

## **Queensberry Initiative – end of year report – August 2010**

This has been a very eventful and exciting year for the Queensberry Initiative. We began the year with only our Development Officer in post and with a series of plans and objectives. At the end of this year we have achieved many of our goals, operating with our full staff team and a group of volunteers.

Advertising and appointing our two key members of staff was successfully completed as soon as possible, although the work of the Initiative was begun prior to their start, and both our Project Worker and Cluster Support Worker were in post by the end of October. This meant that we were able to complete their induction and ensure that all the aspects of the Initiative were moving forward in line with our plans.

To enable pupils from Wallace Hall Academy and our cluster primaries to engage in the outdoor learning and development opportunities that the Initiative is promoting, presentations were made to groups of staff, highlighting the types of experiences that the 'outdoor classroom' could offer. Our cluster primary schools received visits from our Project Worker to initiate the development of their participation in the Initiative. Subject teacher use of the outdoor opportunities has increased throughout the year. Now all subject areas of the secondary school and all primary schools within the cluster have either made use of the 'outdoor classroom' or have plans to do so. The Curriculum for Excellence, the Scottish Government's educational initiative, is well supported by our Queensberry Initiative. In particular the development of the Four Capacities is facilitated by the Initiative's activities. Some of the most interesting subject based activities using the outdoor classroom included Art lessons, Enterprise activities, French translation of Estate information, ASDAN team building events, a Chemistry bio-diesel project, photography modules, Geography field work, as well as creative writing stimulus with English classes hanging poetry from trees and Maths classes undertaking practical work. These are just a few snapshots of some of the subject based QI lessons.

Targeted groups, involving pupils from Primary 7 from 4 of the cluster primaries, pupils from Second Year and Fourth Year pupils, began their work in September 09. These groups focus on their personal and social development, along with improving their general health by increasing their level of physical activity. These groups have been working throughout the year and the impact of these interventions has been assessed in a variety of ways. Individual pupil interviews have been conducted three or more times during the year, with targets set for each pupil. During these interviews pupil views on the Initiative have also been solicited and the feedback has been positive both in terms of enjoyment and in connection with the support the Initiative is giving to their goals. Parental responses have also been solicited and these too indicate an assessment of positive impact. Interestingly, the parents of our P7 targeted pupils were the most concerned about how their daughters/sons would mix with pupils from other schools. By the end of the year, in June, a great majority of the parents responding were positive about the support given. In 2010-11 we will have five targeted groups, covering all years from P7 to S4.

As part of the targeted group work, volunteers from the local community were invited to become Business Mentors. They were trained over two evening

sessions and then given detailed plans for each mentoring session. These sessions were held once a month and were small group work. Each session was also supported by a member of the Queensberry Initiative team. Pupils were puzzled at first about how to work effectively with these mentors but they became generally very positive about this opportunity. For some of the S4 group, these sessions led to part-time work and provided an additional referee from outwith the school, which was also beneficial. The business mentors were very eager to provide a helping hand to pupils. The proof of their commitment was that all of them turned out for their final training/evaluation night at the end of the year and all committed themselves to undertaking a further year. The P7 and S2 mentors are following on with their mentor groups. The S4 mentors have a new group of S4s to be working with this year. During the evaluation event, some changes to this year's programme were agreed: two site visits are now built into the second year of the Initiative for each group and the mentors are going to be working with their pupils on an individual basis this year, to give maximum opportunity for individualized support. We are holding a training session for new mentors at the end of August 2010 to put mentors in place to cover all five targeted year groups.

One of the key areas of our Initiative centres on developing and expanding Rural Skills, allowing our pupils to have a respect and engagement with their local enterprises and landscape in this area. We have expanded from a preliminary Rural Skills basic, Intermediate 1 course, to now offer Intermediate 2 at a more advanced level, using the Estate as the classroom for the practical parts of the course. Also, during the year in conjunction with Barony College and the Forestry Commission, Forestry as a senior option has now been developed and is being trialled here for 2010-11.

Work-related learning in all its forms has been key to meeting our targets with pupils of all ages. Pupils from Third Year upwards have all had the chance to undertake more focused work placements, some of just one taster day, others lasting for the more traditional week and many ongoing throughout the year. Revitalising this link with our community has been important to us and we are very pleased that so many local businesses and employers have agreed to come on board with our new Initiative.

In June we held our first Rural Opportunities Day. We invited all our work experience providers and also any other local and regional businesses who wanted to come along and share with the pupils of Mid-Nithsdale what their enterprises are all about. We were delighted to have over 80 businesses booking stalls for the day. Pupils from P5/6/7 of our cluster primaries were present and were actually very eager to get around all the exhibitors. Pupils at Wallace Hall Academy all had at least one hour touring the various stalls, which were both in the Bailey Hall and outside in the play ground and on the playing fields. It was a very worthwhile day, as the feedback we received from both stall holders, pupils and staff demonstrated. We hope to hold this event, with some changes based on feedback, approximately once every two years.

We have continued to spread the message of the Queensberry Initiative and how the experiences we are offering the pupils of Mid-Nithsdale could be undertaken in other areas of the Authority and further afield. Already, dialogue with Lockerbie Academy, Sanquhar Academy and Castle Douglas has been mutually

beneficial. We were also delighted last September to take a stand at the Scottish Learning Festival in Glasgow to talk about our intentions. This year, on 23 September we are presenting a Showcase of our work in the Learning Teaching Scotland part of the Festival, at the invitation of LTS, and hope to open a dialogue with many other areas of Scotland. Finally, one of our Second Year English classes entered a BBC competition last spring, which invited First and Second year pupils from around Scotland to enter to have their programme made by the BBC on the theme of their local landscapes. Wallace Hall Academy's entry was one of the four winners and the BBC will be coming to Thornhill in early September to make the pupils' film about the Queensberry Initiative. This film will be shown on CBBC sometime in the autumn winter.

All in all, we are very happy about where we are and what we have achieved so far in our Initiative. It would not have been possible for us to make the progress which we have made without the support of the Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme and we are very grateful for that continuing support.