Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

This report evaluates the progress being made in implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, based on visits to 37 schools between May 2008 and March 2009. The schools in the survey had embraced the opportunity to introduce more variety into teaching and learning to engage and motivate students. They had made less progress in linking subjects and incorporating skills across the curriculum, although there were examples of good and outstanding practice in these areas.

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Executive summary

The new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 came into effect for students starting in Year 7 in September 2008. This survey was conducted between May 2008 and March 2009 to evaluate the quality of schools' planning to introduce the new curriculum and their progress in introducing the changes (see Annex for details of the new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3). Inspectors based their evaluations on the progress which schools might reasonably have been expected to have made at that early stage of implementation.

Inspectors visited 37 schools across England which taught Year 7 students. The schools differed in size and were chosen to represent urban and rural settings. They included selective and non-selective schools, secondary schools with and without sixth forms, and middle schools. Three of the visits were made in the summer term 2008 to pilot the survey methodology. Grades are not included for these schools as the visits were prior to the introduction of the new curriculum.

The planning for and implementation of the new curriculum were outstanding in four of the schools visited, good in 21, satisfactory in eight and inadequate in one, reflecting the vision and the quality of leadership and management. The most successful schools, in a range of social and economic contexts, were already developing a vision for a whole-school curriculum and involving all staff. They introduced the curriculum in a way that promoted coherence across knowledge, skills and understanding in subjects, underpinning these with the cross-curricular skills and whole-curriculum dimensions of the new curriculum. There was less coherence across the whole curriculum, however, in the schools which left implementation to subject departments once senior leaders had introduced the changes. This was the more common approach found during the survey.

The schools had not made radical changes to the overall structure of their curricula, with most changes taking place within subjects. Where schools had introduced particular days to cover elements of the curriculum, or discrete courses to teach certain skills, these tended not to be linked clearly to the rest of the curriculum, therefore limiting their usefulness.

The readiness of subjects to implement the new curriculum varied both within and between schools, although the general picture was positive. Schemes of work ranged from detailed plans for the whole key stage (years 7 to 9) to minor modifications for Year 7. This inconsistency in the schools in the survey was also found during Ofsted's regular programme of subject survey inspections. However, even in the schools where planning was otherwise good or outstanding, they had rarely considered how to create better opportunities for learning outside the classroom.

The teachers who were interviewed during the survey were generally positive about the quality of the training that had been provided to support the introduction of the new curriculum. Subject leaders and classroom teachers were more enthusiastic

about the opportunity to introduce more varied approaches to teaching and learning within their subjects than they were about any other element of the new arrangements. They were particularly enthusiastic about how reducing prescription had enabled them to introduce more varied and engaging approaches to teaching and learning. This was the area of greatest development in the survey schools. The vast majority of Year 7 students interviewed during the survey were also positive about the variety in teaching and the ways in which this involved them in their learning.

Teachers also said that schools had created more time for assessment in lessons. This was borne out by the lessons seen during the survey, which allowed students to reflect on their learning and to discuss this productively with their peers.

Although the survey found some outstanding examples of personal, learning and thinking skills underpinning learning across the curriculum, introducing these skills was generally left to subject departments to implement as they saw fit. Even when this was done well, schools usually had little or no knowledge of where the skills were being taught, although there were some notable exceptions. Functional skills were well served within English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), but there was little development of them across the curriculum.

In the very best practice, the whole-curriculum dimensions (see Annex) informed the rationale for developing the curriculum, both across the school and within subjects. However, more usually, schools referred to the dimensions in their schemes of work simply to indicate coverage rather than to improve learning or ensure coherence across the curriculum.

Key findings

- In the most successful schools visited, senior leaders ensured that staff were involved in developing a vision of and model for a coherent whole-school curriculum, incorporating cross-curricular elements in ways that promoted skills in subjects. Senior staff in these schools monitored the implementation of the changes regularly and systematically.
- A common feature in the less successful schools was that senior staff shared their thinking for the development of the whole curriculum, but left subject leaders to interpret it as they saw fit. In these schools, however good the development was in individual subjects, the curriculum as a whole lacked coherence.
- Subject departments were at different stages of readiness for implementing the statutory requirements of the new curriculum. Some were fully and outstandingly prepared, while others had made only minor modifications which did not meet the requirements. One common element, even in the best planning, was that schools had rarely considered how they would create better opportunities for learning outside the classroom.
- Subject leaders and classroom teachers were more enthusiastic about the opportunity to introduce more varied approaches to teaching and learning than

about any other element of the new arrangements. The vast majority of the students interviewed during the survey were positive about the variety in teaching and the ways in which this involved them in their learning.

- Personal, learning and thinking skills, with notable exceptions, were usually left to subject departments to arrange, without reference to a whole-school audit of their coverage or consideration of students' needs. The six schools that had tried to find ways of assessing students' progress in these skills had yet to be successful.
- Although functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT were usually well planned and taught in those core subjects, they were rarely being developed systematically in other subjects.
- The whole-curriculum dimensions provided a strong context for learning in the schools that made them explicit in and central to their planning. However, more usually, schools referred to them in schemes of work only to indicate coverage rather than to underpin and promote achievement.
- The schools made clear links between the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the rest of the secondary curriculum. Only five of the schools, however, knew about the primary National Curriculum in sufficient detail to create links with it and so improve transition to Key Stage 3.
- In almost all schools, there was evidence that the new curriculum was having a positive impact on students' progress in lessons and their enjoyment of learning. However, it was too early to identify a significant impact on students' standards.

Recommendations

The Department for Children, Schools and Families should:

- provide support and guidance for schools to help them to devise coherent plans across the curriculum for the whole-curriculum dimensions, functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills of the new curriculum.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should:

- provide further support to schools to help them to assess students' progress in developing personal, learning and thinking skills.

Schools should:

- ensure that all subjects meet the statutory requirements in planning to implement the programmes of study at Key Stage 3
- analyse the extent to which their curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop personal, learning and thinking skills, and create coherent plans to extend these opportunities across the school, based on the needs of their students

- ensure that the whole-curriculum dimensions underpin the curriculum
- develop their knowledge of the curriculum in the primary phase and ensure that planning helps promote smooth and effective transitions.

Planning for change: the leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

1. The survey investigated how well headteachers, senior managers and teachers had focused on improving students' achievement and personal development in planning to introduce change to the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum were outstanding in seven of the 37 schools surveyed, good in 19 and satisfactory in eight.

Training by external providers

2. Senior leaders were positive about the training that had been provided to support the introduction of the new curriculum. They appreciated the clarity of the presentations on the structure of the new curriculum and on the guiding principles behind it. They found that this gave them a useful platform from which to structure their own training for developing the curriculum in their schools.

3. Although most middle leaders were positive about the training they had received for their subjects, the picture was mixed. In the better schools, all the subject leaders had attended the training. Those who attended valued the presentations which explained the overall curriculum structure and the implications for their subjects. They particularly valued the chance to work with subject leaders from other local schools to share planning and strategies. However, in five of the schools visited, a few subject leaders had not found the presentations at the training clear or helpful and they were less positive about the training and support for individual subjects. However, when combined with the in-school presentations by senior leaders, the training provided departments with a sound basis for planning the new curriculum. Most valued by subject leaders and teachers was the emphasis in the training on the development of varied and active approaches to teaching and learning, and they gave this area the highest priority in their planning.

Training and development in schools

4. Schools were provided with an additional staff training day to support the introduction of the new curriculum. All but one of the schools visited used the day to introduce the curriculum to staff and begin the process of planning and implementing change in time for the start of the new curriculum in September 2008. However, the quality of the training within schools varied considerably and a clear relationship existed between this and the quality of subsequent curriculum development.

5. The schools which used the training very effectively used the time to explain the national requirements, communicate a vision for the school's own curriculum and give teachers a chance to consider what the changes would mean for the school as a whole and within their subject areas. In the best practice, staff were fully involved in formulating the whole-school curriculum, debating its structure and contributing to developing it. In these schools, the programme for training and development, typically, was spaced strategically through the year, with a clear timeline for completing tasks and making decisions. Most importantly, the outstanding leadership and management showed itself in the way in which all staff were involved in formulating the new curriculum as a whole, as well as within their subject areas, guided by the shared vision which had been established.

6. Schools in which developing the curriculum had been a priority before the introduction of the new curriculum used the reduced prescription to good effect. They took forward work already in train on teaching and learning, assessment and the development of personal, learning and thinking skills.

One of the schools visited started the process of curriculum change in November 2007. It held a staff meeting after the deputy headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum had attended a conference on curriculum design, led by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. After a presentation from the deputy headteacher, staff established areas for development and working groups to consider these aspects in detail.

Senior leaders set out a clear timeline which showed:

- how the Key Stage 3 development fitted in with the school's other developments and priorities
- when tasks would be completed
- when the work would be monitored and evaluated within an overall plan.

The school also set up processes through which all staff could discuss proposals and provide feedback to senior staff. A regular newsletter from the headteacher outlined decisions and work still to be done. This kept staff involved and informed about developments.

Middle leaders attended training in their own subjects. This had an important role in developing cross-curricular skills together, as well as ensuring that schemes of work in subjects responded well to the new requirements.

The result was that staff were enthusiastic about the new curriculum, involved in formulating policy and well informed about the decisions made.

7. In the very best practice, cross-curricular skills and the whole-curriculum dimensions were key to creating a coherent curriculum in which these aspects underpinned subject knowledge and skills. These schools audited cross-curricular skills and the whole-curriculum dimensions[1] to establish their coverage. Consequently, the curriculum had greater coherence and links between subjects were more clearly established.

> One of the schools visited audited how subject areas covered the whole-curriculum dimensions. This enabled the staff to see where these were taking place and the extent of the coverage. Action followed.
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> Another school decided to take a whole-curriculum dimension as a theme every half-term and appointed a middle leader as a champion to coordinate the subjects' responses. This was effective in providing a context for developing subject knowledge and skills and for discovering and making the most of links between subjects.

8. Only four of the schools visited had conducted an audit of how personal, learning and thinking skills were covered across the curriculum. Where they did so, the results were illuminating and subsequent action was effective in improving curriculum provision.

> On a training day, one of the schools visited put departments in different areas of the school hall and provided their members with various coloured balls of wool to represent the six personal, learning and thinking skills. They were then asked to consider which of these they covered most in their subjects in Year 7 and, by stretching the wool between them, to link themselves with subjects covering the same ones. This immediately represented, visually, the existing links between subjects. It also revealed that some skills were not well represented across the curriculum, while there was a surfeit of others. This enabled subject leaders to tailor the coverage in their schemes of work to ensure that the skills were more balanced across the curriculum.

9. In contrast to these four schools, most of the senior leaders simply set out the requirements of the new curriculum, made clear to staff the opportunities offered by reduced prescription, and then left subject departments to prepare their schemes of work for September 2008, reminding them to include personal, learning and thinking skills where appropriate. The results of such a lack of clear direction and vision were:

[1] See Annex.

- no clarity about where skills and wider aspects were being covered across the curriculum
- personal, learning and thinking skills, functional skills and whole-curriculum dimensions were included in schemes of work without reference to what was happening in other subjects, so that some aspects received undue weight and some not enough
- insufficient overview of coverage by senior staff or middle leaders.

10. Only three of the schools visited included functional skills outside the core subjects of English, mathematics and ICT in an effective way.

11. Specialist status, in 10 of the schools visited, played a particularly important role in leading new curricular developments. In two schools with specialist status in business and enterprise, the specialism contributed to extra-curricular and cross-curricular work which developed personal, learning and thinking skills well. In two schools with specialist status in sports, the physical education departments were taking the lead in developing more active, varied and engaging approaches to teaching and learning; they also disseminated their good practice in encouraging students' reflection on learning during lessons. The departments in two schools with specialist status in science showed other subject departments how they had reduced the content in their schemes of work. They used the reduction to introduce more investigative work in science and to integrate the skills and dimensions of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum into lessons.[2]

> A science department began the process of reviewing the Key Stage 3 science curriculum well in advance. Taking advice from national organisations, the teachers reduced the prescription and repetition in their existing curriculum and increased the amount of active learning in their schemes of work. They ensured that the schemes of work in science incorporated subject knowledge and understanding, investigative and cross-curricular skills, and whole-curriculum dimensions.
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> The department's assessment strategies were developed to enable students and teachers to track progress regularly, referring in detail to what had been achieved and what required further work.
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> The department presented its curriculum and the process by which it had been developed to other staff in the school. It was well received and provided a useful model for other subjects.

[2] The Annex provides details of the skills and dimensions of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum.

A mathematics department audited where numeracy skills were required in other subjects and when and how they were taught. It began the process of aligning the teaching of these skills in mathematics with the other subjects, with teachers making the links between them explicit. Although this was at an early stage, the benefits were clear. The science department, for example, reported that it made the teaching and learning of some important concepts and processes much more efficient in terms of effectiveness and of the time spent.

Developments in the new curriculum at Key Stage 3

Overall developments

12. The development of the new curriculum was outstanding in five of the schools, good in 20, satisfactory in eight and inadequate in only one.

13. The schools visited had not made major changes to the overall structure of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. All were predominantly providing the curriculum through discrete subject lessons and almost all were doing so over the full three years of the key stage. The schools had also not made major changes to the time available to different subjects: any changes were relatively slight. Cross-curricular delivery was rare and generally limited, although one of the schools was planning further, extensive development of the Year 7 curriculum for September 2009, with integrated delivery across a range of subject areas.

14. Two of the schools had introduced a separate skills-based course for 20–35% of the week. In one of these, this was to ease the students' transition into secondary education, most notably by extending the time they spent with one main teacher to support the development of their general learning skills. In the other school, the subject content of history, geography and religious education was being taught in a programme which was also designed to develop more active approaches to teaching and learning and to cover personal, learning and thinking skills. This was at an early stage of development and, at the time the survey took place, it was not possible to make a firm judgement on the long-term effectiveness of the programme. Nevertheless, the students were enthusiastic about it, reporting that they found the styles of teaching and learning in these lessons engaging and motivating.

15. Evidence from Ofsted subject surveys, especially later in the reporting period, suggests more widespread interest in such skills-based courses. The geography, history and religious education surveys found 24 schools of the 84 sampled with integrated courses in place or planned for. While these usually included subject content from the humanities subjects, the focus was on the development of students' general learning skills. Similar courses were also found in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship surveys. Strengths of the best of these included good levels of interest on the part of students, good thematic and conceptual links that made learning more

coherent, and shared approaches to the development of students' general learning skills. However, subject inspectors also identified emerging problems with the courses. These included the loss of subject content and subject skills development; lack of continuity from primary school experience; lack of rigour and challenge; uneven quality of teaching and artificial 'links' or themes. These problems were especially manifested where courses had been given insufficient planning time and where the component subject departments were not fully involved in planning.

16. In four of the schools in the survey sample, a small number of students who were likely to find the transition to secondary school difficult were being taught in separate classes in Year 7. These schools were attempting to ease these students' transition into secondary education by making their Year 7 experience more like primary school: the students were taught by fewer teachers than is usual in Year 7, and had most of their lessons in one classroom. There were often opportunities for them to spend more time studying English and mathematics. Introducing this provision had led to measurable improvements in attendance, behaviour and achievement compared with similar students in other year groups in the schools visited.

17. The survey schools had a range of provision for students who required additional, focused assistance to support their learning, but, on the whole, these had been in place before other changes were made to the curriculum. At the time of the survey, only three of the schools had taken advantage of reduced curricular prescription to make new arrangements to support such students.

18. In 12 of the schools, there were regular or occasional special events, such as 'off-timetable' days; typically, these were cross-curricular.

Takeover Day

A school had made particularly good use of special 'off-timetable' events, especially the annual Takeover Day where students took over some of the roles of staff.

Students apply for posts in advance and are interviewed by the School Council and staff. Nearly all teaching, clerical and support posts are taken over by students, who, for example, are required to plan and teach lessons, and work as laboratory technicians. These students have real credibility and are respected in their new roles by staff and other students.

Staff and students spoke enthusiastically about a wide range of benefits. The programme:

- improves relationships between staff and students

- boosts students' confidence and self-esteem
- provides valuable insights into what the roles involve and improves students' understanding of career paths.

19. The schools visited were often able to show how they were covering parts of the content of the National Curriculum through such events, but not how participation enhanced or improved students' learning. Because these special events were not sufficiently linked to the students' usual lessons in subjects, they tended not to have a lasting impact on achievement.

20. Work to ensure the coherence of the curriculum was at an early stage at the time of the survey visits. In all but one school, there had been a range of changes to the curriculum, but these had generally been made within curriculum subjects and in relative isolation, with little consideration of students' experience of the curriculum as a whole. Schools had rarely planned systematically for the coherent and comprehensive development of the wider aspects, such as functional skills, across the curriculum. However, there were examples of good practice.

Using cross-curricular themes

One school visited had planned periodic cross-curricular thematic work to improve the coherence of the curriculum and to extend students' learning across a range of subjects. At the time of the visit, students were studying civil rights in their lessons in English, history, citizenship and drama. Teachers reported that working collaboratively had helped them to improve their teaching. Students said that they enjoyed this way of working because it reinforced their learning and enabled them to understand a topic from different perspectives.

Linking subjects through homework

In one of the schools, subject areas were working together to develop common, coordinated homework tasks. This was enabling students to be more creative in the way that they approached and presented their work. One homework task was titled 'Plants and animals'. It linked work from biology, mathematics, drawing and design, imaginative writing and ICT. Tasks included practical experimentation, research and writing. Students were encouraged to think creatively. The resulting work was very well written and presented, with two- and three-dimensional art work, and research illustrated by ICT-generated graphs.

Subject developments

21. In all the schools surveyed, work had been done to revise and redevelop schemes of work for subjects and teaching materials in light of the changes to the curriculum. However, the extent of development varied markedly between survey schools and even between subjects in the same school. This variation was also noted in Ofsted's regular programme of subject surveys.

22. In the best examples, schools had made extensive and well-coordinated improvements across the school to schemes of work and teaching approaches:

    - streamlining the content of lessons
    - introducing more group work and investigative activities
    - using personal, learning and thinking skills effectively and explicitly.

    In other schools, developments were considerable in some subject areas, but limited in others. Two schools felt that the need for middle leaders to prioritise curriculum development at other key stages had been an important factor in limiting developments at Key Stage 3. In almost all cases, the focus had been very sharply on Year 7, with only very broad longer-term planning for future years.

23. Almost all staff welcomed the opportunities offered by the new curriculum. In particular, they appreciated reduced curriculum content and the opportunities this gave them to develop more interesting approaches to teaching and learning. The focus was on making activities in lessons more varied and engaging for students.

> Developing history
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> A history department had used the opportunity presented by the new curriculum to make lessons more active and interesting. The approach to teaching and learning revolved around practical activities. Students expected to move during lessons: standing up to register opinions or to vote was common. Role play was frequent and included unannounced visits to the classroom by teachers acting the part of a messenger to announce key information (for example, the death of Edward the Confessor). More extensive practical work happened outdoors in the school grounds, where historical events were frequently re-enacted.
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> Thinking skills were given prominence in the new history course. All lessons provided starting points – often questions – but not a full route through the lesson; research in groups or individually was essential for students to make progress. Clues were offered through information and resources. The teacher's role had become one of facilitator and prompter, providing support or challenge. Personal, learning and thinking skills were

promoted well, with students, for example, given responsibility for leading and coordinating the work of teams.

Personal, learning and thinking skills

24. Personal, learning and thinking skills are intended to become an integral part of enhancing learners' knowledge and understanding across the curriculum, giving teachers greater opportunities to help all learners secure the skills they need for life and work (see Annex). In half the schools visited, students were explicitly aware of their school's focus on developing their personal, learning and thinking skills, and were able to explain how this provision was helping them to learn more effectively.

25. Of the 34 schools visited, 29 had incorporated personal, learning and thinking skills into subject-level planning; in a further school, opportunities for students to develop these skills had been planned into time spent with their form tutors. However, there were notable weaknesses and inconsistencies in the way that subject areas planned for and taught these skills. In the weaker schools, schemes of work listed particular personal, learning and thinking skills without any evidence that **how** these skills would be used or developed within lessons had been considered. In some cases, the skills were planned into schemes of work and lesson plans, but the opportunities for students to use them were not actually realised in the lesson. Opportunities for students' development of these skills had rarely been coordinated systematically across all subjects. Students therefore sometimes had many opportunities to develop certain personal, learning and thinking skills, but few opportunities to develop others.

26. Only three of the schools visited had based their planning on a curriculum audit of where personal, learning and thinking skills were already taught or developed. None had systematically analysed students' current levels of skill to inform their planning or prioritise developments in particular skills. Only five had considered how they would assess students' progress in developing these skills; few had planned systematically to enable students to strengthen and improve their skills over time. However, there were examples of good practice and the impact on the coherence of the curriculum and on students' achievement was clear.

> In the spring term 2008, a school undertook a full audit of students' skills and current provision, involving all staff. Staff agreed on the particular skills and personal qualities that the students would need to develop in order to make the most of their education and prepare them for future employment. The audit of provision confirmed that the school was already doing a lot to promote students' personal, learning and thinking skills.
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> Further work was carried out to strengthen and extend these opportunities, coordinated across all subjects to ensure comprehensive provision. For example:

- planning in history focused on independent enquiry by emphasising analysis and evaluation of sources of evidence through a variety of independent, group and paired work

- in modern foreign languages, students researched the whole-curriculum dimension of identity and cultural diversity by working as independent enquirers and in teams

- in art, the students initiated their own projects and presented their research in a format of their choice.

In addition, the excellent use of speeches, PowerPoint presentations, film and audio files and podcasts contributed significantly to improving students' functional skills, as well as their personal, learning and thinking skills.

These active approaches to improving knowledge, skills and understanding in subjects encouraged cross-curricular skills and placed them in the context of the whole-curriculum dimensions. Achievement was excellent and the aims of producing successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens were clearly met. The school is now at the early stages of creating systems to assess and track students' development of personal, learning and thinking skills, using a learning journal and an online programme.

27. Some of the schools had used commercial resources to address personal, learning and thinking skills. These programmes had made an important contribution to debate in schools about the aims of the whole curriculum and to raising the awareness of staff about the potential for links between subjects. However, students reported that, when their schools set up special days or weeks outside the normal timetable to promote such links, they did not have a clear sense of what they had gained from the events or how it related to their day-to-day learning.

Functional skills

28. The schools visited taught the functional skills of English, mathematics and ICT mainly through those subjects, with little planning to cover them elsewhere, although the new curriculum at Key Stage 3 encourages this. Only four of the schools surveyed were using other subjects, cross-curricular work, particular school events or other aspects of the curriculum to develop or consolidate these skills. Where a more cross-curricular approach was evident, the focus was usually on literacy.

A geography department in a middle school used the reduction in curriculum content and prescription to increase opportunities for students to engage in fieldwork and develop their functional skills. Year 7 students

were planning a visit to Hadrian's Wall for Year 5 pupils and going to the visitors' centre to help their preparation. In their mathematics lessons they were working out costings and calculating travel times and in their English lessons they were preparing a visit booklet for the Year 5 pupils.

Whole-curriculum dimensions

29. Whole-curriculum dimensions provide a focus for work within and between subjects and across the curriculum (see Annex). The schools in the survey made only limited use of the whole-curriculum dimensions when planning the new curriculum. All the schools visited were able to refer to a range of activity that was relevant to the dimensions, for example charity or environmental work, although most of this work preceded the introduction of the new National Curriculum, and they had rarely used the dimensions as an opportunity to review or develop practice in these areas.

30. There were, however, notable exceptions. Two schools had used the dimensions to underpin the development of the whole curriculum and this was helping them to cultivate connections and improve coherence across all aspects of the curriculum. The best practice used the dimensions effectively to provide a context for developing subject skills as well as personal, learning and thinking skills.

A geography project on sustainable communities encouraged students to think about their place in the world, their values, and their responsibilities to other people and the environment. Year 10 students prepared and presented materials to Year 7 students on the topic of climate change. Students also learned about the role played by China in the world and our relationship with that country. The focus on the dimensions, on identity and cultural diversity, and on the global dimension and sustainable development provided an excellent context for students to make progress in geography while developing skills across the curriculum.

Wider opportunities

31. In the majority of the schools visited, the students were very positive about the opportunities available outside the classroom, including extra-curricular clubs and other activities, trips and residential visits. However, in most cases, these wider opportunities had been in place before the new curriculum was introduced and were not a direct result of its implementation.

32. In two of the schools visited, introducing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum had prompted them to review their programmes of wider opportunities to ensure that they were properly linked to the curriculum as a whole. However, there was no evidence that introducing the new curriculum had so far had any noteworthy impact on wider curriculum opportunities or learning outside the classroom, either within subjects or across the curriculum as a whole.

Personal, social, health and economic education

33. The new curriculum had been used as an opportunity to review and redevelop schools' provision for personal, social, health and economic education. Of the 34 schools visited, 20 had taken the opportunity to rewrite PSHE courses, integrating the programmes of study for personal development and economic well-being in order to meet the new requirements to teach economic and business understanding and personal finance. This work was particularly effective in the schools with specialist status in business and enterprise.

Links to Key Stage 2

34. The schools visited had a variety of arrangements for transition, although these had generally not changed because of the new curriculum. In many cases, transition focused mainly on pastoral issues. There were, however, examples of good practice in transition.

> A smooth transition
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> A secondary school had done much to build on teaching and learning as pupils moved from Year 6 to Year 7. The school employs a primary teacher who works cross-phase to develop ICT and technology learning. A number of secondary teachers also work in the primary schools. Instead of the usual single transition day, Year 6 students spend several days at the secondary school. Most of the departments teach transition units in Year 7 to ensure that they are able to build on students' learning from Key Stage 2.

35. At the time of the survey, the new Key Stage 3 curriculum had yet to have an impact on schools' arrangements to ensure that transition into Year 7 was helping students to sustain and improve their rates of progress. In discussion with inspectors, students in 30 of the schools were positive about arrangements for transition, saying that they had felt well prepared and supported during the process and that their lessons were interesting and challenging.

36. However, assessment information from primary schools was not informing teaching and learning in classrooms in a way that helped teachers to personalise provision. Although high schools and upper schools considered how their Key Stage 3 curriculum linked to the 14 to 19 curriculum within their institutions and beyond, they had not considered how knowledge of the curriculum in Key Stage 2 might inform their planning, except in cases where the institutions had Key Stage 2 pupils (such as middle schools) or particularly strong links with primary schools, as in the example in paragraph 34.

37. In the four middle schools in the survey, transition from Year 6 was smooth and planning built effectively on the students' previous learning. In two of these schools, the students reported that they preferred the style of teaching and

learning in Year 7, although this was not always attributable to changes brought in by the new Key Stage 3 curriculum; for example, students responded enthusiastically to using science laboratories in Year 7 more than they had previously done. One of the middle schools had taken the opportunity to plan personal, learning and thinking skills from years 5 to 8, creating more coherence and initiating changes to teaching and learning across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

The impact of changes

Teaching and learning

38. Inspectors evaluated whether changes to teaching at Key Stage 3 were resulting in better progress for pupils. They also evaluated the extent to which teachers' subject knowledge and teaching skills were engaging students' interest and helping them learn more effectively. Teaching and learning in Year 7 were outstanding in two of the schools, good in 25, satisfactory in six and inadequate in one.

39. The new curriculum was having a positive impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning in the survey schools. Subject leaders and teaching staff were more positive about the opportunities that reduced prescription gave them than about any other aspect of the new curriculum, since they believed that it enabled them to be more adventurous in their approach to teaching and learning. It was common for staff to report to inspectors during the survey that such approaches were having a positive impact elsewhere, too. For instance, one teacher said, 'I have found that the more active approaches I am using have had such a good effect on my Year 7 students that I am now introducing them in my other classes as well.'

40. At the early stage at which the survey was conducted, it was not possible to make firm judgements about the impact of the new curriculum on students' standards and achievement. However, their progress in lessons was being positively affected by more flexibility and by the active approaches to teaching and learning. Year 7 students said that they were enjoying their learning, that it built well on what they had learnt before and that the teaching encouraged their more active participation than in Year 6.

41. In 30 of the schools, the survey evidence indicated that activities in Year 7 lessons had become more varied and interesting for students. In particular, the new curriculum was extending opportunities for students to learn more actively and engage in collaborative work. In all but two of the schools visited, the students were positive about the way in which teaching engaged them; they found the work challenging and interesting. This was confirmed by inspectors' scrutiny of their written work. As one student succinctly put it, 'Our maths lessons are more challenging and that makes them fun.'

42. A notable feature of the best practice was the increased time teachers gave for students to reflect on their learning and to assess their own progress and that of their peers.

> In part of a geography lesson, the students spent 10 minutes writing a summary of what they had discovered about the impact of a new shopping centre on the local environment. They were well prepared for this by the teacher, who ensured that they had the subject-specific vocabulary to write their responses in an appropriate style. They also discussed the criteria that would enable them to achieve a high standard in their work.
>
> After writing their responses, the students exchanged books and were asked to grade their partner's work, pointing out two positive features about the work and how it could be improved. Because the students routinely engaged in this sort of exercise, the grades awarded were accurate and their comments were perceptive and helpful.

> Another school had used the new curriculum to develop teachers' use of assessment for learning. While senior leaders acknowledged that there was still work to be done, much had already been achieved. In particular, teachers across the school were consistently ensuring that students understood precisely the purpose of the lessons and were giving them clear criteria by which to judge their progress. In addition, students were regularly involved in assessing the quality of their own and each other's work. Students appreciated these developments, saying that they helped them to be much clearer about what they needed to do to improve.

43. As noted earlier, planning for personal, learning and thinking skills was inconsistent. Although the assessment of subject-specific skills and knowledge was benefiting from the reduction in content, the development of effective methods of assessing progress in personal, learning and thinking skills was limited.

44. Five of the schools had considered how they would assess students' progress in developing these skills. The preferred method was for teachers to record, in the students' daily planner or in a separate skills 'passport', when students demonstrated particular skills. However, the effectiveness of such arrangements was limited. For example, the skill of 'effective participation' was recognised and recorded more often than 'self-management', not because the former was necessarily used more than the latter but because it was more obvious. The recording showed only where the skills were used, but not whether students had made progress in them.

45. Discussion with students during the survey revealed that they did not always know what, for example, effective participation actually meant, even though they had been given recognition for demonstrating it. One of the schools had made good progress in making sure that the students understood the skills and were being helped to make links across their subjects in terms of them. The school's policy was that every lesson should have at least one subject-based learning objective and one objective related to personal, learning and thinking skills, and that both objectives should be referred to throughout activities. This was a simple and effective way of raising students' awareness of the skills, knowing what they were and when using particular skills was most appropriate. However, discussions with the students showed that this still did not enable them to consider how much progress they were making in particular skills.

46. The whole-curriculum dimensions rarely featured in lesson planning. When they did, it was usually only to flag up that they had been covered rather than to show how they underpinned or promoted learning. However, there were exceptions. In the very best practice, the whole-curriculum dimensions, functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills were fully integrated into planning. At its most successful, this ensured that these key elements of the new curriculum lifted the quality of the teaching and learning of subject knowledge and skills so that it became outstanding.

The whole-curriculum dimensions and science

The theme of a science lesson was the impact of the environment on disease and immunity in different countries. The thorough planning identified clear learning outcomes for students' personal learning and thinking skills, as well as their knowledge, understanding and skills in science. The learning objectives and outcomes were referred to throughout the lesson, and the students were helped to reflect intelligently on the strategies they might use to improve their understanding.

The lesson had a range of well-structured tasks; whole-class, group and independent work engaged the students actively. Excellent resources, such as video footage of the impact of disease in the developing world and written accounts of the difficulties experienced by individuals, placed the science within a global context by showing the detrimental influence of poverty on health in the developing world. The whole-curriculum dimensions of healthy lifestyles and sustainable development were central to the issues the students considered. In an excellent discussion of possible ways to improve health and immunity, the students debated the potential benefits of a range of strategies, such as providing clean water and changing diets.

By setting the context of the lesson firmly within the whole-curriculum dimensions, the teacher was successful in improving the students' subject knowledge and skills, as well as their personal, learning and thinking skills.

47. Commonly, the schools visited saw the new curriculum as an opportunity to develop the use of ICT in teaching and learning. In most cases, teachers were continuing to develop their use of interactive whiteboards to support more engaging teaching. In five schools, there had been a considerable increase in students' use of ICT. One school had prioritised 'getting the ICT to the learning' by providing laptops for every student in Year 7. Although this was not a direct result of introducing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, nevertheless the initiative was having an important impact on the students' learning in subjects and on developing their skills across the curriculum.

Embedding curriculum change

48. In implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, the main developments so far have been in individual subjects rather than in the creation of a coherent whole-school curriculum. This is largely because schools considered the most urgent task to be ensuring that schemes of work matched the changes in subject requirements. Although some progress has been made towards the broader aims of the National Curriculum – the development of 'successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens' – ensuring that these aims are met will require schools to create more coherence across subjects and to incorporate the skills and the whole-curriculum dimensions more explicitly.

49. Reducing prescription has been the aspect which has had the most positive impact on teaching and learning and therefore on students' attitudes to learning. Less progress has been made in personalising the curriculum, providing additional support and challenge, and in making connections between subjects, events and activities. However, as this report shows, there are good examples of how some schools have approached these, from which others may benefit.

Notes

This report is based on survey visits to 37 schools with Year 7 students, conducted between May 2008 and March 2009. The schools differed in size and were chosen to represent urban and rural settings across England. They included selective and non-selective schools, secondary schools with and without sixth forms, and middle schools. The schools' overall effectiveness at their previous inspection ranged from satisfactory to outstanding.

Three of the schools were visited in the summer term 2008. This enabled inspectors to trial the inspection methodology. Inspectors visited the remaining 34 schools between September 2008 and March 2009 and spent one day in each institution.

They held discussions with senior and middle leaders, teachers and Year 7 students; observed Year 7 lessons; scrutinised students' work; and reviewed a range of documentation. Inspectors' judgements were based on the progress that schools could reasonably be expected to have made in implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum from September 2008. Further evidence was drawn from Ofsted's regular programme of subject visits to schools.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Curriculum innovation in schools (070097), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070097

Learning outside the classroom: how far should you go? (070219), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070219

Websites

The website of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has full details of the new curriculum, with supporting materials.

http://curriculum.qca.org.uk
http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

Annex

The new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3

This is a digest of information about the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, based on information on the QCA website referred to above.

The new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 came into effect for students starting Year 7 in September 2008. It will come into effect for Year 8 in September 2009 and for the whole of Key Stage 3 in September 2010.

The aims of the National Curriculum are to enable young people to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

The new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 has less prescribed content. This is to provide sufficient flexibility for schools to design their curriculum so that it matches the needs of learners, and the local context. The flexibility can be used to help pupils who need additional support, especially with literacy and numeracy, and to provide others with more in-depth study and challenge. Increased flexibility is designed to give teachers greater time and freedom to use their professional judgement in deciding how to assess their learners. They are encouraged to personalise assessment, ensuring that it supports learning and enables all students to make progress and achieve. They will also be supported in helping learners to recognise the progress they are making within, across and beyond subject disciplines, broadening the measures of success.

In summary, the new curriculum is designed to:

- personalise the curriculum, designing it to meet individual needs and engage all learners
- provide focused support and greater challenge where needed, helping to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to make progress and achieve, particularly in the key areas of English and mathematics
- devise coherent learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful to learners by making connections between subjects, events and activities
- use a variety of teaching and learning approaches to engage and motivate learners, and to maximise impact on learning.

Programmes of study

Every programme of study in the new secondary curriculum has been written with the national aims of the curriculum as a starting point. The revised programmes of study share a common format:

- Importance statement – why the subject matters and how it can contribute to the aims.
- Key concepts – identifies the big ideas that underpin the subject.
- Key processes – identifies the essential skills of the subject.
- Range and content – outlines the breadth of subject matter from which teachers should draw to develop knowledge, concepts and skills.
- Curriculum opportunities – identifies opportunities to enhance and enrich learning, including making links to the wider curriculum.

The level descriptions for National Curriculum subjects have been modified so that they complement the revised programmes of study. New level descriptions for citizenship have been developed; the non-statutory level descriptions for religious education are unchanged.

Personal, learning and thinking skills

The development of personal, learning and thinking skills is intended to become an integral part of enhancing learners' knowledge and understanding across the curriculum, giving teachers greater opportunities to help all of their learners secure the skills they need for life and work. The personal, learning and thinking skills provide a framework for describing the qualities and skills needed for success in learning and life. The framework comprises six groups of skills to ensure that young people become:

- independent enquirers
- creative thinkers
- reflective learners
- team workers
- self-managers
- effective participators.

For each group of skills, a focus statement sums up the range of skills and qualities. This is accompanied by a set of outcome statements that are indicative of the skills, behaviours and personal qualities associated with each group.

Functional skills

Functional skills of English, mathematics and ICT have been built into the curriculum. The 'key processes' sections in the programmes of study highlight the essential skills that learners need in order to make progress and achieve in every subject. The National Curriculum encourages delivery of the functional skills, where appropriate, in all subjects.

Whole-curriculum dimensions

Cross-curriculum dimensions provide important unifying areas of learning that help young people make sense of the world and give education relevance and authenticity. They reflect the major ideas and challenges that face individuals and society. They can provide a focus for work within and between subjects and across the curriculum as a whole, including the routines, events and ethos of the school.

The whole-curriculum dimensions are:

- identity and cultural diversity
- healthy lifestyles
- community participation
- enterprise
- global dimension and sustainable development
- technology and the media
- creativity and critical thinking.

Training and support

The National College for School Leadership and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust provided support for headteachers and their curriculum deputies on whole-curriculum design and leading curriculum change. The Secondary National Strategy and CfBT Education Trust provided support for leaders of National Curriculum subjects in schools. Local authority strategy managers, consultants and school improvement partners have been trained and briefed to enable them to offer effective support to schools.

Schools visited for this survey

School	Local authority
Aldercar Community Language College, Nottingham	Derbyshire
Birkenshaw Middle School	Kirklees
Bognor Regis Community College	West Sussex
Brighton Hill Community College, Basingstoke	Hampshire
Cleeve School, Cheltenham	Gloucestershire
Corpus Christi Catholic College	Leeds
Dame Alice Owens School, Potters Bar	Hertfordshire
Eastbury Comprehensive School	Barking and Dagenham
Farmors School, Fairford	Gloucestershire
Hardenhuish School, Chippenham	Wiltshire
Hartismere High School, Eye	Suffolk
Highfield Middle School, Prudhoe	Northumberland
Highlands School	Enfield
Marriotts School, Stevenage	Hertfordshire
Middlewich High School	Cheshire East
Newport Girls High School	Telford and Wrekin
North Leamington Community School and Arts College	Warwickshire
Orwell High School, Felixstowe	Suffolk
Our Lady's Catholic College, Lancaster	Lancashire
Pendle Vale College, Nelson	Lancashire
Reddish Vale Technology College	Stockport
St Aloysius RC College	Islington
St Anne's Catholic School	Southampton
St Gregory's Catholic Middle School	Bedford
St Luke's Science and Sports College, Exeter	Devon
Tarleton High School, A Community Technology College, Preston	Lancashire
The Albany, A Business and Enterprise College	Havering
The Crypt School, Gloucester	Gloucestershire
The Giles School, Boston	Lincolnshire
The Magna Carta School, Staines	Surrey
The St Thomas the Apostle College	Southwark
Tupton Hall School, Chesterfield	Derbyshire
Uplands Community Middle School, Sudbury	Suffolk
Upton Hall School	Wirral
Wadebridge School	Cornwall

Wheatley Park School, Oxford	Oxfordshire
William Edwards School and Sports College	Thurrock