



Consultancy and innovation makes a great school

“As adults we recognise that we can learn from the children and we involve the children in making decisions at many levels. On Friendship Friday, at the beginning of each term, the children focus on projects to make the school an even better place to be.”

Pam Pitman, Headteacher
St John's School in Jersey

Since taking advantage of Serco's consultancy services St John's School in Jersey has developed as a community. It has introduced policies designed to generate responsibility and encourage life-long learning, not just in its pupils but also in the staff, parents and other adults associated with it.

The changes are obvious in many places, from the friendly atmosphere to the standard of pupils' work. In the playground there is a visible sign of the positive attitude in the form of a playground charter stating "At St John's School we have agreed that we want our playground to be a place where we can all SMILE". It then sets out ways, such as being polite and supporting each other, that help to achieve that. The children created the list themselves.

Pupils also learn to assess their own and each other's work. The aim is to learn how to give and take constructive criticism, recognise what is good and move learning forward. After careful review children write "two stars and a wish" - two positive comments and one way that the piece could be improved.

Reinforcing positive behaviour

In head Pam Pitman's office there are five small jars each containing glass nuggets of different colours. There are a corresponding five large jars in the reception area, which, on first sight, appear to be part of the general decoration in the welcoming area. But the five containers are a cumulative celebration of the five positive learning behaviours that the whole school focuses on.

The five colours represent valuing, autonomy, confidence, co-operation and positive attitude. When staff, students or even visitors see someone displaying a learning behaviour they award them the relevant glass nugget. That person then has to share with the head the learning behaviour they have shown before taking a glass nugget from one of the small jars to transfer to the jars in the reception area. As the display grows everyone can see how well the school is performing and what its strengths are.

"The person who has demonstrated one of the learning behaviours explains to me what they have done to earn the nugget before they transfer it," Pam said. So even five-year-olds at St John's understand the vocabulary and complex concepts involved.

Much of the work needed to create the positive attitude takes place in the classroom and is attributable to keen and supportive staff, Pam said.



Photographs by Peter from Year 6

Consultancy help

Pam ascribes much of the school's current success to the support of one of Serco's consultants who has been a regular visitor. She said: "As a new head I needed to be clear of my role and my vision. He challenged me to think about issues and deal with them. He made me look at things in a different way."

The confidentiality of the service is important in a small island but Pam is confident that she can safely share information and concerns. "He is highly professional, not just in his approach but in the way he motivates. I don't think I would have moved the school forward in the way I have without him."

The changes have not always been easy. "He is so solution-oriented that he pushes you to think and evaluate everything. He doesn't let you get away with anything." At the end of the school's first year of coaching he asked Pam which improvement she was most proud of. "I said it was the children's attitude to learning and I thought that was enough but he asked what I was planning to do next to build on it. Hence the focus on learning behaviours."

As part of evaluating and monitoring the impact of that focus teachers observed the children in each other's classes. It showed there were concerns in some year groups, especially further up in the school. Although the five key behaviours were evident in younger pupils it was noticed that some of the older children were not displaying the same qualities.

"We spent a long time in a staff meeting discussing what it was that was getting in the way and came to the conclusion that it was not the curriculum as at first we thought but 'time'. As a staff we recognised the importance of giving time to quality learning opportunities. This led us to review our planning and we now plan differently building in time to review, extend and consolidate. It's changed the whole culture of the school."

At St John's the children are involved in decision making. The purpose statement for the school is: 'We aim to nurture and empower both children and adults to develop as responsible citizens and life long learners'.

Pam said: "As adults we recognise that we can learn from the children and we involve the children in making decisions at many levels. On Friendship Friday, at the beginning of each term, the children focus on projects to make the school an even better place to be. On our last Friendship Friday they designed our school flag, which represents all we stand for."

Pam credits the children with a lot of the success. "We have very passionate staff and we also have amazing children. Sometimes we can lose sight of things because we assume that this is the norm, but it isn't. We need to remind ourselves of that."