

Start at my feet

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The Parents

My bridging school prides themselves on their brilliant parental links. They operate an app called 'Dojo,' where teachers can post the homework, classwork, or any announcements that need to be made. Parents can join the group using a QR code and access these posts. Due to the app also having a private message feature, parents can message the teacher if they need to speak to them urgently. The school has a pastoral officer and wellbeing co-ordinator who run many workshops to support both parents and children. They also offer the PACE program where unemployed parents are offered support in finding a new job or retraining in a different field. In the class I've been placed in (nursery), the teacher may call some parents prior to their children starting in nursery and arrange a meeting if they're particularly anxious and have questions. The pastoral officer may also conduct home visits if their child is feeling worried or nervous about school. Estyn's report reflects the great effort that my bridging school makes, to include parents, reporting that "the school is active in encouraging parents to be involved in its life and work." (Estyn, 2013).

The Education Endowment Foundation have stated in their guidance report, that the amount of parental engagement is persistently correlated with the academic success of children. (EEF, 2018). The ACT Government would agree with this statement, explaining that schools will benefit remarkably from the consequences of flourishing parental collaboration, in ways such as, the building of reciprocated commitment through further support at home with regards to 'in-school' learning. (ACT Government). Therefore, many schools make their best efforts to get parents involved in school life.



The Community

The community surrounding my bridging school consists of a wide range of ethnicities which is reflected by Estyn, who have reported that the pupils amongst the school speak 18 languages altogether, with not one of them being Welsh as a first language. (Estyn, 2013). This report however was published in 2013, and therefore may not be the most accurate representation of the school's current statistics. On questioning the Head Teacher of my bridging school, I discovered that the school definitely puts an emphasis on how important it is for the children to have an awareness of the great community around them. They have a great deal of local community links, including not only sports teams such as The Ospreys and Swansea City FC, but also the Fire Service and the local Police Liaison Officer. The school arranges for these organisations to visit, give talks and conduct question & answer sessions with the children. The children are also taken out on trips outside of school, which may involve doing things such as local Church visits. It's not only Key Stage 2 children who are actively involved with the community though- foundation phase also do their part by visiting the local care home to play games and sing songs with the residents, an activity that they cherish fully, and always have positive feedback from. According to New Hampshire Department of Education, linking community activities to the classroom has many benefits ranging from an improvement in behaviour and academic achievement, to the reduction of suspension rates (Judson, 2012). On my bridging school's website, they claim that they "seek to contribute to, and enhance the life of, the wider community." (My bridging school). Estyn's report acknowledged this, noting that the school's "partnerships with parents, the community and local schools are well developed." (Estyn, 2013). According to the 2019 Census results, the average percentage of children (primary and nursery) eligible for free school meals in Wales, is 17.3%. (Gov.Wales, 2019). The percentage in my bridging school is a much lower 10.1% (Gov.Wales, 2019), which indicates that school's community is of a higher affluency than the average school in Wales.

The School

My bridging school is a primary school in Sketty, Swansea, for children aged 3-11. They have 2 nursery classes, called 'Rising 3's' which is morning/afternoon nursery for 3- and 4-year olds. The school consists of 573 pupils, with a 95.7% average attendance during the year. They have a 25.5 PTR and a £3086 budget per pupil. (Mylowalschool.gov.wales, 2020).

The Curriculum

To my mind, it's important for primary schools' curriculums to be reflective of their community, as when teaching children of varying ethnicities, they have to make sure that they're creating an environment of respect and belonging. Whilst doing my bridging experience, I noted that they celebrate a plethora of different events that occur in many countries. For example, while I was there, they were celebrating the Chinese New Year in Year 2. This will have given any students of the Chinese ethnicity, a sense of pride and happiness as their peers would be learning about their culture. Estyn stated that in my bridging school, "Trips, for example to local mining museums, and the inclusion of contributions from parents and the community into classroom topics are a particular strength of the curriculum." (Estyn, 2013). Year 1's in my bridging school were learning about a famous Indian festival, in a very interactive way. They had about 5 different tasks based on their theme, to complete. This included colouring in and painting traditional Indian patterns, using technology to record audio of them speaking about the festival, and creating their own Indian candles out of paper. From my perspective, giving the children the opportunity to learn about different cultures will widen their knowledge of the world around them, that they don't experience as a general rule. Some may believe that including religious education in the curriculum is a "waste of time," or, "provokes an exchange of hateful comments." (Torumbra). On the other hand, it's said that it can, "make a very positive contribution to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development." (Davies, 2004).

