EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE RURAL DIMENSION

Dr Roger Levy, Dr Claire Dickerson,
Dr Kathy Weston and Professor Philip Woods

University of Hertfordshire

2011

Report of a study commissioned by the
Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

Executive Summary

The rural dimension is intended to offer the opportunity to schools to enhance and extend the curriculum. Its focus is the understanding of environmental issues and the countryside, and it is seen as relevant to all schools, including those in urban areas. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) wishes to evaluate the extent to which the rural dimension is effective in raising standards. The aim of this study, commissioned by the SSAT, was to ascertain the extent to which the work schools undertake as part of their rural dimension has a demonstrable impact on achievement and attainment - in particular concerning:

1) attainment (pupil performance and school standards);
2) behaviour and attendance (on the part of pupils);
3) engagement (pupil interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families).

The approach taken in the study is chiefly an interpretative and illuminative one with the aim of throwing light on how the rural dimension acts as an influence within the school context. Rather than looking for linear cause-and-effect, methodologically it was seen as more helpful to view organisations as complex processes of continual interaction in which any one initiative is the catalyst to multiple interpretations and reactions which generate further initiatives. Qualitative data are particularly helpful in throwing light on these processes. An exploratory case study approach was used, generating both qualitative and quantitative data in order to reflect the complexity of practice and experience in the rural dimension. Six case study schools were selected from rural dimension schools which expressed a wish to participate in the study. Criteria were used to maximise the variation in the sample used, although those with relatively large farms are over-represented. Each of the six case study schools was visited by one or more of the research team. Visits involved interviews, observation and perusal and collection of documentary data (including schools' websites). This report also includes a selective literature review, highlighting some of the issues concerning research into specialisms and the value of education for sustainable development.

The study's findings are that:

1) there is strong qualitative evidence that the areas of school activity that come within the rural dimension have a clear and significant impact on the attainment of numbers of pupils;
2) there is evidence of the rural dimension helping both low attaining pupils to achieve more, as well as high attaining, 'gifted and talented' pupils;
3) the rural dimension encourages opportunities for learning in a broad sense, which includes:
    - 'soft' skills and attributes, such as teamwork and responsibility;
    - functional skills, such as writing, speaking, and use of maths;
    - conceptual learning;
    - an affective sense of connection with the natural world and heightened awareness of life, which may help in fostering psychological and spiritual growth;
4) at its best, the rural dimension overcomes the binary divide between the practical and the academic through learning in which the use and development of skills, conceptual learning and emotional and spiritual growth support each other;

5) the rural dimension encourages pupils' good behaviour and attendance by helping them to become confident, act creatively and to find a purpose meaningful to them in what they are doing;
6) the positive influence of the rural dimension on engagement is a key aspect of its impact in schools;
7) it is the interaction of positive factors and influences (engagement, behaviour and attendance, and attainment) that is key to understanding the impact of the rural dimension in the curriculum;
8) the rural dimension in the case study schools contributes to a school culture that displays the features associated with effective or improving schools;
9) the rural dimension opens possibilities for enhancing and developing practical and creative pedagogies.

Based on our data from the case study visits, we suggest that in school self-evaluations of the rural dimension it is important to consider the following elements of process and focus:

Regarding the actual process of evaluation:

- **dispersed self-evaluation** - the value of involving the different people and groups in self-evaluation of the rural dimension - pupils, teachers, support staff, governors, parents and the community representatives;
- **collaborative evaluation** - developing further opportunities for schools to work together to diagnose problems, devise solutions and share what they know about the processes of the rural dimension that lead to positive changes for pupils;
- **reflection on 'real-life' cases** - capturing the diverse and exciting nature of the rural dimension through the 'stories' of individual pupils and groups of pupils, which then offer a rich resource for reflection and evaluation by teachers, pupils and others;
- **imaginative generation of evaluation data** - as well as quantitative data, the generation and use of other forms of record and representation, such as photographs, images and videos.

Regarding the focus of evaluation:

- **social justice** - probing the 'reach' and assumptions of the rural dimension;
- **internal reach: visibility and embeddedness across school** - the degree to which it is succeeding in working across the school and in what ways its whole school value could be enhanced;
- **external reach: community engagement** - the degree to which the rural dimension is achieving its potential in developing community engagement and in what ways this could be enhanced;
- **breadth of learning** - considering how and to what degree the rural dimension makes the most of its potential to nurture interactively the whole range of learning: 'soft' skills, functional skills, conceptual learning, and areas of development that can include sustainability awareness and spiritual and emotional growth.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE RURAL DIMENSION

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The rural dimension accreditation is intended to offer the opportunity to schools to enhance and extend the curriculum. Its focus is the understanding of environmental issues and the countryside, and it is seen as relevant to all (including urban) schools[1]. As is clear from the SSAT's rural dimension mission statement (Figure 1), the rural dimension is seen as contributing to 'whole school achievement' and to awareness of rural business and livelihoods, as well as such issues as environmental stewardship and natural and cultural heritage.

Figure 1: rural dimension – mission statement

A specialist school with a rural dimension will be committed to a vision of a specialist school relevant to its chosen specialism(s) and would include within its mission statement a further commitment to raise whole school achievement through a diverse and inclusive range of activities that reflect the ethos and characteristics of the rural dimension.

The introduction of a 'rural dimension' is seen as being appropriate wherever rural and countryside issues manifest themselves. Therefore, it is relevant to all schools, not just those situated in a rural environment.

All schools with a 'rural dimension' will provide opportunities for their students to increase their awareness and understanding of the countryside and the environment, including:

land management (e.g. farming, animal health and welfare, forestry, fisheries, building, leisure)

environmental stewardship (e.g. biodiversity, recycling, pollution, access)

rural businesses and livelihoods (e.g. leisure and tourism, sports and recreation, transport, rural crafts, farming)

natural and cultural heritage (e.g. the relationship between humans and the environment).

(Source: https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/community/ruraldimension/Pages/article_215790_1.aspx**)**

The rural dimension, as we have seen it in our case study schools[2], covers a range of activities and opportunities. It describes not just a curriculum area, but a way of approaching teaching and learning that values and seeks to maximise the potential of practical and creative pedagogies. The rural dimension includes and enables:

- 'hands-on' learning and 'real tasks', such as caring for animals and planting trees and plants, as well as doing presentations and organising tasks;
- flexible and varied ways of teaching and learning, responsive to pupils' needs;
- pupil peer learning and team working;
- connection with the natural environment, including the 'aliveness' and growth of the living elements;
- provision of vocational learning and qualifications, such as a BTEC in Animal Care
- local and community-based enterprise;
- a focus on sustainability;
- opportunities for breadth of learning.

[1] https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/community/ruraldimension/Pages/default.aspx

[2] We owe many thanks to the rural dimension subject leaders in schools who organised our visits to their schools and who, with their colleagues and pupils, gave so freely of their time to support this evaluation.

At the time of writing, 57 schools are accredited as having a rural dimension, comprising a wide variety of schools both in terms of their context and location, and including many inner-city schools. The SSAT is planning an expansion to 75 schools and introduced six new Lead Practitioners in April 2010 to provide support to other schools in the rural dimension network as part of its support programme through seminars and other events for and in rural dimension schools[3].

The SSAT wishes to evaluate the extent to which the rural dimension is effective in driving up achievement in specialist schools[4]. The aim of this study is to ascertain the extent to which the work schools undertake as part of their rural dimension has a demonstrable impact on achievement and attainment - in particular concerning:

- attainment (pupil performance and school standards);
- behaviour and attendance (on the part of pupils);
- engagement (pupil interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families).

2. LITERATURE

There is an immense literature that touches on the areas of school education associated with the rural dimension. The potential importance and value of rural dimension activities, with their marked practical aspects, is reinforced for example by the capacity of outdoor learning to develop knowledge and skills, improve self-perceptions and promote positive health and well-being (O'Brien et al, 2011, Rickinson et al 2004). The recent Wolf report into vocational education emphasised the 'need to ensure that students have every opportunity to gain the most important and generalisable skills', which means 'making certain that institutions focus on students' demands and needs' (Wolf, 2011, p10): the rural dimension is potentially able to make a strong contribution to this. The value of fieldwork for motivating pupils and enhancing learning was emphasised by the latest Ofsted report on geography (Ofsted, 2011).

Our brief review here is a highly selective one, highlighting some of the issues concerning research into specialisms and the value of education for sustainable development.

Studying specialisms

Studies which attempt to evaluate the impact of school specialisms face the problem of disentangling numbers of interacting variables, including whether the specialism, as such, has a positive effect or whether it is other characteristics that specialist schools happen also to possess. What is clear is that the impact of specialisms on attainment is not a simple cause-and-effect process but is affected by and interacts with other variables. The complexity is illustrated by the range of conclusions emerging from different studies.

A study reported by Taylor (2007), using panel data - that is, assessing the change in schools' exam results over time - found a statistically significant specialist school effect in relation to four specialisms: business and enterprise; technology; arts; and science. In addition, it found evidence of specialist status being associated with improved attainment in schools with a high proportion of poor families (but not in other specialist schools): the association of improved attainment with 'poorer' schools varied greatly between specialisms, with the greatest impact associated with business studies, languages and

[3] https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/community/ruraldimension/Pages/rdprogramme201011.aspx
https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/community/ruraldimension/Pages/welcomerdlps.aspx
[4] https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/community/ruraldimension/Pages/rdprogramme201011.aspx

technology. These findings differ from some of the conclusions of Bradley et al (2008, p3) who compared the EiC and specialist schools programmes[5]. One of the points that Bradley and colleagues highlight is that neither programmes were successful in raising levels of attainment for 'white boys from disadvantaged backgrounds' (Bradley et al, 2008, p3).

Noden and Schagen (2006) found evidence in some cohorts of specialist schools, and none in others, of the positive impact of specialist status on attainment. They also found increases in educational attainment differentially associated with specialisms: Language and Sports Colleges achieved better than expected examination results in their specialist areas (Noden and Schagen, 2006). Levacic and Jenkins (2004), in their study of the association between specialisms and educational attainment, also found that the effect varied between specialisms, cautioning that identifying the effect of specialism depended on assumptions about other, confounding variables (such as changes in school recruitment[6]). Their data showed too that where the specialist status had been held longer the more likely it was that there would be better performance than non-specialist schools. The latter association with length of time as a specialism is echoed in an evaluation of the STEM Pathfinder Programme, which suggested that any impact on attainment would be a consequence of long-term commitment to it as a specialism (Springate et al, 2009, p34).

Statistical approaches to the study of specialisms cannot tell us if results can be attributed to the change in status: from these kind of data it is 'not possible to deduce the underlying cause of any changes that can be attributed to the change in status' (Taylor, 2007, p10). An overview of research concluded that there is 'evidence of improved performance in specialist schools, but it is not clear whether this is due the specialist status *per se* or the extra funding and drive generated around becoming a specialist school.' (Castle and Evans, 2006, p3).

The difficulties of inferring causality are illustrated by a study of high performing specialist schools (HPSS) schools. This found that almost two-thirds (64%) of headteachers who responded to the survey indicated that the attainment profile of their school had improved since the introduction of HPSS; however, a large proportion found it difficult to comment on the direct impact of HPSS status, 'with only 77 out of the 204 schools that returned the survey choosing to answer this question' (DCSF 2009, p4). Case studies of two specialist schools found that impact on pupils' learning and achievement was ambivalent (Sinkinson, 2006). In one school gaining 'specialist status of itself did not result in a transformation of mathematics results, but rather a consolidation of pre-existing trends' (p93). In the second school, the motivational impact of new technology on pupils in the specialist subject (maths) stood out: pupils' 'comments focused on perceptions of the benefits of the "withdrawal" lessons about which they were universally positive, stating that the smaller groups, more individual attention and different learning styles (where they were forced to work together and ask and answer questions) aided their understanding' (p94). In the HPSS study, perceptions were clearer concerning impact on pupil motivation and behaviour: 'For schools where improvements in motivation and behaviour were identified, the headteacher survey asked how much of that improvement could be attributed to the programme: 89% of headteacher respondents (of 125 schools that responded to this question) attributed some of the improvement in behaviour and motivation to the

[5] 'Using pupil-level data, we find, first, that the EiC programme has been substantially more effective than the specialist schools initiative in raising the attainment of ethnic minority pupils, particularly Asians. Second, the Specialist Schools initiative has favoured pupils from economically advantaged families whereas the EiC programme has been more effective in raising the attainment of pupils from poor families. Third, both policies have been more effective for girls than for boys, thereby contributing to the educational gender gap.' (Bradley et al, 2008, p3).

[6] A study by Exley (2009) found that specialist schools as such had not had increasingly privileged Year 7 intakes as compared with non-specialist schools, though schools with strong and/or improving examination results and those with foundation status have drawn more privileged Year 7 intakes over time.

introduction of HPSS options. The data from both the headteacher and school site visits suggests that the HPSS option is impacting on the motivation and behaviour of pupils in some schools in a range of ways...' (DCSF 2009, p5).

Some insight into the processes associated with successful specialisms is given by the evaluation of the STEM Pathfinder Programme, which highlighted key characteristics associated with successful STEM activities (Springate et al, 2009, pv). These included:

- support by senior leadership teams, plus an individual or group responsible for overseeing the activities;
- delivery by enthusiastic teachers willing to try something new;
- features which included 'having a clear focus; a "real-life" context; a competitive element for pupils; some freedom for pupils to experiment and think for themselves; practical and interactive aspects to the activities'.

Sustainability

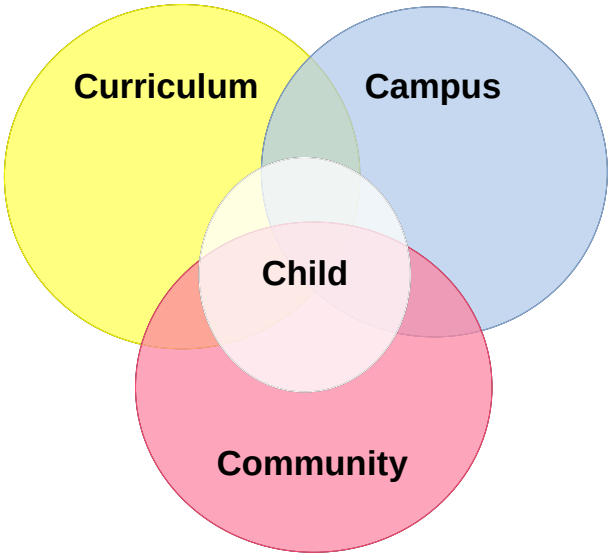
The need for schools to develop education for sustainable development has been recognised for some time (Ashley, 2006a). Whilst the rural dimension and sustainability are not identical, the issues, experiential activity and educational aims of sustainability map comfortably onto the rural dimension and are signalled through the concern with environmental stewardship (see Figure 1 above). Harris argues that 'Teaching based on sustainable development will be richer, more relevant teaching... [providing] contextually rich learning opportunities for all pupils with a clear focus on raising awareness about the challenges of sustainability as well as the opportunities' (Harris, 2008, p10), and that sustainable schools 'combine deep moral purpose with a central focus on learning' (p11), encouraging:

- care for oneself – our health and well-being;
- care for each other – across cultures, distances and generations;
- care for the environment – near and far.

The importance of education building up knowledge and capabilities for critical thinking about sustainability, rather than passing on 'pre-packaged judgements', is emphasised by Ashley (2006a, 194). In other words, education for sustainability and the rural dimension requires and is part of the development of wider educational capabilities. It is also something that involves developing a deep sense of awe and respect for, and connectedness with the natural world in all its splendours, including its sometimes threatening features (Ashley, 2006b). This derives from the idea that 'a rich, deep connection with land and place is a key part of a healthy human culture, a source of human wisdom and sustainable living' (Plumwood, 2005, p371), echoing aboriginal people's sense across the world that 'the land becomes the first teacher, the primary relationship' (Haig-Brown and Hodson, 2009, p168).

The pupil is at the heart of education for sustainability and the rural dimension. Harris (2008) shares an image (from Teachernet) , showing three 'lenses' associated with sustainability through which the child is seen, on which Figure 2 below is based.

Figure 2: Three lenses associated with sustainability



This figure features not only the school's curriculum and buildings and grounds (campus), but also its local community. Recognition of the educational benefits of a close and mutually supportive relationship with the school's community has grown (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009), the challenge being to avoid the 'Mont St Michel' model in which 'two separate areas' - the school and the community - are 'joined by the causeway but more often than not kept apart by the tide' (Goodfellow, 2005, p137).

Sustainability can be seen as boosting achievement and standards by at least two means: 'firstly, the increased concentration brought about by natural light and ventilation, good-quality food and drink, and higher levels of pupil fitness. Secondly, the potential to make learning more interesting and relevant to young people enabling them to become better engaged' (Harris, 2008, p13). Harris (2008) argues that sustainability can be approached in two ways, with the second, integrated model more likely to bring about benefits:

- a 'bolt on', peripheral activity that is a small part of the curriculum;
- an integral, holistic, whole school development that shapes curriculum delivery, interpretation and implementation.

What has been learnt about effective school leadership applies to the rural dimension and sustainability - in particular, the value for improving pupil outcomes of distributed forms of leadership, in a context of strategic and values-based leadership, and leadership strategies that are sensitive to context (Day et al 2009). Harris (2008, pp39-40) concludes that:

> *... distributed leadership seems to be the best model fitted to fostering sustainability in schools with different aspects of sustainable development being led by different members of the school community. By sharing tasks out many are enabled to participate in the overall strategy, reducing the burden on those in formal leadership positions and more deeply embedding sustainability across the school (Jackson, 2007, p9).*

3. METHODOLOGY

The approach taken in this study is chiefly an interpretative and illuminative one (Kushner, 2000, p5, 42, 70) with the aim of throwing light on how the rural dimension acts as an influence within the school context. As the discussion above of research shows, associations between some specialisms and attainment can be found, but the underlying causes of influence are not clear. Rather than looking for linear cause-and-effect, we take the view that it is more helpful to see organisations as complex processes of continual interaction in which any one initiative is the catalyst to multiple interpretations and reactions which generate further initiatives (Stacey, 2007, Woods, 2005, pxvii-xviii). If specialist status is about shaping school culture, this is not the product of linear change following on from rational planning, but more of a process that emerges from series of interactions within the school (Solvason, 2005). We consider, therefore, that with regard to the rural dimension and similar policy initiatives in complex settings, 'simple input–output models of evaluation, [which assume] that the financial, human, and intellectual resources of an initiative will lead straightforwardly to readily identifiable pupil outcomes, are unlikely to shed much light' (Dyson and Todd, p123). Our analysis is interested in examining differing perspectives and interpretations from participants in the rural dimension - an analytical approach which seeks 'to understand institutions as relatively emergent clusters of interactions among and between social actors' (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009, pp178-179). For this purpose, the in-depth character of qualitative data is particularly helpful. The individual pupil is the focal point of interacting processes and their own reactions and interpretations, and the qualitative approach allows us to foreground what happens to individuals (Dyson and Todd, p129) and what the rural dimension means for individual pupils.

An exploratory case study approach was used, generating both qualitative and quantitative data in order to reflect the complexity of practice and experience in the rural dimension. We liaised with the SSAT to identify locationally and demographically representative case studies of schools. Six case study schools were selected from rural dimension schools which expressed a wish to participate in the study. Criteria were used to maximise the variation in the sample used, although those with relatively large farms are over-represented.

Data collection took place between November 2010 and January 2011. Each of the six case study schools was visited by one or more of the research team. Visits involved interviews, observation and perusal and collection of documentary data (including schools' websites). A summary of the data collected from each school is given in Table 1 below. Our approach to collecting the data enabled triangulation of data from differing perspectives.

Table 1: Summary of data collected

	Brockhill Park Performing Arts College	*The North School*	*Oathall Community College*	*Ripley St. Thomas C of E School*	*South Holderness Technology College*	*The Westlands School*	***Total***
senior leaders & other staff interviewed	4	1	1	4	3	1	***14***
senior leaders & other staff in focus groups / reflective workshops	20	14	6	3	2	5	***50***
pupils in reflective workshops	6	6	5	8	7	12	***44***
other stakeholders in focus groups / reflective workshops	5	1	6	22	2	1	***17***
observation, & perusal / collection of documentary data	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	***6 sets***

A template was used to analyse the data from each school, generating case study summaries (set out in the Appendix) which include for each school quantitative performance data over the last five years and a narrative of the development of the rural dimension. For some schools the narrative concerning areas of the rural dimension pre-dates the adoption of accredited rural dimension status: information on this is included in the cases studies as appropriate in order to provide a proper context. The case studies provided the basis for thematic analysis and key findings reported in the following Section 4.

4. KEY FINDINGS

The fundamental question that this study is intended to throw light upon is the extent to which the rural dimension is effective in driving up achievement. The study was not designed to investigate the presence or otherwise of statistical correlations between the rural dimension as a distinct independent variable on the one hand and measures of impact on the other. Amongst other things, the number of schools included in the study is too for small for such as an investigation and the rural dimension is a diverse phenomenon shaped by its local school context. The aim of the study was to illuminate influences and underlying relationships as revealed by these case study schools.

4.1 Attainment

We conclude that there is strong qualitative evidence from the study that the areas of school activity that come within the rural dimension have a clear and significant impact on the attainment of numbers of pupils.

This impact does not work in a linear cause-and-effect process and is, therefore, extremely difficult to quantify. Amongst the quantitative data we collected on the case study schools covering 2006 to 2010, we found that all of them showed an upward trend in average GCSE point scores; other indicators were more variable, however, such as rates of absence and contextual value added scores. No simple relationship between the rural dimension and performance can be inferred, even where there is an improving trend. As some of the participants in the study were at pains to point out, reducing the rural dimension to a variable measured by the impact on one or more simple, narrow metrics is not how the specialism can or should be understood. This reflects the continual interactive process of numerous factors that occurs in the school setting. As one member of staff put it, '*It's very difficult. Results are up but we have had lots of strategies to do this*.' Participants were, however, able to offer a large range of specific and compelling examples concerning individuals whom they perceived as benefiting significantly: two examples are highlighted in Box 1[7] below; there are numerous others alluded to in the case studies.

Our study also **found evidence of the rural dimension helping both low attaining pupils to achieve more, as well as high attaining, 'gifted and talented' pupils.** For example, at Brockhill Park College the point was made that the rural dimension includes project based teaching designed to enable gifted and talented pupils to develop the skills of problem solving, stretching them and building them up as rounded individuals for higher education or employment, as well as including pupils who otherwise would not be achieving so well. At The North School 'more able' pupils were seen as benefiting too by doing '*ecology type projects out in the field*' which helped them develop problem solving and communication skills, discover how to make use of resources and '*do it themselves*': as a member of staff put it, '*it is about building them up to be a rounded individual*'.

This point about building up a 'rounded individual' points to a further conclusion, that **the rural dimension encourages opportunities for learning in a broad sense.** It encourages self-confidence, self-esteem and a positive sense of agency, noted below, which are themselves valuable

Box 1: examples of impact

*The chance to study a BTEC [in Animal Care] was seen as helping to engage students which led to many gaining passes that they would not otherwise achieve. One example was a girl who was motivated by the farm to attend school and ended up gaining 6 to 7 A*s at GCSE.*
(Brockhill Park College)

Several examples were given by staff of students who exceeded expectations on the farm site or through vocational courses, whereas in the traditional school learning setting, they could often be disruptive or on the verge of disengagement. Comments such as the following were repeated several times throughout the day in relation to a number of pupils: "I can't believe it is this students' [calving record] book. I can't get her to do anything in my class"; "[named pupil is normally a reprobate! but he just got a pass on the animal care course."
(The Westlands School)

[7] The examples are taken from the case studies in the Section 5 where they are placed in their broader contexts.

educational outcomes and part of the attributes which will aid future progress in further and higher education and in employment. Other similar outcomes are experience of teamwork, collaborative working, increased leadership skills, a sense of responsibility and the practical experience of taking responsibility, developing problem-solving skills, and being able to mix with different kinds of pupils and others - all of which pupils take with them and are valued in a variety of post-school settings. In addition to these, the data show how the active learning and responsibility characterised in the rural dimension engaged and developed functional skills such as writing and the practical application of maths and science.

There were also clear examples where pupils could illustrate how the rural dimension activities aided conceptual learning, including improved development and integration of concepts - for example, about animals. One pupil described the rural dimension as '*intellectual*', meaning that '*You learn things that you wouldn't learn elsewhere*'.

A further educational outcome is the sense of being connected to the natural world - developing a 'love of life or living systems' an attraction to all that is alive and vital. This is about awareness - appreciating, through outdoor learning, that learning has wider boundaries than schooling, gaining a sense of personal responsibility for the environment, developing greater awareness of nutrition and the value of positive changes in eating habits, appreciating tensions between, and the competing appeals of, some forms of farming and sustainablility and of the place of enterprise in the economic well-being of the local community, and gaining an appreciation of traditional country knowledge and pride in the school and its locality.

"If we think about life chances for pupils, for our students, the rural dimension is significant because it is about achievement, very much about achievement and success, but it's also about personal development and that's for all students. So it's the personal skills that they develop the self worth, the sense of place in the community as well… We always talk about collaboration, cooperation, so it's about developing those skills as well."
(Senior Leader, Oathall Community College)

"I was just blown away by their maturity. I see a lot of young people but the young farmers had maturity beyond their years"
(Parish Priest associated with one of the case study schools)

In summary, areas of the rural dimension where they are working best were found to be capable of nurturing and enabling the development of learning in a broad sense, which includes:

- 'soft' skills and attributes such as teamwork and responsibility;
- functional skills, such as writing, speaking and use of maths;
- conceptual learning;
- an affective sense of connection with the natural world and heightened; awareness of life, which may help in fostering psychological and spiritual growth.

At its best, learning incorporating these elements of breadth was undertaken in an integrated way, in which the use and development of skills, conceptual learning and emotional and spiritual growth supported each other, overcoming any binary divide between the practical and the academic. As one senior leader put it, '*I don't separate subject knowledge and emotional intelligence*'. A good example of this is the journal which pupils at The Westlands School kept which required not only determination and responsibility but also writing and presentational skills and learning about the growth and development of the young animal. This is an example of *authentic* school science, in that it is in line with the sorts of activities that scientists and technologists do in the real world. Moreover, developing pupils' understanding of the relationship between science and agriculture in this way can provide spiritual growth as well as academic enrichment. Another illustration is given in Box 2.

Box 2: a case of engagement

The Year 7-8 course was certainly regarded as responsible for raising attainment in terms of pupils' cross-curricular skills, which have the potential to raise attainment in all subjects. Indeed, that specific claim was made, based on the view that the 'real', engaging, nature of this problem based learning course helped pupils gain a more explicit understanding of what these skills were in practice, and so were more able to transfer them into other areas of the curriculum. The way the curriculum has been planned to focus on these skills in an integrative way, the explicitness with which the skills were focused on and developed was identified as key here.
(Brockhill Park College)

4.2 Behaviour and Attendance

The positive influence that rural dimension activities often have on pupils' behaviour are evident as a theme running through the accounts we were given at the case study schools. This is closely interconnected with engagement - which we give attention to below - in that being interested and engaged helps pupils to focus and work actively on activities which lead them to find both success and satisfaction through what they are doing. The result of this is to breed a sense of personal agency and self-confidence which further encourages engagement. Longer sessions and the freedom to be flexible in approaches to teaching enabled pupils in one school to 'get in the flow with their creative juices, not dropping things and trying to get back into it'. We conclude that **the rural dimension encourages pupils' good behaviour and attendance by helping them to become confident, act creatively and to find a purpose meaningful to them in what they are doing**.

"I never have to say a word about behaviour. They are wonderful ambassadors… I have to watch some trips very closely but they're so engaged"
(Senior Leader, Brockhill Park College)

Students "get in the flow with their creative juices – not dropping things and trying to get back into it'
(Teacher, South Holderness College)

4.3 Engagement

The positive influence of the rural dimension on engagement is a key aspect of its impact in schools. Numerous examples were given in each of the schools of ways in which the rural dimension engendered the interest and motivation of pupils with regard what they were doing, and hence with activities that give opportunities for learning. One example, at The Westlands School, involved pupils who would not easily engage with Maths and English located within the main school and the conventional classroom, but were able to keep meticulous records in a journal for a calf they individually reared from two to seventeen months of age

"The quad is used by a lot of areas of the curriculum. It is outside and pupils, teachers, interact differently. I have observed groups really engaged, you can just tell... It's the same at the eco-club. They want to be there. It's a gut feeling from observation. The absence of disruption, you can sense if there is engagement if it is anticipated by pupils. I know that from my OFSTED experience. It's outside, it's exciting doing different things, you can see they're on task. They could easily be distracted by the surrounding classrooms but they're not, they're asking relevant questions"
(Senior Leader, South Holderness College)

In terms of the dimensions of impact with which this study is concerned - attainment; behaviour and attendance; engagement - the importance of the impact on, and of, engagement could be represented in a simple linear model (Figure 3, below), though as we suggest below the influences are more complex and interactive.

Figure 3: Importance of Engagement – a simple linear model

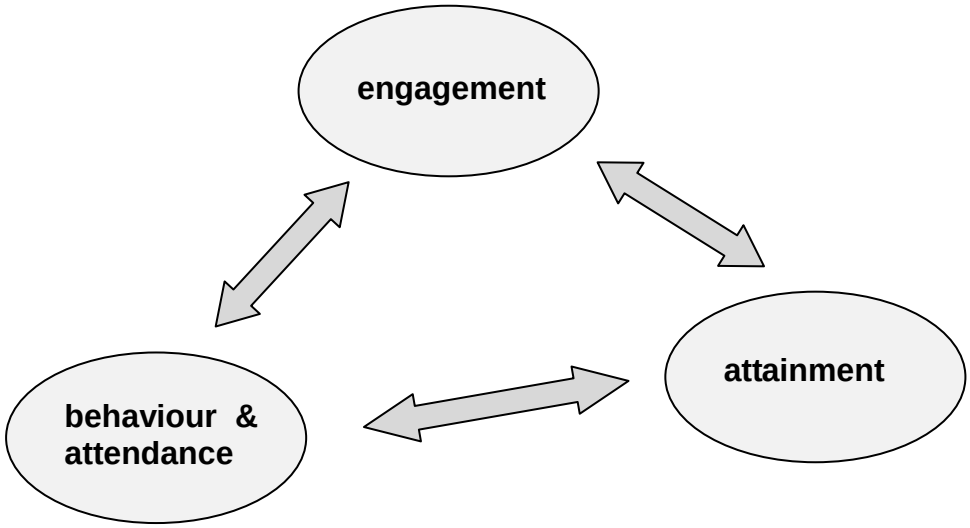
Engagement and enjoyment are not necessarily the same, but they are closely related. A study of pupils' enjoyment of secondary education in England found that less than half did so and that one of the clear reasons for this was that lessons lacked interest (Gorard and See, 2010)[8]. This study also found that lack of enjoyment did not vary significantly with the standard variables of social class, ethnicity and entitlement to free school meals (FSM). This disconnection between enjoyment and the usual social variables may tell us something about engagement, and, in terms of the focus of our study, suggest that positive influences of the rural dimension are potentially of significance across the range of pupils. Research evidence suggests that higher achieving pupils have higher levels of emotional school engagement (Foliano et al, 2010). All pupils' learning is likely to benefit from greater engagement. It is interesting, therefore, that our study found evidence of the rural dimension helping both low attaining pupils to achieve more, as well as high attaining, 'gifted and talented' pupils.

4.4 Influence through interactive processes

The study throws light on the sorts of processes and interacting factors underlying the impact of the rural dimension on pupils - for example, the interconnection of finding an absorbing interest in activities, developing self-confidence, being able to be creative, and learning skills and knowledge. A central conclusion for us is, therefore, that **it is the interaction of positive factors and influences that is key to understanding the impact of the rural dimension in the curriculum.** This is represented in Figure 4 below. A useful metaphor is to see the rural dimension as an ingredient in a baking mix that works and is integrated with other ingredients to form an outcome that is greater than the individual parts. One way that this seems to work is through a sense of connection with the earth and the natural world, creating a sense of achievement and motivation. A theme that emerged from the data from Brockhill Park College, for example, was the impact of handling animals: this was seen as having a calming effect on some pupils and, over time, this was identified as helping to raise the confidence of some children in a way that other curriculum areas could not replicate.

[8] Gorard and See's study found that 44% of students in year 11 enjoyed being at their school and that only 38% said that most of their lessons are interesting (p5).

Figure 4: Interactive Processes



It is also likely that the long experience of rural-related curriculum and community activities in most of the case study schools is important in understanding the influence of the rural dimension. This experience pre-dates the adoption of Rural Dimension specialist status. Research discussed in the literature review suggests that long-term specialisms are more likely to have an impact.

4.5 Contribution to school culture

The value of seeing the rural dimension as part of a larger whole and of interactive processes is reinforced by considering its relationship with school variables associated in the research literature with effective or improving schools. Four of the most important variables are[9]:

- vision: clear direction and high expectations;
- collaborative culture;
- an environment and pedagogical strategies conducive to learning and responsive to pupils' needs;
- high social capital in the community.

The rural dimension in the case study schools contributes to a school culture that displays the features associated with effective or improving schools. It forms part of the schools' strategic vision and direction; enshrines and encourages a collaborative culture by providing pupils with opportunities to work in teams, to become part of social groups like the Young Farmers' Club and to support each other both socially and academically, as well as across age groups; encourages ways of working that help to create an environment for learning and a variety of opportunities for teaching in different ways, 'making the whole site an area for learning', as it was described at The North School, and creating opportunities for individual attention to pupils; and helping to raise social capital (the valuing of and supporting education) in the community by encouraging a

[9] See, for example, Chapman (2005, pp29-31), Day et al (2009), Lewis and Murphy (2008), Sammons (2007).

positive view of the school, enabling parents and the local community to use facilities as a community resource and fostering positive local media interest in the school. The nature and effects of the rural dimension, where it works well, are to encourage a reshaping and enrichment of the curriculum along the lines that other research has found to be associated with improved engagement and achievement - changes which 'broaden learning opportunities and provide access points for each child' (Day et al, 2009, p120).

4.6 Practical and Creative Pedagogies

The rural dimension opens possibilities for enhancing and developing practical and creative pedagogies. We were told how, where it is operating most effectively, the rural dimension encourages innovation and boundary-crossing in teaching. The pedagogical variety facilitated by the rural dimension includes:

- experiential, direct, 'hands-on' learning;
- more challenging and exciting experiences;
- use of outdoor settings for pupil-centred education;
- more pupil-directed tasks and open-ended enquiries;
- access to rare material and to "big" science;
- inter-generational learning.

An example of integration with other areas of the curriculum is the school farm which is used as a resource for the photography pupils, with an artist in residence basing his work on pigs and working with pupils and adults.

5. LESSONS FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE RURAL DIMENSION

We have emphasised the importance of understanding the rural dimension as a set of processes and initiatives which is part of the wider interacting processes of the school and its community relationships. An implication for evaluation by schools of the impact of the rural dimension is that it needs to be done in ways which are sensitive to this complex dynamic. Evaluation cannot effectively isolate a neat 'rural dimension' variable and identify in a linear fashion its effects on engagement, behaviour and attendance, and attainment. With this in mind, eight elements that we suggest are important in a school's evaluation of the rural dimension are picked out here. The first four are about the process of evaluation and are embedded in much of what is known about evaluation in self-improving systems; the final four are suggestions concerning the focus for evaluation.

Regarding the process of evaluation:

- **dispersed self-evaluation**

Self-evaluation by schools is now an accepted as a crucial component of being an improving school. We would emphasise the value of involving the different people and groups in self-evaluation of the rural dimension - pupils, teachers, support staff, governors, parents and the community representatives. All have valuable perspectives on how the specialism is working - both its successes and how it could be improved or its benefits spread more widely within the school.

- **collaborative evaluation**
Rural dimension schools already have ways to learn from what each other is doing, such as through the SSAT website[10]. There is scope to extend this more actively - through schools working together to diagnose problems and devise solutions and to share what they know about the processes of the rural dimension that lead to positive changes for pupils[11]. Collaborative evaluation *within the school* is also valuable - working across curriculum areas, from science to spiritual development - since the influences of the rural dimension cross curriculum boundaries.

- **reflection on 'real-life' cases**
The quality of the rural dimension lies in how it engages and involves pupils and adults in ways that create exciting and 'real' experiences that lead to broad learning - from skills to conceptual learning to a heightened awareness of nature and living. These are captured in the 'stories' of individual pupils and groups of pupils. Such cases offer a rich resource for reflection and evaluation by teachers, pupils and others. In other words, they are a resource for the dispersed evaluation highlighted above: to learn about what works well, how it is seen from different viewpoints, and about cases that worked less well or offer ideas for further improvement.

- **imaginative generation of evaluation data**
Data on changes in attendance and attainment (on the part of individual pupils and groups of pupils) have their relevance. To reflect and capture the quality of the rural dimension requires the use of other forms of record and representation - such as photographs, images and videos. All of these can form part of the cases which are used for reflection. Generating them (e.g. pupils doing videos or an artistic depiction of an aspect of the rural dimension) can themselves be learning experiences and reveal different dimensions of the learning involved.

Regarding the focus of evaluation:

- **social justice**
Specifically giving consideration to who is benefiting and who is not benefiting (and who might otherwise do so) is important for probing the 'reach' and assumptions of the rural dimension. Are there groups or kinds of pupil who are not taking the opportunities offered by the specialism? What can be done to further enhance its inclusiveness?

- **internal reach: visibility and embeddedness across school**
The Rural Dimension specialism is embedded to varying degrees in the schools we visited across the curriculum areas, with its impact occurring in many diverse ways. For example, before this study we had not considered that a school engaging in the rural dimension would see a significantly increased numbers of pupils using the canteen, but it seemed clear that this effect was associated with the visibility of the produce from the farm and garden being used in the canteen, and pupils' engagement with this aspect of the rural dimension. 'Visibility' is itself an interesting concept to consider. A focus for evaluation is the degree to which it is succeeding in working across the school and in what ways its whole school value could be enhanced.

- **external reach: community engagement**
Many successes and highly appreciated activities that brought school and community together were apparent amongst our case study schools. A further focus for evaluation is the degree to which the rural dimension is achieving its potential in developing community engagement and in what ways this could be enhanced.

---

[10] https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/community/ruraldimension/Pages/default.aspx

[11] See Hargraves (2010) for example on self-improving systems.

- **breadth of learning**

The power of the rural dimension is the way that it potentially facilitates a breadth of learning and the positive interaction of skills, cognitive learning, awareness, self-responsibility and practical activity. Evaluation is likely to be most effective where it considers how and to what degree the rural dimension makes the most of its potential to nurture interactively the whole range of learning: ‘soft’ skills, functional skills, conceptual learning, and areas of development that can include sustainability awareness and spiritual and emotional growth.

APPENDIX 1: CASE STUDIES

Case Study A: Brockhill Park Performing Arts College,

A.1 Contextual Information

Brockhill Park Performing Arts College is a rural mixed 11-18 non-selective comprehensive school that caters for the full ability range, in an area in which there are a number of grammar schools. It is a Foundation school maintained by the Local Authority. The governing body is the admissions authority. The school buildings include a working farm - the old manor house is one of the school buildings - set in grounds of over 24 hectares, within a Site of Nature Conservation Interest. In addition to the emphasis on the rural dimension, the school has an SSAT accredited specialism in the Performing Arts.

The Ofsted Report of 2008 reported that the pupils' attainment on entry was well below the national average with few higher attaining pupils joining the school. The majority of pupils continue to be White British with a growing number from other ethnic backgrounds, some of whom have first languages other than English. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than the national average, although fewer than average have a statement of special educational needs. The school serves a community with some pockets of social deprivation. Key quantifiable data which contextualise the school are presented in Table A.1 below.

Table A.1: Selected quantifiable contextual data

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Total number of pupils (all ages)	1250	1301	1223	1143	1190
% of pupils with SEN, with statements or on School Action Plus	11.4	10.9	9.6	4.9	5.5
Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	184	219	229	229	225
Number of pupils aged 16-18	154	159	161	168	198

The information in this case study is based upon a one-day visit to the school in November 2010. Table A.2 below shows the numbers of those consulted, and their relationship to the school. There were focus group interviews with staff, one primarily of stakeholders other than teachers, and two others with teachers, one of which was held informally over lunch. There was one reflective workshop with pupils and teachers. Individual interviews were also conducted with the Principal and Vice Principal.

In total, 13 members of staff and six pupils participated in interviews (some key staff were involved in more than one interview, though took care to say less after the first one). See Table A.2 below for details. Documentary data were gathered on the school site and are referred to throughout this case study. The data presented below are also based on observations, informal conversations and a staff-led tour of the school.

Table A.2: Data collection methods and number of participants

	Senior leadership	*Teaching staff*	*Pupils*	*Other stakeholders*
1:1 interview	2	2		
Focus group		6 + 8[12]		5
Reflective workshop		6	6	

A.2 Quantitative data

The information provided below in Table A.3 is derived from the performance and attainment data available for Brockhill Park Performing Arts College. (See: www.education.gov.uk).

Table A.3: *Pupil achievement*, *contextual value added measure and absence*

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4					
Key Stage 2 to 4 contextual value added measure	1032.5	1026.2	1016.8	987.2	1009.0
% achieving Level 2 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-C)	65	71	67	58	76
% achieving Level 1 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-G)	84	90	95	92	95
Average point score per pupil (uncapped)	391	416	412	373	469
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 5					
Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 value added measure	N/A	N/A	993.8	1000.3	1037.6
Average point score per pupil	494	429	388	466	541
Absence					
% of half days missed due to overall absence	9.2	10	10.6	11	8.5

The most recent indicators of pupil performance and attainment are very encouraging for the school, with the trends previously being somewhat uneven.

A.1.3 Narrative of the rural dimension in the school

A.1.3.1 History and context

The farm was established before the school, which moved into the farm house-mansion in the inter-war period. The relatively large working farm is now set in 24 hectares of school ground, some land having been sold in the 1970s. There has therefore been continuity in terms of this aspect of the rural dimension, which has always had a significant place in the school. In fact, more than one teacher referred to the SSAT '*catching up'* with what had always been important to a school with a farm which has always had large animals (i.e. cattle, sheep) and is reportedly one of the largest working school farms in the country. There have, however, been significant developments in recent years. The farm had come to be seen as a financial 'black hole', but the accreditation of the rural dimension received in 2010 - while acknowledged to be '*just a badge'* - has been used as a means to '*celebrate what we did'*. The farm has moved to the forefront in terms of its visibility in the

[12] The latter was a more informal session over lunch

school, a key element in its 'Unique Selling Point' rather than being a '*part of the furniture'* which had limited impact on the curriculum overall, and was reported to be irrelevant to many teachers. The farm and Victorian walled garden (being re-developed after seemingly limited use for some years) are significant financial investments for the school, but were justified in terms of the contribution they make to the curriculum and children's school experience (and compared favourably to IT in terms of value for money).

A.1.3.2 The nature of the rural dimension in Brockhill Park College

A key feature of the rural dimension in this school is through providing experiences seen by teachers as 'real' - a word that was used constantly - with practical outcomes. This characteristic was seen by teachers as important in helping to explain the impact of the rural dimension on pupils, as discussed below. A tangible example of this is that pupils go and watch sausages being made from their own pigs. They then sell them in a sausage sale at school – just one example of how the farm is embedded in the curriculum and pupils' experiences. Ofsted (2008, p3) concluded, even before a number of developments referred to in this document had taken place, that '*The school farm and garden is effectively used to promote awareness of healthy eating and of quality in food. The farm is a real benefit, offering pupils rare access to animal care and enriching subjects such as science*'.

The teacher curriculum leaders discussing the rural dimension put this area of the curriculum in the broad context of the importance of the environment: '*the resources are around us, it can be in cities, City Farms…'* but they claimed with pride, that the way in which pupils are able to engage with the rural dimension at their school on the farm provides a '*unique experience'*. This was contrasted by a school leader with '*the stale years of the national curriculum when we had to have a staid grammar school curriculum'*.

The rural dimension is continuing to develop and is now embedded for all children through a specific 'Go Outdoors' (GO) course for Years 7 and 8, based around problem based learning related to the farm, the Victorian walled garden and sustainability issues in general. There has also been 'Farm Fortnight', in which curriculum areas across the school had the opportunity to work with lead rural dimension teachers to develop the rural dimension in their lessons. This has included highlighting farm-related language in Modern Languages lessons, and designing and making animal enclosures.

The GO course takes a problem-based approach which was seen as supporting pupils' reflection and creativity, as well as cross-curricular skills far more effectively than the skills-based course it replaced, said the teachers involved in developing this. A key here was reported by teachers to be the outdoors, '*hands on'*, nature of the experience: '*A lot of our pupils are kinaesthetic learners, we need to get them out there, get them engaged, they're much better because of it*'. A 'sausage sale', in which pupils marketed and sold sausages produced from the pigs on the farm was a 'real' task that has proved very popular. In Key Stage 4, there is an Animal Care BTEC, which is increasingly popular and highly praised by external assessors. There is also an active Young Farmers' Club.

A.1.3.3 Contribution of, and impact on, school staff

The impact of the rural dimension on teachers emerged as significant. This paralleled the appeal of the rural dimension to many pupils, in that their experience of teaching the rural dimension represented a point of contact with something timeless. But, particularly in this school, it also represented a professionalising experience: *'freedom for teachers',* '*a place for curriculum innovation*'. This was associated in particular with taking pupils out of the classroom – something many teachers initially regarded as a risk, but one with which they had become comfortable.

The Young Farmers Club

The SSAT accreditation of the rural dimension seemed to be having an effect on the professional confidence of a number of teachers, who referred to now being in a position to '*help other schools more often than they can help us'*, because of the nature of the rural dimension curriculum and resources available at the school. A display resource developed by those teaching the GO course in year 7-8 was believed to have helped staff not involved in this to know what was being done and to make use of the skills being developed there by pupils.

A.1.3.4. Community engagement

The farm was the main means of supporting community engagement. This was achieved in part through hosting visitors from other schools, including a number of primary schools. This form of activity seemed to be gradually extending as the school became more aware of and confident in its particular expertise in working with, for example, large animals. Pupils from Brockhill often played an important part in acting as guides for these visits. A significant number of pupils also engaged in events beyond the school – and the impact of this was extended by being brought into the curriculum, at least informally, and being made visible in the school. Lambing Day and the Kent Show were events with particularly high profiles, and The Young Farmers' Club played an important part in the visibility of the school in and engagement with the wider community.

A.1.3.5 Leadership of the rural dimension

Leadership and support for the rural dimension from the top was seen as important by the teachers most closely engaged in the rural dimension. The Principal and Vice Principal were praised for '*having the confidence in themselves to go ahead. There was a feeling it was a white elephant and we should get rid of it* [the farm]'. This commitment was seen as exemplified in the investment of curriculum time as well as money in the farm (which was ascribed to the vision of the Principal, Vice Principal and key Governors).

But leadership was evidently dispersed. This was evident in the way that teachers referred to the rural dimension and their place in its development in the curriculum, and in the senior leadership publicly acknowledging the importance of staff overall in supporting the rural dimension. This seems to have helped the impact of developments associated with

the rural dimension to be seen as central not peripheral to the school: '*3 to 4 years ago the farm was operating well for the Young Farmers, but it was parallel to the curriculum and the main staff body... [this has changed] due to the drive and hard work of [the rural dimension subject leader] and the vice chair of the Governors. Governors' support has been important, it needed to be seen that it mattered*'.

A.1.4 Impact of the rural dimension

Pupils, members of staff and community partners gave their views on the impact of the rural dimension in the school and suggested reasons for this impact during interviews and the reflective workshop. Their comments on impact have been categorised into three main themes: **attainment** (performance and school standards); **behaviour and attendance** (on the part of pupils); and **engagement** (interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families).

A.1.4.1 Pupil attainment (performance and school standards)

The impact of curriculum development on pupil performance is notoriously difficult to establish. The exam results data indicates improvement in the period during which the rural dimension has been developed, but it is too early for significant developments such as the new course for Years 7 and 8 to have had an effect on this. Nevertheless, there are particular examples of academic success; '*There is value-added in animal care students … believed wouldn't pass but they did and that's very much due to Animal Care. One girl was kept in [school] because of the farm and ended up with 6 to 7 A*s'*. The value added scores on the BTEC were reported to be relatively strong evidence of the impact of the rural dimension.

The Year 7-8 course was certainly regarded as responsible for raising attainment in terms of pupils' cross-curricular personal employability learning and thinking skills, which have the potential to raise attainment in all subjects. Indeed, that specific claim was made, based on the view that the 'real', engaging, nature of this problem based learning course helped pupils gain a more explicit understanding of what these skills were in practice, and so were more able to transfer them into other areas of the curriculum. The way the curriculum has been planned to focus on these skills in an integrative way, the explicitness with which the skills were focused on and developed was identified as key here.

Similarly, Animal Care pupils were reported to develop employability skills, through working in committees when organising events such as Lambing Day, liaising with organisations involved, and talking to people on the show days, for example. The parish priest, who was there, said '*I was just blown away by their maturity. I see a lot of young people but the young farmers had maturity beyond their years*'. Pupils were clear that the rural dimension had an impact by raising their achievements in terms of these broad skills. Interestingly, pupils gave many examples of this in the context of diverse forms of community engagement:

> *'The Kent show gives us certain responsibilities and skills which makes us become more independent',*
>
> *'trips and new experiences – may never have them again – remember them forever',*
>
> *'volunteering teaches students helping out, not only benefits those you help, but yourself as well'.*

Those involved as Young Farmers in the school gave many detailed examples of how their involvement in this, and their work with organisations beyond the schools, as well as the

public generally, developed their organisational and inter-personal skills and abilities – and explicitly related these to an increase in their confidence. Pupils' comments here overlapped with the nature of their experience of the rural dimension within school courses, through their references to the value of group work in which they engaged with ideas and each other. In terms of attainment, staff and pupils referred constantly to the personal and life skills that may be seen as important in terms of employability, as well as, possibly, to other areas of the curriculum.

In the reflective workshop, teachers highlighted pupils' increased confidence as a key impact of the rural dimension, as well as seeing it as a distinctive opportunity to develop team-building and social skills. More often, teachers referred to the rural dimension in terms of its impact in developing pupils' values and understanding of broad concepts and issues, and identified these as the rural dimension's most significant impact. Typical examples given were '*sustainability', 'understanding of reality, where food comes from', 'enterprise', 'charity'.* Pupils less often referred to the rural dimension in terms of concepts or issues, though two pupils did say the rural dimension had a (rather limited) impact on the aim of '*preserving land for everybody*'. Interestingly, one pupil noted that the rural dimension '*awakens people to the real world and people don't like it'*.

The relationship between pupil performance and aspirations (discussed below) is complex, but the Vice Principal was clear that the rural dimension '*allows children to dare to aspire to life outside the local area. It's the "can do" - the "what" is not so important, it's the skills that are important*'.

In terms of employability, the rural dimension was seen as important by school leaders because a lot of the pupils go into farm employment and, more broadly, in terms of the knowledge to be handed to the next generation. The contribution to employability was recognised to go beyond the direct one of farm-related employment and to include supporting the teamwork which was seen to develop through, for example, pupils working together on a farm where there is no farm manager. The responsibility for the care of animals, for example, which the pupils take – and evidently delight in – was seen as generating that teamwork by providing a context in which it can develop in a sustained and meaningful way. Pupils associated this with developing the '*social skills needed in everyday life, communication skills – needed for working with others and the public'.* Teachers also agreed that the Farm was a place where the pupils mixed across age groups in ways that were not typical of the rest of their school experience. The relationship between the development of teamwork and the rural dimension is discussed further below. But some individual pupils are clear about the impact of the rural dimension on their life: *It's changed my life, it's changed what I want to do when I'm older. I want to become a farmer now*." (BBC, 2011).

A.1.4.2 Pupil behaviour and attendance

The farm (and this was given a higher profile than the garden by interviewees) was seen as important in establishing a community in which children were '*happy and loyal'*. In part this was explained by the farm being seen as unique, with its scale making a qualitative difference to the nature of its contribution to the curriculum. As with pupil performance, it is inherently difficult to provide a quantitatively based causal link between pupils' experience of the rural dimension and their behaviour, but there was a lot of anecdotal evidence that pupil misbehaviour was less common in the rural dimension than in other areas of the curriculum. This was said to be so of lessons, but also when children were on the farm and of occasions when pupils were in the community: '*I never have to say a word about behaviour they are wonderful ambassadors… I have to watch some trips very closely but they're so engaged'.* The sense of loyalty to the school community was also seen as

enhanced by taking responsibility for the care of animals even on mornings, before school started, in the snow. The breadth of impact of this is difficult to establish, but an experienced teacher who knew the course well commented '*I couldn't get my daughter to look after the guinea pig. Yet these animals rely on these children, and I wonder if this reflects through in their taking responsibility for other things.*' *so engaged*'. This sense of responsibility was directly related by teachers to pupils' attendance at school. The absence rate in the school has declined in recent years, but it is not possible to directly relate this to the development of the rural dimension; in addition to the usual complexities referred to above in trying to establish this relationship, reducing the absence rate has been one of the priority targets for school improvement here, and the effects of the strategies developed to meet these targets cannot be separated out from other potential causal factors. Nevertheless, the opportunity to get involved with animals, through the Animal Care course and the Young Farmers' Club was identified as having an effect on pupils: '*they are more likely to attend school, they know they have their responsibility'* and this sense of responsibility was seen as significant in this context by a number of teachers. Teachers also gave a number of examples of pupils who they felt would have been excluded from school were it not for the engagement and sense of responsibility they experienced through the rural dimension of the curriculum. While the teachers were quick to acknowledge the complexity of such issues, and that it was not a simple cause and effect, it was notable that a number of the examples given by teachers were given independently of each other. The evidence teachers provided of pupil engagement increasing punctuality at lessons was more direct, with pupils rushing because: '*that way they get to stroke the cows before I'm there to take them into the classroom, you see them dashing down the car park on a Thursday morning to get there before me'*. Pupils certainly like being on the farm. There were many examples of how individuals were engaged by this, but some made more generalising comments which imply a potential positive effect on school attendance, with the farm being '*a place to go – for some people, a community feel – some children need the farm to enjoy school'*.

Showing pigs at the Kent Show

It seems interesting that in official documents, the work to maximise attendance levels refers to working with Education Welfare Officers, the Local Authority and, of course, establishing Action Plans (School Profile, 2008) and not to the nature of the children's learning experiences, though this was identified as an important factor by teachers and school stakeholders in all the data collected through interviews.

A.1.4.3 Pupil engagement

The engagement of pupils with the rural dimension was highlighted consistently. There were innumerable references to the pupils being engaged in their work related to the farm, especially when this took place outdoors. All participants were convinced from their observation of and interaction with the pupils – in and out of lessons - that this had a real impact on pupils' interest and motivation. It was strongly suggested that this motivation generated through the rural dimension extended into pupils' motivation generally. There were also a number of examples given by teachers and others working in the school of pupils who had stayed in school (rather than being expelled or leaving at 16) because of

the nature of their experiences on the farm and working with animals. The Principal was clear: '*I don't separate subject knowledge and emotional intelligence*' and communicated to colleagues, as well as in the interview for this evaluation, her commitment to a holistic curriculum.

Relatively open learning strategies were associated with the rural dimension in this school and in the Year 7 and 8 curriculum this was developed through problem-based learning that encouraged competition between groups, a competition that all the teachers agreed stimulated creativity, including that of the higher attainers. The opportunity to support a range of learning styles, to promote self- and peer-assessment were seen as important attributes of the rural dimension, particularly, it seemed, in Key Stage 3.

The impact of the rural dimension on pupils' self-efficacy and confidence was consistently referred to through examples of particular pupils, events, and lessons. The process by which this happened was recognised to be complex and difficult to pin down to a simple process of direct cause and effect. One strand that came through time and again though was the effect of handling animals. This was seen (and reports of direct observation were the evidence base for this) to have a calming effect on some pupils; over time, this was identified as helping to raise the confidence of some children in ways that were believed to be inherently unique to this area of the curriculum. Again, examples of particular pupils were used to show how this was associated with raising their aspirations. The 'real' nature of the experiences and tasks involved, as discussed below, also involved pupils supporting the learning of pupils (and even teachers) whom they would not normally work with, in this and other schools – which was seen as an opportunity to develop social skills and develop confidence. As noted elsewhere, the effect on motivation was seen as key in keeping a small number of children in the school.

The tangible, 'real' nature of the rural dimension experience was clearly seen as very important. The schemes of work for the year 7 and 8 course were linked to the agricultural calendar, to help children know where food comes from, to understand sustainability, food miles and associated issues. The first year 7 project, a sausage sale, included packaging developing a logo and calculating food miles, integrating personal learning and thinking skills with other areas of the curriculum, supported by the involvement of specialist maths, geography, art and science teachers. The rural dimension was seen by one pupil as an '*inspiration for art and photography'.*

One very tangible experience is working with animals. This was identified by teachers as appealing to boys as well as girls, and specifically boys who showed limited engagement with the rest of the curriculum. This appeal was not always immediate; boys in particular were said to be initially put off by the smell of the farm, but soon found the experience engaging.

Being outdoors provided a particular context for developing teamwork. This was developed through the taught curriculum – where children worked together well in mixed attainment and mixed skill groups. Teachers suggested that this was because of the pupils' engagement in real tasks, contrasting it with the previous course which had sought to develop similar skills. While these teachers were those who were teaching this new course, they did have many examples to support their views. Older pupils independently highlighted the appeal of real tasks and the opportunity to learn out of the classroom, even though they had not experienced this particular course. The tangible, hands-on nature of the rural dimension experience was also seen as important in increasing understanding, as well as skills and affective areas of development. The parish priest noted that '*It's important that the next generation understands ecology, and there's nothing like doing the work to understand it'*. For one pupil, the rural dimension '*makes people understand the work of Life in a true way*'.

The broader extra-curricular curriculum also seemed to, more subtly, support the development of teamwork, through the opportunities for children from different classes and year groups to come together on the farm, with broadly common interests and purposes. Pupils appreciated the opportunity to '*make new friends'.* All the teachers and stakeholders, including the pupils, also highlighted the different sort of teacher-pupil conversations and relationships that developed through the rural dimension's contribution to the curriculum.

The rural dimension has also helped the school to develop it's engagement with the community, by showing animals at regional events, liaising with local food producers and with organisations related to the rural dimension (such as the Young Farmers' Club).

Case Study B: The North School,

B.1 Contextual information

The North School in Ashford, Kent, is a Specialist School for Sport, Information Technology and the rural dimension. Located in one of the fastest growing towns in England (www.thisisashford.co.uk/), it is a mixed gender local authority maintained community school with 1057 pupils aged 11-19 years. There are significantly more boys than girls and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average (Ofsted, 2009). The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average. The number of those for whom English is not a first language is broadly average; of this group, the largest, and growing, number are of Nepalese heritage (Ofsted, 2009).

Facilities at The North School include a commercial farm, an extensive outdoor sport area, a climbing wall, a dance studio, fitness suite and specialist facilities for IT, Design Technology and Science.

The school provides a variety of post-16 A-level and vocational courses, including BTEC level 3. Curriculum Management is divided into by Faculties of Learning: English, Mathematics, Science, PE, Technology, Global Dimension, Performing and Creative Arts. Every Wednesday the formal curriculum ends early to allow pupils to take part in what are termed 'enrichment activities'. The school offers a range of these activities, many of which are linked to the rural dimension. Annually, pupils in Years 7-9 take part in an 'Activities Week'. In 2010 there were opportunities for residential and camping trips; international study tours; local visits; on-site activities and projects including archery, climbing, farm, technology project and a variety of sports[13]. Approximately 3 acres of The North School site accommodates a school and community farm which provides extensive opportunity for curriculum enrichment and development. The North School has developed level 3 and sixth form provision since 2009.Key quantifiable data which contextualise the school are presented in Table B.1 below.

[13] The North School newsletter. The North School News, September 2010

Table B.1: Selected quantifiable contextual data

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Total number of pupils (all ages)	790	811	851	951	1057
% of pupils with SEN with statements or on School Action Plus	24.3	25.2	26.7	27.1	27.6
Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	153	154	155	146	178
Number of pupils aged 16-18	N/A	N/A	5	25	51

The information in this case study is based upon a one-day visit to The North School in November 2010. Table B.2 below shows numbers of those consulted, and their relationship to the school. Documentary data were gathered on the school site and are referred to throughout this case study. Researchers were given access to areas of the school connected to the rural dimension and the data presented below are also based on observations made during this staff-led tour.

Table B.2: Data collection methods and number of participants

	Senior leadership	*Teaching staff*	*Pupils*	*Other stakeholders*
1:1 interview	1			
Focus group		5 + 5		1
Reflective workshop		4	6	

B.2 Quantitative data

The information provided in Table B.3 below is derived from the performance and attainment tables available for The North School. (See: www.education.gov.uk.)

Table B.3. Pupil achievement, contextual value added measure and absence

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4					
Key Stage 2 to 4 contextual value added measure	1003.7	1032.5	1013.5	1016.6	1025.0
% achieving Level 2 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-C)	48	51	40	51	80
% achieving Level 1 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-G)	79	95	93	99	98
Average point score per pupil (uncapped)	320.3	378.7	350.9	366.4	478.1
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 5					
Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 value added measure	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average point score per pupil	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Absence					
% of half days missed due to overall absence	7.3	8.8	9.1	7.6	6.8

B.3 Narrative of the rural dimension in the school

B.3.1 History and context

The North School obtained the Rural Dimension of Specialism accreditation in 2006. Facilities closely linked to the specialism at the school include the farm and the Environment and Land-Based Centre. The Land Based Centre has a community room, meeting room, classroom with computer access, specialist classrooms, an indoor climbing wall, working farm and reptiles.

The school farm is a Defra registered small holding and community farm managed by key individuals (with passion and enthusiasm) as a commercial activity. It is the oldest school farm in the County established in 1936 and has been developed to provide facilities to support curriculum delivery and enrichment activities. It accommodates a range of livestock including pedigree Red Devon herd as well as other cattle and sheep, small mammals, poultry, pigs and reptiles. There have been changes in the school since the introduction of the Rural Dimension and the farm is now seen by the school to have a bigger impact, to be more integrated across the school and is used as a resource across every faculty area.

The North School is an SSAT Sports College. The rural dimension has served as a vehicle by which the traditional sports curriculum has been extended to encompass 'Sport and Active Leisure with links to Land Based and Environmental learning. Orienteering, climbing, golf, fishing, outdoor adventure activity, equine, Archery, cycling and kayaking are areas that are being developed and have provided pupils with opportunities to learn 'off site' or embark on programmes such as NCFE Sports courses or Duke of Edinburgh Awards. A 10m high climbing wall has been built in the Land-Based Centre for Learning that is now used by all year groups and the wider community. Physical activity on the Farm is referred to as the 'Green Gym'.

The Sports College organises a whole school activity week on an annual basis, which consists of taking learning (where possible off site and outside). This includes opportunities for travel (global dimension) and residential visits. Since the introduction of the rural dimension, pupils have been provided with a greater variety of vocational learning courses. directly linked to the rural dimension including the Level 3 BTEC Extended Diploma in Animal Management; Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Animal Management; Level 3 Advanced Level Diploma in Environmental and Land Based Studies; Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Horse Management; and Level 2 BTEC Horticulture Extended Certificate; City and Guilds Outdoor Education and Level 2 and 3 BTEC qualifications in Sport.

Members of staff from The North School share best practice locally and nationally, by facilitating workshops, presenting keynote speeches, writing case studies and curriculum materials. Staff also regularly present at the annual SSAT Rural Dimension of Specialism Conferences. In 2007, the Headteacher explained how the rural dimension was used to support learning across the school. The following extract is taken from a workshop session entitled: 'Sharing Best Practice: Raising standards through the Rural Dimension & Science'.

> *'Many aspects of the curriculum and a variety of key initiatives are delivered at the North School using the Rural Dimension specialism. The rural dimension creates opportunities for our pupils to increase their understanding and experience of the countryside as a living, working environment'.*
>
> *'The impact of the rural dimension towards raising standards across the curriculum is significant. This year, for the first time, we exceeded our school's Science target for SATs, for the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or higher'.*

'Three acres of the North School site includes our school farm and environmental areas. This is used extensively to help deliver Science using the rural dimension.' (Headteacher, The North School, 2007 Rural Dimension Conference)

The contribution of the Rural Dimension Specialism was also noted in the 2009 Ofsted inspection report:

'Students make a positive contribution to the school and local community, for example raising money through their learning communities for a variety of local and national charities. The specialisms have been at the centre of building local community links. Some students work with primary schools as junior sports leaders; others share knowledge and expertise of the rural dimension. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is good. Their development of good teamwork and cooperative skills stands them in good stead for the future. As one parent wrote, 'I feel confident that my son will leave this school in a position to pursue a course in further education and on to the career of his choice.'' (Ofsted, 2009 p5-6)

'The school's subject specialism in sport has made a good start in influencing provision in other subjects. Its contribution to the extra-curricular provision is well established, with a wide range of sporting activities being enjoyed by a large number of students. The rural dimension, the school's second specialism, also makes a major contribution, often involving members of the local community. It has had a rapid impact in broadening the curriculum, with an emphasis on promoting a sustainable environment.' (Ofsted, 2009 p6-7)

B.3.2 The nature of the rural dimension in The North School

The following account of the rural dimension in The North School has been compiled using the feedback of the pupils, members of staff and stakeholders who contributed to the interviews, workshop and informal discussions carried out in November 2010. Additional evidence has been included from school documents and the school website (see: www.north.kent.sch.uk/index.html). Most direct quotations are taken from interview transcripts and written records provided by pupils and staff during the workshop.

Participants gave their views of the meaning of the rural dimension in the school as part of the evaluation. They cited specific activities linked to the specialism and identified several key elements including countryside and outdoor activities; approaches to learning; ownership and engagement; examples of cross-curricular links; developing social skills and inclusion.

Opportunities for learning outside. The view that the rural dimension meant *'making the whole school site an area for learning'* and *'learning outside the classroom'* was put forward in the workshop. The rural dimension was seen to provide *'practical learning both in class and outside of lesson time'* and *'hands on experience*' so that the pupils can *'see it and experience it - beyond books.*' [14] Providing pupils with the opportunity to go outside and enjoy the expanse of the 'outdoor classroom' was noted as a key characteristic of the rural dimension by pupils and other stakeholders. It was a commonly held view by staff that the definition of the 'outdoor classroom' at The North School was not limited to the school grounds but rather '*it covers a lot of Kent with the school and with the farm, it stretches into Wales and Devon as well, It is a dimension but also rural and covers so much it is a network*'.

[14] Stakeholders commented on getting employers invested and involved in the curriculum. This had happened on a a number of occasions, most notably with organisations such as Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (Kent) and the Kent Wildlife Trust, both of which allow students to experience working in a real life work setting.

Several rural dimension activities were mentioned during the discussions with pupils and members of staff, many of which encompass learning in an outdoor setting. These included: field trips to Wales, visits to the Olympia Horse Show and the Kent County Agricultural Show, camping, mountain biking, skiing, water sports, orienteering, archery, beach cleaning and collecting litter in a local park as part of the “Clean Up Kent Campaign” on Active Citizenship Day. Many of these opportunities were also available during 'Activities Week'.

Pupils and teachers suggested that the specialism provides a *'slice of countryside life'*, *'the outdoor 'stuff"*, giving pupils opportunities to work outdoors and take part in activities that would not otherwise be available to them.

One teaching member of staff provided a concrete example of this:

> *‘Some of [our] children don’t go out, I have had children who did not know what a pig was. The kids were quite scared, what is that? You find that really strange, we take that for granted. Like the climbing wall, they would never get that to experience that’.*

Demonstrating to pupils the origin of different food types was part of the learning identified during the stakeholder interview, together with learning about the rural economy and seeing the relevance of what you are learning. For example, picking pears from trees in the school grounds, making chutney and selling it to the outside community provided pupils with the opportunity to *'learn where food comes from'* and develop key enterprising skills. Pupils are able to develop an understanding of country life and career opportunities, which help to inform their life choices.

Rural dimension and the curriculum. Contributors responsible for curriculum areas and activities suggested that a diverse range of opportunities had been created for pupils and that cross curricular collaboration areas enhanced this offer. The curriculum at the school is very broad and strategically developed. There were many noted links between sport science and the rural dimension. These links were judged to be so embedded that pupils ‘*just see it as what we do’*. Pupils and staff suggested that the dimension supports environmental stewardship; sustainability (for example, recycling; composting and the Eco-club), outdoor adventure activity and the global dimension through links with other parts of the world including Malawi.

Prior to the rural dimension accreditation of the school, the farm did contribute to the learning environment. However, staff noted that the curriculum was enriched greatly as a result of the school gaining the specialist status in 2006. As one put it:

> *‘Before it used to be the farm and us. Now, I teach food technology across the whole curriculum, any lesson, it is brought in. The farm is now part of the school, which is part of the rural dimension. It goes further than that. It is taking applied learning and developing teaching skills which makes the curriculum more interesting. We are focusing on the opportunity to draw on new resources that can inspire and motivate’.*

One staff member said that for him, the rural dimension offered unique opportunities to explore more tailored learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom. He gave a specific example of this, which he believed demonstrated the positive role that the rural dimension could have on pupils normally less able to engage:

> *‘We have taken eight students out of English lessons, as they have been having a problem engaging and we have booked them into a classroom in the Land-Based Centre. We are doing morse code with them as an alternative to communication. We have taken one aspect of non-verbal communication and put them in a different classroom in the same school but because they look at it as the farm and the Land-based Centre because….when we looked at them in the classroom, with the rest of the students, it took twenty minutes for them to sit down and do the first aspect of the*

lesson. We have done three groups of them. We have had them doing what they need to do within ten minutes. Just by doing that, actually, just offering, giving them a different viewpoint of what they are trying to do in English…we are doing it in maths too. We will come at it from a different way'.

Engagement, inclusion and the rural dimension: Pupils and teachers commented that rural dimension activities provided pupils with opportunities to work in teams (such as the riding team and show team) and the thriving Young Farmers' Club. In joining the latter, pupils become *'part of a social group'* and took responsibility for caring for animals. All students are provided with a range of rural dimension activities during The North School's Summer Activities Week. These include a broad range of activities ranging from countryside walks through to residential educational visits, locally, nationally and internationally.

Stakeholders suggested that rural dimension activities encourage team-building and teamwork. Taking the pupils outside the school community was seen to give them an opportunity to bond and impact on other pupils. Developing pupil relationships was seen as very important, and it was claimed that pupils realised the educational benefit to them and learnt life skills and independence. This was supported by pupils taking on new roles: for example, acting as ambassadors, writing bids and taking part in activities leading to unique opportunities such as the visit to the 2010 Shanghai International Youth Science and Technology Expo. Pupils and teachers from eighteen countries attended the Youth Expo and The North School was one of two schools chosen to represent the UK. The Deputy Headteacher reported that *'Because of our team's outstanding performance The North School has been invited back to participate in the next Expo in two years' time*!'[15]. It was suggested that this was part of the 'can do' culture at the school.

Pupils were also seen to be *'supporting each other both socially and academically'*; *'taking leading roles - as experts*' and *'helping younger students'*. Contributors to the reflective workshop saw the rural dimension label as a *'good starting point to get students to take ownership' and to engage the interest of staff; something that could be pushed 'across whole curriculum*'.

Staff commented that all pupils in the school have the opportunity to get involved with the rural dimension. This includes pupils across the spectrum of academic abilities. Although staff recalled several instances where less able pupils or those with special educational needs had benefited hugely from learning outside the classroom, they made clear that the rural dimension was also being used to aid learning for those described as 'more able.

'We teach them the skills they need such as problem solving and communication, I have had them go to sport, do ecology type projects out in the field, they have to use the resources we have and they have to do it themselves. For me it is not an academic thing, for me it is about building them up to be a rounded individual'.

The rural dimension is seen to provide unique learning opportunities for pupils of all abilities. As one member of staff put it:

'*The rural dimension equalises it. Every child does it, they all do it'.*

B.3.3 Contribution of, and impact on, school staff

In addition to the impact of the rural dimension on pupil motivation and enjoyment, there was a reference to teacher enjoyment. When asked 'Why does the rural dimension have

[15] The North School newsletter, The North School News, September 2010

this impact?', in addition to the link with the sense of responsibility reported above, pupils and teachers made the following suggestions;

> *'Good experience to come to the farm. Community – Never know the farm was there. Inspiring and motivating. Getting young people outside the classroom.'*
>
> *'If frustrated, great to get outside in open air. Like being around animals 24/7'.*
>
> *'Added value – farm used as a hook. Lots of work in inclusion. Motivation. See behaviour improvement. Fresh air. Bonding – human + animal; animal + human.'*
>
> *'I prefer to teach outside myself you can show more. You can see the relevance to learning'.*

B.3.4 Community engagement

The prospectus for The North School notes that the rural dimension '*has been at the heart of building community links*'. Parental and community engagement was noted, with a lot of parents supporting the farm and the school. Parents see and comment on the ways in which their children are changing - for example, increasing in confidence, maturity and the ability to engage with adults. The activities and facilities linked to the rural dimension attract prospective parents who want their children to attend the school. Parents of existing pupils are not only supportive in their feedback but also contribute through practical means such as fund raising and other activities. The school has been able to extend its reach into the wider community through the rural dimension. For example, approximately 2000 visitors attended the most recent lambing event.

As the only school in Ashford to have a rural dimension and a farm, The North School welcomes pupils from other schools, providing opportunities to study animal care and learn through the Land Based Centre facilities. The engagement of pupils from other schools was mentioned by the stakeholders also, together with the value of community cohesion (rural, urban or both) and the importance of links with outside organisations. These links sometimes arose through activities such as the angling club and in some cases led to project funding. One contributor noted that the pupils '*feel special'* when people take the time to come to the school; this couldn't be managed as well without the rural dimension links.

B.3.5 Leadership of the rural dimension

The school is clearly driven by an enthusiasm for the rural dimension. Staff at a senior level are committed to the development of the specialism and embedding it through the curriculum. One of the stakeholders reported that the Headteacher at The North School is particularly passionate about the rural dimension and involves others at the school. Interviewees for teaching posts are asked about their knowledge and skills relevant to the specialism and members of staff are appointed especially with that in mind.

The leadership team are supported by a highly committed and experienced group of staff, many of whom have specific professional expertise that strongly relates to the specialism. The Site Manager of the Environment and Land Based Centre, for example, has an extensive background in outdoor and adventurous activities and has been heavily involved with scouts for many years. He is also a qualified archery coach and climbing wall instructor. The Farm Manager was a member of the Young Farmers' Club for years and obtained a degree in animal science. Her role is to promote the farm as a resource across the curriculum. The Centre Coordinator has a background in environmental pursuits, is a qualified archery coach, fencing instructor and pond warden.

The Lead Practitioner for rural dimension and Head of the Centre for Land Based Studies at the school leads the South East Rural Dimension Network and has previously worked as a zoologist, veterinary nurse, equine yard manager and animal behaviour counsellor. She authored the SQA crofting course in 2007 and 'promoted learning outside the classroom' and 'the importance of using the natural environment within the curriculum'[16]. Following her appointment in June 2008, the Lead Practitioner at The North School has been championing the rural dimension and bringing it forward, working with other schools, providing advice and acting as a consultant. Working together, the Lead Practitioners are building a national network.

B.4 Impact of the rural dimension

Pupils, members of staff and community partners gave their views of the impact of the rural dimension in the school and suggested reasons for this impact during the interviews and the workshop. Their comments on impact have been categorised into three main themes: **attainment** (pupil performance and school standards); **behaviour and attendance** (on the part of pupils); and **engagement** (pupil interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families.

In general, pupils and teachers taking part in the project reflection workshop suggested that the rural dimension had a *'big impact'* on pupils and in turn, as suggested during the focus group with stakeholders, the pupils themselves were making a national impact.

B.4.1 Pupil attainment (performance and school standards)

In the reflective workshop, pupils and teachers suggested that pupils had *'different opportunities to succeed'* as a result of engaging with the rural dimension. It was suggested that the specialism *'makes the school better'*, particularly through its emphasis on learning *'outside the classroom'* (see previous section). Several examples were given of pupils across the academic spectrum making progress through the rural dimension across subject areas. The rural dimension could make a dramatic difference in developing the potential of individual pupils. An example was given of one pupil, for whom the rural dimension had made '*a whole school difference':*

> *'One student had a reputation for underachieving… this year… through the rural dimension, she is starting to achieve, she has gained the grades she wants and is now working to improve them. She already has her Cs and is working towards Bs and As. There is a whole school difference. The whole behaviour around the school is different because she is realising that there is something she can achieve at. Within a normal academic classroom, she could never make that leap. Down at the farm she is achieving Cs and that has given her the encouragement and she is now asking me for help in other subjects because she has realized there is something she can do. Last year, she couldn't see anything for the future and now she has found something she is very good at. She has done animal management, she is very good with them and is very good with the young people if they are down here. Nobody would have ever put her with that [task], now she is good at something and she would have never have known that she had that skill without the resource of the farm.'*

[16] The North School, South East Rural Dimension network meeting 5 Nov 2010

There was a clear sense that pupils enjoyed the activities and learning associated with the rural dimension. This enjoyment translated, as one pupil pointed out, into greater concentration which in turn would lead to doing well in the subject:

'*When you have something you like doing, something to concentrate on, you do it well.'*

B.4.2 Pupil behaviour and attendance

Pupils and staff reflected on the beneficial effect of pupils' developing deeper connections with the environment around them and how activities linked to the rural dimension might positively affect behaviour. Numerous examples were given:

> *'Taking some of the students that would otherwise not necessarily engage in your standard English and maths classes, taking them to the outside classroom, and changing the environment, that alone has an impact on their behaviour and their responsiveness to us as teachers, adults whatever.'*

> *'I had one student... who [was not behaving well in school] but you bring him/her down to the farm, he/she became a young farmer and now he/she is encouraging others to do well within school themselves.'*

> *'In our science class, we use the rural dimension and we do a lot of work outside....I have students that I am well aware are not...the best students across the school in terms of behaviour and I do not have behaviour problems with them and for some of those, it is a blanket statement. I have got students that are [displaying poor behaviour] in the main school yet for me, I do not have a problem with them. I cannot equate the person that they are for me to the person that I am hearing from other people. I can only think that is because I use the rural dimension a lot in my teaching. Also, it does give you the relevance again of it in an industrial or real world context. This is not something out of a textbook. It does make a difference to behaviour.'*

> *'Often, I give the student the leadership role and they teach the lesson and they pick up on behaviour management, it is about using the rural dimension as a starting point for that.'*

> *'Different environment can have massive impact on behaviour (for the better!)'*

> *'Year 7 science enjoyed pond dipping. Improved behaviour in class.'*

> *'There is one student who was on the verge of disengaging, who got hooked on the reptiles and stayed in mainstream education [as a result].'*

Providing pupils who would normally not behave well in a traditional indoor learning environment with responsibility was thought to be a significant factor in improving behaviour. Pupils who are given specific roles on the farm, such as being responsible for caring for an animal, appear to '*really shine and behave well'.* Improved behaviour was also seen to be linked to engaging pupils in something they enjoyed and concentrated on. Overall, there was a sense that pupils and staff thought the rural dimension affected pupils behaviour for the better.

Stakeholders suggested that providing lessons with relevance to an industrial, real world context also plays a role in improving behaviour. One stakeholder gave an example of a pupil who often displayed difficult behaviour in the main school, but when involved with rural dimension activities seemed fully committed. It was suggested that being given responsibility through stewardship was making a difference.

Improved pupil attendance as a result of the rural dimension was noted in the reflective workshop:

'Allows students to have a subject they enjoy and have a career plan. Attendance improved. Commitment. [They are here] out of school hours.'

'Improves attendance due to responsibilities.'

And one group in the workshop commented on the beneficial impact on opportunities for staff as well as pupils:

'Farm influenced students coming to school. Staff wouldn't have applied for job without RD influence on school.'

Our data suggest that the factors associated with the rural dimension which may positively impact on behaviour and school attendance include: teaching in small groups, in an outside environment; highly personalized teaching, for example asking a pupil to look after a particular animal and giving them a leadership role; and pupils being able to apply their learning in the real world with immediate effect.

B.4.3 Pupil engagement

Pupils and teachers associated an increase in pupil confidence with the rural dimension. Trusting pupils to look after animals was seen to boost pupils' confidence. In one example this was seen to be related to providing pupils with responsibility, as well as to impact on their behaviour. Pupils and teachers also raised the issue of responsibility when they were asked to suggest reasons for the impact of the rural dimension on pupil engagement

'Animals and outdoor work gives students feeling of responsibility.'

'Improves confidence - due to responsibilities and trust in ability. Overcoming phobias and fears.'

'Horse jumping - confidence levels'

Pupils and teachers referred to the rural dimension providing *'more opportunities [for] tailored learning'*. This was linked to engagement of employers and pupils' embarking on work experience in the Land Based sector and representing the school at events such as the Farm Dairy Show. There were examples of pupils carrying out public speaking at a meeting in London, engaging with VIPs and feeling part of something bigger. The rural dimension day similarly received *'positive feedback from students'*.

Overall, there was a real sense of enthusiasm for learning in relation to the rural dimension and it was suggested that it increased motivation and gives pupils something to work towards. Pupils suggested that they wouldn't know what to do in the future without the farm. As one of the pupils expressed it:

'If the farm wasn't here I wouldn't know what to do in the future. Because we have this farm, I know what to do in the future.'

'Look forward to learning. Enjoy the environment – and are more engaged in learning.'

'Makes learning easier, it increases motivation.'

Teaching staff agreed with this:

'The rural dimension has opened opportunities and given students goals and ambition for the future.'

Stakeholders gave an example of the impact of the rural dimension in the context of developing language skills. The rural dimension was seen as something pupils can do which builds their confidence, leading on to developing communication and language skills. For pupils at the school for whom English is not a first language, the farm and associated activities presented an opportunity to engage with aspects of the curriculum not

dependent on fluency in English. They could engage physically with learning, and many were seen by the school to benefit from this through improved self confidence.

Stakeholders clearly linked between the rural dimension with progression for some pupils. They gave examples of three pupils who had been taken on elsewhere because of their experience at The North School. it was reported that a significant number of pupils have got employment and apprenticeships from the work experience. An example was given of one pupil who completed two weeks work experience at a silversmiths and was then taken on for an apprenticeship.

In addition to the views within the three themes given above, attainment, behaviour and attendance, stakeholders say that the rural dimension provided a *'sense of security and breaks down barriers'* and *'makes it seem less like school and much more homely.'*

Case Study C: Oathall Community College

C.1 Contextual information

Oathall Community College is a training school with specialist status for Science and Visual Arts with a Rural Dimension. Located in Haywards Health, West Sussex, it is a mixed gender Comprehensive Community College with 1199 pupils aged 11-16 years. The college has a smaller proportion of girls than boys and a higher than average proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils are of White British heritage with few pupils who speak English as an additional language (Ofsted, 2010).

Oathall is now the only secondary school in Haywards Heath and was described by a senior member of staff as very inclusive, really a 'comprehensive school'. Inclusion is very important at the school and members of staff have worked very hard on that issue over a number of years.

Facilities at the school include a five-acre farm, a new art and design building, a music centre, conference and learning centre and sports facilities. The farm contributes to the curriculum and is a centre for primary, secondary and adult land-based education locally, county-wide and nationally. The farm has hosted visits from HRH Prince of Wales and senior government cabinet ministers. Oathall is a lead school for the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (SEAL). It works in partnership with local primary and secondary schools and with Plumpton College in East Sussex, which specialises in providing a wide range of land-based courses in partnership with schools and for those in further and higher education. Key quantifiable data which contextualise the school are presented in Table C.1 below.

Table C.1 Selected quantifiable contextual data

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Total number of pupils (all ages)	1342	1313	1273	1219	1199
% of pupils with SEN, with statements or on School Action Plus	9.8	11.1	14.3	15.3	16.2
Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	265	275	275	248	247
Number of pupils aged 16-18	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

The information in this case study is based upon a one day visit to Oathall Community College in January 2011. Table C.2 below shows numbers of those consulted, and their relationship to the school. Documentary data was gathered on the school site and is

referred to throughout this case study. Researchers were given access to areas of the school connected to the rural dimension and the data presented below are also based on observations made during this staff-led tour.

Table C.2: Data collection methods and number of participants

	Senior leadership	*Teaching staff*	*Pupils*	*Other stakeholders*
1:1 interview	1			
Focus group		5		6
Reflective workshop		1	5	

C.2. Quantitative data

The information provided below in Table C.3 is derived from the performance and attainment tables available for Oathall Community College. See: www.education.gov.uk

Table C.3. Pupil achievement, contextual value added measure and absence

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4					
Key Stage 2 to 4 contextual value added measure	997.3	1003.2	1000.7	1004.3	992.8
% achieving Level 2 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-C)	58	68	75	75	71
% achieving Level 1 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-G)	99	95	97	97	98
Average point score per pupil (uncapped)	372.8	385.8	383.6	408.9	415.6
Absence					
% of half days missed due to overall absence	6.2	6.8	6.6	7.4	6.8

C.3. Narrative of the rural dimension in the school

C.3.1 History and context

Oathall Community College obtained the Rural Dimension of Specialism accreditation in 2004; one of the first schools to be given specialist status. The school is seen as an example of good practice and the SSAT consulted with a key member of staff in the school on the criteria for the Rural Dimension of Specialism before setting up the specialism. The Headteacher from Oathall is on the SSAT Headteacher Steering Group and members of staff have also contributed at SSAT conferences. The rural dimension was seen not as a 'tag-on' in the schoo, but as a whole policy. The 'badging' of the Rural Dimension specialism was seen as important and highlighted on information materials such as the school prospectus.

The farm (and Young Farmers' Club) and gardens had their origins as part of the Dig for Victory campaign in the 1940s. Since then they have been developed as a resource to enhance the teaching of most mainstream areas of the curriculum. Facilities include a large glasshouse, polytunnel, raised beds and a small orchard as well as the farm, which is run as a 'mini business'. The farm has specialist animal housing, a milking parlour and machinery and a range of livestock including cows, sheep, pigs and poultry. Within the school, however, the rural dimension encompasses far more than the farm; everything is interconnected, for example, healthy eating, the environment, geography and learning

where food comes from. Members of staff at the school helped to set up the School Farms Network (see: <www.farmgarden.org.uk/education/school-farms-network>) and the school is now a Food for Life Flagship school.

The contribution of the Rural Dimension of Specialism was noted in the 2010 Ofsted inspection report:

> *'Threaded brightly through every aspect of college life are the specialisms in science and the visual arts with a rural dimension. The farm is a centre of excellence for the college, the local community and for schools nationally and internationally. It provides memorable experiences and cross-curricular learning, generates an impressive network of partnerships, makes community cohesion an exceptionally strong and working reality and motivates students, including those otherwise at risk of dropping out of education. One student's response was typical: 'I wasn't very academic but now that I work on the farm I have come to love science and other subjects because I need them to complete my dream.' Hands-on farm experience also develops students' environmental awareness and contributes to their excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Farm-based projects are among the ways in which students make an outstanding contribution to their local community. Students also take on significant responsibilities within the college. The head boy and head girl, for example, are routinely involved in the business of the governing body and the student council is both respected and influential.'* (Ofsted, 2010, p4)

C.3.2 The nature of the rural dimension in Oathall Community College

The following account of the Rural Dimension of Specialism in the college and some of the context provided above has been compiled using the feedback of the pupils, members of staff and stakeholders who contributed to the interviews, workshop and informal discussions held in January 2011. Additional evidence has been included from school documents and the school website (see: <www.oathall.w-sussex.sch.uk/>). Most of the direct quotations are taken from the written records provided by pupils and the teacher during the workshop.

Participants gave their views of the meaning of the rural dimension in the school as part of the evaluation. They cited some specific activities linked to the specialism and identified several elements including the countryside and outdoor activities and approaches to learning; ownership and engagement; examples of cross-curricular links; developing social skills; and inclusion.

Opportunities for learning outside. Pupils and the teachers in the workshop emphasised the *'outdoor education/outdoor classroom'* aspect of the specialism, which meant *'offsite trips in lessons*' or perhaps to *'get out of lessons'*. It was referred to as an *'amazing experience – doing different things'* and an opportunity to *'make the environment better'*. Giving pupils insights into *'where food comes from'*, using the apples, vegetables and *'fantastic meat'* for preparing lunches served in the school canteen and then using '*all peelings [that] come back from kitchen to help compost for garden'* were all part of the experience. The rural dimension was thought to mean *'practical learning'* or a *'practical way of learning*' and according to pupils it *'opens your eyes to things'*. Not only were the pupils at the school learning about the origin of different types of food themselves but they were also *'watching the pre-school children learning where food comes from*...'. Stakeholders reflected that the rural dimension involved teaching across the age range from very young children through to adults. Farm open days, for example, provided opportunities for parents to learn about the origin of meat.

During the day several rural dimension facilities and activities were mentioned in the discussions. Farm open days, mentioned above, which provide opportunities for visitors to see sheep shearing; BBQ farm meat; and to look at the animals were a particular focus. Enrichment activities included using the farm as the setting for the carol service. Many of the activities provided opportunities for learning in an outdoor environment.

Rural dimension and the curriculum. The farm creates many opportunities for learning across the curriculum in a range of subject areas including English, art, maths, science, ICT and horticulture (see: <www.oathallfarm.org>). Many examples of cross-curricular links became apparent over the course of the day. One of these was the mathematics Lamb Growth Project carried out by pupils in Year 7. This project develops a range of skills. It involves pupils in collecting data by weighing very young lambs and offers them the freedom to deal with numbers in a real world situation. Pupils generate the questions themselves and are invited to contribute feedback, making recommendations based on their findings.

In addition to the links with mathematics demonstrated in the Lamb Growth Project, teachers referred to the link between the creativity agenda and the resource available in the farm. The farm was used as the setting for art scenarios for the visit of HRH Prince of Wales, and on one occasion, an 'Artist in Residence' at the college used pigs on the farm as the basis of his work with pupils and adults. The farm was also seen as an amazing resource for the pupils taking photography.

One contributor described a Key Stage 3 ‘Super Art’ programme for between two and fifteen pupils, some of whom have social or learning issues. During the programme, they visit the Art department twice a week and take part in large scale art projects, which have a high profile around the school, such as creating murals which are prominently displayed within the school. This project is used to engage the pupils in working cooperatively and with a sense of pride. Other similar Key Stage 3 work is used to build confidence.

As well as the links between visual arts and the rural dimension, pupils and teachers referred to learning activities involving science including *'plants/gardening/science'; 'science composting'; and 'micro-organisms milking (science)'.*

There are also growing links with food technology now that Oathall is a flagship school for food for life with pupils purchasing ingredients from the farm shop some of which they have grown or reared themselves! This allows young people to see the whole cycle of food production. Business studies use all the data from the farm and shop for studying a local business.

Engagement, inclusion and the rural dimension. Pupils and teachers recognised that the rural dimension created opportunities to develop *'life skills'* and provided a *'good opportunity to show hidden talents'*. Stakeholders also referred to having to work as a team, developing skills for life from the rural dimension that ‘*will help you get on in life’*, and making a rounded pupil *'to fight the world'*. Teachers referred to pupils presenting well in front of Royalty, dignitaries and other visitors at the South of England Show. Standards were high and this activity resulted in large sponsorship.

In addition to the aim of reconnecting children with the countryside and the land, inclusion featured in the stakeholders’ view of the rural dimension in the college. It was seen as a role within the college to nurture those who are school shy, academically challenged and those who benefit from more vocational courses. Stakeholders had seen many members of the community enjoy coming to the college, including pupils with disabilities, and there were seen to be benefits for the community. One participant described how pupils aged 17-19 years with severe learning difficulties really appreciated coming to Oathall where they were expected to participate in activities.

Teachers with responsibility for relevant curriculum areas referred to work with local special schools and to links with twenty primary schools, including those beyond the school's catchment area. When working with the primary school children members of staff at Oathall try to arrange for the pupils to visit the college once a term so that they can take part in projects at Oathall. An example was also given of engaging with local secondary schools through the Work Based – Land Based Operations NVQ Level 1 programme for pupils aged 14-16 years. This programme had been opened out to local schools because it was felt that other pupils would benefit from taking part. This two-year, one day per week course based at Oathall was made available to a range of pupils including those who were coping less well. The school also had links with industry through sponsorship and work placements.

In response to the question 'What makes the rural dimension work well?' pupils discussed a range of issues including pupil involvement in leadership of the rural dimension, described below, which gives pupils an opportunity to learn leadership skills. They felt that communication was good and that on the farm communication was better, a little more relaxed. The farm is well organised; pupils always have something to do and most if not all of the pupils in the school are included because nearly every class visits the farm. Pupils were aware that the farm also offers something to all subjects and recognised that they could get better qualifications in other subjects by studying on the farm. Their experience of working there would also open up more job possibilities for them because *'we always have to eat'*. They knew they could record this experience on their CV and get a reference from the two leaders of the specialism at the school.

Pupils were also given the opportunity to suggest 'What things could be changed to make the rural dimension work better?' Their responses demonstrated an awareness of the need to extend the publicity and also for additional funding, which was needed for further investment. One pupil thought that it would be useful to have more land because at present a lot of the sheep are kept off site. However, following discussion it was agreed that this could actually be an advantage because it provided links with others in the community. Overall, pupils expressed a real sense of satisfaction with the current situation suggesting that it worked the best it could and that there was not a lot you really need to change.

C.3.3 Community engagement

Community engagement was discussed during the focus group with teachers. One participant noted that two members of staff with a leadership role for the rural dimension invested a lot of time into bringing in the community; there is a tendency to have an *'open doors policy*' and people come to seek advice and to visit the farm. The lead member of staff finds the time to network and liaise with others and make the name of the college known.

Farm open days were always successful, bringing in lots of visitors and providing opportunities to engage with different parts of the community including parents who find parents' evenings intimidating. The open days generated some income, for example, from the sale of items that pupils had made such as bat boxes, bug boxes, bird tables and hanging baskets. The key member of staff for the specialism was seen as a 'past master' at gaining sponsorship.

Projects also provided a means of engaging with the wider community. Last year pupils from Plumpton College attended a residential home for the elderly to build raised beds as part of a funded Level 1 course project for pupils aged 14-16 years. Time was also spent doing other community projects, such as clearing an overgrown orchard.

Continuing links are maintained with former pupils who manage local agricultural retailers, provide butchery services, building expertise, agricultural support, for example, sheep shearing on the farm open day and other activities. Attendance at county shows allows pupils to compete against and build relationships with other local land based professionals many of whom are employers. Former pupils are well represented as stewards or committee members at the South of England agricultural society.

C.3.4 Leadership of the rural dimension

There was a real sense of enthusiasm and commitment for the rural dimension within the school. One senior member of staff put the success of the rural dimension down to the leadership of one key member of staff and his subject knowledge, commitment and passion, and the way he handled children. Leadership, in the context of teaching and learning, is about skills, knowledge and understanding. This leadership was recognized as absolutely critical. A participant in the stakeholder focus group noted that the rural dimension worked so well because of the two main leaders of the specialism in the school. Across the school colleagues engage with these two members of staff to ask about ways of supervising particular pupils.

In terms of strategic leadership, the Headteacher is totally committed to the rural dimension. It is acknowledged to be very costly running it as a facility and there is no funding for the rural dimension - although there is some historical funding from the County. Stakeholders also acknowledged a very strong link between the strategic leadership and the rural dimension, and an awareness that it was very expensive to fund. A farm shop is being opened at Oathall to make the rural dimension more self financing and develop as a standalone business. All monies being raised for the building of the shop are coming from non-school sources. To this end the sheep flock is being changed over from a pedigree flock producing breeding rams to a commercial flock producing meat to retail through the shop.

Staff and pupil leadership was a feature of the management of the rural dimension within the school, noted by stakeholders. One of the participants in the workshop explained that the leadership included pupils who start at the bottom and work their way up. Team leaders are usually pupils from Years 10 and 11. As reported above, pupils identified the form of leadership as one of the reasons why the rural dimension worked well in the school.

C.4 Impact of the rural dimension

Pupils, members of staff and stakeholders gave their views of the impact of the rural dimension in the school and suggested reasons for this impact during the interviews and the workshop. Their insights on impact have been categorised into three main themes: **attainment** (pupil performance and school standards); **behaviour and attendance** (on the part of pupils); and **engagement** (pupil interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families). Overall, pupils and teachers reflected that *'It has a big impact on the people and the school and all [who] want to find out what goes on the farm'* and one group identified a specific example, suggesting that *'You get a big impact on showing animals for schools.'* When asked for their views about why the rural dimension has this impact pupils and teachers referred to the *'hands on – practical'* aspect of the specialism and that it engaged pupils in *'real life – see things with own eyes'.*

C.4.1 Pupil attainment (performance and school standards)

Oathall has developed a strong tradition for pupils moving on into the land-based sector for additional/ higher level courses or training when they leave the college. Teachers and

stakeholders illustrated the impact of the rural dimension on pupil attainment by citing as examples a lot of academic pupils from the college who go on to become veterinary surgeons, and pupils who have completed the diploma. Approximately 50 per cent of pupils attending land-based courses at Oathall go onto further land-based education. In terms of NVQs, 100 per cent of pupils leave with a qualification. It was noted that the percentage of pupils getting 5A* - G GCSE grades in the college is about 98% and a senior member of staff asserted that there would be a contribution towards this from the rural dimension..

The role of Oathall Young Farmers' Club was highlighted in relation to attainment. The club has approximately one hundred members and it was recognised that pupils learned a range of skills through membership. A number of agricultural/farming pupils go on to study at Plumpton College. This was seen to have given the area '*a step in front'* of everyone else.

In terms of impact on individual children, an example was given of one pupil who was doing the diploma. A link was perceived between an improvement in grades and self-belief and it was suggested that the farm gives pupils a sense of self-value.

In summing up the significance of the rural dimension in the school, one senior member of staff was clear that: *'If we think about life chances for pupils, for our students, the rural dimension is significant because it is about achievement, very much about achievement and success but it's also about personal development, and that's for all students. So it's the personal skills that they develop, the self worth, the sense of place in the community as well…. We always talk about collaboration, cooperation, so it's about developing* [those skills as well].'

C.4.2 Pupil behaviour and attendance

Pupils and staff noted that *'Behaviour changes in this environment'.* Teachers and other stakeholders attributed improvements in attendance and a reduction in the number of exclusions to the impact of the rural dimension, referring to the effect on attendance for some pupils of working on the farm. As one teacher commented:

> *'For some kids it's the one thing that keeps them going, keeps them coming into school.'*

There were references to quite a lot of pupils with problems who were kept within the school rather than excluded by altering their curriculum so that they were doing things with their hands. An impact on the number of NEETs was highlighted; pupils could be identified who would have been in this category but have continued in school because of their engagement with the farm and related projects. This impact was not confined to the school itself; there was also a report of improved attendance at other schools because pupils were attending courses at Oathall.

C.4.3 Pupil engagement

The school profile shows that inclusion is very important at Oathall and for some pupils it is the reason they go to school. Through extra-curricular engagement, pupils who are becoming disengaged develop responsibility and their self-esteem is raised. Pupils and teachers identified developing confidence; a sense of responsibility related to caring for the animals on the farm; and consideration of others among the impacts of the rural dimension:

> *'Builds confidence.'*
>
> *'Never know what you can do till you...'*
>
> *'Have to keep the farm up and running – you have to come in on holiday.'*

'More responsible – come in on holiday to look after animals in all weathers.'

'To be careful with animals – treat with care.'

'Think of others before yourself.'

Stakeholders also referred to the impact of the rural dimension on pupils' confidence. Pupils were said to receive more individual attention and take this confidence and concentration into other classes. One parent in the focus group felt it had changed their son's confidence, commenting that it was the children who were interviewed, photographed and spoke to visitors. This was just one example but participants suggested it would be possible to find hundreds of parents whose children had been really changed.

The strong sense of enthusiasm, engagement and enjoyment extended to younger children. When referring to young children visiting the farm, participants remembered seeing a *'look of absolute joy'* on children's faces, who were so keen to be there. In the focus group, teachers referred to older pupils working with young children and recognised that they were able to get pupils engaged with the rural dimension who were becoming disengaged. The pupils developed responsibility and self esteem, which was seen to have a 'knock-on' effect on them. School staff referred to seeing a 'turnaround' in pupils who can be disengaged when they start: they work weekends and holidays. Pupils were reported to develop a sense of achievement, which is difficult to quantify. There were many references to the link with Plumpton College, with an increasing number of pupils using the confidence they developed to go onto courses there and to pupils themselves seeing a pathway for themselves, for example, to Plumpton College.

The following quotations from teachers illustrate something of the nature of pupil engagement through the rural dimension:

'It fosters a strong sense of loyalty and responsibility and they seem to thrive off that – it's difficult to quantify but it's a real strength of the farm – students come in at 7am, muck out, even on Christmas Day – it's quite remarkable – we get so much back by the time they get to Year 11.'

'It impacts in other areas of their school life – some kids can be so disengaged in terms of school life – they feel they can achieve, they think: 'I can do quite well in this area'. It rubs off, allows them to get a foothold on something.'

Case Study D: Ripley St. Thomas Church of England School

D.1 Contextual Information

Ripley St. Thomas Church of England School is a mixed 11-18 comprehensive school in Lancaster, Lancashire, with a stable school roll of a little under 1,600, including a sixth form of 330 pupils. It is set on the outskirts of Lancaster, drawing pupils from a wide area of the surrounding countryside, and catering for the full ability range in an area in which there are grammar schools. The school is Voluntary Aided with a religious (Church of England) foundation that appoints most of the governing body. The governing body is the admission authority. In addition to the rural dimension, the school has SSAT accredited specialisms in Languages and Technology. The school is set in extensive grounds including a wide range of mature and newly planted trees, as well as the school farm, plant centre, walled garden and sports buildings.

The ability profile of Ripley is broadly in line with the national average, though with a higher than average number of more able pupils. The proportion of pupils with educational special needs or disabilities is below the national average, as is that of children receiving

free school meals. Lancaster is significantly less ethnically diverse than is the county in which it is situated, Lancashire – which is itself broadly representative of the country as a whole. Table D.1 below presents some of the key contextualising data.

Table D.1: Selected quantifiable contextual data

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Total number of pupils (all ages)	1585	1548	1528	1576	1597
% of pupils with SEN, with statements or on School Action Plus	2.5	3.2	2.9	2.9	2.9
Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	263	256	260	245	247
Number of pupils aged 16-18	315	287	267	318	330

The information in this case study is based upon a one day visit to the school in January 2011. Table D.2 below shows the numbers of those consulted, and their relationship to the school. Two focus groups were conducted, one with teachers, one with other schools staff most closely involved in the rural dimension, and one reflective workshop with pupils. Individual interviews were also conducted with the Head and Assistant Head.

In total, eight members of staff and eight pupils participated in formal interviews - see Table D.2 below for details. Documentary data were gathered on the school site and are referred to throughout this case study. The data presented below are also based on observations, informal conversations and a pupil-led tour of the school.

Table D.2: Data collection methods and number of participants

	Senior leadership	*Teaching staff*	*Pupils*	*Other stakeholders*
1:1 interview	2	2		
Focus group		3		2
Reflective workshop			8	

D.2 Quantitative data

The information provided in Table D.3 below is derived from the performance and attainment tables available for the school. See: www.education.gov.uk

Table D.3: Pupil achievement, contextual value added measure and absence

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4					
Key Stage 2 to 4 contextual value added measure	1012.1	1005.4	1007.2	1007.1	1007.2
% achieving Level 2 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-C)	77	87	83	91	91
% achieving Level 1 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-G)	99	98	99	100	100
Average point score per pupil (uncapped)	445.3	470.1	442.2	489.6	511.0
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 5					
Average point score per pupil	854.9	855.2	889.2	882.9	867.1
KS4 to KS5 value added measure	N/A	N/A	1002.3	999.2	1000.0
Absence					
% of half days missed due to overall absence	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.7	4.8

Results across the Key Stages are significantly higher than the national average. At GCSE level they have improved in terms of percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C grades (and specifically in English and Maths), with results for the last two years being higher than previously. The average points score at GCSE level has continued to rise steadily with the exception of pupils in 2008, with that cohort similarly interrupting the rise in post-16 results.

D.3 Narrative of the rural dimension in the school

D.3.1 History and context

The farm, and garden, have been part of the school since it was founded almost 150 years ago and are seen as making an important contribution to the ethos of the school through a holistic concern with the stewardship of the planet, the preservation of resources, and the cycle of life. While the school had always had these grounds, competitive tendering for their maintenance meant they became, in the view of a senior leader, a '*disaster area'* in the 1990s. The rural dimension had suffered from a reduced place in the curriculum in this era – there had been 10 schools with farms in Cumbria but these had been closed due to insufficient funding being available and, presumably, this not being a specific focus in the National Curriculum.

D.3.2 The nature of the rural dimension in Ripley School

The rural dimension was now, said the Headteacher, '*an idea that has come of age'*, and the school was seen as having an engagement with this that has been sustained for some time. Or, as the Subject Leader put it, '*we were ahead of Jamie Oliver'*. The headteacher showed a strong commitment to the rural dimension in terms of 'big' concepts such as sustainability and the sourcing of food, and in terms of values such as

> *'a sense of connection to the world, the wonder of creation, a connection with something bigger than ourselves, a sense of awe and wonder, spiritual – in the broad sense - working with it in your hands, it makes a difference'.*

This also came through in the pupils' representation of the rural dimension in that the practical outdoors nature of the rural dimension was highlighted, while its significance was most often explained in terms of concepts such as sustainability and health. The headteacher used a range of specific practical exemplifications of this, such as the way leftovers from the canteen were used to feed the pigs, and how working with your hands makes a difference in terms of connecting people to the earth, to something that goes beyond the boundaries of their own lives.

All children study agriculture and horticulture in Years 7 and 8, with an additional module taken in Year 9. This involves a particular emphasis on food production, agriculture and horticulture, and examining issues such as food choice, battery cages, marketing, and world population. There is also sustainability week in which all subjects are encouraged to focus on that area of the curriculum. Environment and Land Based Studies is an option taken by a number of pupils in Key Stage 4. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate was seen as likely to increase the number of pupils engaging directly with a rural dimension focused subject because of the negative effect on the place of the BTEC in Science as Key Stage 4. In the recent past, post 16 pupils had studied a subject at a local college, but the timetable constraints had been felt to be too significant to continue this, though some, including senior leaders, expressed the aim to reintroduce Environmental Science at A-level. Food Technology is reported to be a popular and very high achieving subject and the farm is used to source the food they use. A number of Key Stage 4 pupils

wanted to be able to make more use of the farm than they anticipated being able to do - and saw this as a means to show the farm '*is still important'* as well as engaging in experiences that interested them.

The Headteacher, like all staff and pupils participating in this evaluation, emphasised how the rural dimension was embedded in a range of subjects. While the rural dimension and the sustainability with which it was closely associated in this school was acknowledged by all to be stronger in some subjects than others, it was consistently represented by senior leaders and in the evidence from the pupils and staff as being part of the core of the school and overarching the curriculum - '*spidery, going throughout the school*'. One experience which seemed particularly memorable for pupils was measuring the weight gain of sheep and pigs over time in maths. For the pupils, the rural dimension was represented most strongly through the farm and working outdoors to achieve practical outcomes, exemplified by producing food which went to the canteen. Some pupils saw this as a practical example of sustainability, which they also related to a global context through food miles, for example.

The place of rural dimension across the curriculum was supported in some subtle ways; the use of different forms of fencing, including types of construction, wood and ways of working with this not normally used in the region, provided opportunities for technology teachers to use real examples of construction in their curriculum. Rural dimension activities were also embedded in the broader curriculum beyond the classroom. The visibility with which the farm and garden fed into the school canteen all through the year, including the ham in sandwiches in vending machines available when the canteen was closed, was particularly notable, and evidenced by all participants in this study as well as having a high profile on the school website. The quality of the food from the farm was referred to by all pupils and staff. The rural dimension was certainly very visible across the school in terms of extra-curricular activities in the garden and farm – which often involved pupils mixing across year groups, whether these were teacher-led or a still less formal part of pupil-pupil interaction.

D.3.3 Contribution of, and impact on, school staff

The Subject Leader recognised the passion with which he and key colleagues led the rural dimension curriculum and was clear that this, and the sense of purpose associated with it, got through to, and had a positive impact upon, the children. This seemed to be fuelled in part by teaches' personal life histories – '*We are of farming families, it is close to your heart'* . The values and beliefs of teachers, key to the teaching and development of the rural dimension, were clearly very important in generating teacher commitment to the development of the rural dimension, but a key factor in this success, according to the Assistant Headteacher, was the way it fitted with the mission of the school, '*it is under the skin'*.

Non-teaching staff closely engaged with the rural dimension were very motivated by the development of the rural dimension, and the emphasis given to this by the school leadership. This was evident in data from these staff, including the school kitchen chef, and in comments from teaching staff about the '*pride and passion'* shown through their contribution to the school.

For some staff, personal and family history was a forceful, energising, influence: '*Farming is a vital part of the future, it's been condemned and now we want to see it being built up again*'.

D.3.4 Leadership of the rural dimension

Moving on to examine the leadership which helped the rural dimension to develop as successfully in the school as it was perceived to do, the senior leadership of the school highlighted the contribution of the Subject Leader, who was seen as having a key role. Senior school leaders appreciatively noted '*he is a farmer, very experienced, not just a teacher messing around, he has real understanding'*, '*fantastic'*. The importance of distributed leadership was also implicit in the senior leaders' recognition of the significant contribution of other staff who worked autonomously in ways that fitted perfectly with the mission of the school. There was also some evidence of a form of learning community operating, in which staff, including non-teachers, bounced ideas off each other. Reflecting the fact that the rural dimension was relatively embedded across the school curriculum, the half termly meetings of a sustainability teaching and learning 'community' of teachers was seen by a teacher as helpful in that participants suggested specific new strategies as well as working at an operational level of project implementation.

Equally, the school staff participating in this study were unanimous in appreciating the value of the strong and committed leadership from the Headteacher who was seen as '*very enthusiastic, there's very encouraging and supportive leadership'*. A number of teachers felt the rural dimension was seen by the school as something that was important for all pupils including, now, the more able. Staff in this curriculum area were highly motivated and the Head and senior leadership team's role was in valuing and promoting the rural dimension was seen as key in this, though the SSAT accreditation was also seen as contributing to the recognition that these staff received: '*it makes you feel you have a place in the school*'.

D.4 Impact of the rural dimension

Pupils, members of staff and stakeholders gave their views of the impact of the rural dimension in the school and suggested reasons for this impact during the interviews, the reflective workshop and more informally. Their insights on impact have been categorised into three main themes: **attainment** (pupil performance and school standards); **behaviour and attendance** (on the part of pupils); and **engagement** (pupil interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families).

D.4.1 Pupil attainment (performance and school standards)

The Headteacher greatly valued the rural dimension in terms of its impact on pupils, but said '*Some things you can measure, some things you can't'*. She consistently highlighted the contribution of what she described as a knowledge based area of the curriculum to the affective dimension in terms of the pride pupils felt through this aspect of their work. Again, this was represented in value based terms such as a developing respect for the earth, and the practical representations of this in pupils' sense of pride in bringing home something they had grown with their hands, and feeling good about this. The Assistant Head showed a similar resistance to trying to relate the pupils' experience of the rural dimension directly to their attainment. To exemplify the difficulties of this approach in terms of appreciating the nature of its impact, he gave the example of a lesson which involved giving medicine to sheep; '*I've no idea how this would meet the Ofsted criteria… but it was clearly very good'*. Later, he referred to Ofsted inspections and internal evidence showing that that this area of the curriculum was very well taught, but did not claim to be able to relate that directly to pupils' results - while maintaining that pupils' enjoyment and engagement in this area of the curriculum was of fundamental importance in maximising pupils' achievements.

The Key Stage 4 Environment and Land Based course has recently attracted a more diverse range of pupils than has been the case in the past have and results have improved significantly, with 92% of pupils achieving A*-C, although this was ascribed to the exam becoming more accessible as much as any other factor.

A factor identified as key by teachers independently of each other, was the way the rural dimension enhanced pupils' confidence, which was seen as having an impact on pupil attainment and performance generally: '*you can have a relationship with an animal which you don't have with your peers, and you can move on from that'*. For some pupils, the rural dimension was perceived by teachers to have a unique place in developing and revealing skills that would otherwise not be seen,

'*They may not achieve academically, but [a particular boy] can show how he can achieve something, how he can catch and turn a sheep better than anyone else, for example. I've seen it time and time again'*.

Other rural dimension activities were seen as providing opportunities for the development of pupils' work and leadership. An example given of this was building a bridge across a pond, which gave pride to those who had participated in the project, through which they were reported to have said they felt they were contributing something to the school and its community.

Pupils' employability was identified, unprompted, as benefiting from the professional way in which the relatively large farm was run, with the size of the arm being seen as helpful in enabling pupils to gain sense of this area of work sufficient to enable 'a lot go into careers in the outdoors, and they wouldn't know about it without the rural dimension'. Pupils believed that the rural dimension, including Key Stage 4 courses and the farm in general, helped broaden their knowledge of career possibilities. The rural dimension, and particularly working outside on the farm and garden, was seen as developing '*skills that we may need in later life*' such as teamwork, and even as a form of work experience'.

D.4.2 Pupil behaviour and attendance

While the notion of establishing a quantitatively based conclusion was dismissed as impossible and inappropriate, the Headteacher did note that there was 'never ever any bother in the farm, it's something about working on the earth, an appreciation of the seasons, the earth produces fruit each year, you're part of that feeling nearer to the earth.

There was evidence from many participants that the nature of this area of the curriculum and the way it was enacted engaged pupils in ways that avoided the development of pupil misbehaviour. A range of specific factors were referred to in this context. The association of the rural dimension with learning and experiences outside the classroom was the factor most often identified as engaging pupils in ways that positively supported behaviour management. A range of examples were given, including that of a lower ability class which was '*in silence for an hour while a sheep was lambing – you wouldn't get that otherwise'*. The opportunity to be out of the classroom was clearly popular with pupils, as evidenced in their own responses as well as that of a teacher who noted that pupils ask '"*are we having a practical "even when it's wet'*. There was some evidence that this appealed to those, including very able children, who felt constrained by classrooms described as 'regimented' and who preferred the more open (in both senses of the term) tasks associated with working independently in the school garden – where they were also able to develop different, more informal, relationships with teachers, in which there was '*more listening'*, and with pupils across the age ranges. The farm and the garden were seen by both teachers and pupils as places where pupils mixed across age groups in ways that they did not in the playground, helping pupils of different ages to work together.

Attendance at the school was seen as already high, and not impacted upon by the rural dimension.

D.4.3 Pupil engagement

A sense of pupils' pride from engaging in sustainability was highlighted by the Headteacher who saw the pupils as very enthusiastic about their rural dimension related work, with its embeddedness in the curriculum being part of this. Indeed, '*Interest'* and '*interesting'* were common pupil responses to their experience of the rural dimension.

The opportunity for pupils to have first hand, 'real', experiences was seen by teachers to engage pupils '*it gives them a break, wakes them up… gives them a new perspective'*. This was associated with being outdoors, and experiences which (often literally) had more life than the text book examples typically used in classrooms and in other areas of the curriculum. This, staff agreed, had a powerful effect as pupils

> *'can get out of class and see the textures, how cold the bark feels and smells, it's gone down really well.'*
>
> *'you remember it if you poked it with a finger.'*

The power of the 'real' was recognised by pupils, who said the farm '*helps people understand the course*'.

From the pupil perspective, working outdoors came through as a most distinctive and positive aspect of the rural dimension, and the practical dimension of this has a particular appeal. The pupils explicitly associated working outdoors with an opportunity to learn in another way, and valued this. Typical representations of this were:

> *'being able to go outside and work practically – knowing it is worth it because it's going to the canteen.'*
>
> *'we're outdoors and active.'*
>
> *'another way for pupils to learn → good for physical learners.'*
>
> *'good for kin[aesth]etic learners.'*
>
> *'Gives pupils the chance to get out of the classroom and learn.'*
>
> *'what makes the rural dimension work well? Having animals and a garden to work with, to practice skills and make it a fun lesson – and to go outside'.*

The out of classroom experience was also seen as important in enabling more diverse pupil-pupil relationships to develop, especially through extra-curricular activities – '*it helps younger and older years to work together', 'cross year, so there is more knowledge and understanding'.*

The appeal of the rural dimension curriculum was seen as coming in part from its content. This included the nature of the issues addressed in this area of the curriculum:

> *'demonstrates the importance of sustainability to students.'*
>
> *'learn about the impact of food miles… what we can do to help the environment.'*
>
> *'How animals are treated and how they should be treated.'*
>
> *'informs of things happing in the world that concern us.'*

but the issue based, problem solving nature of the subject as constructed in the curriculum design here also emerged as important in generating pupil engagement and enthusiasm: '*there are lots of questions and the students love it.'*

Case Study E: South Holderness Technology College

E.1 Contextual Information

South Holderness Technology College is an 11-18 Community School in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and maintained by the Local Authority (LA). The LA is the admissions authority - and has the main responsibility for deciding arrangements for admitting pupils. The school is set on the outskirts of a small town, and serves a number of small towns and villages in the area. It was established as a Secondary Modern school in the 1950s as part of the tri-partite system operating in the area. It now caters for children of all abilities, and in addition to rural dimension accreditation, the school has an SSAT accredited specialism in Technology - and as such specialises in Technology, Maths and Science.

The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average overall, but is almost one third of the pupils in Year 8, and above average for those with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is very low. The college serves a population that is relatively advantaged in terms of the region, with an average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The school is contextualised further by the quantifiable data presented in Table E.1 below.

Table E.1: Selected quantifiable contextual data

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Total number of pupils (all ages)	1831	1822	1810	1822	1829
% of pupils with SEN, with statements or on School Action Plus	5.5	6.11	6.1	4.0	4.4
Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	317	309	328	311	338
Number of pupils aged 16-18	200	204	178	188	185

The information in this case study is based upon a one day visit to the school in January 2011. Table E.2 below shows the numbers of those consulted, and their relationship to the school. We conducted a focus group with staff and one reflective workshop with pupils. There was also an individual interview with the Deputy Head.

Data were gained from fewer participants in this case, as shown in Table E.2 below, but the interviews lasted longer. Documentary data were also gathered on the school site and are referred to throughout this case study. The data presented below are also based on observations, informal conversations and a staff-led tour of the school.

Table E.2: Data collection methods and number of participants

	Senior leadership	*Teaching staff*	*Pupils*	*Other stakeholders*
1:1 interview	1	2		
Focus group		2		2
Reflective workshop			7	

E.2 Quantitative data

The information provided in Table E.3 below is derived from the performance and attainment data available at: www.education.gov.uk.

Table E.3: Pupil achievement, contextual value added measure and absence

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4					
Key Stage 2 to 4 contextual value added measure	999.8	1007.6	1003.3	998.5	990.6
% achieving Level 2 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-C)	56	65	68	73	81
% achieving Level 1 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-G)	98	97	98	99	98
Average point score per pupil (uncapped)	364.7	447.1	467.0	447.9	488.1
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 5					
Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 value added measure	N/A	N/A	993.8	1000.3	1037.6
Average point score per pupil	773.8	774.6	831.7	791.9	828.5
Absence					
% of half days missed due to overall absence	6.7	7.0	7.0	6.9	7.1

The data here indicate a small, steady increase in pupil attainment in absolute terms and, at Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 in comparison with other schools nationally, although the trend for the value added measure relating to Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is uneven. . Using the CVA data available through the DFE, the school is in the mid range of schools in terms of pupils' progress from the end of Key Stage 2 to 4, as it is in other measures, such as pupil attainment of GCSE grades of A-C or equivalent. While the absence rate has been increasing, it is below the average in the Local Authority and nationally.

E.3 Narrative of the rural dimension in the school

E.3.1 History and context

Those who led the bid for Rural Dimension specialism status which was gained in 2007 initially thought this curriculum area would, in the context of their school, be horticulture related. Pupils had at some point been able to study rural studies on the land of a local college, but there is no continuing tradition of a farm on the site. The roots of the school are in the rural community and it did used to have Rural Studies on the curriculum, but this disappeared with the introduction of the National Curriculum. Now, the business dimension of farming probably takes a higher profile in the area than previously, as many businesses in the area provide food for supermarkets, and the school works hard to engage with them.

Some animals are kept in the school – there are two lambs, some chickens and other small animals and a garden in a quad, but the more visible foci of rural dimension here are on horticulture and sustainability

E.3.2 The nature of the rural dimension in South Holderness

School interest in sustainability pre-dated accreditation of the rural dimension. There is now a Renewable Energy Learning Centre (RELC) comprising a specifically equipped room based at the college. This has dedicated staff to support pupils' learning about renewable energy - a resource which schools and colleges in the area can book through the school website. This technological dimension is again evident in sustainability, where the interests and commitment of the rural dimension subject leader (a science teacher) are also having a significant impact. There is a focus on energy from wind turbines, solar heating and the generation of electricity by photovoltaic cell - data from the solar panels

and the wind power turbine are presented on monitors in the RELC. This is seen as embedding the rural dimension in significant parts of the curriculum, with data also being used in maths, for example.

All children in KS3 engage in horticulture, with a Year 7 sunflower growing competition gaining a high profile. This includes presentations of knowledge, skills and concepts associated with sunflowers based in a range of school subjects to an assembly. In Year 8, pupils use the raised beds in the garden to grow, on a small scale, produce for the farmers market and the dinner plate. The harvest is judged by Governors and tied to a Year 6/Community Evening to publicise rural dimension work. Later, the school's specialism of Technology is translated in the context of food into, for example, a focus on the design of lettuces in terms of how the dinner looks and smells, and marketing this. Horticulture has a significant presence in the school through the quad which, although small, is visible to everyone from many corridors and seen as '*part of the school. Children can spend lunchtimes there, there are a lot of benches there to have lunch'*.

The rural dimension is further embedded in the curriculum through Year 8 Enterprise Days designed to support personal, employability, learning and thinking skills. The rural dimension is an important part of this work, in which the manager of a local firm in the food industry plays a lead role. Another food related strand is that of encouraging a healthy lifestyle. This includes improving the environment through planting bulbs and trees, recycling and composting, as well as experimenting with alternative energy sources and creating growing environments.

In Key Stage 4, the rural dimension continues to be supported through Science, Technology and Maths in particular, but there are also Level 2 ELB Diploma and NVQ level 1 in Land Based Operations courses, developed and taught with a local college. A partnership with local schools and an Agricultural College provides opportunities to work with agriculture and an equine centre. The school leads some aspects of these courses which, it was felt, they would not be doing were it not for the rural dimension. This vocational area of the curriculum was going to be developed further, including a food related Young Apprenticeship, but the school is now awaiting the Wolf Review and, in the context of the English Baccalaureate and developing Government policy, is concerned that the future of vocational learning '*could stumble'*.

E.3.3 Community engagement

Links with local businesses were an important part of the rural dimension provision -*'the rural dimension leads to employer engagement, it is attractive to other organisations.'* As well as developing the breadth of pupils' experiences and employability, one link that relates well to sustainability is with a local wind-farm, which was seen as significant as this is a developing industry in the area. The impact of 'real' tasks being used in the curriculum is discussed below, but this was also seen as important in the context of employability and links with businesses: '*real employment is a way to do this rural dimension. Knowing their jobs across the ability range was a real eye-opener for Governors and staff*'. The school had also established strong links with a local businessman-farmer who has developed research into horticulture, and wants to address the skills shortage in this area of employment. Engaging in this way was seen as having mutual benefits, with the pupils gaining employability skills and, for the school, it '*is important as it has raised the profile of this rural dimension school. A lot of people heard about us through this'.* While local employment and employability were evidently of great importance in influencing the curriculum development in this school, the rural dimension was also developed in the context of broader and open aims. The link with a wind farm form was explicitly put in the context of the sustainability agenda that is important to the school. A focus on global

issues was also extended by internationalising the curriculum through, for example, studying solar cookers, a number of which have been sent by the school to Malawi.

Engagement with the community was further supported through liaison with primary schools (in which a Governor played a leading role) and links with local schools, college and, to an increasing extent, businesses, notably in food and horticulture. The constraint in this latter area was primarily the ability of local firms to commit time to this, though many had come to a recent conference organised by the school, designed to raise the awareness of local schools and businesses of the opportunities available. The rural dimension was a part of the community engagement developed through providing courses, which included food-focused ones, as well as through the RELC - where school staff could provide lesson plans or develop bespoke ones.

E.3.4 Contribution of, and impact on, school staff

The place of the rural dimension in the school had enabled a number of teachers to gain specific forms of Continuing Professional Development, notably employment based learning through observing and participating in the processes used in local businesses and factories, for example. Some were also taking the community engagement related opportunity to teach adults after school, itself a new experience which supported their professional development. Possibly more significant, in terms of their day-to-day experiences as teachers, were the opportunities to teach in ways they would not otherwise have been able to do. They too valued working outside in the quad, for example, and the different ways of working and relationships with pupils that could develop as a result. The aspect which received most emphasis, however, was the flexibility provided by the longer session on vocational courses in Key Stage 4 courses. Teachers were able to plan, and adapt during the lesson[17], learning and teaching strategies in ways they could not do elsewhere in the curriculum. This was seen as being learner centred, but also as professionalising, in that it developed teacher skills and abilities little used in a curriculum structured by shorter lessons. A cautionary note is that this evidence was provided by an enthusiast for this way of working, and they appreciated that the flexibility and (acknowledged) risk taking it involved is not something that appeals to all.

E.3.5 Leadership of the rural dimension

The Headteacher delegated leadership of the rural dimension within the school to the Deputy Head. The life history of this school leader seemed to have an immensely powerful effect on his beliefs in ways that brought a clearly articulated commitment to the development of the rural dimension. He had left school at 16 to be an apprentice, having not been engaged by the school curriculum as he experienced it: The turning point came when his company paid for him to get further qualifications. This school leader was sure that *'vocational learning saved me and re-engaged me with academic learning'* and was committed to ensuring others had the opportunity to experience this at school. The Deputy Head also had strong and engaged support from the Governors and key middle school leaders. This leadership approach was seen as enabling '*Governors and the Head have given us permission to innovate. They are enablers'*. The supportiveness of the Governors did not mean they were not also directly involved:

> '*Governors work through committees and with the senior leadership team. The process holds people to account, and we Governors encourage heads of department to be honest not just give a rosy picture And Governors often ask "what can we do?"*

[17] Emphasis evidenced in the teacher's voice

The Governors agreed that things were sometimes achieved as a result of asking the Head to look again at funding; they, like other key leaders in the school, wanted to make use of opportunities provided by the energy and commitment of particular school staff, and were clearly flexible in how they worked to achieve their broad aims for the school. As a result, for example, a Science teacher had become a Subject Leader and was driving the rural dimension forward through her commitment to sustainability

E.4 Impact of the rural dimension

Pupils, members of staff and stakeholders gave their views of the impact of the rural dimension in the school and suggested reasons for this impact during the interviews and the reflective workshop. Their insights on impact have been categorised into three main themes: **pupil attainment** (performance and school standards); **pupil behaviour and attendance; and pupil engagement** (i.e. interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families).

E.4.1 Pupil attainment (performance and school standards)

In this school, as others, there was clear resistance to any attempt to directly relate pupils' experience of a particular aspect of the curriculum with their exam results or achievements and performance more broadly. A typical comment was '*it's very difficult, results are up but we have had lots of strategies to do this'.*

On the other hand, the rural dimension was seen as making a valuable contribution, even if it could not be established in terms of direct cause and effect. The impact of the rural dimension was seen as operating through increasing pupils' engagement and motivation. A specific example of this was the use of 'real' examples (i.e. data from the RELC rather than a text book) in maths: '*It even influences those who take the higher papers in maths, a lot more doing higher papers now'*. One interesting outcome, which seems to have come from pupils' experiences of relating differently to staff when they are working outdoors, is a pupil saying he now could '*Understand activities from a staff member's point of view, and the skills that should be developed'* - and as a result '*can get more from those activities*'. Another pupil noted: *'we can work independently because we have a full day of learning'.*

Of course, there can be a link between increased attainment and confidence; Key Stage 4 pupils gave many examples of their belief in this connection, typical ones including:

> '*it makes me become more intelligent and confident in myself… more prepared for life outside school.'*
>
> '*the diploma works well for me because it makes me more independent and confident'*

which indicates a potential impact through raising aspirations as a result of this.

In terms of raising these aspirations - of parents as well as pupils, the contribution of the rural dimension was constructed primarily in terms of vocational learning and qualifications. These were seen by the school as valuable for a significant part of the school population, including higher attainers who were able to gain 5+ A-Cs at GCSE level. Here again, it was the nature and contexts of such learning that was seen as crucial in terms of engaging and thereby motivating pupils. Young Apprenticeships, for example,

'*have been very successful though they are very limited in the rest of the county. And they have met the needs of the 30, they are engaged, they include a number of very academically able children who traditionally would only have been offered GCSE options*'.

Pupils agreed that the vocational courses associated with the rural dimension had a positive impact on their career possibilities. This came through strongly in the data from the reflective workshop, where these courses were seen as: '*opening options, more jobs, people been able to learn more and do what they want',* with this linked, as was the development of pupils' confidence, to increased attainment, with these courses *'important because people can do what they want to do and be happy and achieve better grades'.* An additional characteristic of the rural dimension – evidenced in Key Stage 3 as well as subsequently, was the nature of the learning experience. This was seen by pupils as more 'open', involving different sorts of relationships with teachers – and with their peers: '*you get to comment on other people's work to develop their skills'* which *'makes it easier to work to the best of your ability.'*

The extent to which parents were influenced in these ways was seen as dependent on the attitudes to vocational courses which they brought with them. Some parents, seen by rural dimension school leaders as '*conservative'*, did not talk to teachers about these courses, but those who did often encouraged their children to take vocational course options.

E.4.2 Pupil behaviour and attendance

The rural dimension was seen as impacting upon pupils' behaviour and attendance in two related ways. First, was the ability to engage pupils in learning, as discussed above and, in more detail, below. Particularly strong evidence here was seen in the behaviour and attendance of Key Stage 4 pupils when following courses at a local college. The Deputy Head, to whom any incidents would have been reported, said he had few or no concerns. Not only were these pupils perceived to respond positively to the freedom they were given, they also attended afternoon college sessions despite the temptation, not available in the area around their school, of the shops around the college. An important factor, in his view, was them being on a course that was right for them. This was explicitly contrasted, a number of times, with the situation as it would be with the pupils taking subjects traditionally seen as more academic in order to achieve the English Baccalaureate.

E.4.3 Pupil engagement

Pupils' engagement in learning was seen as supported by 'real' tasks such as those which used data from the RELC. A similar appeal was provided by the opportunity to see and focus on the processing of food in local factories, visited by pupils on Diploma courses, for example. The appeal of the 'real' over the virtual was also seen in the number of pupils who looked at real time images of birds in the bird boxes, caught by video cameras there.

The flexibility with which the rural dimension was often taught in vocational courses was seen as helping to engage pupils. The length of sessions, and the Diplomas being timetabled in day blocks, were seen to allow more varied forms of teaching and learning. As a teacher commented,

> *'I can plan a number of three-hour lessons but as it turned out it was wet outside, so I adapted and it was totally different. There was very high achievement in terms of outcomes. They were getting on with it… flexibility is key… especially when working with animals and plants.'*

This flexibility was also extended to pupils in terms of them engaging with the teachers and curriculum to design how this would be adapted to their needs. From a perspective that focuses on learning, the sustained time available for sessions was seen as enabling pupils to '*get in the flow with their creative juices, not dropping things and trying to get back into it.'*

Working outside was seen as an experience which engaged pupils in learning:

'The quad is used by a lot of areas of the curriculum. It is outside and students, teachers, interact differently. I have observed groups really engaged, you can just tell.'

'the quad works well, with all the plants and animals it engages your interest and you feel involved.'

Horticulture in the quad

For pupils, being outside was the aspect of the rural dimension which had most impact on them *don't do the same thing every day'* was, like the other views represented below, explicitly linked to the positive experience of working outside, and to the development of independence and confidence which pupils associated with this. The first two comments below were seen by pupils as having an especially high level of impact*:*

'no other lessons allow you to be outside and work with the environment.'

'allows personal ideas to develop – free thinking.'

'Good student involvement encourages students to take part in discussions and activities.'

'more independent. This is important to me because it builds self-confidence, team building and opening your eyes to more things.'

'Starting the eco team – encourages more student involvement.'

Pupils also responded positively to the rural dimension in terms of the broader aims of the rural dimension (as identified by teachers), which involved pupils in examining environmental and related issues:

'look at the world in a new way. A better way.'

'feel like your actually helping.'

'knowing how to make a difference.'

'understanding how to be more sustainable.'

'raising more awareness, being able to tell people how to be more efficient. Telling family to Reuse, Reduce, Recycle.'

'becoming healthier.'

'better understanding of "Green issues."'

'it changes people's attitudes to help protect and save the environment.'

And this had a clear impact on pupils in terms of their personal lives and their desire to influence others:

'it has changed my thinking about using coal, oil, gas on a everyday, for example walking to the shops instead of going in a car.'

'started to reduce, renew recycle more and am more aware of why we need to.'

'it educates people who then become more aware and teach people about it'.

'The experience and teaching have made it work, Exploring, discovering and investigating new technology had made the course work and people to learn.'

'better life experience, work experience' [which was linked to increased independence].

This engagement was (literally) seen by teachers to be true of pupils' engagement formal lessons and extra-curricular activities:

> *'It's the same at the eco-club. They want to be there. It's a gut feeling from observation. The absence of disruption, you can sense if there is engagement if it is anticipated by students. I know that from my OFSTED experience. It's outside, it's exciting doing different things, you can see they're on task. They could easily be distracted by the surrounding classrooms but they're not, they're asking relevant questions.'*

Pupils saw this as a context '*which allows personal ideas to be developed'*, '*to be more independent'.*

A similarly subtle factor identified was the nature and development of the school environment. Planting trees (by Year 7) and daffodil bulbs (by Year 8 pupils) was seen as affecting behaviour and well-being by softening the environment. Increasing pupils' access to the quad and the garden (and chickens) there was also seen as a positive factor.

The nature of the rural dimension and the way it was interpreted in the school clearly had an important impact, but the nature of staff involvement in this was also recognised by a pupil:

> *'It works well because the people and teachers are all passionate about what they are doing, so it makes it interesting and fun!'*

Case Study F: The Westlands School

F.1 Contextual Information

The Westlands School is a secondary modern school located in Sittingbourne, Kent. It has just over 1600 pupils aged between 11-18 years. Sittingbourne is an industrial town about eight miles (12.9 km) east of Gillingham in England, beside Swale, a channel separating the Isle of Sheppey from mainland Kent.[18] In addition to the rural dimension accreditation, the school has an SSAT accredited specialism in the Mathematics, Computing and Science.

The pupil profile of the school has been shaped by the presence of local grammar schools which tend to attract pupils within the higher ability ranges (Ofsted, 2008). As a result, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and or disabilities who attend the school is double the national average at 38%. The majority of pupils are of white British heritage. Key quantifiable data which contextualise the school are presented in Table F.1 below.

Table F.1 Selected quantifiable contextual data

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Total number of pupils (all ages)	1600	1604	1623	1625	1691
% of pupils with SEN, with statements or on School Action Plus	16	15.6	15.1	15.6	16.5
Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	269	265	265	278	267
Number of pupils aged 16-18	206	209	211	211	285

The information in this case study is based upon a one day visit to The Westlands School in January 2011. Table F.2 below shows numbers of those consulted, and their relationship

[18] Source: Wikipedia.

to the school. We conducted two focus groups with staff and one reflective session with pupils. An individual interview was also conducted with the Deputy Head.

In total, researchers spoke to seven members of staff and twelve pupils. Documentary data were gathered on the school site and is referred to throughout this case study. Researchers were given access to areas of the school connected to the rural dimension and the data presented below is also based on observations and informal conversations during a staff-led tour of the school.

Table F.2: Data collection methods and number of participants

	Senior leadership	*Teaching staff*	*Pupils*	*Other stakeholders*
1:1 interview	1			
Focus group		5		
Reflective workshop			12	1

F.2 Quantitative data

The information provided below in Table F.3 is derived from the performance and attainment tables available for The Westlands School. See: www.education.gov.uk

Table F.3: Pupil achievement, contextual value added measure and absence

	2006	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4					
Key Stage 2 to 4 contextual value added measure	1031.9	1031.5	1039.0	1042.1	1042.3
% achieving Level 2 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-C)	47	54	63	74	80
% achieving Level 1 threshold (the equivalent of 5+A*-G)	96	98	98	99	99
Average point score per pupil (uncapped)	350.5	396.8	452.2	474.7	496.7
Achievements of pupils at the end of Key Stage 5					
Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 value added measure	N/A	N/A	1001.3	1014.3	1020.2
Average point score per pupil	586.8	517.6	564.5	588.3	521.0
Absence					
% of half days missed due to overall absence	9.2	7.9	7.6	7.7	7.3

F.3 Narrative of the rural dimension in the school

F.3.1 History and context

As noted on the main school website, the school prides itself on being the only Mathematics and Computing Specialist School in local vicinity of Swale and, one of only twelve Mathematics, Computing and Science Specialist Schools in the county.[19] The school gained specialist status for maths and computing in 2003. Five years later, it was inspected and judged to be 'outstanding' (Ofsted, 2008).[20]

[19] http://www.westlands.org.uk/Files/What-is-a-Specialist-School.pdf

[20] http://www.westlands.org.uk/Files/Ofsted/Ofsted-report-2008FULL.pdf

The 2008 Ofsted report was seen as a 'passport' to gaining a 'high performing specialist school status'. This allowed science to be added as a specialism to the existing mathematics and computing specialism, in addition to that of the rural dimension.

The introduction of the first specialism in maths and computing allowed the school to '*increase opportunities and resources'* and give the school a more '*academic feel'* according to a school leader (January, 2011). The Science and Rural Dimension specialism further enriched the school's academic culture and provided a 'badge' spelling out the school's areas of expertise to the wider community. The rural dimension specifically was seen as a '*neat fit'* with science and especially important as it drew the community's eye to the existing resource of the school farm. The farm has been a feature of the school since the 60s. The school management considered that the rural dimension 'badge' could help the school 'make *the best of what we have got'* and '*give the [farm] that level of credibility*". The farm was considered to be a useful *'starting point'* as it was already working as a '*hugely effective learning tool'* (School Leader, January 2011).

The school management was further motivated by the desire to extend the learning that occurs in and around the farm into the wider school community and beyond. The question was asked, "*What can we take from the farm into the school...away from the farm and into a wider setting?"* (School Leader, January 2011). They were not content to '*be a school with a farm'* and expressly wanted to '*make learning more interesting and relevant*" (internal document bid for rural dimension). There was an expectation that the rural dimension focus given its natural links to the farm would open up more creative pedagogical opportunities and develop teaching '*beyond traditional techniques...and away from teaching with formals/boxes'* (school leader, January 2011). This desire to distinguish the school from others in the area and start '*doing things differently'* was a key motivator in the decision to apply for the rural dimension accreditation.

F.3.2 The nature of the rural dimension in The Westlands School

For most pupils, the school farm which is situated on The Westlands School site springs first and foremost to mind when talking about the 'rural dimension'. The farm which has been in existence for over forty years is approximately 0.8 hectares in size and has a wide range of farm and domestic animals including cattle, sheep, pigs, cats and reptiles. The remainder of the land has various accommodation buildings, barns for cattle and sheep as well as a small pet's room. The farm also has a dedicated teaching room with twenty computers.

A large body of young farmers (aged 11+) work on the farm through the year. According to the school website, members of the Young Farmers' Club (YFC) are responsible for '*the daily husbandry of the animals as well as the preparations for agricultural shows and sausage production'*.[21]

As of 2011, the club has approximately fifty pupil members. In general, membership of the YFC entails learning how to look after, train and groom livestock. Animals are often prepared for shows where they are judged. As demonstrated by the picture below, Westlands has a long history of showing animals at various agricultural events and the school farm office proudly displays past successes (see image below).

[21] See also, press clippings e.g. 'Young Farmers oversee the entire process from piglet to packet' (www.thisiskent.co.uk).

Farm Office displaying awards

In addition to associating the rural dimension with the farm, pupils overwhelmingly link the rural dimension with “hands-on” learning activities which they undertake as part of their YFC or through the vocational courses. These generally take place within the school farm area. When considering the meaning of the rural dimension, pupils immediately mentioned activities such as ‘*catching a chicken’*, showing pigs and cattle at shows, cleaning out the rabbit hutches and breaking in animals.

Whilst pupils and farm staff tended to associate the rural dimension with the farm, others had a wider definition of the rural dimension. One stakeholder described it as ‘*a scientific approach to what agriculture and natural history is about really, in a practical sense’.*

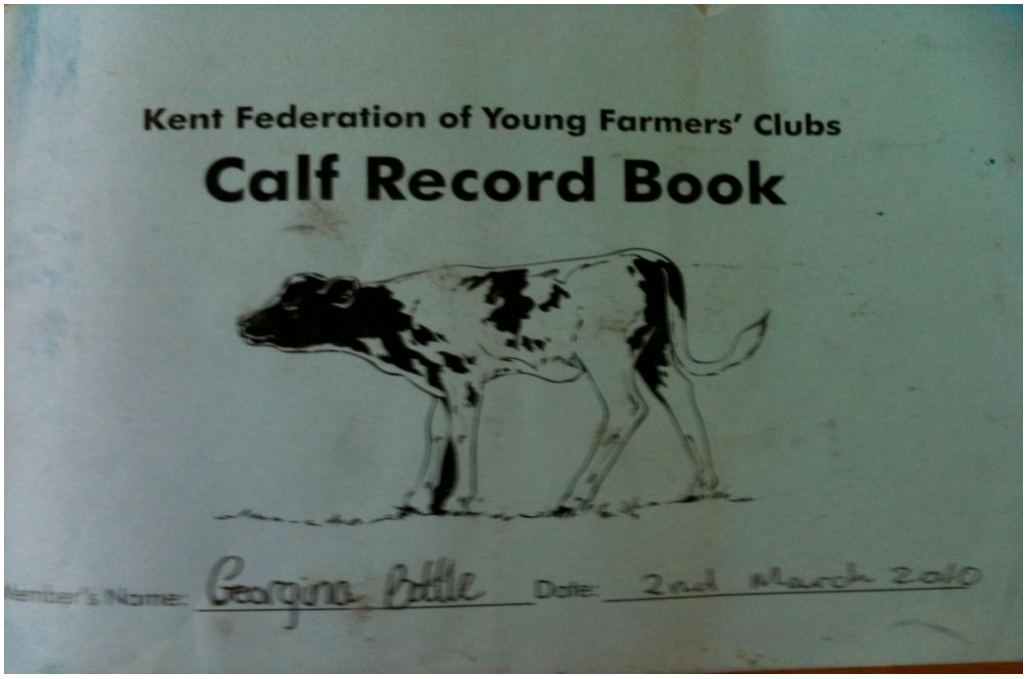
Opportunities for learning outside. There is a belief among farm staff that the rural dimension affords greater outdoor learning opportunities which in turn can enrich the learning experience for pupils and engage them more fully with the curriculum.

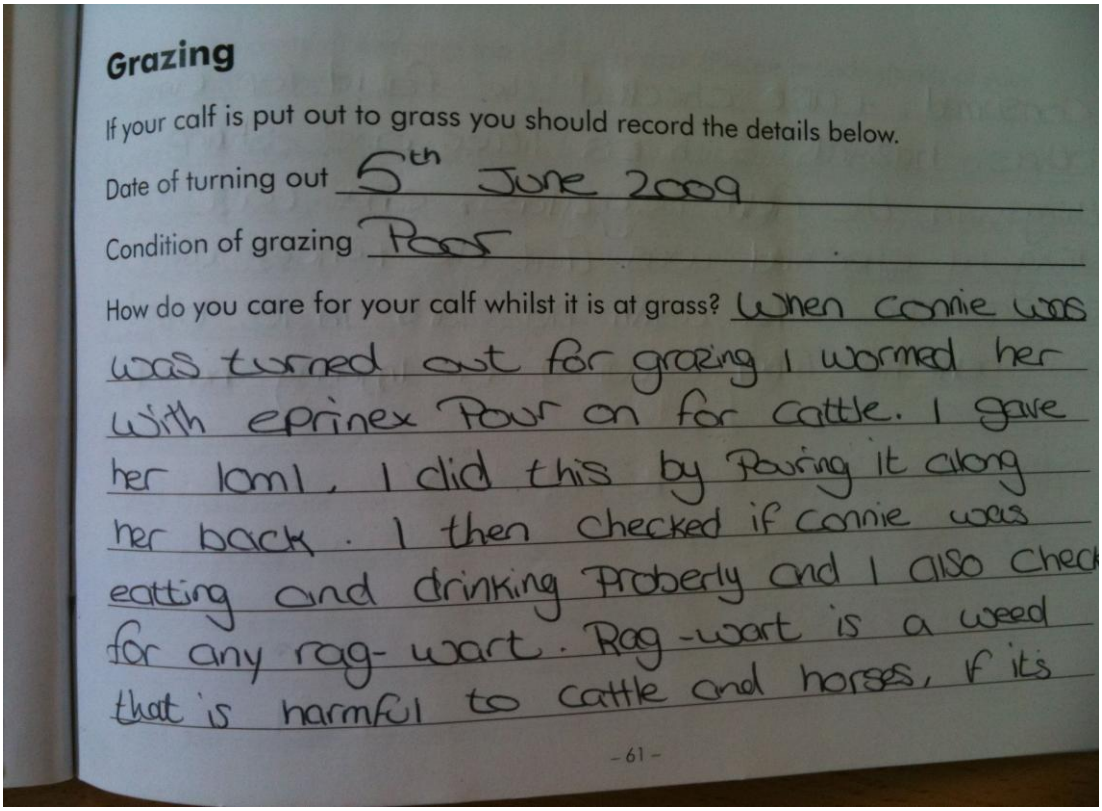
As noted in one internal school document: ‘*a group of “disaffected” low ability year ten and eleven pupils obtained data for their coursework by measuring growth of lambs over many months. These pupils gained GCSE grades D-C in their coursework, which compared with target grades of G-E*’.

The enjoyment associated with this form of learning was most evident from the pupils themselves. Many of these pupils would not easily engage with the Maths and English classes located within the traditional classroom, yet were able to meticulously keep records, for example, for animals that they have taken on responsibility for at the farm. Young farmers are given a calf to rear from two to seventeen months of age. They keep a

journal for this activity which is eventually used as a means of judging them at the county shows. An image of the book appears below:

Record Keeping by pupils





Pupils commented that they enjoyed this form of learning very much, that it '*beats being behind a desk because you can see what will happen'.*

Learning through the rural dimension was associated with not being '*boring'* and indeed beyond that, there was a sense that it was a '*privilege'* to be connected to a farm and be able to attend it for lessons. As pupils commented:

'It is a unique subject.'

'In the class we have different animals you would not get a lot of [normally]'.

'It is not every day you get to walk a cow around [the farm yard] at break-time'.

'We need more rural lessons.'

'I would change it so that there is more hands on work.'

'A good thing.'

'A good subject to learn.'

'I think it is a good thing.'

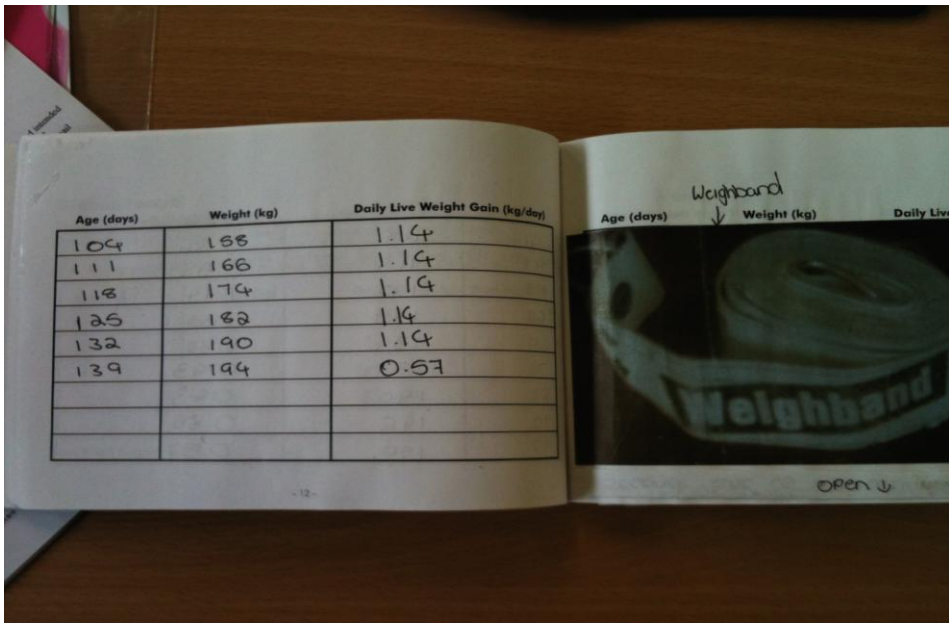
'It is fun, you get involved more. It is not boring.'

I prefer animal care to my other lessons because with animal care you can get involved with cleaning out animals, feeding them and also washing and cleaning the animals themselves.'

Rural dimension and the curriculum. The introduction of vocational courses such as the BTEC in animal management and the environmental and land based studies diploma at Westlands, provided more opportunity for the school to '*move away from traditional classroom learning*' (ref: internal Rural Dimension bid document) and provide courses better suited to the needs and aspirations of many of its pupils. As the vocational farm leader pointed out, '*not everyone can be a doctor or a lawyer and we need* people with hands-on skills'. The BTEC course has a large element of 'hands-on skills' and the farm is used as a learning resource for this. To date, the course has had a 100% A* to C pass rate.

Departments across the school such as maths, art, design and technology have begun to use the farm to meet curriculum needs. The Year 7 farm project, for example, involves pupils applying their maths knowledge to real life problems such as calculating the cost of keeping animals, reading scales and measuring equipment, using advanced maths techniques to calculate tree heights (see the image to the right). The pupils on returning to the classroom used ICT to record and analyse their findings. This real life learning is reported to have been beneficial academically.

Year 7 farm project journal



The farm was seen as a central resource for learning and was used across subjects such as art, maths, biology and art. Pupils said that they greatly enjoyed learning in the outdoors on the farm. When asked if they would like to see any changes to the rural dimension, their responses reflected an enthusiasm for farm and the RD. They asked for '*more funding',* '*more types of animals',* '*more lessons on the farm'* and '*new buildings'*. They also expressed a desire for other pupils and staff in the school to be involved with the farm and to understand more of what they do.

F.3.3 Contribution of, and impact on, school staff

Staff feel empowered to experiment with curriculum delivery and pedagogical approach outside the classroom, and are enthusiastic about doing so:

> *'We have made a conscious decision to look at different ways of delivering it. The fact that we have rural dimension available to us, we can take the shackles off and be freer in our approach to teaching. We, as staff, are not afraid to do something different. You see lessons in the Quad...whatever [staff] think is the best medium for delivering those objectives'.*

The following comment, from a member of teaching staff highlights the contribution that staff feel they can make through the provision of 'real life learning' opportunities:

> *"When you see a child dig up a potato that he has planted several months before and you see him wash it and take it home, you realise that you have made an impact on that child's life. You would not make an impact like that in the classroom."*

There is a sense that the 'outdoor classroom' extends beyond the school into the wider community. Staff explained that the rural dimension gave them a chance to emphasise to pupils '*the fact they are living in the garden of England', 'that within 500 yards of the High Street, we are in the countryside'.*

F.3.4. Community engagement

In addition to allowing pupils to experience 'real life learning', the farm is also used as a community resource for visitors beyond the school. Local community groups and younger children regularly attend the farm and are often shown around by members of the school's YFC. Also, older pupils get the opportunity to instruct younger children about animal care at an annual event called the 'Living Land day' at the Kent Showground. This is an event attended by large numbers of others school pupils and outside visitors. Community outreach events at the farm are often the subject of local media interest.[22]

F.3.5 Leadership of the rural dimension

The farm manager manages the day to day working of the school farm and coordinates the Young Farmers' Club. The vocational team leader has a 'hands on' presence on the farm daily and is also responsible for the development of vocational courses based there. The school also has a member of staff who focuses on development or the rural dimension. The Deputy Head also takes an active interest in the rural dimension and helps ensure that developmental plans relating to this area of the curriculum are taken forward as far as possible. He also helps write bids. The departmental development plan document on the farm (2010-11) conveys the staff's commitment to developing the rural dimension further and '*ensuring that momentum is carried on.'* Further objectives include developing

[22] See: "Cubs come face to face with calves on the farm", www.thisiskent.co.uk".

the BTEC courses to ensure pupils reach their individual targets, to '*develop outside tasks to aid meeting criteria*' and a focus on tasks '*which will pave the way for the development of subsequent areas of sustainability*'.

Specific targets relating to the rural dimension include continuing to build links with other departments such as Maths, ICT, Science as the school moves forward with its 'outdoor classroom strategy'. Art, design and technology already use the farm as a resource. Further objectives are to encourage more community engagement from external clubs, feeder schools and to provide activities to meet visitors' needs. There is also a commitment to forging links with YFCs overseas and entering more food and farming competitions.

F.4 Impact of the rural dimension

Pupils, members of staff and community partners gave their views on the impact of the rural dimension in the school and suggested reasons for this impact during interviews and the reflective workshop. Their comments on impact have been categorised into three main themes: **attainment** (pupil performance and school standards); **behaviour and attendance** (on the part of pupils); and **engagement** (pupil interest and motivation, and raising aspirations among pupils and their families).

F.4.1 Pupil attainment (performance and school standards)

It was acknowledged by staff that making a causal connection between experience of the rural dimension and academic performance was difficult to do. As one school leader made clear:

'*In the same way that our improvement in maths these last six or seven years has been down to lots of factors, you can't just say it is because of that specialism, you have to look at the whole school'.*

Despite this, there was significant anecdotal evidence that the rural dimension and its aspects had made a direct impact on individual pupils in terms of attainment. *S*everal examples were given by staff of pupils who exceeded expectations on the farm site or through vocational courses, whereas in the traditional school learning setting, they could often be disruptive or on the verge of disengagement. Comments such as the following were repeated several times throughout the day in relation to a number of pupils:

> *"I can't believe it is this student's [calving record] book. I can't get her to do anything in my class."*
>
> Students also drew a link between learning that occurred within the context of the rural dimension and their progress in other subjects. As one student put it:
>
> *'I learned how things work in an animal and can use that in another subject.'*
>
> *'We dissected a heart in biology but I had done it [already] on the farm [which] made it easy.'*
>
> *'You can remember things you learned on the farm in other lessons.'*
>
> *'What you learn on the farm, you can apply to lessons.'*
>
> *'Some of the work I do on the farm, I use information in other lessons so it makes me sound smart.'*

One pupil described the rural dimension as '*intellectual*'. "*You learn things that you wouldn't learn elsewhere."*

Pupils were able to identify the other life skills that this form of learning could impact. They recognised that they were able to become more responsible though their involvement with animals on the farm and this '*might help in later life'*. They were also able to directly identify where their learning on the farm had extended into the classroom.

When learning about breeding on the farm in relation to raising cattle for example, young farmers reported having '*to learn about the genes and mixing them'.* They were able to follow up this learning and apply it in later Biology lessons.

F.4.2 Pupil behaviour and attendance

There is anecdotal evidence that the availability of vocational learning through the farm has an impact on pupil attendance and engagement according to staff working on the farm:

> *' It is not quantifiable but we know...we know that students have engaged with the curriculum because of what we are offering them. There is no way about it. There are definitely kids engaged with the curriculum because of the farm."*
>
> *'[named pupil] is such a different kid when up at the farm.'*
>
> *'[named pupil] is totally different up the farm than when in the rest of the school. He is fantastic in that environment.'*
>
> *'[named pupil] is often a pain in lessons, yet up at the farm, she is taking the lead, showing the kids around.'*

This view was echoed by school management:

> *'Many children are engaged at [the] school now because of the farm and more practical subjects.'*

The positive impact of rural dimension activities and outdoor learning was reiterated by pupils themselves as the following comments show:

> *"Some of us come to school just because of the farm."*
>
> *'In [the BTEC] in Animal Care, I enjoy it and I concentrate and never be naughty but in other lessons I am naughty and I get distracted but on the farm I can do what I want to do and I am not always sitting at the desk doing basic work.'*

F.4.3 Pupil engagement

There is little doubt that pupils greatly enjoyed the farm as a resource for learning and that it engaged pupils in the curriculum in a powerful way. It engaged them too, socially, as the farm was often described as central to social activities and a meeting place for the young farmers. The farm could be a place of refuge for pupils. One described it as '*somewhere to escape to at lunchtime'.*

The activities of the YFC entail not only showing animals but numerous social events held over the year, culminating in the YFC ball toward the end of the year. There is also great camaraderie amongst the different age groups involved with the YFC and anecdotes included pupils doing their homework at the farm with other pupils and stepping in to mind each other's animals if a pupil was absent. The farm has a lunchtime and break-time club which facilitates pupils getting to know one another. As one pupil described it:

> *'You can relax, talk to the younger ones [and] find out how they are doing'.*

Pupils themselves were able to identify the positive impact that involvement with farm activities had on their social skills. As one put it:

‘Personally, I have really come out of my ‘shell’, I am more confident and outgoing because of the farm.’

‘My mum thinks that since I have started BTEC Animal Care I have been more alive’.

‘The [YFC] helps when talking to people.’

There was undoubtedly a strong social aspect of belonging to the Young Farmers’ Club which aids the development of social confidence:

“The YFC is a big part of my life...it is good because there is a lot of activities that happen within the YFC. The YFC is helpful activity today as it gives you a hands-on experience of what a farm works like.’

‘*Going to shows with the farm you make friends with kids from other farmer clubs.’*

Young farmers at Westlands are given a great deal of responsibility for looking after animals and they are aware that this has positively impacted on their confidence and on being able to work in teams.

APPENDIX 2: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL FOR TEACHERS OF THE RURAL DIMENSION

Evaluation is a key to effective development – of the curriculum as for teachers. The professional development tools below enable teachers, pupils and other stakeholders to evaluate the rural dimension (RD) in ways that are straightforward yet effective. The tools are flexible, and teachers can adapt them to their specific context and needs.

The first tool supports teachers' curriculum review and development and is informed by the report of which this tool is an Appendix[23] and a model of school development of the RD developed by the SSAT.[24] Using these tools will help schools meet the high level characteristics of the 'transforming' school presented in this SSAT model. The precise nature of the evidence used to complete the first column will vary with the school, but may include one or more of a range of sources, such as a review of documents, teachers' (and pupils') views, images, etc. The second column provides an opportunity to interpret and 'make sense' of the evidence.

Curriculum

	Evidence	***Evaluation of evidence***	***Planning for development***
Shared definition of the RD			
Plans for developing RD			
RD is embedded in the curriculum (across subjects, key stages extra-curricular)			
Resources including outdoor spaces to support learning			
Extent RD supports community engagement			
Use pupils as ambassadors for the RD, within the school and the community			
Recognised for impact of its RD locally, and potentially nationally and internationally			

Other questions may be examined to extend the foci of the evaluation as set out above. The Key Findings of the evaluation of which this is an Appendix, indicate the following two possibilities, and schools will be able to identify others:

- Who is benefiting and who is not benefiting (and who might otherwise do so)?
- Are there groups or kinds of pupils who are not taking the opportunities offered by the rural dimension? What can be done to further enhance its inclusiveness?

[23] Levy, R., Dickerson, C., Weston, K. and Woods, P. (2011) Evaluating the Impact of the Rural Dimension, Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire

[24] SSAT (2011) Rural Dimension Maturity Model**,** London, SSAT

Enabling the voice of pupils to be heard is recognised as a powerful means of engaging them in positive activities, empowering them to shape their experiences and become involved in their communities,[25] as well as supporting school improvement more generaly. Pupils may use the matrix below (which can of course be adapted to the needs of particular contexts) in various ways. These include using or responding to images, writing which is open or structured by teacher prompts, sub-headings, etc. Pupils may find this easier to complete in small groups supported by prompts that indicate the areas of knowledge and skills they are learning. The skills category may be further divided into 'soft' skills such as teamwork and responsibility, and functional skills, such as writing, speaking and use of maths. The category of 'values' may benefit from discussion, which may address issues such as sustainability, land management and awareness of life.

Pupil Voice: learning and application of the rural dimension

	in school	***at home***	***In the community***
Knowledge learned			
Skills learned			
Values examined			
Action I have taken to put RD aims into practice			
My aspirations, hopes, dreams			
Action I will take to develop the RD			

These tools are intended to be one means by which evaluation of the rural dimension may be dispersed across the school community. They provide opportunities for collaboration of stakeholders within schools, but also across schools. Teachers, pupils and all those engaged with the rural dimension will benefit from sharing experiences, and working together to diagnose problems, devise solutions to these, and share what they know about the rural dimension and how it can continue to be developed to promote positive changes for pupils, and others in and beyond the school community.

[25] Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2007) Listening to Learners? Citizenship and learner voice, London, LSIS

REFERENCES

Ashley, M. (2006a) 'Tensions between indoctrination and the development of judgement: the case against early closure', *Environmental Education Research*, 11, 2, 187 — 197.

Ashley, M. (2006b) 'Finding the Right Kind of Awe and Wonder: the metaphysical potential of religion to ground an environmental ethic', *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 11, 88 – 99.

Bradley S., Migali, G. and Taylor, J. (2008) *The distributional impact of increased school resources: the Specialist Schools Initiative and the Excellence in Cities Programme*, Lancaster University Management School Working Paper 2008/022, Lancaster: Lancaster University Management School.

Castle, F. and Evans, J. (2006) *Specialist Schools – what do we know?,* RISE (Research and Information on State Education).

Chapman, C. (2005) *Improving Schools Through External Intervention*, London: Continuum,.

Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., Brown, E., Ahtaridou, E., and Kington, A. (2009) *The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes: Final Report*, Research Report DCSF-RR108, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

DCSF (2009) *High performing Specialist Schools: Final Evaluation Report*, Research report No. DCSF-RR109, London: DCSF.

Exley, S. R. (2009) 'Exploring pupil segregation between specialist and non-specialist schools', *Oxford Review of Education*, 35, 4, 451 — 470.

Foliano, F., Meschi, E. and Vignoles, A. (2010) 'Why do children become disengaged from school?', *DoQSS Working Paper* No. 10-06, London: Institute of Education.

Goodfellow, M. (2005) 'Innovation in Secondary Education: The added value of a community dimension', *REICE - Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 3, 1, 131-145.

Gorard, Stephen and See, Beng Huat (2010) 'How can we enhance enjoyment of secondary school? The student view', *British Educational Research Journal*, First published on: 15 June 2010 (iFirst), 1-20.

Haig-Brown, C. and Hodson, J. (2009) 'Starting with the Land: Toward Indigenous Thought in Canadian Education', in P. A. Woods and G. J. Woods (eds) *Alternative Education for the 21st Century*, New York: Palgrave.

Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2009) *The Fourth Way*, Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Hargreaves, D. H. (2010) *Creating a Self-improving School System*, Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

Kushner, S. (2000) *Personalizing Evaluation*, London: SAGE

Levacic, R. and Jenkins, A. (2004) *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specialist Schools*, London: Centre for the Economics of Education, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Lewis, P. and Murphy, R. (2008) *Effective School Leadership*, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

Noden, P. and Schagen, I. (2006) 'The Specialist Schools Programme: golden goose or conjuring trick?', *Oxford Review of Education*, 32: 4, 431 — 448.

O'Brien, L., Burls, A., Bentsen. P., Hilmo, I., Holter, K., Haberling, D., Pirnat, J., Sary, M., Virbaste, K. and McLoghlin, J. (2011), Outdoor Education, Life Long Learning and Skills Development in Woodlands and Green Spaces: The Potential Links to Health and Well-Being, in Nilsson, K.; Sangster, M.; Gallis, C.; Hartig, T.; de Vries, S.; Seeland, K.; Schipperijn, J. (Eds) *Forests, Trees and Human Health*, Dordecht: Springer.

Ofsted (2011) *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference*, Reference no. 090224, Manchester: Ofsted.

Plumwood, V. (2005) 'Belonging, Naming and Decolonisation', in J. Hillier and E. Rooksby (eds) *Habitus: A sense of place*, 2nd Edition, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Rickinson, M., Dillon, J., Teamey, K., Morris, M., Young Choi, M., Sanders, D., Benefield, P. (2004) *A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning*, National Foundation for Educational Research.

Sammons, P. (2007) School Effectiveness and Equity: Making Connections, Reading: CfBT.

Sinkinson, A. J. (2006) 'The impact of Specialist School status: a case study of two contrasting mathematics and computing colleges', *Educational Studies*, 32, 1, 87 — 99.

Solvason, C. (2005) 'Investigating specialist school ethos ... or do you mean culture?', *Educational Studies*, 31, 1, 85 — 94.

Springate, I., Harland J, Lord, P. and Straw, S. (2009) *Evaluation of the 2008-09 DCSF-funded Specialist Schools and Academies Trust STEM Pathfinder Programme*, Slough: NFER.

Stacey, R. (2007) The challenge of human interdependence: Consequences for thinking about the day to day practice of management in organizations, *European Business Review* 19, 4, 292 — 302.

Suddaby, R. and Greenwood, R. (2009) 'Methodological Issues in Researching Institutional Change', in D. A. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Methods*, London: SAGE.

Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, London: Department for Education.

Woods, P.A. (2005) *Democratic Leadership in Education,* London: Sage