

## National Low-Attainers Pilot (LAP)

### Speedwell Technology: A competence-based curriculum

The school is a large 11–19 comprehensive with 1100 pupils. Its pupils have low levels of prior attainment with over 30% being on level 3 or below on entry into Year 7. The percentage of pupils with special education needs is above average.

The school was keen to be part of the pilot as they recognised that the target cohort consisted of the pupils with whom they had been least successful in recent years. They recognised that they needed a new approach and one that would include the explicit teaching of learning skills.

The school did not immediately decide on a curriculum with an Opening Minds structure and the initial planning time was spent considering what elements were needed in a new approach to the curriculum for level 3 entrants. They decided that they needed to:

- take what is best from primary practice;
- make extensive use of active engagement strategies and brain-based learning;
- give pupils their own main base, resulting in less movement around the school;
- have fewer subjects for the pupils, and consequently fewer teachers;
- encourage pupils and teachers to know each other better, so that improved relationships would improve learning;
- boost the pupils' learning in Year 7 in order that they would be more able to access the Year 8 curriculum;
- involve parents more fully in their children's education;
- use ICT to enhance learning.

A curriculum based on the Opening Minds model seemed to have the potential to support the aims and a small group – mostly of younger teachers – was set up by the LAP coordinator to write the six modules. The final structure for the course was as follows:

Each fortnight pupils receive the following subject allocation:

- 30 × 60-minute modules, consisting of 15 English/humanities, 6 mathematics, 6 science and 3 DT/ICT;
- 8 × 30-minutes French, 6 × 30 minutes numeracy and 6 × 30 minutes literacy;
- 10 × 60 minutes art, music and PE.

The daily structure for the competence curriculum is:

- Lesson 1 – 2 × 30-minute sessions of literacy, numeracy or French;
- Lessons 2, 3 and 4 – modular lessons, which will incorporate English, humanities, PHSE, citizenship, mathematics, science, DT and ICT;
- Lesson 5 – art, music, PE with rest of the cohort.

The course has been assessed using the National Curriculum levels, the progress tests and against the Opening Minds competences.

Despite a year of some turbulence in the management of the school, the course has been very successful. There has been improved pupil motivation, engagement and behaviour, with increased parental involvement. Links with partner primary schools are improved and the image of the school has been enhanced. Writing the course has meant a strong focus on teaching and learning. The coordinator, whose own role has been crucial in holding the team together, reports that a real bonus has been the enthusiasm which the project has generated among the group and the realisation that this sort of collaboration can widen horizons in an exciting way. The networking with other schools involved in similar curriculum projects had been essential and invaluable. Prompted by the possibilities demonstrated by the pilot, the school has now acquired a large number of interactive whiteboards and aims to be a Centre of Excellence.

The school experienced some challenges this year. The writing of the new curriculum was time-consuming and hard work, particularly since there was not time to finish all the modules at the beginning of the year. There was considerable success in the aim of closer pupil–teacher relationships, but an unexpected result was the disturbance felt by some pupils when one of the teachers left during the year. The LAP groups formed a close identity, which sometimes made it difficult to induct new pupils mid-year. There was also an impact on the school timetable which made things difficult for other staff. However, these issues will inform future planning and the success of the innovation has encouraged the school to roll out the curriculum to the whole of the new Year 7 entrants.