



Children as active learners

Raising Aspirations and Standards in Challenging Circumstances

Graiseley Primary School, Wolverhampton is an inner-city school in an area of high social and economic deprivation – in fact, it serves one of the most deprived areas in the country, with high levels of crime and domestic disturbance. Unsurprisingly levels of pupil mobility and special needs are also high, as is the number of pupils with English as an additional language. Importantly, there's one thing that is also high – the expectations of the school for its pupils *and* for the community it serves. As head teacher Wendy Briscoe explains, "All too often, social and economic circumstances prevent families from achieving a proper education and a better life despite the aspirations they have for themselves and their children. That's why we strive to provide the opportunities and tools for learning. Our long-term vision for lifelong learning reflects the needs of our community – there's a

strong link between the regeneration of learning and the renewal of neighbourhoods and communities."

Partnering for Progress

One key step on Graiseley Primary's learning journey has been its partnerships with other institutions and community members. "It's about being part of a network of people and organisations with a purpose; preparing children to become more active learners and active citizens," explains Wendy. One example of this can be seen in the school's strong and successful partnership with the University of Wolverhampton where involvement with the university is helping to raise pupil aspirations. Every pupil has his or her own lifelong-learning business card, with children as young as three visiting and learning about the university, and working with lecturers and students on a number of diverse projects. For example, the Nursery has a 'University Corner' where children

dress up in black gowns with cardboard mortarboards – which they wear when visiting the university. As another example, Year 6 pupils worked with university students at the School of Legal Studies to recreate a 'bullying court', complete with wigs and gowns.

Elsewhere, the school partners with the Chamber of Commerce and the Wolverhampton Economic Partnership in order to link education to business strategy city wide. As Wendy says, "By raising the children's awareness of the relevance of their schooling for their future, it has developed their character and given them personal strengths." It's a feature highlighted in a recent OFSTED report which not only noted the "considerable business shrewdness" of older pupils but also made the observation that, "Pupils' preparation for life outside school and the next stage of their learning is first rate."

Pupils as Partners

The school's emphasis on raising aspirations underpins the way in which teachers and pupils work together in lessons and lesson planning. The school has taken a cross curricular approach to teaching and learning from nursery to Year 6 which is a carefully planned blend of basic skills and development of pupils' creativity and self-reliance. Children are actively involved in steering the direction of learning. Although teachers choose the initial framework it is down to pupils to guide the direction, evaluate their progress and decide on next steps. As a matter of course, pupils analyse examples of good work at the beginning of the lesson and draw up the criteria for their own success. Pupils decide whether they will work independently or work with the support of peers or staff. Children have the



Ignite: working with artists, technicians and engineers

power to change their planned learning, provided this still delivers the same learning outcomes. "Recently Year 4 were set to study the Tudors, but when they heard *Goodnight Mr. Tom* in literacy they wanted to find out all about World War Two!" notes Wendy. External visits and visitors are a feature of the planned curriculum with the intention of raising aspirations and giving children experiences and opportunities they might normally not have.

There's an emphasis on ensuring that the curriculum is exciting, dynamic and relevant with a high degree of pupil responsibility and partnership. A recent 'Ignite!' project, for example, involved pupils working with artists, technicians and engineers to present a firework display for the enjoyment of the whole community. Pupils were not just generating ideas, but also the solutions for a safe display. As one pupil remarked after another project, "In our Freedom project the chainsaw carver didn't tell us which freedom it was going to be - we decided. That makes us feel proud, we say what happens and we learn more because it's ours."

"It's a partnership approach to teaching and learning," comments Wendy, "and we're seeing increased pupil ambition, confidence, eloquence and achievement".

Raising Ambition

The school makes full use of its resources to raise aspiration and achievement. For example, it has appointed a Home School Liaison Manager as part of its work to encourage parents to value education and, through a series of varied activities aimed at the emotional, and educational development of parents, parents are becoming far more involved in school life and in the support of their children. The aim in all of this is to nurture pupil and parent confidence in decision-making. As Wendy explains, "We want parents and children to be our partners in decisions about the learning in school and beyond. This gives everyone the opportunity to develop a strong sense of responsibility for school-based education and community learning."

The children themselves are heavily involved in planning and organising community events and projects, such as painting a mural for a ward in a local care home. Peer Supporters operate on the playgrounds, pupil librarians run the KS1 and KS2 libraries, and children run the milkshake bar at lunchtime. Prefects organise their own rotas for overseeing the cloakrooms and toilets, and assist dinner staff with younger children at wet playtimes. The School Council has plans to open a second hand uniform shop to support some of the children and their families and to raise

income for the school. Pupils organise their own competitions and fund raising activities; and organise the certificates and merits given out in assembly. Recently, one group of pupils had several meetings with the manager of a local supermarket to secure resources to run an Easter egg decorating enterprise.

As a consequence, the school has seen an upsurge in children's independent contributions to school life and this degree of trust and initiative promotes self esteem and breeds responsibility. Pupils are involved in the appointments of new staff, including senior posts. With minimal supervision, children interview and select lunchtime staff, with a good understanding of the importance of Criminal Records Bureau checks. Pupils have even been included in recruitment panels for the city's Children's Fund staff.

Next Steps

On its journey to raise aspiration, the school has seen impressive improvements in standards in both key stages, with an overall contextual value added score that now places it in the top twenty-five per cent in the country.

But what of the impact on the community? In an independent assessment of local community members, seventy-eight per cent said that they were now convinced that their children would be able to study at university level while sixty per cent said that they are now considering further education for themselves.

"We're pleased but not content with what we have achieved," says Wendy. "We still have a lot to do to motivate each new generation to make a difference by participation, not isolation."

For more information visit the Graiseley Primary School website at www.graiseleyprimary.co.uk or contact headteacher Wendy Briscoe at wbriscoe@graiseleypri.biblio.net