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Preparing children to be 21st century citizens, contributing to sustainable communities: Southwood School

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Brief description

Children are prepared to become valued members of the local community. They are involved in key decision-making in the school and the community. They are taught to develop a social and moral conscience and skills for the future, including conflict resolution and critical thinking.

Overview – the school’s message

‘The Sustainable Development agenda to care for ourselves, for each other and for the environment is all-embracing, is meaningful to our pupils and is at the heart of the school. It is integrated into all that we do in teaching and learning, in the development of our grounds, in how we manage the school buildings to reduce carbon emissions and improve our environment, and in our relationships with parents and the community. By engaging our pupils in key decision-making, which not only shapes our school but also has an impact on their families and the community, we are preparing them to be leaders in the communities in which they live. We also encourage our community into the school and value the richness a multicultural community brings to the school. Our recent partnership with Quinton School adds value to the experience of pupils in both schools.’



Bryan Schram, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

There are a number of key initiatives through which the school focuses on the skills which pupils need to be successful citizens and which impact on the quality of life of local people.

The Respect Agenda

Enabling pupils to care for themselves and for each other is a key priority and is part of the school's respect agenda. The school population and the local community have changed significantly in recent years and both benefit greatly by pupils understanding others' heritage, being proud of their own heritage and developing skills such as conflict resolution. The Learning and Achievement Base (LAB) and its kaleidoscope therapy provide a platform for success which supports teachers work in the classroom.

Maria Grace, who runs the LAB with Jennie Phillips says, 'The Learning and Achievement Base is fundamental to the success of the school and its multicultural ethos. It is a place where pupils can come to receive help to address home, personal or behavioural issues or to build self-esteem and confidence.'



Maria Grace

Managed by a small dedicated team, the LAB provides pastoral support for pupils in a variety of ways. They provide support for their transition from feeder schools to Southwood and their forward transition to secondary school, negotiating transition arrangements for pupils with health issues. It provides support for vulnerable pupils and helps them grow to independence. Members of the LAB team are also key links with families and other services. Parents are encouraged into the LAB and an open-door policy means they are always welcome. 'Pupils may be referred to the LAB by a teacher or they may self-refer,' says Maria. 'LAB is about moving forward to a happy child and successful outcomes.'

Kaleidoscope sessions are much enjoyed by pupils; these are innovative discussion sessions held in the relaxed environment of the LAB. Children are encouraged to empathise and share with each other, to understand their feelings and share their activities and interests and anything positive. They are also helped to work on negatives. These are key success factors in creating a happy environment, without conflict, in the school and the community.

The pupil voice

'We want our pupils to play a very active part in the school and the wider community, now and in the future,' explains Elaine Hawkins, deputy headteacher. 'Empowering our pupils to take responsibility for their own future and contributing to a sustainable community is a key part of their education at Southwoods. The pupil voice is intrinsically linked with this agenda; it is now more powerful and meaningful and is a great tool in school improvement.'



Elaine Hawkins, Deputy Headteacher

Student voice is part of an integrated whole-school approach, involving the school council, the sport council and the pupil parliament. Southwood's pupils have a strong voice. This extends from making decisions about their learning styles to leading charity events and fundraising, or producing leaflets and posters which will inform their families and the public about how to improve their recycling practices.

Pupils on the School Council take their responsibilities seriously and regard it as a great privilege. A recent improvement initiated by the school and sports council has been the 'trim trail'.

‘The school council makes big differences. We helped to research the equipment and the costs and to choose the equipment. We also helped to raise money.’

The pupil parliament is a recent innovation. It involves over 30 pupils including the school council, sports council, play leaders and safety wardens. To prepare the pupils to understand their roles and responsibilities and the importance of every individual's right to express their own views, an experienced youth worker facilitated a series of workshops, during which pupils also developed skills such as conflict resolution and representation. From the children's many suggestions, members of the pupil parliament identified the key issues, which when addressed, would impact on the local community as well as on the school. The activity culminated in a question time session. Pupils chaired the session and questioned a panel which included the deputy mayor, parish council members, community wardens

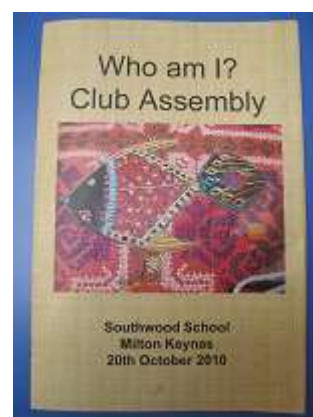
and the police. They challenged the panel about overgrown shrubbery on the local estate which made children and adults alike feel unsafe. The council responded positively by removing the bushes.

Understanding our culture

The 'Who am I?' project helped pupils to better understand their culture, their local community and what makes people English. To reach this understanding they interviewed parents, members of their families and of the community, and developed their speaking and listening skills at the same time. All interviews were recorded for the national archive. Pupils published a booklet and the interviewees attended assemblies and lessons to further enhance learning.

Southwood has developed a successful link with Quainton School. The schools are very different: Southwood is a modern urban multicultural school and Quainton a traditional (in building at least) village church school whose pupils are of predominately white British heritage. Pupils have compared the cultural and environmental differences of both communities and reached a number of surprising conclusions. However, what has been most successful has been the way in which pupils quickly established common ground through computer games and school lunches.

Pippa Brand-Benee, deputy headteacher of Quainton School says, 'Our work with Southwood is based on citizenship: getting together and having shared learning experiences with pupils diverse to our school cohort promotes a common sense of identity and supports diversity. It demonstrates that although there are cultural differences, there are commonalities too, both of which are respected and celebrated. It proves different communities can work effectively together. If they can establish this value at the age of nine, they can carry this with them into adult years and create a future of harmony. In essence it is citizenship.'



The 'Who Am I?' project

Teachers have also identified good practice which they will embrace to enrich their own school community. Quinton already has plans to adapt the kaleidoscope session of the LAB and the pupil parliament and Southwood pupils will help.

This strong focus on developing pupils' citizenship and the community is part of the sustainability agenda which is well integrated into the school's ethos. It has developed along with the curriculum and campus and is only one of the ways in which the school has made significant progress.

The school's background



The school's mural

Southwood School is a small community Junior school. Pupils attending the school are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being of White British and Black African heritage. Almost two fifths of pupils speak English as an additional language, although few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has a variety of awards for aspects of its work, including Healthy Schools bronze and Eco Schools silver awards gained in 2010. It is federated with a nearby infant school. A private nursery operates on the school's site.

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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