

‘Start At My Feet’ Poster Commentary

During this essay, I will be explaining how opportunities and challenges in a school’s community influence teaching, learning and other aspects of the school. In order to successfully do this, I will refer to my Bridging experiences, along with exploring my own research. My placement school was opened in 2001, with approximately 633 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11 years, spread between 23 classes. Around 62 children attend nursery full-time and most pupils come from the immediate area. The school has two classes in a learning resource base for learners aged 3 to 11 years old who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum conditions. These pupils come from across the local authority. Approximately 29% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The individual school budget per pupil for School A in 2016-17 means that the individual budget is £4712 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in that community is £6870 and the minimum is £3427. School A is 8th out of the 61 primary schools in the area in terms of its school budget per pupil, (Estyn 2016). Later on, I will be discussing how the school provides its services to the families of their pupils and its local community. For example, Family Support Officers, home visits and their ‘Take What You Need’ corner and trolley. I will also be discussing how they are a Pioneer School, a Golds Rights Respecting School, and how they have included the Four Purposes and Twelve Pedagogical Principles of the New Curriculum in their teaching and learning.

	Target	What I have done in this assignment
Target 1	Ensure that key theorists are included in both discussion and referencing	I have ensured that any key theorists are included in both my discussion and my references
Target 2	Provide more counter arguments for recommendations made or critically evaluate aspects to be cautious with	I have ensured that recommendations were made
Target 3	Use more appropriate sources	I have used more appropriate sources

According to End Child Poverty (2021/22), 81% of the children in poverty in School A’s county were in working families in 2021/22. This means that there were 2,982 children living in poverty and in working households in that area. School A prides itself when it comes to ensuring all of their pupils feel safe and secure within their school. They don’t only work with the children who may be struggling, but also their families. School A offers ‘home visits’ in which a family support officer will visit a family’s household to discuss and support any problems that a family may be dealing with and break down any potential barriers. Visible barriers such as COVID-19 had a huge impact on specifically young children and their carers or parents, as these young children would not have had the same opportunities to develop holistically as the young children who did

not experience COVID-19 at that age. However, invisible barriers such as mental health, family life and disabilities are much more difficult to detect and talk about, but with the help of family support officers and home visits, these barriers can slowly be broken down. Home visits are beneficial for parents and carers as they are able to receive information on where they can get the right resources and supplies for their children, donations, uniforms and books for example. In a community such as this one, it is considered a materially deprived area, meaning a lot of parents may be working long hours in order to keep money coming in. This may then mean that some parents may find it difficult to find the time to help their children with any school work or even just spending time with them. You'll also find that some adults who have children are uneducated or even illiterate, meaning they'll find it difficult to support their children with their school work. However, the family support officers who carry out home visits offer their support by helping these carers with filling out any documents or forms needing to be signed, for example consent forms, as they may find it challenging to do so themselves. Family Support officers are also available for weekly toddler groups to welcome new families to the school, whilst offering their emotional support to the parents or carers. The New Curriculum for Wales was first published in January 2020 and it aims to help each school develop its own curriculum, enabling their learners to develop towards the four purposes of the curriculum... The purpose of every school and setting's curriculum is to support our children and young people to be ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (gov.wales, 2023). School A is a 'pioneer school'. This means that it worked with the Welsh Government and other pioneer schools to develop a national model of professional learning and to develop and pilot a new curriculum for Wales (Estyn, 2016). School A have implemented the Twelve Pedagogical Principles of the New Curriculum within their teaching and learning. During Bridging experiences, I observed pupils completing their 'Amser Cwest', which relates to the fourth Pedagogical Principle, "employing a blend of approaches including those that promote problem-solving, creative and critical thinking" (Gov.Wales, 2023). Each child obtained their own set of quests every week, in which they had to carry out either individually, in a group, digitally or as a pair. For example, one quest included construction, where the individual had to work independently to create a building in relation to what they have been focusing on that week. During my time on bridging day experiences, I found that in every classroom I visited, the four purposes were clearly displayed for every adult and every child to see. The school also created four different characters who each represent one of the four purposes, in order for the pupils to develop towards the four purposes. For example, with these four characters being created, each child has the opportunity to visualise themselves as one of them and hopefully prove it to themselves by positively executing one of the characters by understanding and considering the impact of their actions when making choices and decisions. School A prides itself on being a Golds Rights Respecting School, meaning that the school has explicitly adopted a child rights approach based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has embedded it in school policy, practice and culture (UNICEF, 2021). Again, within every classroom, the Child's Rights are displayed and at the start of the academic year, each child chose one right in order for the teacher to know which right that child resonated with the most. Child's Rights were adopted throughout the school through a number of different techniques.

For example, by using Article 16 “You have the right to privacy”, each child had their own tray in the classroom for them to place their own personal items in. Also Article 19’s “You have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly threatened” is covered by safeguarding officers. Free school meals are provided for children at the school and since the area is materially deprived, 29.3% of pupils are eligible, which is significantly greater compared to other schools in Wales. ‘Take What You Need’ trolleys are provided within every classroom, which include items such as spare school uniform, hats and scarves, and pieces of fruit at snack time for pupils eligible for free school meals or pupils without fruit that day. They also have a ‘Take What You Need’ corner at the entrance of the school. This is available for children, Their families and the local community and it is provided by any donations that have been given directly to the school. Within this corner, supplies such as nappies, toys, clothes and sanitary products are available for all. School A clearly adopts the Child’s Rights within their school, as they edge toward inclusivity, ensuring no child is left out for whatever reason. In order to develop pupils holistically, School A has introduced a number of techniques. For example, ‘Daily Check-ins’ are available for pupils, in which every morning each child places a picture of their face onto a ‘Mood Monster’, giving their teacher the opportunity to check-in on them throughout the day if needed. Mood Monsters have shown to be highly effective when it comes to ensuring every child performs to their best ability academically. Shawmind has researched how mental health affects education and states that “many children actually achieve low grades because their mental health challenges cause difficulty concentrating, lack of optimism and difficulty sleeping” (Shawmind, 2023). Therefore, by introducing ‘Mood Monsters’, every child has the opportunity to express how they are feeling everyday, without having to actually tell someone, in the fear of embarrassment or rejection. School A has highly effective partnerships with parents, local schools, the community and local stakeholders that have positive impacts on pupils’ standards, learning and well-being. For example, ‘Diversity Day’ fell on a bridging day, in which I got to experience families and the local community being welcomed to the school to celebrate this special day. The school provided a range of food and beverages and by involving the local community and the children’s families, it gave the children at school the opportunity to engage and involve themselves with everyone around them. Another event the school held, specifically by the Year 5 classes, was a soup kitchen for the local underprivileged individuals. During this day, families and the local community were invited into the school for a social gathering, where a range of different flavours of soups were provided, as well as beverages and sweet treats. The school choir also performed a few songs for everyone, and it was incredible to see everyone socialising and getting involved. By holding events such as Diversity Day and Soup Kitchens, not only does it benefit the children in a number of different ways, but it also benefits the visitors. For example, their social development, their health and well-being, and their resilience can be improved, just in one day.

When I start teaching in my placement school, I will adopt School A’s methods such as ‘Amser Cwest’ in my lessons, as it involves the 12 Pedagogical Principles and the Four Purposes. Amser Cwest is a great activity to give the children as it can help them improve on their independent studies, their social skills, digital competence and their intellectual development. I will also listen to the learners and let them lead their learning. I will promote positive learning habits and behaviours that meet the four purposes and are understood by learners in that

context, as previously mentioned. I would personally recommend that School A incorporates Forest School learning as part of their teaching methods. It has been proven to be very beneficial for young learners, as it gives them the opportunity to play and explore, whilst taking risks. It is a great way of developing confidence, resilience and self-esteem and improves their health and well-being. Therefore, Forest School learning is another aspect of teaching and learning I would like to involve within my lessons whilst on placement. Another suggestion I would make for School A is to try and involve the Gypsy Traveller community in their school and events carried out. Whilst on Bridging, Teacher A (2023) explained how there has been a decline in the number of Gypsy Travellers going to school, whether that being because their parents or the children themselves have had poor experiences in school, or because they do not feel the need to send their children to school. Either way, I would personally suggest that the school hold events and activities suited for everyone in the community, specifically Gypsy Travellers, in order for them to get to know how the school functions a bit better.

References

End Child Poverty Coalition (2021/22) '*The Percentage of Children in Poverty in Working Households, 2021/22*'. Accessed on 7th January, 2024. Available at <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>

Gov.Wales (first published 1st December 2017, last updated 24th March, 2023) '*Curriculum for Wales: overview*'. Accessed on 7th January, 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.wales/curriculum-wales-overview#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20every%20school,of%20Wales%20and%20the%20world>

Estyn (2016) '*A Report on School A*'. Accessed on January 15th, 2024. URL removed for reasons of confidentiality.

UNICEF (2021) '*Rights Respecting Schools Award*'. Accessed on 15th January, 2024. Available at <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/getting-started/gold/what-is-gold/#:~:text=Achieving%20Gold%3A%20Rights%20Respecting%20means,school%20policy%2C%20practice%20and%20culture>.

Shawmind (2023) '*How Mental Health Affects Education*'. Accessed on January 15th, 2024. Available at <https://shawmind.org/how-mental-health-affects-education/#:~:text=Mental%20health%20%26%20academic%20performance,Difficulty%20sleeping>

Gov.Wales (2023) '*Pedagogy*'. Accessed on 15th January, 2024. Available at <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/pedagogy>