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Developing pupils as leaders: Foxmoor Primary School

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Brief description

At Foxmoor Primary School, leadership skills are developed from the Early Years upwards. The levels of pupil participation and involvement in school decision-making are remarkable and contribute strongly to their outstanding personal and social development.

Overview – the school's message

'If you expect pupils to be responsible, take the lead and achieve success, providing you give them the tools for the job and support them well, they mostly rise to the challenge. If on occasions, they mess up, you live with it. But that doesn't happen often. Our pupils are not afraid to take risks and we support this strongly as a school.'

Nan Maycock, Headteacher



The good practice in detail

Foxmoor Primary School is committed to progressively developing pupils' skills as leaders across the school in order to promote self-esteem and develop their personal and social development. The ultimate aim is that in Year 6, all pupils have an opportunity to lead, regardless of their ability and aptitude. The school does this without having a traditional school council. However, the levels of participation and involvement by pupils in school decision-making are remarkable and contribute strongly to their outstanding personal and social development, as noted in the school's inspection of [citizenship](#) last year and at their previous full school [inspection](#).

The approach to pupil leadership that has been developed involves all pupils and builds their skills and confidence progressively from entering the school to the end of Year 6, when pupils are regarded as partners in helping to run the school. 'It is about empowering pupils and trusting their judgement', says Nan Maycock. She explains that the impetus for the approach came from her experience as headteacher in a previous school over 20 years ago. It was a small village primary school where Nan observed how well older pupils took responsibility when it was offered. Nan explains, 'Many of the pupils came to school by bus and we observed the older ones looking after the younger ones on the bus and taking a lead in the school playground. It was such a small school; we used to have pupils helping out with administrative tasks, such as getting resources together and answering the phone. Pupils blossomed and became confident and independent. This small "family feel" was one I wanted to try to replicate in a larger school. When I arrived at Foxmoor, there wasn't much mixing across age groups, either in the curriculum or socially.'



The first thing Nan introduced was a vertical house system with four houses to create small 'schools' within the school. There was a big drive to get the scheme started with a variety of competitions to create a sense of team identity. Pupils elect their house captains for each house. The candidates prepare their manifestos and campaign for election across the school. Once the elections are complete, attention is paid to involving other pupils by delegating to create good teamwork and to use other pupils' strengths effectively. Pupils gain points for their houses, which are collected and counted on a weekly basis by the house captains who organise the house assemblies and manage their houses with a remarkable degree of independence. All pupils are urged to make contributions to their houses and lead house initiatives.

Various tasks and responsibilities are delegated to pupils, from the Early Years upwards. They might be about deciding on school policy and practice. For example, in response to an assembly about various issues at playtime with football games disturbing non-footballers, pupils were asked to reflect on the problem and devise the solution. A Year 2 pupil came up with a plan for organising the grounds into sections, marked off with cones for different



activities and having explained her idea to the rest of the school in an assembly, it was implemented and is now operating successfully at social times. Year 2 pupils have responsibility each year for casting the roles in their annual production. They audition and choose pupils for the parts themselves, informing the teachers of their decisions.

It might be about making curriculum decisions. For example, pupils in Years 4 and 5 learn about the Tudors and plans are underway for a Tudor day when pupils would be in role and immersed in Tudor life. Their teacher, Lucy Hallam discovered that it was possible to hire a company that would visit the school and support the children in building a Tudor house in the school hall. However, the cost was prohibitive and it was unlikely to be feasible for this reason. She explained this to the class and they considered the likely benefits and the impact on their learning. They decided that they would raise the money themselves for the event. They organised a cake sale, wrote to all parents and enlisted the support of the whole school community. They successfully negotiated a discount

with the company for the event which then went ahead. Following the event, Lucy asked the pupils to evaluate their learning, to determine if they would recommend to future year groups that this was a worthwhile event. Pupils' comments illustrate their views: "We got to use all of our senses in making the house... actually building it made it so real... and it was a much better experience than just reading about it or seeing it on the internet."

“All of us have jobs, everyone can be a leader, we have a lot of independence and we make sure that school runs well.”

It could also be about running clubs and activities. For example, a group of Year 6 girls run a lunchtime craft club for 30 Year 2 pupils, and another group of Year 6 boys run a 'bug club' for 20 Year 1 pupils. The older pupils plan the activities and lead the younger ones with minimal input or supervision from the teachers.

Pupils also train and support other pupils. The first aid club that is run during the summer by two teaching assistants for Year 5 pupils, led to these pupils helping to devise a suitable syllabus for the whole school from the Foundation Stage to Year 6. It starts with teaching the four year olds to dial 999 to Year 4 being confident to apply 'ABC' (checking Airway, Breathing then Circulation) in an emergency and Year 6 being able to administer basic first aid.



Pupils also work to improve the school facilities. Year 6 pupils were invited to consider how the school grounds might be improved by a 'trim trail track'. They were challenged to research the range of suitable equipment that might be included. Having gathered their information they worked with a planner to design the trail themselves, work out the costs and dimensions, and make decisions about what could be

afforded and where revisions had to be made to stay within budget. After the facility was built, Year 6 worked with their PE teacher on the health and safety implications. They put together a training [presentation](#) to ensure that all pupils were aware of how to use the equipment safely and to its best advantage. Each year group had to be trained by Year 6 in an assembly before they could use it.

Pupils frequently discuss how their grounds might be improved. A suggestion that climbing pegs might be put around the exterior of the school building for use at social times was subsequently taken up by the school and successfully introduced. And Year 6 pupils took responsibility for training younger pupils about how to use it safely.

Mini leaders in Year 6

One of the aims of developing leadership throughout the school is to prepare pupils for their final roles as 'mini leaders' in Year 6. Throughout the school, emphasis is placed on enabling pupils to make decisions and take responsibility by working as monitors and helpers. By the end of Year 5, pupils are looking forward to their final year, knowing that they are going to become school leaders with important roles in helping to run their school.

At the start of Year 6 the whole year group (approximately 40 pupils) goes on a one-week



residential trip. This is pivotal in preparing pupils for the year ahead. They are required to organise themselves, take responsibility in unfamiliar surroundings and work with different people. Although the work undertaken on the Isle of Wight is significant for the curriculum studies in the term ahead, equal attention is paid to developing the personal and social skills required during a week away from home. The consistent message to pupils is: 'When you come back you are going to be helping to run the school.'

‘It is good to help others, you feel respected and you know you are making a difference in your school.’

On their return, pupils are allocated roles for the term ahead. Every child has a role, ranging from lunch duties, to helping in the library, to helping with the organisation of equipment in assemblies. They keep the roles for one term before moving on to new responsibilities. Their teacher has high expectations of their performances: 'They have to cover for each other if necessary. If something isn't working I want to know why and we discuss it', says Jane Stevens, the Year 6 teacher.

'It is critical that every Year 6 pupil is given responsibility', says Nan. 'Otherwise it establishes a hierarchy and can lead to resentment.' She feels that the approach is successful because 'pupils feel that the school trusts them, knows they can perform their various roles well and consequently, they rise to the challenge. We believe in them and they know it, which works wonders!'

The school's background

Foxmoor Primary School is community primary for pupils aged four to 11 of above average size situated in Stroud, Gloucestershire. Most pupils are from the area around the school but an increasing number come to the school from further afield.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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