

SSAT and Dulux Smarter Spaces Project – end of project report

School Name: St Mildred's Primary Infant School

Name of person completing this report: Elena Hill

Brief description of type of room/space: An underused classroom

Overview

St Mildred's is an infant school in Broadstairs of 270 children. We were rated as outstanding by Ofsted in February 2016. Our vision is for children to develop a lifelong love of learning, independently and creatively. St Mildred's decided to take part in the Dulux Smarter Spaces campaign because we were looking to do something with our small hall which was in desperate need of a make-over. We had the idea of redesigning the hall linked to the arts and had also recently decided to go forward for Arts Mark so the project would help us tackle these two objectives in one go.

Obviously, as with many schools, money is an issue for us and without funding the chance to redesign and redecorate would not be possible and this did influence us in applying. As it was something that we hoped would benefit the school as a whole and not just a small number we decided to involve the whole school in the process of designing and creating this space. This involved a whole school launch day where all the staff and children got creative and gave their ideas and this helped us foster a whole school investment in the project too.

The space has had a huge impact on the school which has gone beyond our initial aims in revamping the space and in helping to work towards achieving the Arts mark. There has been a much wider impact though that we didn't foresee; it has helped us to continue our vision of children loving learning and making independent learning choices, it has helped us provide opportunities outside of school, it has helped us support and target vulnerable groups and give them new opportunities too.

Finally, and probably most unexpected has been the effect the room has on people in terms of how it feels! Everyone loves the room and wants to be in it and as members of staff have put it "It now feels connected to the rest of the school", "it makes me smile every time I walk through". "Children's faces light up" when they use the space.

Enhance the teaching and learning environment

Our small hall had no real identity. It was used for some assemblies, yoga once a week, toddler group, some staff training and for some interventions. It had lots of use but with no clear, deep learning going on. The hall itself was a relatively empty space apart from a few cupboards and a few resources for music and RE. It was one of the most old and tired parts of our school with little colour and it certainly didn't reflect the rest of the school's vibrancy and engagement in learning. It had one display board at one end of the room and a TV at the other. Also on either end the walls were covered in old, hole-filled tiles that you couldn't put anything on. The paintwork was old and one single cream colour. We had done a lot of work on environments and learning behaviours over the last couple of years but this space didn't reflect that like the rest of the school did. Because it wasn't used very often it was not bothered about or cared about as much because it wasn't really anyone's space or responsibility. It needed an

identity, a purpose and to fit in with the rest of the school and most importantly it needed to have learning going on in it.



We were looking to develop the Arts curriculum and also wanted to go forward for the Arts Mark Award so this seemed a natural identity for our new room. So, the idea was to have the space as an arts room with specific areas for each of the arts e.g. drama, art, music etc but within a big space so that either big arts projects could happen or that the children could use room to choose which arts skill to develop or for teachers to teach other subjects it in, with an arts twist. E.g. poetry reading on the stage, story mapping on a whiteboard wall etc

The room once designed and done now gives us that space. It is the complete opposite of what it was before, with bright colours identifying the designated areas of the hall for each area of the arts and all tied together through the rainbow at the heart of it all. The room has also been filled with bright, inviting furniture and is all moveable in order to create small areas or a big space to work in. The whiteboard wall gives children the opportunity to share ideas, plan stories and create their own backdrops for their plays and the addition of a stage has proved very popular! With our further fundraising we were also able to buy new resources to help us teach the arts such as dressing up clothes, puppets, play scripts and art equipment. It is included on the School Weekly timetable with each class having sessions allocated to them as well as extra sessions available to each year group. It is also a now feature of PPA time and is used regularly by the children during this time.





This project has also enabled us to link what we know makes good teaching and learning and to develop the children as independent learners across the curriculum. As a school we had done a lot of work on how to improve engagement through children understanding their role as a learner and have spent a lot of time looking at the work of Shirley Clarke. We created a series of learning powers that gave children a common language to use when discussing how to be a learner and how to improve as a learner. Following this the way we worked as learners also shifted. We used to have the children in ability groups but moved away from this to giving the children the chance to choose the learning they felt they needed to do next, which really impacted on engagement. Our new space enables us to continue this way of learning and working too as the setup of the room lends itself entirely to this and so extends what is already going on through-out the school. Children are able to choose not only the area of the arts they wish to focus on but the learning within that area also e.g. creating a play, using the puppets, creating something in the art area or composing a piece of music.

Inspire Engagement

The engagement of children in the new space is incredible and obvious when you come into it. Children are fully engaged in their learning for a number of reasons. Not only because they have been involved in the design of the space from the start, with the whole school being involved, but they also feel they gave it its identity with the rainbow theme coming through. They can see their ideas in front of them and they are proud of what they did. It was definitely beneficial to have the whole school involved in the design process from the start and the launch day was really exciting as the idea that they would design the

space and see it built was such an exciting opportunity. The ideas flowed and an instant love for the space developed from the start. It wasn't without its difficulties though, especially when the design process had to be halted by unexpected circumstances. For small children any amount of time can seem like forever, however once things got moving again and the room was finished it brought everything back to life.

Because the children love the space and its bright colours and furniture they want to be in it. Also, because they can choose their own learning when they are in there they are totally engaged in what they do and the way the space is set up enables them to do that, with its specific areas to go to and do things that they want to do. This also makes it clear that choosing the arts as the focus for this room was right as our children love it! Their comments about what they love to do in the room are clear:

"My favourite thing is dressing up because we can pretend to be different people"

"It has masks, dressing up and drawing and they are all my favourites."

"You get to play instruments in there"

"We get to draw on the wall"

"We can draw and paint and make things"

"Dressing up is my favourite and I like the stage"

Also, initial comments from the staff show their love for the room too and that they want to provide amazing learning opportunities for their classes when they are in there.

"On one hand vibrant and inspiring but on the other tranquil and serene"

"Now the room has its own identity"

"It's now so bright and well-resourced for the Arts"

"Children love the open plan areas and creative space"

"The children love the puppets and doing puppet shows"

"I love the different areas and the range of different activities you can offer"

"A beautiful new space for the children to learn in. I like the layout and the areas are inviting"

"The rainbow through the middle makes the room feel cosy and inviting... great impact through the middle of the school"

It is amazing to be able to give children opportunities to develop this area of learning thought-out their time with us, instead of some of those opportunities being squeezed out of the curriculum.

We were able to offer our year 2 children an amazing experience, as part of a topic they did on the Arts, when the children designed and created their own Art gallery and all the exhibits within it! They were able to create the Gallery in the new space and it looked incredible! It was so successful that we even had The Turner Gallery in Margate send someone to see it, which was very exciting.



Encourage Positive Behaviour and Attitude

Our new space enables us to continue what we know about how children learn best. It totally enhances the provision we want to give to children and means consistency across the school and curriculum. The room is different in that it is new and bright and colourful but now it gives the room the chance to be the same as the rest of our school in that it enables us to teach and children to learn in the same way through-out the school. It continues to support our children in that journey of discovering themselves as a learner and develop their learning skills and independence as a learner and thus increase that engagement. The ability for children to be able to make independent choices is something we encourage and value because when children are involved in making choices for themselves they are instantly engaged in what they are learning as they have been involved in the decision making. We have had a lot of other schools visit us over the last few months as a result of our Ofsted and from some schools that we are supporting as part of the "Journey to Outstanding" project and the comments they give us are consistently around seeing a calm environment of high engagement. That feeling is now there in our new space too and when you walk through that space the children are totally engaged in what they are doing.

You can see from the findings of the staff surveys, before and after, the impact the room has had in terms of planning and use of the space:

Before

- 80% said the hall did **not** feature in their planning and those that did say it was included said that was only for assembly, write dance and interventions.
- 70% said it was **not** an appealing place to teach and for children to learn in
- 20% said they did not use it at all and 50% said they only used it a couple of times a term
- 100% said they did **not** use the room for any learning other than assembly, interventions, write dance, singing practise and staff training

After

- 100% said it **did** feature in their planning
- 100% said it **was** an appealing place to teach and for children to learn in
- 100% said they used it at least once a week with 50% using it more than 2 times a week
- 100% said it was used for **learning** such as: child initiated sessions, creative focus groups, story retelling/story mapping, performing poetry, guided reading groups, planned art sessions, music making, art work related to topic, role play, PPA sessions, must and may sessions, large art projects

They also wrote some fantastic comments on the bottom of the surveys too:

"It's bright and well-resourced and a lovely place to be. Great for teaching the arts!"

"It's a beautiful environment, bright and interesting and I like the way it is zoned but with freedom to change it"

"The children enjoy initiating their own learning in the different areas"

"Children love the colourful environment. Creates a calm atmosphere for children and adults to be creative and there's lots of space for the children to explore"

"Feels like a very positive space for learning. The children love it and the adults also love using this space!"

"Children seem very proud of the space!"

The impact is also being felt wider now with further opportunities for the space being developed. It is now used for After School club on particular nights. In fact, Tuesday is Craft night and has the largest

number of children attending, with numbers reaching nearly 40, compared to the usual 20s. We would never have been able to accommodate this number before! This has also increased the revenue brought in by After School Club and has helped to revive it as at one point we were looking at being unable to sustain an after-school club if numbers didn't increase. We are also using the space for new clubs such as Creative Club, which is aimed at targeting pupil premium children. This is still in its infancy and will need longer to measure the full impact. Music opportunities have increased immensely as we now have the right space to offer music lessons, with external teachers, such as Ukulele and Recorder, which we have not been able to do before with approximately 20 children taking up Ukulele and 15 doing recorder.

Promote Personal Development and Wellbeing

The room is enabling us to support personal development in that it continues to allow the children to be independent learners and decision makers. As I said before this is something that is a key part of learning at St Mildred's and supports engagement. The new room allows children to make choices about their learning and encourages that independence as well as their creativity, all of which are key things in our vision. Our values also tie in beautifully with the new space, not only in terms of colours, which allows us to have that as a consistent theme across the school, but in terms of helping children uphold some of those values of enjoyment and achievement. All of these aspects were not things we were expecting to get from taking part in the project but have certainly emerged as such! Again, it comes back to that idea that one staff member said about the space now being connected to the school and uniting the school together!



In terms of Wellbeing, as a school we have done a lot of training on the work of Professor Ferre Laevers who, along with the Research Centre for Experiential Education at Leuven University, produced the Leuven Scales of Wellbeing and Involvement. The scales can be used to see how children are in their setting in both the level of involvement a child has with their learning and their wellbeing, which focuses on the extent to which pupils feel at ease, act spontaneously, show vitality and self-confidence. The rationale underlying the focus on these two areas is that high levels of well-being and involvement lead in the end to high levels of child development and deep level learning. We have used these scales within the school for a number of years to help us identify children who are low on these scales and then identify ways to support them. In fact, the research of Professor Laevers and the university fits in perfectly with the Smarter Spaces project in terms of setting up the environment to support wellbeing and involvement.

The Research Centre for Experiential Education (RCEE) with Professor Ferre Laevers, has produced a list of 10 action points that should help practitioners to focus the learning environment on the well-being and involvement of pupils:

1. Rearrange the classroom in appealing corners or areas.
2. Check the content of the areas and make them more challenging.
3. Introduce new and unconventional materials and activities.
4. Identify children's interests and offer activities that meet these.
5. Support activities by stimulating inputs.
6. Widen the possibilities for free initiative and support them with sound agreements.
7. Improve the quality of the relations amongst children and between children and teacher(s).
8. Introduce activities that help children to explore the world of behavior, feelings and values.

9. Identify children with emotional problems and work out sustaining interventions.
10. Identify children with developmental needs and work out interventions that engender involvement.

When you consider many of these points they are exactly what we are trying to achieve in terms of the Smarter Spaces project and fits in perfectly with what we have tried to achieve in terms of our new space with its different areas and activities etc.

In terms of other possibilities in developing wellbeing, we are just beginning to explore what the room might be able to do in supporting this. As I said earlier we are beginning to use the space to target Pupil premium children, using the arts, and have set up a club specifically to target them and their wellbeing and involvement. This is in its early days but we hope to carry out the Wellbeing and Involvement screener, using the Leuven Scales, with those children to see if there has been an impact not only in the club sessions but back in the classroom with their learning and engagement there too. We are now also exploring the idea of using the space with a particular group of vulnerable parents that our Family Liaison Officer has identified. We are hoping to set up a group that they can come along to and get involved in the arts with their children, thus building them a support network. Again, this is something we would not have had the facilities to offer in the same way before and of course now that we do have the space it is making us think of even more possibilities.

As you can see from this report our 'Smarter Space' is certainly going to have a lasting impact on the school and is helping us achieve more with it in much wider ways than we ever expected! Quite simply the children just love being in the room, which is evident from their comments.

"It makes me feel happy when I look at the rainbow"

"It's so colourful"

"The rainbow is my favourite bit"

"The rainbow is most important because it's nice to look at"

"I like all the colours."

"It's really good because it has a rainbow"

"I like the 'paint' carpet and the coloured seats and I like the rainbow over the top"

"It's all new and colourful"

"I like the rainbow and the bright colours. It makes me feel happy"