

HBG Investment in Local Communities

Project: Bromsgrove Schools PFI

Client: Worcester County Council

In 2005 HBG were selected as the preferred bidder for the Bromsgrove PFI Schools project which involves the construction of five new schools over a three year period. We were challenged to make the project a learning opportunity for the whole community. Our approach was to use our experience on previous PFI projects to embrace safety, the environment, education and training, community relations and communications, with the driving force being provided by a Learning Resource Coordinator (LRC) who we employed to liaise between our project team, the schools, the local community and the client – Worcestershire County Council.

In October 2005, the LRC met with the schools involved in this project to discuss ways in which HBG could work with the schools over the coming months and years. A programme of activities was identified focussing on safety awareness to ensure that the pupils and teachers would be aware of the dangers associated with having a construction site alongside their school buildings. The LRC and site managers attended a series of school assemblies to explain what would be happening and to prepare the pupils for future site visits. This gave the pupils a fuller understanding of the impact that the project will have upon their day-to-day activities and allowed the project team to minimise disruption as much as possible.

Over the last couple of years the LRC has worked with the schools and the local community on a range of activities, some of which are described below.

- Year 10 GCSE performing arts students wrote a play that they performed to groups of younger pupils during National Construction Week to warn them against playing on construction sites.
- Workshops to highlight real-life applications of subjects being taught in the schools, e.g. our structural engineer explained the principles behind post-tensioned concrete to a group of physics students, backed up by observations of how it was being installed on the site.
- In an Enterprise Challenge developed by the LRC, pupils work through a series of activities that lead towards the presentation of a bid for a small building project. Not only do they have to take some commercial decisions, but they also gain an appreciation of the different roles that are involved within construction.
- We are helping the schools deliver a BTEC First Diploma in Construction– something that is not being offered at local colleges. We have run introductory courses covering safety

awareness and site management, and sourced specialist tutors for brickwork and painting & decorating. We are also locating within one of our site compounds a mobile classroom for use by the students.

- For the fifth year running a major event is being held as part of National Construction Week at Avoncroft Museum of Building. Over the week 750 pupils undertake a series of activities aimed to promote an awareness of construction, including a spaghetti building challenge, bricklaying and wattle & daub. (Photo 1).
- A competition run in conjunction with the Malvern Three Counties Agricultural Society challenged the pupils to consider environmental issues and produce two sustainable gardens that were built at the Three Counties Spring Garden Show. Both gardens won gold medals, and were later re-located within the Bromsgrove community. (Photo 2)
- Communication with the wider community is being achieved through regular newsletters and a website that is being designed and run by groups of pupils as part of their IT coursework. (www.bspfi.co.uk).
- We organised a cricket match between our project team and one of the schools to provide an opportunity to consult about a potentially sensitive issue, as well as raising £1000 for a local charity.

These activities have contributed towards the success of this project. Community relations have benefited as potential problems have very often been resolved through the proactive approach taken by the project team, through the communications channels that have been developed. We are using the Bromsgrove Schools Project as a model for our involvement in other projects around the country, and it is our intention to develop a library of case studies and resources that will be available to any schools or projects.

We have also observed that our employees benefit greatly at a personal level through their involvement in these activities, and it also brings benefits to the business as a whole:

- It helps develop our communications skills, particularly in presenting to groups of people.
- It provides us with a greater understanding of young people, which enables us to provide better support to our own trainees.
- It changes our perception of teachers and gives us a greater understanding of the facilities they require when teaching – and hence improves our ability as a company to design and construct better schools.

- It gives us a better understanding of where the construction process can support or enhance the delivery of the National Curriculum.
- It fosters better relationships between the Client (LEA), the schools (teachers and pupils) and the construction teams – one tangible outcome being less vandalism around the sites.
- It creates a positive image of construction, which will hopefully result in more young people considering it as a career option.

Contact Details

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Children taking part in activities aimed to promote an awareness of construction



Award winning sustainable gardens that were built at the Three Counties Spring Garden Show