

Full STEAM ahead at Parsons Green Prep

By Matthew Faulkner, headmaster

The world of education is no stranger to acronyms and, as with everyone else, these tend to get longer with every passing year (anyone remember PSE?). The latest subject to grow in this way is STEAM (formerly STEM). So what is this new letter? A is for Art, and we welcome it to the team, recognising that the previous STEM focus (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) wasn't sufficient.

We have heard for many years that the workplace is changing and that the workers of the future will require quite different skills to the workers of today. Schools have been quick to react, removing subjects from distinct silos and amalgamating them into things such as Humanities and Creative Learning. In addition to these subjects, chess is a daily activity, taught by the talented Viv Richardson; children and parents value it hugely for all the strategic and planning skills it draws out. And now STEAM is coming right to the fore. This subject combines the skills of research, creativity, planning, prediction and improvisation, to name but a few.

Engaged and eager to learn

At Parsons Green Prep we already devote significant curriculum time to these subjects. STEAM subjects encourage children to become confident in accepting challenges, in researching and collaborating. We want our children to be able to think for themselves, confidently hypothesise, accurately analyse data and text, synthesise information accurately and apply their knowledge to new situations. They should learn to deal with unexpected results and be adept at starting all over again without missing a beat. Most importantly they need to be engaged and actively involved in their learning and able to challenge their own understanding of the world.

Some challenges reside within discrete lessons (building a balloon powered car, for example), whereas others are school-wide and open ended. This year the whole school is involved in investigating and contributing to

Children with an aptitude for STEAM will be in hot demand in the workplace of the future.



PGP's move to carbon neutrality within three years. From counting the recycling bins to identifying appropriate locations for solar panels, everybody has a role to play and different children will contribute, stress-test and feedback on different areas of research. By raising the profile of STEAM further, we wish to stimulate the brain, giving it a free rein to create, rather than simply to replicate what is already known; to enhance our children's critical thinking skills so they are able to draw on a wide range of sources and develop sophisticated study skills.

Why adding Art into STEM?

The addition of Art to the quartet is a welcome and long overdue one. All the work done in STEAM is inherently artistic. The quest for elegant solutions to practical problems runs throughout our current work. Art underpins both the form and the function of everything we create. To quote Steve Jobs, 'design is not just

what it looks and feels like. Design is how it works'. Mathematical concepts as art are evident all around us, from the snowflake to the shell of a snail to the Corinthian Column. Every successful design is a combination of function and aesthetic and both are essential to the products we make and the services they perform.

So we are delighted to add the A to the team. At PGP we are developing the designs for our new STEAM room, to run alongside the new playground also in development. Due to open in September 2022, the architects are working in conjunction with Lucinda Waring, the founder. Samantha Porter is leading this STEAM initiative, ably supported by our Science coordinator and head of KS2 Phoebe James and our Year 6 teacher and head of pastoral, Ryan McAvoy. All their pupils are similarly engaged on the project and will be presenting their findings to parents in the summer term of 2021.

The building will incorporate the latest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, but Art will straddle these four. Whether underpinning the design itself or simply making the work eye-catching to the end-user, Art will be behind every decision we take in the process. Needless to say, the children are going to be deeply involved in the creation of this facility, from the bottom up. Ms Porter anticipates the process like this: 'While the older children will be busy comparing the merits of one laser cutter over another, our youngest children will be researching the comfiest bean bags and the most ergonomically satisfying computer mice!' This project is pure STEAM and we look forward to sharing the results of our work – the Art bit especially – in a future edition.

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