

Art helps autistic pupil's creativity blossom

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By Sian Davies

AN AUTISTIC pupil who once refused to attend school is now blossoming – thanks to his love of art.

Matthew Whyhne has gone from strength to strength at his Hampshire school after having his artwork displayed at the Royal College of Art (RCA).

Teachers at Great Oaks School encouraged 12-year-old pupil Matthew to enter the National Open Art's children's competition as a way to encourage him to engage with school after he stopped going following a difficult transition from primary.

Matthew, who is autistic, showed a talent for art and his subject teacher Roger Hardy urged him to enter the competition.

The youngster's painting of his grandad, who died a few years ago, won second prize and as a result was exhibited at the RCA.

He was invited to a private viewing where he was presented with his prize of a Go-Pro camera worth £350 for himself plus a £1000 donation for his school.

Mr Hardy said engaging in art and entering the competition had completely transformed Matthew from a withdrawn pupil to one of Great Oak's most confident and bright students.

He added: "When he first started his parents and staff were only able to get him as far as the car park, none of us could actually get him to enter the school itself.

"We were pretty exasperated, thinking what we could do to help this young man.

"I asked his parents if he has any particular interests and they told me that he liked drawing.

"He uses graphic pens mainly and watercolours too. I said 'even though he's not coming into the school itself, why don't you bring some of his work with you' and they brought in this folder of beautiful work.

"Through art, we found a way in with him. He started coming into art lessons and we started building a relationship.

"Matthew is actually very articulate but first of all he barely spoke. But it was obvious just how exceptionally talented at art he was. He is just naturally gifted at art – he has the talent, he just didn't have the confidence to be working in a classroom.

"These days he's so much more confident at school. He's joining in with everything – sports, lessons – in fact he's now one of our most confident and bright students.

"It's been hugely satisfying to see such a transformation."

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