

Visit — 15 June 2017

A group of governors visited school to find out about Foundation Subjects

What did we do?

We met Mrs Henzell, Deputy Headteacher, who has responsibility for curriculum. She gave us information about the foundation subjects in the curriculum and answered our questions on the curriculum. We then visited the classes to see different aspects of Foundation Subjects.

Nursery: were playing Music

Reception: were singing using the 'Charanga' programme

Year 1: were doing art

Year 2: were taking part in liturgical dance, led by More Than Dance, an outside provider

Year 3: were making small working models of 'onagers' (Roman catapult machines) as part of their work on the Romans

Year 4: were doing RE

Year 5: were producing animations using iPads

Year 6: were at the Discovery Museum

What did we learn?

We found out a great deal about foundation subjects in the national curriculum.

•Which subjects are included in the Foundation subjects?

History, Geography, Design Technology, Art and Design, Music, Modern Foreign Languages at KS2, PE, Computing.

•What have been the main changes to the curriculum?

ICT is no longer a core subject. The curriculum must be broad and balanced. There is a focus on school on any groups who might have barriers to learning. In EYFS there are prime and specific learning areas that are taught and assessed. The prime areas are: communication and language and personal, social and emotional development. These are embedded before the specific areas are introduced. They are: literacy, Maths, understanding the world and expressive arts and design.

•Is there still a thematic approach?

To some extent the school has moved away from this since the revised curriculum was introduced. EYFS still use topics e.g. Mini-beasts

•How are skills developed?

In PE a range of skills is taught and developed through different games and activities *eg* ball skills. Children learn coding skills in Computing. Basic skills of Reading, Writing and Maths are developed with interventions where needed. The core subjects are embedded and the skills taught in these subjects are applied to the foundation subjects. For example, writing skills taught in literacy should be applied when teaching history and maths skills should be applied in geography etc. This follows the EYFS approach to prime and specific learning areas.

•How is the curriculum mapped?

Topics and skills are mapped. Termly or half-termly maps are on the website.

•What are the strengths of the curriculum?

It is broad and balanced. Coverage has been mapped. We have good, skilled teachers.

•How will the curriculum be developed further?

By further development of annual curriculum maps. The school would also like to develop further the idea of curriculum workshops for parents.

•How are the Foundation subjects assessed?

There is no requirement for an assessment framework in the national curriculum for Foundation subjects. There are some time allocations *eg* 2 hours for PE. Science must be taught. There are requirements that swimming must be taught.

We also discussed the role of the staff coordinators.

Positive comments

Curriculum mapping for coverage has been carried out. Some subjects are planning across phases *eg* Geography so that there is better progression from Year 1 to Year 2.

Our school extends swimming provision.

This year there have been curriculum workshops for parents on Talk for Writing and Accelerated Reading.

The topics that are taught can be changed to reflect the children's interests.

Different areas of the curriculum are shared with the whole school in assembly.

Linked visits can enthuse the children. We saw this in Year 3 who had been to the Great North Museum as part of their work on the Romans. When we visited their class they were very enthusiastic about making their 'onagers' and were able to tell us about what they were doing and how it involved design, Maths and science.

Any questions?

We asked about how many parents attended the workshops. How can we reach and involve more parents and families? We discussed how to engage parents through the class blogs.

We asked about links with the high schools for subject areas e.g. the Reece Scholars initiative in Engineering at St. Cuthbert's

The school has initiated a link with the nearby Discovery school which should lead to some lab experience for our children. We mentioned the Artsmark revised scheme and whether this might be something to explore.

Future visits?

It would be interesting to look at the range of skills that is covered in the curriculum and to have more time to talk to the children about the different subjects.

Other comments

The classes we visited were enjoying their learning. The children were very involved in their work and were well behaved. Some of the Foundation subjects provide opportunities for extended writing tasks.

SIP links

Key Issue 3: improve attainment in Writing across the school. KI 4: Assessment and Monitoring. KI 6 Quality First Teaching