

# Llanharan Primary School case study

Interview with Headteacher **Bethan Price** and Foundation Phase class teacher, **Lee Arthur**, and Teaching Assistant, **Sarah Howells** – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2019

## Background

Llanharan Primary School in Rhonda Cynon Taf, Wales serves the ex-mining community of Llanharan. The school has almost doubled in size in the past four years from 79 to 143 pupils. Currently 34% of the children are eligible for free school meals and 24% have additional learning needs such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Many pupils enter the school with speech and language needs as well as behavioural needs.

## Introducing Thrive

The school's Looked After Children (CLA) Educational Psychologist first introduced the school to Thrive four years ago. "As a school we had noticed that many of our pupils were entering nursery with more challenging needs and we realised we would have to change our approach" says Headteacher, Bethan Price. Lee Arthur and Sarah Howells were identified for training and both attended a Thrive Licensed Practitioner course, with the school paying for Lee and Sarah receiving Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) funding.

"To start with Thrive was used as an intervention at Foundation Phase for children identified as needing the most support," says Bethan. "However, we soon realised that we should investigate replicating what we were doing across the whole school so that all the children could benefit."

## Using Action Research to justify adopting Thrive across the whole school

In 2016 the school undertook 'Action Research' into the impact of Thrive on raising end of Key Stage 2 attainment. "Although we could identify pupils who were emotionally underdeveloped," says Bethan, "we were unable to pinpoint the exact areas that were delayed. As a result, we could not accurately create plans to meet the individual learner's needs, improve wellbeing and their readiness to learn. We wanted to know if Thrive's screening and action planning would make a difference."

Following the six-week research programme, pupils' attendance, attainment and self-esteem was measured and charts drawn to show emotional and academic progress. For pupils engaged within the Thrive project this proved to be positive within all the aspects measured.

## The importance of involving the Senior Leadership Team

"Personally, it was very important that I understood Thrive so I could drive forward the ideas behind it and lead a whole school approach," says Bethan. "Thrive requires a depth of knowledge, it can't be explained in ten minutes. With myself and three of our four member of Senior Leadership Team now trained it is far easier to ensure there is a consistency of language related to social and emotional wellbeing across the whole school."

The school now employs 6 Thrive Licensed Practitioners including two TAs, one of whom works in the Nursery and is able to support whole class group sessions, and the ALNCo. Sarah Howell has also

completed Family Thrive Training and runs sessions to support our parents and the wider community. These sessions are an ongoing feature of the school.

“In addition Lee Arthur and I have run Governor meetings to engage and inform our Governing Body,” adds Bethan. “and members of the Governing Body also attended our whole school Thrive training.

“Involving staff, parents and governors at every level has been key to the successful of Thrive at Llanharan Primary.”

### **How Thrive is delivered**

Llanharan Primary currently delivers Thrive sessions in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 as core provision for all pupils. Pupils with statements of educational needs receive 1:1 sessions as do CLA pupils. KS2 pupils, identified through class profiling, receive group Thrive sessions. There have also been two Family Thrive events and a third one is planned.

Every pupil is screened and signposted to appropriate support. Teachers undertake class screening and Thrive practitioners work closely with teachers to share group and individual targets.

“We changed the timetable to create the time – depending on the children’s needs - to use Thrive practice. We do group work every afternoon in Foundation Phase,” says Lee, “and in KS2 we run Thrive activities for the whole class on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

“We have also invested in lots of Thrive resources,” explains Lee. “They are available, centrally in a Thrive Room in KS2 for all our staff to use. These include sensory materials, puppets, sand trays, emotional stones... We aim to create a Thrive Room in our Foundation Phase soon too. We are lucky that we have a fantastic outdoor space and which I would like to develop further, with Thrive in mind. This could involve introducing animals, which we know from our experience with the ‘Reading Dog’, can be hugely beneficial.”

“Another way we have been supporting pupils to understand emotions is with film,” says Bethan. “We have been working with IntoFilm and they have provided us with recommended films and short animations. One of our teachers, Rhys Roberts, who is currently training as a Thrive Practitioner, is leading this within the school. His work was recognised by IntoFilm and Rhys was awarded ‘IntoFilm Teacher of the Year’, a national award.” (For Further information check out the IntoFilm website - <https://www.intofilm.org/news-and-views/articles/into-film-awards-2019-teacher-of-the-year-rhys-roberts>)

### **The Impact**

“The impact of the Thrive programme in the Nursery/Reception Class has been particularly noticeable,” says Bethan. “This is where we run whole class Thrive sessions twice a week. All pupils are assessed and grouped to their stage of development and have a group Thrive action plan. Sessions are very popular with both pupils, parents and staff and in partnership with Family Thrive and they are definitely having a positive impact on the wellbeing and communication skills of our youngest pupils. (Age 3 – 5 years)

Thrive practitioner, Sarah Howells, who leads the sessions says: “In 2015 we identified 11 Reception pupils as needing access to the Language Link intervention. (Language Link supports the

development of communication, processing and speech skills.) Since implementing whole class Thrive sessions in Nursery and Reception, we have seen a dramatic decrease in this number. In September 2018 four pupils were identified, with two pupils being identified as a serious concern and two pupils were identified as moderate concerns. In April 2019, we now have only two pupils accessing the Language Link intervention at a moderate concern level. By the time they reach Year 1 they should all have a language understanding in line with their chronological age.”

There have been no exclusions in the last academic year. Staff are also spending far less time ‘safe holding’. “There has been a de-escalation of ‘losing it’ behaviour which we now manage through attuning and validating,” says Sarah. “There was an incident this morning which in the past would have led to a positive holding situation. Today the child managed to control himself. These types of incidents, which could be violent, used to be a daily occurrence for him but now they are much rarer – he has come a long way.”

### **Family Thrive**

All PDG pupils, CLA pupils and pupils with a statement of educational needs receive a Home Thrive Action Plan and these are introduced and discussed by Thrive Practitioners. Parents also receive information from Thrive online resources as to the programme and how it is run in school.

“I have run two Family Thrive sessions and the second was definitely more successful than the first as word gets out about what Thrive is all about,” says Sarah.

“Our Thrive work with families has also helped improve attendance. The target this year is 95.8% and we are currently at 95.4% which means that for the first time ever we could possibly reach our target!

“Some parents in KS2 are difficult to reach and these are the ones that ‘don’t mind’ children being at home. But this is changing. We think the children are starting to ask to come to school now. We may have been running Thrive for 4 years but it still takes a long time to embed across the whole school but we are getting there.”

### **Transition to secondary**

We are using our CLA fund to pay for a member of each school cluster, including secondary schools, to be Thrive trained. The heads have had Thrive SLT training too – so when the children arrive at a new school, there will be an understanding of their social and emotional needs. “Some children have really struggled in secondary school,” comments Lee. In my opinion if that school had known about Thrive, this could have been avoided.”

### **Loss and Grief**

“I have found the Thrive training of great benefit when we lost a pupil within our school community last year. The information, strategies and activities supported us through our time of grief and helped make some sort sense of a difficult and emotional time,” says Bethan.

“Many of the children were very upset,” added Lee, “but by drawing on the Thrive Approach, alongside other specialist support, we were able to help them. We did activities which involved the whole school, such as making jars of memories, organising a celebration day, planting bulbs. We asked the children what they wanted to do. Some were matter of fact others needed time to come

to terms with what had happened. Had I not had Thrive training I would have dealt with things very differently. I would have moved on and pretended to get back to normal and pushed the emotions away. With Thrive, though harder, I was able to give the children time to put words to how they were feeling which was incredibly important.”

### **What next**

This Easter Llanharan Primary is using an inset day to give staff and staff from the school cluster (approx. 200 people) a two hour Thrive update. It is also aiming to fund another member of staff to become a Licensed Thrive Practitioner.

“Moving forward, we will continue to assess all pupils using Thrive-Online and support individuals, small groups and whole classes with appropriate action plans. When social and emotional needs are met children are able to listen and engage and their language development improves dramatically. Due to the changing world that we live in, many pupils are entering a social void; they are making social media or digital connections but are not engaging in rich personal real time relationships. Thrive has helped us make time for pupils to connect and collaborate through a cooperative learning approach. This is a priority for our school.” Bethan Price, Headteacher.