



CASE STUDY Valley Road Primary School Sunderland

Winner of the Best LOtC Provision 7-11yrs (Key Stage 2) in the LOtC Awards for Excellence & Innovation 2010 in association with TUI Education Division

At Valley Road, Learning Outside of the Classroom (LOtC) is an integral part of teaching routines and expectations. The school is a state-of-the-art primary with extensive grounds housing the previously separate nursery, infant and junior schools. It offers a full, extended service for families and their children aged between 6 weeks and 11 years and serves an area in the 10-20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOA) in England. 60% of children receive Free School Meals and 16% have English as an Additional Language. An additional challenge is the extremely high level of pupil transience – in the first 4 years, over 100 children a year were admitted and around 90 lost, a quarter of the school's population. Children also leave and return to the school several times within a key stage. These challenging circumstances simply reinforced the school's commitment to provide the best education possible and in 2005 led to a change in staff thinking about the style, delivery and content of learning.

Staff recognised that the curriculum didn't suit their children's needs, as it presumed a certain level of quality play and learning experiences prior to starting school. The vast majority of children at Valley Road do not have these experiences and arrive in school unprepared for the challenges of a busy, demanding classroom. The school re-designed the curriculum and placed quality, 'real' learning experiences at its heart.

LOtC is at the heart of the new curriculum, getting children out of school to explore their surroundings, meet other children and adults and enjoy, value and use their experiences to underpin their learning. LOtC has become the strength of a successful curriculum and enables children to see that learning is fun, worthwhile and important, whilst instilling a pride in their locality, with much to explore and be proud of in inner city Sunderland. The school has drawn up a Charter of Entitlement which specifies clearly the visits, visitors and other LOtC opportunities that children in each year group should experience. All of this is to ensure that children at Valley Road 'know things' which they can talk about and apply to their learning and that this immersion in quality, first hand experiences means they are no longer 'empty' and capable of only thin and meagre outcomes, but able to use the rich and meaningful learning experiences embedded in a 'can do' culture, to make good progress across all areas.

The school had been at the bottom of the local league tables prior to the amalgamated, new school opening in Sept 2002. It is no longer at the bottom of the local league tables, and, more significantly, data shows an upward trend in pupils making two whole levels of progress in KS2 (83% of pupils in 2010).

Building learning outside the classroom into the curriculum

Recognising that children learn best when they see and do as opposed to simply listening, staff created learning situations that inspired and supported children to observe, participate, talk, think and learn before writing or recording information. Empowered to experiment with curriculum delivery, the school used LOtC experiences to underpin the development of the curriculum and created learning environments where process and social interaction are as important as content.

A key aspect of the school's ideology is the **Charter of Entitlement** which includes a section on learning outside of the classroom and states that:

Each academic year all children in Valley Road School are entitled to:

- A minimum of one visit a year to the theatre or cinema
- A visitor who enhances their safety e.g. fire services
- A visitor who enhances their health e.g. Dental care nurse
- A visit to the Wildfowl Park
- The opportunity to take part in a drama / music production or workshop once in an academic year (At Christmas for Years 1 -3 and in the Summer production in years 4 -6)
- Belong to the school choir
- At least one educational visit relevant to **each** topic covered in the school year with a minimum of three visits each term
- Make relevant crafts for festivals and holidays
- In Year 4, 5 or 6 to have the opportunity to attend a weekend residential at Derwent Hill
- Opportunities to take part in fundraising activities which benefit the school and the wider community
- Access to a variety of after school clubs
- Attendance at the daily breakfast club in school 7.45 – 8.45am
- The celebration of World Book day

To support the implementation of the Charter, each class teacher has an annual budget of £320 to use for visits out of school. The school is fortunate in that it is very close to the City centre and children can walk to the bus and metro stations, as well as access lots of local places of interest, including the beach. Alternatively, and spending no money at all, children regularly go out into the streets to note the season changes and make observations or to see who is at work in the shops and roads around the school.

Regular use of public transport to go on visits has developed skills such as how to purchase tickets and read maps and timetables; the children have also developed citizenship skills such as civility and respect for others, an understanding of appropriate behaviour and care for the public transport system and its environment.

Other LOtC activities include learning to surf at a nearby beach and a residential visit to the Lake District. This takes place every other year to give families time to save for the visit. The school are also involved with Earthkeepers, a programme of outdoor activities, training and personal development run by Northern Education for Sustainability (NEST).

Valley Road have set up a partnership with Selside, a small rural school in Cumbria. 24 Year 6 children spent two nights camping in the school grounds and met parents who parents showcased their skills in baking, sausage making, horse shoeing and sheep shearing. Pupils from Selside have made a return visit to Sunderland, and they stay in touch as pen pals and buddies. The exchange was funded by Creative Partnerships.

The school also has a link with Durham Cathedral Chorister School, and took 16 children there every Saturday morning for over a year. After participating in a whole range of events, including performances at the Cathedral, the Sage and the Civic Centre, three pupils were invited to audition for bursaries at the prestigious Cathedral Chorister School and were all successful. The school worked with the families to find the remaining funds

from a variety of sponsors and now all three have completed their probationary year and become full choristers, demonstrating the life-changing possibilities of the world opened up by LOTC.