

# The Cloth Place

Kingsfield School, Chatteris





Big Wide Talk is a strictly not for profit organisation, which reaches out to and speaks with children, parents and practitioners where they live and work, strategically connecting them to government.

Big Wide Talk is dedicated to documenting debate about children's lives regardless of race, religion, politics or gender and to raising awareness about needs and the ways in which they can be addressed.

Above: Boys in the Cloth Place; right: the Animal Sanctuary



## The Cloth Place, Kingsfield School, Chatteris

Four schools in Chatteris have agreed to take part in the DCSF led Extra Mile (Primary) Project. Cambridge County Council and Big Wide Talk have agreed to work with the schools using the Cloth Place as the hub for initial development.

The Cloth Place will provide a space in which children do things under their own direction that excite them and provoke intense learning. Adults - both parents and practitioners - will be able to observe the children and share the experience in reflective sessions afterwards. Big Wide Talk will set up and service the space as well as film the children in action. A mobile edit suite will be provided on site so that parents and practitioners will be able to view the footage of the children, making clips and talking through what the children say and do. Children will also be able to work with Big Wide Talk to edit their own footage and make their own movies.



The Cloth Farmyard



Parents will be delighted to see footage of their children and to watch some of the movies the children make themselves. The reception class at St Albans, seen here, worked with us to make 'Filling the shed' a delightful account of intense 'hands on' learning. See 'The Good, The Bad and The Cow', 'The Right to Complain'. 'Filling the Shed' and 'You're Learning More if You're Doing it on Your Own?' at [www.bigwidetalk.org](http://www.bigwidetalk.org).

The Cloth Place will have:

A cloth farmyard with potting sheds, wellies, compost, wheelbarrows, a chicken coop, and an animal sanctuary; the faith place, including a cloth sarcophagus with the cloth bones of an entire skeleton; a launderette; a cloth café, cloth kitchen and cloth shops, including the ladies and gents outfitters, and the Cloth Beauty Parlour.

Throughout there will be an abundance of cloth and everyday objects to intrigue and stimulate everyone. There will be seating around the perimeter and at strategic points for parent and practitioner observation.

**Above all, the Cloth Place and this way of working is about participation. Big Wide Talk maximizes the impact of participation as an educational strategy.**

This will mean that before the Cloth Place takes place for the children, parents will be invited to take part in workshops held at Kingsfield School and at the other participating schools so that they can help create the objects their children will use: cloth eggs, bacon, chips, carrots, cabbages and so on.

There will be the opportunity to gain accreditation for this work if people want this. But these workshops are good fun. Younger children can take part. Parents will also be invited to help with set up and the running of the event itself. There are many skills to be explored and experienced and the Big Wide Talk team will be work with everyone who wants to take part.



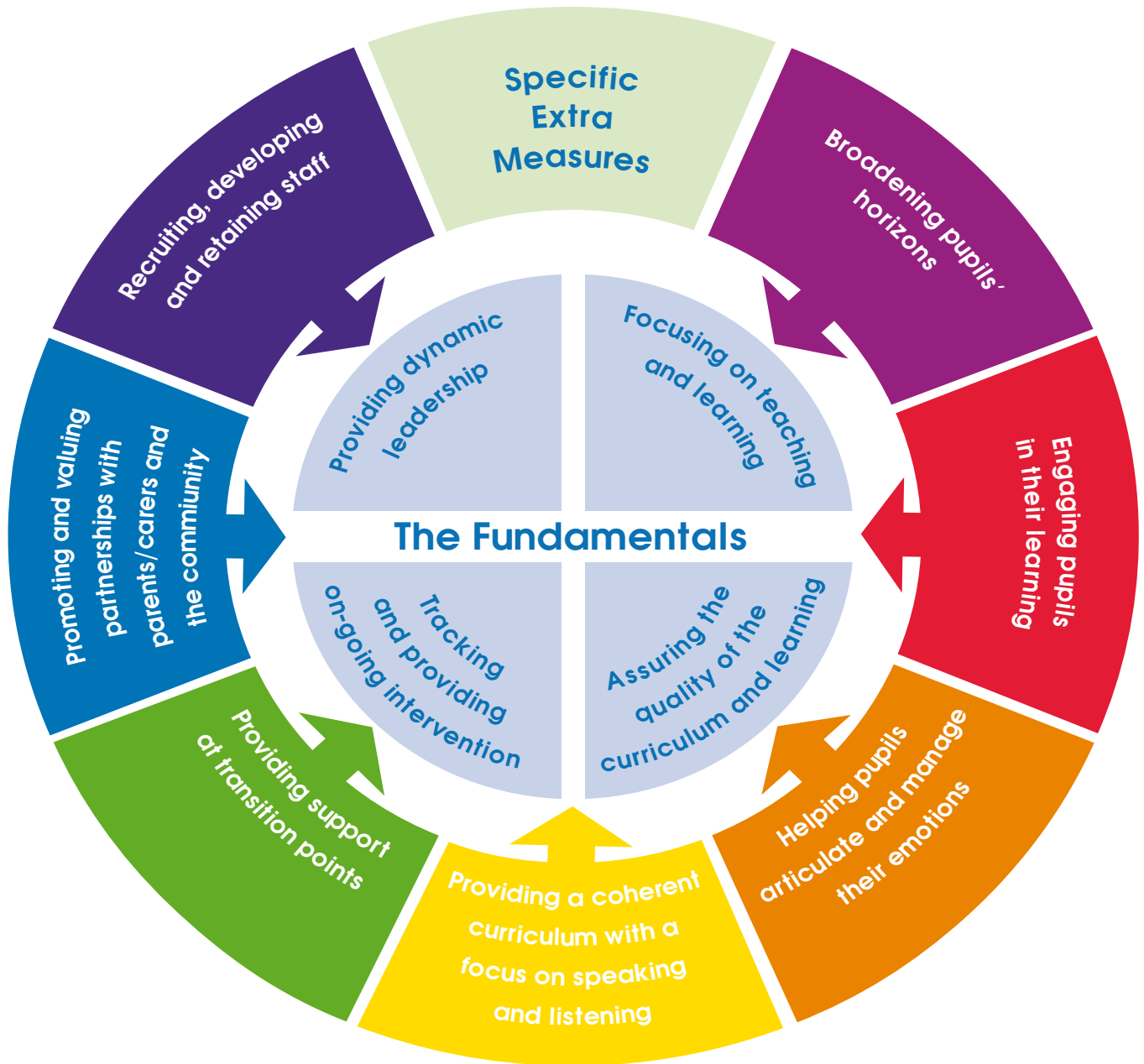
The cloth shops



Big Wide Talk wish to make the Cloth Place available to all parents and children in the participating schools. This will be possible in workshops to be held in the schools from the last week in September through to the Cloth Place, which will run from 12th October for two weeks. Professional development and family learning sessions will be held after the October holiday.

**Further discussion with Heads and staff are vital. Big Wide Talk will be available to visit all of the schools from 2nd September and will provide a presentation about the work at the Extra Mile launch event on 24th September.**

## Going the extra mile to establish a culture of achievement



The Cloth Place, Chatteris, will combine best practice as outlined in the 'Extra Mile (Primary) Achieving success with pupils from deprived communities' DCSF, 2009, with the established good practice of Big Wide Talk which uses the participative action research method of working described opposite.



### Agreeing starting points / next steps.

Big Wide Talk argues that the really difficult problems in our society stem from inequality and injustice and we therefore work to augment existing services by empowering parents and children to instigate change for themselves. We show that the natural creativity and learning of children can stimulate whole communities, even in the poorest places, if the children and their families are given the chance to choose what they do and how they do it.

We use a participative action research method that involves: doing exciting things with children, observing children, co-operating, documenting, and instigating change. This puts detailed information in the hands of parents and practitioners. But the method also delivers frontline services to support families and family learning, to help schools engage more with parents, and to contribute to community cohesion.

### Doing exciting things with children

Children flourish when they are allowed to develop as freely as possible. Their natural desire to be with others and their need for adult care ensures that their own needs and wants are tempered by the roles and responsibilities that surround them.

We do exciting things with children because this brings out the best in them and ourselves - the adults around them - and forces us to think more carefully about what children actually need. Doing exciting things with children is a vital part of our approach to extending and augmenting services and is the cornerstone of our theatres of learning, large and small, routine or exceptional.

### Being with and observing children

Observing children can be done in many ways. We always observe as part of a process of being with them. We never pretend to be absent. Children's behaviour and what they say is always deeply contextualised and a large part of observation is understanding the context the child believes himself or herself to be in. Judicious questions often help explore these contexts. Film footage is invaluable. The camera often sees what we, as individuals, have not. But film footage is only one aspect of observation. Being with children and talking with them is crucial. Observation is a key element of our method of working and contributes

greatly to the documentation produced. It also contributes significantly to holistic assessment from all professional start points.

### Co-operating

Our experience is that everything about children demands co-operation, whether with children or between adults. It is not possible to do exciting things with children without co-operation. Understanding the nature of this co-operation is essential because it forms the backdrop to all services and the call for greater community cohesion. Our method of working draws attention to this phenomenon. Observations and reflection on the value of co-operation is an integral part of our documentation.

### Documenting

Documenting is fundamental to our method of working and the empowerment that underpins it. Documenting means that children, parents and practitioners write their own history. Doing exciting things is the stimulus for this. Participative action research is the vehicle. Parents and practitioners use Big Wide Talk documentation to instigate change. It is rich and powerful information for service providers and politicians.

### Instigating change

Empowerment is fundamental to services and democracy. The two go hand in hand. Our method of working produces proposals for service change locally and nationally, after parents and practitioners have deliberated on their shared understanding of children's needs and the services around them. Parents and practitioners routinely take their research into public arenas for further discussion where they can pursue change on their own terms.

### Thinking and talking

It is impossible to overstate the role of reflection or 'thinking and talking' - the term we also use. It is key to development across all the services that children need and is the core of our method of working. We provoke and enable thinking and talking in every aspect of our work. It is therefore the driving force for our way of doing family support, family learning, and professional development.



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