

How we learn

As a family of schools we believe that learning should be evidence-based and research-driven. Our staff are committed to making marginal gains in their teaching and believe that continuous improvement is at the heart of all that we do. This allows us to work towards our mission to become the best we can be.

As a trust, our core belief is that learning should be REAL, IMMERSIVE and PURPOSEFUL. We call this *Let RIP!* learning and it underpins all that we do.

REAL: Bringing child-initiated learning to life through memorable experiences and irresistible challenges that make a real difference to the world in which our pupils live. Children's curiosities are piqued so that they are hooked from the start and yearn to learn.

IMMERSIVE: Igniting pupils' passions so that they become immersed in their learning and want to dive deep and linger longer. Pupils experience the joy of being stuck and have to work long and hard on things they find a challenge so that they learn in depth and in a state of flow.

PURPOSEFUL: Ensuring that real experiences are based on children's interests so that they can make links to the world. Deep-rooted learning must always be challenge-based so that pupils become resilient, creative and independent learners.

To enable this, as a family of schools, we believe in the principles of a NICER® curriculum. Each school curriculum is different but the principles of NICER ensure a continual and steady stream of RIP experiences with a strong focus on creativity, enterprise and challenge-based learning.

NOW: *Based on children's interests, ensuring that experiences are relevant to the here-and-now. Learning is therefore engaging and purposeful for all pupils.*

INDEPENDENT: *Ensuring our pedagogy allows pupils to build learning power and to know what to do when stuck so that they choose to think instead of remember. They are fluent speakers of Learnish.*

CREATIVITY: *This sits at the heart of NICER. We want our pupils to have an appetite for discovery; to have fresh ideas that are worthwhile and add value to their learning experience. Knowledge is key: The more pupils know about something, the more curious and imaginative they can be. Motivation is the key to creativity and to getting the work done because pupils continually acquire new skills.*

ENTERPRISE: *Social enterprise is what we do. It's what makes us unique as a trust. Pupils need to be taught how to use 21st century skills, such as meta-knowledge to think actively in social contexts (TASC) in order to achieve complex and difficult learning challenges.*

REAL: *In order for learning to be real it needs to be regional and relevant. Opportunities to learn outside the classroom are essential so that we can hook and ignite curiosity and imagination.*

All of this requires pupils to be thrown into the Pit. We believe that effective learning can only occur if teachers plan for opportunities for pupils to be stuck. When they are, they are in the Pit and need to know what to do to get out of it, either on their own or collaboratively. Only then has real learning taken place.

More information about the above can be found in: *'The NICER curriculum: A primary school framework for challenge-based learning'* written by Andrew Morrish (2015).

The six pillars of great pedagogy

Each academy is different. There is no one single teaching and learning policy across the trust. Teachers need to be able to adapt their own well-crafted and unique teaching style to suit the needs of their learners. To enable teachers to have the freedom to teach creatively, each school has agreed a set of key principles of effective teaching that are non-negotiable and expected to be evident in all lessons. How the teacher does this is down to them.

These key principles are evidence-informed and are known to contribute to great teaching. We call these our Pillars of Pedagogy and are based on research and ideas by Carol Dweck, Dylan Wiliam, James Nottingham, Beth Wallace, Kieran Egan, Edward de Bono, Sir Ken Robinson and Guy Claxton.

The six pillars of pedagogy are:

CHALLENGE: Teachers have exceptionally high expectations. As a result of effective marking, activities are well-matched so that pupils relish being in the Pit. Pupils will FAIL often but know that this is their First Attempt In Learning. They need to rely on grit and resilience to work hard to complete difficult tasks and get out of the Pit and demonstrate mastery.

MODELLING: In order to learn effectively, pupils need to be given opportunities to copy what the teacher (or successful learner) does. Working walls allow the teacher to capture and model the messy learning process throughout the week. Examples of pupils' learning are displayed alongside teacher models showing what a good one looks like using the shared success criteria.

INSTRUCTION: Teachers need to explain clearly what to do and how to do it. Through careful and specific explanation pupils need to know what it is they are learning as a result of explicit skills-based lesson objectives. Misconceptions need to be identified promptly so that teachers (and successful learners) can explain to pupils what they need to do next and why.

PRACTICE: Learning is hard and so pupils need to have ample time to practise the things they are trying to learn, either individually or in groups. They need to get stuck a lot and know how to overcome this. The teacher needs to facilitate learning and to be the 'guide by the side' and not the 'sage on the stage'. Pupils need to finish a lesson knowing that they have worked hard and have been challenged. Homework can be used to allow further opportunities to practise.

QUESTIONING: Teachers need to ask really great questions that are open, dialogic and challenging. Rather than tell the pupil what to do, great questioning coaches the pupil so that they find the right answer for themselves. Pupils also need to know how to ask great questions of themselves and others to develop their higher order thinking skills. Great teaching is about getting the balance right between knowing when to instruct (tell) and to coach (question).

FEEDBACK: Continual verbal feedback throughout the lesson from an expert coach (child or adult) is essential. Pupils need to be skilled at self-feedback and feeding back to their peers. Not every piece of work needs marking in depth. Timely gap-task marking needs to be purposeful so that pupils have time to respond through Directed Improvement Review Time (DIRT), remembering that good Feedback Always Improves Learning (FAIL). This will close the gap.

Each individual academy has incorporated the six pillars into their own teaching and learning policy. By continually evaluating the impact of teaching, and applying what we know from evidence-based research, we can ensure that the CSPD offer in each school and across the trust empowers staff and pupils to become the best they can be.