. All workshops are led by artists and performers. Pupils also learn about lighting and sound.

Make Theatre Christmas Show: A backstage tour and workshop for Year 6 and a look behind the scenes to see how the Christmas show is made.



'The best bit is seeing how much the children enjoyed the story and how involved they became'

Hill Mead year 1 pupils and their parents have been busy all term exploring the story of *The Sea Serpent's Daughter*.

It's the story of how light and dark and the stars came to the land.

Mums and dads participated with their children in workshops with members of the National Theatre to delve into the story and make the props and backdrops for the show.

On the day, their handiwork was proudly hanging on the stage of the theatre.

One mum said: "The kids were so excited, making costumes out of fabrics with their teddies playing different roles."

Another added: "The National Theatre has had so much public funding, disproportionate to who uses it. "So, It's good to get the community here."

For many of the parents,

it was their first time at the theatre. And one dad was particularly proud of his contribution to the backdrop - pointing out the frog he had painted by hand. "It was the



Romeo and Juliet

first time I had painted and I really liked it."

Teacher Kelly Davis said the workshops had a big impact on the children's language retention, particularly those with English as an additional language.

"They were talking more about the story at home, because their parents were involved. It really sparked an interest and it was possible to set the story as part of homework.

"The best bit is seeing how much the children enjoyed the story and how involved they became."

Teacher Paul Highman worked with year 4 on *Romeo and Juliet* drama workshops over two terms. This length of time allowed for in-depth analysis in the classroom.

The children learned different parts of the play. "I love seeing them come out of their shell. How all of them, the more timid, quieter ones, are still really engaged.

"You could see the excitement in their faces. Doing drama has had a knock-on effect on their writing too."



Banners made by the Hill Mead parents hang proudly on the National Theatre stage set

THE THREE SKILLS OF GREAT ACTORS

By Shadequa and Yumma Year 5

In year 5 we have begun to prepare for the performance of a play called *The Quest for Arthur*. We are using techniques from the National Theatre's Playmakers project to develop our acting skills as we start to prepare for the play.

We have learnt three important skills which will guide us to be great actors in the future.

The first is observation. To practice this we had to stand opposite a partner and mirror their movements without it being clear who is the leader.

The second skill is listening. To become better at this we played a game where you have to steal keys from a blind-folded master and if he heard you, you were out!

The third key skill was to trust each other. For this we had someone falling backwards into another person's arms. It was scary but fun.

Year 5 also learnt fun activities which help you practise how to move around the stage and make it interesting for the audience.

We practised scattering evenly in the space, arranging ourselves in clusters of small groups and everyone clumped together in different scenarios.

You have to think very quickly about what to do, but it looks really good and everyone does different things.

Along with other activities we have really enjoyed creating our own theatre company (*The History Mystery Theatre Company*) and logo and discovering the many roles involved.

We are very excited to continue our rehearsals and when we perform the play to our friends and family on 17 July.