

## Peace Week at Carswell School

Just before May Half Term, in the week following SATs, Trinity Church organised Peace week for their local school.

Carswell Community Primary School is a one-form entry school for Nursery - Year 6 children, not far from Abingdon town centre. A large proportion of the children are based at nearby Dalton Barracks, and it's a diverse community that includes many Nepali and African families. When the Head agreed to host Prayer Spaces, Peace seemed an obvious theme.

We were anxious that Prayer Spaces should not come across as an isolated event in the school hall, and the Head kindly accommodated this by taking up our suggestion of a "Peace Week". This began with a special whole-school assembly on Monday and finished with Foundation Stage planting poppies on Friday. Further integration came thanks to the staff, who welcomed us into their staff meeting in the week before and enthusiastically took up our ideas for classroom activities around the theme. (This also helped reassure those who had been perturbed by the very religious-sounding "Prayer Spaces" name!)

The prayer gazebos went up in the school hall on Tuesday.

Our six workshops:

- Peace within - stillness - calming jars
  - Peace with yourself- forgiving yourself/fresh starts - wiping away sandprints
  - At peace - letting go of worries - watching the bubble tube
  - Peace with God: thank you - modelling important things
  - Peace with others -forgiving - dissolving Vit C tablets
  - Peace for the world - caring - globe-hugging/post-it prayers on the map
- ...were visited by a class at a time.

Each hour-long visit started with a brief discussion of what prayer is and ended by singing "Shalom" together. Our volunteers, from our own Methodist Church and seven others (Catholic to Society of Friends) were all new to Prayer Spaces and were delighted when we provided scripts, to boost their confidence.

Prayer Spaces was a big hit with staff and students. Each class fed back that they loved the stillness and would like more of it in classroom life. The favourite workshop was, of course, the bubble tube, and it was great to see the relief on the teachers' faces as they left that gazebo! Christian children were delighted to be able to talk about church and prayers, while others felt safe enough to mention family problems that staff had been unaware of. A volunteer, about to have surgery, shared that the event had really helped her, too. Best for me was the privilege of experiencing a group of Year 4 students who crammed into the thank-you tent one very wet lunchtime and lay chatting about positive attitudes to life, as they modelled.

For so many children, being quiet is a punishment, and it was good to enable them to experience it in a different way. We have no doubt that Prayer Spaces will have a lasting impact. Use of a calming jar has already allowed a pupil with anger-management issues to take control and remain in the classroom, while a teacher has asked TrinityLearning if we can do reflective activities with small groups on a regular basis. The Head has also asked for our advice on setting up a permanent reflective corner in the school!

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