



Our South Downs Case study

Droxford Junior School, Meon Valley

Capturing the special qualities of the South Downs National Park

Droxford Junior school in the Meon Valley takes children from a number of rural infant schools in local villages. Its strong ethos of linking learning to its locality has been established over a five year period by an enthusiastic senior management team, inspired by what they see around the school.

Every National Park has to develop a list of the features that make them special as a baseline for measuring how it changes overtime. To make sure these qualities reflected the views of the people living in and around the National Park, the South Downs National Park Authority asked residents and visitors, landowners and farmers, businesses, school pupils, parish councils and many others to put forward their ideas. These were then developed into a list of seven 'Special Qualities' which include:

- 1 Diverse, inspirational landscapes and breathtaking views
- 2 A rich variety of wildlife and habitats including rare and internationally important species
- 3 Tranquil and unspoilt places
- 4 An environment shaped by centuries of farming and embracing new enterprise
- 5 Great opportunities for recreational activities and learning experiences
- 6 Well-conserved historical features and a rich cultural heritage
- 7 Distinctive towns and villages, and communities with real pride in their area.

Making the links

Droxford Junior School has discovered that the work they have been developing is closely linked to these special qualities. Here is a taste of the huge range of features and opportunities that the school is already offering.

Diverse, inspirational landscapes and breathtaking views

Y3 children have an annual camp in the school grounds. The teacher walks them up on to the chalk downland, where they stop and take in the amazing views, looking back down at the village and school in the valley. The Y3/4 students also take part in a literacy project called

Out on the downs (below); the annual camp (bottom)



'Dragonology' – the local police are invited to come and help children investigate reported sightings of dragons on the downland. The children go off the school site to explore clues and gather evidence.

A rich variety of wildlife including rare and internationally important species

Y5/6 children study the river Meon from 'Source to Sea', working closely with the South Downs National Park staff to learn about the work that is going on to protect the Bullhead fish in the river.

Tranquil and unspoilt places

In Y3/4 the children investigate contrasting localities by studying their school and village and linking with Portswood Primary in Southampton. They use their senses to explore the sights and sounds of the two communities.

An environment shaped by centuries of farming and embracing new enterprise

The Y3/4 children study alternative energy and visit the Sustainability Centre (www.sustainability-centre.org) to investigate hands-on exhibits. They get involved in discussions about the wind farms and solar technology in the National Park. Back in the school grounds all students take a role in cultivating plants in their allotment, which are sold to parents and the community. A local farm offers enrichment activities – for example, children go out to the fields to calculate how many grains of wheat they might harvest in an entire field.

Great opportunities for recreational activities and learning experiences

In Y5/6 the children do a topic on precious places, identifying the South Downs as their precious place and contrasting this with other communities' precious places. One of their homework tasks is to plan a walk in the South Downs for their families. They take photos along the route and create a map for others to follow. These are then shared with classmates.

Well-conserved historical features and a rich cultural heritage

Droxford has a host of heritage features but the one the school has chosen for this case-study is the use of the village for children in WWII. Children follow traces to explore what the village would have been like for the children during the war.

Distinctive towns and villages, and communities with real pride in their area

The school, like many others, celebrates its work and local distinctiveness. Examples of this are the topics above being mentioned in assemblies, newsletters, parish magazines and dynamic displays. The school celebrates further by working with an artist once a year on indoor and outdoor projects. They are also aiming to be awarded the Eco Schools' Green Flag, having achieved their silver in 2011.

Enthusiasm and knowledge

As recommended (see www.primaryreview.org.uk), Droxford already relates approximately 30 per cent of the curriculum to its locality. And they are looking forward to making continual improvements, while emphasising the need for gradual change.

On visiting the school, a representative from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology commented:

'I've taught the workshop in 21 classes in 10 schools now and I was incredibly impressed at both the skill and local knowledge of your lower KS2 children. I haven't seen such enthusiasm for their own local history as was displayed by the three classes I taught last week, and I'm pleased that the workshop helped build on that.'