

**Our experience at Gillotts School, Henley-on-Thames**

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**Context**

- Gillotts School is a 11-16 comprehensive in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire
- We have 900 students divided into 6 Houses
- Student attainment has risen rapidly over the past 4 years and is high (2009: 5A\*-C – 80%, 5A\*-C incl. E/M – 65%)
- Student achievement has also improved (CVA – 1014.8)
- Our intake is comprehensive although it is skewed towards the more able end of the spectrum, with a notable increase in the number of students with very weak literacy/ numeracy skills and profound SEN

**What are our issues ?**

- Progress in KS3 has lagged behind KS4
- The KS3 curriculum was pretty traditional with mainly subject-based delivery with limited cross-curricular collaboration
- Although standards of attainment are high in the school as a whole, in-school variation between subjects is quite marked
- Focus over the past few years has been on introducing structures and systems (e.g. House system; use of data) to 'tighten up' existing procedures – this has paid dividends but the quality of teaching and learning has lagged behind
- The House system has reinvigorated progress management and the desire to support individual students at every level
- External changes (e.g. new National Curriculum, demise of SATs, 14-19 reforms) have needed to be addressed
- Having redesignated (Maths and Computing) and achieved a second Specialism (Languages) there was a real need to reinvigorate the role of the subject specialisms

**One step amongst many**

- We have made a number of changes to the curriculum over the past two years:
  - created a larger 'linear' timetable block in key stage 3 (e.g. Y7 – English, Science, Geography, History, RS, ICT, Art, Music, Dance and Drama) to improve the distribution of lessons/ reduce split classes – resulting in mixed ability teaching rather than setting by ability
  - teaching subjects through languages (CLIL)
  - linking ICT and functional maths across the curriculum
  - adopting a competency based approach to teaching and learning in Key Stage 3

## Opening Minds and the 'Intervention Group'

- Although we are a 6 form entry school we have 7 teaching groups in Key Stage 3
- One of these teaching groups (Intervention Group) consists of 12-15 students who, on entry, have relatively low literacy levels (L3/ low L4) but have the potential to achieve L5+ in their SATs
- These students also tend to have issues regarding their organisational and study skills and have, in the past, found the transition from primary to secondary school difficult
- We became aware of the RSA's Opening Minds programme about 3 years ago – I attended a Conference here in April 2007
- We followed this up with visits to two schools which were already using the programme (Campion School in Northamptonshire and Denefield School in Reading)
- From this we decided that it could meet the needs of the students in the Intervention Group – through an Opening Minds style course (English, L2L, Geography, History, RS)
  - fewer teachers/ classrooms
  - joint planning
  - project-based approach
  - focus on the competences to help develop the students' personal, organisational and study skills
- One teacher has focused on English (6 hours per fortnight) while I have focused on Humanities (Geography, History, RS – 8 hours per fortnight)
- Some of the projects have been jointly planned and delivered (e.g. Making Connections, Time) while others have been set up in isolation (e.g. Fairy Tales, Breaking News)
- However, a real focus has been on developing the competences and literacy skills

**Some of the issues to consider:**

**1. What were your concerns re. subject content when planning Opening Minds?**

- I did not have any concerns about subject content – in part because the way I conceptualized the delivery of the programme was to teach specific Geography, History and RS elements as part of each unit (see Breaking News)
- Also, I have a very strong background in both Geography and History, but have also taught RS
- This was, however, a major concern amongst the Subject Leaders in the Humanities subjects – I have involved them directly in the planning so that they can see where their subjects fit

**2. How have we used the competences ?**

- We do make the competences explicit in the lesson planning – they are shared with the (subject/ topic specific) learning outcomes at the start of each lesson – and are referred to through the lesson and in the plenary
- The competences have been mapped out across the year with opportunities for progression (particularly through creating opportunities for increased independence; students to identify the competences they will be using; developing tasks themselves which will help develop them)
- Perhaps of equal (if not greater) importance has been the way in which it has made us reflect upon our teaching – how we construct units of work, individual lesson plans and the way in which activities are linked to learning – I have become much more reflecting in my own teaching

**3.**

<b>What have been the biggest problems ?</b>	<b>How did you (will you) resolve them if at all?</b>
Planning a course from scratch	Tried to bring other staff in (not been as successful) Also, used some of the resources developed by other Opening Minds schools (web-site)
Originally it was envisaged that a number of colleagues would contribute to planning – this has been difficult because of the other aspects of my role	Linking up with Languages – as part of the CLIL work – they have already had some experience of cross-curricular project work – this will provide additional input and staffing (GTP and FLA - from September
Ensuring sufficient time to meet and discuss student progress with my the other teacher	A key development point for the next academic year
Assessing their progress in the individual subjects and also in developing their competences	Used Blooms Taxonomy to underpin assessment across the three Humanities subjects (reflected in the new National Curriculum attainment targets)  Developed the ‘Mountain of success’

**4. What did you learn? How has it improved?**

- Student progress appears to have been very good (end of year progress tests)
- Levels of engagement are high and behaviour has improved
- It has reinvigorated our teaching
- It has made us think about how we can develop these competences across the whole curriculum (linked to PLTs)

**5. What would you have liked to have known or had that would have helped you?**

- More time for joint planning
- More explicit support from the other Humanities' teachers
- ICT facilities in place at the start
- Effective ways from the start to assess student progress in developing the competences

**6. Are there any general principles that you can draw from your experience that you think would help to guide others?**

- It has made us think carefully about what we teach and how we teach it
- It has underpinned my belief that although we like to put subjects in silos (and I agree that each subject has its own body of subject content, skills etc) they can support each other (Blooms Taxonomy) – reflected in the new National Curriculum (and attainment targets)
- We have used the competences as a way to address the requirement to teach PLTs
- In September 2010 we adopted a whole-school approach to the use of competences in Year 7 and 8 – and in tutor time:
  - the competences are in student planners
  - students are expected to have this page open in each lesson to refer to
  - teachers are be expected to focus in on the competences when planning and delivering lessons
  - we have used tutor time to get students to reflect on their progress in developing specific competences

**7. What questions do you still have about the balance?**

- The main concern is about the balance between the three Humanities subjects rather than subject vs. competence – we don't see these as mutually exclusive things

**8. What was the debate in school, if any? What were the tensions? What did/do others think?**

- Will we extend this approach to other Humanities classes (and potentially other subjects) in Year 7 ?

## Competences

### Managing information

- M1- use a variety of methods and sources to find the most useful information
- M2- plan effectively and present logical work
- M3- identify and make changes to work where necessary
- M4- use ICT effectively to organise, develop and present work

### Communication

- Co1- understand the importance of good literacy and work to develop those skills
- Co2- listen carefully to others
- Co3- respond appropriately to others
- Co4- learn and use new vocabulary
- Co5- present work clearly in the most effective format

### Problem solving

- P1- work in logical stages
- P2- ask good questions
- P3- use past experience
- P4- consider a range of possibilities

### Relating to people

- R1- successfully be a team member or team leader
- R2- understand own strengths and weaknesses
- R3- take responsibility for completing tasks on time
- R4- be able to take and give praise and advice

### Emotional intelligence

- E1- recognise and manage own emotions appropriately
- E2- recognise impact of words and actions on others
- E3- know how to resolve conflict and disagreements calmly
- E4- provide support to others when needed

### Citizenship

- C1- understand what is meant by ethics and values
- C2- understand how an active citizen contributes to the community
- C3- recognise that people have different values and customs
- C4- understand that other people's different identities, beliefs and customs should be respected

### Reflecting on learning

- Re1- respond to targets set
- Re2- assess themselves and others
- Re3- collaborate with others taking on both roles in a coaching relationship
- Re4- evaluate experiences and learning to inform future progress