

Best practice

Ysgol Bryn Hedydd

Number of pupils: 470

Age range: 3 - 11 years

Date of Estyn inspection: **November 2012**



Area of sector-leading practice which has been identified during inspection and relates to a particular quality indicator:

Key Question(s): 1. Outcomes, 3. Leadership

Quality Indicator(s): 1.2 Wellbeing, 3.3 Partnership working

Aspect(s): 1.2.2 Participation and enjoyment in learning, 1.2.1 attitudes to keeping healthy and safe, 1.2.3 community involvement and decision-making and 3.3.1 strategic partnerships

Context and background to sector-leading practice:

Ysgol Bryn Hedydd is in Rhyl, North Wales. There are currently 410 full time pupils on roll and a further 60 children attend the nursery. Sixteen percent of pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school identifies that 11% of pupils have additional learning needs.

The school is about half a mile from the coast, near the well-known landmark, 'Splash Point'. The school has used this natural environment to enhance learning and develop its 'Beach School' initiative. The school recognises the benefits and values of learning outside the

classroom to help it develop its already rich and varied curriculum.

The idea that, 'there is no evidence to say that learning occurs best while sat behind a desk, became the focus for the 'Beach School' project. This project has become an inspirational resource for the development of all children here in school.

The school wanted to develop opportunities for pupils to learn outdoors. It spent time investigating the local environment and considering how to use it in the most effective way. As the beach is only a 10-15 minute walk from the school they concluded that it could provide a valuable resource that could extend the learning experiences of all pupils. As staff talked to pupils it became apparent that many had never spent time on the beach or around the local promenade during their free time.

Staff decided to develop the 'beach' theme throughout the school. They created 'seaside areas' inside the building and in the school grounds. The school also fully stocked an area with relevant supplies so that staff could access easily any necessary resources. The school also worked with a parent and local builder to design and build a play ship for the Foundation Phase.

The school identified members of staff to co-ordinate and set the project's direction. They were fully trained in beach school activities. The aims of the 'Beach School' were to:

- enhance the opportunities given to pupils;
- to develop learning in a new environment;
- to examine beach characteristics closely;

The school has shared the project successfully and trained staff in over 12 schools along the North Wales coast.

- to develop an understanding for the ecology of the area;
- to improve pupils' ability to work independently; and
- involve the local community and as many stakeholders as possible in the project.

Through the school's activities it became apparent that many other local schools were close enough to the coastline to get involved in using the local environment to develop children's confidence, skills and wellbeing. As a result, staff are involved with a number of local professional learning communities, the Denbighshire Countryside Services and the Lifeguard and Water Safety Service in order to ensure the project is shared across the county and North Wales.

Nature of strategy or activity identified as sector-leading practice:

The school aims to carry out as many lessons as possible using the beach. They now have a whole school beach day every term with all children from nursery to Year 6 taking part. These days are focused around a subject or skill area and examples include 'Science on the Sands', 'Literacy by the Waves' and 'Hwyl ar y Traeth'. The school encourages parents actively to participate in these days and this has helped the pupils develop positive attitudes to learning in the outdoor environment and strengthened their social and life skills.

Two specially trained 'beach school leaders, employed by the school, have helped to develop a learning programme for all subjects and topics covered as part of the school's curriculum. In addition, they offer valuable support to pupils on all beach visits. The school has been successful in devising inspiring opportunities to exploit learning at the beach. Examples of these include the beach becoming a spacecraft crash site and a site where lost treasure was buried. The school also work closely with the North Wales and Community Police Force to develop community links. A recent example of this occurred when Year 2 were on a dinosaur print hunt and the officers came to the beach asking the children to help locate and identify mystery footprints found on the Rhyl beach.

The beach topic has also been used to provide problem solving activities for more able pupils including den building and shelter designing. In addition, the school's pastoral care team identified a programme of activities to improve the self-esteem of a group of older key stage 2 boys that were showing a few signs of disengagement.

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Impact on provision and learners' standards:

Although it is difficult to fully quantify the improvement in standards using such a project, since the beginning of the 'Beach School' project, standards have improved across the school but most significantly in Foundation Phase. In 2012, standards in literacy improved by nine per cent overall with writing and oracy seeing the greatest improvements.

In key stage 2 in 2012, the literacy skills of the pupils in the focused skills group improved by 18%.

The most significant data improvements came in the pupil and parental questionnaires where a range of aspects reflecting the pupil's wellbeing were very positive.

Results of pupil and parent survey

- most pupils felt the beach impacted positively on their learning;
- nearly all pupils felt that learning outdoors helped their social skills;
- nearly all pupils felt that the project helped encourage and teach them how to be healthy; and
- nearly all parents felt the beach project benefited their children.

Feedback on the training provided to other schools showed that in all cases the staff involved felt that the project would impact significantly on standards and provision in their school.