



partnerships for schools

This case study looks at the varied and innovative pupil engagement programme being rolled out at Acklam Grange School in Middlesbrough.

Middlesbrough Council was shortlisted for the Innovation in Student Engagement award at the *PfS Excellence in BSF Awards 2009*.

Key project information

Local authority: Middlesbrough

Name of school: Acklam Grange School A Specialist Technology College for Maths and Computing

No of pupils: 1,410

Project cost: £23.5m

Project timescales: Expected to open in September 2010

Pupil engagement at Acklam Grange School

Project description

Acklam Grange is one of eight schools to be rebuilt under Middlesbrough's BSF project. In November 2008, it became the first BSF school in the Tees Valley to start construction.

The pupil engagement strategy is focused on a BSF journey from thinking of initial ideas and deciding on the use of ICT, to assisting in the design process and being involved in all aspects of delivering their new school. This is to engender a feeling of ownership amongst the pupil body and enable a smooth transition into the new building.

Key groups of pupils have been identified to lead this process, whilst ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to be a part of the change.

Pupils leading the way

The pupil engagement process began in 2007 when a group of Year 9 pupils entered the national Design of the Times (DOTT 07) competition. The group based their project on how BSF might impact their new school by designing a classroom of the future and a recycling unit. They produced the winning design in the north east and won an external learning environment worth £20,000, which will be a part of the new school. The DOTT 07 pupils have chosen its location in the grounds of new school and will be involved in its erection in summer 2010.

Following in the footsteps of the DOTT 07 Team, a group called Gang Green was formed in 2008. The two groups

together use the knowledge they have gained whilst working on this project (sustainability and eco-schools) to help the school prepare for its new building. Both groups are part of the Eco-schools Group which has consistently worked with the local authority to ensure the school has excellent eco-facilities such as an energy display meter, recycling units, biodiversity habitats and renewable energy technologies.

Our school, our future

The school council regularly discusses BSF-related issues and is updated on progress of the new school. When thinking about how they would like the views of the whole school to be sought, they decided on a dedicated BSF subgroup which would represent all pupils on all BSF matters, known as Team 2010.

Team 2010's motto is 'Our school, our future'. There are four Team 2010 representatives in each year group who pupils go to if they want to have a voice on BSF. Team 2010 members present information through assemblies, in form time and have also produced literature detailing their work, which is distributed at the school's Open Days.

Team 2010's duties have included representing their school in ceremonies (start of works ceremony and steel signing ceremony), being interviewed by local media and writing a blog which explains the development of the building from the pupils' point of view, for the Council's BSF website (www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/bsf).

The team also lead a project to research the history of their school. The Reminiscence Project gave the pupils

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an insight into the history of their school, which helped them when contributing to the planning and design of their new school. They have researched the history of the school logo, key school events and held interviews with key people at the school.

Nikola Bunyan, Director of Resources at Acklam Grange School, said: "We felt it was very important to have a systematic way of getting all of our pupils involved in the whole BSF process. Before the creation of Team 2010 we had done some *ad hoc* engagement with the pupils, but we knew that it was important to formalise this to ensure that the engagement process was robust and would continue in the run up to the new school opening and beyond that."

Pupils informing school design

In early 2008, Middlesbrough Council hosted a pupil conference to inform and consult pupils from all of its BSF schools. Acklam Grange was represented by five members of the school council who had spoken to their peers about what they did and did not like about their existing school.

The pupils thought about how the new school would affect them. Their comments were given to the design team and were used to inform the design process. For example, the pupils highlighted the toilets in their school as a major concern. Consideration was then given to designing toilets that would remove bullying opportunities and the best pupil design was included in the scheme.

The pupils also said that a performance hall was the one thing which would help them to make a positive contribution. As a result, the school design includes a large hall with tiered seating which opens out on to an outdoor amphitheatre, giving several options for performances.

Later in 2008, a second conference was held. The pupils heard how their ideas had been incorporated into the design and they sampled some of the new technology that would be used in their new school. They spoke to the ICT Managed Service Provider, RM, and gave their opinions on the devices.

The conferences also highlighted the importance of the external spaces to the pupils. Therefore a workshop was held with the landscape architects and Team 2010 to get pupil opinions on the central courtyard and the external classroom spaces. The pupils wanted a variety of spaces with areas to play, areas to sit quietly, areas to cultivate and areas to eat.

This activity also helped towards the school's BREEAM assessment.

Team 2010 pupil comments

Tom, Year 11

"I am really happy to be involved in Team 2010 because it's our school, so it's important that everybody has a say. We've been involved from start to finish and the decisions that we make are those which represent the whole school."

"It's really great when we see that our suggestions have been listened to and that the architect has put them in to the designs."

Jack, Year 9

"It's brilliant being able to see what our new school will look like and test it out a year before it has been built using Second Life. This was really helpful when we were planning what we wanted in it."

Emma, Year 11

"We have our own input on what's going in to our new school. It's not just the teachers that are deciding what it will be like; they are asking us what our views are. We know what our classmates don't like in our school, so we can change them in the designs for our new school."

Ensuring a smooth transition

Time has been dedicated to keeping all pupils informed of the progress towards the new school and ensuring that everyone knows what to expect on their first day in the new school building.

When the school opens the 2008/09 Year 6 pupils, who joined the school in September 2009, will be moving into Year 8. Engaging these pupils in 2008 meant that the new school was still in the design stage and they could have an impact on their new school.

The school's traditional Year 6 induction programme in June 2009 was therefore extended to include an extra day that was specifically dedicated to BSF. All Year 6 pupils participated in a Transition Day, consisting of:

- a tour of the construction site;
- a tour of the school in a 3D virtual world in Second Life;
- an external landscaping workshop;
- a new uniform design workshop; and
- a construction workshop in which pupils built pyramids to learn about construction issues as well as teamwork (such as health and safety on site and a variety of construction based jobs).

A similar day of workshops was held for all Year 7 pupils as a curriculum enhancement day dedicated solely to BSF. This enabled pupils to become more engaged in the BSF project, become more informed and express their thoughts and ideas. These ideas were used by the design team.

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Outcomes and impact

BSF is a driving force for pupil engagement in all of Middlesbrough's BSF schools. Pupils are a key part of the design and development phase of the scheme and are actively engaged in the construction phase, which provides a range of educational opportunities.

- By mid-point of construction, every current pupil plus Year 6 pupils, will have had the opportunity to tour the construction site.
- Pupils studying specific elements of construction, such as insulation and health and safety, have visited the site to gain an insight into how this works in practice.
- Groups of pupils have visited the suppliers of steel and paving to learn about fabrication.
- The building contractor will hold mock interviews with Year 11 pupils planning a career in construction, to prepare them for entry into the industry.
- Groups of pupils are regularly taken by their teachers to the viewing panels in the site hoarding to see and hear about the progress on the site.
- The building contractor will be a key agency at the school's annual World of Work event promoting careers in architecture and construction.

Top Tips

- **Involve pupils in working directly with the architects right at the start of the project. As this is the first school to be rebuilt as part of Middlesbrough's BSF project, Acklam Grange was very much a test case. Middlesbrough Council is working with the other seven schools within its BSF project, and pupils at those schools are being invited to meetings with the architects, the teachers and the local authority.**
- **Plan pupil time effectively and bear in mind all of their commitments. Pupils at Acklam Grange are very keen to get involved in everything regarding BSF, however their time is limited.**
- **Because of the pupils' time constraints it can be a struggle to get them together all at once. Anticipate this at the start and recruit a big team (Team 2010 consists of almost 20 pupils).**
- **Listen to all of the pupil comments, feedback to them and let them know how their input will be incorporated in to the design.**
- **Ensure that pupils are involved in the entire BSF process and make it fun.**
- **Involve the whole school by electing champions from each year so that all opinions can be fed in to the design.**

Key contact

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Further information

Please visit the Building Schools for the Future pages on the Middlesbrough Council website for further information: www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/bsf

To see Team 2010's BSF blog please visit the Acklam Grange School page on the Middlesbrough BSF website.