

# Case Study 13: Building Community Values

## Golspie High School, Highland

**This case study describes two community initiatives involving pupils from the school and which offer opportunities for the development of creativity.**

Golspie High School is a small secondary school in the north of Scotland. The school is proud of a number of the creative achievements of its pupils and none more so than their work in the community and local environment of this rural area. Much of the work that has been undertaken has enhanced and supported the personal and social education programme in the school with guidance staff playing a vital coordinating role. However a growing feature of more recent developments has been the integration of activities into mainstream subject areas. Two of these school initiatives are described in this case study.

For a number of years the school ran a weekly activities session that allowed pupils to opt into a range of initiatives across a variety of areas including the expressive arts, community involvement, charity, sport and environmental activities. A key feature of this approach was the collaboration of staff and pupils in both the choice of activity and in planning the development of any work over the school session.

*The development of these various initiatives over the past fifteen years or so has led to a number of achievements for the school in which we all take great pride. The initiatives have set free the creative abilities of the pupils and staff and have included the writing of words, music and production of school shows, enterprise and business awards, sports success at team and individual levels and outstanding community involvements.*

David Whyte, Headteacher

However as recent curriculum developments unfolded the school introduced additional subject availability at Standard Grade and began implementation of the Higher Still programme both of which required altered time allocations in the middle and senior school. This led to the demise of the weekly activities session although this was compensated for by various study support initiatives and challenge funds. This provided funds for transport after school allowing some pupils to remain beyond the end of the school day and so maintain a number of activities. Nonetheless the rural nature of the catchment area and the travel distances involved for some pupils has meant that significant efforts have had to be made by both staff and pupils to find time and raise resources for initiatives to be sustained.

*I suppose that it is a question of balance and priority. We certainly want to raise standards and increase the range of academic opportunity for our pupils; but the wider elements of the rounded education system, which develops innovation, creativity and social responsibilities, also*

*need to be maintained and we will have to evaluate through debate as to whether or not we have achieved that balance.*

David Whyte

As part of the work of the guidance team there are links with community and environmental groups with a view to promoting pupils' involvement in local initiatives and encouraging participative citizenship.

## **Littleferry Project**

The coastline of north-east Sutherland is one of its greatest assets and is a key element in the area's quality of life, cultural heritage and appeal as a tourist attraction. This is particularly true of the area close to the school at the Loch Fleet estuary, which has been designated a special protection area on account of its outstanding natural heritage. The community of Littleferry is of significance not only locally but also to the whole of the North of Scotland. The ferry linked with that of the 'Meikle Ferry' near Tain as part of the route of the Great North Road. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it also provided an important sea link between the port of Burghead in Moray and the Sutherland estates in the days before the railway. In the latter part of the nineteenth century several of the buildings associated with the Littleferry community that developed to support the transport and fishing trades fell into disrepair. Many of the buildings changed function, with some becoming private houses whilst others such as the wooden ferry ticket office and the stone pier area became more or less derelict.

The school in collaboration with local outdoor sports clubs had been involved in a project to convert an old gasworks building on the shore of Golspie into the 'Seafront Centre' as a base clubroom-cum-store facility for a number of clubs. This highly successful project awakened an interest on the part of the pupils in restoration and local history. The guidance department became aware of moves by two Littleferry residents to write a book on the history of the area and a group of interested pupils – some of whom had been involved in the Seafront Centre project – was established to see what contribution they could make to maintaining this piece of local heritage. Pupils were encouraged to research the history of the ferry and this was done primarily by directly liaising with the husband and wife team planning to write the book. Searches were also carried out on records going back to 1290. Use was made of library and internet sources and meetings with the prospective book authors were particularly fruitful because of the wealth of material which they had gathered.

*I have been to the school several times to talk with the pupils and they have been to our home to look at documents and artefacts we have here. We have taken exploratory walks to look at the properties in the community and to talk with local residents. This is such a valuable initiative for the community, tourism and also for engendering a love of the local heritage in our young people.*

Jimmy Henderson, Littleferry resident and author

The pupils became particularly concerned about the state of some of the historically valuable buildings. They were keen to preserve the wooden ticket office built by Sutherland estate carpenters in the mid-nineteenth century. Pupils also felt that the stonework on the pier could be restored since many of the damaged or decayed pieces could be recovered from the sea adjacent to the pier. The pupils also agreed that it was important that signage with information on the historical significance of Littleferry should be erected. This latter concern arose because residents spoke of how visitors often queried them about the village since no signs equivalent in detail to those detailing the natural environment were in place. The pupils felt this was unfortunate given the number of walkers and naturalists who visited the area.

As an agenda for action emerged pupils realised that they would need to generate funding and liaise with a number of specialist heritage and environmental agencies including Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish National Heritage and Forest Enterprise. They also realised they would have to initiate and commission construction work if they were to make any impact and to negotiate with the owners of the site, Sutherland Estates, who were very supportive of the initiative. Application was made to various agencies for fund support and advice including links with the Council for monies under land renewal. In all some £15,000 was secured.

The tasks broke down into:

- conservation and repair of the pier and timber ticket office
- restoration of use including access to the beach and repair of an old winch donated by Lord Strathnaver
- design and manufacture of interpretative signs for visitors
- commissioning consultants and construction including engaging the services of a conservation architect and structural engineer and the engaging of a local construction company.

Working in the framework of a properly constituted project team, pupils took the lead in all these tasks in correspondence and discussion and the work was consolidated by building in tasks to the wider curriculum. For example, the design of signs and the establishment of an interpretative area became a design project for students in Higher Art. The project team became the client and the art class was commissioned to provide designs, models and layouts. This involved a competition between class members with the successful design having to meet the exacting standards required by the environmental agencies responsible for the area's natural heritage.

*This was a real design opportunity which fitted the curriculum and was made all the more powerful an agent because of the community project and the commitment of the young people. It represented some 30 per cent of the coursework.*

Tom Sharp, PT Art

*There were constraints in the brief regarding budget, content and profile of the signage. You had to take account of materials, weathering, location, language to be used and the balance of text and*

*pictures. I want to be an architect and I felt that the exposure to this project helped me with my confidence, organisational skills and working to a brief in the real world.*

Neil McLauchan, pupil

Pupils' work in biology involved beach surveys and clean-up tasks, which in itself led to a team of pupils reporting their initiative to an environmental conference in Inverness. As well as meeting some of the practical curricular demands of subjects, such as art, science, history and English, other skills were developed in collaborative working, preparation and presentation, negotiation and budgeting.

*The litter analysis on the beach gave some interesting results in the types of litter and the places it had come from. It also showed us how the tides worked. The presentation at Inverness was a challenge in terms of preparing and actually doing it, but it was good and we felt we had gained a lot from the whole thing especially in terms of our confidence.*

Clare and Pamela, S3 pupils

Exciting knowledge about the area was highlighted in the project. This included a survey of the port in the mid-nineteenth century by the surveyor father of Robert Louis Stevenson. The area was also used as a secret World War II base for locally recruited saboteurs and resistance teams in the event of Nazi invasion. Significant community interest was generated and local press coverage heightened awareness and community contribution. The now listed timber building was discovered to be a unique example of carpentry and local construction and its restoration sees its use now as a shelter and talking point in ranger-led nature walks as well as a boat store for the school. Further work is planned to restore artefacts such as an old pair of scales that would have at one time been used as part of the ferry trade, and final discussions are being held with the Scottish Wildlife Trust on siting and finished content of the new signs.

*This is a real project in the sense that the issues we have explored and the work undertaken have an impact on the lives and community of our young people. We have succeeded in creating a valued resource at Littleferry which will be used, developed and maintained into the future. Like our work with the local old folks home it is an investment in our community.*

Ian Murray, PT Guidance

## **Seaforth House Project**

Seaforth House is a residential home for elderly people with a day centre attached. It is a modern development built in an area of some three acres and although the building has excellent facilities the residents felt a little remote from the community. The school pupils became involved in trying to provide garden facilities some ten years ago. They raised funds for a greenhouse and pond and developed an area within one of the wings that was paved and

where raised beds were established. The pupils who choose involvement in this project have representation on the management committee of the home and they take responsibility for maintaining the developments of previous years and for initiating at least one new initiative each year. Past work has included the construction of a shelter belt around the grounds from native trees and shrubs, seating, raised beds, paving, a herb garden and a memorial garden. This session the project has been the development of a wormery using kitchen waste from the house kitchen. The pupils sought and obtained a £200 grant from a local waste minimisation initiative. This has allowed them to buy the worms that are then fattened up and bred, for resale together with the compost, which is also to be sold in future years to sustain further work. Income generated is also supplemented by more traditional ploys, such as sales of work and sponsored walks. Plans for the future include the development of a crazy golf course and a walkers' route to take the community through the grounds of the home – reducing residents' feelings of isolation. In these initiatives there is an intermeshing with other community projects including the construction of a biblical garden. The garden project is only part of the work with Seaforth House, as pupils also help out around the home and socialise with the residents. Once again the initiatives are linked to the curriculum and include the fostering of interpersonal skills as part of access coursework as well as meeting wider guidance department aims of collaboration, team working, confidence building and raising self-esteem. The design of the crazy golf course has become an important element in craft and design classwork with CAD work, construction of pins and the layouts for each hole.

*Certainly the drive to increase standards and subject choice has cut into this kind of experience for the pupils and I have to work hard to keep the participation of the more academic pupils. I think the gains in life experience which our community projects bring greatly assists our pupils in their growth towards independence and they act as great vehicles for unlocking the creativity and innovation which all young people have.*

Shona McKay, guidance teacher

Despite the difficulties the school is always seeking ways to develop and foster the higher-order skills that underpin creative thinking and work. For example, another feature of the school's effort to build a supportive school community sees sixth-year pupils running tutorials with first-year pupils in the area of general confidence building and in supporting a first-year activities week involving a range of outdoor activities.

In the community activities engaged in by the pupils of Golspie High School, a range of features involving the development and channelling of creativity are noteworthy.

- A number of projects have been developed over time that require planned and progressive contribution and which have high profile value by the wider community.
- Links with the ongoing curriculum are fostered to exploit the creative

opportunities across a pupil's experience, both in and out of school.

- Real challenge characterises the work of the pupils with the encouragement of decision taking and collaborative working.
- A climate of enthusiasm and participation is fostered.
- Creativity features in the planned work of departments with a focus through project activities.
- Staff and adults involved with pupils provide good role models.
- Staff and pupils believe that the projects in which they are involved allow for the taking of real responsibility and value the creative contributions of all.