

# PREPARING PUPILS WITH LIFE SKILLS - OUR SWIMMING STORY

**G**reat Abington Primary School is a small, rural school with 140 pupils ranging from Reception to Year 6. Despite the clear challenges of being a small school, our ambitions for every child are big and we demand of ourselves the best in all that we do. We are always looking at innovative ways to give our pupils the best possible school experience so that they are well-prepared for the next phase of their school and outside life. Our local community has a chalk stream, and around Cambridge there are many waterways, so our children need to be water safe in life.

Understandably, swimming has been a second thought over the last couple of years but we were keen to provide a swimming experience for all of our children at the earliest opportunity. We knew that pupils would need to catch up as opportunities outside school were very limited, especially for our disadvantaged pupils who rely on our provision at school. We were aware that many of our youngest pupils had not been swimming before whilst our Key Stage 2 pupils had missed at least a year of swimming. Our swimming catch-up focused on enabling Early Years and Key Stage 1 pupils to be water confident. For Year 3 upwards, we wanted to teach life-saving skills and swimming technique. For all pupils, the goal was to encourage them back into the water and to have fun but also to learn and appreciate the hazards that water presents. Our goal was for as many pupils as possible to be confident in the water using a multitude of strokes and to be able to survive in an emergency situation.

One of our new ways to explore learning this year was for our Key Stage 2 pupils to take part in a swimming survival programme. This type of lesson has never been delivered at Great Abington before but we thought it would be essential for our children (no matter how confident they are in the water) to understand how to survive in water. We wanted to achieve a clear understanding of how to swim in an emergency. This is where our survival programme came in and supported all pupils.

Our survival programme took place towards the end of our season when pupils were at their most confident. Our children loved this experience and fully understood how hard it is to swim

in full clothes rather than just their swimming costumes. Only experience can teach you this! The children started by imagining that our pool was a lake or the ocean. We looked at survival techniques such as floating in clothes and how their body position may change over time. We set an ambitious target of 95 per cent of Key Stage 2 pupils being able to float in clothing for three minutes. By the final week the majority were successful.

The next goal for our children was to understand what to do if they did fall in water and there was no help nearby. First, we made it clear that they should never swim alone. To survive in water we looked at slightly different swimming techniques. The main thing was to swim with their heads above water to fully see where they were going. We looked at using breaststroke as our primary stroke to use in the water but also had a go at front and back crawl and explored the benefits and disadvantages of using these techniques.

Finally, we looked at how to help someone else who was struggling in the water. The first rule we discussed was not to jump into the water to help straight away but to call for help, then, secondly, to find something they could throw in to help them to float. Finally, and as a last resort, we looked at how to safely help someone in the water; the children loved to practise this and it constituted a large part of the survival lesson. They naturally found it challenging to begin with but showed great resilience to overcome the challenge. A catch-up club supported pupils who were struggling with confidence. A parent helper with considerable swimming experience supported the sports assistant in delivering 1:3 ratio sessions across four weeks. This accelerated opportunity benefited our weakest swimmers and was immensely successful in levelling up our Key Stage 2 cohort.

All of our swimming sessions were delivered by our sports assistant so that the messages and key knowledge were consistent.

The main impact of our survival swimming programme is that the pupils have gained confidence and knowledge around water safety. The provision will now become a regular part of our programme and we will look to build upon it year on year, looking at a wider range of water sports and the challenges associated with tidal and river flow patterns. The main benefit of this for our pupils is that they will learn that it can be dangerous in the sea or rivers but they will also know why that is and understand what to do if they should ever get into this situation. This is an essential life skill. Ultimately, our vision is that the children will become more confident through undertaking this type of swimming which will, in turn, help their overall swimming skills to become stronger. ■

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