

Promoting positive body image within primary schools: Oak Cottage Primary School

URN: 104956

Region: West Midlands

Remit: Schools

Provider background

Oak Cottage Primary School is an average-sized primary school in Solihull, West Midlands. Most pupils come from a White British background and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is low. A very small minority of pupils are supported by the pupil premium. The school aims to ensure that each child is treated as an individual and is able to achieve their full potential.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how Oak Cottage Primary School developed a body image programme with the support of the local authority personal, social and health education (PSHE) team and put it into place following the analysis of pupils' responses. The aim was to increase teachers', parents', carers' and pupils' awareness of body image and to focus on how images portrayed within the media can impact on how pupils view themselves and others.

The good practice in detail

Karen O'Keefe, headteacher, says:

'As a Solihull 'healthy school', Oak Cottage Primary is committed to ensuring that pupils receive a full PSHE programme that is exciting, interesting and current.

Pupils are keen to explore and discuss issues that have, or will have, impact on their lives. The topics covered throughout the school offer

pupils the opportunity to feel confident and enable them to make informed decisions.

Enabling pupils to discuss issues linked to body image helps them to develop a secure understanding of how to cope with problems they will undoubtedly come across later on in their lives. This is vital if we are to prepare them effectively to respond to the opportunities and challenges of their rapidly changing world.'

The curriculum and body image

Every two years, the school takes part in a national health-related behaviour questionnaire. Pupils in Years 4 and 6 give their views about health issues as part of an anonymous survey. The most recent results indicated that pupils in Year 6, particularly girls, had a negative view of their own body image.

After talking with pupils, the school became aware that they were not only comparing themselves with those around them, but also with celebrities as they are represented in the media. This is why the school felt it was important that pupils were taught how to apply discernment to media messages, particularly in relation to body image.



The PSHE team began by leading a training workshop for all staff exploring body image issues and how they can affect children. This received positive reactions from staff and as a result the workshop was also provided for parents. With parents and staff keen to become involved, the school then worked alongside the PSHE team to develop a scheme of work. Further training helped teachers explore the most effective way to teach these sessions.

Evaluations from the pupils indicate an extremely positive response to this work. They enjoy the sessions and share their thoughts and opinions in a mature manner. They also feel more able to tackle difficult issues including the peer pressures they may face later on in life.

The following quotes are from pupils as they discussed their work on body image:

'Freckles are fashionable!'

'If everyone wasn't unique, it would be really boring.'

'Who we are makes us special.'

'There is not actually a perfect person. We're all equal.'

'I'm happy with myself.'

'It's offensive to say to models that they, and their family before them, are not good enough.'

'We learnt about airbrushing and [the Dove video](#) explained how companies change the way people look in order to sell their products. It affects children of my age as people I know might want to lose weight so they can look like celebrities or size zero models.'

Body image throughout school life

In Years 1 and 2, pupils begin to recognise similarities and differences between themselves and others. By encouraging positive self-esteem they develop an appreciation of these differences. Pupils are taken on a journey through the support of a robot. They are asked to identify individual features about themselves and their peers and how to celebrate their originality. The robot supports the pupils by guiding them to recognise the importance of differences. They enjoy discussing what makes them 'special' and sharing this with others.

In Year 3, pupils discuss positive role models and the influence they have on them. This introduces the topic of the media.

In Year 4, pupils begin to look more closely at how images of celebrities are changed using digital enhancement and air-brushing. They also begin to define what beauty means to them and how this may differ according to culture, race or religion.

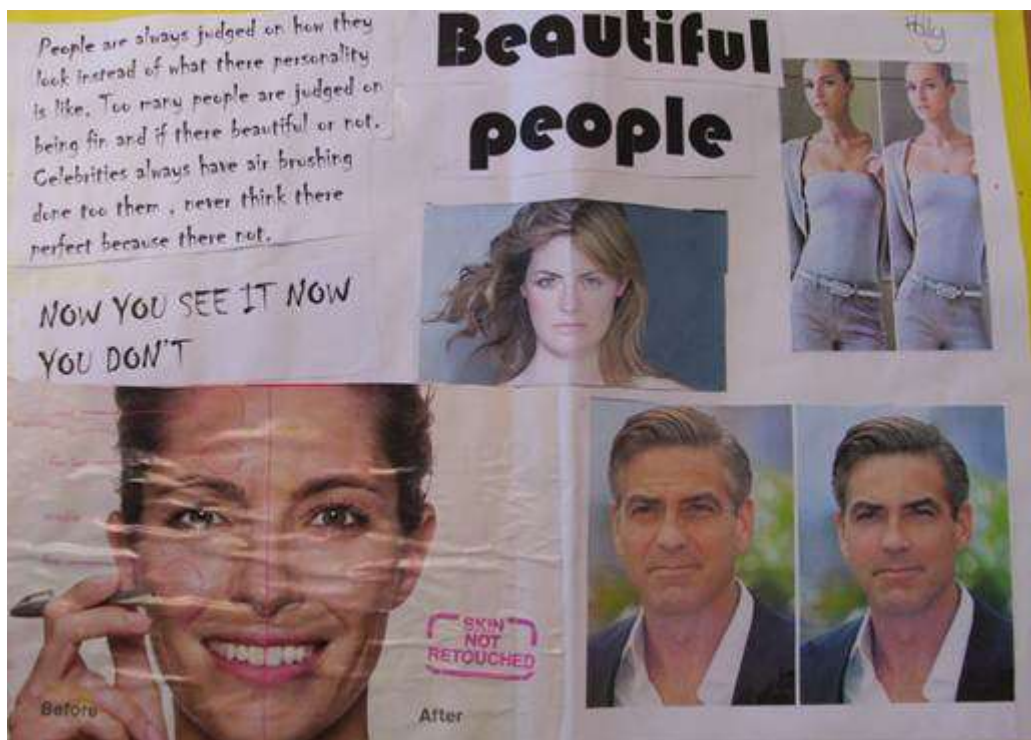
In Year 5, pupils begin to recognise the importance of physical appearance and become more aware of the differences between themselves and those around them. They openly discuss the influence the media has on them and identify celebrities that they would like to look like.

At this point, the importance of health and its relationship to body image is raised. Teachers deal sensitively with discussions around anorexia and obesity and use a

range of resources to highlight the significance of opening up this dialogue with pupils of primary age. The unit also offers various pieces of homework that enable parents or carers to feel more confident about tackling difficult issues with their pupils.

Finally, in Year 6, pupils look at how genetics and DNA help to make them who they are. They research the different physical attributes they have inherited and begin to develop an appreciation for their background and heritage. They explore how some photo-journalists and fashion photographers air-brush and digitally enhance images, including changing skin colour.

Alongside the scientific aspects, pupils also look at how cosmetic surgery is used by some to alter their appearance and the social and emotional impact of these procedures. Pupils display a mature attitude when exploring these issues and it provides them with a secure environment in which to ask questions and address misconceptions.



Debbie Goodman, deputy headteacher, says:

'These discussions around health and body image are crucial to the development of a child's self-perception and confidence. They feel safe to talk about the aspects of their body that they worry about and are given permission to have these feelings.

More importantly though, their perceptions of a "healthy" body change during the course of the unit from the stereotypical "thin" to an

understanding that they can look the way they always have looked as long as they eat well, exercise and take care of their bodies.

The indignation and disbelief that anyone would want to change their body, starve themselves or be 'air-brushed' in a photograph is a joy to see as they recognise that we should feel happy in the skin we are in.

By the end of the unit the children felt empowered, more at ease with themselves and are equipped with the confidence and the strategies to deal with peer pressure in the future.'

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For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

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