

Case Study 1: Llanishen Fach Primary School

Putting the wow factor into learning meant Llanishen Fach Primary School encouraging staff to take risks to develop a rich and creative curriculum. The school has embraced reform and promotes the belief that anything is possible. This case study represents the school's curriculum development in relation to their progress in self-evaluation and planning and preparation.

Context

Llanishen Fach Primary School is in Rhiwbina, in the north of Cardiff. There are 494 pupils on roll, including 78 part-time nursery children. There are two mixed ability classes in each year group. The school also has a special resource base unit for pupils from across the city that have a wide range of additional learning needs.

Almost all pupils speak English as their first language. A very few speak Welsh at home. A very few pupils are from minority ethnic or mixed race backgrounds. No pupils receive support for learning English as an additional language. A very few pupils are eligible for free school meals.

The school identifies a few pupils as having additional learning needs, including the pupils in the special resource base unit. A very few pupils have a statement of additional learning needs.

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

Following the publication of Successful Futures, (Donaldson, 2015), school leaders have involved the school's community in evaluating its overall purpose, vision and values. Leaders ask all stakeholders to consider and reflect upon three questions:

- What kind of school do we aspire to have?
- What are we trying to achieve?
- What do we want our pupils to be like when they leave Llanishen Fach?

Stakeholders were surprised to find that their views on what they were trying to achieve for the pupils of Llanishen Fach and what kind of school they aspired to have aligned well with those outlined by Professor Donaldson. The outcome of this process resulted in an immediate 'sign up' from staff and an instant commitment to curriculum development. Staff felt that the proposed Curriculum for Wales finally matched the genuine values and aspirations of practitioners.

As a result of this process, staff also concluded that, for a number of years, they had been teaching a "hidden" curriculum whereby they would plan and build experiences to achieve the school's values in addition to the statutory national curriculum. Although teachers were developing values such as co-operation, adaptability and risk-taking, it was done mainly through discrete activities. Following a whole school training day to discuss this "hidden curriculum", staff decided to conduct an audit of the school's current provision to evaluate the extent to which the four purposes were already being developed. Staff recognised the importance of including many current activities in the new curriculum and wanted to ensure

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that they did not “throw the baby out with the bath water”, as had occurred with previous change to the curriculum.

The first stage of the audit was for senior leaders to carry out a series of learning walks, observing and listening to pupils in order to capture the temperature of everyday learning experiences that already realised the four purposes of the curriculum. This was recorded into a digital photo journey, which was produced and displayed widely across the school giving the four purposes a high profile.

Leaders focused on capturing more succinctly how frequently the four purposes were being met. They evaluated teaching and learning to note how often the four curriculum purposes were evident in current provision. They considered where the gaps existed and talked about what needed to be adapted with all staff. All members of staff worked in small focus group sessions with a cross section of the school’s community, and groups reflected on the learning experiences already provided. Staff were keen to discover where their current curriculum encouraged pupils to build on each of the characteristics of the four purposes. This process developed from a post-it note activity to a web-based version integrated into the school’s website.

Stage 2: Planning and preparing for change

During a curriculum training day, staff considered their interpretation of a ‘rich context’. Leaders circulated copies of Chapter 5 of Successful Futures, (Donaldson, 2015), and asked two groups to extract key words and phrases that would identify clearly the features of a rich context. They compared the two lists and drew up a list of criteria for ‘meaningful and authentic learning’ to take place. The staff concluded that a ‘meaningful and authentic context’ should:

- include a dynamic method of teaching an aspect of learning that provide a world of experiences and opportunities for learning in an exciting environment full of possibilities
- provide hands on experiences that are engaging and challenging, that develop determination, adaptability, confidence building, risk-taking and enterprise
- provide planned opportunities to revisit and embed skills in different ways so that learning becomes almost subconscious

With their existing beliefs and Donaldson’s principles in mind, teachers and teaching assistants worked in cross phase groups in carousel based activities. They shared ideas on adapting and updating current contexts to develop a rich and creative curriculum. This included encouraging staff to take risks, think outside the box and put the ‘wow’ factor into learning. Teachers considered pupil voice fully by asking pupils what they wanted to learn. Most importantly, they encouraged them to think of inspiring and creative ways they would like to learn, such as using parents in the classroom to set problems that they would encounter in their workplace. This evolved into the school’s “Inspire a Generation” project, which allows parents to attend school to discuss their career challenge and inspire children in their field of work.

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In order to establish an ethos where staff make learning more irresistible, leaders ensured that staff had sufficient time to enable that to happen. Leaders realised that they needed to help teachers to manage their workload more efficiently and change their expectations around planning. The school has abolished weekly plans in favour of “Pacer Sheets” as a planning tool. Pacer Sheets take the context’s “wow” factor and entry point, so that teachers map the skills to be covered in all areas of learning over half a term. Planning combines cross curricular learning that covers a number of subject areas where appropriate, but maintains a focus on standards and skills progression. The focus is on pedagogy and developing irresistible learning experiences for the children.

An analysis of these trailing activities highlighted the fundamental link between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy. They created a teaching template, unpicked each of the areas of learning and experience and considered the 12 pedagogical principles. Leaders have developed a bespoke program of professional learning that interpreted and delivered these 12 areas through training sessions.

This enables staff to model new skills and strategies; to practise and trial new ideas in their classrooms so that they are constantly sharing and refining pedagogy. The focus is on teachers actively researching and learning in the classroom, taking risks and working outside their comfort zones in a safe and supportive environment.

Llanishen Fach has developed a strong culture of sharing practice and staff have the freedom to organise and observe each other’s practice, focusing on specific skills development. More recently, lead practitioners have developed a structured coaching model, with staff focusing on developing and strengthening pedagogical skills in the classroom. Using coaching principles, staff work together in year group teams before collaborating on pedagogical development with a cross phase group. Leaders focus on excellence in learning and teaching to ensure that the school sets a firm foundation to realise the four purposes of the curriculum in the future.

Stage 3: Realising change

The response to Successful Futures, (Donaldson, 2015), from staff has been one of necessity and positivity and seen as an opportunity to revisit the reasons why they chose to teach in the first place. Staff appreciate the ownership they have in influencing and determining changes. Although staff were initially cautious in taking risks and thinking outside of the box during the early stages of evaluating the curriculum, they are now embracing reform and consider how they will evaluate impact on standards of teaching and learning.

Leaders recognise that keeping the school’s vision at the heart of the process and promoting an ‘anything is possible mind-set’ is vital to encourage those who were comfortable with familiar approaches, to embrace change. Continuing the focused coaching model, opportunities to observe good practice, a relevant program of professional development and networking with other schools ensure that staff have the required skills to implement the new curriculum.

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At Llanishen Fach, teachers have harnessed the 'hidden' curriculum to shape and steer the new curriculum. The values of the school are in line with four purposes and take centre stage of everything they do. Meaningful experiences provide rich contexts to deepen learning that embrace pupil voice to ensure that learning is irresistible. Staff manage workload more effectively and ensure that learning is the focus and remains the focus.

Useful links

Provider:

[Llanishen Fach Primary School](#)

Provider website:

<http://www.llanishenfach.co.uk/>