

Learning Outside the Classroom Awards

Castlechurch Primary School in Stafford was named winner of the 2008 National Learning Outside the Classroom Award for Innovation and Excellence. Headteacher Gill Hampton takes us through Castlechurch's winning philosophy and how learning outside the classroom helps her school.

Castlechurch is a large primary school in Stafford with 420 children aged between 3 and 11 drawn from a very socially diverse catchment area - we have the lowest 15% in terms of deprivation indices while also catering for the other end of the social spectrum.

I have been Headteacher for the past eleven years and in that time have seen a transformation in the school's attainment, with standards rising from 40 to 90%. Our success is underpinned by our ethos that opportunities to learn outside the classroom can be built into every topic area, helping the children develop emotional intelligence and giving a sense of belonging which in turn helps propel them to greater things.

Consulting with our pupils and involving them in planning their learning is commonplace in many schools. Our pupils told us that their best and most memorable learning often takes place outside of the classroom - in the school grounds, within the local community or further afield (including residential stays).

Initially, some years ago, Governors committed an element of the budget to facilitate us incorporating enrichment activities which linked directly to topics, taking many forms - from educational visits to visitors to the school (such as artists, theatre groups and community professionals). To begin with, Year 6 was the only group engaged in residential activities, but the benefits were so great that we agreed such visits should be incorporated more widely into school life and are now an entitlement for every Key Stage 2 year group. Learning outside the classroom is now integral to everything we do, rather than an added extra or enrichment activity.

We look for and plan learning outside the classroom in the core subjects (literacy, maths, science) as well as cross curricular topics. Recently, Year 6 visited Liverpool and the Beatles Story museum. This experience linked directly to both a biographies and autobiographies topic in literacy as well as the School's 'Britain since 1948' course in humanities. The visit allowed the students to visit the areas where the musicians grew up, thereby giving them an appreciation of British society in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War whilst also allowing them to compare how what they saw tied in with the texts.

Every year, Year 5 embarks on a residential educational visit to Llandudno, where they undertake activities reaching across many topic areas. Students gain first-hand experiences that bolster their understanding in specific subjects such as history and geography whilst also developing their personal independence skills away from home. On return their learning is presented in a variety of ways to a wider audience of parents (incorporating IT, multi-media, art and design and fictional writing – a book called 'Llandudno Tales'.)

We have found that learning outside the classroom provides opportunities to apply skills learned in the classroom to real life situations, adding purpose to the learning and, above all, making learning fun. The teachers say that these activities, whilst hard work and a great

responsibility, make teaching fun too. In a catchment of great social diversity, many of the activities expand the horizons of children who have relatively few experiences beyond their estate. For children who have supportive families and wide-ranging experiences the activities provide new experiences shared with their peers, which they may not get at home. For these reasons all children benefit greatly - whatever their background.