

A case study from the South West

Two primary schools in an urban area in Cornwall volunteered to be part of the Primary Futures project. Both had looked at aspirational work before with primary age children but were excited and interested in the developments and ideas from the Primary Futures / Inspiring the Future websites.

The localities that both schools are situated in have high levels of deprivation and much of the previous aspirational work comes from the schools but both have good parental links and relationships. The children targeted were all from Y6 and when we met both teachers we felt it was an interesting idea to work co-operatively and bring all the pupils together in one school for the day. A model we found very effective. It was also important to have two very proactive teachers leading the project on behalf of each school.

This meant there would be 75 pupils in total but by being carefully organised they could spend the morning listening and interacting with the various volunteers. In the afternoon they decided to develop news reports and information sheets following the presentations with hopefully a number of the volunteers staying to practically assist the groups.

The next task was to register on the website, that took us a while to work out so that delayed some of the planning slightly! Again it proved crucial to have identified staff leading the project. The volunteer database was interesting and we soon got the hang of it. There were at this time not many people in our area registered and those who were appeared under several different categories so that actually reduced choice. A number were also out of the county and we were unsure as to whether that meant they were willing to travel or that their geography was unsound! We discovered later that some of these travelled through on the way to and from work so were willing to contribute. It's worth noting that since our pilots more people are volunteering via the website which is really encouraging.

The two teachers looked at who they had used in the past and combined these resources as well as making enquiries via the website. A letter was devised to send to volunteers and a date in the spring term was agreed. It was also decided to ask volunteers they knew to go on to the website and volunteer their services to add to the number already registered. They were happy to agree to this request.

A focus of literacy and numeracy was agreed upon for the day and contributors would be asked to consider how either of these had impacted on them in their primary school years and whether this was still the case in their working lives.

When organising the visit it was found that the coach costs to transport one school to the other, less than five miles, was prohibitive. This was raised with NAHT and the Primary Futures Coordinator and it was agreed that the project would fund it therefore making everything possible.

Letters and emails were sent to prospective participants and the whole outline of the day and Primary Futures was carefully explained. Owing to communication problems and an initial lack of responses to all communications both schools decided to move the day to the summer term. One school found that they would have a SATs moderation the day after the agreed day in the summer so they decided to put their day off until the autumn. This was frustrating but necessary. Flexibility with the programme is essential. The other school were looking to go ahead but there were still only two responses from the emails and letters, in spite of follow up communications. Based on this we decided to move the two schools together once more in the Autumn term.

Both schools have spoken to their own staff about joining the programme and signing up on the website as well as encouraging friends and associates to do the same. There is a real challenge here in the south west with a lack of volunteers (although this is slowly improving) and we have tried to raise the positive side of Primary Futures with all potential volunteers. We think we need to start actively getting into Rotary and Lions Clubs plus Chambers of Commerce to try to get the local businesses more involved. The biggest challenge is that the local economy is made up a lot of small businesses and although that is a very positive model for the future it does mean that although they may be keen to help the whole issue of time for them is a problem.

We have two major colleges for FE and HE in the county and are attracted by the idea of sharing the Primary Futures aspirations model with them. They may well also have the contacts and some really inspiring leaders and those who have real key practical skills that appeal to all of their audience. Another avenue we have discussed is targeting former students who either work in successful enterprises or have developed an effective hard working self-employment route. There will be many skills here and a lot that are easily recognised as achievable by all students so we can demonstrate the links between primary school learning and the world of work

This project is still on-going but, as with many activities, it takes time to organise but is still alive and well in Cornwall. There is no doubt that once established Primary Futures will help to raise aspirations and show the children there is a world out there that they can play a key part in.

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