



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# Staying alive - an exciting and innovative programme to embed functional skills in Y9

Sheila Naughton and Joanna Lambert

*This study was originally published in 2010 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.*

## Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of the study was to enliven the curriculum for Year 9 and make teaching of functional skills meaningful in a cross-curricular context, while meeting targets for the Every Child Matters agenda.

**Aims:** The main aim of this development work was to enliven the curriculum for Year 9 and make teaching of functional skills meaningful in a cross-curricular context, while meeting targets for the Every Child Matters agenda.

**Methods:** The participants included the school's headteacher, middle leader, senior leadership team, subject leader, and teacher. They were supported by an external agency, senior management, and the LA Functional Skills Lead. The methods used included workshops to co-create materials and ideas, collaborative learning to develop team-building skills, questioning to ensure teachers had ownership, and PDP sessions to keep up-to-date with developments.

**Findings:** The main findings of this case study are that the school has successfully implemented a cross-curricular project involving PSHE, D & T, English, mathematics, ICT, PE and tutor time, which has had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that collaborative learning, problem solving, and the integration of functional skills and PLTS can have a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organization and leadership.

*This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.*

Keywords: Secondary education

## Introduction

### What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

The school wanted to enliven the curriculum for Year 9 and make the teaching of functional skills truly embedded and meaningful in a cross-curricular context and ensure that they were meeting targets for the importance of the overall school plan, beginning with the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. This led to thinking about healthy schools and children as part of a wider community, helping them to make positive contributions by enjoying and achieving and creating an ethos of healthy living for a future generation. The school also wanted links to International School Project (link in South Africa, ICT teacher gone to Malawi to make links). The school developed an integrated Year 9 project involving, PSHE, D & T (Food), English, mathematics, ICT, PE and tutor time.

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

## Description

### What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- All aspects
- All subjects

### How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

High expectations of standards of behaviour.

Pupil progression checks are named 'Who's not learning now?' Both pupils and staff have a clear understanding of curricular targets, and intervention - monitored and managed by curriculum and pastoral leaders. Steered by SLT. SMART targets for students. High priority (traffic lighting). Tutors manage the whole process (personal interviews - where they were, where they should be and to identify good progression for the following term). APP is used to moderate progress checks within departments. Collaborative learning is at the heart of this project and aims to improve team-building skills and the students' ability to become a committed member of a learning team. Problem solving is a key part of the work and collaborative talk (talk for learning).

It was intended that the collaborative learning approach would develop student ability to make positive contributions, enjoy and achieve, achieve economic well being.

### What were your success criteria?

This would be measured by engagement levels, sustaining motivation through having a sense of ownership. Students develop the ability to project plan and achieve steps within the planning. Ability to build, apply and transfer literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum.

Measured by pupil voice, teacher voice, reflective log in the Y9 Staying Alive project planner to include the self-monitoring of PLTS (personal, learning and thinking skills). Learners would be better able to manage their learning at Key Stage 4 and the challenges of GCSE and apply their functional skills in a range of relevant, realistic and increasingly unfamiliar contexts.

## What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

## Describe the CPD approaches you used

AHT Lead attended National Strategies functional skills training which she found exciting and inspired her to make changes to the Year 9 curriculum, drawing on her previous experience as an Advanced Skills Teacher.

Collaboration and communication

Excellent creative collaborative climate for learning professional development days has engendered a climate for learning within the staff which is growing over time. Staff had particular confidence in the leadership of the AHT.

Workshops to co-create materials and ideas. Some formal and informal sessions, quite an organic process as a result of the enthusiasm of the AHT.

Spin offs created as a result of the project. Ideas web began the initial ideas with English, Ma and ICT, had to include ECM, Functional Skills, PLTs and cross-curricular elements, It was easy to pull in PE and interviewed the subject leader. Project on monitoring fitness was already going on. PSHE has re-written half a terms unit plans to reflect the project. English have re-written their unit plans with the four new NQTs, coincided with existing thoughts of changing the curriculum. D&T teacher very excited. All subjects relished the idea of working with other subjects with the content of one subject affecting another subject with an understanding of joint accountability.

The Deputy Head initiated the project as a result of the curriculum changes. The Personal Development Planning (PDP) programme is often discussed by the DHT and AHT and influences the project . AST in music is the Building Learning Power (BLT) champion (innovative approaches to assessment of music through the use of video placed on the LA MLE).

The climate in the staff room is one where conversations are about the process of learning and the school is very happy to develop the curriculum.

- Plotted everyone's ideas across subjects and weeks
- Worked with ICT and Ma subject leaders (AHT = English)
- Drew together group who would be interested, took suggestions for changes to make the project flow better (ICT video could be peer assessed in English) fine tuning.
- Maths, English and ICT skills looked at by the group and the four differentiators. (session jointly planned with FSRA, AHT and LA Functional Skills Lead)
- Questioning throughout the process using AST skills to ensure that teachers had ownership.
- Simple plan - what is the plan for each week? Ensuring that all teachers have these made explicit in teaching. Weekly PDP time used to keep up-to-date with developments.
- Themes used in the new curriculum made the centre of a mind map (diversity, etc.). Every couple of minutes teachers had to move on to the next theme and add their ideas. This helped with co-creation and high levels of professional collaboration.

## What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

National Strategies Functional Skills training – from the second year of the Functional Skills pilot. Particularly liked the idea of pitching to an unfamiliar audience.

The school also have a Kodak project (Y8 during activity week have a classroom as a base, design, make, market, sell a product, in-flight meal, aeroplane, hot water warning device for blind people etc.) Teachers have been trained as facilitators from TVEI theory (Technical and Vocational Education Initiative). Took the principles of Kodak and applied it to an eco project (eco-fair, fashion design using recycled materials, campaign to improve the students view of the environment (pond designed and created as a result ) also recycling marketing etc. landfill, research

## Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Senior management

## How were you supported?

School senior leadership 100% backing and the governors and colleagues very supportive. LA Functional Skills Lead and other LA staff and The National Strategies Functional Skills Regional Advisor. Being a national development has given it a greater focus. The school are a leading-edge and teaching school.

## Impact

### What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Building Learning Power has been a large feature of the work that the students do and so the meta cognitive elements of learning around functional skills and Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) are well embedded. The students are well accustomed to addressing new challenges and working in teams to solve problems. They have responded well to the challenge of applied learning and problem solving including functional skills.

### Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

There has been an impact on a significant number of departments across the whole school in terms of their planning (PSHE, DT, PE, mathematics, English and ICT, including tutor time which includes Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS), reflective logs, learning to work in teams and produce presentations, often initiated by PSHE or the school 'Thought for the day' (teachers and pupils have input and a teacher collates it).

Students are representative on the council and perceived a need to extend the Healthy Living Programme at the LA (student advisory group, including the Youth Parliament/sponsorship activities to replenish PE equipment including Harrow Youth Council)

### Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Talking to learn, PLTS and subject objectives are very strong in every lesson in Science – lesson observations across the department by the DH.

Meta cognitive conversations about how they have worked in a group and personal target setting for a particular PLTS.

Direct links between the PDP sessions can be seen happening in the classrooms.

Pupils said.....

"I liked being responsible for my own learning."

"The group has made me more confident with my ideas."

"I liked the way we had to assess ourselves. I learnt a lot about myself, I speak a lot and I am not best at listening."

### Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

### Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

### Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Progress is being measured during this on-going study by Pupil voice, teacher voice, learning logs, engagement, progress checks (PCs), reaction of SEN students.

### What has been the impact on teaching?

Dual objectives (see above), PLTS and monitoring this on an individual basis.

### Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

Teachers said...

"It's an extremely creative process."

"It gives the children power over their own learning."

"It was good to see the children challenged in this way. They had to learn how to use negotiating skills."

### Evidence of impact on teaching

- Teacher perceptions

### Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

The teachers involved in planning and delivering the project with Year 9 felt that they had been given the opportunity to be creative whilst ensuring coverage of the National Curriculum Programme of Study and the integration of functional skills and PLTS. The teachers involved were also observed engaging pupils in challenging conversations and thought processes in order to solve the given problems.

### What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Personal Development Planning (PDP) sessions has made the professional development aspects possible. The whole school culture has further developed towards a focus on pedagogy.

Stronger link between Curriculum Deputy and AHT creating synergy and direction through a creative process.

PDP – every other Tuesday morning has given (1.5 hours in which to develop staff) whilst students stay at home and do e-learning on the MLE. Rigorously monitored. There is a whole school commitment across the school that

there is a different subject focus each week providing shared ownership.

## Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Core subject leaders forthright about the impact of the project and the opportunity to gain ownership of the curriculum and think more creatively about the potential impact of functional skills within their subject areas.

They valued highly the opportunity to work with staff outside their subject areas.

"It has given me the confidence to share my skills and understanding of mathematics with my colleagues and to think about becoming an AST."

## Summary

### What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Commitment, collaboration and enthusiasm. Functional Skills not seen as a bolt-on initiative, but part of the regular opportunities to discuss pedagogy and apply to the developments which are already an integral part of teaching and learning philosophy.

### What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

The presentation for SLT on reinvigorating the KS3 curriculum and the Staying Alive draft plan.

### What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

National Strategies Functional Skills regional events and Functional Skills Modules 1-4

### If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- This case study is relevant where there is an opportunity to review the curriculum through the revised secondary framework and the materials and pedagogy of functional skills.
- Key documents are functional skills assessment criteria for the three subjects, the four differentiators (unfamiliarity, independence, complexity and technical demand) and building and applying skills in realistic, relevant and purposeful contexts (links to the Enterprise curriculum).

### What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

Further project-based learning for Y9. Groups of the Arts, Humanities (Geography, History, Philosophy and Ethics), ICT and mathematics with Geography, Science and D&T. English and Art (portraits).

## Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Key Outcomes for English
- Key Outcomes for Mathematics
- Pupil Booklet
- SRE scheme of work - Y9 Staying Alive PSHE
- A draft copy of the Staying Alive Y9 Integrated Project Plan
- Teacher Booklet
- Week 1 plan
- Week 2 plan
- Week 3 plan
- Week 4 plan

- Week 5 plan
- Mapping functional skills into the project
- Presentation for staff meeting to introduce the project
- Reinvigorating KS3 meeting
- Speaking and listening for collaborative learning
- Pupil certificate for excellence
- A draft Staying Alive Y9 Integrated Project Plan

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## About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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