

Investing in Children Membership Award™

Re-evaluation of Burnopfield Primary School



Introduction

Burnopfield Primary School is situated in a village at the edge of County Durham. The school caters for 393 children, including a 52 place Nursery. Their ethos is:

"We inspire, challenge and care" for all. We are passionate about seeing the whole child and supporting them to find their strengths and talents, whatever they may be. Through our curriculum we develop a sense of inspiration, aspiration and adventure in addition to helping children develop healthy minds and bodies, respect for themselves and each other and to be resilient in everything they do.

For this re-evaluation I (alongside college student Scarlett Crawford, who was on placement with Investing in Children) met with fourteen students, from years 1 to 6. The visit was conducted in person and we met as a large group, which included representation from the KS1 School Council, the KS2 School Council, the Mini-Police, the Culture Kids, the Lunch Leaders, the Rainbow Ambassadors, the Digi Leaders and the Reading Champions.

A huge thank you to Zak, Izzy, Finlay, Charlie, Kyara, Eva, Lincoln, Archie, Nieve, Lucy, Emma, Evan, Lily, Poppy and Blake for welcoming us into their school and helping me to carry out this evaluation.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

Evidence of Dialogue resulting in Change from Children and Young People

From the start the children were full of praise for their school.

"I love how much the students get input into everything we do. If you want to speak up about something they always listen to your ideas."

"If you're feeling rubbish the teachers will make you feel happier."

"The work is not too hard and not too easy."

"If you do well you get good rewards."

"[School is] fun and enjoyable!"

I got a real sense that the children enjoyed coming into school and felt supported and listened to by the teachers and staff members.

OPAL – Outdoor Play and Learning

OPAL is a new initiative for Burnopfield Primary and was launched in May this year. Continuing feedback from the students was that they needed more to play with during

their lunchtimes so the head teachers researched OPAL and began planning, a process which the children were a part of from the beginning. At the start a survey was conducted:

“A survey was sent out to every child and parent, asking questions such as ‘What would you like to happen?’ and ‘What’s your favourite things to do?’”

Two weeks later, in assembly, the survey results were discussed. The process of dialogue is ongoing.

“Every week on a Monday we get assemblies.”

“We go up on stage and we test.” The children informed me how they conduct risk assessments in assembly, whereby they can test if their ideas are feasible. As such, the children are actively involved in all stages of decision making.

The children explained that they previously only had about five minutes of playtime but after a lot of the children spoke to their teachers about how they would like longer, this was extended to half an hour: ***“We get half an hour now!”*** The children commented that this has vastly improved behaviour. The children also asked repeatedly if they could have PE outside and now they can.

“We have a wallet to put in suggestions for what we want.”

“We donated things for it, like trays, buckets, cutlery and stuff.”

There are now dens in the forest at the top, at the children’s request, and they are now allowed to go to the woods adventure garden.

“I put in an idea about having a stage and eventually it happened!” On a tour of the school, after my meeting with the young people, Mrs Carson showed me the drama area where the stage is situated. OPAL consists of lots of different zones all around the school’s outdoor areas and children’s voices are clearly evident in the spaces; different zones cater to different personalities, interests and moods, which is far more inclusive and accommodating than a one-size-fits-all playground or yard. The children I spoke with were incredibly excited about this new venture, and in particular about the crucial role they had played in its development.

The School Councils

Burnopfield Primary has two school councils, one for KS1 and one for KS2. A recommendation from the previous evaluation had been to unify the process for selecting class representatives for these councils. The school council members I spoke to did not know whether there was supposed to be a universal method of selecting councillors, they just knew of the experiences in their own classes.

“I gave a speech, we had to do a speech of what we wanted to change.”

“We put our heads down for a secret vote – this was good as it doesn’t hurt somebody’s feelings, like if you have to choose between two of your friends.”

However, one child suggested that it was good that different classes did things in different ways. ***“I like differently for different classes.”*** He suggested that each individual class should decide how they want to elect their councillor. None of the children I met with were concerned that there was not a central process.

Both the KS1 and KS2 councils helped interview for the new Play Leader being recruited.

“We all decided our own question to ask.”

“I asked ‘Do you like children?’ I thought this was important.”

“I asked ‘What will you build?’ Then they showed me their designs.”

“We gave feedback afterwards.”

The KS1 council chose some playground buddies.

“I thought it would be a good idea to have some buddies and we agreed.”

“[Potential buddies] wrote on a little sheet of paper why they would be a good buddy. Mrs Crawl read these out and we voted by putting our thumbs up.”

In May 2021 the KS2 council planned and organised a ‘Break the Rules Day’, to raise money to develop the Wellbeing Walkway (a corridor in school dedicated to mental wellbeing, that children can access during the school day).

“We organised it and made a sheet of what rules you can break. Mr Gibson asked what rules would be good to break, so no one would get hurt.”

“I dyed my hair!”

“You could eat anything that day!”

“It was so fun!”

Recently, the KS2 council ran a competition – ‘What does playtime mean to you?’

“We gave the idea and Mr Gibson made it into a bigger idea!”

Lunch Leaders

Lunch leaders are pupils that supervise in the dining hall, helping the younger students navigate around the dining hall.

The children informed me that the idea for the role came from pupils themselves, after some children started staying longer and helping out. They had to write an application to Mrs Thompson and Maddy from the kitchen and then were interviewed. The children all approved of this process, with one commenting that the process was ***“massively fair”***.

The lunch leaders all said that they really enjoy the role.

“We clean tables, collect trays, hand out water.”

“We help out the children as much as we can really.”

“Every half term we get a treat!” One lunch leader commented that their treat was kept back for them after they missed it due to Covid isolation. They really appreciated this.

Lunches

At the previous evaluation the children recommended that it should be made fairer about whether you can have cake at lunch – cake was part of school dinners at this time but children were not allowed to have cake in their packed lunches.

This has been resolved: ***“You can bring in what you like now.”*** The children explained that packed lunches can bring in what they choose, as long as the foods do not affect those with allergies (they gave the example of nuts). The children thought this reasoning had been explained to them well so were more than happy with the decision.

Comments regarding school dinners were:

“Delicious!”

“I’m a really fussy eater but I do like school dinners.”

“We get to choose on the board.”

“You can tell them, like I said I didn’t want gravy on my potatoes.”

“You don’t have to have pudding if you don’t want to. And there’s always the choice of fruit or yoghurt if you don’t like the pudding that day.”

Every time a new dish is introduced Maddy from the kitchen will talk to the children. ***“She asks us ‘do you like it?’, ‘what would you change?’”***

Rainbow Ambassadors

Rainbow Ambassadors are pupils that champion equality and diversity within school. ***“[To apply] we wrote a letter saying what we would do to promote equality and diversity.”***

“We meet every Wednesday.”

The children themselves decide what the Rainbow Ambassadors should be working on.

“We think of different ideas.”

“We put different ideas together.”

“Mrs Errington created a Google Classroom where we suggest ideas.”

Assemblies have promoted the Rainbow Ambassadors to the wider school community and subsequently more children have asked to join: ***“if everyone agrees we say yes”***. There are now so many Rainbow Ambassadors they run out of seats during meetings.

The Rainbow Walkway is a corridor in school ***“where you can express yourself”, “there’s books to educate”, “it’s really fun!”***

“My idea to raise money [for the Rainbow Walkway] is to throw a wet sponge at a teacher – I said this at the meeting.”

The ambassadors are currently planning a pride event, where children to bring in £1 to wear rainbow clothes. They plan to paint the fence with rainbows – ***“children can do this”***.

Also, on their agenda is to launch rainbow wallets, linked to issues on equality and diversity. Pupils will be able to put worries in, which will either be addressed by a teacher or the Rainbow Ambassadors, if not confidential.

“We’re talking about this at the next meeting.”

“I’m very excited!”

“We’ll let the children know where you can come if you have any queries.”

The Mini-Police

The Mini-Police deliver assemblies to the school and also undertake a restorative approach on the yard.

“We help other children in school.”

“We have a uniform – high viz, lanyard and caps.”

For the selection process, ***“There was an application and we were asked ‘How would you help?’”, “Mrs DGLISH picked”***. The children commented: ***“It’s fair.”*** However, the Mini-Police helped select their newest member when someone left.

At their weekly meetings, ***“We talk about what we’re going to do next.” “We learn about things we’re going to do in assemblies, then we vote for which one we want to do next. We chose hate crime.”***

When I asked if anything could be done to improve the Mini-Police the responses were ***“I don’t think so to be honest”*** and ***“it can’t improve”***.

Reading Champions

The Reading Champions are a group of pupils who promote reading across the school. They do this through a variety of initiatives. ***“We do different stuff every term.”***

The children informed me that they generate the ideas, such as a Mr Men theme for World Book Day: ***“we chose this theme”***.

They also read to year one pupils: ***“It was really fun!”***

Their pre-loved book sale was hugely successful.

“We raised over £1000!”

“We thought of the ideas for raising money. We thought about a bake sale but agreed that something about books would be best.”

“It was just £1 for a chunky book.”

The money raised went towards buying new books for every class, with the Reading Champions deciding what books to buy: ***“We chose.”*** However, they consulted other children in the school before making their decisions, asking classes what genres and authors they liked: ***“We took this all into consideration.”***

The Reading Champions produce a monthly newsletter: ***“We come up with most of the ideas for this.”*** They told me Mrs Marley then helps them put their ideas together.

The Culture Kids

The Culture Kids aim to raise the profile of art across the school. Their main role is to decide who is Artist of the Month: ***“We choose who is the winner. The art goes up on display.”***

They also decided to run a Christmas art competition, which the children I met with spoke very positively about: ***“You had to do the best artwork, you got a prize of arty stuff.”***

Digital-Leaders

These students educate their peers about the importance of online safety. They told me that ***“we wrote a little letter”***, as part of their application process. The children informed me that the group is very young people led.

“We do most of it all by ourselves.”

“We stay after school.”

“We educate people about online and anything to do with computers.”

“We did a lesson to years 5 and 6 on online behaviour.”

“We think it’s good!”

The Digital-Leaders decide which topics would be relevant to their peers, such as WhatsApp issues for year 6 students.

‘Didgy the Detective’ proved very successful. This was an online animation utilising shapes, created by one of the children in the group, that promoted Safer Internet Day.

Litter Pick Event

A non-stop litter pick has been planned for the summer term. The idea came about after a survey was conducted with the children three years ago; it was not possible to carry out the event during the COVID pandemic but the children are pleased that it is happening now. Regarding the survey they told me:

“We were the ones who said that.”

“We can do better about the environment.”

Every year group is going to go out at different times, with year 6 students helping the younger year groups.

The children I met with are very excited to go out in the community post-Covid.

“It will be very beneficial and very good for the community and the school.”

“We’re going all around the village.”

“Everywhere is going to get covered somehow.”

When asked if they were looking forward to it I was told: ***“Definitely!” “Absolutely!”***

Some of the pupils are so passionate about the issue that they have already started litter picking in their local communities. ***“I did it. There’s loads of litter in the woods.”*** The school is celebrating these students, with Mrs Carson telling me: (*“These students are being held up as an inspiration to us all.”*)

Indeed, these role model children took part in assemblies to promote the litter pick event, alongside Richard Simpson (a local villager, famed for his litter picking in Burnopfield) and Tidy Ted from Durham County Council.

Additional evidence of Dialogue resulting in Change provided by the organisation

The children are encouraged by staff members to promote their own values, generate their own ideas and pursue their own initiatives, such as a pupil who did a trampoline bounce to raise money for Ukraine. ***“This is always recognised by the school.”*** One child did a brave the shave and teachers raised money for them through a cake sale.

Recommendations

Recommendations from children and young people

Assemblies

One suggestion from the previous evaluation was that less assemblies should take place; instead of everyday the recommendation was to just have three. This change has not occurred.

“We still have five.”

However, the majority of the children I met with enjoyed the assemblies and said they were glad to have five a week.

“Something new is always happening in school – the assemblies are good because then every child is told about it.” They thought that five were definitely needed for this purpose.

“I really like the Monday OPAL assemblies!”

Therefore, they concluded that it would be best if daily assemblies continued as normal.

Stationery

The previous evaluation revealed that stationery supplies could run very low in some classes and the children I met with informed me that this is still the case, with whiteboard pens, glue sticks and rubbers in particular running out often.

Some children thought teachers should make sure their classrooms are always stocked up so that they do not leave their classes in the middle of lessons for minutes at a time.

Another child thought it would be better to fully stock the ‘middle cupboard’, so other children cannot access the stores and take things.

One child suggested there be a daily check-in that every child has everything they need for the day.

Recommendation: Address the issue of stationery supplies and consult the students, perhaps through the school council, of the best way to proceed.

Student Consultation

Suggestion boxes were raised as an issue at the previous evaluation; although the school has them the school council did not feel that all other students knew about them or used them. This was still unresolved.

“They’re there but no one uses them.”

“We have a shout out box and a worry box but they hardly ever get checked.”

“There was a big intro to it at the start.”

“I don’t know any example of where a suggestion has gone in the box and we’ve acted on it.”

The children had some suggestions to remedy this.

“Assemblies to advertise would be good.”

“Maybe have something on the door of the two school council leaders, a suggestion wallet.”

“Better to tell the teacher if you want to talk about something.”

Recommendation: Consider how children not on the school council can have their voice heard. Review the suggestion boxes, if these are not working either re-promote them to all children in the school, i.e. through assemblies, or think of new ways for children to raise issues, such as through their teacher or encouraging school councillors to regularly check-in with their classmates.

OPAL

The children I met with had some further ideas for OPAL.

“A petting area – like bunnies to stroke.”

“I’d like a gymnastics area with equipment.”

“Go into the nursery area to play with the little kids.” Mrs Carson informed me that this probably would not be possible, due to the fact that the nursery children go home at lunchtime. However, they are hoping that reception children will be introduced to OPAL soon and be able to interact with the older students. Discussions are currently ongoing about the logistical possibility of this.

Recommendation: Continue to involve students in dialogue surrounding the development of OPAL.

Meetings

The Rainbow Ambassadors I met with felt that their meetings were quite disorganised. They suggested a timetable of when meetings are scheduled as they feel there had been quite a few weeks recently when they have not had meetings: ***“it could work more efficiently.”***

This was echoed by the Reading Champions: ***“Sometimes our meetings are all over the place.”***

Recommendation: Create a timetable of meetings for each of the groups so the children are kept fully informed.

The Culture Kids

At the previous evaluation it was suggested that the remit of the Culture Kids be extended: ***“The culture kids group focuses on art but I would like to extend it to dance and music and more ways to express yourselves.”***

I was informed that this has not happened yet but the children I spoke with were keen to do more with their role: ***“I think we should do more stuff than just picking art. Events would be good, not just a meeting once every three months.”***

Recommendation: Involve the Culture Kids in dialogue about how they would like to take their group forward and the ideas they would like to implement. Mrs Carson informed me that the staff member that oversees the group will be on leave soon so the future of the group is uncertain. This would be a good time to get young person input.

liC recommendations

Recommendation: Keep a public record of the changes that have occurred in school as a result of dialogue with the children. A “You Said, We Did” board would be a good way of doing this. This will enable all students to be kept informed and will celebrate the fantastic things that have happened at Burnopfield as a direct result of the pupils’ contributions.

Conclusion

I was very impressed by the volume of opportunities for pupils at Burnopfield Primary School to engage in dialogue and enact change. There are a variety of groups for the pupils to get involved with but most importantly the children can take a leading role in these and put forward their own ideas.

The children I met with were very proud of the things they have achieved, such as the huge amount of money they have raised through initiatives such as their pre-loved book sale and Ukraine Appeal, and I think these achievements are made more meaningful by the fact the pupils themselves have come up with the ideas and taken a lead on them.

The children felt that their voices were heard in school and when I asked if their school should receive the Investing in Children Membership Award™ for dialogue resulting in change they were very positive: ***“Yes!” “Definitely!”***

Therefore, I am pleased to recommend that Burnopfield Primary School once again has its Investing in Children Membership Award™ renewed.

Well done!

Endorsement by Young People

The children I met with have read and endorsed this report.

Tabitha Dodd
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