

# CASE STUDY

## BP: ENHANCING LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

This case study outlines the partnership between bp and Reach Academy in Feltham.

### Background

bp has been working with Reach Academy, Feltham (which is both a primary and secondary school) for two years. The project involved Year 6 pupils in their last year of primary school.

**44.9%**

*Pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during the past 6 years compared with 27.7% (national average)*

For 51.7% of pupils, English is not their first language. bp is committed to encouraging young people into STEM education in schools and colleges across the UK, particularly those close to bp sites. As a large employer, bp wanted to play its part in helping to close the STEM and essential skills gaps.

The relationship was initiated through bp's [School Link](#) programme. Through this relationship bp met and worked with a range of stakeholders at the school including members of teaching staff and the Headteacher. Over the years bp has provided the school with mentors, workshops, and work experience.

### What did bp do?

Reach Academy was seeking to engage Year 6 students in the full requirements of the primary



science curriculum, including scientific enquiry, research, and exploration. To do this, the school called upon bp to help create a project which could engage the students through the real- world application of these more abstract concepts in science.

To meet these requirements, bp and the science teacher created a 'Challenging Environments' project developed from a mentoring programme bp has supported in secondary schools. The project focused upon the protective clothing needed to work on different bp assets in various climates across the world. The nature of the climates was investigated, and the properties of the materials were researched. A challenge was set which required the students to create and present a scientific poster to bp which would summarise their findings and recommendations. Parents were also invited to attend.

bp volunteers introduced the challenge to a group of 30 students. The students were split into small groups and assigned a bp mentor to work with them every two weeks over the course of one term. The bp volunteers worked with students each

## HOW CAN BUSINESSES ENHANCE CURRICULUM LEARNING?

week on specific pre-planned research tasks with clear learning objectives, so the students knew what was expected of them each week at the start of the project. The volunteers also shared information about their jobs and real examples of materials' use and scientific enquiry within bp.

### **Impacts and outcomes**

- Pupil attainment in STEM subjects for this cohort was measured far above the national average at the end of the school year.
- Teachers and staff noted a distinct improvement in pupil attitudes towards STEM – especially science – particularly for pupils of high prior attainment.
- Two specific pupils who were previously disengaged from their science lessons showed a marked improvement in their attitudes throughout the project.
- Pupil feedback was positive about both the content and structure of the programme.

### **Adapting to COVID-19**

During the coronavirus pandemic, bp quickly adapted to delivering virtual experiences for students. Building upon the range of resources already available to schools at <https://bpes.bp.com/>, bp launched a range of online activities which enabled interaction with employee volunteers such as the Ultimate STEM Challenge for primary schools and Virtual Work Experience for secondary schools and sixth form colleges.

In 2020, 190 students undertook virtual placements between May and October. Students aged between 15-19 applied and were selected from underrepresented groups based on the quality of their application. bp created content for each week which included 'What Does bp Do?', speakers from different departments across the business and the opportunity to ask questions. The experience also incorporated sessions with HR, CV workshops, interview skills and a presentation workshop. Throughout the programme the students worked on a project and planned a debate on climate change called 'climate speak'. The students

adopted the role of key stakeholders and had debates and shared ideas on the topic. The virtual programme was delivered on Google Classrooms in partnership with the charity Speakers for Schools.

Into the future bp intends to continue delivering virtually as well as online as this has allowed the company to reach many more students that it has ever reached before.

**“I HAVE LEARNT THAT WITHIN THE ENERGY INDUSTRY, ESPECIALLY BP, THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT ROLES AND TYPES OF JOBS – NOT JUST ENGINEERING.”**

*Student attendee, virtual work experience*

### **What was learnt from the programme?**

bp already had a long-term relationship with Reach Academy which gave both parties the confidence to innovate by building upon existing experiences. bp had already been working with the secondary school with the support of the Engineering Development Trust, to develop and deliver STEM projects linked to its business. Over 10 weeks, bp provided mentoring support to the students, conducting a project using microbits to automate a process in their school. bp was able to build upon this and develop a project relevant to the primary science curriculum rather than starting from scratch.

Together, bp and the school were able to adapt existing material to create a project appropriate for the age group. A brief for the students was created which outlined the STEM knowledge they would gain, and the essential skills bp expected students to develop.

**“IT IS CRITICAL TO HAVE BUY-IN FROM THE SCHOOL SO THEY CAN DEDICATE TIME TO WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTEERS AND CO-ORDINATE THE ACTIVITY WITH THE STUDENTS. WITHOUT A PASSIONATE TEACHER WHO BELIEVES IN THE VALUE OF CONTEXTUALISED**

*Business in the Community*

### LEARNING, IT ISN'T POSSIBLE TO DELIVER A PROJECT OVER A NUMBER OF WEEKS"

*Masudur Rahman, bp*

#### *Key learnings for the future*

- Think carefully about the age of the students you are working with. For primary school age children, keep it simple and focused so the content is clear, accessible, and enjoyable for the students to engage with.
- It is important that the teachers remain in charge and the company remains a visitor. Teachers play a key role in supporting students to deepen their understanding of the content between session and practical considerations such as monitoring behaviour.
- Ensure the teachers have introduced the project and set the expectations of the students before the company starts the project. bp conducted a briefing session for students covering what the project would entail, an introduction to bp and what they would learn. However, the students needed time to digest and understand the project before working with bp volunteers and this time should be planned in at the start. This would have made the session flow better, ensured everyone understood the purpose and put everyone at ease from the beginning. At the time, the teacher added in some additional sessions after the introduction with bp to lay further groundwork with the students but going forward the partners will ensure this takes place earlier.

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