

Healthy Schools Plus Cohort 3 Case Study

St Mark's is a small primary school of three mixed-age (currently two of the classes have three year groups) classes in an idyllic setting in the far north of Cornwall. The children behave very well and are easy to work with as they cooperate readily with adults and each other.

There is a wide range of activities going on at playtimes and especially lunch play (last year the Ofsted inspector commented that he had never seen so many balls out in a playground but all being used appropriately); the children have lots of freedom and play together across the ages and classes. We very seldom have to deal with playtime issues in class.

However, at parents' evenings, it is often a comment that children do not feel that they have friends and this is what we wanted to address.

We have used the PASS survey in the past and decided to use this as our benchmarking data. Through it we identified children who have concerns or are not confident at school and, using the HSP funding, we have provided some sort of provision for all children with any yellow or red colour coding on their survey, other than those who were already receiving support from somewhere else.

In the Spring term we introduced R-Time (not religiously, it has to be said, but most consistently in the middle class where most of the friendship issues were). We ran a Healthy Eating Cookery Club for Year 6, then 5 and finally 4. We purchased some traditional games like French Skipping and asked parents to come in one day a week to do long rope skipping at lunchtime. I also ran a club where there was an identified gap which was for Years 3 and 4 and was a club where we decided as a group what each session's activities were to be. Some reported that this was the "best club ever" (and the children did the planning for it!)

However, the main thrust of what we did was to have the TA attached to each class work with the highlighted children in there. In the youngest class this consisted of the TA "just happening" to be working with this (disparate) group of children, for example on an art activity, and encouraging them to talk to her and each other. They also became library monitors which made them feel very important.

In the middle class a very small group of children were identified and they were encouraged by the TA to find a shared interest and then decide what they would like to do about it. This resulted in the building of a cardboard castle for themselves and the class to play with. This small group needed lots of work to get them to interact with each other rather than the adult but the result has been amazing! One boy who joined us in Year 2 (and is now Year 3) had always had problems engaging with other children and now chats readily, offering and receiving help from peers. His confidence has improved enormously and his whole attitude is different. The other boy had been going through a family break-up and was not happy coming to school. He is a great deal more settled and confident now and his interactions are much improved. The use of R-Time has opened the children up to new working and friendship groups.

In the oldest class, the TA trialled the County provided materials (A Short Programme in Self Esteem) and found it a very useful resource (feedback from the TA who delivered it is on the HSP website). We have since purchased these materials and the "I Can Monsters" for future use.

To complete our cycle, we have repeated the PASS survey with the relevant children only (and have purchased this with an extra small grant for future use).

This showed a marked improvement in the KS2 children in the middle class, with the targeted children (and others in the class who had shown any amber/red) moving to green and giving some very high figures. In KS1 (across two classes), five out of the seven children showed a marked improvement, two going to all green with very high figures. In the Year 5 and 6 class ten out of the twelve children showed improvement, some very marked.

Overall I think what we did had a very positive effect and with the money from Healthy Schools Plus we were able to set ourselves up to run this system year on year, improving as we go. We have now picked up children to monitor or offer support to next academic year. It also looks as if R-Time has a good effect when used regularly.

To finish, these photos say it all, it is of the little boy in the middle class who did not interact with peers at all and constantly sought adult attention. He was very underconfident and had a Self Regard score of 0.8 (now 63.4, his lowest of a set of figures now hitting 100 for Feelings About School). In our yearly

"Activity Week" he was den building in a group and announced "This is the life for me!"

