

## Case Study: Claire Rodway, Strathaven Academy

### Anti-Racism Transition Project

In November 2022, I applied for and was awarded £5,000 from SLIF to run an anti-racist education project at Strathaven Academy. At Strathaven Academy we are always looking for ways to improve and enhance the transition experience and strengthen the relationship between all the schools in the learning community. I felt that this could be a great project to run as a transition event from primary school to S1. This transition time is so important for young people, especially since the disruption of the COVID lockdowns, and at Strathaven Academy we work with the primary schools throughout the school year to ensure there are several transition events to suit all children and the change from primary to secondary is gradual rather than a shock to the system.

Strathaven Academy is based in the town of Strathaven. The learning community consists of 2 large primary schools in the town and 4 small rural schools in the surrounding area. One of the aims of our project was to allow P7 pupils to work with pupils from all the other schools, allowing them to get to know each other. When speaking to the learning community head teachers, I became aware that the rural schools have composite classes, which I had not considered.

On starting out with the project, Ms Hamilton, my colleague from Social Subjects, and I discussed what we know of racism generally and also racist incidents within schools. We also

undertook professional reading of documents which are available from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland websites. These documents were uncomfortable to read at times and challenged our own beliefs and caused us to re-think opinions we held. However, we believe that race related incidents or bullying in schools are mainly borne out of lack of awareness of other cultures, rather than genuine malice or firmly held racist beliefs.

For a number of years, Strathaven Academy has had Reading for Pleasure at the heart of the literacy programme and I took this as my starting point in researching appropriate texts. I wanted this to be a fun project for the young people involved therefore I needed to ensure the chosen text was entertaining and accessible to all readers of all ages and abilities involved in the project, which now included P5 and P6 pupils (in composite classes) along with the intended P7 pupils.

I researched the National Literacy Trust, The Scottish Book Trust and children's literary awards websites for inspiration. At this point I found a reading list from Read Woke Ayrshire, a previous recipient of SLIF funding, which had great books, but none were *quite* what I was looking for. By chance I found a dog-eared copy of **Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet** by Zanib Mian in the library and it was perfect! It met the criteria which I had set:

- Entertain – it was written in a similar style to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* or *Tom Gates*
- Educate - Themes of racism, new school and bullying.
- Accessible to all – visually very appealing with short sentences, double line spacing and different fonts to break up the text

I tested this book out on a few young people before I committed to buying 200 copies of it. For an S1 pupil who is a keen reader, this book was below her reading ability, however she enjoyed the story and characters involved. A colleague's son read and enjoyed the book; as a 10-year-old of Pakistani Muslim heritage, he recognised himself in the main character and another member of staff read *Planet Omar* with her own son who is P5 and he also gave the story the thumbs up.

Primary 7 is a really busy year for pupils and teachers with residential trips, leavers assemblies, school shows and transition events taking up most of the year. I didn't want to add an additional burden by asking teachers to add a novel study with associated activities to their already busy schedule. The learning community head teachers approved the choice of novel, so on a bright cold day in February, I drove around the Lanarkshire countryside, dropping off copies of *Planet Omar* to each school, with the very clear instruction to only read and discuss this book, we will do the rest at the Academy during a day of Workshop Activities. All the P7 classes read the book in different ways, e.g., personal reading, paired reading, the teacher reading to the class, the pupils taking turns of reading to the class, but all had

discussions about the issues raised in the story as they were going along.

The aim of the workshop day at Strathaven Academy was to give the P7s an opportunity to carry out tasks related to the story and to question the differences and recognise the similarities between people of different races and also to question what they think they know about people from different cultures than their own, in this case Muslims from South Asia, specifically Pakistan.

Ms Hamilton and I created the workshop activities and asked the P7 teachers to ensure the work was age appropriate and would be of interest. The activities were designed to be fun and develop relationships between pupils from different schools.

On arrival at the Academy, the 160 P7 pupils were divided into 2 large groups. One group of pupils went to the library and the other group went to PE for games. The 80 were then divided into 8 groups of 10 with 2 S6 pupil ambassadors per group to facilitate the sessions. The 2 large groups swapped after a lunch break. One aspect which was hugely successful and unforeseen, was how much the P7s enjoyed working with S6 pupils and vice versa. The S6 pupils were able to engage the P7s in a way that adults and teachers from other schools would not have been able to, as many of the P7s were a bit shy to begin with.

In summary, the P7 pupils had a fantastic experience and they felt that they were able to ask questions about race, gained a deeper insight and appreciation of cultures different to their own and also

got to meet and socialise with pupils from other schools in anticipation of moving up to secondary. All in, the project was very well received and an enjoyable experience for the pupils and I am already looking forward to the next stage of the project.

To find out more about this project, watch the film at <https://t.ly/ed5Q6>

