

## National Low-Attainers Pilot (LAP)

### Top Valley School: A competence-based curriculum

The school is a large, urban 11–16 school, and the Low-Attainers Pilot is known as Learn Effectively and Achieve Progress (LEAP). *Every Child Matters* is at the centre of its strategic direction and is being integrated into plans to develop the recently acquired status as a specialist college for engineering.

The school operates a two-week timetable and the current Year 7 LAP cohort has six hours of English and mathematics and three additional hours each of literacy and numeracy. While a survey with Year 7 LAP pupils revealed their willingness to meet and work with more teachers than they would have experienced in their primary schools, the school recognised the benefits on transition of smaller classes, fewer teachers and less movement.

The Learning Ladder devised by Year 7 LAP pupils from the National Strategies' *Learning Challenge* has been exceptionally successful with the cohort in supporting their organisational skills in order that they make the most of their learning opportunities. It is now well embedded and was identified as good practice during the school's recent HMI visit.

The school has decided to move to a competence-based curriculum for all of Year 7 in the academic year 2006/07. The LAP coordinator, who is leading on the curriculum innovation for next year's Year 7, said, 'The project-based enquiry approach for all Year 7 in 2006/07 is a direct result of the pupil voice from the stand-alone projects that were part of the LAP programme in the academic year 2005/06.'

The school's Year 7 curriculum in September 2006 will be based around the ALITE and RSA Opening Minds materials. All pupils will have approximately 40% of curriculum time dedicated to ALITE's *Learning 2 Learn* and the *Learning Challenge*. More-able groups have 18 periods of *Learning 2 Learn*, while the less-able groups (traditionally the level 3 learners) have 20 periods of *Learning 2 Learn*. In addition level 3 learners will access two periods of the *Learning Challenge*. The LAP coordinator said, 'This a major step forward in the way we are flexing the curriculum, whereby we are extending the good practice within LAP to the entire Year 7 cohort.'

In preparation for this significant curriculum innovation, the school provided seven planning days for colleagues, who were carefully chosen to develop and teach within the project. It was considered a vital aspect of the curriculum innovation to bring new staff on board. The venue for these sessions was a local hotel and the process finished with a formal celebratory meal.

The first part of the planning was to review the materials and consider how they could be used to underpin the new curriculum. Colleagues in English and mathematics were confident about the new approach as a result of their experience with the LAP cohort and were central to the planning days. They provided coaching for colleagues in the Literacy and Numeracy Frameworks and helped identify opportunities to write these skills into the competence-based curriculum. As a result of the partnership with Promethean, these colleagues began to share their interactive whiteboard (IWB) expertise across the new team, as the technology is fundamental to the success of the new model.

A Caribbean theme provides the context for learning up to and probably beyond Christmas 2006. The choice of theme is relevant to the local context and pupils will access humanities, technology and the creative curriculum through this theme. Literacy and numeracy objectives have been included in all of the planning for the lessons. Colleagues planned the missions collaboratively (*missions* is the pupils' term for smaller tasks within the project) and lessons are based on the four stages of the accelerated learning cycle. Lesson plenaries link to de Bono's *Thinking Hats*.

All the lessons for the competence-based curriculum are to be team taught in the 'small hall' to half-year groups of approximately 75 pupils. The school believes this is a good opportunity for teachers to learn from and with each other. The 'small hall' is being refurbished with coloured floors and walls to reflect de Bono's *Thinking Hats*. The school hopes to be successful in its request to Boots the Chemist for additional funding to provide water fountains and other resources.

Progress will be tracked within the 5Rs exemplified through the *Learning 2 Learn* materials. Further coherence will be provided by the LAP coordinator's central role in teaching the new curriculum.

The first day in September 2006 for Year 7 will be a team-building day and will see the launch of the new curriculum. Pupils will see the school's LAP DVD and it will be explained how this has helped formulate the school's planning for this year. Year 7 pupils and their parents will attend all day and will also get their target-setting interview during this time. Pupils will return home with a bag full of goodies, which will include a water bottle, a copy of the *Learning Ladder* and their *Learning 2 Learn* journal.

In the first two weeks, pupils will concentrate on *Learning 2 Learn* and work on the early competences around 'I Learner' and 'Team Learner', with the later competences being built into the Caribbean themed project.

The headteacher commented, 'This is the second year of curriculum development in Year 7. The new curriculum has been put to the governors on several occasions. Their feedback has been very positive. While they fully support the *Learning 2 Learn* skills-based curriculum as a motivational tool to boost attainment, they were keen that literacy and numeracy skills were interwoven carefully into the Year 7 enquiry approach. The governors will monitor and evaluate the project carefully through observations, as part of their normal operations within the school.'