



## Pupils take control of their learning

GLEBE SCHOOL, KENT

Glebe is a school for students aged 11 to 16 with moderate learning difficulties. The school is very much at the early stages of their sustainability journey, and only just beginning to think about how they might take this work forward in their school. They have a small group of interested teachers who, this year, explored what their approach to teaching and learning for sustainability might look like.

The school is currently in a process of change towards a more inclusive, flexible, and democratic model of education - a model which is it hoped will provide the underpinning rigour to the change process. This model could provide the background to provide rigour to this change process.

### Getting the model right

In order to understand how Glebe might change, the coordinator of their sustainability programme decided to look at how pupils could steer their own learning and, on the flip side, how the current curriculum restricts pupil participation. He began by using things they were already involved in, the Bromley Garden Project, and a pilot of a new Geography GCSE, alongside the WWF training and support to evaluate the impact of a participatory school grounds project on learning.

*'an attempt to include pupils in environmental education as much as possible...and for pupils not to be restricted by their special needs'*

A collaborative learning cycle was developed for use within the classroom (diagram): students decided on the learning content and approach, and reflected on this learning, thereby contributing to the larger research. This model is similar to the participatory, action research and learning model used in the Supporting Schools programme.

### Impact on learning

The initial impact on learning developed as a result of the collaborative learning cycle moved the focus of geography lessons (and wider projects) away from transmissive learning to transformative learning. It enabled lessons to be created by the students in collaboration with each other and the teacher. Participation in this project was not just about 'doing things' but also about finding a way to collaborate with others and to reflect on learning. In the early stages, and with some students, participation had to be phrased more as a requirement than voluntary involvement: however, over the course of the research, as a result of trial and error, this need was greatly reduced.

The coordinator's dissertation on this work shows that the approach has:

- been inclusive to students who may be excluded due to literacy, behaviour, or self-esteem issues;
- encouraged progression and deeper learning;
- encouraged individual learning to be agreed as part of a collaborative process;
- developed experiential learning opportunities;



- supported 'change' management skills
- enabled a wider variety of learning styles to be used as part of a geography lesson;
- helped students to develop new skills;
- attempted to provide practical illustration of abstract concepts;
- made real connections to other subjects, places and people
- encouraged entry to, and hopefully success in, GCSE geography; and
- involved pupils in curriculum development, school grounds development, and formal research.

### **Widening it out**

Students at Glebe are now given the opportunity to participate in the school grounds project, whilst using the collaborative learning cycle in the student councils (diagram) and other cross-curricular work.

Participation in the project has also been extended to included students not taking geography as an option. One of these students became so involved in the project that, as a result, she has been entered for a GCSE.

The coordinator of this project is now embarking on an investigation into how this approach can be used across a broader section of the school, the challenge being to highlight what they have been doing and to draw existing projects together.