



CASE STUDY

Sandford Award Criteria 1

The education programmes are delivered in a way that engages, informs and inspires visitors.

Discover how teenage students with special educational needs are engaged through sensory and tactile experiences with Victorian life at Dinefwr National Trust

Dinefwr National Trust, Carmarthenshire, Wales



The Dinefwr site comprises: Dinefwr Park, an 800 acre estate which is both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the only parkland National Nature Reserve in Wales, and includes a medieval deer park which is home to over 100 Fallow Deer; Newton House, owned and presented by the National Trust as the late Victorian/Edwardian home of the Rhys/Rice family; Dinefwr Castle, owned by the Wildlife Trust and managed by Cadw, the iconic remains of a 12th-century Welsh castle, the seat of the influential Lords Rhys who held court at Dinefwr.

The Session:

Nine pupils, aged 14 - 16, from a special needs school for children with learning difficulties, were visiting Dinefwr to take part in a Victorian Servants day. They were accompanied by one teacher and four helpers. They received a very warm welcome when they were introduced to the Volunteer Learning Team - the Butler and three Housemaids - who were all suitably dressed for their roles. After an appropriately short explanation of the plan for the day the children were offered their clothes 'props' - green aprons for the boys and white caps and aprons for the girls. Dressing as servants employed in the House was very popular with all the children except one, who was totally fascinated by the White Park Cattle in the field outside the house, and who frequently had to go outside, throughout the visit, to check on the cows.

What impressed the Sandford Award Judge?

Hands-on tactile and sensory experiences

Three 'hands-on' sessions had been planned for these children:

Session 1: Scent Bag Making

Using dried flowers and essential oils to create a lavender scent bag to take home. This was an excellent sensory activity and much enjoyed by all the children, and they were delighted to be able to take something home.

The children stopped for a short break before going on to:

Session 2: Butler Investigation

Handling and using artefacts and investigating the Butler's room, to try to find out why the Butler has his own room inside the basement of Newton House. The children loved polishing the cutlery (including seeing their own reflections in the spoons!) and brushing (and wearing) the top hats. They were fascinated and very impressed by the Butler's bed that folded up into the wall!

Session 3: Comparison Activity

Looking in several rooms on the ground floor for the Victorian version of items we have in our homes today - telephone, clock, iron etc. For most school groups this would normally involve using a picture sheet of clues but one of the Volunteers had thoughtfully put these images on to an iPad so that all the children could see them more clearly. The children were allowed to sit on the chairs and handle many of the artefacts, which they enjoyed, but by now the children were getting very tired and the session was foreshortened so that they could take a break for lunch in the Old Kitchen, the room reserved for the use of schools for this purpose.

Meeting learning objectives and links to the curriculum

'The pupils, described by their teacher as "a very 'varied' ability group", had individual learning needs, with some following a sensory curriculum. Most had limited speech and were unable to answer open questions. The teacher had requested that as the children were working towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum, all questions should be Key Stage 1 based. "The main focus of the visit is for our pupils to experience a different era and to be able to compare their own lives with how people used to live. We want the pupils to begin to use comparative language, use empathy in seeing how hard people worked, as well as having fun whilst learning." (Class Teacher.) The Learning Team at Dinefwr delivered this superbly.'

Planning sensory and tactile experiences that meet the abilities of SEND pupils

'The children were, as far as their 'varied' abilities allowed, totally engaged with all the activities delivered by a very caring, enthusiastic and professional Learning Team. The teacher was absolutely delighted with the day, describing it as 'fabulous', perfectly pitched for her pupils and, by providing so many sensory and tactile experiences, she said she would return with other groups from her own school and would thoroughly recommend the session to colleagues in other schools. The activities had been very carefully adapted to fit the ability of the visiting pupils, and the timetable altered to take account of their needs. The children all came away at the end of the day having gained positive and memorable experiences they could not have had at school. Whilst I did not see any other school groups on this day I feel confident in thinking that the enthusiasm with which the Team delivered an excellent and well thought out programme could not fail to engage, inform and inspire any school group.'

Every child was warmly encouraged to participate in every activity offered during the course of each session. Individual children, whose needs were at times demanding and potentially distracting to others, were discreetly offered alternative activities instead.'