

Linking Lives Turing project 2023-2024

This has been a yearlong project looking at ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

Background

The early months of 2023 were spent sourcing Danish partner schools. I had previously worked with a partner school in Vejile and Warrington and so it was easier to connect and find other partner schools. A successful bid was granted in June 2023 from the Turing scheme.

The five primary schools taking part in this project are from Warrington and St Helens. All schools were keen to learn strategies and ideas for pupils suffering from anxiety and other mental health issues that have been made much worse by the pandemic. As Denmark is renowned as the 2nd happiest country in the world it seemed the obvious choice

Ten pupils were chosen for the visit from each primary school but the schools chose to make it a whole class project. The children were either in year 5 or 6. All pupils taking part met the criteria of being from a disadvantaged background either socially, educationally, SEND or EAL. The selection process involved scrutiny of school data parent and social care meetings, and professional dialogue.

All schools reported on pupils lacking resilience, self-esteem, independence and suffering with anxiety.

The project was much more than the mobility. It began at the beginning of the academic year with schools working collaboratively by email and video calls. These have included some basic language learning and culture. Base line assessments and observations were made by all teachers involved in this project. This gave them an opportunity to measure success. Exchange of ideas and simple collaboration occurred before the visit.

In October, myself and Linda Barker visited each of the 5 schools and found suitable local accommodation within our tight budget. Four of the schools self-catered in hostels near to their partner school and the 5th school was based in a local hotel on a B&B basis. This was due to the physical needs of two pupils.

The visit took part form May 20th to May 24th inclusive.

Fifty pupils and 15 teachers all took the first flight from Manchester to Copenhagen on May 20th. As it was a public holiday in Denmark the schools were closed so a cultural visit to the capital city took place. Pupils experienced ordering traditional Danish food, learning about Hans Christian Anderson and how the city deals with recycling, from the bins having shelves for bottles that are collected by the homeless to exchange for money to collection of rainwater in underground storage systems. Later that afternoon each school took trains to the different areas of Denmark to the accommodation.



The rest of the week was spent in the partner schools where pupils took part in lessons in , Danish, Maths, Science, technology and sporting activities. Some met local families after

school and all experienced lessons outdoors as well as on the beach, in woodland/ forests and had BBQ's. The Danish pupils oversaw cooking the food on the BBQ's and our pupils were given the opportunity to toast the marshmallows as previously learnt in forest school lessons in their UK school.



Pupils at first were reluctant to take part keeping to themselves and near to familiar teachers. However, it soon became very apparent that the pupils cemented the friendships they had confidence, were able to happily go into class by themselves and readily joined in with all activities. They didn't need staff with them during break and lunch times. Their resilience, collaboration and team building all developed during the mobility. All pupils said they felt happier, had reduced anxiety and felt freer.



One very noticeable difference in the teaching approaches was an encouragement for pupils to lead the learning. The subject teacher would give a 10- 15 minute lesson introduction then the pupils went outside to carry out the tasks . The pupils worked in groups and left to sort and organise themselves with the teacher observing. Pupils had to be responsible for their own learning, work as a group and any issues or problems were resolved by the pupils themselves. All of this led to pupils developing a sense of agency, developing important soft skills and became much more motivated.

Positive Take Aways

The pupil's mental wellbeing has greatly improved and they have learnt valuable coping strategies when faced with challenges. They saw the value of having responsibility for their own learning and less rigid rules in place. Pupils developed their independence both by travelling and attending lessons in the Danish schools. Creativity, team building, problem solving and resilience naturally improved as the week went by.

All pupils will become health and wellbeing ambassadors for their schools. This allows for the sharing of their experiences, put things in place at break time to encourage all pupils in school to become happy pupils.

Teachers gained insightful knowledge on the Danish way of teaching and learning, using a pupil led approach, lessons being taught with an outdoor element and always a cross curricular approach. All lessons incorporated a sense of trust between teacher and pupils which in turn led to respect for each other. This massively contributed to pupils increase in confidence, independence, resilience, team building, leadership, creativity and general happiness.

Teachers are initiating new approaches that increases development of life skills. One simple change is having no lining up or bell at the end of break. Pupils must be responsible for themselves in getting back to class for lessons. Not only does this increase independence but stops the inevitable fidgeting and waiting around in line. Staff have decided that lessons will include learning outdoors whatever the weather and will have the pupils working in groups. This allows for the natural leaders to step up and for pupils to work collaboratively.

Another positive impact from this project is the wellbeing garden being created by one of the UK schools. It involves parents and the local community coming together to create a wellbeing garden in the school grounds. This will be a place for reflection, and tranquillity whilst also using methods of drainage and recycling surface rainwater copied from the Danish school grounds. There will be a mosaic created from recycled materials at the heart of the garden which blends the logo of the UK and Danish schools. This logo design was the result of a competition held for the year 6 pupils. This garden will be for the use of everyone within the school and wider community.

All 5 schools will continue to work collaboratively in the future with Google meets and Teams calls already booked for next week. Two schools are hoping to gain further funding from Turing to continue their work on improving health and wellbeing.

Finally, one teacher will use the first hand and in depth experience of learning about the Danish education system combined with the Hygge approach to form part of her thesis / research for her NPQSL qualification.

Pupil voice

I loved the trip (apart from all the walking in Copenhagen) it was amazing! I have made lots of new friends and enjoyed playing football with them. The food has been amazing, especially breakfast. It was my first time on an aeroplane and it was a great experience. I enjoyed visiting the beach everyday and buying my souvenirs to remind me of my trip.

I have really enjoyed meeting the Danish children from the school and making new friends. I have loved experiencing being in a different country as I have never been to another country before. I loved seeing all the sites in Copenhagen. The little mermaid statue was my favourite. I enjoyed the food too! Abigail

11:11

I have loved exploring Copenhagen and the local area. I saw the famous statue of the little mermaid. The sculpture was inspired by a ballerina. The famous author, Hans Christian Anderson, wrote the fairytale 'The little mermaid. Libby

I have learnt to say Hello, goodbye, good morning and thank you in Danish. It is has been fun making new friends from a different country and visiting their school. The lessons and the classrooms are very different to ours. Lydia

Schools involved

Warrington- Penketh Community Primary

Appleton Thorn Primary

Croft Primary

Statham Primary

St Helens School – Holy Spirit RC Primary

All schools gave blanket permission for pupils photos and quotes to be used for report writing, newspaper articles and social media accounts.

Report written by Wendy De Corte 3rd June 2024.