

Developing a citizenship ethos across the whole school

School/centre: Ferguslie Primary School

Age range: P1 - P7

Education for Citizenship contexts: cross curricular, community links, curricular areas, young people's participation.

Background to Ferguslie Primary

Ferguslie Primary School is situated in the north of Paisley in an area of multiple deprivation. During the 1999-2000 session, 84% of the 218 pupils were entitled to free school meals. The school seeks to combat the negative effects of widespread deprivation by working to enhance pupils' self-respect and their care for the school community. A number of distinct activities contribute to this, some of which are supported by Renfrewshire Council's 'New Community School' initiative and by the action fund. However the Headteacher, Mary Taylor, is clear that the most important feature is that pupils, staff and parents have opportunities to exercise responsibility and feel that their point of view is valued.

Citizen of the Month awards

Each month the school holds 'praise' assemblies that focus on an area of citizenship such as 'care for others', 'care for the school grounds' and 'being cheerful'. At the end of the month two pupils from each class are nominated by their class teachers to receive 'Citizen of the Month' certificates for taking on their responsibilities in the chosen focus area. The pupils' pictures are then taken and displayed in the school entrance hall under the title of 'Citizen of the Month'.

Buddy systems

All Primary 1 pupils are each given a Primary 7 'buddy' who looks after them at interval times during their first few weeks in school. Until Primary 1 pupils are in school full-time, the buddies take them to lunch and are responsible for handing them over to their parents, often helping to carry messages about children and school between parents and teachers.

After the Primary 1s are established in the school, the buddy system develops into a paired reading scheme with Primary 7 pupils supporting infant reading at break times. Similarly members of the local community support senior pupils, thus reinforcing the idea that everyone has a role to play in the support of fellow citizens. In a similar vein, local secondary school pupils give support to infant classes once a week as part of a community placement module.

Ferguslie Primary's pupil council

A pupil council has operated in Ferguslie Primary for ten years. Classes from P4 to P7 elect two class representatives to serve on the council. Primary 1-3 pupils are not represented on the council but are included in consultation by council members. At present there is only one class per year, so the council numbers eight pupils and one member of the teaching staff. Each year a member of staff volunteers to support the council and cover for his or her class is arranged for 30 minutes per week for the whole year so that pupil council time is protected.

At the beginning of the school year the council elects a chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary. This gives pupils a chance to learn how to run a meeting, how to chair and how to take minutes. Occasionally pupils find these responsibilities overwhelming and ask to be excused from them, but most have benefited greatly. The council secretary is responsible for preparing the minutes with the teacher's support. (The quality of minutes has improved considerably over the years of the council's existence, reflecting pupils' greater familiarity with ICT.) The council is free

to discuss any items brought to it by pupils or staff. They then communicate their thoughts to everyone by visiting classes and distributing the minutes.

The staff member communicates council concerns and decisions to other staff, who ensure that time is made available in class for feedback to pupils and for any consultation or information gathering required by the council. At any time the council can ask for members of staff or the community to explain why decisions affecting pupils have been reached. Over the last few years the council has brought forward various ideas for change. These include changes and improvements to the toilets including the addition of mirrors, new equipment for the playground and a useful suggestion to colour-code homework baskets with the relevant jotters to avoid confusion. The council also transmits useful information to the school staff, such as damage to a toilet that had gone unrepaired for several weeks and the need to re-paint some of the blackboards. A previous concern that too many pupils were in difficulty because of missing pencils led to a major initiative by pupils to set up a school shop with sponsorship and practical support from a national bank.

Occasionally, the council has to be told that there is no money to act on their suggestions, or that there are other reasons such as safety factors for not proceeding. For instance, it has not been possible to finance or progress the Primary 6 request for goalposts in the playground to match Primary 7 goalposts in the neighbouring park. There are continuing requests from some younger pupils for fencing to protect part of the playground from the football areas and these requests remain under consideration by the headteacher and staff.

Citizenship in the curriculum

Participation by pupils in decision making is well supported by studies within specific subjects. Within the school's programme for social subjects, 'People in society' topics at Primary 4, Primary 5 and Primary 7 include aspects of citizenship. At Primary 4 the pupils undertake a local study focusing on vandalism. They examine where it exists, who causes it, who should clear it up and what they can do themselves to stop it. Pupils are encouraged to discuss the issues with local groups such as the community police. In Primary 5 pupils examine issues to do with litter in the school - why it exists and who should clear it up. They learn about local refuse collections and recycling, and the role that the local authority plays in these. They examine pollution and the worldwide responsibilities of all human beings for caring for the planet. In Primary 7 pupils discuss the work of local action groups and the decision-making powers of the elected local authority, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament.

Pupil participation within enterprise topics

Again within the school's programme for social subjects, 'People in society' enterprise topics in Primary 3 and Primary 6 introduce and develop pupils' skills in problem solving, communication, working with finance, negotiation and decision making as well as developing their confidence, perseverance and self-esteem. Pupils choose their own enterprise topic. Over the last few years these have included a printing company, the setting up of a café and the establishment of a school garden. In all cases the pupils have made decisions about what to do with the money they earn. As well as organising treats for themselves, they have always decided to give something back to the school and the community. For example, in creating their garden they involved local businesses and a local adult training project. They grew vegetables, which they distributed to the elderly in the community as part of the school's harvest celebrations.

Home-school links

Through the community school initiative the school has a family support worker, who supports a number of initiatives. She has supported children in running their own breakfast club. They have been helped in this by Reid Kerr College and are learning about various responsibilities associated with running such a club. They are also helped by members of the community who

have volunteered to support them, by 'Have a Heart Paisley' and by the Renfrewshire Community Health Initiative.

The school's family support worker has supported the development of after-school clubs that help to develop attainment in literacy and numeracy through games led by volunteer parents. Action fund money has been used to make provision for training parents to give this service.

Similarly, parents have also been assisted in training as temporary community workers and, after training, work with other parents to support various activities in the school. This supports both the needs of children and of adult learners in the community, ensuring that the opportunities to volunteer are open to all.

These activities reflect the very positive relationship that the school has succeeded in fostering with its parents. The school has an active Parents' Association, which works hard to provide treats for the children. With advice from local authority councillors, the Parents' Association has successfully applied for grants that help ensure that all pupils can benefit from activities such as residential trips, Christmas treats or leavers' dances. The school also has a room reserved for use by parents, which is widely used for the benefit of the community. It is the location of various courses organised by parents for parents. Throughout, parental involvement supports the school's work with children, but does so in a way that attracts an unusually high level of participation and provides social support to parents, many of whom are living in difficult circumstances.

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