

The children of the nursery class at Broadmeadow Infants are checking the progress of their garden; strawberries, herbs and vegetables are bursting out of old tyres and other ingenious pots.

This school, located in the heart of Birmingham, is in the middle of providing a host of new learning experiences for the class: not just the gardening, but cooking, hatching chicks, and discovering fruits they've never seen before. It's all part of their learning with the Food unit from the International Primary Curriculum (IPC).

This thematic, cross-curricular and internationally-minded curriculum was introduced into the nursery class at Broadmeadow Infants in 2010, a year after the rest of the school had adopted it. Speaking to nursery class teacher Helen Richardson, it's clear that it has made a real difference to staff, parents and the way in which children learn.



A change of curriculum

TN visited Broadmeadow Infants School and a nursery class taking a new, thematic approach to early years learning...

Food for thought

The Food unit illustrates the structured approach to learning Broadmeadow is now taking. Like other units in their new curriculum, it began with an 'entry point', designed to generate excitement around the theme, help to engage the children in their learning and provide a common experience that all the children can refer back to. "For our Food entry point, all of the children brought in a piece of fruit and we made a fruit salad," says Helen. "There were a wide variety of fruits that we were able to talk about, and sort and count in different ways."

This was followed by a 'knowledge harvest' during which Helen learnt what the children already knew about the theme and offered them the chance to discuss what they would like to learn about during the unit.

The children are now following a series of learning tasks which take a holistic approach to the early years, helping them to develop skills in preparation for Key Stage 1 at their own pace. They are also beginning to learn subject skills, for example, using a world map to identify the countries that their favourite foods come from and looking at the changes that happen to pasta when it's cooked. Links to numeracy and literacy are made regularly (sorting, repeat patterns, shape and measuring, themed stories and role-play and the development of vocabulary around the theme).

There is, as you would expect, an international element to children's learning too: "We've started touching on the learning of interdependence," says Helen. "This has included things like finding out where the different foods that we've been learning about come from, and talking about how they get to our country. At this stage, the aim is to help children gradually become less child-centred and more aware of others. This is the start of international mindedness."

Involving parents

Helen purposely selected another unit, 'All





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The International Primary Curriculum is the fastest growing independently-owned primary curriculum in the world and is considered by many educationalists to be the most internationally-minded and learning-focused curriculum available for early years and primary children. It is in use in 940 primary schools in England, Wales and Scotland, and in 65 countries around the world in total. To visit an IPC school in your area, call 020 7531 9696 or visit internationalprimarycurriculum.com



About Me', to begin the year and the children spent six weeks learning around that theme. "It's a great introduction for all of the children as it focuses specifically on them and their family – and every child has something to say about that!" she says. "It was also a great way for me to start to get to know my new children, to get some baseline evidence and to get a sense of their experiences and home life."

As part of the unit, Helen created an 'All About Me' book for each child to take home to their parents. "It was a little memoir of each child's first few weeks in school," she explains. "The parents really liked that and it was the start of a positive relationship with them."

Helen has also established monthly drop-in

sessions where parents can work with their child for 20-minute sessions, participating in learning activities linked to the units the children are exploring. She creates a simple leaflet to give to parents at the start of each new unit, explaining what learning will be happening; and breaking it down into the six areas of learning and development, including ideas for how parents can contribute in school as well as additional ideas to extend the learning at home. "The parents love this," says Helen. "Many want to help their children but don't quite know how. The leaflet helps to guide them through what they can do and, importantly, helps with conversations between parent and child."

Since starting the Food unit, the children have made bread and gingerbread in school and gone home with a very simple recipe to make again with mum or dad. "It's a nice way to actively involve the parents, and the children benefit enormously," says Helen.

New practice

Helen is clear about how the new curriculum has changed her practice. "It has helped me to give the nursery a structure. We didn't have topics before and this thematic approach has helped to give a clear focus to our learning, which has meant we've been able to make more links in the learning, and build progressively upon it.

"But I don't like to teach from a script," she concludes. "You need to be flexible, and the new curriculum has given me that flexibility while helping me to keep focused in a rigorous, child-centred way."



Recipe for learning

Try these learning activities from the IPC Food Unit...

- Collect a range of food items and encourage the children to sort them in a variety of ways. Classifying could include: sweet/savoury, eat raw/need to cook, foods good for healthy living/foods we should eat less of, shape, colour, hard/soft, food from home countries, etc.
- Talk to the children about food they eat on special occasions and at celebrations. Ask parents to come and talk about foods that are special in their culture. If possible, make some of these foods and stage a class celebration.
- Talk about favourite meals. Children can then use collage material to make their favourite meal on a paper plate (this could lead to maths activities – e.g. making graphs of favourite food). Other art activities could include printing with vegetables and drawing the insides of fruit that has been cut open.
- Grow a selection of quickly sprouting food, e.g. bean sprouts or cress (when grown, cut, wash and make egg and cress sandwiches). Make a diary of how much they grow and what the children see. Give the children responsibility for caring for the seedlings.

The **curriculum** is all about learning through exploration, **catering** to multiple intelligences, and each unit embraces a wide range of **thinking** and language skills

HELEN RICHARDSON, TEACHER