

The Farmer

Ryan Bigger has worked as the shepherd at the Royal Veterinary College, Boltons Park Farm for the past three years. Previously, he worked on a mixed farm in New Zealand and as an intensive pig farmer in Shropshire. He graduated from Harper Adams University in 2014. Ryan became involved in the FaceTime a Farmer initiative after responding to a post from LEAF Education on social media.

The School

Langley Park Primary Academy, part of Leigh Academies Trust, in Kent is a relatively new school, opening in September 2016. The school decided to become involved in the LEAF Education FaceTime a Farmer initiative in order to inspire their pupils and to learn more about where their food came from.

Currently, the Reception children have been working with Ryan and are thoroughly enjoying the experience. Rebecca Bye, the class teacher, uses a blog to update parents on what has happened in each session and she admits that she is also learning with the children during the sessions.

The Sessions

Before each session, Ryan and Rebecca make contact to discuss what the children are learning, Ryan then has some guidance on what to talk about. The children are also encouraged to develop their speaking and listening skills by thinking of questions to ask Ryan.

Rebecca stated, "Ryan is super at answering some of the trickier questions, for example, when the children asked why the eggs didn't have chicks in them!"

During one session, following a school lunch of chicken, the children were able to talk to Ryan about chicken meat. The children were curious if their lunch would have come from a chicken like the ones on Ryan's farm. Ryan was able to tell them that his chickens were egg laying ones and that they would have eaten a different type of chicken.

Throughout the sessions, Ryan is kept very busy visiting different parts of the farm to show the children via Skype and introducing them to some new words, which is a vital part of the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) curriculum. The children have also witnessed the changes on the farm as the seasons change which again encourages key learning.

Following on from each session Rebecca creates opportunities for the children to show what they have learned within their early year's classroom setting. The children have made models of tractors and scarecrows and have planted bulbs to compare to how a farmer grows their crops.

The children, aged four and five, are enthusiastic participants in the project, comments include: -

"I like it, he says lots of things about lots of animals."

"We learnt about chickens, they have special chickens which get killed to eat, not the ones that lay eggs."

"We learnt about sheep. They've got special stuff on them to make them warm in the winter."

" We watched the tractor crunch the seeds."

Impact

Langley Park Primary Academy believe that their children are very lucky to have their own farmer to talk to, subsequently providing different opportunities for learning.

Ryan is enjoying his participation in this project, "I find Facetime a Farmer extremely rewarding as I can provide an insight into agriculture that some of the children wouldn't have previously been able to experience and show them where their food comes from in the UK. It's always a joy to see the kids get excited about what's happening in the background and how the farm changes throughout the seasons"

Rebecca cannot praise the project enough, "I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience of FaceTiming our farmer and have learnt just as much as the children about the animals and what it is like to work on a farm. I have been very impressed with how kind Farmer Ryan is with the children, never dismissing their slightly odd remarks and sensitively answering other rather tricky questions. He always enquires what the children are learning about and tries to tie in the session with our topic. After each weekly session the children always come back to class with a real buzz, desperate to tell their friends about what they saw and what new things they have learnt. I've realised how mature our children can be when discussing the eating of animals but also how they genuinely care about seeing crops and animals grow. It has been a fascinating journey and we're so happy with the learning opportunities and experiences the children are having because of it. We have a lot to thank Ryan for and look forward to continuing our relationship with him.

Further information about this initiative and how your school or farm can become involved can be found at www.leafuk.org/facetimeafarmer

Contact: Julie.Neale@leafuk.org

Thank you to Royal Veterinary College, Boltons Park Farm and Langley Park Primary Academy, part of Leigh Academies Trust



