

Curriculum design and raising standards

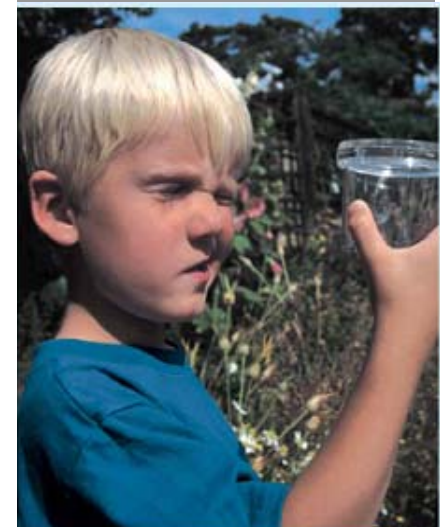


Evidence from Ofsted

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A dilemma?



Does this sometimes ring true?

'We're under so much pressure to deliver on standards in numeracy and literacy. And then there's ECM and healthy schools, accountability, not to mention health and safety. We'd really like to do all sorts of exciting stuff, but...'



If that dilemma exists

- Many schools overcome it
- Ofsted judges outcomes not process
- Inspection evidence indicates what can contribute to high quality outcomes
- Well planned, motivating and broad curricula correlate with high inspection grades and achievement



The curriculum in successful primary schools 2002

Ref. HMI 553

- Led to 'Excellence and Enjoyment'
- The thirty schools achieved what some said wasn't possible – a full and rich curriculum with high achievement and high standards
- Rich curriculum supported teaching and encouraged positive attitudes to learning
- Curriculum, and progression, a key means to achieve vision
- Consistent approaches from well focused leaders
- Subjects important
- First-hand experiences important, often outside classroom

Two recent
aspect surveys



Curriculum innovation in schools 2008, ref. 070097



- Principal barriers included anxiety from staff about a possible negative impact on national test and examination results
- **But** in 28 of the 30 schools visited, innovations led to clear improvements in pupils' achievement and personal development
- Staff frequently worried that inspectors would not understand or would be very critical of the changes they were introducing

Curriculum innovation survey

Ten innovative primary schools

- High achievement (and standards) in standard measures
- Provided a curriculum which was notably different to many other schools
- From all over England in varied socio-economic circumstances
- Excited pupils and had some key underpinning features

The innovative schools

- All different!
- Often a rigorous, thematic, progressive approach to curriculum planning
- Made confident choices based in **evidence**, not 'diktat'
- Met real, local needs
- Ensured pupils had 'real' experiences, including significant learning outside the classroom and tasks with genuine outcomes and purpose
- Often taught the **basics** 'traditionally' - **quality not quantity** - then applied the basics in innovative ways

Some underpinning features of all ten schools

1. Clear philosophy of learning
2. Staff able to discuss issues critically
3. Know local needs and circumstances really well
4. Respect subjects, even if they are not taught discretely
5. Curriculum, if not the underlying philosophy, remains a work in progress
6. Assess (precisely) and evaluate what the school values

Learning outside the classroom 2008, ref. 070219

'Hands on' activities in a range of locations contributed much to improvements in:

- achievement
- standards
- motivation
- personal development
- behaviour

A broad range of LOTC activity



Whitburn CE High School, South Tyneside

The value of LOTC (1)

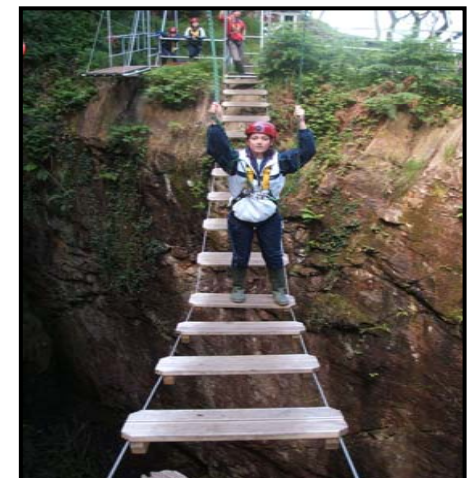
- Memorable activities led to memorable learning
- The place where activities happened often added to their value
- It contributed significantly to 'staying safe'

The value of LOTC (2)

Learning outside the classroom had positive benefits for all groups of young people, including those underachieving or not sufficiently motivated by mainstream provision

Importance given to LOTC: key findings

- Schools (and some LAs) unsure of how national programmes, especially the National Strategies, viewed LOTC
- The most effectively led, managed and confident schools included LOTC as an integral part of a well-planned, effective curriculum
- However, much LOTC is not, in practice, provided free



Self-evaluation of LOTC

- Schools felt they **knew the value** of learning outside the classroom activity ...
- ... but **few evaluated** this rigorously
- **little analysis of take-up, inclusion or quality** of extra curricular activities

Primary and secondary differences

- mixed practice in EYFS
- primaries good at using their own grounds and the local area flexibly
- secondaries good at promoting high quality integrated learning on day and residential visits.

Outstanding schools



12 Outstanding Secondary Schools 2009, ref. 080240

- Culture encourages **innovation and experimentation** but never allocates blame
- Headteachers: a **good curriculum** does much to **reduce behaviour problems** and **drive improvement**
- Curriculum **personalised** to provide as much choice as possible
- **Rich provision** in and out of lessons; substantial LOTC. All feel gains in learning fully justify the time on such activity

20 Outstanding Primary Schools 2009, ref. 090170

- Interesting, **stimulating curriculum fundamental** to effective schools
- **Know pupils** well and **shape curriculum** around them
- Subject leaders take **strong whole school role**
- If pupils **learn well**, no need to teach to the test
- Schools **confident** to reject national materials, based on evidence

12 Outstanding Special Schools 2009, ref. 090170

- Schools lead in **personalising learning**
- Example:
 - Tier 1: What the pupil actually needs to learn
 - Tier 2: Breadth and balance
- Learning and **progress** are **monitored microscopically, guiding the curriculum** and teaching by analysis of what has been learned
- Pupils have a **thirst for excitement** which is provided: 'Children have got to want to be here.'

A recent subject survey



Mathematics:

understanding the score (2008, ref. 070063)

- Attainment scores have risen; but the rate of improvement has slowed in Key Stage 2 and stalled in Key Stage 1
- Based on the gains at Key Stage 3, more pupils should reach higher GCSE grades
- Gains not matched by identifiable improvements in pupils' understanding of mathematics

Mathematics:

understanding the score (2008, ref. 070063)

- Much of rising scores comes from interventions
- Interventions and teaching focused on tests narrows experience and is at the expense of understanding underpinning concepts

Mathematics: understanding the score (2008, ref. 070063)

- Many pupils **lack confidence** and worry about getting answers wrong, **even when their methods are right**
- Open-ended and unusual problems are daunting, but enjoyed in the end
- **Short-term satisfaction** can be gained from a page of ticks for correct answers
- This is **fragile** if the **mathematics** itself is **not understood** well enough to be applied independently to unusual problems
- Subsequent learning is then built on **conceptual sand**

Mathematics: understanding the score (2008, ref. 070063)

- 'Working with someone else helps you understand, especially if they ask you questions.'
- 'Every lesson, you have to answer questions from the textbook. It gets boring.'

Mathematics: understanding the score (2008, ref. 070063)

Good subject expertise and curriculum design:

- structures learning so that pupils **connect different topics** and build on **previous learning**
- includes significant well structured **open ended, novel or complex tasks**
- Ensures pupils work **independently** (of the teacher and textbook) and understand the method
- This deepens learning and **increases progress**

Making more of music (2009, ref. 080235)

- Pupils enjoy music but progress limited
- Published schemes a mixed blessing
- Subject leadership much more important than teacher skills and specialist knowledge
- Time: 'It depends on the teacher. My teacher this year really likes music and we do a lot but last year we hardly did any; there was always something else we had to do first.'
- Funded initiatives 'bolted on'

Other recent Ofsted survey reports pose interesting questions

- **Music 2009:** standards of performance achieved in choirs, productions and instrumental groups are often very high and considerably higher than those in classroom lessons
- **Extended schools 2008:** provision outside the normal school day has a positive impact on the achievement and personal development of children, especially those in danger of underperforming
- **Geography 2008:** fieldwork sharpens and deepens understanding but many schools do not meet statutory requirements



Curriculum grade descriptors



Outstanding curriculum

Memorable experiences... rich opportunities for **high quality learning**... may be at the forefront of successful, **innovative** curriculum design...**customised** to changing needs of individuals and groups... **highly tailored** programmes... highly **coherent and relevant**... promoting **outstanding outcomes**

Good curriculum

Well organised, **imaginative** opportunities for learning... **broad range** of experiences... **adjusted effectively** to meet needs... activities have a **high take up across groups** and are **much enjoyed**

Last word: from one very high achieving school's survey inspection

Primary education is not just about targets and results in league tables, nor is it simply a preparatory step for secondary school; it is much more than that. We want children to have a **memorable experience** that encourages and inspires them to achieve in life and to aim to exceed their potential. I'm convinced that if you provide an innovative, creative curriculum that encourages children there's **no need for cramming, no need for teaching to the test**. That kind of approach will achieve those results.

Headteacher



Thank you for your attention

