

STEEP LEARNING



"I moved here from the Sea Mills/Coombe Dingle area seven years ago because of rising crime and the schools my kids were going to weren't very good. The crime level compared to the inner city is non-existent. We can go out and leave our front doors open for five minutes without worrying about it. Also, it's fairly relaxed here and it has a good community spirit."

Mark Lovell, 44, lives in Champs Sur Marne



"I've been here 15 years and I love the fact that everything is accessible - including Bristol city centre and the Mall. It's a good base - we are two minutes from the motorway and from there you can go in any direction you like. The district centre is great - and it's only six minutes from where I live."

Kim Forsy, 39, lives in Merryweather Close



"I've been here for four years and moved from Pilning. It's a nice and quiet community with lovely schools and lovely people. There's not a lot of trouble around here. I like it even better now that the new Tesco store has opened."

Kerrie Sharpe, 25, lives in Merryweather Close



"We moved here from South Wales eight years ago because my husband got a job here. We chose this area because the houses were modern and we wouldn't have to do it up. The bus routes to the city centre are excellent. We have a little one and there are so many play groups and the leisure centre is great."

Sandy Benham, 34, lives in Three Brooks Lane



Vision: St Mary's Roman Catholic School head teacher Colleen Collett
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Once-in-a-career opportunity: Dave Baker, head of Bradley Stoke Community School
Photographs: Jon Kent



DAVID CLENSY finds out about the art and the alchemy that's been behind creating Bradley Stoke's school communities from scratch

IT is an experience that most headteachers will never go through during the course of their entire careers - starting their own school from scratch. But as a "new town", many of Bradley Stoke's headteachers know how it feels to start with a completely blank canvas.

"It's very liberating, because you get to create your own vision of how education should be," explains Colleen Collett, headteacher at St Mary's Roman Catholic School, which opened in Webb's Wood Road 10 years ago.

"But the downside to that is that the responsibility to make it work is very much on your shoulders - everyone knows that what you have created is your vision, so if it goes wrong, you're clearly to blame," she laughs.

But Colleen need not have worried about failure when she first started planning to bring her vision to life back in 1999.

Now, a decade on, her vision has been proven to have been successful - so successful in fact, that St Mary's recently made it into the Top 50 primary schools in the country, in the national league tables based on the Key Stage 2 SATs results.

"It was great to find out we were in the Top 50," she says. "But we're cautious about being too proud of that fact. I'm not sure how useful league tables really are."

"Much more important to me is checking that the school is working well on a day-to-day basis - that is, by ensuring that the pupils' experience of life here is positive."

"I want the pupils here to all feel that they are valued as people, irrespective of their academic achievements. I want them to respect each other and be comfortable with their capabilities in the classroom."

"That was certainly my vision of a healthy school when I first walked in here 10 years ago, when it was a new and empty building, that's what I wanted to create, and it's very rewarding to know that's exactly what we've done."

But Colleen says there were also plenty of challenges attached to coming into a brand new school. "You literally have to start from scratch," she says. "So from a practical viewpoint, you have to ensure that everything is there in the building - right down to making sure that there is a sick bucket, in case any of the children feel ill on the first day."

CURVE LEADS TO SUCCESS

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Heart of the community: Pupils at St Mary's Roman Catholic School, which opened in Bradley Stoke 10 years ago and has since made it into the Top 50 primary schools in the country

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Key to success: Chloe Watkins uses a computer in the resource centre at Bradley Stoke Community School

members for that matter) not spotting the fact that the headmaster is heading in their direction. "At first we started off with fewer than 100 pupils, and we have gradually built up the year groups each September," he explains. "But we have tried to maintain the close-knit feel that the school had when the numbers were so low back in 2005."

"This is a landmark year for us, because that first year group that arrived in 2005, is now in Year 11, so will be sitting their GCSEs this year - the school's first ever GCSEs, so we're all keeping our fingers crossed that we'll be getting good results."

Last November's Ofsted report, which marked the school as "outstanding", gives Dave a good indication that he is certainly on the right track.

"We're also building our Post-16 Centre next door, which will allow those founding pupils to stay on to do their A-levels, which is great news."

"The Post-16 Centre will be a joint project with our neighbouring schools - Filton High School, Patchway High School and Filton College. "Subjects will be spread out at all the Post-16 facilities in the four schools, which seems like a sensible and a unified way of doing things. It's sort of like the old Sixth Form College model."

"There's no doubt about it," Dave adds. "On a personal level, coming in and developing a school from scratch like this is a once-in-a-career opportunity, and it's a great honour to play a part in shaping the school at the centre of the community."

"Schools like this really do act as a hub to a relatively new community like Bradley Stoke. Our facilities are used by all sorts of community groups - from church groups to sports clubs."

"We recently became the first school in the country to be awarded a gold standard for 'parental recognition'."

"We specialise in communication and performance here, and that doesn't simply mean that we're particularly good at teaching languages and drama. Communicating amongst ourselves, with parents, and with the larger community is a big part of what a modern school needs to be able to do."

What's your story?

All this week we're featuring news and features from Bradley Stoke in the *Evening Post*. If you've got a story about a community event, business or anything else, call reporter Dan Evans on 0117 9343232 or the newsdesk on 9343330. You can also email d.evans@bepp.co.uk or epnews@bepp.co.uk.

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“ You have the challenge of establishing a new community of people – teachers, pupils, classroom assistants, cooks, parents, school governors – everyone has to come together and that's what gives the school its personality

Colleen Collett, headteacher at St Mary's Roman Catholic School

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