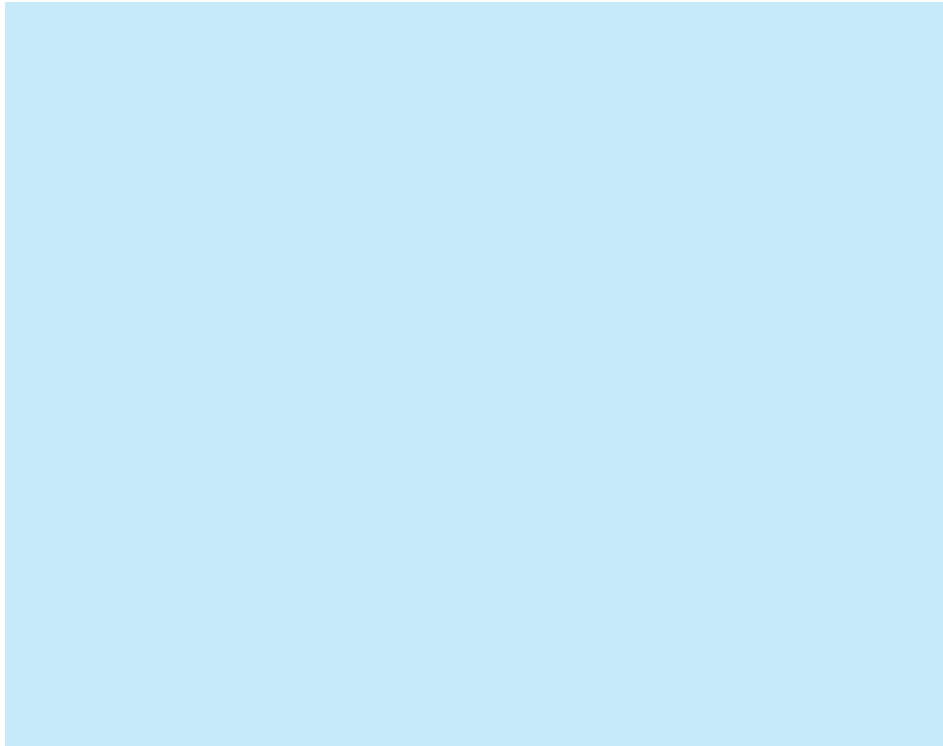


Learning Journey: Glossopdale Community College



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Curriculum Innovation at Key Stage 3

Glossopdale Community College serves the communities of Glossop, Hadfield, and surrounding villages. It is a large comprehensive college of about 1600 students, including 300 post-16. The college is based on two sites almost two miles apart, with Years 7-8 on one site and Years 9-11 on another. There is also a separate post-16 centre. Its catchment area represents a socially diverse mix and the college has an above national average number of students with learning difficulties. Recently the school has focused on curriculum innovation. Head teacher John Hart explains, "The climate in which students are learning in the 21st century is so different from that of even ten years ago that there has to be change of a very significant kind to equip young people with the skills they need for their lives."

Pedagogical and Pragmatic Drivers for Curriculum Innovation

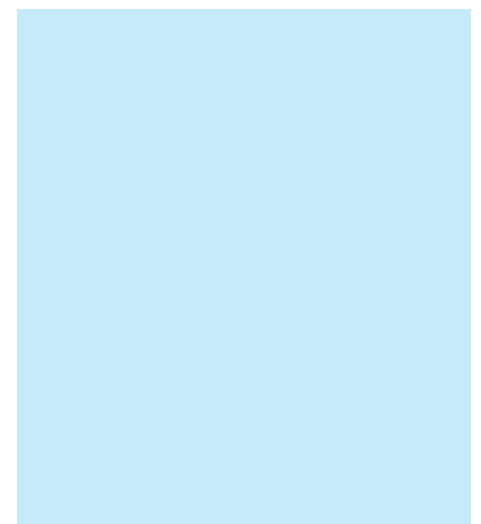
The college had both pedagogical and practical reasons for redesigning its curriculum. For the latter, the split site campus was taking its toll. Staff at Glossopdale regularly commuted between the two sites, adding considerable stress to staff, students and the school. With the college in a late wave of the Building Schools for the Future programme, due for rebuild in 2018, the pragmatic and timely solution reached was to house Years 7 and 8 exclusively on one site with staff opting to teach at one site or the other for a period of time.

Shortly after he joined the college in 2002, John headed a review of the college's curriculum provision. The review not only covered internal factors but looked

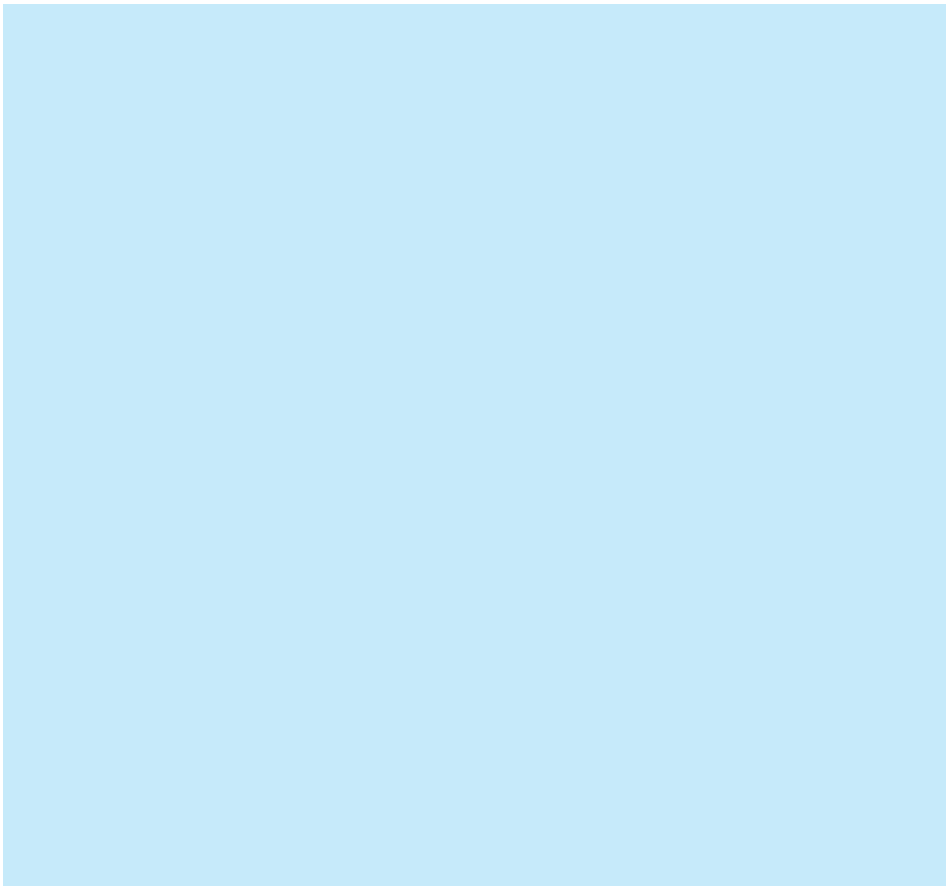
externally too. For example in the students' choice of degree courses and how the college prepared for success of university and beyond. The review considered the changing nature of learning in the 21st century and concluded that education needed to equip students with the ability to work independently and collaboratively, to have a creative approach to problem solving and be able to take their place as global citizens. "We also concluded," says John, "that the congested, content-driven timetable, with learners moving from one one-hour lesson to the next, was largely to blame for turning so many off learning and the resulting underachievement. This disengagement was so damaging in its consequences for our young people that we sought a radical solution."

A Foundation Stage for Years 7 and 8

One "radical solution" to promote and develop the skills identified in the review has been to create a 'Foundation Stage' for Years 7 and 8. For Year 9 a 'Compacted Curriculum' is offered with Key Stage 3 tests being retained at the end of Year 9.



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The Year 7 and Year 8 Foundation Stage at Glossopdale is an integrated, competence-led curriculum. This competence-based curriculum takes place in the forty per cent of time traditionally available from the three areas of the arts, humanities and technology – hence its name, C3. The five one-hour period day and bells have largely been abandoned to make way for more flexible blocks of time. The competences upon which the C3 curriculum are based come from the RSA Opening Minds project and cover citizenship, learning to learn, managing information, relating to people and managing situations. Says John, “The competences describe the essential skills for young people to enable them to fully engage with life in the twenty-first century.”

The C3 curriculum is delivered through six half-termly projects, each of which has a specific launch and a celebration at the end. Each project is driven by key questions as a way of encouraging open-ended research and to move away from prescriptive learning. This approach also allows students to follow aspects of the topic that they find particularly interesting and produce wider outcomes. Homework is known as ‘Home

Study’ in C3 and is set once a half term in line with the project. Each project outline is communicated to parents with details of the key questions and specific lines of enquiry, together with the home study task and an invitation to participate in the delivery of the learning. The Home Study task and increased parental engagement increases the opportunity for more students to set up their own learning in a creative and individual way. Students have a choice about how they carry out the tasks and also some negotiation about the tasks themselves. The flexibility of the six projects enables teaching and learning to respond to local context and build on the strengths of the staff and community, for example in working with local artists.

As part of the refurbishment programme to accommodate Year 7 and Year 8 on the one site, priority was given to creating a Learning Resource Centre, which is the hub of learning on this site. It is staffed by a learning resource manager and provides access to research materials of all kinds. The site also provides a number of C3 exhibition rooms which contain displays of students work from the home study tasks, and larger learning spaces for team teaching and

performance-based work.

Because C3 staff teach outside the boundaries of their subject specialism there has been evidence of increased creative approaches to teaching and learning, for example a history teacher using drama and dance as a vehicle for learning. English, maths and science are taught separately from the C3 competence-led curriculum and with a more traditional approach to staffing and timetabling. However, there is increased collaboration between staff – particularly as a result of concentrating all staff on one site.

The positive response from staff is matched by that of students and parents. As part of the continuing evaluation of C3, questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with parents show that parents are more involved in the students work in C3 than was ever achieved through the traditional curriculum. The same research on student perception has mirrored anecdotal teacher experiences with one student commenting, “C3 has opened my eyes to the world.” The positive student response is also the result of increased use of formative peer and self assessment. For example, says John, “Students have the time and space to develop a language to enable them to find out more about themselves as learners, to appraise themselves more effectively as learners and to talk about the learning process.”

Next Steps

The majority of students start their GCSEs in science and modern foreign languages in Year 9 while at post-16 the college offers Open University modules and Foundation degree courses. Says John, “We are taking steps towards stage not age assessment. Our C3 curriculum has had a positive impact in improving students’ attitudes to learning. Our next objective is to continue this practice in Year 9 and beyond.”

To find out more visit the Glossopdale Community College website at www.glossopdale.org