

Account of practice:

Food glorious food

Haworth Primary School, West Yorkshire

1/7

Context

Haworth Primary is a one form entry school in West Yorkshire. In 2012 Ofsted graded the school as good with leadership and management outstanding.

The school's strengths lie in its inspirational leadership. This provides an overarching vision of 'Learning for Life' gives a first-class curriculum and creates a strongly positive ethos.

Haworth Primary School Inspection Report, 2012:4

The school has a national reputation for its promotion of healthy lifestyles and was the first school in Yorkshire to achieve the Food for Life Partnership's (FFLP) Gold Award.

This account focuses on how the school's leadership have threaded the principles of healthy lifestyles through the school's curriculum; the strategies they used to engage stakeholders; and some of the leadership challenges they faced.

Beginnings

Haworth was Janet Parkinson's first headship and early into post she identified a number of challenges. Pupils performed significantly below national averages in tests; pupil behaviour was poor and Janet linked this in part to the stodgy curriculum diet; the nutritional quality of the school meals required improvement; finally, community representatives had concerns with children's lack of awareness of healthy lifestyles and care for their environment.

However, things weren't all bad. Haworth had a well-established gardening club led by Steve Thorpe who was also a governor, which had developed an enviable reputation as a community project winning several regional awards.

Janet and Steve began to explore how the gardening club might become central to the life of the school as part of a 'creative curriculum'. The school was making progress when the FFLP partnership initiative was launched and Haworth was chosen to be a flagship school. In Janet's words: "This gave us a wonderful framework for developing our creative curriculum and promoting healthy lifestyles."

Janet's leadership strategies during these early days are instructive for trainee heads. Firstly, whilst she saw challenges, she also recognised its great strength and chose to focus her energies on taking the school from good to great in its use of horticulture rather than bemoaning its shortcomings. Secondly, she was opportunistic. She recognised how she could use an external initiative to deliver her personal agenda for the school. Thirdly, she had a vision. This was critical. Without a vision she wouldn't have recognised the opportunities around her. Finally, she ensured that there was a close alignment between her vision and the governing body. Together they have driven the strategic direction of the school together and achieved plaudits such as this:

The school shows what real 21st century education is all about, which is using real life experiences to teach the curriculum and providing the next generation with solutions to what threatens their future, namely climate change and the obesity crisis.

Grundy, L, Food for Life Partnership website

Focus on the curriculum: putting food at the heart of Haworth's creative curriculum

FFLP activities are woven through Haworth's curriculum. All staff must include eco activities, provision for cooking, class growing, Fairtrade activities, opportunities for parental involvement and FFLP enrichment activities into their planning – not as discrete activities but as part of the themes their class is working on. The school has two cookery rooms and has developed its own cookery skills progression grid to provide structure to the minimum 12 hours of cookery for each class.

Sustainability is at the heart of the curriculum. Cooking, growing and farming links run throughout the year and through all topics. As a result, the curriculum provides learners, their families and the wider community with life skills and a much greater understanding of sustainability.

- **Reception** – Visited a working farm where the children collected eggs and cooked them for their lunches.
- **Year 1 and 2** – Followed a whole topic on 'Eastern Spice.' The children use organic, Fairtrade spices to cook with. The children write about the spices, for example, describing their appearance, taste, smell and texture.
- **Year 3 and 4** – When studying the Romans looked at food in Roman times and how it was prepared. They then prepared a range of Roman dishes; including honey cakes, tasted them and took the recipes home.
- **Year 5** – Visited a Victorian weaver's cottage. The children designed and baked bread in advance then worked in the cottage kitchen to make scones, butter and a vegetable soup for their lunch.
- **Year 6** – On their residential visit, the children were given £4 each and asked to work in a group to plan and purchase the food they would need for lunches for their 2 day residential.

Focus on the dining hall: changing eating habits

Changing the dining experience

To achieve the Gold Standard a school must increase its uptake of school meals. Like many schools this was a challenge for Haworth but they succeeded. In January 2006 take-up was 34 per cent; by 2011 it was 58 per cent. This was achieved through a raft of strategies:

- Changing the physical environment of the dining hall.
- Reducing queuing times and noise levels.
- Introducing themed lunches.
- Inviting parents to sample school dinners.
- Ensuring that meals are at least 75 per cent freshly prepared, 50 per cent locally sourced and 30 per cent organic.

Nutritious packed lunches

Haworth faced the challenge of encouraging children to switch from packed lunches to a more nutritious school meal or to ensure that packed lunches were nutritionally well-balanced in accordance with its packed lunch policy. Lunch boxes are monitored for their contents and staff will actively intervene if necessary, discretely pointing out any unhealthy items and contacting parents to discuss Haworth's philosophy.

A 'packed lunch morning' was held to develop children's understanding of the constituents of a healthy packed lunch; children were provided with a wide range of healthy ingredients and chose which to put in their lunch boxes. At the end of the day parents came into school and discussed the meal with their child and staff. Many left surprised...

'She's never eaten couscous!' commented one flabbergasted parent.

Families are invited to eat a meal with their child annually. Their reactions are almost invariably the same - parents are delighted with the range and quality of food. This has led to children switching from a packed lunch for some or all of the week.

For more detail on the strategies Haworth has used see: www.foodforlife.org.uk/Resources/Casestudies/Resourceview/tabid/110/ArticleId/294/Increasing-school-meal-take-up-in-a-primary-school.aspx.

Leading from the front: engaging and empowering stakeholders

Janet recognised from the outset that she needed to engage all of the school's stakeholders. A School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) consisting of pupils, the cook, catering manager, food leader, a governor and Janet was established to drive the strategy. To bring the vision to life she set the goal of achieving the FFLP Gold Standard.

Janet is passionate about the importance of 'empowering' staff and pupils and cites the freedom given to the cook and pupils to design new menus together as one example. At Haworth 'distributed leadership' encompasses the whole school community and is underpinned by the leadership's desire to engage and empower all stakeholders.

If you want success, you've got to delegate and trust people.

Pupils

The school encourages all pupils to become involved in decision-making about the school's food policy. In 2008, following a suggestion from Ben, a pupil, Janet organised a pupil school development planning conference to devise an action plan for gaining the FFLP awards. Pupils' views are canvassed through questionnaires (see appendix one) at frequent intervals.

Staff

Janet quickly recognised that staff would require some specific skills development if they were to have the capability of delivering her vision. As a flagship for FFLP, the school had a week-long training event to develop the cooking skills of teachers and support staff and also provided training in growing skills, crop rotation and how to use the school garden to grow produce for the kitchen.

The importance of FFLP was highlighted through its inclusion as a school development plan priority and was reinforced by its inclusion in all staff's performance management targets. Haworth has developed a 'layered model' of performance management whereby the scope of the targets increases with the level of responsibility: for example, a teaching assistant's targets might include getting children motivated to grow things; a classroom teacher's target might be to implement the policy, and so on.

Governing body

The governing body have been very actively involved from the start. Its executive committee carefully scrutinises the head's strategic plans. The governing body recognised that the success of the strategy depended upon getting pupils to switch from packed lunches to school dinners and Janet recalls how initially she was vigorously challenged over their affordability. They also quizzed her intensively over her strategy for communicating the new policy to parents and were insistent that no parents should become alienated.

The governing body are also involved with monitoring progress. A group of the governing body undertake learning walks and hold discussions with pupils and then report back to the full governing body. The food governor actually undertook a food hygiene qualification and then served school lunches in order to evaluate them!

Parents

Central to the FFLP philosophy is that parents are involved in all aspects of food education. To promote this, Haworth held a parents evening with a difference: parents made growing boxes for herbs; tasted some vegetable soup and were then given its recipe, together with the vegetables needed to make it at home. They were also given information about the aims and objectives of the FFLP. This approach produced an overwhelmingly positive response – far more effective than simply sending parents the school's food policy.

Parents are regularly surveyed about the quality of food provided; there is an open invitation to come into school to sample it; and they receive a half-termly newsletter telling them about the latest food and gardening events.

Community

Haworth's prodigious achievements in promoting horticulture and healthy living reflect a shared community vision and the governing body and the senior leadership team place a high priority on activities which engage their community. Recent examples include: dads and lads cookery sessions; adapting fairy tales, such as Princess Pizza, for pre-school children at a Children's Centre; sharing with pensioners the vegetables harvested from the school garden.

Leadership challenges

Inevitably Janet faced challenges

Some teachers lacked confidence in cooking with a whole class and required support from the food leader. Initially, teachers did the cooking with half of their class whilst a teaching assistant covered the remainder. They have now moved to a more sustainable model, where the food leader covers 12 hours of cooking with each class as part of the teacher's PPA time.

A significant number of parents fell short of free school meals (FSM) entitlement and chose the packed lunch option to save money. Initially a minority of these parents were very resistant. Janet's strategy was to work with them by developing their skills in preparing a nutritionally-balanced lunch box; inviting them to sample the quality of the school meals; and suggesting that their child might like to have a school dinner on special occasions whilst remaining resolute that the school's food policy would be adhered to.

Advice to other school leaders

Janet offers the following advice to trainee heads:

Strategic leadership

- The head's role is critical; they have to create and share the vision.
- A vision needs sustaining; throughout Janet worked closely with her deputy Helen who has taken up the reins on Janet's retirement.
- Empower and engage key stakeholders to lead the initiative.
- Make the FFLP programme the core of your creative curriculum and an integral part of your school development plan.
- Include FFLP activities as a performance management target for all staff.
- Build in time for monitoring and evaluating impact.
- Have a nominated FFLP governor and a food leader.

Operational management

- Develop a cookery room that will accommodate half classes.
- Consider how to make 12 hours cooking sustainable, eg, through the use of PPA time.
- Visit a school which has achieved an FFLP award to seek out ideas and support.
- Use the FFLP framework and resources to implement the School Food Plan.

If you are stimulated by Haworth's achievements and wish to learn more the FFLP website (www.foodforlife.org.uk) has a number of case studies or contact headteacher Helen Thompson.

References

Food for Life Partnership, Awards dished out to schools in the South West. Available at www.foodforlife.org.uk/Whatshappening/Newsandupdates/Newsitem/tabid/117/ArticleId/640/Food-for-Life-Partnership-awards-dished-out-to-schools-in-the-South-West.aspx (accessed 16 January 2014)

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