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# KYRA CASE STUDY

## BOSTON WEST ACADEMY

 [kyrateachingschool.com](https://www.kyrateachingschool.com)

 01522 527339

 @KYRAteaching



## School in focus: Boston West Academy

**Boston West Academy has been receiving a lot of attention recently. The school's innovative and creative approach to outdoor learning has been recognised far and wide – from case studies in national education publications to receiving awards from key education figures such as Lord Andrew Adonis. The level of interest and recognition is well deserved. Here we talk to head teacher Mike Schofield about his leadership, outdoor learning, and being part of the Kyra family.**



Within weeks of Mike Schofield's arrival at Boston West Academy in 2000 the school was inspected by Ofsted. The news wasn't good. The school was put into Special Measures and Mike – who had left a successful headship at a school elsewhere in Lincolnshire – had a lot of work to do. "There were a number of issues" says Mike "including the inconsistency of teaching and standards and inefficient leadership structures. However the first priority was to address problems with behaviour in classrooms and poor relationships with the community. This was a real barrier to

progress. Once we had good behaviour and strong relationships, anything was possible."

Mike set out to create what he describes as a "small school vibe", creating a culture where relationships with the community and parents were strong and where all staff felt empowered and encouraged to contribute to all aspects of school life. "It required a lot of listening initially – it's important for a leader to do a lot of that early on – even

though I'm quite a talker!" This included inviting parents and the community to the school at a weekend – helping with the gardening, painting and maintaining the outdoor area. "It was a great leveller – parents got to know me and the other staff, the relationships grew and we slowly but surely created a culture of trust." The importance of relationships extended to staff: "I spent a lot of time listening to staff and watching them teach. I needed to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how we could help them to develop as professionals. I also wanted to see who would help me develop and lead the long term vision for Boston West."



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That vision would set the school's direction for the next fourteen years and strongly reflects Mike's philosophy for learning and childhood. "I was really clear that Boston West would be a child-centred school. We did experience poor behaviour in the early days – however I am strongly of the view that children do not set out to behave poorly. Children are made with an inbuilt desire to learn and to explore. In today's modern world, for a whole host of reasons, children tend to spend lots of time in 'boxes' – either their homes, bedrooms (often playing on the games console), or indeed classrooms. Children have far less opportunity for genuine exploration and social learning within a natural environment. It wasn't about having a rose tinted version of childhood – I wanted us to enthuse children to learn in a way that ultimately helped them to become the masters of their own learning."

The most significant opportunity for this came initially with the Eco Schools project and the sustainable schools agenda. Outdoor learning became a priority for Mike and his team and today it forms an integral part of the school's curriculum and children's learning. "It is a minimum expectation that children spend at least two hours a week outside learning. That is over and above playtime and PE lessons. Every aspect of the curriculum is built into the outdoor learning experience – including phonics and Maths. For us, this isn't another initiative, it is in the DNA of our school."

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"Effective learning is practical" says Mike "when we learn by doing we are more likely to retain knowledge and we are also more likely to develop key life skills at the same time." For example, children of all ages are able to put their knowledge of history to use through willow weaving Viking ships and re-enacting their invasions. The outdoor reading area allows children to express themselves through literature and the school's chickens (who are the full responsibility of pupils) provide countless links to the curriculum content for all ages. Practical skills are also encouraged – from building camp fires and dens from natural materials to bush craft skills as

are research skills – with an emphasis on using technology to access relevant information for learning and practical skills. In the near future, Mike is keen to create a 'research hub' at the heart of the school, integrating the library with a range of technologies to ensure children are developing their use of online and offline resources alongside the natural resources at their disposal.

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The risks of outdoor learning are there of course, but managing risk forms a key part of the learning experience says Mike, "Children are part of the risk assessment process together with adults. They are involved in anticipating what may go wrong and how we can all work to avoid potential hazards. They are developing confidence and awareness in equal measure – it's a very powerful combination for the world they will be entering as young adults."

The successful transformation of Boston West into an inspiring learning environment owes much to Mike's leadership and vision. In 2012, Ofsted said of Boston West that "pupils' enjoyment of school is clearly demonstrated by their above average attendance and exemplary behaviour. They willingly take on responsibilities and contribute much to

the school community.... The development of pupils' interest in the world around them makes a strong contribution to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development." This also owes a great deal to Emma Schofield who has been instrumental in its development and the wider team who have contributed to an innovative and ever developing curriculum. The expectations of staff at the school are high, and Mike expects every one of his team to contribute to the wider vision and the extra-curricula activities that make Boston West an inspiring place to go to school. Those expectations have been met with enthusiasm because of the leadership opportunities they have provided and the opportunity to be innovative.

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Mike and his team are keen to share their ideas and learning with other schools across Kyra. "The great thing about Kyra is that we all have something to give and we all have something to learn. As children learn best through practice and by working together, so too do adults. That's the powerful thing - it is exciting to see Kyra develop and create more opportunities to learn from one another in the years ahead."

If you are interested in learning more about the learning environment at Boston West, Mike is happy to be contacted at: [Mike.Schofield@bwacademy.co.uk](mailto:Mike.Schofield@bwacademy.co.uk)

To learn more about how Mike and our other Local Leaders of Education can provide support to other schools, please visit: <http://kyrateachingschool.com/local-leaders-in-education/>





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**Kyra Teaching School Alliance, Mount Street, Lincoln, LN1 3JG**

 [kyrateachingschool.com](http://kyrateachingschool.com)  01522 527339  @KYRAteaching