



SCHOOLS GUIDE

2026

# Our Merthyr Our Stories

MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY COUNCIL

MORE THAN FLAGS AND RAINBOWS CIC



# INTRODUCTION

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for taking the time to explore this resource.

I have spent many years working in schools, first as a teacher and then as a senior leader, and one thing has always stayed with me. The curriculum is one of the most powerful tools we have. It shapes how young people see the world, but also how they see themselves and their place within it.

Too often, I have seen diversity treated as something separate. It appears in assemblies, themed weeks or specific lessons, but not always in the everyday experiences of learning. When this happens, it can feel like an add-on rather than something that is part of the fabric of school life.

This resource has been created to support a different approach.

It is about helping you to plan learning that reflects the communities you serve, using people, places and events from Merthyr Tydfil and the surrounding area. It is about making learning feel relevant and meaningful for pupils, so that they can see connections between their lives and what they are learning in the classroom.

Alongside this pack, you can explore the online platform at [www.ourmerthyr.cymru](http://www.ourmerthyr.cymru). The website includes an interactive map of people, places and events, along with key information and prompts to support your planning. It is designed to work hand in hand with this pack, giving you flexible ways to build your curriculum.

It is also about broadening the stories we tell. Young people should learn about a wide range of people, not only through moments of challenge or injustice, but through their achievements, contributions and everyday lives.

This work is not about getting everything perfect. It is about taking small, thoughtful steps to build a curriculum that feels more inclusive, more representative and more connected to the world around your pupils.

I hope this pack, alongside the website, gives you practical support, useful starting points and the confidence to try something new. Most importantly, I hope it supports you in creating learning experiences where every pupil can feel that they belong. Thank you for the work you do every day.

Ian Timbrell  
Founder, More Than Flags and Rainbows

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project has been developed to support teachers in Merthyr Tydfil to plan learning that is relevant, engaging and reflective of the communities they serve.

At its core, the project brings together local people, places and events to help teachers build curriculum experiences that feel meaningful to pupils. By using role models and stories from the local area, learning becomes more connected and helps pupils to better understand both their history and their place within it.

To shape this work, we brought together teachers, libraries, charities and community organisations from across Merthyr. This collaboration allowed us to explore what is already happening in schools and where there are opportunities to strengthen practice.

During this session, practitioners shared a number of common experiences. Many spoke about the importance of inclusion, but also the challenge of embedding it consistently across the curriculum. Diversity was often present, but not always integrated into everyday teaching. Instead, it was sometimes linked to specific events, themed days or particular subjects.

There was a clear appetite for practical support. Teachers wanted:

- accessible, local examples of people, places and events
- support with planning, rather than additional standalone content
- approaches that could be adapted across different subjects and age groups
- guidance that builds confidence, not workload

This project has been designed in response to those needs.

The teacher pack you are reading provides the guidance, structure and planning tools to support curriculum development. Alongside this, the website offers an interactive way to explore local content and generate ideas for learning.

Together, they are intended to support a curriculum that is rooted in place, rich in representation and flexible enough to work in different school contexts.

This is a starting point. The project will continue to grow over time, with new content and contributions from schools and communities helping to expand what is available.





## WHY THIS MATTERS

In many schools, there is a genuine commitment to inclusion.

We see this in assemblies that celebrate difference, in themed days or months, and in lessons that explore important topics such as racism, homophobia or other forms of discrimination. These moments matter. They help pupils to understand fairness, challenge harmful behaviour and develop empathy.

However, this is often where diversity sits.

It can become something that is visited at certain times of the year or within specific subjects, rather than something that is part of everyday learning. When this happens, it can unintentionally separate people and experiences from the wider curriculum.

Pupils may come to associate diverse people only with struggle or injustice. They may not see them as scientists, artists, leaders, local figures or people with full and varied lives. This can limit how pupils understand both others and themselves.

This project is built on a simple principle.

### **We should teach with diversity, not only about diversity.**

This means that diversity is present throughout the curriculum, not just in isolated moments. It is woven into topics, projects and everyday teaching so that it becomes a natural and expected part of learning.

It is important to be clear about what this does and does not mean. This is not about removing teaching on racism, homophobia or other forms of discrimination. These are essential areas of learning and must continue to be taught. It is about balance.

Alongside this, pupils should also learn about people through their achievements, their work, their communities and their lives. They should encounter a wide range of individuals in different contexts, not only when learning about inequality or injustice.

By doing this, we support pupils to develop a broader and more accurate understanding of the world. We also create more opportunities for pupils to see themselves reflected in what they learn.

This resource has been designed to help make that approach practical. By using local people, places and events, it supports teachers to build learning that is both inclusive and relevant, without adding unnecessary complexity.

It is not about adding more to the curriculum. It is about thinking differently about what is already there.



# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIVERSE ROLE MODELS?

In this project, a diverse role model is not defined by one single characteristic.

Instead, it is about building a rich and balanced picture of people from Merthyr Tydfil and the surrounding area. This means including individuals from different backgrounds, experiences and time periods, so that pupils encounter a wide range of stories and perspectives through their learning.

People should have a clear connection to Merthyr Tydfil or the surrounding area.

This helps pupils to see that history, achievement and influence exist within their own community.

LOCAL AND RELEVANT

Role models are drawn from different time periods. This includes both historical figures and more recent individuals.

It helps pupils understand how the community has changed and developed over time.

ACROSS TIME

This includes a range of life experiences, including class, upbringing and opportunities

It is important that pupils see people from backgrounds similar to their own, as well as those that are different.

DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

Including people with visible and non-visible disabilities.

Ensuring that achievement and contribution are not limited by how people are often represented.

DISABILITIES

A balance of men, women and people of different genders.

This helps to challenge assumptions about who can succeed in different fields.

GENDERS

Representation of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting both local diversity and wider connections. The story of these people should be told, outside of where they come from or what challenges they faced.

ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

Individuals are not included for one aspect of their identity alone

Pupils should learn about their achievements, work and lives, not only their identity.

MORE THAN ONE STORY

Human beings are complex and have positive and negative impacts on society.

Role models are presented as such and their decisions and actions can be interpreted in different ways.

COMPLEXITY AND NUANCE



## A BRIEF HISTORY

Merthyr Tydfil has a rich and powerful history shaped by industry, community and change. It is often known for its role in the Industrial Revolution, when it became one of the most important iron-producing towns in the world.

However, this history is often told in a narrow way, focusing mainly on industry and production. Less attention is given to the diverse communities of people who lived and worked here, the different backgrounds they came from, and the lives they built beyond the ironworks.

Merthyr's story is not only about industry. It is about people, movement, culture and resilience. It is also about how the town has changed over time, particularly following the decline of heavy industry, and how communities have continued to adapt and grow.

This overview offers a starting point for exploring that wider story.

### Early Origins

Named after Saint Tydfil, a Welsh princess believed to have lived in the 5th century, Merthyr began as a small rural settlement shaped by farming, faith and local community life. Its early identity was strongly influenced by Welsh language, culture and religion, laying the foundations for the town's future development.

### Industrial Growth

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Merthyr became a global centre for iron production. Major ironworks such as Dowlais, Cyfarthfa, Plymouth and Penydarren transformed the area, creating jobs and attracting people from across Wales, England and beyond. This rapid growth turned Merthyr into a busy, diverse and internationally significant industrial town.

### A Place of Innovation

Merthyr was not only a centre of industry, but also of innovation. In 1804, Richard Trevithick's steam locomotive completed the world's first steam-powered railway journey from Penydarren, marking a major moment in technological history. This spirit of innovation helped place Merthyr on the world stage.

### Community and Protest

Industrial life brought opportunity, but also hardship. Many workers faced difficult conditions, low wages and limited rights. In response, Merthyr became a place of protest and resistance. The Merthyr Rising of 1831 remains one of the most significant moments in Welsh social history, as workers stood up against inequality and injustice.

## **Our Merthyr Our Stories**

### **Merthyr in the 20th Century**

The 20th century brought major change to Merthyr Tydfil.

As traditional heavy industries declined, many communities faced unemployment, poverty and uncertainty. The closure of ironworks and coal industries changed not only the economy, but also daily life for thousands of families.

At the same time, Merthyr continued to be shaped by migration and new communities. Families from Italy, Ireland and other parts of the world contributed to local business, culture and community life, adding new stories to the town's identity.

Merthyr also experienced moments of deep tragedy, most notably the Aberfan disaster in 1966, when a coal tip collapse devastated a local community and had a lasting impact on Wales and beyond.

Despite these challenges, Merthyr remained a place of resilience. Communities adapted through new industries, strong local networks and continued pride in the town's identity.

### **Merthyr Today**

Today, Merthyr Tydfil is a town that continues to evolve.

While its industrial past remains an important part of its identity, Merthyr is also shaped by education, arts, sport, business and community activism. Local organisations, schools and cultural spaces continue to redefine what Merthyr represents for new generations.

Modern Merthyr is home to stories of creativity, diversity and ambition. From local entrepreneurs to artists, athletes and community leaders, the town continues to produce people who shape Wales and beyond.

For many young people, understanding Merthyr today means recognising both its proud history and its ongoing transformation. It is a place where heritage and future possibilities exist side by side.

### **Why This Matters**

Understanding Merthyr's history helps pupils to see their community in a broader way.

It encourages them to explore:

- how communities change over time
- how industry can shape identity
- how migration and diversity contribute to local life
- how communities respond to challenge and change
- how local history connects to national and global stories

By exploring Merthyr's full story, pupils can develop a richer understanding of the town, its people and their own place within its continuing journey.





# TEACHING WITH DIVERSITY

This resource is built on a simple but important idea.

**Diversity should be part of everyday learning, not something that sits separately from it.**

When diversity is embedded across a topic or project, pupils are more likely to develop a deeper understanding of people, places and events. They are able to see individuals in context, rather than as examples linked to one aspect of identity.

This approach helps pupils to build broader knowledge, challenge assumptions and develop a more meaningful understanding of the world around them.

## **What Do We Mean by Teaching with Diversity?**

Teaching with diversity means including a range of people, perspectives and experiences as a natural part of curriculum planning. Rather than adding separate lessons about difference, diversity is built into what is already being taught.

For example:

- learning about a local entrepreneur as part of business or enterprise
- exploring a historical figure within a wider timeline
- including different voices and lived experiences in literacy

Diversity becomes part of the story, not the entire topic.

## **Moving Beyond One-Off Approaches**

In many schools, diversity often appears through:

- assemblies
- awareness days or themed months
- isolated lessons

These can be valuable, but on their own they can sometimes:

- separate people from the wider curriculum
- reduce learning to a single issue
- create tokenistic experiences
- limit pupils' understanding of context

Embedding diversity across a sequence of learning allows pupils to revisit ideas, build knowledge and make deeper connections over time.

## **Seeing People in Full**

When we teach with diversity, we move beyond single stories.

Pupils should learn about people:

- through their achievements
- through their work and contributions
- through the communities they shaped
- through the historical and social contexts they lived in

This helps prevent people from being defined only by struggle, discrimination or one part of their identity.

## **Building Meaningful Local Connections**

Using people, places and events from Merthyr Tydfil and the surrounding area makes learning more relevant.

This helps pupils to:

- connect learning to their own lives
- recognise the value of their local community
- understand that history, innovation and influence exist close to home
- develop pride and belonging

Local learning can often make wider national or global themes feel more accessible.

## **A Balanced Curriculum**

Teaching with diversity does not mean avoiding difficult topics.

Pupils still need to learn about:

- racism
- homophobia
- inequality
- injustice

These are essential parts of education.

However, they should sit alongside a broader curriculum where pupils also encounter diverse people through success, creativity, leadership, entrepreneurship and everyday life.

This creates balance and helps pupils understand people more fully.

## **What This Looks Like in Practice**

Across a well-planned topic or project:

- diversity is embedded naturally
- multiple perspectives are explored
- context is built before conclusions are drawn
- pupils are encouraged to question assumptions
- discussion is used to challenge stereotypes and misinformation

This approach supports richer learning, deeper thinking and more meaningful representation.

## **Why This Matters**

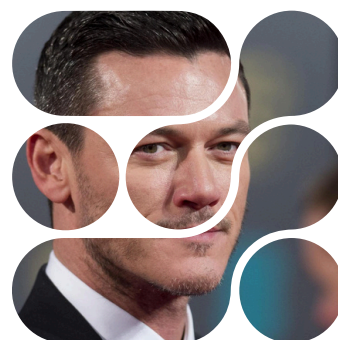
Teaching with diversity helps pupils to understand that communities are shaped by many different people, experiences and contributions.

It supports a curriculum that is:

- more inclusive
- more accurate
- more connected
- more relevant

Ultimately, it is not about adding more content.

It is about thinking differently about the content that is already there.





# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

VISIT [WWW.OURMERTHYR.CYMRU](http://WWW.OURMERTHYR.CYMRU) AND USE THE INTERACTIVE MAP TO EXPLORE PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS FROM MERTHYR TYDFIL AND THE SURROUNDING AREA.

EACH ENTRY INCLUDES KEY INFORMATION, CONTEXT, SOURCES AND AN AI PROMPT TO SUPPORT PLANNING.

## CHOOSE A STARTING POINT

SELECT A PERSON, PLACE OR EVENT THAT CONNECTS TO YOUR CURRICULUM. THIS MIGHT LINK TO HISTORY, LITERACY, SCIENCE, ENTERPRISE, ART OR WIDER PROJECTS  
CHOOSE SOMETHING THAT FEELS MEANINGFUL TO YOUR PUPILS AND YOUR PLANNING GOALS.

## USE THE PROJECT PROMPT OR CUSTOM PROMPT

THE PROMPTS ALLOW YOU TO CREATE A SERIES OF LESSONS AND GENERATE IDEAS SUITABLE FOR YOUR PUPILS  
ADAPT THESE TO SUIT YOUR PUPILS, CONTEXT AND CURRICULUM.

USE THE PLANNING TEMPLATE TO BUILD A SEQUENCE OF LEARNING, RATHER THAN A ONE-OFF LESSON.

### CONSIDER:

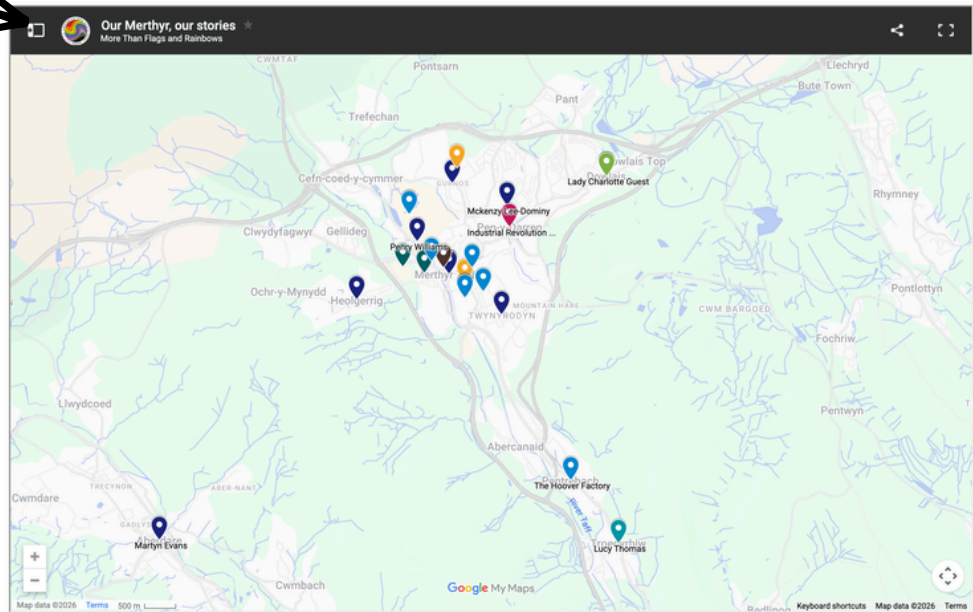
- WHAT PUPILS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE TIME, PLACE OR CONTEXT
- WHAT SOCIAL, POLITICAL OR CULTURAL FACTORS MATTER
- HOW LEARNING WILL BUILD OVER TIME
- HOW DIFFERENT SUBJECTS OR AREAS OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE CONNECT
- WHAT THE FINAL PRODUCT WILL BE

THE GOAL IS TO HELP PUPILS UNDERSTAND SIGNIFICANCE, NOT JUST FACTS.

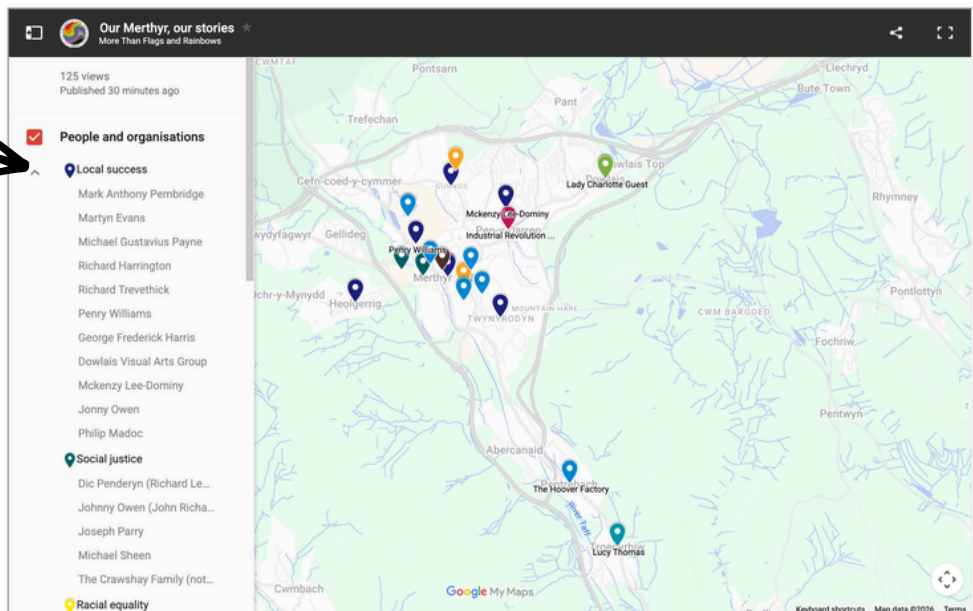


# HOW TO USE THE MAP

Click on this icon to open the menu to see all items on the map



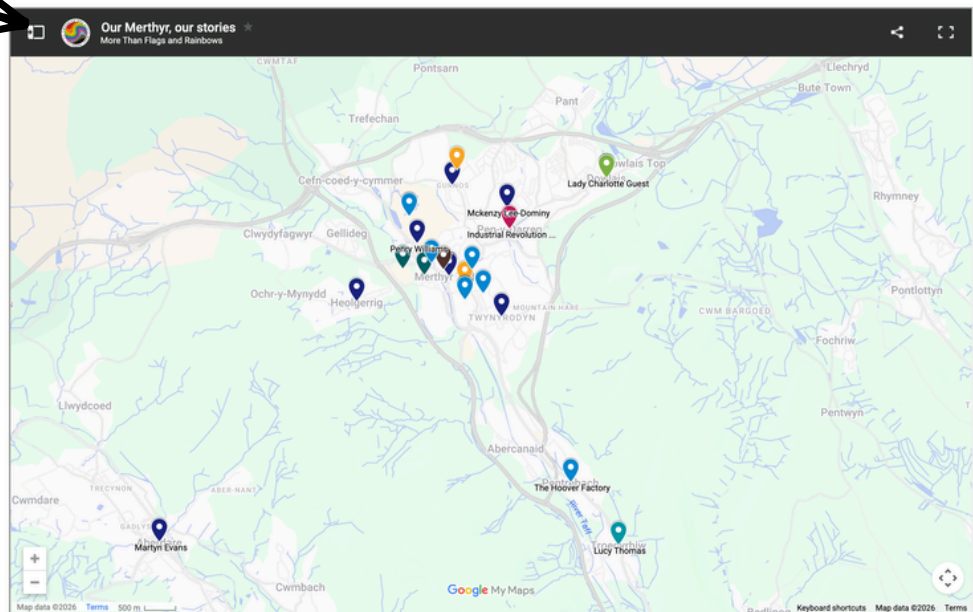
Click on this arrow to open up the full list and click on a name to see their story, links to external sites and AI prompts to help you with planning



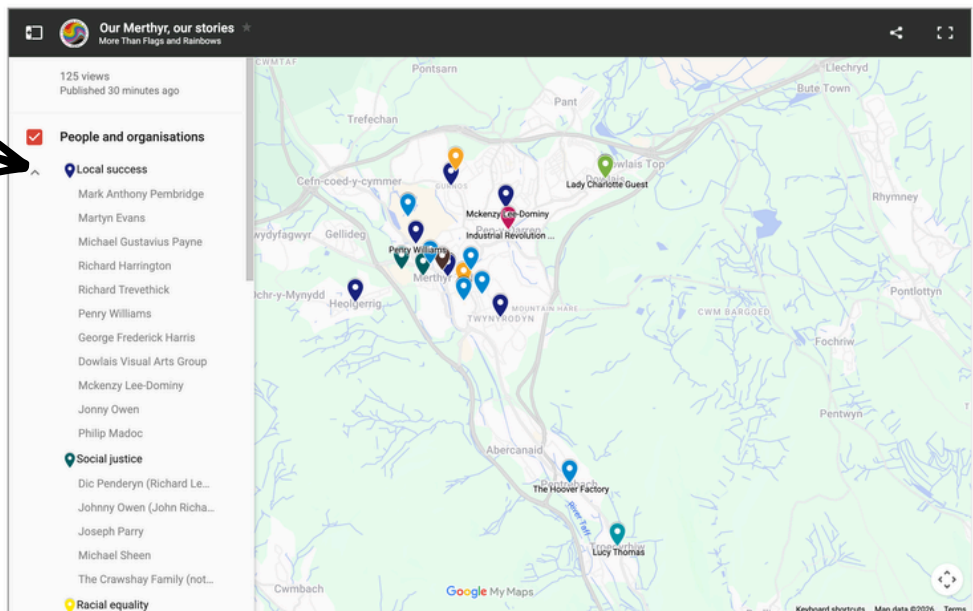


# HOW TO USE THE MAP

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# USING AI TO SUPPORT PLANNING

Artificial Intelligence can be a useful tool to support curriculum planning. It can help generate ideas, structure projects, adapt activities and provide starting points for exploration. In this resource, AI is intended to support your thinking, not replace it.

The website includes suggested prompts linked to people, places and events to help you begin planning. These are designed to save time, encourage creativity and support wider curriculum connections.

## How AI Can Help

AI can support early planning by helping you generate lesson ideas, structure sequences of learning, adapt activities for different learners and create questions that encourage discussion. It can be particularly useful when exploring possibilities or making links between local stories and wider curriculum themes.

## Using AI Effectively

The quality of AI responses often depends on the quality of the prompt. Being specific usually leads to stronger results.

For example, rather than asking, **“Plan a lesson about Charlie Speroni,”** you might ask, **“Create a sequence of lessons for 10- 11 year olds about entrepreneurship using Charlie Speroni as a starting point. Include historical context, local relevance and opportunities for discussion.”**

The clearer your request, the more useful the response is likely to be.

## Your Role as the Teacher

AI does not replace professional judgement. You know your pupils, curriculum and context. AI should support your planning, but all content should be reviewed, adapted and refined to ensure it is appropriate, meaningful and connected to your wider learning goals.

## Checking for Accuracy

AI can sometimes produce inaccurate or misleading information, so it is important to check facts carefully.

When using AI:

- verify dates, quotations and historical details
- check information against trusted sources
- use website references as a starting point
- avoid relying on information that cannot be confirmed

This is especially important when teaching about real people, places and events.

## Keeping Learning Meaningful

AI can generate ideas quickly, but meaningful learning still depends on thoughtful teaching. Strong curriculum design focuses on building context, sequencing knowledge, creating opportunities for discussion and helping pupils think critically. AI can support this process, but it is your expertise that ensures learning is accurate, relevant and impactful.



# SUSTAINABILITY AND ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

This resource is designed to grow over time.

The people, places and events included here are a starting point, not a finished list. Merthyr Tydfil has a rich and evolving history, shaped by many communities, experiences and contributions. As new stories are shared, this resource will continue to develop and reflect the full breadth of the area it represents.

## **A Growing Resource**

New entries will continue to be added to the website, helping to expand the range of local role models, historical moments and significant places available to schools.

This means the project can remain relevant, responsive and reflective of both Merthyr's past and its present.

## **Your Role in Shaping the Resource**

This project has been built with community in mind.

Teachers, schools, families and local organisations are encouraged to contribute ideas for additional people, places or events through the website submission form. These suggestions can help ensure that important local stories continue to be recognised and shared.

All submissions will be reviewed before being added, helping to maintain quality and suitability for schools.

## **Maintaining Quality and Trust**

More Than Flags and Rainbows (MTFAR) will continue to oversee and maintain the project. This includes reviewing new submissions, updating information where needed and ensuring that content remains accurate, relevant and supported by reliable sources.

While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, teachers should always review and verify information, sources and AI-generated content before using it in the classroom. Professional judgement remains essential when planning learning for pupils. This ongoing review helps ensure that the resource remains trustworthy for teachers and meaningful for pupils.

## **Looking Ahead**

Our Merthyr, Our Stories is about more than a single website or teacher pack.

It is part of a wider commitment to supporting curriculum development that is rooted in local context, encourages critical thinking and utilises diversity through everyday teaching.

As the project grows, it will continue to support schools in creating learning experiences that are connected, inclusive and reflective of the communities they serve.

## **A Shared Story**

Merthyr's story is still being written. By continuing to explore, contribute and build this resource together, schools and communities can help ensure that future generations understand not only where they live, but the many people, stories and experiences that have shaped it.

# RESOURCES TO HELP

More Than Flags and Rainbows CIC is dedicated to helping schools and communities become more inclusive for all. We have produced these resources to help you work with families. If there are resources that you feel would be helpful, please contact us and we would be happy to help.



## Training and Support

We offer inclusive education training for school staff, governors, and community groups. Our sessions are practical, honest, and rooted in real classroom experience. Whether it's a whole-staff INSET or focused support for leadership teams, we can help you respond confidently to inclusion-related concerns and create a genuinely welcoming environment.

## It's More Than Flags and Rainbows

Our flagship book supports schools in developing inclusive practice. It explores how to build a whole-school approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion, address difficult conversations, and embed values across the curriculum. It's ideal for teachers, leaders, and anyone looking for practical, values-led strategies.



## My Child is Being Bullied Booklets

These free resources help parents and carers understand what to do if their child is experiencing bullying. Each version includes clear steps, helpful scripts, and advice on working with the school.

- Printed copies available for schools, local authorities or community groups
- Free online download at [www.morethanflagsandrainbows.com/families](http://www.morethanflagsandrainbows.com/families)

## Free diversity and inclusion training

On our online training platform, you will find free online courses on a variety of diversity and inclusion topics. You can find the MTFAR Academy at: [www.morethanflagsandrainbows.com/academy](http://www.morethanflagsandrainbows.com/academy)

