



The Future of Education

According to the McKinsey Global Institute “robots could replace 800 million jobs by 2030”. So the question is how do we equip today’s children with the skills they need to get on in the world?

This was one of the themes discussed by a panel of experts last January at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos. Their overriding conclusion, from the likes of Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba (China’s equivalent to Amazon), and Minouche Shafik, Director of the London School of Economics, seemed to be the importance of helping children develop soft skills like emotional intelligence, independent thinking, values and teamwork, along with promoting creative pursuits like music and art.

Soft skills determine the way people handle themselves in various situations in life. They are positive social skills which are a combination of communication skills, interpersonal skills, general attitude, adaptability, and the ability to negotiate and deal with others. They go beyond the standard ability to commit to memory and regurgitate factual information. Society has transitioned to where hard skills and knowledge are important, but it is also essential to have the soft skills to deal with people, find solutions to problems, and be adaptable. In short, good soft skills can take you a long way.

Bringing things to a local level, it is great to see evidence of this approach already being applied in practice in Heswall. The current children in Year 2 (6 and 7-year-olds) at St Peter’s CoE Primary School are very excited about their planned trip to the Barstondale Centre in June. This is a recurring event that St Peter’s does every summer at the Barnstondale inclusive adventure and activity centre with their Year 2 pupils. As soon as they enter the gate they have to do everything themselves – carry their own bags, help out on rotas for meals and clean up, etc. The children go and stay there overnight and get involved in outdoor pursuits, team building and sports as a complement to their more traditional education in a classroom setting.

In previous years, St Peter’s pupils have had a fantastic time and got a lot out of it. Previous stays have involved things like trying out Barstondale’s climbing wall, going on nature walks in the woods, building dens, playing football and participating in the ‘super-soaker challenge’. Their final assessment was “what a pity we weren’t there for a whole week”, while hopefully having learned some useful soft skills at the same time. Typically children might do this as part of their secondary school education in terms of outdoor pursuits, but it’s great that local primary schools like St Peter’s get their pupils involved in this at such a young and formative age.

Although it’s hard to measure the tangible results of educational experiences like this in the same way as marks out of ten for a spelling test, we are lucky that schools like St Peter’s, along with the Barstondale Centre, are doing their bit to equip our children with the soft skills that experts believe are necessary to succeed in tomorrow’s world.

By Stephen Kirk, Foundation Governor, St Peters CoE Primary School.



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