

Less is More: the move to person-centred, human scale education

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ABSTRACT Bishops Park College, Clacton, is arguably the most important single educational innovation at secondary school level the United Kingdom has seen for 20 years. Here the Principal, Mike Davies, begins by reflecting on ways in which forgotten pioneers can help us develop a more profound approach to truly 'personalised' learning, before providing an inspirational and passionate account of the first English school designed and built to house a 'schools-within-schools' approach to learning. At Bishops Park such an approach is based on the belief that we must start with relationships that enable us to know and shape each other's learning in depth. For this to happen we need continuities of time, place, and persons and a wide-ranging, extensively negotiated curriculum.

Overview and Introduction

This article draws on a radical tradition in which a number of state schools have, for the past twenty five years, sought to develop a community comprehensive education that is sensitive to personal needs and interests, supportive and challenging, yet robust and exciting. Part One - *Past as Future* – begins with a reminder of the current government's desire to innovate and personalise, then moves to trace the development of those ideas in a series of progressive comprehensive schools in the 1970s/80s. Part Two - *The Move to Educate on a Human Scale* – is the contemporary story of the development of Bishops Park College, Clacton where in the early years of this century the principles of human scale and restructuring are again thriving ... enjoy the ride ...

PART 1. PAST AS FUTURE

Looking Beneath the Surface of 'Improvement'

The third term of the Labour government in the United Kingdom began with a growing realisation that while successes were championed about an overall improvement in what were termed 'standards' this was accompanied by a growing gap in achievement between those for whom the school system was deemed to be successful and those for whom it was making little difference. While it was possible to claim improvement for all, the differential rates of progress meant that in absolute terms the achievement gap was ever widening. In many cases, slower improvement was linked to localities of significant deprivation, with the socio economic status of the parent being paramount. For instance according to the *Times Educational Supplement*

the difference between the proportions of girls and boys gaining five or more good GCSEs has doubled since 1997 in the country's most deprived wards when compared to more affluent areas.
(August 2004)

and from the *Guardian*

Whether school leavers go to university is almost entirely dependent on a postcode lottery which leaves people from 'good' areas six times more likely to make the leap than those from deprived areas, according to the biggest ever survey of students' backgrounds'.
(January 2005)

Whilst media reporting and public interest in the relative success of the school system continued to be largely driven by outputs from the rounds of annual examination statistics there were some intriguing sidelines such as ever increasing data showing improvement at the 16+, GCSE examination in mathematics and English coupled with an ever vocal lobby, especially from organisations like the Confederation of British Industry, (see for instance comments in an article in the *Observer*, 21 August 2005, reporting the Director of CBI, Digby Jones, bemoaning a loss of standards in numeracy and literacy), leading to suggestions that the system had become progressively more intelligent and proficient at gaining marks at standardised tests while making relatively less headway in the general education of all citizens. Despite this suggested sham, the third term of the Labour government began by continuing its commitment to data-driven reform and data-driven measures to judge success as though they were value free.

'Schools-Within-Schools' and 'Personalised Learning'

The debate over what values and vision of future society a data-driven system supports was largely absent. However, at least within education circles, concerns over the relationship between the structures and apparatus of schooling and the

aims of education were raised. In a piece originally written in 1993 and then repeated by Ted Wragg in his introduction to *Letters to the Prime Minister*, he warned of the dangers of seeing 'children as commodities, parents as consumers, schools as competitive businesses, teachers as technicians, the curriculum as a set of bureaucratic requirements, accountability as narrowly conceived test scores' (Wragg, 2005, p. 13). Nevertheless, the prevailing approach emphasised the instrumental, serving the interests of the economy and selection rather than the expressive, personal and community.

In the contemporary era of 'Leading Edge', 'Beacons' and 'Pathfinders' it seems unfashionable that the new might also have a past. However, within a climate of delivery and conformity another idea was also reemerging, one that revolves around the idea of breaking large secondary schools into smaller units. A headline in the *Guardian* newspaper, 'Break-up of large schools mooted' suggested that the Labour party was considering 'Radical proposals to break up large and unwieldy secondary schools into more manageable, smaller learning communities or even into 'schools within schools', which are common in America.' (*Guardian*, March 19, 2004). Such ideas were described by the then Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, as the 'newest and most exciting' of those being considered for the next stage of Labour's programme of educational reform. In making such a claim however, he was ignoring some very significant earlier work of innovative schools in the UK from twenty years ago. Schools like Bretton Woods in Peterborough, Madely Court in Telford, Countesthorpe in Leicestershire, and Stantonbury Campus in Milton Keynes. What are common between these early pioneers and the 'new' thinking are the core ideals that the restructuring is aimed at. According to the *Guardian* report the moves towards a schools-within-schools model that were fuelling Clarke's excitement were based on a belief that such restructuring:

- Helps to tackle the transition from primary to secondary school amid evidence that it can be a daunting experience for pupils and often leads to a dip in academic performance
- Breaks down the anonymous nature of a large school, creates a team environment and gives pupils a sense of identity and belonging, the smaller structures help combat a time when pupils can feel alienated and vulnerable to bullying as they are forced to cope with a large, anonymous environment and the challenges of a complicated timetable and moving around a sprawling new building
- Gives youngsters a more formal sense of identity and allows them to more easily compete in extra-curricular activities such as sports and games
- Enables the grouping of pupils in the first three years of secondary school into individual blocks led and managed by their own staff so that teachers get to know their own group rather than spreading themselves over a whole year group
- Enjoys the support of a significant majority of parents in places where the model has been adopted, where the parents believe that the structure

will improve their children's educational opportunities by creating a culture of high expectation.

John Watts, 'Sub Schools' and the Possibility of Holistic Curriculum

This is an interesting list, and John Watt's, a powerful architect of practical ideas that helped shape the development of community based comprehensive schools in the 1970s and 1980s foresaw such advantages of what he termed 'sub schools' in a series of articles written for a now defunct publication called *PRISE News* in 1980. He saw the restructuring of the comprehensive school into smaller units as having the benefits to reunify or meld the academic and pastoral roles of the teacher which he feared had been separated in the processes of amalgamating the secondary modern and secondary grammar schools. His concern was that the pastoral structures had become too divorced from their prime function to support learning, warning that 'it is not true that if we just get the relationships right, all the rest will follow.' (Watts, 1980, p. 5). Watt's was looking to a restructured school as having greater capacity to engage, support and challenge, through what we now term 'personalising' learning, and for it to provide a means by which smaller scale structures were better able to facilitate 'the appropriate dialogue, a continuous, prolonged, unhurried, activity-related conversation between teacher and student' that would lead to greater challenge and rigour. In this sense Watt's saw restructuring as an antidote to soft, indulgent curriculum provision and practice. He also saw the potential of human scale structures for increased participation and the taking of responsibility by students.

In his articles in *PRISE News* Watts also foresaw the development of 'sub schools' as a way of avoiding the fragmentation and Balkanisation typical of so many secondary school systems. He advocated team structures to promote 'co-ordinated planning across subject boundaries' and recognised that this would entail 'the specialist to open gates in his fences and increasingly take a broad look at the whole curriculum'. (Watts, 1980, p. 6). Dovetailing with, and reinforcing his embracing of this holistic curriculum view was Watt's appreciation of the need to offer students greater stability and security of a 'fixed base', where they physically belonged and felt a sense of emotional ownership. In Watts' own words, 'Sub schools can satisfy the need for membership that relates both to living together and learning'.

All this stemmed from a deep dissatisfaction with the prevailing status quo which John Watt's, in association with highly gifted colleagues such as Michael Armstrong, who writes eloquently elsewhere in this Special Edition of *Forum*, were twenty years ago struggling to ameliorate. Advocacy of smaller scale structures was nothing to do with the Blair vision (see *Guardian*, 2004) of a return to Houses which Watts understood as pathetic 'attempts to promote a sense of belonging centred on distinctive clothing, collaborative games or other means of accumulating merit which have hardly touched the real business of

learning and collaboration that a school should be about.' Rather, human scale structures can provide a positive challenge and hope to a system by which:

Schooling has mostly emphasised and rewarded activity that is conformist, unoriginal, and generally, convergent. Means have been sought, and still need to be sought, of promoting all those other qualities that psychologists now associate with the neglected right-hand brain hemisphere, the intuitive, synthesising, holistic, spatial capacities for approaching experience. They will flourish in a learning centre that offers time, continuity, long-term relationships, divergence, the exploitation of the spontaneous and the value of the Eureka principle (Watts, 1980, p. 8).

While being realistic enough not to claim the Holy Grail, Watts did have the foresight to see the potential of schools restructured into schools-within-schools, as a realistic, achievable and worthwhile way of meeting the needs of a new generation.

PART 2. THE MOVE TO EDUCATE ON A HUMAN SCALE

Anachronistic Continuities

There can be little doubt that the first few years of the new century have seen an increasing recognition that the school system that we know and work in today owes more to the past than to the future. It resonates to the fixed certainties of the factory hooter and the mass production of the assembly line rather than the 'just in time', flexibility and team working of today.

The spirit, or more accurately, the soullessness of the school as factory was well encapsulated in the novel 'Among Schoolchildren' which sought to reflect on, and remind us of, the realities of classrooms in the USA in the late 1980s and 1990s:

The problem is fundamental. Put twenty or more children of roughly the same age in a room, confine them to desks, make them wait in lines, make them behave. It is as if a secret committee, now lost to history, had made a study of children and, having figured out what the greatest number were least disposed to do, declared that all of them should do it. (Kidder 1991)

<i>1988 National Curriculum</i>		<i>1904 Regulations</i>	
English	10%	English	13%
Mathematics	10%	Mathematics	13%
Combined sciences	10-20%	Sciences	10%
Modern language	10%	Other language(s)	11-15%
Technology	10%	Housewifery	5%
		Manual work	5%
History }	10%	History	13%
Geography }	10%	Geography	13%
Art }	10%	Drawing	5%
Music }			
Physical Exercise	5%	Physical education	5%

Figure 1. Comparison of 1988 and 1904 Curriculum Arrangements (based on Ross, 2000).

In England, the curriculum of 2004 largely mirrored that of 1904 (Figure 1). Its interpretation of this into a subject based, and fragmented timetable has hardly changed. As Ross (2000) demonstrated, ‘The subjects selected (for the National Curriculum) were the simple traditional and unadorned subjects of the public and grammar school, and bear an uncanny resemblance to the 1904 ‘Regulations for Secondary School’

This continuity with the past is repeated throughout the school system and echoes to the conservative tune of many parents and teachers who claim that there is too much change and repeatedly call for ‘consolidation’ in the name of ‘maintaining standards’. We can see school uniforms today that would not have been out of place in 1950; plans for new schools in the UK are still dominated by rectangular classrooms of 50sqm built to contain classes of 30 children, which we still segregate by age. Children still move on mass at regular intervals defined by a bell and disgorge into a maze of corridors; they are frequently segregated by something called ‘ability’ although the concept was denounced many years ago (see Hart et al, 2004), and we still largely define success as the consequence of sitting at a small table and writing furiously for two or three hours.

Recognising the Need for Change

While we perpetuate this system we also know that it is insufficient as the basis of fostering an educated citizenry. In the UK, ministers are increasingly taking the platform to sketch a new educational landscape one in which ‘Excellence should be our aspiration for all; equality of opportunity should be the birthright of all pupils; excellence used as a battering ram against inequality; equity helping develop the talents of every learner.’ (Milliband, 2004). The inherent tensions in meeting such aspirations in a state sponsored and controlled system are also being recognised.

The key is how we tailor a universal service to individual need. As our best schools and colleges demonstrate, decisive progress in educational standards occurs where every learner matters, with teaching and learning structured around the needs, interests and aptitudes of individual pupils. High expectations of every student, given practical form by high quality teaching, based in a sound knowledge and understanding of each learner's needs. (Milliband, 2004)

This encouragement towards what has become known as 'personalised learning' exposes some of the paradoxes of contemporary schooling in that we know so much more about establishing and sustaining relationships; engagement and motivation; pedagogy; curriculum design and organisation; assessment of and for learning and the potential of reflection and sharing best practice to transform the experience of all learners, whether they be students or teachers; and yet we change so little. It may be as Stoll (Stoll et al, 2003a), suggests that, 'Somewhere along the way, in the name of educational reform, policy makers may have confused structure with purpose, measurement with accomplishment, means with ends, compliance with commitment, and teaching with learning.'

Concerns about the reluctance of the school system to adapt and evolve along with the pace of change in contemporary society did lead to some very powerful central direction by government

Education policy in England in the 1990's was characterised by a sustained period of 'school improvement', closely allied to public accountability measures, the emergence of data rich schools and centrally directed, research-informed initiatives around teaching and learning, such as the national literacy and numeracy strategies. The early years of the twenty-first century have, however, brought a sharper focus, with the 'improvement' movement giving way to more radical thinking. Despite significant gains, national and international analyses of student outcomes suggest that education in England is still not serving all pupils well. The message is clear: if we continue to do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got. (FutureSight, 2004)

Under the umbrella of OECD a number of countries, including New Zealand, the Netherlands, England and Canada, are currently looking to match current trends in economic and civic society and project their likely impact on the school systems. Such 'futures thinking' has, in the UK, stimulated debate around a number of possible futures, developed by the OECD into a number of radically divergent scenarios. These range from maintaining the status quo to re-schooling to de-schooling. (OECD 2001)

Restructuring on a Human Scale: learning from the evidence

This article is located in the scenarios that look at re-schooling and especially to reconstruct the current emphasis on large, bureaucratic, prescribed and recipe-bound, one size fits all schools and restructure them on a human scale. It is an account of the attempt by one innovative school on the east coast of England, Bishops Park College, to break from the stranglehold of the past. The work that is being encouraged draws on this 'futures thinking' and is developing practices that are supportive of, and reflect education on a human scale. In relation to the OECD scenarios it can be seen as fusing elements that see reconstructed schools both as 'core social centres' and as 'focused learning organisations'. Combining the role of being an 'effective bulwark against social, family and community fragmentation' coupled with a pedagogic culture of 'high quality experimentation, diversity and innovation' (NCSL, 2003), or, more simply, to accept the challenge of understanding societal trends and apply our new understanding of learning to help students deal with the opportunities and ambiguities of contemporary life.

The development at Bishops Park is reflecting a global trend that recognises scale and relationships as an important dimension in the desire to achieve greater person centeredness and effectiveness in our work with students. It also responds to the challenge set by Miller & Bentley (2003),

to develop an organisational structure that allows much more direct links between curriculum timetabling and pedagogic strategy, generating 'just in time' patterns of organisation which allows teachers, resources and physical spaces to be organised responsively around different patterns of learning activity.

Nearly ten years ago Ted Sizer (Sizer,1996) wrote that 'one cannot teach a student well if one does not know that student well and that the heart of schooling is found in relationships between student, teacher and ideas.' The influence of the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools in the United States and of the Middle Years Development Programme in Australia ripples throughout the developing work of Bishops Park. A summary of the key features of both these initiatives signals a very clear step change in what it means to be a learner at school and a starting point for our development.

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), has set out its ten common principles (Figure 2).

1. The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well
2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. The aphorism 'Less Is More' should dominate
3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of- instructional-services.
6. Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks
7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of expectation, of trust and of decency and embrace families as vital members of the school community
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first and specialists second
9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils include substantial time for collective planning
10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies in its commitment to democracy and equity.

Figure 2. Coalition of Essential Schools: ten common principles.

These ten principles echo the conclusions drawn by the Middle Years Research and Development Project in New South Wales and Victoria, Australia, commonly known as MYRAD (Russell, 2003). The reflections of the MYRAD team on the lessons emerging from their research were enthusiastically quoted in the UK in the conclusions of a report commissioned by the DfES (Stoll et al, 2003b) on the impact of its Key Stage 3 strategy. In its conclusions there was explicit encouragement for

Creating a new model of provision; the need for a core curriculum for most middle years pupils, taught by small teams of teachers – smaller communities for learning – sharing responsibility for 70-80 pupils, who they teach for at least two consecutive years in larger, uninterrupted blocks of time, allowing development of closer relationships.

and

Tooling up for reform; the need for middle years teachers to be qualified to promote literacy, numeracy and other core knowledge, have in-depth knowledge of at least two specialist areas, and understand strategies to integrate specialist knowledge through problem-, topic-, and issues-based approaches to learning. Also, trialling, evaluating and implementing comprehensive, integrated design approaches for improving middle years schooling.

The experience of work in CES schools and those involved in MYRAD embrace a number of common elements that relate scale, and especially to [i] the organisation and deployment of staff.[ii] the organisation of students [iii] the organisation of the timetable and [iv] coherent approaches to learning and assessment. Taken together the emerging tenets can be seen as a series of key messages (Figure 3).

- teachers organised into teams
- regular planning time built into the schedule
- timetable operates as a flexible block schedule
- emphasis on the extra-curricular
- heterogeneous [diverse and mixed] groups
- teachers are generalists first, experts in pedagogy
- assessment based on student performance of real tasks
- essential 'skills' rather than coverage
- staff have contact with fewer than 80 students per week
- stress on the 'learner and learning' rather than 'teacher and teaching'

Figure 3. Key Messages on Scale from Recent Research. Summary based on Preparing for Change: Evaluation of the Implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy Pilot (Stoll et al, 2003b).

This contemporary concern with scale is not a new millennium sentimentality or reaction to the brutalism of mass education per se but rather part of the move to 'personalise learning'; a new drive in the determination to raise universal standards and foster a more cohesive society. Mary Tasker (Tasker, 2003) in her review of the research into small structures in secondary schools gathered significant evidence to claim that smaller structures 'enable children to learn better, achieve more, feel more secure and socially confident and have the desire to enter further education'. She cites research from the United States to support the view that such gains are especially true of students from 'ethnic minorities and impoverished backgrounds'. Working with smaller learning communities Tasker claims that 'Students gain in self esteem and achieve higher academic results, teachers experience greater job satisfaction, parents are more involved in their children's education and society gains from the long term benefits of an educated citizenry'. In many cases the creation of the small learning communities has been the planned consequence of restructuring large schools into smaller autonomous schools on the same site – the 'schools-within-school' model.

Trends like those sketched above have guided the development of Bishops Park and especially helped the articulation and practices associated with a coherent set of values and dispositions. We have attempted to synthesise the experience of CES and MYRAD and the messages they contain for the way we organise our schools, group students and support learning together with a growing confidence that the use of techniques associated with Assessment for Learning (Black et al, 2003) and a curriculum built around a set of competences

to inform and lead life long learning can have in releasing talent and transforming learning. In the UK the development of a curriculum framework fashioned around a set of competences has been pioneered by the RSA in a project named 'Opening Minds' (Bayliss, 1999) which organises learning around five sets of competences. Each set or category contains a number of individual competences, which are expressed in terms of what a school student could achieve having progressed through the curriculum:

- competences for learning [e.g. understand how to learn, taking account of their preferred learning styles, and understand the need to, and how to, manage their own learning throughout life]
- competences for citizenship [e.g. understand cultural and community diversity, in both national and global contexts, and why these should be respected and valued]
- competences for relating to people [e.g. understand how to operate in teams, and their own capacities for filling different team roles]
- competences for managing situations [e.g. understand how to manage risk and uncertainty, the wide range of contexts in which these will be encountered, and techniques for managing them]
- competences for managing information [e.g. have developed a range of techniques for accessing, evaluating and differentiating information and have learned how to analyse, synthesise and apply it]

The Voice of the Student

In addition to external sources of legitimacy we also tapped into the voice of the student. In 2001 a British newspaper sponsored a repeat of a successful collection of ideas and thoughts from children that first appeared in 1969 in a book called *The School I'd Like* edited by Edward Blishen (Blishen, 1969). In the 2001 version the key ideas can be summarized as:

The school we'd like is ...

A beautiful school with glass dome roofs to let in the light, uncluttered classrooms and brightly coloured walls.

A comfortable school with sofas and beanbags, cushions on the floors, tables that don't scrape our knees, blinds that keep out the sun, and quiet rooms where we can chill out.

A safe school with swipe cards for the school gate, anti-bully alarms, first aid classes, and someone to talk to about our problems.

A listening school with children on the governing body, class representatives and the chance to vote for the teachers.

A flexible school without rigid timetables or exams, without compulsory homework, without a one-size-fits-all curriculum, so we can follow our own interests and spend more time on what we enjoy.

A relevant school where we learn through experience, experiments and exploration, with trips to historic sites and teachers who have practical experience of what they teach.

A respectful school where we are not treated as empty vessels to be filled with information, where teachers treat us as individuals, where children and adults can talk freely to each other, and our opinion matters.

A school without walls so we can go outside to learn, with animals to look after and wild gardens to explore.

A school for everybody with boys and girls from all backgrounds and abilities, with no grading, so we don't compete against each other, but just do our best.

(Birkett, 2001)

Such ideas are optimistic, fun, outward looking and encouraging. They are million years away from the retro-engineered secondary school that was aptly summed up as the 3Ds by a British government adviser in 1996 (Barber, 1996); 'the disappeared', 'the disaffected', and 'the disappointed'. They do however appear to be more conservative than the de-schooling scenarios of the OECD. What the young people sketched was a reconstructed, less institutionalised and more person centred experience of learning and school.

Guiding Assumptions

It was against this background that when the opportunity to open a new secondary comprehensive school came in 2001 the challenge was irresistible. We began by building on the simple truth that schools as communities are much like others and will be better where there is:

- clear *respect* for all; respect for the people that we are not some idealised future that we as teachers might mould to our prejudices
- shared participation and *responsibility*; an inclusive community of learners where the gifts and talents of all are accepted and where the voice of all is heard and valued
- rich and varied *opportunities* and circumstances for all to develop their skills and abilities
- shared *recognition* and celebration of successes with a wide range of audiences, and where those successes are not defined in a narrow range of outcomes solely driven by data for the purposes of accountability.

From the experience and research in the above projects a number of dimensions were identified that have help guide the development of Bishops Park. Key among these have been:

- place An emphasis on promoting a sense of belonging through the designation of a coherent suite of rooms for groups of students and staff. Not

as a closet or cocoon but as a stable base from which to branch out and explore other contexts and sites of learning.

- pedagogy A need to interpret our understanding of different learning styles into practical formats for teaching and learning that are active, varied and appropriate to purpose and student. To understand the power inherent in the nexus of intertwining the matters or contents of learning with the processes or methods of learning.
- time To move away from pre-specifying a fixed and rigid annual timetable and towards flexibility according to learning needs. To use time as appropriate to learning rather than as a container into which learning has to be levered
- teams The development of a series of learning communities through the encouragement of a limited and coherent number of teachers to work alongside a dedicated cohort of students. Each contributing expertise whether it be in organisational abilities, leadership, creative flare, counselling skills or subject expertise
- synergy ... the power of partnerships and the end of an arrogance that saw lines across the playground commanding 'No Parent's Beyond This Point' and the dismissal of primary education by the proclamation of a 'fresh start'. This coupled with a move to a family centred focus involving multi-agency joint working as a powerful mechanism to break into what, in some communities, appears to be an impenetrable cycle of repeated failure
- simplicity.....essentially through subsidiary and distributed leadership; a move to re-professionalise teachers through devolving responsibility for decision making to the point of action and impact within the tolerances of agreements on core propositions, such as equal value, inclusion, challenge, support, excellence, and democracy.
- audience.... a recognition that real motivation is more likely to come from real work, in authentic contexts, shared and presented to audiences for whom the work has some intrinsic value and meaning.
- authorship the need to give students their voice; space and place to vent their interests and passions as well as be caught in the spell of a charismatic storyteller or enthralled in a contemporary social or ecological issue

In practical form this has meant the creation of a series of small learning communities that model the concept of 'schools-within-school' and a holistic approach to learning and assessment.

The College is seen as a 'centre for innovation in learning'. We might talk about it as a workshop or laboratory... to explore, to test out, to take risk, to celebrate and share successes, to be supported in failure and to use misconceptions as a source of further learning rather than rejection. It is not a centre of preparation for some 'next stage' but a vibrant and restless quest to establish a model community of achievement where all are involved in sustained activity, scrutiny and reflection; critical appreciation and engagement in culture, the arts and sciences; and, are active participants in and contributors to local

community activity and enhancement. It is not a centre working in isolation and links with parents, community organisations and local groups as well as partner primary and secondary schools are vital.

Organisational Structure

The current organisational structure of the College might be seen as three concentric rings. In time a fourth ring will be added to support outreach and inter-agency/extended schooling with the community. Pictorially it might be best envisaged as a series of interlocking rings similar to those of the Olympic flag.

At the heart of the College are the students and the arrangements made to enhance their learning. Staff and students work together in three semi autonomous schools – Lighthouses, Towers, and Windmills. When the College eventually reaches its final student capacity of 900 students, each of these schools will have 300 students from 11-16 years. The design and planning for the new College, which opened in Easter 2005, is built around this core concept of three-schools-within-a-school. Each of these schools has its own dedicated team of staff, teachers, Teaching Assistants and in time administrative and technical support staff. Staff from the three schools join together to ensure coherent planning, sharing of expertise and the pooling of ‘best practice’. The College has its own Professional Tutor to encourage the development and sharing of experience/expertise throughout the College.

In the school year 2003-2004 the main structure of student/staff organisation looked like this:

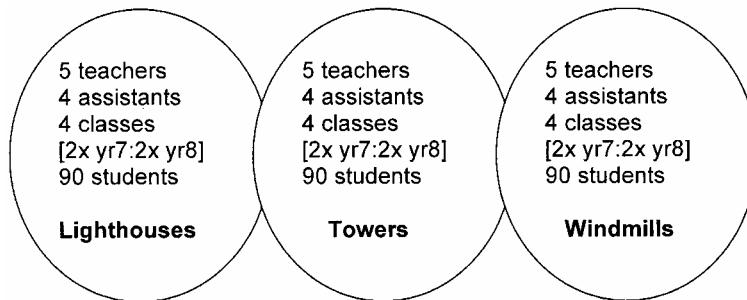


Figure 4.

The five teachers in each of these schools are responsible for developing and delivering the whole curriculum. The main resources for planning and building the curriculum are the programmes of study of the English National Curriculum and the competencies of the RSA ‘Opening Minds’ project. Teachers of Music and PE stand outside the current school structure and work across all three schools. Apart from teachers of these subjects all other teachers work with only

90 students each week. The teaching team uses the expertise of its staff to organise the best match to the various components of the curriculum.

In 2004 there were 270 students on roll at the College, 135 in year 7, 135 in year 8, with a waiting list for those wishing to join the new year 7. In each year group we organise classes into 6 teaching groups and allocate them to the schools. Within each of the three schools there are four classes, two from year 7 and two from year 8. Each class is made up of four learning groups. These groups meet with their class teacher and attached Teaching Assistant first thing, on one morning a week. At this time students talk about their work and progress. This process is helped by the introduction of a log book which acts as a diary, a record of work and a channel of communication between home and school.

The College day follows a varied pattern but the base is:

08.25 Staff Briefing

08.40 Small Group Tutorials; assembly

09.00 Morning Lessons includes 15 min break usually at 10.10

11.30 Club Enrichment Programme

12.10 2 schools at Lunch, 1 school at Numeracy / Literacy

12.50 1 school at Lunch; 2 schools at Numeracy/ Literacy

13.30 Afternoon Lessons

15.30 End of lessons, Voluntary Clubs until 16.45

The curriculum offer of the College is more varied, broader and more balanced than in many other schools. Within each of the schools the small teaching teams work as solo teachers, e.g. to engage students in aspects of the National Curriculum or in extended tutor times, such as induction. They come together to work as a team of five to support cross curriculum and thematic work. About 80% of the curriculum time is given to work within the small team structure. The balance continues to support learning focused on contemporary issues, ideas and themes as a whole but with the possibility of a greater emphasis on subject based work where appropriate. This work is either solo, through a rolling programme of 'Masterclasses', whole day intensive study with one teacher in an area of real passion and expertise for that teacher or with a group of teachers with expertise in similar areas e.g. the Arts. The faculty programme is organised around a rolling programme of three-day, team experiences. Students from both Year 7 and Year 8 join together as new learning communities for these special times. Again staff are organised into three teams:

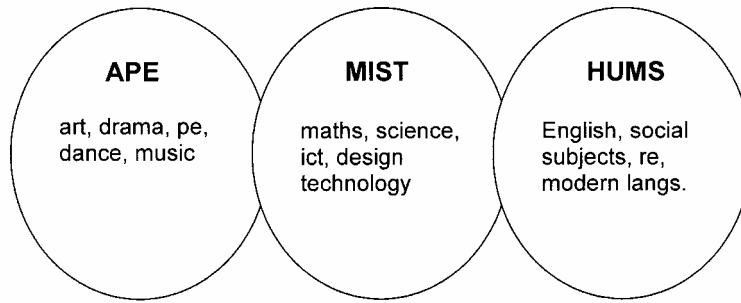


Figure 5.

In addition to the above the College provides for all students a continuous rolling programme of clubs each lunchtime. Each student chooses their club from a menu and then attends that club for two school weeks before moving to their next club. These lunchtime clubs do not displace a growing programme of after school clubs, and in time we (in January 2006) will have a regular breakfast club. The other element of enrichment is that each day, on a half-termly rotation, students engage in a regular numeracy/literacy session that is led by the class teacher.

Parents are regularly encouraged to join us at the College and participate in the learning as well as share in the delights of their children’s achievements. We are keen to use the local community as an arena for inquiry and rich source of resources, rich also in offering many opportunities for comparison and contrast. Local area work is also highly motivating and honouring of the community: ‘Young people are fascinated by projects that take them into the community, allow them to work in groups, influence real decisions and challenge them to develop skills and knowledge that other people clearly value’. (Hargreaves et al 1996).

Individual	Small group	Whole class	Team
Student initiated projects	Problem based learning	Class negotiated project	Cross-curricula theme
Basic skills	Gifted & Talented programme	Masterclasses	Team events/visits
Extended assignments	Learning tutorials	Community commissioned projects	Faculty projects/performances

Figure 6.

At the end of every term all parents are encouraged to attend an 'academic review day' where each student has a piece of 'best work' on display and the student and her/his teacher leads a conversation to show progress made and determine the 'next steps' to move learning further forward. More formal data to show progress is collected and analysed using the Local Authority 'Target Tracker' programme that is building on successful practice of our local primary partner schools. (Essex C.C., 2003)

Curriculum and Learning

While many of the above may be seen to be 'structural', they are intended to give clear signals about values and direction. They are also intended to support a curriculum that is rich in experience and challenge, recursive in so far as its planning will ensure that ideas are returned to for deeper analysis, understanding and insight, relevant to the extent that the bespoke nature of the learning habits and needs of young people will be known to the small teaching teams, who will work to ensure that the contexts and contents of learning both have meaning for the learner and help to meet the entitlements that each student has a right to.

In practice this would mean that there should be opportunities for young people to

- Ai* Pursue independent study/enquiry on topics of their own choosing as well as those externally set, making extensive links through the web and email contacts around the globe,
- Aii* Work in small groups on a range of problem-based-learning scenarios that reflect authentic issues and dilemmas in our society and their community,
- Aiii* Be involved as part of a class group and negotiate, with their tutor, an appropriate theme for a class project, and move to take responsibility for part of the project, organise their work and contribute to the final exhibition,
- Aiv* Feel the passion and power of a teacher-as-expert/enthusiast for a specialist branch of learning e.g. a poet in residence, a history teacher tracing the rise of fascism,
- Av* Work within a broad, cross-curricular theme such as 'Global Warming' with a team of teachers who accept responsibility to engage and lead a students through an exploration of a range of issues, past and present,
- Avi* Ensure that the latent and overt talents of every student are able to thrive and that every student is supported and encouraged to be fully literate in all the basic skills.

As a sub-set of the above, each student should also have an entitlement to

- Bi* Two contrasting residential activities during their school careers

- Bii* At least one work placement for a minimum of two weeks and a similar block placement in a community project
- Biii* Participation with a group, e.g. Theatre in Education, or a branch of Community Volunteers/Action or the Princes Trust and involvement in a non-school context
- Biv* Supported private study on two evenings per week
- Bv* Curriculum on-line, accessible to parents and students, especially those who are ill, with details of current activities and homework tasks

Student entitlement needs to extend to ways of supporting the student and their families

- Ci* Close tutorial support, academic monitoring and advice
- Cii* Personal Mentor and advocate who will also forge a strong link with home
- Ciii* Multi-agency support and co-ordination of targeted intervention

Frameworks for Learning

Given the above it will not be surprising that the one-size-fits-all timetable has also been found wanting. In its place a framework to support and encourage the various engagements with learning has evolved. The pattern illustrated below is that which has been followed in the early Spring of 2004, although there were slight variations between the three schools:

Team theme	Team theme	Team theme	Team theme	Masterclass
Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Masterclass
Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Masterclass
Team theme	Team theme	Team theme	Team theme	Masterclass
Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Masterclass
Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Conventional timetable	Masterclass
Team theme	Team theme	Faculty	Faculty	Faculty

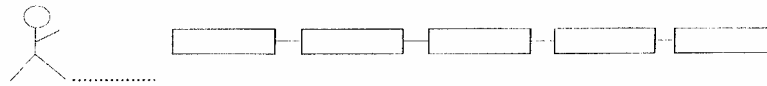
Figure 7.

The conventional timetable operates within a team of 5/6 teachers, with no teacher working with more than 85-90 students. Team theme involves a cross-curriculum team working as one on a particular topic or to launch, sustain, integrate or synthesise. Trips and visits tend to occur during these times. Master-classes are day long workshops with an 'expert teacher' and Faculty comprises groups of 3 / 4 teachers from cognate area working together.

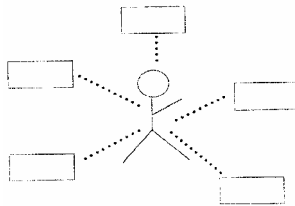
In addition to the above the College Day allows for:

- small learning group tutorials, with 4/5 students meeting with teacher and LSA for weekly review of work and target setting
- lunchtime clubs for all, with students choosing from a menu and staying with a club for 10 x 40 min sessions
- daily session of literacy [rotating half-termly with numeracy] for 40 mins
- extensive programme of after-school clubs.

From the perspective of the student the challenge has been to move the culture from a structure of organisation and curriculum delivery that emphasises subject and departments that are visited by pupils:



... to one that recognises the learner as the centre of coherent and complimentary activity:



An OfSTED View of Bishops Park

In the Autumn of 2003 a team of OfSTED inspectors visited the school and reviewed its organisation and provision. In its conclusions it highlighted many innovative features, including several aspects of the curriculum:

An innovative curriculum that results in pupils really enjoying their school life

'The curriculum and teaching are arranged so that the transfer of eleven-year-olds from Year 6 in their primary schools to Year 7 in Bishops Park is as smooth as possible. Students who might have become disillusioned with their schooling at an early stage start enjoying lessons and wanting to come into college.'

Each student only comes into contact with five or six teachers in Years 7 and 8 for normal lessons so that students and teachers really can get to know each other very well. Each Friday, students have a single session for the whole day, a 'master class'. Teachers select their own topics in their area of subject expertise, and provide an in-depth and interesting experience for the students – master classes rotate amongst classes to ensure equality of opportunity and a balance across the curriculum. Each half-term each class experiences three faculty days, for example three days on science or English. During this extended time, National Curriculum subjects and religious education are explored, giving students excellent experiences through the five faculties of performing arts, technology, classics, maths and science, and literature. All classes experience them all, over the year.

The richness and width of this variety of planning are further enhanced by timetabled clubs and 'lit/num' each day. Students select clubs, which they attend for ten school days, before moving onto another activity. The variety is great, from board games to origami, and from chocolate to basketball. 'Litnum' refers to lessons in literacy and numeracy. These are arranged in half term blocks so that, in addition to English and mathematics lessons, students experience a daily input of one or the other of these two key skill areas. A further bonus for the students is the number of visits and visitors they enjoy.

These arrangements, with an associated inclusive approach to all students, results in very good growth in personal development and a great pride in the college' (OfSTED 2003)

Towards a Responsive, Person-centred Provision

The developments and experiences illustrated above are very similar to those being developed in parts of Australia and the USA. They reflect a recognition that...

'Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the education system was seen rather like a machine. Productivity gains came from working that machine harder, reprogramming more often from the top, tightening specifications and quality standards, and setting ambitious targets. This is no doubt a powerful way of reforming public services. But there are limits to its impact'. (Leadbeater 2004)

....and we are moving to a more responsive and person centred provision characterised by

- Providing a significant teacher for a significant time, reducing the number of teacher contacts for each student by having teachers teach a group of students across a number of learning areas;
- Developing interdisciplinary teams; having teaching teams working with designated groups students work together beyond a single year; facilitated by common planning time and shared space; teams where teachers regularly meet are able to share information about students in their care, develop consistency of approaches, and plan a coordinated and coherent curriculum.
- Using flexible and innovative timetabling with teams of teachers sharing a group of students for an uninterrupted block of time ranging in length from 40 minutes to an entire day or longer.
- Redesigning schools on a human scale as a series of schools-within-schools

It is in the designing of the permanent building of Bishops Park that many of the ideas that trickle through this article will break the mould for schools and the experience of being a learner in an English state school. Bishops Park is the first to be designed and built as a series of three schools-within-a-school, combined with extensive facilities to engage and help regenerate the local area. The building will be the embodiment of a move to educate on a human scale, to end the isolation of the teacher and the taught and bring a sense of community and belonging as the foundation for dignity, challenge and excellence.

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Resources

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- www.dfes.gov.uk Department for Education and Skills, England
- www.hse.org.uk Human Scale Education, England
- www.ncsl.org.uk National College for School Leadership, England
- www.sha.org.uk Secondary Headteachers Association, England
- www.sofweb.vic.edu.au Department of Education and Training, Victoria