

CASE STUDY

WESTLEA PRIMARY SCHOOL

THE IMPACT OF THE FFL SCHOOL AWARDS PROGRAMME

Westlea Primary School is a culturally rich school in Swindon with over 300 pupils from a range of backgrounds. Since joining the Food for Life programme in 2003 they have transformed both their food provision and food education, recently achieving the prestigious Food for Life Gold Award.

Creating a positive food culture

Westlea have worked hard to improve lifestyle choices both within school and in the local community and have taken a practical approach to delivering food education in order to do this.

Every pupil takes part in cooking lessons throughout their time at the school, often with their parents joining in the fun. These sessions extend out into the community through termly parent workshops with the Kitchen Manager, focusing on healthy eating and cooking well on a budget. This coincides with the publication of Westlea's own cookery book, sharing popular recipes with parents, encouraging them to cook with their children at home.



Caring for the garden is integrated into school life for pupils at Westlea and the children and their



families are actively involved in a range of growing activities. Each class is responsible for cultivating their own raised bed, growing different vegetables including salads, herbs, onions, potatoes and garlic, and a range of fruits including strawberries and tomatoes. Parents and grandparents are often invited in to school to help and the annual 'grounds week' has become a firm community favourite, with parents and grandparents working alongside pupils to get the gardens in tip top condition.

SEEING RESULTS

Teaching children to understand where their food comes from and to make informed choices about what they decide to eat is firmly on the agenda at Westlea Primary School. Pupils are responsible for looking after the resident brood of chickens and children in year five and six take part in a seven day residential trip to Treginnis Farm. The children participate in a range of activities such as mucking out animals, watering and feeding, collecting eggs, checking the sheep, watching lambs being born, planting crops and milking the goats. This encourages pupils to think about how their food is sourced, the importance of growing organically, why we should support local producers and the air miles associated with some foods.



Attendance

Attendance at Westlea Primary School has increased consistently since the time of their last OFSTED Inspection in 2011, when attendance was below average. They have told us this improved through implementing a range of measures and adopting new approaches to pupil engagement, including joining the Food for Life School Awards programme. The whole school approach at the heart of the project has enriched the curriculum and engaged pupils and as a result, attendance has now risen to be in line with the national average.

Meal Take Up

Four years ago, Westlea redesigned their school kitchen to enable them to cook meals on site. Before these changes they collected meals from another school, but staff felt they could increase meal take up by bringing their catering in-house, enabling staff and pupils to decide what food to serve. Both parents and children were consulted about the changes, with pupil voice playing an important role in the decisions being made. Twice a year the School Council conducts a school improvement questionnaire which is completed by each class. The findings are collated and shared with the head teacher and

kitchen team and menus are adapted as necessary. Theme days were also requested by pupils and now regular events are held, including an 'Around the World Day' which celebrates the 19 different languages spoken in school.

Today, with the help of the Food for Life Awards framework and a dedicated team of in-house cooks, the food served to children is healthy, ethical, uses lots of local ingredients and is animal and climate friendly, including a minimum of 15% organic and 5% free range ingredients. Parents, community members and school governors join the children for a school dinner on a regular basis and frequent tasting sessions are held to encourage packed lunch pupils to take up school meals.

This hard work has paid off. School meals are now the norm at Westlea, rising from only 20% uptake in 2011 to 58% in 2016 - an increase of over 38% in the last 5 years.

Attainment

Westlea believes that the increase in children's uptake of free school meals has improved attainment in KS1 in all subjects. Over 90% of children in both year one and year two are working within the age related Programme of Study.

Westlea has Special Resourced Provision (SRP) for children who are physically disabled, all of whom are fully integrated into the mainstream classrooms. These are not the only children in the school who have special needs; there are also those with learning, emotional or behavioral difficulties. For these pupils, the provision of healthy food, cooking, growing and farm links education is seen not only to support physical health, but to provide pupils with essential life skills and confidence.

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAY

Sarah Summner, Westlea's Food for Life Coordinator commented:

"Through our Food for Life work we have seen several vulnerable pupils making impressive improvements in both their academic and social achievements."

- One pupil in year five is a Young Carer, eligible for free school meals, with their family involved in TAC (Team Around the Child). They have suffered trauma due to their mum being very ill and were significantly underachieving and on a reduced timetable to support behavioural issues. Every Monday afternoon they take part in a cookery group for vulnerable children and are able to interact with their peers. In these sessions they are relaxed and happy – this is the only session in the week where they are calm and don't need the support of their one to one Teaching Assistant.


- Another pupil in year five was underachieving with low level behavioural issues. Taking part in growing activities has provided them with a physical outlet that now motivates them in the classroom. If they behave and comply with their work, their reward is to be involved in the daily gardening checks; if they don't comply, their gardening entitlement is reduced.

- Another pupil in year six, also with free school meal entitlement, is elective mute and underachieving. They have really enjoyed being involved in the growing activities at school and it has boosted their confidence because it is one of the only topics they will talk about. They have been made a Chief Gardener and they help to select people to water the plants and delegate different jobs.

Siân Creagh-Osborne, Food for Life Awards Programme Manager supported Westlea Primary to achieve their gold award and said:

"Westlea are an example of a school that has adopted and embraced the Food for Life framework throughout their journey. Starting at Bronze they used the framework to shape how they wanted their school's food culture to be, not just by ticking boxes but really working to make each criteria a meaningful change within their school. They have recently achieved FFL Gold status and they couldn't be more deserving. The positive food culture truly spills out of their dining hall and around the whole school."