Implementing a Skills Based Curriculum transcript

We feel that a Skills-Based Curriculum is essential for every child going into GCSE and to A Level or to further to higher education. We wanted to ensure that it was embedded within as many subject areas as possible. Our vision would be that it will be embedded within every subject area within the Skills-Based Curriculum in Key Stage 3. Those things are extremely important for the economy, for industry, for further and higher education and we can see the move towards that specifically with apprenticeships and with work based and related industry wanting more of those skills but if the transfer of those skills into Key Stage 4 which are going to be an important transition for our children as well.

My role in St Pius X College is Head of English for me that would involve basically implementing the revised curriculum for English within our Year groups for 8, 9 and 10. I feel very strongly that my responsibility for that therefore is a ensuring that our children progress through the levels of progression. Whilst they are in English class as well as that I also work with the literacy co-ordinator in promoting literacy throughout the school.

The focus of term one was trying to get all children in the key stage to recognise that legibility is a really important factor especially as they move towards exam situations in Key Stage 4. So we explicitly have made them aware of the importance of it and not just our subject in recent assembly but that it would apply to all subjects and would expect the standard to be seen in evident in all subjects.

We move very quickly on from that to the skill of group discussion and all children in Key Stage 3 and at the same time Years 8, 9 and 10 we’re all having revised or visiting or for some of our Year 8’s the first ever proper teaching and understanding of what the elements of group discussion were, the roles of group discussion. The importance of group discussion in the workplace, the importance of discussion in every aspect of their lives and they've totally bought into that and they recognise it is a skill that they are going to need and we were talking about some of our past pupils, we actually had some of them in to talk about how they need spoken communication in everyday language and they went on then to talk about the importance of presentation that skill we are focusing on after Christmas.

I think this is well supported as well by CCEA with the cross-curricular events were they can go and recognise yes this is happening in my subject and we are writing, we are reading and finding evidence and supporting and analysing and evaluating and that we are, we definitely are accessing most of the time there is a group discussion and presenting.

We initially sat and had a numeracy audit as a staff as part of our staff development day and from that we were asked to identify all three cross-curricular skills. In many ways Maths is different from communication, communication whilst we talk and listen in every subject of the curriculum we tend to find that Maths doesn’t naturally occur to the same extent and to the same level in all subjects.

We took then the approach as a cross-curricular team to initially divide the workload as it were and see which ones would buy into Maths more naturally because it was the hardest one to get the natural fit and we identified Geography, Science, Home Economics and
Technology as our starting point and I was assigned to work with the heads of department in each of those four areas and from that we took our Year 8, 9 and 10 schemes for each of those subjects and said what are you doing already? How can we actually take the Maths content out of those lessons that are occurring and actually create a problem create something for the students to buy into to solve were they had to actually choose the Maths that they are going to do for themselves do the mathematical calculations and say and ask each other are we right? And then from that present their data and talk about what they've found and analyse it and again we were encouraging them to be the problem solvers of the future by doing that.

When our children leave here it is not sufficient for them to just have 4 or 5 GCSE's or 8 or 9 GCSE's it is absolutely vital that they have the life skills to take them further when they leave school and when you approached it from that and didn't actually focus on the assessment. If you focused on the learning experience that the students would have and what they would get out of it and the confidence the self-esteem, the ability to work with others, the ability to solve problems and the belief that they have in themselves you actually find when you change the mind-set of staff you were simultaneously changing the mind-set of students and our students actually I think in St Pius do actually believe now that they do things when leave here which is fabulous.

Well for us when children from Key Stage 2 we know that they have been using ICT in the primary school and it's very important for us when they come over the door to baseline where they are in terms of the levels of progression. If they have participated and levels of progression are forwarded it makes our job so much easier but using our baseline and data we can very quickly look at a student's results and we can sort of predict where they are and where then it's our job to get them to move forward.

So we're looking at you know establishing some form of value added in terms of children's skills. What we are about in this school and what's important to me for students is that they acquire a range of skills, a depth and a breadth of skills and that they gain a competence in a range of software packages and applications.

We always have each of those skills based areas core within our school development plan. We in June had a very successful sharing of good practice day were all of our Heads of Department shared good practice in relation to each of the key skill areas.

I have to say CCEA were very much on board with coming into the school helping look at how we could embed it within the curriculum which meant that it was core to everything that the child was learning and therefore teachers re-engaged with the process and made the process a much less onerous task for themselves and departments and I think it's like everything within schools if it's successful in one area that then comes across in other areas.

The challenge that I put to each and every teacher was how do you teach without literacy? How do the pupils learn without literacy? Now the deafening silence told me that those teachers in that room know that they cannot move forward, we cannot move forward as an institution society cannot move forward unless we are sending youngsters out not just with an avalanche of GCSE and A Level results that isn't necessarily synonymous with being
literate we need to send them out with core skills that allows them to be model citizens, contributors to society, contributors to the economy, the leaders of the next generation.

We have been able to showcase a department in the school who with the HoD and with the whole of the department who've completely bought into the ideology the concept behind the cross-curricular skills and that's the Science department.

With any Science subject if the Science that we teach stays in the classroom we are not doing our jobs. With my departmental team we want to look at the three core skills Using Maths, Communication and ICT. The Science subject lends itself to the development of these skills and within this lesson today on speed the Year 10 had an opportunity to manipulate data, manipulate equations, formula they also had the chance to design an experiment were they had to think and they worked in groups so your bringing your thinking skills and personal capabilities and they also had the opportunity to carry out the practical and then look and see how they could improve it. Improvement is brought about by looking at error and that's why we were able to bring in our ICT and using light weight.

We do need our children at the end of the day to be given every opportunity to gain these vital transferable skills which they need for future careers I mean children nowadays we want them to be digital makers, digital creators, digital citizens and I think we need ICT to enhance children's opportunities and learning.

With regards to a whole school approach when it works it really works well and subjects that get involved are excited about being involved. They see the need to be involved they recognise that there were gaps in what they were providing and what they were expecting from their children and it tends to be the skills are filling the gaps. So they have a better experience in the teaching and hopefully the children will therefore experience that in the learning and in the outcomes.

I think like many other schools maybe we have come to this maybe slower than we should have in that it has taken us a long time to find our feet with it but now we can of garnering support and finding our way and it's taken lots of people maybe working away in isolation till eventually it's made it to the top table it's on the school development plan.

As a result it has a far higher profile for staff inset days for example CCEA is invited into train and offer support and they are delegated co-ordinators for each of the skill areas within the school.

Another thing that struck me in this whole process was how the three cross curricular skills very much integrated together naturally and I was unaware of that. I would’ve seen Maths as very much a discreet entity linked into Science or Geography. But I didn't actually see what communication English and Maths if I'm being honest had in common. We would very much in the past have come at it from well actually they are either English based or there Maths based and there was very much a cut off line between the two.

What we found through this using Maths was that in every using Maths activity there was going to be some feedback from the students the students were going to have to have the belief in themselves to actually present their findings and all of a sudden they were doing
communication when I really set to do using Maths and the final stage very often is to keep their enthusiasm through a project is to display their findings using ICT.

The whole area of the cross-curricular skills is really beneficial for every child if it's embedded within the school curriculum and that it's not seen as an add on and it has had a very wobbly start but I know that we've had to re-culture it and rebrand it within the school to ensure that everybody is on board with it and that everybody is accountable to ensure that every skill is embedded within curriculum but that every child has success and that every child can see that why are we doing this and what benefit is it going to be for them because after all it has to be seen as a benefit for every child because the ethos of our school is that every child has success.