



Wigan Comino Centre Classrooms in Companies

In 1999 a Comino Centre was established in Wigan Borough Partnership in association with Wigan Education Business Partnership. The focus of the Wigan Comino Centre was Classrooms in Companies and the Wigan Comino Centre, led by Pat Walters as Director, helped to develop these innovative centres over ten years with Comino funding. The first Classroom in Company was sponsored by Martland Mill Newspaper Company with twelve more being established over the period with sponsorship from organisations representing utilities, sport, farming, local government, construction and the environment.

Each Classroom in Company offered a unique learning experience and embraced a range of learning styles. The activities were designed to develop skills linked to creativity, enterprise and employability and were delivered by staff from both industry and education, working together for the benefit of young people whose ages ranged between 3-19 years old. When fully established, 15,000 young people were visiting these classrooms on an annual basis. Typically young people visited a classroom for one day and teachers were trained in GRASP principles to enhance the learning experience.

Each centre aimed to help raise young people's attainment by offering them purposeful learning opportunities through an active partnership between schools and businesses. Typical comments from participants included:

- Pupil - *'Best experience ever - I've learnt more today than a week's work in school - it all makes sense now why we have to learn about circuits - I've seen how United Utilities (UU) make use of circuits in their everyday work. I want to be an electrician with UU when I grow up'.*
- Teacher - *'I have seen one of my pupils in a different light today. He has been more enthusiastic and has focused on the activities far better than in school'.*
- Industry partner - *'I really enjoy working with the pupils and talking about what I do - I feel as though I am being useful in imparting my knowledge and also giving something back to the community. I look forward to the pupils coming into our workplace. It fills me with pride and a warm glow to discuss with them what I do'.*

Groups of young people typically visited a Classroom in Company for a day. A tour of the site is followed by workshops which are led by the employees of the host company in collaboration with seconded skilled teachers. The centres utilised the Comino Foundation approach of "getting results and solving problems" through a wide range of different teaching and learning approaches, providing all learners every opportunity for success.

Amongst the impressive list of Classrooms in Companies established in this period were:

- Wigan Athletic Football Club - housed in the JJB stadium and delivering the curriculum through all aspects of football. Resources included networked laptops and immersive multi-media experiences;
- Western Skills - delivering insights into all aspects of the construction industry to all ages of pupils;

- Leylands Living Farm - providing an awareness of the farmer and the countryside in a free range environment
- Haydock Park - in partnership with the British Horseracing Education Trust, offering the opportunity to view one of the country's most beautiful race courses and work with the designers making jockey silks;
- Pennington Flash - offering a wide range of environmental activities and providing hands on experience of the wetlands and surrounding countryside
- Mesnes Park - a classroom within the park which is currently being restored; pupils were actively involved with the development and plan for its future ensuring awareness of sustainability and responsibility for the park's future
- Worthington Lakes - delivering a programme which raises awareness and influences behaviour, with the intention of conserving resources and protecting the environment. United Utilities was the key partner and supported two other centres:
- Leigh Environmental Education Centre – is owned and managed by United Utilities and provides opportunities for primary pupils to develop their understanding of the water cycle, water treatment and the environment. It also offers an electricity classroom to provide 'hands on' experience of electricity for Year 6 pupils. It also offers a climate change and sustainable energy classroom.
- Hope Carr Barn the flagship of Classrooms in Companies where both a water and electricity programme were developed.
- The Anderton Centre - delivering a young chef programme.
- Three Sisters Recreation Area offers a wide range of environmental activities providing hands on experiences.
- Leigh Centurions RLFC and Wigan Champs RLFC - classrooms based within their respective stadiums, helping to bring together the worlds of rugby and education
- Leigh Town Hall - delivering programmes enabling young people to experience the work of local government and learn about creative citizenship, helping develop the skills of enquiry, discussion and presentation which are vital for informed citizens and voters of the future.

The initiative is described on the leaflet which is published by Wigan Borough Council:
http://www.wiganschoolsonline.net/smi/docs/Classrooms_in_Companies.pdf



HM the Queen being introduced to John Slater, Chairman of the Comino Foundation during her visit to Classrooms in Company

Over the years the Classrooms in Company became the test-bed for numerous educational initiatives that influenced both local and national policies. Classrooms in Company won several awards and in May 2010 Her Majesty the Queen opened a classroom sponsored by Leigh Centurions Rugby League Football Club. In 2009 Pat Walters retired and it was felt that the Classrooms in Companies approach had become firmly established in Wigan and funding from the Comino Foundation ceased.