This investigation centres on museum learning (ML) within the curriculum. The study school acquired academy school status in 2004, and received sponsorship from a philanthropic organisation. The sponsor’s intention was to promote ML in an area of socio-economic deprivation, as a means of supporting the educational experiences of young people in secondary school. The school employs two staff who are responsible for ML and have a background in museum education.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the extent to which ML had become embedded in the school’s curriculum, and what impact ML had made.

The study focused on:

1. The vision of ML
2. Roles of the ML staff
3. Impact on learning
4. Responses of and support for teachers
5. Broader impact of ML

Interviews were conducted with; teachers, senior leadership, ML staff, and head of a museum.

Student views were obtained through: focus groups; thought-cloud activity; and a photo diary.

Observations were carried out in school of; an assembly, a poetry workshop, a number of classes, students in the school’s museum display areas.

Parental views were gathered through an online questionnaire.

The idea of curriculum as process and theories about the implementation of change provided a theoretical framework for the study.

The analysis of data reveals positive attitudes towards ML. However, a number of issues were highlighted which hinder the successful implementation of ML within the curriculum.

1. Staff work with different conceptions of ML, making it difficult to appreciate what contributes to ML. Most students recognize this inconsistency, but felt that ML was valuable.

2. Most teachers were unclear about the roles of the staff employed to support ML.

Students could join a museum council and a museum club, but participation was low and few students felt they had a voice in developing ML.
3. Most students saw ML as a process but thought it helped them to become independent, inquiring thinkers and learners. Improved confidence and self-esteem were seen by parents, teachers and ML staff when students were able to take the lead on their learning or the direction of a ML project.

4. Teachers’ attitudes towards ML varied and were shaped by levels of support and length of time in the school.

5. Few examples were found about the broader impact of ML.