



Challenging pupils' learning, challenging outcomes



Burry Port Primary measures its pupils' progress every half term, in order to identify areas that need improvement, but also to celebrate successes and promote strengths. This case study represents the school's curriculum development in relation to their progress in self-evaluation, planning and preparation, realising change and evaluating change.

Context

Burry Port Community Primary School is in Burry Port, Carmarthenshire. The school has 207 pupils on roll, including 21 who attend the part-time nursery class.

The school has nine classes, which include a nursery class, two mixed-age classes and seven single-age classes.

A minority of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils have English as an additional language. The school has identified a minority of pupils as having additional learning needs and a very few have a statement of additional learning needs. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language or come from ethnic minority or mixed backgrounds.

Stage 1: Evaluating the current curriculum within wider self-evaluation arrangements

By 2014, prior to the publication of *Successful Futures*, (Donaldson, 2015), the development of a growth mind-set, the adoption of a facilitative teaching style and the promotion of pupils' independent thinking skills were key features of the school's provision. However, following its publication, a whole school review of the curriculum demonstrated that there were inconsistencies in the extent to which approaches were adopted by all. This was impacting negatively upon pupils' ability to build successfully upon these skills during their time in school. One of the reasons for this was the extent to which staff understood the theoretical bases behind the approaches. Over time, teachers had adopted a 'formula' for teaching, without the necessary understanding of pedagogy needed to develop a dynamic classroom environment.

In addition to this, lesson observations and scrutiny of teachers' planning highlighted clear differences in teaching and learning approaches between teachers in the foundation phase and key stage 2. This hindered pupils' transition from one stage of their education to the next. One key difference was that the teaching approaches in key stage 2 were becoming more rigid and less pupil led. The pressure for teachers to address an overloaded curriculum overtook the need to ensure that pupils had worthwhile opportunities to develop the skills that they needed to become lifelong learners.

Following robust self-evaluation, leaders focused on:

- the way that teachers viewed learning and how having a 'growth mind-set' could impact positively on their own development and that of pupils
- the teacher as facilitator approach; where pupils acquire learning tools, which they use with increasing independence
- the way learning is structured, to ensure smooth transition from foundation phase to key stage 2
- maintaining a broad, skills-based curriculum, which is flexible and pupil-led
- teachers' understanding of the theory underpinning the approaches

Stage 2: Planning and preparing for change

In September 2016, leaders arranged training in the principles of growth mind-set for all teachers as well as teachers from other schools. Following training, a middle leader from each school met to share good practice in developing growth mind-set within numerical reasoning lessons in key stage 2 classes.

Within school, sharing of good practice in relation to marking and feedback ensured that written and verbal comments rewarded pupils' efforts as well as their attainment. In addition to this, the whole-school rewards assembly became effort-focused and 'Star of the Week' awards were replaced by 'Super Effort Awards'. These awards support the four purposes and are centred on the skills needed to ensure that pupils challenge themselves and overcome obstacles to achieve their goals. Publicising awards, for example using social media and informing parents, ensured that the approach has become school-wide and there are greater levels of consistency and understanding amongst the school community.

To ensure that staff supported when trialling new approaches, leaders encourage practitioners to develop an approach that views mistakes as opportunities for learning and development. Leaders have developed a more open and supportive culture of collaboration as teachers have more opportunities to share and discuss their pedagogical skills.

Stage 3: Realising change

In partnership with two local schools, the school has widened its scope for developing pupils' learning skills or 'tools' further by engaging in a structured approach to answering the question 'What makes a good learner?' Teachers focus on developing one learning tool per term within and across each school. Six of the nine learning tools that the pupils have developed include:

- collaboration
- perseverance
- listening
- imagining
- reasoning
- questioning

Initially, professional reading takes place in each individual school. This ensures that staff have the theoretical understanding of why pupils need to develop the 'tool' in order to be successful learners. Following this, there is high quality discussion and debate, which encourages all staff to engage with the professional reading content before deciding on how they will develop this tool with their class over the forthcoming term. Each teacher assesses their pupils' current learning behaviours in relation to the learning tool. For example, teachers assess how well developed their pupils' skills of perseverance are and where their next steps in development are. Each teacher creates an action plan for the term, which sets out how they will develop the learning tool with their class.

At the end of the half term, each teacher shares their successes and challenges and there is high quality professional discussion and debate. Pupils' achievement against the learning tools continua is recorded and provides evidence that the project is having a positive impact on learning. Regular, shared meetings amongst the staff and pupil representatives of the three schools facilitate the sharing of good practice and promote professional discussion.

Measures to ensure progression from foundation phase into key stage 2 include a transition plan, which incorporates taking key elements of the foundation phase pedagogy into key stage 2. For example, foundation phase pupils work in an increasingly independent way on 'Challenges' in the continuous and enhanced provision areas of the classroom. Challenges are colour coded to denote the level of challenge and pupils are given the opportunity to choose the most appropriate level of challenge for themselves. At key stage 2, pupils work independently and collaboratively on similar challenges. These are usually rich tasks, based on real life problem solving skills, such as preparing a stall for the school summer fair that will raise the greatest amount of money or working alongside a digital film maker to create a film about the Tudors. As a result of this work, the curriculum at key stage 2 is more flexible and pupils learn skills that are then applied to real life situations.

Stage 4: Evaluating change

Developing the learning tools occurs naturally within most lessons and, where they do not, discrete lessons are worthwhile due to their impact on pupils' learning skills. In addition, the manageable pace of the project means that, even with all the other constraints in the school day, there is ample time to develop a new learning tool.

By ensuring consistency in high teacher expectations, nearly all pupils are positive about challenging themselves in their learning and, in many classes, pupils display high levels of independence and work very well collaboratively. Many pupils speak confidently about the skills that they need to be good learners.

The project has ensured greater consistency in teaching approaches from foundation phase to key stage 2. Nearly all teachers have worthwhile opportunities to access action research methods, outcomes of published research and professional reading, so that they base their pedagogy on the most successful models.

Links

<http://www.burryportprimary.amdro.org.uk/>