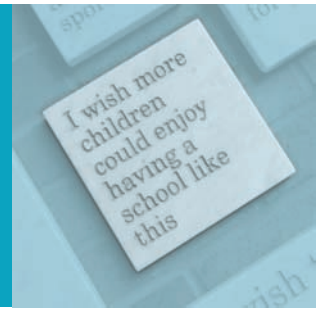


Learning Journey: Cramlington Community High School



The aim is to create independent learners

Developing Independent Learners

Cramlington Community High School is a large 13–18 upper school in Northumberland’s three-tier system. It draws its pupils from a collection of Sixties-built estates twelve miles from Newcastle. Says head teacher Derek Wise, “We have high expectations for all our youngsters and, importantly, that includes developing the skills, attitudes and dispositions that they need in order to learn well.”

From September 2008, as a result of the local authority’s school reorganisation, Cramlington takes the next step on its learning journey as it becomes Cramlington Learning Village and starts admitting pupils from Year 7 and Year 8.

A Focus on Learning

Enabling students to take charge of their own learning is something that the school takes very seriously. It underpins the curriculum. For example, all Year 9 pupils (the current intake year) follow a five hour

per fortnight Learning-to-Learn course based on developing learner attributes of responsibility, resourcefulness, resilience, reasoning and reflection. To help build students’ capacity for independent learning, teachers place an emphasis on group work, thinking skills and enquiry-based learning techniques. The focus on learning is further consolidated through the school’s own approach to Accelerated Learning and use of the ‘Cramlington Learning Cycle’ to plan lessons throughout the curriculum. “The aim is to create independent learners. We need to give students a shared vocabulary and understanding of learning to be able to discuss their needs with teachers. All this is essential if learning is to be truly personalised,” comments Derek. It’s an approach that extends to the sixth form where twenty per cent of time for each ‘A’ Level is based on independent learning.

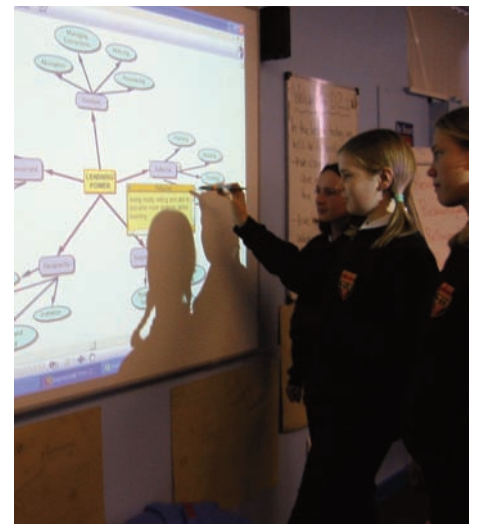
Parents, employers and other members of the community also form an important part of the curriculum focus on the learner – as

can be seen in the following example. As part of an approach to develop active and independent learning centred on environmental issues, members of the community with expertise and experience in this area were invited by the teacher to attend the school at specific times. Meanwhile, Year 9 pupils were engaged in analysing areas to research, identifying the skills they would need, and allocating individual responsibilities within the team. Pupils were given the times when community experts would be available and were able to plan their questions and research for these meetings. Throughout all of this, teachers carefully monitored, steered and challenged pupils.

Placing a focus on the learner at the heart of the curriculum has had a number of implications and consequences.

Flexible use of Space

Space needs to be both sufficient and flexible to meet the needs of whole-class teaching, small group and individual work. By removing partitions, larger spaces have been created (each room in the Discovery Zone is approximately ninety square metres)





Accessible ICT



Specialised break out rooms

that allows for all modes of teaching and learning. Some even larger learning spaces provide for up to ninety students, with each space having specialised break out rooms such as green screen, boardroom, or project room. ICT provision needs to be both instantly accessible yet unobtrusive. To this end, specially designed desks have been provided that incorporate laptops which can be stored beneath them.

An Impact on Teachers

The curriculum focus on the learner and the nature of learning has also had implications for teachers. Initially, it provided challenges for those more comfortable in traditional

didactic roles but an effective and ongoing process of professional development, dialogue and support has been met with an enthusiastic response from teachers, and a consequent increase in effective teaching styles and methods. For example, teachers now take a more active role in modelling learning and team work. In one example pupils were shown a short video of their teachers planning the current unit of work and asked to analyse the way in which their teachers worked as a team. Indeed, acting as part of a team is part and parcel of the way in which teachers now work, "Lessons are collectively and collaboratively planned and made available via the school learning platform," comments Derek.

Flexible use of Time

Asking students to work in a more independent and self-directed way is less feasible in traditional short periods and so one further implication of the curriculum focus can be seen in the way time is managed. For example the timetable is collapsed six times a year for "immersion/experience" weeks and larger blocks of teaching time - a half or whole day - are provided as part of the regular timetable. Time is a precious resource for teacher planning too. To support the collaborative approach to planning, the school finishes early on Wednesday afternoons to create time for teachers to talk, plan and review together. As Derek explains, "By freeing teachers from having to plan each lesson in detail and by collecting together the associated resources, teachers are encouraged to focus on personalising the lesson using a detailed knowledge of the students and the way they learn."

Next Steps

From September 2008, the school becomes Cramlington Learning Village. A new Junior Learning Village, for Year 7 and 8, has been created with an open plan Science Plaza that provides practical, investigative and presentational zones. In Humanities, there are plans for larger groups of sixty students to be team taught. The Junior Learning Village will have its own Mayor, TV Station, village newspaper and arts festival. Derek is positive about the challenges ahead, "The developments are, of course, exciting but the real excitement is in our intention to continue to develop resources, and teaching and learning opportunities that engage our youngsters and fully develop their potential as learners and citizens."

For further information visit the Cramlington Community High School **website at www.cchsonline.co.uk**