

REDUCING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

POLICY OBSERVATORY CASE STUDY 8

Name of School/Setting: **Ysgol Bassaleg School**

Local Authority: **Newport**

Type of School/Setting: **Secondary**

Language Medium: **English**

Number of Pupils: **1670**

Free School Meal Percentage: **6%**

Focus of Case Study:

Teaching approaches including feedback to pupils, developing thinking skills, and peer-to-peer learning which have been made effective by “home grown, in house” toolkits and systems of support

Ysgol Bassaleg School

Bassaleg School is a mixed 11-to-18 school maintained by Newport Local Education Authority (LEA). The school is situated on the outskirts of the city of Newport. The majority of pupils who attend the school come from the city and a significant minority come from more rural areas. The catchment area is that covered by the High Cross, Marshfield, Mount Pleasant, Penrepoeth, and Rogerstone Primary Schools. Bassaleg School currently has 1670 pupils on roll and of these 347 are in the Sixth Form¹. The majority of pupils come from neither prosperous nor economically disadvantaged areas. Over the last five years the number of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) has averaged around 6%², this is lower than the average for the Local Authority and nationally across Wales. However 33% of the current Sixth form are entitled to an Educational Maintenance Allowance and therefore staff are mindful that they have to ‘cast the net’ wider than just FSM pupils as they believe that a significant population of pupils are borderline FSM and are thus consciously aware of the concept of ‘in work poverty’.

The Case Study

Bassaleg School ‘strives for excellence’ in all aspects of school life. The general aims are that the school:

- will be a happy and caring community where there is encouragement and opportunity for all learners to achieve their potential, where they feel valued as individuals and learn to co-operate with one another;

¹ My Local School 2014

² Stats Wales

- will be an ordered and disciplined place, where the students know that they will find the guidance and support they need;
- recognises all the needs of the learners – intellectual, spiritual, social and physical and endeavours to meet those needs in a manner suited to the individual;
- sees that learners are recognised as individuals and are cared for as individuals;
- continues to strengthen the links which have been developed with the community which it serves and of which its learners are part³.

This case study focuses on teaching approaches including feedback to pupils, developing thinking skills, and peer-to-peer learning which have been made effective by “home grown, in house” toolkits and systems of support.

Standards Culture - *What makes an outstanding lesson?*

A standards culture has evolved over time at Bassaleg School. During 2008-to-2009 the school became interested in the Skills Framework and staff took it on board as statutory. As a result of focussing on the key skills of literacy and numeracy with an increased emphasis on thinking skills staff re-wrote all Key Stage 3 schemes of work. Using a subject specific- skills based framework staff then looked at the best of the research available and then unpicked it to see how they could make it their own and apply it to their school. Staff wrote a classroom handbook and developed and distributed guidance as to what they expect an excellent lesson to look like in Bassaleg, this includes the delivery of:

Feature	Excellent
Start of lesson	Objectives shared with and owned students; links with new learning made explicit. Challenging expectations established; clear sense of pace.
Engagement of students	All students engrossed in their work. Students persevere with tasks and are highly motivated to succeed.
Style of teaching	Teaching is based on expert knowledge and is stimulating, enthusiastic, rigorous and consistently challenging.
Teaching methods	Teaching methods are imaginatively selected to deliver the learning objectives of the lesson, with a wide variety of activities to meet the needs of students with different learning styles and different abilities.
Differentiation	Demands of activities are matched sensitively to individual needs. All students extended in their learning.
Independence of students	Independence and collaborative work is very much in evidence. Students are aware of how to manage and extend their own

³ School prospectus

	learning.
Relationships	Excellent positive and supportive yet challenging relationships in classroom which are conducive to very high levels of personal development.
Productivity and behaviour	Time is used very productively for independent and collaborative work. All students are engaged in their own learning throughout the lesson, with excellent awareness of time management. Student behaviour is exemplary, with active involvement in the lesson.
Teacher knowledge	The teacher has expert knowledge of the subject and pedagogy. S/he uses their expertise to maximise student learning and achievement, both in the subject and in teaching and applying cross-curricular skills.
Questioning	The teacher employs a wide range of questioning styles and strategies to ensure student learning is extended. Questions are carefully planned to scaffold learning and challenge all.
Achievement	Achievement of all students is consistently very high in relation to student capability; the students attain excellent added value.
Progress	All students make considerably better progress than expected.
Assessment	Accurate teacher assessment of student learning underpins careful planning. The teacher consistently involves students in assessing their own learning, highlighting targets that need to be addressed in different activities in order for students to continue to improve. Students increasingly take responsibility for their own learning.
Use of other adults in the room	Well-directed teaching assistants who enhance the quality of learning in the classroom through working in partnership with the teacher and students.
Homework	Homework, extension tasks and independent research further extend student learning.
Plenary	Students are actively engaged in evaluating the progress they have made in meeting the learning objectives and can accurately identify the next steps in their learning.
Literacy/ numeracy/ ICT tasks	Highly effective cross-curricular links, which enhance students' understanding of key skills and their application in a range of contexts.

Staff have worked on formulating a clear and consistent marking criteria matrix and regularly meet to standardise their judgements. This is consistent across all levels in the school.

“We started to realise that a plenary talking about skills to discuss “what have we learnt today during this lesson?” was almost not worth having. How have we used the skills is a much more demanding question and actually gets the children to think and apply their knowledge.”

Assistant Headteacher

Thinking for Learning Programme

During the transitional phase from Year 6 to Year 7, upon entering Bassaleg School pupils become part of the 'Thinking for Learning Programme'. Metacognition is at the heart of the programme and pupils are given one lesson a fortnight in teaching 'how to think', this also instils in pupils an understanding of 'how they learn' through:

- Metacognitive processes
- Higher order questioning
- Leading peers
- Active presentation of ideas
- Development of communication skills

“Teachers at Bassaleg do all they can to make learning active, fun and interesting.”

“I am encouraged to ask lots of questions; it makes me more confident about my learning.”

Pupil Voice

Following the course pupils are then encouraged to try out their new skills in other subjects across the school and as a result pupils feel that they are confident and resilient learners.

However Bassaleg staff are now at a point where they feel that their thinking and learning programme is embedded across the curriculum (taught implicitly through subject skills) so that now teachers and pupils need new challenges.

“There is a danger in any organisation to think you have arrived – there is always something you can do to tweak and improve and move forward. We want to make us even better as an organisation and keep developing as a centre for excellent learning.”

Headteacher

Staff are now actively developing a 'digital transition phase model' with partner primary schools which encourages literacy and numeracy skills across subjects. A Global Learning Virtual Platform will enable the delivery of new skills and Bassaleg pupils will be empowered to go out to primary schools to train their staff and pupils how to engage with the technology. This cloud based network initiative entails an interactive magazine where the aim is to communicate, work together on collaborative projects, and assess each other's work.

The Teachers' Toolkit

The teachers' toolkit was designed to develop thinking and communication skills and includes many practical resources and strategies to enhance reflection and articulation. The toolkit enables all staff in leading excellent practice across the curriculum and offers guidance on how each resource and strategy can be used to positively impact on pupils' learning. In the toolkit there are a variety of items to develop the skills of pupils of all ages and abilities, and facilitates "no hands up" to ensure all pupils contribute to the lesson.

"As Dylan Wiliam advocates, no hands up means that thinking and participation are not negotiable!"

Deputy Headteacher citing Dylan Wiliam

Tool	Suggested Use
Mini whiteboards Dry wipe pens and erasers	To facilitate no hands up and promote all students' response systems.
Traffic lights	To indicate levels of understanding of each section of the lesson. Identify who is in most urgent need of support. Pupils working on green can be utilised to guide and support pupils who are displaying red.
Questions matrices	Devised from Anderson's Taxonomy to support pupils in forming high order questions.
A3 question matrix	Displayed in each classroom as a continuous visual aid to promote the use of high order questioning.
Thinking skills dice	Kinaesthetic resource based on Anderson's Taxonomy, supports pupils in forming more evaluative questions. Also used at different stages of the lesson to indicate to pupils which skill is being developed: remembering, analysing, creating etc.
Coloured tokens	Can be issued to pupils on entry to the classroom to indicate which group they will work in or what roles you require pupils to assume in the lesson. Tokens can represent "questions" and the number of tokens issued to pupils at the start of each lesson can indicate how many questions one expects each pupil to pose or answer.
Thinking hats	Can be employed in discussion tasks to solve a problem. The strategy is an excellent means of developing pupils' communication and collaborative skills.
Playing cards	Can be distributed at the start of each lesson to help to facilitate "no hands up" and encourage all pupils to respond. The teacher can select a card from their own pack at random and the pupil with the matching card can be invited to contribute. Alternatively, the card can be selected by the teacher and any pupil from the matching "suit" can contribute. This can be most effective with

	more reticent or less able pupils who feel very uncomfortable in contributing; this “group” option offers support.
Exit passes	Available at the end of each lesson for pupils to respond to a particular question, e.g. to formatively assess pupils’ understanding of a key concept to inform future planning. Also used by pupils to record any questions they might have and act as a bridge to new learning.
Post it notes and question wall	To record questions which are then in turn displayed on the class question wall.
Question bean bag	To ensure all pupils are contributing to the learning within a lesson.
Blob tree	Used by students in periods of reflection. The diagram provides pupils with a visual representation of how they might be feeling at a particular stage of a lesson or about a particular task.
Group role badges	Can be distributed when engaging pupils in group work to support staff in allocating roles and identifying the various skills needed in effective group work.
Wordle	Information resource - go to www.wordle.net copy and paste any text into box and a “wordle” is formed. Can be displayed to students at the start of a lesson to develop pupils’ thinking when trying to establish the learning objective for example.
Think, pair, share	A frame to support discussion tasks and encourage collaborative learning.
Electronic “randomisers”	To further facilitate “no hands up” and encourage all pupils to contribute.

Following distribution of the toolbox kits to every class, members of the senior leadership team put together a manual and then went into each department to explain how to use it in context.

“I can wander around the school and in every class there will be some part of the toolbox in use. It has been a fantastic piece of whole school training and is a great resource.”

Headteacher

The Headteacher states that the toolkit has had a great impact on ‘ways of working’ at Bassaleg School; “lesson observations produce consistent results, and the quality of pupil work in books and attainment outcomes is evident.” The pastoral impact has also been significant.

“If you have a lesson that is well planned and pacy and taking students on a journey of improvement they do not want to miss-behave, students are engaged and therefore there is less need for intervention strategies for behaviour.”

Pastoral Assistant Head

Developments

The current CPD model is training all staff to research the use digital applications to motivate and inspire, and staff are moving on and evolving their practice with digital technology.

“You have to have a research culture, we don’t launch in with something whole school until we know what the pitfalls are and can see that it is having an impact on learning, because if it isn’t you have to question the value of doing it.”

Headteacher

Staff at Bassaleg School are very excited to introduce their first version of the ‘Digital Toolkit’. Last September they embarked on a journey that would build on existing innovative teaching and learning methods and ignited a new era of pedagogical practice to inspire, motivate and challenge all learners. Starting with a pilot study involving 10 members of staff, 10 classes from across all key stages, and a “Digital Leaders Pupil Group” voicing the opinions and ideas of the students, they began to research and evaluate how digital technology can be used to positively impact on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. The outcome of this pilot study is the “Digital Toolkit.”

To support all staff in this agenda, leaders have created a 12 month CPD programme of six tailored workshops to meet the individual needs of staff in order to ‘up-skill’ them and equip them with the knowledge of how these applications can be used to support skills development across the curriculum. The workshops are expertly led by “Digital Leaders” who have been instrumental in motivating colleagues to embrace this exciting agenda. An extremely in-depth document details the applications and explicit links to the ‘Literacy and Numeracy Framework’ so that staff can use the Digital Toolkit as a practical resource to support the planning of lessons in all key stages.

Study Skills Support

‘Study Skills Support Provision’ currently has 100 learners in Year 10 and Year 11 and runs in a dedicated space within the school. The study skills space has a computer room and a classroom, which has comfortable chairs and grouped tables to work at in an informal relaxed atmosphere.

5 lessons a fortnight (100 hours per academic year) are dedicated to study provision and this is instead of taking ‘an option’ which aims to try and improve attainment across the board.

During each study skills session pupils are asked to set themselves a target. This is written in each individual pupil's working booklet or file in a thought bubble and then pupils tick a box to indicate if the target relates to:

- Coursework
- Classwork
- Homework
- Revision
- Research
- Other

Study skills incorporates the full range of subjects and some examples of targets might include activities such as making revision flash cards; reviewing teacher comments; making improvements to coursework; proof reading homework to re-write before handing in; or online activities- e.g. listening to podcast etc.

Pupils will then take their booklet or file to the teacher so that they can check the target and distribute pupils to the correct learning environment, i.e. computer or desk-based room.

At the end of each session pupils review their progress and a tick box in their booklet to indicate if they have achieved their target – yes or partly. They then complete a small speech bubble to note what they did during the session to achieve their target and start to formulate their goals for their next study skills session.

Every half term pupils conduct a review or 'tally exercise' to see how many sessions and targets they have set in each of their subject areas. This information is then discussed at regular assessment points during the term with a member of staff during pupil progress meetings. Current attainment grades are then mapped onto the tally exercise and a scoring system shows if pupils are on target or indeed shows what they need to do to achieve better results. This is enhanced by using a colour coding system: blue = above target, green = on target, amber = one grade off target, and red = two grades off target.

This visual aid then helps both pupils and support staff to see where they need to be putting in more work and spending more time on specific subjects.

“Sometimes we are seeing that the red ones are the ones where pupils have not put in as much effort and have spent less time on.”

Assistant Headteacher

“This forms part of our language we use with pupils, when they come up to us with a target at the beginning of a session we will ask them what colour subject this is so that we can check that they are spreading their time more evenly - this helps them manage their workload effectively.”

Assistant Headteacher

One lesson every half term is dedicated to showing pupils how to improve their study skills and how to revise effectively. Bassaleg School helps their students understand what their preferred and effective learning styles are by completing a questionnaire relating to auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic learning and then matches them up with revision strategies which will work best for them. Staff then encourage pupils to vary these techniques so that they keep active and work with their 'thinking brain' to make study creative and effective.

“Two big statements we constantly hear is “I read my books” and “I’m not going to start too early as I would have forgotten it all by the time the exam comes”, we tell students to start early and review regularly as this commits information from the short term to the long term memory.”

Assistant Headteacher

Bassaleg pupils are also taught about the theory of brain and understand what 'whole brain learning' means. Diagnostic games are played and demonstrate to pupils how to best memorise information. Managing stress levels also forms part of the study skills package and staff help pupils deal with the pressures of Year 11 by generating revision timetables and managing workloads effectively.

Developments

Staff at Bassaleg developed the study skills programme from the 'learning coach' training course and an increased awareness developed from supporting pupils who were taking 14 GCSE or equivalent qualifications who ran the risk of getting stressed and overloaded, and not achieving their target grades. The course started being offered to a range of target children, but as time has progressed and staff have been able to see how successful it has become it is now offered to all pupils and will soon become embedded and take the place of 'an option'.

“This is about children reaching their target grades, it is not just for those pupils who need to reach a grade C, it includes higher tier and MAT children as well.”

Headteacher

A recent pupil survey found that 100% of participants agreed that they would recommend study skills to a friend, 100% agreed it improved their learning, and 98% agreed it improved their grades.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

At Bassaleg School co-constructed learning between pupils is core to every lesson. Pupils are extremely practised at leading learning and in some circumstances the dynamics of the lesson are completely pupil led.

“I like the trust and freedom I get when making decisions, it helps me to become more independent.”

“The amount of discussion and debate we do encourage us to think for ourselves.”

Pupil Voice

Peer learning can range from pupils setting goals and assessing understanding of tasks, to ‘think, pair, share’ dialogues. Pupils get one minute to think alone and on a laminated sheet note their thoughts, then they get one minute to discuss this in pairs, then they share it amongst their peers in class. These types of collaborative discussion are totally embedded in classroom practice.

“If you ask a question you cannot be answering it yourself a few minutes later, you need to allow think time.”

Headteacher

Collaborative peer-to-peer working has also had an impact on ‘peer mentoring’. Relationships between pupils are more mature and has developed a culture of inclusivity. Bassaleg operates a ‘reading and maths buddies scheme’ which is run by its Sixth Form A Level Students who extend their support across the whole school. Members of the Sixth Form are also assigned to form tutor groups to offer social and emotional support. This dedicated team receive formal training and monitor pupil progress by keeping a portfolio of work and they have done with pupils which counts as accredited work towards their Welsh Baccalaureate community hours. The voluntary scheme is oversubscribed and many ‘buddies’ are students that received support from a reading or maths buddy when they were lower down in the school.

There has been an acute focus on up-skilling pupils to enable them to effectively assess each other’s work, this has been facilitated by sharing the right criteria with them so that they can mark work in a productive and consistent way.

Using a basic 2 stars and wish concept was not enough for Bassaleg School. They found that pupils were giving each other ‘generalised comments’ such as ‘well done’, ‘good work’, ‘you have understood this’. Instead, staff wanted their pupils to give constructive feedback based on the assessment criteria so that they can give a detailed response indicating what needs to be applied and included to ensure that the work meets high standards.

Students use a range of assessment matrices to indicate to peers ‘not what’, ‘but how’ they need to improve. Feedback is specific and of high quality which reflects the ‘marking dialogues’ which take place between pupils and teachers to encourage and facilitate effective feedback. Literacy skills have also improved, as this is the medium for the marking.

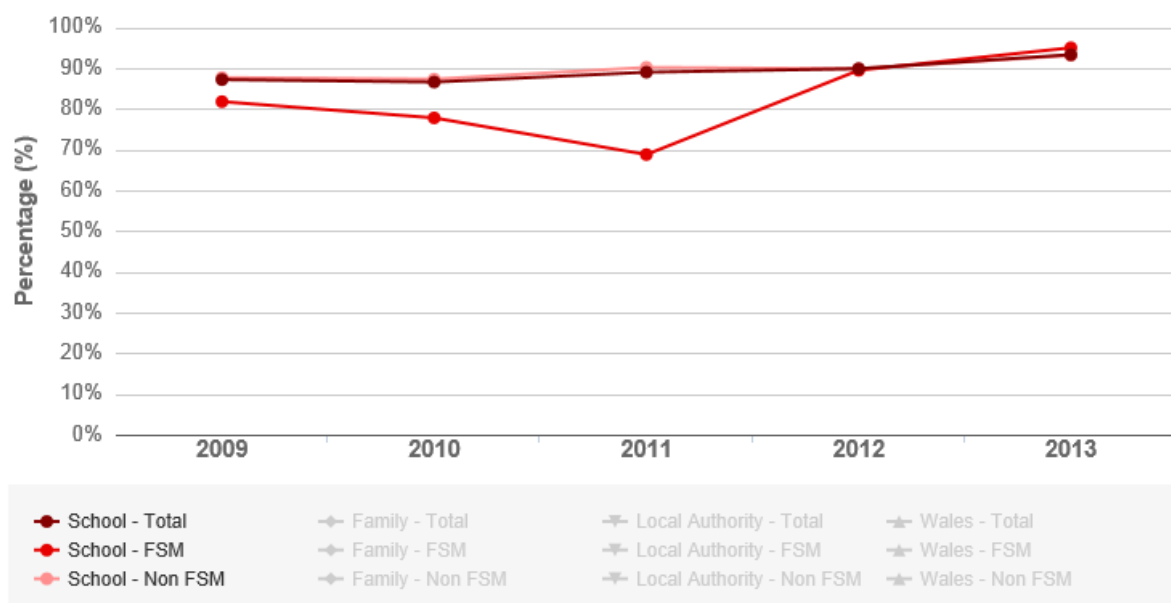
“Unless that wish is something that pupil can use and apply its use is very limited. The quality of diagnostic assessment shows us how much progress pupils have made and helps us track how pupils have made use of the comments and feedback.”

Assistant Headteacher

Evidence of Impact - Celebrating Success

The greatest impact Bassaleg School has seen is in its Key Stage 3 Core Subject Indicator results. Not only has it been successful in closing the gap between Free School Meal (FSM) pupils and non FSM pupils between 2009 and 2012, in 2013 Bassaleg Key Stage 3 FSM pupils outperformed the non FSM pupils as evidenced below.

Pupils	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
FSM	81.8%	77.8%	68.8%	89.5%	95.0%
Non FSM	87.7%	87.3%	90.2%	89.9%	93.1%



My Local School Data⁴

Represents the percentage of pupils achieving at least level 5 in English or Welsh (first language), mathematics and science in combination.

GCSE Level 2 Threshold results (5 GCSEs at Grade A*-C) have also increased for Bassaleg's FSM pupils (see table below).

Pupils	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
FSM	75.0%	60.0%	44.4%	66.7%	79.2%
Non FSM	77.9%	82.0%	77.1%	84.6%	92.5%

GCSE Level 2 Threshold Results

Staff are currently working towards raising attainment in GCSE Level 2 Inclusive (5 GCSEs at Grade A*-C including one in English or Welsh first language and one in Mathematics) by targeting interventions and revision workshops for its FSM pupils.

As part of Bassaleg's commitment to sharing and celebrating good practice across the school, they scheduled time in the calendar year to invite departments to showcase how they have used elements of the teachers' toolkit to positively impact on pupils' learning.

Each department was invited to prepare a 10 minute presentation to be delivered to all staff. Any member of the department was welcome to be part of leading this presentation and included a key focus from the following:

- A discussion of one or more of the elements of the toolkit
- Modelling / demonstration of a practical activity
- A discussion of a lesson plan, sequence of lessons, or scheme of work
- Pupil or staff evaluation of how such strategies have positively impacted on various skills: reflection, communication, quality of questioning or on pupils' interaction within certain groups
- Video of a lesson or part of a lesson
- Images to represent the learning process
- A discussion of how the toolkit has developed assessment for learning practices within the department

⁴ <http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/school.htm?estab=6804030&iaith=eng>

“Our ethos is that anybody can lead anything - not just senior or middle leaders. We have a wealth of talent across the school and invest in all of our staff.”

Headteacher

Staff and pupils have also taken a lead role in presenting at national teaching and learning conferences and have held workshops to disseminate the importance of having a framework to engage learners. This has stimulated great interest in the field.

“We have had requests to buy the toolkit, but we encourage schools to develop their own because it is about finding out what works for your school, success will only be guaranteed if you go on a journey - the journey of change.”

Headteacher

Funding

Bassaleg School has targeted the use of its Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) on the following:

- Pastoral support workers
- Targeted interventions
- Monitoring of attendance
- Revision workshops for FSM pupils
- PASS (Pupil Attitude to Self and School) analysis
- Pre-school, break time and after school learning support to increase ICT access
- Alternative learning pathway provision – enabling full curriculum access
- Develop an alternative course for learners with additional needs

Summary

The key message from this case study is the importance of promoting learners' independent thinking skills and providing high quality feedback.

Theme	Particular factor	YB
Teaching and Learning	Effective feedback and assessment	✓✓
	Metacognitive strategies	✓✓

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