



Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

QCA | **FUTURES**
PROMOTING INNOVATION

A curriculum like tartan

A new secondary school has taken the opportunity to create an innovative curriculum that is inspiring, meaningful and fun

School

Bishops Park College,
Clacton, Essex

Innovation

Theme-organised secondary curriculum; three-day focused-learning sessions

In the words of headteacher Mike Davies, the curriculum at Bishops Park College in Clacton has been planned 'from the perspective of a student engaged in inquiry across a swathe of ideas and competences, rather than a stranger visiting a series of disconnected subjects'. He describes it as a 'tartan', with the national curriculum subjects woven seamlessly together.

Bishops Park uses the national curriculum to provide goals for its students, but subjects are not taught as discrete lessons. Instead teachers plan work around a particular theme for each half-term – 70 per cent of class time is spent on theme work. The themes meaningfully connect the learning content and skills, rather than separating knowledge into compartments. As this is the approach that many primary schools take, pupils tend to find the transition from year 6 to Bishops Park straightforward and stress-free.

Making sense of learning

Bishops Park's aim is to make all learning meaningful, to give students guided choices about what they want to

learn and, ultimately, to enable them to work without needing an external stimulus where appropriate. Mike gives the example of students using the school's music studio during their free time to explore different functions, compose tunes and produce a CD. Tutorials are a vital part of the school's pastoral system and form tutors have weekly meetings with their form in groups of up to six to review progress, celebrate successes and plan next steps.

To support the theme work, every day except Friday students receive a lesson in either numeracy or literacy. They also take part in Friday masterclasses – a whole-day session in which a class focuses on a particular national curriculum subject or project, such as engineering a clock in design and technology. And in addition to traditional after-school activities, students have the opportunity to rotate between extra clubs every four weeks, spending nearly two hours per week on activities ranging from textiles to gardening on the school's allotment.

The faculty approach

As the holidays draw near, staff and pupils across the country tend to experience a winding-down slump. But the opposite is true at Bishops Park,

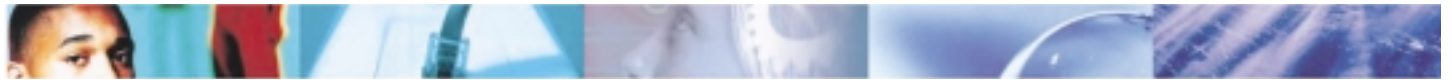


Bishops Park College provides an innovative, stimulating environment for learning

where the end of each half-term is marked by a focused-learning session known as 'faculty'. This involves students spending three days working intensively on a particular project or theme, investigating it from a variety of angles with the support of teaching staff.

Each year, groups of three or four teachers work together to prepare around ten faculties in total (the faculties and teaching groups change year on year). The teachers prepare a range of activities for the three days, but once in the classroom are guided by what captures the





students' imagination. This in turn keeps students involved and motivates them to engage and learn. Throughout faculty there is a strong emphasis on creativity and imagination, but all the work is tied in to the national curriculum and national strategies.

Bringing learning to life

A group of students drawn together from years 7 to 10 are taking part in the faculty Catherine Wallis and two colleagues are running on the Second World War. This morning she tied tags on her students and sent them off to be evacuated to Yorkshire and Wales. A clip from the film version of *Goodnight Mister Tom* gave them some idea of the experiences of evacuees, and the students brainstormed their feelings before writing postcards home to their families. Now the students are researching the places they have been evacuated to and thinking about daily life in the 1940s. Some have worked on role plays and scripted pieces about the evacuee experience and are now turning them into radio plays.

Another popular faculty involves spending the first two days preparing to open a restaurant on the final day. As well as cooking, the students dye fabric to make napkins and tablecloths, carry out scientific investigations into the chemical compounds in fruit and vegetable dyes, and use ICT to plan and present menus. Meanwhile, over in the circus faculty some students are learning tricks from a visiting clown while others sculpt clown shoes.



Faculty provides opportunities for pupils from across the school to work together

Year 10 students often act as coaches or mentors to the younger pupils during faculty and Mike Davies is currently considering extending this by giving the year 10s training to help them take responsibility. 'The coaching and leadership potential of these students is stunning,' he says. 'People really grow when they are given responsibility.'

Overall, there's a lot of laughter to be heard coming from the classrooms during faculty as new relationships are forged and interesting learning takes place. Catherine Wallis relishes the three-day session, which is fun for everyone involved and prevents the end of half-term slump for both teachers and students: 'Faculty makes everyone raise their game. We all go out on a real high.'

Inspirational fun

The innovative tartan curriculum at Bishops Park – supported by initiatives like faculty – not only makes learning fun, but is also bearing dividends in terms of standards. Ofsted recently validated the school's methods, commenting that the visionary curriculum 'results in students wanting to come to college to learn'. Achievement is good: from being well below average in year 7, pupils have already progressed to just below average by year 8.

As a new school starting with a clean sheet of paper, Bishops Park has seized the opportunity to break away from convention and experiment with new ideas. The result is a curriculum that is inspiring, engaging and fun.

Thinking points

- Do you think that the curriculum at your school is designed from the perspective of 'a student engaged in inquiry across a swathe of ideas and competences' or 'a stranger visiting a series of disconnected subjects'?
- How do you feel as you near the end of a half-term? What difference do you think introducing the faculty approach would make? Would it be feasible in your school?
- Could you build on any of the ideas from Bishops Park to inject more fun into your curriculum?



The school regularly involves the local community in the curriculum