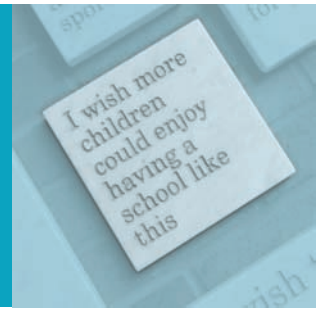


# Learning Journey: Vigo Junior School



*Providing challenge and motivation*

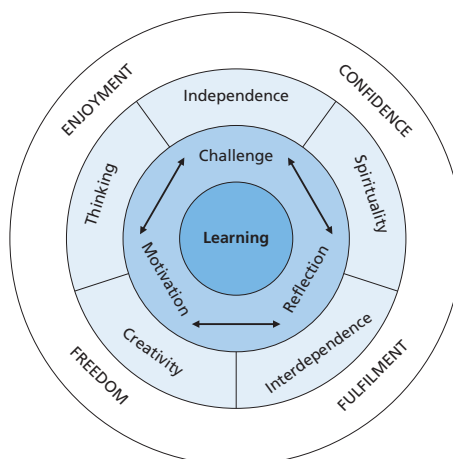
## Transforming the Curriculum to Transform the School

Vigo Junior School, Andover is a large 7–11 junior school of 280 pupils, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average, with standards on entry to the school well below average. The school is now enjoying much success after a period of instability that saw the school in special measures, with poor pupil behaviour, little parental engagement and high staff turnover. Unsurprisingly, head teacher Jackie Green inherited a demoralised school. “It was an un-stimulating learning environment. Children did not enjoy or look forward to coming to school. We simply had to change that. Our focus to achieve this was on how to redesign our curriculum.”

## An Integrated Curriculum

The school has developed, and continues to develop, what it calls an ‘integrated curriculum’. The aim is to create learning experiences that are purposeful and relevant to all children by providing challenge,

motivation, and reflection based on a set of core learning values: spirituality, creativity, thinking, independence and interdependence.



*Vigo Junior School Curriculum Model*

These aims translate into a curriculum that is made up of a series of integrated projects. Each project includes the following: three subjects, two ‘learning values’ and two ‘applications’. For example, the project ‘Lend me your ears!’ comprises the three subjects of history, English and RE; the two learning values of thinking and independence; and the two applications of

ICT and Geography. An application allows the project to be broadened beyond three subjects but does not require the same degree of intensive teaching.

Each of the integrated projects has a specific genre of fiction and non-fiction attached to it to ensure a broad and balanced curriculum with an emphasis on speaking, listening, reading and writing. Even the names of projects are chosen to capture the interest of children and create an initial motivation. For example, instead of ‘Rainforests’, the school has, ‘I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!’ Other integrated project names include: ‘Run for Your Life!’, ‘Magician’s Apprentice’ and ‘Fe Fi Fo Fum’.

Every project also has a ‘hook’. “The hook is designed to really capture the children’s interest and create a wow factor to start the project,” explains Jackie. This could be seen recently in an assembly at the start of the ‘Me, Me, Me’ project when a teacher was presented with the full red book, ‘This is Your Life’ treatment – unknown to her but planned by other teachers. Once the hook has taken place, children are shown the ‘Big Picture’. Explains Jackie, “The Big Picture is a large display in a shared area which outlines to the children some of the work they are going to take part in over the next few weeks it also outlines the subjects and values to be covered.”

Projects operate for between four to seven weeks, extend across holiday periods and include visits out of school and visits from external speakers. Each project has a specific outcome such as a book or an exhibition for parents. In the case of ‘Run for Your Life!’ the outcome is to produce a monster. For these project outcomes, there is an emphasis



Whole school science day, 'Electrodes'

that the work of each pupil is of their best quality with pupils selecting and creating the exhibitions independently. Says Jackie, "All of this is to increase children's sense of worth and pride in their achievements."

Home work or 'Home Learning' as it is known at Vigo is also project-based. For example, in the integrated project 'I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!' the home learning task is to make a medical first aid kit containing rainforest medicines. The response of parents to home learning has been important too says Jackie. "The quality that is produced in home learning is truly amazing with virtually a one hundred per cent return rate." Home learning is always a part of the display in project exhibitions.

The integrated curriculum accounts for approximately seventy-eight per cent of available curriculum time with other time dedicated to such things as handwriting practice, spelling work or synthetic phonics, guided reading and sixty minutes of maths. At the start of each half term the whole school takes part in social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) activity for two whole days. During these two days no other subjects are taught to allow an in-depth exploration of the SEAL unit.

External visitors and inspections now comment that children are motivated, keen and eager to learn. In 2002, forty-nine children were excluded from school. In 2008, that number has fallen to one. Says Jackie, "Not only do pupils enjoy school, they now have a sense of pride in themselves."

The integrated curriculum at Vigo Junior School has had a positive impact on parental engagement and expectations too. For example, parents receive a copy of the Big Picture which identifies the tasks that the children will be doing and parents are invited to integrated project exhibitions.

"Parents now come in their hundreds to our exhibitions and other events, as compared to 2002 when very few parents came in the building and some were aggressive and hostile. Parents are now actively thinking and making choices about which secondary school to send their children to and now, perhaps most importantly, talk to their children about learning," comments Jackie.

### Planning an Integrated Curriculum

The success of this curriculum transformation is to be found in the rigour of its planning.

Each of the core learning values has been discussed and defined by all staff, including teaching and learning support assistants. The school has agreed a definition of the value ('It is') which is then supported by a vision for that value. Each value has a 'learners will' section that highlights the tasks that children will need to do if they are, for example, to become creative or independent for example. There is also a 'staff will' section which clearly states what staff will need to do in order to teach the value. Finally, for governors and other visitors the school has listed a 'you will see' section. Together, these values together form the teaching for learning policy.

Staff plan each project based on programmes of study and on school expectations that are linked to National Curriculum level descriptors and to Every Child Matters statements.

The planning is split in two main sections. The first section is the overview which contains the rationale for the project written by the leadership team. Teachers then complete the rest of the planning sheet in which they identify the 'learners will' statement they will be covering, the tasks to be completed for the applications, the 'hook', the outcome, and the tasks to be covered for each of the three main subjects. The planning sheet also indicates how differentiation will be achieved according to three levels. The second main part of the planning is the weekly overview in which the teaching team decides which tasks and activities the children are going to complete each week. This is then discussed with Jackie before the project begins.

Despite the rigour of the planning, teachers have found a reduction in time spent planning. "This degree of shared whole-school planning," says Jackie, "ensures that a clear route through the project has been planned, provides a suitable level of depth and rigour to the planning, and ensures everyone knows what to do."

### Next Steps

The school has a number of areas for future development. For example, to look at what constitutes continuity and progression within each of the learning values. As Jackie comments, "We are a school which has undergone much over the last six years and will continue to develop further. Six years ago we were a failing school on a catastrophic level. We are now a central part of our local community with much to be very proud of. Our curriculum development work has enabled us to see that it is worthwhile for everyone to take a risk."

To find out more visit the Vigo Junior School website at [www.vigojunior.co.uk](http://www.vigojunior.co.uk)