



Curriculum Implementation

‘You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working;
and just so, you learn to love by loving.
All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves.’

Saint Francis de Sales

Introduction

In planning the way forward for producing our new curriculum, staff and pupils were first consulted and our existing curriculum approach at that time was carefully evaluated. Following this, and using the National Curriculum as our progression model we have worked to write our own curriculum by breaking down the programmes of study into a clear progression framework, and which has been structured with a range of subjects that are taught discretely, whilst others have been integrated into engaging thematic topics – an approach that our pupils told us they greatly enjoyed from our previous curriculum structure, and something, therefore, we felt important to retain.

More significantly, we have sought to design our curriculum for each subject in a way that maximises the likelihood that children will remember and connect the steps that they have been taught, and furthermore will provide them with the knowledge they require for subsequent learning, such as the building of key vocabulary, events, people, places, concepts, and procedures, as well as supporting the development of desirable cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation, problem-solving, creativity, and independence.

We understand fully that it is our children’s prior knowledge that supports them to comprehend new material and is why we have paid careful attention to the sequencing of learning within our curriculum. The knowledge our pupils gain is highly transferable between contexts and knowledge learned across the curriculum supports their understanding. The progressive and well-sequenced curriculum that we have implemented seeks to deepen children’s understanding over time as structures of knowledge stored in their long-term memory become increasingly complex.

Our curriculum facilitates the build-up of component knowledge which leads to clear end goals and the comprehension and development of composite knowledge and skills. We believe that high quality teaching begins with the end goal clearly envisioned from the outset, and with all work ultimately leading to that learning destination. When planning each unit of learning, we start by looking at the standard we expect every child to achieve and what deep level learning looks like. Learning experiences are then planned to ensure that every child has the best chance possible of achieving this.

Curriculum Structure

The curriculum consists of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, The National Curriculum for England, the Come and See scheme for Religious Education, the Life to the Full scheme for Relationships and Health Education, the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised scheme for phonics, and the Jigsaw scheme for Personal, Social, and Health Education.

At St. Bernadette’s all subjects are greatly valued and promoted and feature prominently within our curriculum. Nevertheless, our curriculum design rightly places a central importance upon the subjects of

English and Mathematics and the essential role these subjects play in each child's understanding across the curriculum and the development of essential life skills. We believe in the fundamental importance of every pupil being able to read, write, and to use numbers and calculations with competence. As a Catholic academy, Religious Education (and our upcoming Values to Virtues Catholic Character Education Programme) is also at the very heart of our curriculum and the formation of our children, rooted in the Gospel values of Jesus Christ, and which goes well beyond the National Curriculum RE Framework. These subjects are taught discretely, along with Computing, French, Music, Physical Education, and Personal, Social, and Health Education.

Our thematic topics are generally designed with an added emphasis upon Science as a core subject, and from this we have sought to weave together objectives using natural linkages between this and the remaining subjects that make up our curriculum offer – Art and Design, Design and Technology, Geography, and History.

Sequenced Curriculum

We have ensured that within each subject and across year groups, all objectives have been carefully selected and progressively sequenced to support our pupils in successfully acquiring cumulatively-sequenced, useful, and transferable knowledge and associated development of skills. We have also ensured that within our thematic topics the sequencing of objectives both within individual subjects and across multiple interweaved subjects is similarly progressively structured so as to ensure purposeful learning journeys for our children. It is important to stress that through our topic approach we do not lose the focus on individual subjects and the clear progression within these that is required to enable effective learning to take place across the curriculum. Furthermore, we have carefully integrated into our sequencing the challenge presented to us by our mixed year group classes, developing a 2-year cycle which covers sequenced and progressive content ambitiously spanning the full age range of the group within each topic, thus avoiding a situation where older children in the cycle are covering content purely from a younger year group. Cross-curricular links have also been made across all subjects where this enhances the learning opportunities for our pupils.

Staff phase teams produced a series of progression documents, mapping out which areas of the national curriculum for each subject would be covered in each year group. Cross-phase work then took place to ensure complete continuity of progression from Early Years all the way through to Year 7. As a result, staff are very clear on the learning which has taken place in the previous year group and can see what will be taught the following year, and can therefore plan accordingly for progression. The inclusion of Year 7 objectives within our documentation ensures that in planning Year 6 objectives our staff have a clear understanding of where pupils' learning is leading next, and therefore contributes to our pupils being well prepared for the next phase of their education. Teachers use these documents to ensure that through their planning they have accurate coverage and progression of all the key knowledge and skills required.

Topic Approach

In order to capture the children's imagination each topic is launched with a key question; in our 'Incredible Inventions' topic, for example, the children are posed with the question, 'Why was the Industrial Revolution revolutionary?'. This is followed by taking part in an engaging topic opening activity, such as pupils launching their own rockets in the 'Worlds of Wonder' topic. Topics are delivered over a full term to ensure that subjects are visited in enough depth. The academy is currently introducing knowledge and skills organisers which include a breakdown of all the key vocabulary to enable pupils to access the full curriculum within that topic and which will be referred back to over time in order to support the long-term retention of knowledge.

Approach to Teaching

At the level of the individual lesson, we are focussed on delivering high quality teaching and learning and to the continual improvement of this through careful monitoring and continuous professional development. Our aim is to ensure that learning is enjoyable, engaging, and challenging, and affords all pupils the opportunity to succeed and achieve mastery in their learning.

Prior learning is recapped daily. Utilising their own strong subject knowledge, our teachers aim to then present and model new subject matter clearly, promoting appropriate discussion around this, and providing our children with carefully scaffolded tasks which support achievement for all. Teachers systematically check our children's understanding throughout the lesson, identifying misconceptions accurately and providing clear and direct feedback, and in doing so they adapt their teaching as necessary. Based on an understanding that learning involves an alteration in long-term memory, we have recently introduced a teaching model based on

Tom Sherrington's work covering Barak Rosenshine's Principles in Action. Through this model we are refining techniques which we believe will better support the long-term retention of knowledge within our pupils and will evaluate this going forwards.

Research also shows that development of a broad vocabulary correlates with academic success, supporting a wide range of educational attainment abilities – not just skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but also general knowledge of science, history, and the arts. For this reason, vocabulary is explicitly taught within all units of learning and supports the development and retention of a strong vocabulary within our pupils. This is further enhanced, for example, through the ongoing development of knowledge organisers for our thematic topics which include the key vocabulary to be mastered for that unit of learning; the daily sharing of class story each morning to begin the school day in each class; additional vocabulary lessons within the teaching of English; and immersion of our children in a vocabulary rich learning environment.

Assessment

The academy's approach to assessment is clear in its purpose – to ascertain what pupils know and can do, including what they remember over time. In establishing this, teachers use this knowledge to plan accurately for the next steps in pupils' learning and development.

Our distributed leadership model means that each subject is managed on an ongoing basis by the subject leader and who is tasked with a variety of duties, including a continuing focus on reviewing and evaluating curriculum design. Our subject review process allows leaders to gain a clear understanding of practice, outcomes, and standards within their subject. The pupil and staff voice, along with work scrutiny, statutory outcomes where relevant, external review, and ongoing professional development all support the continuing evaluation and further development of our curriculum as we strive to provide the best educational experience possible for our children.