



Community Learning Outreach Project

A Partnership between Giffard Park Primary School and Electra – Milton Keynes Community Boat

“With the canal just opposite our school it means that the waterways are an integral part of our history and community here in Giffard Park. Stepping on board Electra gave our pupils many opportunities to make links across the curriculum in their learning; about electricity, water, our local history and transport, waterway ecology as well as provide a context to discuss pollution and environmental impact. Being onboard Electra brought this learning to life for pupils and made it memorable for them.” Mrs G Wiles, Headteacher at Giffard Park Primary School



Giffard Park School is an all through two-form entry school located in the northern part of Milton Keynes, within 200m of the Grand Union Canal. With 306 children on role the school strives to create a culture of learning, where children are happy, enthusiastic, motivated and ambitious. Our relationship with Electra began in Autumn 2021 when a school governor met the Electra crew, at a community event in Great Linford Manor Park. For a school with a canal barge as a logo it felt like a link should be made between the school and the waterway, and Electra was the modern vehicle that could make this happen.

Initial discussions identified two possible groups that could benefit from the Electra floating classroom experience, the schools Eco Warriors or the Year 4 pupils, who cover canals, waterways and electricity in their curriculum. Year 4 was finally selected as this would have maximum impact on learning and also benefit more children at the school, and the visit was scheduled for the summer term.

The learning project for Year 4

Through a number of Zoom meetings between school and Electra staff, the project began to take shape. It was clear this experience would enable all Year 4 pupils and staff to learn more about their locality through walking the canal towpath, seeing its bridges and architectural features whilst experiencing first-hand how the modern use of electricity can power a canal boat, and enjoy the serenity and local wildlife. This was going to be an opportunity for children and staff to see and experience another side to Milton Keynes, the concrete city!

The logistics

As well as planning curriculum learning, logistical and Health and Safety aspects were also discussed during the Zoom meetings. Electra has a capacity of 12 and Year 4 at Giffard Park has 43 children, with the added requirement of 2 staff per group, there would need to be 5 x 1 -hour cruises (over 2 days), travelling from the mooring point at Gt Linford Manor Park to New Bradwell winding hole (a turning area for boats) and then back. This meant the children would either walk from school along the towpath to meet the boat at the Manor Park and then return to school by coach, or vice versa, coach transfer to New Bradwell and then walk back to school along the tow path at the end of their cruise.



Learning outcomes

The 1-hour cruise itself was an opportunity for the experienced Electra crew to show the children just how it worked. They looked at the engine.... Or should I say circuits, learnt how travel along the canal has changed and were be-friended by a heron who followed up and down the canal. There were ducklings and goslings (the benefit of doing the trip in late spring) and even rain on one of the days didn't dampen spirits. The crew used power point photos to help the children visualise the early days of the canal when horses pulled the boats and the canal was busy with the transportation of goods; there were spotter sheets to help them notice everything of relevance and the crew were great at answering questions.

"As a teacher it was fantastic to explore local education that I could plan around. The children's art was centred around nature and they also wrote recounts in their English lessons. My class was extremely engaged throughout these lessons as they had such rich experiences. In addition, it was lovely to include all children as occasionally some families struggle to fund their children attending trips.

The children absolutely loved the experience they had with Electra. Many children in the year group explained that they had never even seen a canal, let alone go on one! They enjoyed the links with their science topic: electricity, particularly the size of the motor in a boat compared to the ones we use in school. Making real life links in science is crucial to the understanding of the subject. The children also seemed to enjoy the unintended, informal learning from being in the boat. Discussions on animals and habitats (another science topic covered in the curriculum) were heard quite often.

As the environment (and saving it) seems to be quite popular and relevant. The children enjoyed knowing that the boat ran on electricity and was therefore more eco-friendly. The eco warriors in Year 4 fed back to the eco community and seemed to be very keen and interested in looking into ways that we as a school could move towards producing electricity from renewable sources. Again, it was lovely seeing the children naturally and informally discuss their learning. They all seemed to show a genuine love for learning in these moments. Miss Patel – Year 4 Teacher



Learning impact

The children chose to follow up on the experience by including it in their exciting writing books and they also made model electric motor boats in class.

The following are quotes from the children:

"Arriving at the thrilling and relaxing canal boat, then I detected that it was looking like a relaxing class on water."

"What was a chaotic, busy morning transformed into a nice, calming experience which I will never forget"

"Eventually the beautiful boat came to a stop, sadness came over my body as I was upset the boat had stopped. Suddenly I wanted to stay on it for longer"

"After collecting my things for home time, I was reunited with my family again standing on the playground, looking happy. Little did they know I had just experienced the most exciting trip of the whole year!"

Project costs and funding

Electra private Charter – 2 days in May 2022	£345
Coach hire – 2 day charter in May 2022	£375
Total Project Costs	£720

The school applied to MK Community Foundation under its small grants scheme to pilot this project with Electra. We were successful in our application for the total amount, which was fantastic and enabled the project to proceed. There was a commitment by the school to find the funding for future years so this will not be a one-off event, but an opportunity to embed this learning opportunity into the curriculum.

Other funding options that were explored were a grant from the local Parish Council, individual MK Councillor contributions from ward budgets, doughnut sales by Year 4 pupils or a sponsored litter pick, and the school PTA.



The school PTA gave £200 to fund the buying of the electric boat motor making kits, which can be used year on year, and have pledged £500 towards our next Year 4 trip in 2022/23.

“This has been a fantastically exciting experience for the school pupils, staff and wider community. It has not only improved the curriculum learning for Year 4 pupils but provided them with a life experience, something they will hopefully remember for ever.”

Mrs Thakrar, Parent Governor at Giffard Park Primary School