

Interviewee: Hannah Sandy-Sharpe, Willowbrook Mead Headteacher

Interviewer: Ryan Mitchell

In three words. How has primary pools made your children feel?

I'd say excited, empowered and inspired.

How has mobile swimming benefited at the school compared to your previous provision?

So it's probably like for like in terms of a cost perspective, however, what we have benefited from is that the primary pool being here has enabled more children to access swimming. So that's a massive, massive bonus for so many of them not ever having access to my lesson before.

How do you think after speaking with some of some of the families at the school, how do you think that this method of swimming has impacted those families?

The families have been really on board and excited by the opportunity. Many of our families that would struggle getting their children to a leisure centre or enrolled in lessons, so it's a bonus for them that it's here on school grounds, and being really clear with that communication and giving them reassurance about changing services and all those parental worries, has alleviated that. And everyone seems to be really excited and on board.

What reservations did you have in your first year of changing to a pop-up pool, and how have we supported to alleviate those?

The first reservations that we had was about making sure it was secure on site we have had anti-social behaviour in the past. However, having seen another school and talking through with you guys, like what that would look like and where it could be based in the grounds, and hope to alleviate that and actually touch wood and we've not have any concerns always in relation to beyond the school grounds. Other concerns that I've had were around mapping out on the timetable the impact that might have on the curriculum, what year groups we could facilitate it with, but actually, working together with the team, we managed to tweak the timetable.

How is the perception different now that the school have had Primary Pools UK service.

I think they all thought, including the premises team, that I was absolutely crazy to even consider it. However, now we're nearly a week into it, I've only had positive feedback from staff who have been buzzing when they've seen a child in their class that's gone into the water the first time ever, or seeing the reaction of the children when they've seen the pool, or the excitement when they come back out and they're all buzzing and talking about it with their friends. So I think it's changed everyone's perspective a lot.

Would you recommend primary pools to others other schools

Absolutely yes. If you can make it work in terms of your grounds and your timetable, I think it is a massive saving in terms of not just financially, the cost of it, but I mean the saving the point of view of the number of staff and the commitment it takes to go to your local leisure centre. That's been a huge benefit to us.

Cost vs Value – where does the school stand?

It's slightly more expensive to have the pool here. However you can say that on the back of that, what I would say is the hours of swimming time is significantly greater. So yes, there's a greater cost, but there's a greater benefit. So you're not spending hundreds and hundreds of pounds on transport, getting staff there, and have so many staff in the change rooms, etc. It's all about getting them in the water actually having some lessons. On top of that, when I say it's slightly more expensive, that's based on one year group going we're now having children from the DSP and years two to six, all having some lessons in comparison to it just being one year group. So yes, when I say it's slightly more expensive than previous years and expects to be, because we're actually teaching a far greater number of children swimming.

In terms of lost learning time, it's significantly reduced. You haven't got the transport costs. They're getting longer in the pool, and so therefore it's benefiting hugely.

Yes, in terms of cover, a Thursday, which used to be our traditional swimming at the leisure centre day, used to be really problematic in terms of cover and releasing that many staff, and being on school grounds and having the staff that are based in the pool has really alleviated that. So that's really helped us.

And what's been the biggest benefit that you've seen

The major benefit is seeing their faces when they first walk in and when they come out, buzzing about the fact the water's warm. And they've done this, they've done that, or the did this for the first time. That feels like a real big benefit. However, longer term, that's kind of the initial buzz, but longer term, it's a really important life skill that we feel passionate at Willowbrook that all children need to have. And I know that the traditional going to the leisure centre wasn't quite hitting that in terms of national curriculum objectives. So that will be, hopefully, the long term achievement.