



Re- Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

St Joseph's RCVA Primary School

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School in Coundon is a school for children aged 4 to 11. Mrs McManners is the head teacher and along with her staff team, and the pupils at the school they are committed to making changes both in the school and the community. The school has numerous awards and Mrs McManners is very proud that the school is recognised for their different achievements, and especially those which they are awarded year on year, such as Investing in Children membership, as Mrs McManners believes this shows a real commitment to making changes and continuing to do so.

For this re-evaluation I had the opportunity to meet with Mrs McManners and also members of the school council who are Faye, Dionne, Jade, Mark, Ethan, Mason, Hamish, Amarpreet, Anna, Liam, Ryan, Alex and Katie.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

School Council

The school council continues to be a big part of the school with everyone involved in some way. Each year group from reception to year 6 have representatives. Hamish, from the reception class, told me that each school councillor has a badge to wear to show other pupils that they are part of the school council. Faye said, **"We have a notebook each to make notes from other children, then also notes to feed back to our classes."** Often representatives of the council talk to the whole school in assemblies to remind them about things - like when they had a problem with the toilets, everyone needed reminding that they should flush the toilets to see if this would help them stop smelling. After the toilets were renewed and the floors changed the smell is still there, so the children are trying to work on this and hope that by making sure they toilets are flushed it keeps the problem under control.

The children also report things to the caretaker, such as when locks on the toilets are broken, or if they spot loose pipes. The caretaker also asks them for help if he needs it.

Playground

The children have looked at their playground and areas around the school and have recently planned for new equipment out in the playground. Ryan said, **"We are getting tables painted so there's a sitting area."**

Liam told me, **"We got bins; they say 'please give me your litter'."**

Ryan talked about the problems they have with playing football. **"We need a football pitch for the bigger ones because when we play the little ones get hit."**

Everyone talked about the different things they've tried to help with the problem. They have tried having 'no football' days, and also days where they play traditional yard games. So far the problem is not solved but the children are continuing to think of solutions.

The children have asked for bike racks and also a shelter for parents to use when they wait for the children to finish school, Faye told me she thought it was a good idea

because the parents got rained on and if they had to come into school to shelter it was difficult when all the children came out of their classes.

As well as the bike rack and shelter there are plans for large outdoor equipment. There are a few different proposals to be put forward based on the ideas of the children at St Joseph's. These ideas are going to be drawn up as plans so that all the children can see how it might look and then decide what they would like. It will probably cost between £5,500 and £7,500. The children have already started fund raising, the school won an environmental award last year and went to County Hall to receive a plaque and certificate, and a cheque for £100. They have also had a donation of £100 from the Leek Club to put towards their plans.

Buddies

The school has 'Playground Friends', 'Buddies' and 'Mini Buddies', who all do different jobs in the playground. The Playground Friends usually wear yellow caps so everyone knows who they are, and they look out for people who seem to sad or lonely and they go and play games with them. Liam told me they have got **"Buddy Bus Stops ordered, with signs to say if they are sad, happy or lonely."** Liam went on to tell me that the buddies job was to do with **"looking after each other if someone gets hurt, and talking."** The Mini Buddies are younger children at the school who are learning what to do from the Buddies.

Travel Plan

The pupils at St Joseph's have made a travel plan. To do this they talked to lots of different people like the County Council and Wear Valley Police. The children had lots of suggestions about how to make coming to school safer and better for everyone. Faye told me some of the suggestions were, **"a zebra crossing, sleeping policemen, a dog litter bin, and sign to say 30 mph, although some people suggested it should be 20 mph next to school."**

Dionne told me that people suggested **"a barrier at the gates."**

Faye said, **"When the lollipop man isn't there, when it's breakfast club, or when we go to church we need a zebra crossing."**

Anna talked about getting to school in the mornings, **"People park cars and I can't get across the road when I get off the bus."**

There was a questionnaire for all the children to complete and Faye told me that **"most children wanted to cycle or walk to school, instead of coming in a car or on the bus."**

Liam talked about ideas that they've had, **"We could get more people to walk with a walking bus."**

Ryan added, **"They'd get fitter, and they could wear fluorescent jackets or sashes."**

Dinner Menu

The school has worked very hard on the way that school dinners are done. Everyone was keen to tell me how it hadn't worked before because there were two choices on the menu and if you were on the last tables you probably wouldn't get your first choice. Parents were invited in to try different meals to see what they thought they were like. Then the next step has been for the children to take home menus so that they can choose in advance what meals they would like. There is now a choice of three main meals, and the children get the menu three weeks ahead. Anna told me, **"Everyone gets their first choice. We have coloured pieces of paper, red, green and blue. We take it home, then hand it in for Mrs Hardy. Our teacher gets coloured triangles to give us; we give them to the dinner lady so she knows what we want."** Now everybody gets the school dinner they want, and they are now thinking about offering choices on desserts. The children are really happy with this

new system as they found it frustrating when they were left with something they didn't like.

Recycling

The children at the school have decided to become more environmentally aware and are trying to save energy and recycle. Faye said, **"We've got boxes for recycling paper."** Anna told me, **"We are using both sides of paper instead of just one."**

Jade said, **"We recycle bottles."** Faye added, **"We close doors and turn lights off."** And Anna said, **"We turn the computers off."**

St Joseph's have won a North East School of the Year award, in the Active Community section. Three children with Mrs McManners attended a day at the Centre for Life in Newcastle where they did a presentation about the work the school has done in the community. The school has new railings which have incorporated metal depictions of the history of Coundon including pit boots. They have made banners like those used at mining galas. The four banners were made with an artist, Simon Pell, and they show Coundon as a farming community, a mining community, a working community and also as a family community.

The school is also part of a Cultural Hubs pilot scheme from the Arts Council. They are in the second year of a three year pilot and for this they are partnered with museums and libraries including Beamish, the Baltic, Seven Stories and others. This has meant that the children have had many opportunities to work with people like artists and writers and to go to theatres and cinemas.

The school has a wonderful atmosphere, where everyone is included and valued and this is clear in the work that the whole school does. There is a commitment to the community and the wellbeing of everyone in Coundon. I have no hesitation in recommending that St Joseph's school receives Investing in Children membership for another year.

Lisa Lines

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Investing in Children

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