



SCHOOL SWIMMING:

The Total Immersion way

A school with its own 25m pool is no guarantee pupils will learn to swim

Susan Cheshire is head of swimming at Bancroft's, a co-educational school with 1,000 pupils aged 7-18. When she joined the school in 2011, the pupils were taught swimming using the traditional methods taught to her during her ASA training. It soon became obvious, however, that the pupils were finding swimming difficult to master.

"Instruction focused on pulling and kicking and many were struggling to complete a length," says Susan. "There

were children across all age groups still unable to swim."

During her first year at the school Susan attended a workshop by Total Immersion, founded by the late Terry Laughlin, to help improve her own stroke. "Having been a competitive swimmer, the workshop transformed my swimming," she says. "The logical sequence of learning absolutely made sense." Susan knew instantly this wasn't just for adult swimmers, but for everyone.

Following the workshop, Susan continued to practise the Total

Immersion technique with a level of excitement she had not felt before, developing her understanding further. "I needed to be absolutely certain this was going to work in a traditional school environment," she says.

AQUATIC MAMMALS

In September 2013, she put away the floats and introduced Total Immersion onto the school curriculum. First, the children had to start 'thinking' differently about how humans swim. "We made little reference to pulling and kicking," says Susan. "After all, aquatic mammals don't have arms or legs."

The first lessons, regardless of ability, concentrated on the pupils finding their balance and comfort in the water and learning how to manage their breath. These skills replaced the sinking sensation with the sense of being 'weightless' and supported by the water. "The children immediately became

THE FIRST LESSONS, REGARDLESS OF ABILITY, CONCENTRATED ON THE PUPILS FINDING THEIR BALANCE AND COMFORT IN THE WATER

calmer and more relaxed in the water,” says Susan, “which allowed them to focus on swimming skills.”

Lessons became an opportunity for the mindful practice of the ‘skill’ of swimming. Distance and speed became an outcome and not the focus. As the pupils grew in confidence and became more engaged in lessons, they began asking questions and discussing the science of swimming. “The children were improving faster than I had anticipated,” says Susan.

“Taking apart my stroke and rebuilding it step by step, as well as understanding the science behind the technique, has transformed my swimming and allowed me to compete,” says Year 10 pupil Eleanor Channer. “I feel so confident in my swimming that I now swim in the sea on holiday.”

COMFORTABLE AND CONFIDENT

Today Susan is a Level 3 Total Immersion coach and the programme continues to evolve. “The vast majority of pupils are now comfortable and confident in the water,” says Susan. “They are more efficient swimmers and the overall standard of swimming continues to improve.”

Jonty Pollard, head of physical education at the school, agrees. “We were failing pupils previously,” he says. “We had numerous, quite often athletic, pupils unable to swim 25m or who remained in fear of the water, even up to Year 10. We put this down to lack of time and resources. Total Immersion swimming has been the most significant development to the PE Curriculum that I have witnessed in 20 years of teaching.”

The number of swimmers attending after-school training has increased significantly and last year 97% of Bancroft’s Year 4 pupils achieved 25m and 61% of Year 6 pupils swam 200m. “I look back at a career of ‘splash and dash’ teaching with nothing but regret,” says Jonty.

As well as increased participation in inter-house galas, pupils continue to swim outside of school, taking up open water swimming, triathlon and joining local swimming clubs.

“Total Immersion is a significant and brilliant progression in teaching swimming and I value it as one of the most important things in school,” says Kemi Ogunremi, a 2017 Sixth Form leaver. “I am still improving and I hope to swim a lot more in the future.”

More info: susancheshire.co.uk
totalimmersion.net

SUSAN’S SWIMMING LESSONS

One of our 75 swimmers. Swimmers developing a relaxed, balanced and aligned body position with well integrated body movements.



One of the biggest things that we have introduced over the last few years for our 7+ swimmers is working in pairs to take the role of swimmer and coach. This has really allowed them to cement their learning and understanding. Helped improve their communication and observational skills.



Stroke Timing to help swimmer maintain a patient lead arm as they post their front arm encouraging front quadrant timing early on in their development

Torpedo – this teaches balance, alignment and core stability

