

# Media

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TES JULY 14 2006

## Primary forum

With TES primary editor Diane Hofkins



# The answer lies in Bexley

Where schools have had the courage to build whole curriculum on the ethos of the foundation stage. Diane Hofkins paid a visit

I have found the holy grail. It is in a far corner of south London called Bexley, and it shines like a beacon. It is already attracting pilgrims from across the land.

This vessel of hope is a group of eight primary schools which have done what so many have dreamt of, but few have actually attempted. They have designed an early-years style curriculum of exploration, themes and creativity for the whole primary age range.

These teachers used the foundation stage's six areas of experience to build a skills-based, cross-curricular programme covering everything (except some literacy and numeracy) straight through Year 6.

Called the creative learning journey, it is a more natural way of learning, say the teachers involved. The children like it too.

"We link all the subjects together, so you know what you're learning about more," said a Y6 pupil from Burstled Wood primary, whose headteacher, Ely Prynne, is the project leader.

And another child explained: "Say you don't like maths, you make it fun by combining it with other things."

Many heads and pundits have

called for a primary curriculum built on early-years principles. Wales has gone part of the way with its three to seven foundation phase, which is currently being rolled out. In England, a small number of schools have experimented with extending the foundation curriculum into the infant years.

Bexley's brave teachers have mapped the entire primary national curriculum on to the areas of experience (personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; creative development and physical development).

They have also built in the Every Child Matters five outcomes (enjoy and achieve, be safe, be healthy, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being), the literacy and numeracy frameworks, and several other documents as well. The project had funding from the Department for Education and Skills innovation unit as well as from the local authority.

In fact, not only has the school forged the holy grail, it has invented the wheel. A giant wheel shows



Creative journey: pupils at Burstled Wood primary in Bexley enjoy the new-style lessons

these links, and smaller ones map out specific topics, such as Terrible Tudors for Y5 or Friend and Foe for Y6. And amazingly, all this is on its website.

It was a huge job, says Mrs Prynne. But it means not only that others do not have to reinvent the wheel, but they can download ready-made ones from which they can construct their own projects

and topics. The Bexley group has developed a set of key skills for each year group and a set of 30 wheels for nursery to Year 6. Mrs Prynne hopes they will be able to produce and market a glossy pack as well.

Travellers on the journey are advised to start with a seven-year plan for the entire school. Different schools have been

using the creative learning journey in different ways since embarking on it last year, but 450-pupil Burstled Wood is one of several using the structure in every class and every year group throughout the school. Twenty more schools are joining in September.

For Mrs Prynne it is the creative aspect of all this that matters

### Pointers from pilots

- set aside at least two training days;
- start with school's seven-year plan;
- Look for natural links across teaching units which will lead to a theme title;
- agree titles of themes;
- ensure coverage of skills across the whole year;
- plan whole-school generic wheels (for example, for festivals and themed weeks);
- add discrete units (such as for maths and English);
- add resources;
- add enrichment activities, such as visits and visitors.

most. "We always start with the wow factor," she says.

So she is proud of the big outdoor art projects, such as a row of inventive trees created by each class for a science project, but with links which encompass a range of skills such as weighing, measuring and movement.

"The whole curriculum came out of science week," she says.

The framework developed by the eight schools provides a content base for each year group, in three termly themes, alongside a set of key skills they suggest schools aim to focus on that year. But the heads stress that each school is different and will have its own curriculum.

A continuum of skills in every national curriculum subject has also been constructed, so that progression is clear. Teachers say the approach has tapped into children's natural enthusiasm and ways of learning.

"It makes more sense to the children," says Y2 teacher Eleanor Bacon. "They go home and speak to their mums and dads about it."

Children are now keen to extend their school work into their home lives, and are producing not just more but better work.

Nursery teacher Judith Magness is thrilled with the creative learning journey. "It's all about our early-years curriculum. The rest of the school has adopted the foundation style of learning and it's wonderful," she says.

"Children remember more when it's connected to experience."

www.creativelearningjourney.org.uk. The intellectual rights lie with the Bexley primary heads

## Terrible Tudors score early goal

Here is how some of the skills from the Year 5 Terrible Tudors topic fit with the national curriculum. Early-learning goals from the foundation stage guidance were used as a basis for the skills.

● **Knowledge and understanding of the world**  
Skills: describe characteristic features of past societies and periods including ideas, beliefs, attitudes and experiences of men,

women and children, social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity.

● **Content:** history curriculum: life in Tudor times; differences between the rich and poor; Tudor food, clothing, healthcare and leisure pursuits; Tudor discoveries; religion in Tudor times.

● **Communication, language and literacy**  
Skills: retrieve and collate

information from a range of sources; speak confidently in a wide range of contexts, including some of a formal nature varying expression and vocabulary.

● **Content:** English national curriculum: creative writing on a Tudor joust; diary entries in role.

● **Creative development**  
Skills: drama: use dramatic

conventions; reflect on how working in a role helps to explore some complex issues; dance: perform different styles of dance clearly and fluently; understand styles of dance; music: describe, compare and evaluate different kinds of music using appropriate vocabulary.

● **Content:** drama: role play and hot seating in character; dance: Tudor dancing; music: Tudor music and instruments.

## Principles of good learning

The programme sets out principles of effective learning such as:

- children know what they are going to learn;
- they know what they need to do to be successful;
- they are helped to assess their learning and that of others;
- they receive positive feedback

to identify what to do next;

- they have time to reflect and review;
- they feel cared-for and are happy, secure, motivated and stimulated;
- the learning environment is well organised, attractive and stimulating;
- learning tasks are organised in small steps;

- they experience a variety of learning situations, indoors and out;
- interesting, fun and stimulating lessons, in which children learn through first-hand, multi-sensory experience;
- high expectations;
- timetabling builds in flexibility;
- spontaneity is encouraged

