



## Visiting Castle Douglass Primary School's Hi5 programme

“ For me, it's what teaching is all about... when you see those little sparks and light bulbs go off. I feel like I see that every week with the Hi5 because they get so much out of it. It's hugely rewarding.”

Castle Douglass Primary School is a large rural school of 360 children, who are also the resourced learning centre provision for children with additional support needs in Dumfries and Galloway. We visited them to find out more about their exceptional Hi5 programme.

In 2020, Castle Douglass Primary School incorporated our Hi5 Award into their learning centre

provision. We met with Mr Whan, the Principal Teacher of the Learning Centre, Mrs DeSilva, the teacher running the Thursday Hi5 programme and Head Teacher, Susan Davies, to talk about their school's experience with Hi5.

Mr Whan explained how “as a staff, we agreed that we needed a more structured provision in the learning centre to support children to develop their skills for life.”

“We recognise that we need to provide these opportunities to develop life skills but we're sometimes too constrained by the standard curriculum.”

“The reason that we bought into the Hi5 is that we felt that it allowed us the freedom and flexibility to follow the children's interests as well as providing opportunities to develop their soft skills, opportunities to apply learning from the core curriculum.”





Headteacher, Susan Davies explained that “for us, the Hi5 awards are a way of recognising attainment and achievement in a different format. We’ve got a lot of children in our school who don’t necessarily reach the benchmarks in terms of their academic progress and could very easily be turned off school... the Hi5 is a way of giving them the opportunity to achieve in a different way and also to learn new skills for their life.”

She told us that “post-pandemic, it’s not just about having a framework to work with other people but a framework to be more confident about expressing yourself and stepping into something that’s unfamiliar.”

Mrs DeSilva added that “post-pandemic... there is a real need for... an alternative way of accessing the curriculum because potentially some of these children didn’t access as much as we would have wanted them to.”

She emphasised, particularly for those children with additional support needs, that small-group settings provided essential nurturing environments for their learning and their confidence. Her Hi5 sessions ranged from cooking and crafts to exploring in nature and handling money: “it’s a really good opportunity for all of our kids to mix together no matter



what their abilities and support needs... they learn from each other and work together as a team.”

We were excited to observe one of her Hi5 group sessions and chat with participants. The children collaborated to build bird feeders and were able to hang them up in the school’s own nature garden, as part of a larger rewilding project. Whilst they were cautious about talking to us at first, by the end they were all very excited to tell us about their projects, their friends, and their favourite teacher, Mrs DeSilva!

Asked about her stand-out session, she said, “one of the groups that I ran last year, they wanted to try foods from five different countries around the world. This was a very big challenge for a lot of them because quite a lot of them are very limited in their diets... we got to the stage where they decided they wanted to make sushi as their last challenge and they all tried it; they all made it and they were chuffed to bits with themselves that they ate seaweed!”

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Mr Whan added, "the enthusiasm, not just of the children and the staff, but also the parents and the families. Children come into school particularly on a Thursday morning buzzing and excited about their Hi5 programme and you've got children knocking on the office door asking when is it their turn."

"I think one of our aims as teachers is that when the children go home at the end of the day and their parents say, "what did you do at school today," they don't just say nothing. And after a session on the Hi5 programmes the children leave and they're buzzing and the feedback we get from the parents is that they come home and they are so full of chat. Which is super. It's great to see."

We asked Mr Whan, after he has successfully introduced the programme, where he saw Hi5 going for Castle Douglass: "I think that our next steps for Hi5 would be to continue to build on what we've already implemented. We would like to target more children, we are looking at ways to make our Hi5 journey sustainable and ensure that we have funding in place, we have staffing allocation in place, we're upskilling our learning assistant staff so that they can support the children."

He added, "I would strongly encourage other schools to look into how a Hi5 programme could work in their own context... It really does allow for individuality and freedom to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence and everything that it stands for."

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