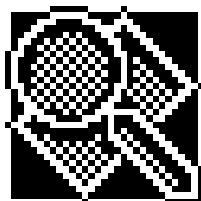


## Action on Ethos

### Getting Started: An Ethos Development Diary

*This case study takes the form of a diary recording the progress of a Primary School as it works towards developing a positive ethos 'from the beginning'. The school had experienced many changes in leadership and staff were concerned about pupil behaviour. Parents and members of the local community felt rather semi-detached from the school. This account describes a year of hard work, surveying pupils', parents' and staff views and then implementing a series of smaller changes as part of the process of developing and implementing a School Development Plan which placed a positive ethos at the top of its list of priorities.*



### Christ The King Primary School

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## 1 Background

Christ The King School is a mainstream primary school situated in the Holytown area of Motherwell, in North Lanarkshire. The school has a roll of 218 children in a very diverse catchment area, socially and economically.

The present Headteacher was appointed to the school as her first headship in April of 1997 after the school had undergone a long period of uncertainty and instability. Since the retirement of the previous Headteacher there had been two Acting Headteachers and other changes so it was understandable that staff morale was low and the school seemed rather ill at ease with itself.

## 2 Thinking about getting started: May and June 1997

The opportunity was taken very soon during consultation time to discuss the production of the School Development Plan with all the school staff. Staff indicated that there was real concern among them about the discipline and the standards of pupil behaviour in the school. It was agreed at first that the main priority in working on the plan for the coming session would have to be the development of a whole school discipline policy. Although there was a policy, strategies for implementing it lacked clarity and coherence. Pupils and parents needed to be more aware of the policy and more involved in its development and maintenance if they were to feel committed to it. Promoting positive behaviour strategies had been tried in the past but staff wanted a more comprehensive approach which included the all-round raising of standards and expectations in work as well as behaviour.

It became clear that in fact what had to be tackled was the whole school ethos if we were to move forward. We hoped that, through taking a broad approach, other issues - including some very worrying ones like pupil indiscipline and low staff morale- might be resolved within the wider strategy simultaneously. Undoubtedly then the number one priority in the forthcoming Development Plan had to be promoting a positive whole school ethos.

## 3 Early steps: August to October 1997

At the beginning of the session a staff PAT night was undertaken. The session was conducted by one of our quality development service advisers. During this session he delivered a very informative presentation on what constituted the ethos of an effective school and then guided the staff into exploring the document, *How Good Is Our School?*, concentrating on the Key Area 'Ethos' (Performance Indicators 5.1 - 5.3). To ensure coherence with local good practice



generally unruly behaviour in the playground and on the senior pupils playing football all around the yard, so that other children were afraid of being caught up and hurt in the game. This had actually happened quite often.

The parent questionnaire brought out a range of worries. They spoke about their perceptions that:

- Current discipline procedures were not known
- They did not know about the newly introduced Headteacher award ceremony
- There were inadequate links with the local community
- Opportunities for pupils did not seem to be equal
- Pupils were not being given sufficient opportunity to accept responsibility
- There was a shortage of extra-curricular activities and of information about them
- Catering arrangements and packed lunch facilities did not seem to be adequate
- Parents had no opportunity to participate in school activities
- There was not enough information given by the school about pupil progress

The staff questionnaire revealed concerns about poor communication across the school. However the overwhelming concerns of the teaching staff were still the poor standards of behaviour and the lack of respect among pupils in the school.

We retired rather anxiously for the Christmas break, aware of what the audit had found and knowing that when we returned we would begin the monumental task of addressing the concerns.

## **5 Action stations: January – May 1998**

### **Children's concerns**

Some suggestions for making the school a better place included building a swimming pool – certainly outwith the reach of the DMR budget! However, in response to the pupils' evaluation a member of staff and her class volunteered to undertake an Enterprise project on improving the school playground. Thus *C.T.K. Changes* was born, a P4/5 company that would change the environment of the playground and provide equipment and activities to keep pupils happy during intervals. To date the company has enlisted the support of many local businesses and made the case for funding from the PTA and it is now, two terms later, well on the way to changing one whole section of the playground to make it more pupil-friendly and attractive – a great achievement.

### **Staff concerns**

Some of the staff concerns were relatively easily met. The problems in communication were addressed by the introduction of a Staff Daybook and weekly diary which was circulated among all members of staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

The main concern about the lack of discipline would be tackled by the production and implementation of a positive ethos policy which would incorporate systems of rewards for good behaviour and high standards of work. The Ethos Committee visited another local school to talk to the staff and to view their system of rewards. This visit was most enlightening and the ideas gained from those colleagues would become the basis of our own Positive Ethos Policy. After staff consultation and extensive discussion, the committee compiled a draft policy to be ratified by staff and to be implemented during the following session.

This policy set out a range of strategies including the introduction of Personal and Social Development programmes at all stages of the school and the use of reward cards. Each pupil would be issued with a card which they had to strive individually to complete with happy face stickers given as rewards for good work, behaviour, attendance and so on. When a card was full they would qualify for a special certificate to be presented at the Head Teacher's Award Ceremony. School rules – all positive – were produced in conjunction with the pupils and were communicated to parents. We did not expect that all our difficulties in relation to pupils' behaviour would vanish but we did then feel confident that we were on the right path and that the children would not only be better behaved but also happier.

### **Parental concerns**

Some major development needs arose from the concerns of the parents. One of the criticisms made was that the arrangements for packed lunches and catering were not adequate. This was easily changed by the introduction of two sittings at lunch time which meant that all pupils could be accommodated in the lunch room at different times.

In order to address some of the issues of inequity and to ensure that children were given more responsibility, the Headteacher worked with pupils at assemblies, encouraging them to wear school uniform and to take pride in being a pupil of Christ The King Primary. At each assembly one aspect of behaviour was targeted and worked on by the pupils, for example, walking rather than running through the school at intervals, behaviour and manners in the dining room, using spoons to eat yoghurt and not straws, having respect for other people and property, manners and courteousness around the school. Pupils who continued to misbehave were invited to bring their parents to the school to discuss their behaviour with the Headteacher and to reach a shared understanding of what was needed to improve it.

At the assemblies the phrase was coined that Christ The King was the best school in North Lanarkshire and that it wasn't just a good school but an EXCELLENT school. All of these little strategies laid the foundation of our ethos policy while we constructed more formal measures.

Another concern of the parents was the lack of links with the wider community around the school. We began by inviting community groups and organisations to become more involved

with the school and to visit it. We established links with the community policeman and became involved in the Strathclyde Police Steps Programme. Dental health workers and dietitians attended Parents' Nights, local theatre groups did productions in the school and at Christmas time a school show was undertaken with members of the local community invited along. Parents were invited to assemblies and to the Halloween Parade. Being a Catholic school, we have an annual programme of mass celebrations and as part of this we arranged to have some of the masses celebrated in the school, with the congregation coming to the school hall for mass and a class of pupils taking responsibility for providing tea and home baking at the end of the service so that congregation and pupils could socialise.

We also contacted the local newspaper and arranged for a reporter to visit the school regularly to report on school activities in the Motherwell Times. In this way we have become better known in the community and, we hope, have risen in its estimation. Children, parents and staff were all pleased to see their hard work and achievements publicly recorded.

More effective links were established with the School Board who now support the school by fund raising through a 50-50 club. Staff were encouraged to support PTA events and to attend committee meetings. Parents were encouraged to be involved in their child's learning by offering them the chance to participate in Parent Curricular Workshops on the new language resources being introduced into the school. A very successful project with parents was undertaken as part of the Early Intervention Programme.

A new Reporting to Parents document was introduced providing more information about pupil progress and the monthly newsletter was revamped with a section for parents with concerns to send their name and telephone number to the Head Teacher to be contacted personally to discuss their worries. This part of the newsletter was introduced with some trepidation - would we be inundated with irate parents or parents who replied impulsively without serious concerns? In the event, we have had only three returns from parents, all of whom, when contacted personally, had very valid concerns to raise, one example was worry about the safety of parking and traffic outside the gates of the school. We hope this innovation, and the other developments, demonstrate that we are a school which listens to parents.

Within the school itself the entrance foyer was made more welcoming with welcome signs and displays of staff photographs on the walls. Staff volunteered to increase the number of extra curricular activities from only football to a range of activities including netball, badminton and recorder classes.

## 6 Reflection, Evaluation and Gratitude: June 1998

So here we are approaching the end of our first year. Have we got it right? All these strategies, each one a small step in itself, has contributed to the overall positive progress of the school. We recognise that we are still at an early stage in making our ethos securely positive in all respects, but we are now a community which knows where it is going and as our adviser told us, 'The ethos of the school impinges on the whole school community'. Already it seems that the weans may be helping to sort themselves out, albeit with the support and encouragement of a staff which has had a very demanding but satisfying year. Staff and pupil morale is much higher, relationships within the whole school community are much more positive and the standards of behaviour and discipline are much improved - all this even before we implement our more formal policy.

School assemblies no longer require the Headteacher and staff to be at battle stations to ensure control. A recent assembly followed a fun day raising money for Lenten charities when every one of the 218 pupils present was not just excited but 'high', yet they were able to control themselves and listen to the address. Sometimes it seems like a different school...

On June 9 we held an Open Night when we threw the doors of the school open and invited everyone to come and see the changes in the school. We got a positive response from the parents and other community members and the comments slip we asked to be completed confirmed our belief that we are well on the way to having a positive school ethos. How have we achieved this? With lots of intensive effort from a very committed and hard-working staff, increasing support from children and parents and more than 'a little help from our friends', colleagues and others who have encouraged us.



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