Promoting independent learning

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“A lot of people never use their initiative because no-one told them to.”
Banksy

Confucius

“Spoon feeding, in the long run, teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon.”
E. M. Forster

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.”
Plutarch
ABSTRACT

The chosen project was the promotion of more use of independent learning activities, with the long-term aim of increasing learner autonomy. This was prompted by the school’s most recent ISI report, which stated that the opportunity for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning was at times restricted.

All participation was optional. The first assessment was a questionnaire on staff understanding and current use of independent learning activities. The second stage of the project was developed from the questionnaire results: a range of ideas, selected to promote the use of independent learning activities, was presented at Inset. Staff then trialed these over a term: about a third of staff took part. Most who did were very positive about the impact.

Greater participation and therefore potential success may have been achieved with lower expectations, more frequent and visible whole-staff encouragement, and individual support, as well as with enthusiastic, visible support from the Head and SMT.

(155 words)
CONTEXT AND OUTLINE

In October 2014 the Independent Schools Inspectorate inspected the school where I work. One of the report’s main findings concerned independent learning, an area previously highlighted in the school’s last ISI (interim) inspection in March 2011. The 2011 report stated, “In a few lessons that were less successful, the pupils’ independent learning skills were restricted (…) because of the style of teaching” (Appendix 1, p3, 2.1). One of the 2011 report’s main recommendations for further improvement was to, “Give consideration to the development of independent learning” (Appendix 1, p7, 3.2-3). Although the 2014 inspection report stated that, “Opportunities for pupils’ independent learning have improved since the previous inspection” (Appendix 2, p6, 3.13), this was further expanded upon in the section relating to the contribution of teaching: “At its best, teaching is exciting. Lessons are carefully planned, a brisk pace is maintained and time used effectively. Good questioning is used to confirm pupils’ previous learning, and open-ended questions encourage them to think independently. Teaching is less successful when it is over directed and there is a lack of variety of tasks set, which restricts the opportunity for pupils to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning” (Appendix 2, p7, 3.18). One of the 2014 report’s recommendations for improvement was that the school, “increase the opportunities for pupils to interact and undertake open-ended activities to match the most effective practice in the school” (Appendix 2, p2, 2.5-1).

The latter recommendation prompted me to target the area of independent learning for this dissertation project. In order to keep the process simple and therefore the integration of my request into lessons and planning easy, I decide to have one aim: to increase teachers’ repertoire of ideas, activities and techniques which would encourage and develop independent learning skills and habits. This would, I hoped, have the additional and subsequent long-term effect of improving learner autonomy. So, although the project focussed on teaching and assessed the impact from the staff’s perspective, my aim was for an outcome that would be beneficial for both staff and pupils. Staff, I intended, would gain greater understanding of and confidence in this approach, as well as having proof that independent learning benefits everyone. Their teaching experience would become less pressured, pupil needs would become easier to manage, and pupils would make greater progress and enjoy lessons more. Over time, the pupils will thus become more engaged and more involved in their learning, will enjoy learning more, and will develop more independent learning skills, thus beginning to establish life-long independent learning habits.

APPROACH AND METHODS CHOSEN AND WHY

It was essential to gain the support of the staff, as I would be asking them to adapt their methods and to use up planning time. I decided to do this by initially asking for their opinions in the form of a questionnaire. This was to be followed up with a presentation that would convey both the ease of applying the ideas and that the project would benefit both them and the pupils (i.e., not just me and my qualification). At this stage I also aimed to inspire their involvement by supplying a range of ideas for independent learning activities that were easy to incorporate. (To further emphasise the usefulness of their involvement as well as the benefit to the whole staff, there will be a final presentation in the summer term 2016, at which I will give feedback on the
experiences of those who took part. I will also produce a document of the successful outcomes, as a teaching resource accessible to all staff.

In April 2015, I made a brief presentation to the staff at Inset, outlining the project’s inspiration and its aims, and emphasising the intention to bring about more frequent as well as easy use of independent learning activities. I explained the background to the project, observing that it was likely that the ISI inspectors did not see all of the independent learning that was actually taking place at the time of the inspections. However, as this area had been highlighted and is also extremely beneficial for the pupils as well as the staff, I suggested that it remained incumbent upon us all to augment the inclusion and the application of independent learning in our lessons and planning. While the project indubitably would help me with my studies, I explained that I had chosen this topic because it would help both the staff and pupils, now and into the future.

I then asked staff to take ten minutes to fill in an anonymous questionnaire (Appendix 3), if they wished. I hoped that the anonymity would prevent any doctoring of the truth, as “most people [responding to a survey or questionnaire] want to present a positive image of themselves and so may lie or bend the truth to look good” (McLeod, 2014). The questionnaire was based on our current independent learning policy (Appendix 4), which lists 15 qualities of independent learners and states that these are “the qualities we want to focus on”, as we aim to “produce thoughtful, creative and self-confident children”. (These qualities were chosen by the Director of Studies, following a training day led by C. J. Simister. The 15 words are displayed in every classroom, and the requirement is for staff to “refer to these where appropriate” (Appendix 4)).

The first and core question asked staff to define what they personally thought was meant by the term ‘independent learning’. Part A asked them to tick the frequency with which they use/implement/promote/encourage the 15 qualities set out in our school policy. Part B asked staff what else they do which they feel promotes independent learning skills and Part C asked them to list whether there are approaches and ideas they would like to use which would enable more independent learning to take place, but which they are unable to - and to explain what impedes them.

The questionnaire format was chosen for many reasons. Being asked one’s opinion is flattering and psychologically one feels that one matters. People generally like to give their opinion and also like to explain how they could do things better, if only certain elements were structured differently or they could have X, Y and Z. Additionally, questionnaires are an effective and time-efficient way of gathering standardised and anonymous information from a large group of people. Conducting a questionnaire also has disadvantages; being standardised, misinterpretations may occur. To combat this, I endeavoured to make the questions as simple to answer and as easy to assess as possible. Another possible disadvantage of questionnaires is that they can generate a wide range of responses that cannot be usefully interpreted; with this in mind, I limited the document to four questions. The first was open yet short, and was crucial - yet was also intended to make the respondent feel pleased that their personal understanding was required. Part A was a closed question in the form of a tick box with a rating scale; it would be quick to fill in (the respondent would not be bored or annoyed) and easy to assess. Parts B and C were open, but with limited space to reply,
allowing the individual to show their abilities (Part B) and to explain their frustrations about any obstacles to their job (Part C), yet in a succinct way. To encourage participation, I highlighted the potential benefits of the project for staff as individuals as well as for the whole school.

The questionnaire would work, I felt, because staff would view it as a social exchange (Smith, qualtrics.com), and would be motivated by the idea of some form of reward (i.e., the benefits to themselves and the school community). The questionnaire was brief and guaranteed the provision of potentially beneficial independent learning activities (i.e., minimal cost to the respondent). There was also the element of reciprocity: the incentive of ideas and the recognition of a colleague’s desire for all to progress professionally. Additionally, as this questionnaire was wholly based in professional experience and knowledge, the staff would feel commitment and involvement since they feel allegiance to the (education) system and have an interest in what was being asked. Finally, having emphasised the envisaged immediate and long-term benefits for each colleague and each pupil, I hoped that staff interest in the project topic per se would mean that the leverage-salience aspect of responding to a survey or a questionnaire would be fulfilled: this theory states that, “there are some attributes (leverage) of a survey that may be viewed negatively or positively by the respondent, and [that] how these attributes are made salient during the survey request process affects the likelihood of participation” (Adua and Sharp, 201, p96).

All 30 staff took part, with only one colleague leaving any section unanswered (the first question). Analysing the answers, my aims were: to discover whether the 15 policy qualities words matched what staff think independent learning means; to find out whether and how often the staff were promoting the 15 policy qualities; to share other independent learning ideas already in use amongst the staff; and, to identify any common areas where staff would like support to enable the school to deliver more teaching of independent learning activities and skills.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

I presented the results at Inset in September 2015 (PowerPoint, Appendix 5). I chose this method as PowerPoint is a very popular medium amongst teachers and would therefore be viewer-friendly, non-threatening and accessible. The first question - How would you personally define the term independent learning? - revealed that the majority of staff (46%) defined independent learning as ‘pupils working alone/doing research alone to discover/gain information from a variety of sources with occasional support’. The second most commonly held definition (27%) described independent learning as ‘pupils taking responsibility for their own learning by seeing/thinking evaluating for themself – not being told what to see/think/evaluate’. Finally, 19% defined it as ‘student-led learning - pupils explore/experiment /develop without being led by the teacher’. All of these definitions could be interpreted as addressing the policy qualities of responsibility, initiative, judgement, curiosity, reflectiveness, persistence and focus. The least frequently given definition (8%) was ‘pupils working together’ (i.e., collaboration).

Part A addressed the frequency with which staff feel they promote, inspire or encourage the policy. Analysis of this showed that the most frequently promoted quality was focus, followed by curiosity, persistence, thoughtfulness, judgement,
resilience, responsibility, flexibility of mind, reflectiveness, self-assurance, and finally empathy. The least frequently encouraged qualities were risk-taking, originality, initiative, and collaboration. These answers in one way support how the staff defined independent learning, as there was little attention given to collaboration. However, what they believe it means and the qualities they promote did not entirely tally; focus was the most promoted quality, however, the two most popular definitions of methods require and encourage but do not guarantee the development of the skill of focus. Equally, the development of flexibility of mind, self-assurance, and empathy are not assured through activities in which pupils work, think and evaluate alone.

Part B asked staff to describe other ways in which they feel they promote independent thinking and the development of independent learning skills. Their wide-ranging responses listed: the use of coursework/projects; encouraging pupils to learn from mistakes; pupils making presentations to the class; giving choice in how to tackle problems; giving choice of tasks from differentiated trays; having pupils do their own research and then giving feedback to the class; pupils explaining/showing others what they have learned and how; independent investigation/research, with a framework set by the teacher and the teacher guiding pupils towards the materials; the use of ICT and the Internet; using (the teacher’s) personal experience as reference and example; allowing pupils to make their own decisions, and to reach their own conclusions; trying to keep teaching to a minimum; allowing pupils to direct proceedings and investigate when appropriate; following up on any pupil initiative; setting open-ended tasks; having debates; encouraging questioning and discussion; encouraging pupils to use a range of skills in each lesson; planning a range of types of lesson; outdoor learning; using pupil self-assessment at the end of lessons/topics; setting challenges; and using group work to encourage peer pressure and peer help, as well as creating momentum. These responses influenced the choice of some of the ideas I later selected for the project, and will be included in the final, resource documentation.

Part C asked whether there are there ways in which staff would like to promote/inspire/encourage independent learning but are unable to do so and why/how they are constrained. The most common reason given was a lack of time in the timetable and the term to complete topics and for pupils to self/peer assess, with this additionally constrained by the pace of learning required in our school, the restrictiveness of the structure for teaching and learning and also exam preparation for 11+ as well as 13+ exams and year-end exams. It was felt that these issues, plus the necessity of staff to take a table at lunch and to do break duties, also prevent the possibility for lunchtime and after-school club, clinics and workshops. Staff also cited the need for a return to former budget levels to purchase resources; the need for sets of portable tablets and more IT hardware; the lack of a VLE and the fact that most year groups do homework in classrooms with no access to resources (preventing independent thinking and learning and the possibility for pupils to prepare ahead); the need for more teaching assistants so that pupils can work in smaller groups; the need for better cross-curricular links; the opportunity for team-teaching; more space for certain activities – there is only one indoor hall space; more training in IT and the use of IWBs; and, the need for a proper, whole-school, structured initiative to encourage independent learning. The presentation of these comments enabled the Head and SMT to truly see the needs and frustrations of the staff. The Head commented that they were of “great interest”, adding that he would refer to the information to assist with future planning and policy-making.
I then gave a brief outline of some of the main ideas behind and the benefits of independent learning and set up the project for the term ahead. All staff were given two sheets of suggested independent learning activities and were asked, if they wished, to use these in their planning to develop more independent learning and thinking skills in their lessons. Activities were divided into ‘easy to incorporate’ on the pink sheet (Appendix 6) and ‘requiring planning’ on the yellow sheet (Appendix 7). I asked staff to record their observations (of how the activity worked and the pupils’ responses) on the sheet, on other paper or in an email - in as much or as little detail as they had time to write. In addition, if staff used other ideas besides those I had provided, I expressed my interest in these activities and techniques. If staff were amenable to my presence, I asked to observe the pupils’ reaction to activities. I assured the staff that if they had any questions or wanted me to go through any aspect with them personally, I was ready to help and would make myself available at a mutually convenient time as soon as possible. I explained that all of the Inset information was uploaded to the shared area on the school’s computer network and promised to give a final presentation on the project’s results at the summer 2016 Inset. Finally, I emphasised Gershon’s point (Appendix 5) that developing independent learning and thinking skills is a long-term project, so changes may take time.

I chose to give the staff two sheets of activities as I wanted to (a) make it easy for them to find ideas, (b) give them a choice, and (c) I did not want it to seem that I assumed that they would all want the simplest or easiest ideas. I made sure that the information on the ‘easy to incorporate’ pink sheet activities fitted onto one page of A4, and could therefore be pinned up by a desk and easily referred to during a lesson or when planning, or stuck into the front of a teacher’s planner. With the yellow sheet, the activities required more planning and used more page space; I imagined that those who chose to read these activities would be more willing to spend more time overall. Reporting back had to be easy and in any written format which suited the individual, as staff have very little spare time - especially during the autumn term. I offered my support in order to demonstrate that I was leading the project and my availability to show that I was both aware that it was asking more from them in terms of their time and that I was, of course, most willing to help. Some of the activities I suggested on the two sheets came from ideas staff provided in Part B of the initial questionnaire.

Most of the ideas were chosen in relation to the school’s independent learning policy and as a result of my research into independent learning, during the summer 2015.

BACKGROUND TO INDEPENDENT LEARNING

The most common definition of independent learning is ‘self-regulated learning’ (Meyer, 2010, p1). This is the process whereby a learner is actively involved in their learning: they set their own goals; they plan how to realise these goals; they monitor their progress as they follow this plan (which will entail controlling their behaviour, motivation and cognition and may also involve adapting and changing their plan); and assess and reflect on what they have achieved (which will hopefully include making links with their prior knowledge). Many qualify the term referring to Forster’s definition (quoted in Cundy, 1991, p13) that independent study is “a process, a method and a philosophy of education: in which a student acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation. It includes freedom of choice in determining those objectives, within the limits of a
given project or programme and with the aid of a faculty adviser. It requires freedom of process to carry out the objectives. It places increased educational responsibility on the student for the achieving of objectives and for the values of the goals.” Candy himself defined self-direction as: personal autonomy (a personal attribute); self-management (the willingness and capacity to conduct one’s own education); learner control (a way of organising instruction in formal settings); and, autodidaxy (the individual, non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities in the ‘natural social setting’).

Holec (O’Doherty, 2006, p2) is often quoted too; he defined independent learning as “the capacity or ability to take charge of one’s learning”. For Little (O’Doherty, 2006, p3) “learner autonomy (is) a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action.” However, Little tempers this with the observation that autonomy is “never absolute. As social beings our independence is always balanced by dependence, our essential condition is one of inter-dependence” (O’Doherty, 2006, p3). Pintrich backs this up: “self-regulated learning is “an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior (sic), guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment” (Schunk, 2005, p85). For Pintrich there are four phases of self-regulation covering four areas for self-regulation (my italics): forethought, planning and activation which cover cognition; monitoring which covers motivation; control which covers behaviour; and reaction and reflection which cover context.

Knowles (O’Doherty, 2006, p3) defines self-directed learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.” Knowles’ main reason for promoting self-directed learning is that (in his view) there is much evidence that those who take responsibility for their learning (proactive learners) learn more, learn better, learn more deeply and more permanently than passive, reactive learners. He also argues that self-directed learning reflects our psychological development, in that as humans mature, we take increasing responsibility for our own lives and are motivated by internal incentives, such as the need for self-esteem, the desire to achieve, the urge to grow, the satisfaction of accomplishment, the need to know something specific, and curiosity. Knowles additionally argues that the structure of modern education demands that students increasingly need the skills of self-directed inquiry and thinking. “We must learn from everything we do; we must exploit every experience as a learning experience. Every institution and every person we have access to become a resource. It is a lifelong process” (Knowles, 1975, quoted on strategiesforabetterway).

Independent learning has obvious crossovers with Assessment for Learning (AFL), the five main principles of which are (as defined by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority): the provision of effective feedback to students; the active involvement of students in their own learning; adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment; recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are critical influences on learning, and; the need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve. Although AFL places more emphasis on the teacher and learner working together to make decisions about the stage of learning, where to go next and how to get there, it
does essentially promote “a more personalised approach to learning and a move towards teaching independent learning” (Blandford and Knowles, 2011, p2), especially as “implicit in the effective implementation of AfL is the development of children’s metacognitive processes” (i.e., reflecting on and assessing their own learning) (Blandford and Knowles, 2011, p3).

Independent learning also crosses over with Biggs’ constructive alignment theory in which “the learner constructs their own learning through relevant learning activities (and) the teacher’s job is to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes” (Biggs, heacademy.ac.uk). Similarly, with independent learning, the teacher seeks to construct activities that develop and promote the pupil’s independent thinking and learning skills so that the pupil is then able to be in charge of their own (current and future) learning.

THE PUPILS: BENEFITS AND SKILLS

With independent learning, the pupil takes responsibility for their own learning rather than deferring to the teacher; the teacher is no longer the ‘sage on the stage’ imparting knowledge, but the ‘guide by your side’ – a facilitator of learning, coach and mentor. Independent learning aims to break the bonds of reliance of the hitherto traditional teacher-pupil relationship, creating a mutualistic symbiosis in which teachers are freed up and able to support their pupils’ growth as a learner and the pupils are “self-regulated, self-motivated, resourceful and resilient – learners with clear goals and direction and who use their initiative to achieve success” (Anstee, 2015, p4). As Zimmerman states (Zimmerman, 2002, p65), self-regulation “is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills. Learning is viewed as an activity that students do for themselves in a proactive way rather than as a covert event that happens to them in reaction to teaching.” Zimmerman (2002, p66) also adds that because independent learners “monitor their behaviour in terms of their goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness, (this) enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning. Because of their superior motivation and adaptive learning methods, self-regulated students are not only more likely to succeed academically but to view their futures more optimistically.”

What the practice of independent learning actually means is that pupils: find and collect information; decide for themselves what to study and when; conduct investigations or projects; learn at their own speed using ICT or VLEs; and complete homework, extension work or coursework assignments. As a result, independent learners “are able to research, reflect and evaluate their own learning in order to identify and seek the support they need to progress” (FGTO, 2013). Independent learning gives pupils skills that they will use for the rest of their life, and gives learners an interest in learning and a confidence about their own ability to learn. Independent learners are able, for example, to gather and effectively use information, to communicate well in different media, to organise themselves, to solve problems solve and to relate to others. Independent learners are involved in their own learning and take responsibility for it. They develop skills that will help them to become good learners and become able to apply these skills to any new learning situation, making meaningful connections with the world outside the classroom.
Effective independent learners acquire many skills. They develop social skills, such as contributing; working with others; group leadership; conflict management; and conflict resolution. They develop thinking skills, such as identifying distortion, bias, and purpose; evaluating evidence; identifying inference, assumptions, and opinions; developing and critiquing arguments; decision making; making connections in other contexts; clarifying issues and language; discerning prejudice and contradiction; developing criteria for evaluation; weighing evidence; and being able to broaden or narrow their focus as appropriate. They develop self-management skills, such as goal setting, time and resource management, and focus. Independent learners also acquire information skills, such as asking relevant questions; locating relevant information; identifying prior knowledge; validating and applying information; and reflecting and evaluating.

As Silberman says (quoted by Simmerman, 2012), “In order to retain what has been taught, people must chew on it. Learning can’t be swallowed whole (…) Without the opportunity to discuss, ask questions, do and perhaps, even teach someone else, real learning will not occur (…) When learning is passive, the learner comes to encounter without curiosity, without questions, and without interest in the outcome (except, perhaps, in the grade he or she will receive). When learning is active, the learner is seeking something. He or she wants an answer to a question, needs information to solve a problem, or is searching for a way to do a job. Under these conditions, learning is qualitatively different from what occurs when the learner is passive.”

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Pupils, however, do not become “effective independent learners by themselves. Rather, pupils need to learn how to learn, (which indicates that) effective ways to learn can and should be promoted by teachers” (Meyer, 2010, p2). Additionally, Little (1995, pp179-180) argues that “learner autonomy depends on the promotion of teacher autonomy (…) We must provide trainee teachers with the skills to develop autonomy in (…) learners [and] we must also give them a first-hand experience of learner autonomy in their training.”

In an independent learning environment, the teacher’s role is more important and more complex than in the old-style, directed learning environment. With independent learning, teachers require “a far greater level of or access to skills and knowledge in order to respond to the inevitably far broader curriculum covered by the pupils with diverse strength and interests. They also need to be infinitely flexible in order to help facilitate a wide range of learning opportunities. Most importantly, they need to hone the very difficult skill of teaching learners to learn – this is a lot harder than simply teaching facts and figures – but is also infinitely more valuable to learners” (creativeeducation. co.uk). As a facilitator of learning, teachers whet the pupils’ appetite to learn; provide a myriad of resource materials; give pupils chances to test their learning; provide feedback on pupils’ progress; and help pupils to make sense of what they are learning.

According to Ofsted, (FGTO, 2013), independent learners need to understand what they are learning and/or are expected to do, they need choice, they need to have time for reflection, they need to know that they can ask for and will receive appropriate
support when they need it, they need to develop research skills and they need to be accountable for their work. Ways of encouraging independence are: making sure that success criteria are clear; having examples of high level work available; establishing routines for question asking (e.g., ask three others before the teacher); asking questions; asking high order thinking questions (such as, How can you evaluate...?, What is the most important part of...?, Why do you think...?); encouraging students to share resources; encouraging students to teach each other; setting collaborative homework; asking for feedback on lessons; encouraging pupils to lead the learning; identifying success and celebrating this.

Mynard and Sorflaten (2002, on s3.amazonaws.com) recommend the following ways of promoting independent learning: give choices to encourage pupils to reflect on their own interests and preferences and to make them start to take responsibility for learning; encourage group work which enables learners to learn from each other in an active, involved way as well as giving control to the pupils; encourage learners to predict their test scores so that they reflect on their progress as well as their strengths and weaknesses; set some learning goals to encourage reflection and self-evaluation; use authentic texts to connect learning with the outside world; involve learners in lesson planning to ensure that the lessons are interesting and relevant to them and to encourage them to reflect on their learning needs; encourage learners to keep learner diaries so that they can reflect honestly on their learning; build reflection and extension in activities; encourage peer and self editing; and create a self-access facility where pupils can choose activities for extra practice or extension.

Nunan (2003) summarises neatly how to enable learner autonomy in nine steps: make instruction goals clear to learners; allow learners to create their own goals; encourage learners to apply their subject knowledge outside the classroom; raise awareness of the learning process; help learners identify their preferred styles and strategies; encourage learner choice; allow learners to generate their own tasks; encourage learners to become teachers; and encourage learners to become researchers. Gershon (2014) advocates a more user-friendly approach, recommending five ways of promoting independent learning which are easy to remember and to incorporate: minimise teacher talk; provide students with a checklist; refuse to help; give out instruction slips; and, teach failure.

In promoting learner autonomy and enabling pupils to develop independent thinking and learning skills, teachers need to adopt a long-term approach and a patient attitude: “The road towards independence is often a long and rocky one and learners need considerable support. Teachers should not try to achieve too much too soon and should not be too hard on themselves if they don’t see an immediate change in their students” (Mynard and Sorflaten, 2002). They also require faith in the process: “How can we be sure that our pupils are being independent learners if we are not closely involved with what they are doing? Ultimately, we cannot be completely certain. We have to have some faith. This faith is the manifestation of the belief we have that our pedagogical approach has cultivated independent habits of mind in the students we teach” (Gershon, 2013). To develop independent learners, Gershon advocates three “particularly effective” paths: alter our own mind-sets about when we need or don’t need to intervene or give help; give frameworks within which pupils have to choose from different options; and, give effective formative feedback. “Creating independent
learners is a long-term project. It is about cultivation; the development of habits of mind over the course of months or longer” (Gershon, 2013).

OTHE CONSIDERATIONS

The DfCSF 2008 independent learning literature review found that “key elements of independent learning may be comprised of factors which are internal and external to learners” (Meyer, 2010, p1). One external factor is the creation of a strong relationship between teachers and students, in which the teacher helps pupils to see that they have a wealth of experience and that they can acquire knowledge for themselves, at times with help. The second external factor is an enabling physical environment, which provides the physical space, the right amount of time, the necessary resources and the support of the teacher as and when required. This links with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943); for Maslow, people’s motivation relates to achieving a certain (level of) need; once that need is fulfilled, they are motivated to move onto the next. So, before a pupil’s cognitive needs can be met, their physiological needs must be fulfilled. Being hungry or tired or cold will not help them to focus on learning. They also need to feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted in the learning environment to reach their full potential. Students with low self-esteem will not progress until their self-esteem is strengthened. Teachers need to show students that they are respected and valued (McLeod, 2014).

Internal factors are the skills that individual students have to acquire. The first of these is cognitive skills, such as understanding how people think and learn, how to improve memory and attention, effective ways of acquiring and understanding information, and different strategies to solve problems. The second is meta-cognitive skills, i.e., reflecting on and assessing their own thinking, reflecting on their own strengths and weaknesses, and thinking about how these can be improved. The third internal factor is affective skills, which refers to the feelings and emotions which motivate pupils despite difficulties - most importantly, self-motivation, delayed gratification, persistence, seeing themselves as a competent learner, and understanding that a person’s attitude can affect their ability to succeed and learn.

These internal factors link directly with the work of Carol Dweck. Dweck’s research studies have shown that what pupils think of their own abilities impacts on their learning. She identifies two mind-sets – the ‘fixed’ mind-set and the ‘growth’ mind-set. Pupils with a fixed mind-set tend to believe that intelligence and abilities do not change, and are full of concern about their ability, which can lead to destructive thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Pupils with a growth mind-set believe that they can develop their abilities and so are more focused on learning. They perceive challenges or setbacks as an opportunity to learn, and so respond with constructive thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Dweck has also found that pupils with a growth mind-set have ‘mastery or learning goals’, while those with a fixed mind-set have ‘performance goals’. Mastery-oriented pupils remain confident in their attitude and approach to a difficult task, while performance-oriented pupils lose concentration and have an attitude of failure. “I have found through my research that these students (performance-oriented) hold a certain belief that undermines them (…) They believe that intelligence is a fixed trait – that some people have it and others don’t – and that their intelligence is reflected in their performance (…) Students who are mastery-oriented think about learning, not about proving how smart they are. When they
experience a setback, they focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent” (Dweck in Hopkins, 2005).

According to Dweck, how teachers help pupils is crucial in developing a growth mind-set and mastery-oriented goals: “teachers should focus on students’ efforts and not on their abilities. When students succeed, teachers should praise their efforts or their strategies, not their intelligence (…) When students fail, teachers should also give feedback about effort or strategies – what the student did wrong and what he or she could do now (…) In other words, teachers should help students value effort. Too many students think effort is only for the inept. Yet sustained effort over time is the key to outstanding achievement. In a related vein, teachers should teach students to relish a challenge. Rather than praising students for doing well on easy tasks, they should convey that doing easy tasks is a waste of time. They should transmit the joy of confronting a challenge and struggling to find strategies. Finally, teachers can help students to focus on and value learning. Too many students are hung up on grades and proving their worth through grades. Grades are important, but learning is more important.”(Dweck in Hopkins, 2005). Dweck and Mueller also showed that the simple act of “praising students for their effort for the strategy they used taught them the growth mind-set and fostered resilience” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p6), and other studies have shown that pupils “are often more motivated and successful when classroom activities involve cooperative rather than competitive and individualistic goals.” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p8)

Enabling a growth mind-set and a mastery-oriented attitude to develop will in turn develop what Dweck terms ‘academic tenacity’. Academically tenacious students: believe that they belong to school academically and socially; see school as relevant to their future; work hard and can postpone immediate pleasures; are not derailed by intellectual or social difficulties; seek out challenges; and remain engaged over the long haul. As for creating academic tenacity, Dweck advocates, “cultivate a growth mind-set; buttress the belief that they belong in school; encourage goals that promote challenge-seeking, engagement, and learning; foster the skills that enable students to pursue these goals tenaciously” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p14). “In summary, a rigorous, supportive learning environment characterizes schools that promote student tenacity (…) student outcomes were most improved when a caring and supportive environment was combined with ‘academic press’, or a focus on learning and high expectations for student achievement (…) educators at every level can promote tenacity by sending the message, in word and deed, that their students truly belong and have great potential” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p32).

Education is not only about curriculum and pedagogy; it is also about the student and the psychology of the student. Psychological factors, (often referred to as motivational or non-cognitive factors), can have just as much impact on students’ academic performance as cognitive factors. “With greater awareness of non-cognitive factors, educators may be able to do relatively small things in the classroom that can make a big difference in their students’ learning” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p3). According to Dweck et al, these psychological factors include the students’ beliefs about themselves, their feelings about school, and their habits of self-control. The authors state that in order to learn and to learn successfully, students need to see themselves and school in certain ways and to manage themselves in ways that promote learning: “Research shows that non-cognitive factors are critical for on-going
academic success.” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p5). In turn, what students believe about their own academic ability influences their academic tenacity: “If students are going to invest their effort and energy in school, it is important that they first believe the effort will pay off. Research shows that students’ belief in their ability to learn and perform well in school – their self-efficacy – can predict their level of academic performance above and beyond their measured level of ability and prior performance” (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014, p5).

Schunk and Pajares’ (on uky.edu) findings on self-efficacy support Dweck. They define self-efficacy as “beliefs about one’s capabilities to learn or perform behaviors at designated levels” (p2) and state, in accord with Dweck, that, “Much research shows that self-efficacy influences academic motivation, learning, and achievement (…) Learners obtain information to appraise their self-efficacy from their actual performances, their vicarious experiences, the persuasions they receive from others, and their physiological reactions. Compared with students who doubt their learning capabilities, those who feel efficacious participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at a higher level” (p2-3). Schunk and Pajares propose the following as ways of promoting self-efficacy: “setting proximal and specific learning goals, strategy instruction and verbalization, social models, performance and attributional feedback, and performance-contingent rewards” (p15). (Proximal goals relate, of course, to Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which teachers ‘scaffold’ learning so that a pupil can achieve more than he or she would be able to unaided.)

The learning styles of pupils also need to be considered when planning and using independent learning activities. It is not possible to teach to every individual’s needs, yet teachers can strive to provide a variety of learning experiences, so that different styles are addressed at some point. “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p38) and for Kolb there is a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles. In his four-stage learning cycle, learning is effective when the pupil progresses through each of the four stages: concrete experience (doing or having the experience), followed by reflective observation (reviewing and reflecting on the experience), which leads to abstract conceptualisation (concluding and learning from the experience) which finally leads to active experimentation (planning and trying out what has been learned). This cycle could indeed be seen as an ideal model of independent learning. In terms of learning styles, Kolb sees learners as having a natural preference for a certain learning style, which is affected by factors such as their educational experience, their cognitive make-up, and social environment, for example. Ultimately, the individual’s learning style is the outcome of how the person approaches a task (processing) combined with how they think or feel about it (perception); the four learning styles which emerge from the four stages plus the processing and perception preferences are diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating. Diverging learners like to watch and use their feelings and imaginations. Assimilating learners prefer a logical, concise approach. Converging learners prefer technical tasks and problem solving. Accommodating learners use their intuition and are ‘hands-on’. Kolb’s definitions provide one method of assessing the learning styles of pupils and of thus ensuring that independent learning activities encompass all types. Groups can also be arranged to include pupils with different styles, so that tasks have complimentary team members and pupils have to learn to work with others who learn
in different ways. “By teaching through the Kolb Learning Cycle, one can ensure that all learning styles have been addressed, in that all questions have been answered” (Montgomery and Groat, p4, 1998).

Other learning styles models exist such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator™, which has overlap with Kolb in that personality types are seen as sensing or intuitive, thinking or feeling and judging or perceiving, as well as extroverted or introverted. The five dimensions of the Felder-Silverman Learning Styles Model also replicate elements of both Kolb and Myers-Briggs; Perception (sensing/intuitive) and Processing (active/reflective). The three other dimensions are Input (visual/verbal), Organisation (inductive/deductive) and Understanding (sequential/global). Grasha-Reichmann based their learning styles on pupils’ responses to actual classroom activities, rather than assessing personality or cognitive qualities – and could therefore be deemed more valid as they are situation-specific assessments. The styles they perceived are competitive, collaborative, avoidant, participant, dependent and independent. As Montgomery and Groat observe (1998, pp6-7), “inevitably, students bring to the classroom a great diversity of learning styles…it is the failure to acknowledge and work out the potential conflicts and misunderstandings that undermine student learning. Indeed, acknowledgement can be empowering for students if they can be made aware of their preferred learning style(s) and assisted in stretching their capabilities to accommodate greater variety.” Matching teaching styles to learning styles will not create the perfect learning experience, as this is affected by many other variables too. However, for teachers, “being self-reflective and explicit about the role of learning styles can make teaching more rewarding and enhance student learning at the same time” (Montgomery and Groat, 1998, p7).

Independent learning requires the development of self-motivation or for learners to be ‘autotelic’ (in Regan, 2013). According to Csikszentmihályi, ‘autotelic’ people are those happiest when absorbed in complex activities. Autotelic pupils are focussed on tasks and outcomes that stretch their skills, and such young people are more likely to grow into contented adults. The most significant factor for autotelic development is ‘attentional capacity’ (fostering attention and improved focus), thus the classroom should become “a laboratory of focus and attention” and “the incubator for growing students’ ‘attentional capacity’”, with teaching “organised in intriguing yet challenging ways to foster attention” (Regan, 2013). The three strategies Csikszentmihályi cites to cultivate improved focus are: sequencing instruction; recovery from mistakes; and setting goals. By implementing these approaches, “the classroom can grow students’ attentional capacity and show the value of and the methods for thinking independently” (Regan, 2013). Regan (2013) further asserts that this is what schools must do if they are to “fulfil their purpose: developing young minds that have been assured new ideas are exciting and worth pursuing”. She advocates this approach in order to help pupils develop intentional focus as she feels that the speed of communication in society “undermines the continuum of thought”. Csikszentmihályi’s research into ‘flow’ also appears to reflect the aims of independent learning. Being in a state of ‘flow’ is the mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. While those in a state of flow are said to be completely involved in the activity and have a sense of being outside everyday reality, they also experience: an inner clarity – i.e., they know what needs to be done and how well it is going; know that the activity is accomplishable;
have a sense of serenity without worries about the self; and have “intrinsic motivation – whatever produces “flow” becomes its own reward” (Farmer, 1999).

Understanding a pupil’s motivational type is therefore crucial to structuring independent learning, as different types of motivation “can affect and control the procedure and outcome of learning” (Mahadi and Jafari, 2012, p232). According to Gardner and Lambert (1972 in Mahadi and Jafari, 2012, p232), motivation can be integrative, i.e., learning for its own sake, because the topic is interesting in itself, or instrumental, i.e., learning out of a desire to reach a goal. According to Ryan and Deci (2000 in Mahadi and Jafari, 2012, p232), pupils have intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Students with intrinsic motivation are inclined to stay with intricate and complicated problems and gain knowledge from their mistakes. Intrinsic motivation is the eagerness and interest to do an activity because of itself and because the pupil feels that the activity is enjoyable. Extrinsic motivation is the propensity to take part in activities as a means of achieving a target, such as reward, admiration or prevention of punishment (Pintrich and Skunk, 1996, in Mahadi and Jafari, p232). Therefore, integrative motivation or intrinsic motivation are the optimal approaches to employ to encourage pupils as they do a task because they want to, not because they are obliged to and they complete tasks “because of an inner drive to do so, which is more continuous and does not rely on anyone else for stimulation” (Fallin, on hull.ac.uk). Independent learning addresses this need for motivation within learners as it aims to develop “(the) monitor(ing of) their behaviour in terms of their goals and self-reflect(ion) on their increasing effectiveness; (these) enhance(s) their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning. Because of their superior motivation and adaptive learning methods, self-regulated students are not only more likely to succeed academically but to view their futures more optimistically” (Zimmerman, 2002, p66).

CONCLUSION

From all of the above research and findings, it is evident that independent learning is an important approach to encourage and to develop. It takes time to acquire the skills and habits and development is gradual, with the teacher playing a crucial role in encouraging pupils to be actively engaged in what they are focussing upon and to be more responsible for their learning needs. The benefits to the learner are numerous, with the growth of skills and qualities such as decision-making, motivation, taking responsibility, confidence, and learning how to learn and how to think. Yet the skills and habits acquired are not only relevant in terms of educational development and the development of life-long learning habits. On a psychological level, human beings need to feel in control of what they do as well as that they have free will and are making choices for themselves. “According to a large body of empirical research in social psychology, autonomy - “feeling free and volitional in one’s basic actions” - is a basic human need. It is nourished by, and in turn nourishes, our intrinsic motivation, our proactive interest in the world around us” (Deci in Little, p2, archive.ecml.at).

People also need to develop the ability to focus their thoughts, perhaps even more than in previous eras. Regan (2013) illustrates this using a vivid analogy: “Imagine the intentional focus you would bring to crossing a rushing creek. Each stepping-stone is a different shape, each distance uneven and, requiring you to tread with all senses intact. The simple act of traversing water on stones is an extraordinary exercise in concentration. Now think how, with all the tweeting, texting and messaging that
technology has given us, our attention is frittered away by the mundane. The speed of communication undermines the continuum of thought. That rushing creek is much harder to cross.” Finally, on a social level, humans increasingly need the skills to ‘be’ independent; education can play a pivotal role in enabling this. As Gershon (2014) remarks, “we live in a culture rooted more in individualism than ever before – where independence (of thought, mind and body) is central to our ethical and social world view. Schools have the job of preparing students to be part of that culture and, if we are not doing that job properly, we are hindering their chances of success in life.”

CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES

The school has an experienced and stable SMT and a Head who has been in post for six years. A team of expert teaching staff supports them. The school is a happy place and pupils achieve well. There is thus a sense of security and satisfaction. However, there is also a sense of developmental stasis, which impedes appetite for change or interest in new ideas and approaches.

As a leader, the Head can be affiliative (as defined by Goleman), as he is extremely approachable, as well as being very supportive and understanding in times of personal need. In meetings, he adopts a democratic style, asking staff for their opinions. Authenticity also characterises his style, as his actions and words match his approach to work and his attitude to education. To some extent he does adopt an Action-Centred Leadership approach, as defined by Adair; the Head tries to balance the needs of the individual and the team, as well as the task. As regards Leader-Member Exchange, he does cultivate one-to-one relationships (although, unfortunately, this is not on the basis of “treating everyone according to their desserts and letting everyone see that virtue is rewarded” (Ireland, 2014, p17)). In psychodynamic terms, he best fits Fromm’s additional type of the marketing personality, needing to fit in and desiring harmony and consensus. The Head definitely displays McLelland’s two motivating factors – an affiliative need (a desire to be liked) and a need for power (in this instance, personal power, i.e., status and the trappings of success).

In essence, the Head’s approach is ‘hands-off’, which has the advantage of leaving staff free to teach and to plan however they deem best, without interference or control. This also makes one feel trusted. However, there are disadvantages to this style. If there is an initiative such as this project, colleagues only become involved if inspired to do so (i.e., by the project leader) or if they are motivated by their own interest and volition. Also, as the Head’s approach can appear indifferent, some staff feel that there is no interest in what they do, while others feel that their contribution is not valued. The Head’s style of leadership essentially meant that there was neither insistence on staff participation in this project nor a history of staff being expected to undertake new initiatives. About a third of staff participated, yet more may have done so if they had been led by a head who embodied Kouzes’ and Posner’s 5 practices of exemplary leadership: to model the way; to inspire a shared vision; to challenge the process; to enable others to act; and, to encourage the heart. Additional inspiration may have come from a leader with “a passion for the work itself, (…) [who] love(s) to learn, (…) [and who] display(s) an unflagging energy to do things better” (Goleman, 2011, loc 234), with attributes as defined by Goffee and Jones’ (2006), such as a clear sense of purpose and community, which would unify staff and give them a feeling of significance, and who empowers staff, which would create a sense of achievement.
and of excitement. In summary, for all or most of the staff to have taken part required a leader who “energize(s) people (…) by satisfying basic human needs for achievement, a sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, a feeling of control over one’s life and the ability to live up to one’s ideals. Such feelings touch us deeply and elicit a powerful response” (Kotter, 2011, loc 821). As this was not the situation, it was incumbent upon me to energise and to inspire: although these were my aims, I learned much about how I could have led better (summarised below in Conclusions).

The project was slow to get off the ground. After the first two weeks of term, I had not received any feedback, although several members of staff had asked me to explain to them in person what the options were and how to give their feedback, which I had done. At the weekly Tuesday morning staff meeting in the first three weeks of term, I briefly summarised the project again and reiterated the difference in the two activity sheets and their options, as well as how to feed back observations and comments. I also explained the benefits that I had found so far, with the inclusion of some of the simple approaches and activities in my French lessons.

In week three, a very experienced Year 3 teacher approached me in the corridor, recounting very enthusiastically that she had been using some of the ideas to very positive effect. She continued to try out ideas until near to the end of term and her experience also inspired the Head of History (a close friend of hers) to begin to implement ideas and feed back on them in week four. He also continued to do so throughout the term, until week nine. In week five, I also made a brief presentation to senior colleagues, urging them to take part in the project, at the weekly Friday morning Heads of Department meeting. I also spoke with and emailed the Head regarding the SMT’s involvement as well as speaking with and asking for participation from the Head of Pastoral Care. This did result in a response: the Head undertook an activity in a verbal reasoning lesson in week four and gave me written and verbal feedback.

In week six, I asked the Head of History and the Year 3 teacher to give brief feedback at the weekly staff meeting, explaining what they had done, how easy it was (or was not) and the benefits (and any drawbacks) they had found. These quick updates (not coming from me) were intended to demonstrate the ease with which the suggested independent learning activities could be implemented and the many benefits they had brought so far. After this, two colleagues came and spoke to me; one asked for me to explain again the options and how to do the feedback, which I did that morning break with her. I re-explained the pink sheet ideas and reiterated that email, verbal or written responses were all absolutely acceptable – whatever was easiest for her, and that even trying one idea would be really helpful and beneficial to both of us. However, she did not take part thereafter, despite repeating her intent to do so over the coming weeks. (This ‘intention-without follow-through’ pattern was also true of other colleagues.) The other colleague said that his feedback form was “too scruffy”; I reassured him that it did not matter and I was very happy to receive any response, no matter how dog-eared. Later that week, another Y3 teacher emailed me with feedback from activities she had tried. The Director of Studies also gave me some written responses at this stage.

After half term, there was no feedback from anyone in week seven. In week eight, I reminded all staff at the weekly staff meeting that the project was on-going, and
explained that I would be very grateful for any response – exhorting them to please try “just one activity, once”. I emphasised that I was fully appreciative of the fact that the half term would be extremely busy with preparation for 11+ exams, mock exams for Y6 and Y8, multiple parents’ evenings and practices for Christmas events, such as the nativity and carol service. However, I reminded them that this project was aimed at improving their teaching experience forever, as well as the pupils’ learning experience for life – and ultimately and additionally, an increase in everyone’s enjoyment and sense of achievement. Finally, I invited colleagues who were still unsure to come and observe one of my lessons when they were free, and I would incorporate some of the ideas and techniques. Later that week, I received a comprehensive, written response from the Compliance Coordinator, who teaches maths, English and history. The Head of History also informed me that at his weekly departmental meeting, he had explained to his team what he had used and the positive outcomes of these activities and approaches from the project. He had also urged all staff in his department to implement these ideas. Also, the new Head of ICT (a newly qualified teacher) asked to come and observe my Year 7 group. She found the group quite demanding and wanted to see the successful independent learning techniques I had mentioned using with them in the staff meeting. In week nine, I went to observe her teaching Year 5 ICT and she had incorporated some independent learning ideas into the lesson.

In the final three weeks of term, I continued to remind and encourage staff at the weekly meeting, highlighting the fact that independent learning activities actually take the pressure and focus away from the teacher and give the pupils more to reflect upon and be in responsible for. However, the intense nature of preparatory school life at this time of the year (see above) meant that staff were under pressure and no further feedback appeared. I emailed the colleague with the “scruffy” results as he was away on jury service and received his feedback during the Christmas holiday.

RESULTS

Myself
Throughout the term, I mostly used pink sheet activities. I frequently incorporated idea 1b, group ideas share. Although speaking pair work is a common element of language learning lessons, I had previously rarely asked pupils to share ideas and to discuss solutions. This technique showed me that the pupils were very enthusiastic about discussing ideas with one another and also about sharing their thoughts with the whole class. It also gave me time walk around and listen, enabling me to monitor the pupils’ ways of thinking and interpreting as well as giving me the chance to learn how they perceive and understand. It was encouraging; I noticed how well most of them grasped concepts and I was also able to pick up on common misconceptions and confusions and then present these to the class as a whole, asking for any volunteers to explain. If no one was able to do this, I could then either take the time to teach that element again (in a new way) or to incorporate it in another, later lesson.

I also frequently used refuse to help (ideas 2a, b and c). This had an amazing impact; although there was some initial moaning from some pupils, overall the pupils’ reaction was very positive with many of them making comments similar to this one; “It’s better for us if we work it out for ourselves.” I realised just how much
unnecessary help I had been giving to pupils – and, therefore, how I had been denying them the chance to feel empowered and to gain a sense of achievement.

I also tried out celebrate failure much more often (idea 4); never naming a pupil (although many like to ‘own’ the error), I showed mistakes one at a time on the board and then asked the pupils to discuss in pairs how to correct it. (After 30 seconds or a minute, a volunteer would explain what was incorrect and why to the whole class.) I also altered the way in which I give feedback (idea 8). I now give just one positive comment and, for all except the scholarship pupils, give only one piece of guidance, which I flag it up with the words ‘Next time,…’ or ‘Improvement Point’. I continue to praise all good elements of the pupil’s work and approach. In addition, I now always make a comment about their effort, as Dweck advocates, in order to have more impact on creating a mastery-oriented mindset. However, I bear in mind her recent comment: “praise the effort (as well as the strategies, focus, perseverance and information-seeking) in relation to the outcome – with particular emphasis on learning and progress” (Dweck, 2016, p39).

I also used activity 6, round the room, for the discussion of topics related to but not necessarily on the programme of study. This had the effect of making the subject topic more relevant and making the group more cohesive and connected. For example, with Year 5 I took 15 minutes of a 30-minute lesson to aim to convey the purpose of practising vocabulary, something this group was quite reluctant to do. I asked pupils to reflect upon activities and hobbies they do outside of school and for which they train or practice. I asked them: What is the benefit of practice? What happens if you practise? What happens if you don’t/ can’t/miss practice? Almost every child had something that they love to do and for which practice/repetition has helped them to progress and, crucially, to get a lot more out of the activity and more satisfaction, as well as the reward/progress/team advancement/national competition/grade etc. We also discussed how best to practise – e.g., if you practise the piano 10 minutes every day, it’s more effective than 30 minutes once a week. I linked this to vocabulary learning. Happily, the pupils subsequently learned well for the test on this topic and have more or less maintained an improved record in terms of application to vocabulary and assessment learning since.

From the yellow sheet, I used activity 8, jigsaw many times and found it to be very successful; the benefits are very similar to the group ideas share method, with the additional advantages of the sharing of many pupils’ ideas, the ability for pupils who are less sure to see that there are others in the set like them, and for the pupils to negotiate, prioritise and inspire one another. There was evidently much more discussion and decision-making and very little writing down. Overall, pupils worked together positively, coming up with many more correct answers than I expected and than when they write alone. I noticed that I did need to closely monitor more able pupils, who needed an extension point/question, and to support and encourage less able pupils, who were veering towards giving up or not taking part. All in all, there was much less of me, it seemed like the pupils enjoyed the lessons more, and these lessons were much easier to teach and manage. The other yellow sheet activity I used was activity 1, three step questioning. I used this most comprehensively with the older pupils (Years 7 and 8), as I had one-hour long lessons with them. The first step engendered similar positive learning outcomes as jigsaw. Using steps 2 and 3 to plan multiple and ‘scaffolded’ questions gave the lessons more structure, flow and
achieved greater discussion and more in-depth, thought-through responses – i.e., higher-order thinking, such as analysing and evaluating.

As well as adding positively to my teaching repertoire, using the above independent learning activities has also led to greater use of discussion and reflection activities; these are now an inherent element of my planning. I now automatically make the following considerations when planning: how can I get the pupils to talk about this/make decisions/find out information/work together/share ideas? As a result, the atmosphere is more productive atmosphere, the pupils are happier and more engaged, they show greater understanding and there is less pressure on the individual and less focus on me. I talk a lot less and have greater grasp of the pupils’ understanding and level. While pupils write down less, I feel that they understand better and more and that the lessons are (even) more enjoyable.

Year 3 teacher (1)
This colleague tried various ideas throughout most of the term, using the sheet ideas and adapting them. First of all, at the start of the Ancient Greeks topic, she put the pupils into groups with one child as the scribe. She asked them to write down everything they knew about the Ancient Greeks and then asked them to discuss how they could find out about them and where those resources might be. She commented, “You don’t get so much written down, but they did really enjoy it and there was much more discussion.” She also said, “It’s really good to be shaken up out of your old habits and be forced to try something new. When I’m planning I’m now consciously thinking ‘How can I get the pupils to work this out/think for themselves/reflect?’ Thanks. All I needed was a kick up the backside!” A few weeks later, she also encouraged more reflection and decision-making by asking pupils to self-mark and to evaluate a worksheet on the use of capital letters. This also led, in her words, “to them finding out more about their strengths and weaknesses”. In another lesson, she asked more able pupils to work in pairs and to compare and highlight the important differences between the city-states of Sparta and Athens. She noted that it “worked really well and there was lots of discussion”.

Later in the term, this colleague tried “something different in Year 3 history”. After telling them the story of Adam and Eve, she then began the story of Pandora’s Box and included pre-prepared questions. She stopped the story at the moment the box is opened, put them into groups and asked them to write down what they thought was inside the box. Their responses were “varied and creative, and most of them linked it with the themes of Adam and Eve”. Finally, she gave them a choice of how to record the story (e.g., words, pictures, diagrams), “which was very well received”. On another occasion, introducing the topic of multiplication she said she wanted to give them four sweets each, so how many did she have to buy in total? Pupils could use any method to work this out – equipment, object, pencil and paper. There were a variety of answers and each pupil had to explain how they had worked it out. It was “very interesting” for this teacher to hear and see how the individuals approached this; “some hadn’t a clue, others were on the right track and only one got it right”. This really helped her to adapt her planning for the topic.

Later in the term, this colleague used the pink sheet idea 1b, group ideas share in English. Pupils were working on making sentences more interesting by including adjectives, adverbs and varied verbs. She put the pupils into groups and gave them a
list of nouns; they then had to come up with suitable verbs, adjectives and adverbs to go with the nouns. In groups, they had to discuss their ideas and decide the best options. She said, “It was very interesting as it showed who would work as a part of a team and who would not. It also showed who said nothing and who thought that their ideas were always the best.” She found this very useful as a Year 3 teacher trying to get to know reasonably new pupils and commented, “The best thing about it was that they came up with lovely vocabulary”. Her final comment to me about taking part in the project was: “I have found it really interesting and it has made me think about how I teach, so thank you.”

Head of History
The Head of History used idea 2, refuse to help in many lessons, and would not comment when pupils were stuck unless they had already tried to find a solution. He now frequently uses the phrase “Whose work is it?” when they ask how to tackle a task and reported that, “My Year 6 class now know not to ask unless they have something solid to discuss and that I will refuse to look at a blank page.” He also used answering a question with a question to “great effect”. Although some pupils struggled with the concept of his not helping, in the end the pupils “trusted their own ideas and were able to make valid judgements on the work set” - from their own reflection and research. He also challenged a pupil who complained that a certain monarch had not been taught to independently research that monarch and present his findings to the class – and the pupil did. As a consequence, the teacher commented, “I am now considering how I can work this into my lessons over the year, getting each member of the class to do a starter presentation on certain people or events.”

This teacher also teaches English and used idea 5, give choices. Working on punctuation and proof-reading and with creative writing always in mind, every pupil was given the same, unpunctuated piece which contained poorly chosen words and spelling errors, too. The teacher then asked the pupils to chose one character from a list – Word Wizard, Punctuation Pirate, Spelling Spaceman or Speech Sorcerer, depending on the area they felt they personally needed to improve on the most. They also had the choice of working alone or with a partner and could also circulate and offer their ideas to others once they had completed the task. He observed that, “All of the children became engaged. All of them chose to approach it and share in different ways; I feel that they all gained from the lesson and covered number of skills. I will also be able to assess not only what they can do and have learnt, but also what they see as their weaker area. I really enjoyed doing it and it is making me rethink my teaching methods.”

This colleague also used idea 3, give out instruction slips with Year 7. Pupils worked in pairs to complete tasks about the effects of The Black Death. He found that pair work was good “but next time I will give them a choice of independent work or small, self-selected groups”. He observed that they remained on task and did some good work, considering they had to both interpret and discuss and also as many of these pupils need constant reassurance. He then used idea 5, give choices for how to record their work; “I was pleased that there was no (usual) silliness when I went into the corridor to photocopy their notes. The really interesting thing for me was who worked well and who did not. All worked well at the start of the class, but about five lacked the rigour and depth when the tasks became based more on ‘free thought’. It’s helped me to target those who need more support and a different approach.”
Year 3 Teacher (2)
Another Year 3 colleague used some of the pink sheet ideas. Mostly in maths and homework sessions, she used idea 2, refuse to help, giving only clues and hints “so that they solve the question themselves”. She also tried idea 3, give out instruction slips, but adapted it for Year 3 by putting the information on the interactive whiteboard. This was “very helpful for the most part, as it meant less time was spent explaining and more time was spent working on the tasks, plus it encouraged pupils to manage themselves and be in charge of their time. The only problem was that some children really struggle with reading, so they still needed regular explanations.” She also used idea 5, give choices, and now has three different trays for independent work, labelled ‘I need more practice’, ‘I feel confident’ and ‘I’m ready for a challenge’. She observed that the pupils really enjoy the opportunity to choose their own work at the level they feel they are at; although the process needs close monitoring, most of them choose honestly and appropriately. She said, “They really enjoy it, and have become used to the process as well as honestly assessing where they are at. A number of pupils have been very pleased when they have chosen and then done well on the ‘next one up’ – you can sense their pride that THEY decided AND they did well.”

Director of Studies
The Director of Studies/Head of Maths reported that she uses ideas 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8 on the pink sheet “all of time”. She always uses idea 1a, whole class brain blast when starting a new topic and always uses 1c, summary with questions at the end of a lesson or topic, depending on when it is appropriate. She also commented that she always refuses to help (ideas 2a, b and c), only giving a hint or a clue or asking pupils what they think the answer is and how they will work it out. Idea 6, round the room is used when appropriate. Finally, she puts “a huge emphasis” on idea 4, celebrate failure. Her overall observation was that these approaches are “the best way to get them to work things out for themselves and from this to truly understand maths.”

Head of Art
The Head of Art adapted yellow sheet idea 8, jigsaw, as a group activity to research, design and modify then create a final design as part of a topic on Kandinsky and music. Pairs were given an A1 sheet and wrote down ideas for the first session; they chose their own partner and the musical instruments they wanted to use as design prompts. The second session they worked in teams, bringing together their pair ideas and designs and modifying them. Before each session, the teacher talked about how failure, reflection and modification are inherent to the process of design, and she gave examples from design history. In the second session, she monitored each group in order to hear their ideas and to give each group ‘one thought to work on’. She reported, “The pupils were excited and engaged. It was interesting to see just how involved they got in this exercise as pupils usually work alone.” At the end of the sessions, there was a whole class discussion and critique of each team’s idea and design. Each team had two minutes to present and the other teams were allowed to ask questions about the design and offer their own ideas on the team’s ideas. “The group discussion worked really well and the whole class involved themselves,” she noted. “It was a really energetic exercise and engaged all levels of ability. And they all worked as a team.” This teacher has also introduced an individual pupil target sheet (adapting pink sheet idea 8, give regular formative feedback) which pupils now
fill in to evaluate the work at the end of each term; this begins with a whole class
discussion before individual reflection and self-assessment.

Headmaster
The Head used the yellow sheet idea 8, jigsaw in verbal reasoning with a Year 5 class.
This is usually an individual process, so he made groups of 4, giving each group a
page of a different style of question and with all groups’ pages related. Each group
had to work out how to do their type of question. After 10-15 minutes, one pupil
explained to the other groups what they had found worked best and then the whole
class discussed the different ways of solving problems. At the end of the lesson, the
head discussed different ways of learning with the pupils and asked for feedback:
50% preferred working as a group, 50% preferred working alone. He felt that it was
“a reasonable experiment”. He realised that he needed to give clearer instructions and
that pupils are not practised in explaining themselves clearly, noting, “It was quite
hard to deliver and there was limited instant impact. The process would need to be
repeated as a continuous process to develop skills. Although the learning was initially
slow, it could be very powerful if time allowed.”

Religious Studies/French teacher
This teacher used pink sheet idea 1b, group ideas share, with Year 5 for a discussion
about photographs of Hindu children’s prayer practice. Pupils worked in small groups
to discuss and to answer questions. “They enjoyed sharing ideas,” she commented.
“Some pupils found it hard to get going but did join in more when the discussion was
for the whole group.” This teacher also used pink sheet idea 5, give choices in Year 4
French. The pupils had a choice of two tasks to help vocabulary learning, and were
then put into pairs of pupils who had chosen different task, to test each other and
compare what they could remember. The whole class then discussed the effectiveness
of the particular task they had chosen. She noted, “Pupils enjoyed sharing the
approaches and it really helped to reinforce the words, and the discussion helped them
to identify how different methods work.”

Head of Compliance
The Head of Compliance teaches maths, history and English. She used many of the
ideas on the pink sheet throughout the term. She used idea 1a, whole class brain blast
in history and English lessons, as well as at the start of maths lessons in the form of a
mental maths question, to reinforce a previous method. “Pupils enjoyed going to the
board to explain their thinking; it encouraged higher order thinking,” she noted.
This teacher also combined idea 1c, end of lesson summary, with idea 8, give regular
formative feedback, in a ‘steps to success’ format as an end of lesson/topic summary
questions on self-assessment, giving ways to improve in the future. She stated, “As a
result, pupils took greater interest in their learning and responsibility for it. Since they
began doing this at the start of term, pupils are becoming more discerning and reflect
more honestly.” At the end of a history topic, pupils reflect overall on their
achievement and select their own target for skills for the next topic.

In history, this teacher used 1b, group ideas share, to share ideas and to encourage
discussion. She asked questions such as ‘Was the Black Death a bad thing?’ and this
led to teamwork and discussion and then debate. On another occasion, she used a
picture of the triumph of death to ask ‘What is this picture about?’, which engendered
“great debate about imagery and thinking in 1350s”. She also used idea 2, refuse to
help. She felt that “this had the impact of always encouraging the pupils to answer their own question. If they are stuck, I asked an alternative questions to encourage and guide them. Pupils gain a sense of achievement and success when they work it out for themselves.” In many lessons, she used idea 3, Give instructions slips. These were prepared instructions about the activity set up on the interactive whiteboard. Pupils entered the room, looked at it and got on with the work. “It helped to start the lesson calmly and with focus, and dealt with the issue of pupils arriving at different times,” she noted. It also allowed time for corrections to be done. When revisiting the topic of The Black Death, she used idea 7, pupils plan the lesson, at the start of the topic to assess what they knew and what they still wanted to know. She also used their questions again at the end of the topic, to review what they had learned and to address any unanswered questions or confusions.

When correcting 11+ practice papers, she used idea 4, celebrate failure. If a pupil had an incorrect answer, she allowed them to attempt to correct it rather than correcting it for them. Pupils also peer corrected practice and the whole class discussed where they went wrong and how to correct it and approach the different types of question in future. She also frequently used idea 5, give choices. In maths, pupils had 4 levels of work, with pupils choosing their own starting point and how far they progressed that day. In addition, how pupils chose to take notes was not proscribed: she emphasised that they are making their own notes, for their own future use and should therefore decide in which format the notes would be most useful to them personally. She often incorporated idea 6, round the room, noting, “Pupils gain confidence as they become accustomed to this practice. They feel successful. Pupils also enjoy sharing and ‘magpieing’ – stealing others’ ideas!”

Head of Geography

The Head of Geography tried three ideas through the term with different groups and ages. He particularly liked pink sheet idea 5, give choices. He did this by giving pupils a sheet divided into three areas (usually at the start of a topic or when revisiting and extending a topic area from a previous year). The areas were entitled, ‘What I think I know’, ‘What I definitely I know’ and ‘What I would like to know’. He noted, “This worked well as each pupil can work on it whatever their level and they address their own learning, too.” In the plenary, each pupil read out a statement from the ‘What I think I know’ section and either another pupil or the teacher answered it/explained it if it was incorrect. For the next lesson, pupils used the Internet to research the ‘What I would like to know’ section. He commented, “Great engagement noted and each pupil working on their own questions – not mine!” He also saw that the most able were really able to stretch themselves with the questions they decided to ask and research. The teacher used the same sheet at the end of the topic as a self-assessment tool, and for his own assessment purposes.

This teacher also used the yellow sheet idea 8, jigsaw, with Year 7 pupils. Each group had to try to secure government funding (the teacher was the minister) for their particular form of transport, working on a presentation/pitch explaining why their method was better than the car and better than the other forms of transport. This required group discussion, division of research, co-ordination of the research and decision-making about the information. Pupils reportedly “engaged well in the preparation, but their lack of debating skills let them down in the pitches”, which the teacher notes is now an area to work on in future. The final idea that he adapted was
yellow sheet idea 7, decisions, decisions. He set up a house teams true/false information hunt about Kenya. Each decision led to another question, but this did not necessarily mean that the team had answered correctly; if the team made the wrong choice, they found out at a later stage and had to work back to figure out where they went wrong. The teacher used the true/false statements as an individual assessment the next lesson to ascertain what had been retained and understood.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the project was more successful than I anticipated and, as a result, a third of staff now have more ideas and more confidence vis-à-vis independent learning and are hopefully incorporating these into their daily teaching. I inspired colleagues, and really enjoyed doing so. In terms of achieving the aim of increasing teachers’ repertoire of ideas, activities and techniques which would encourage and develop independent learning skills and habits, the project was successful in that all staff who participated experienced positive outcomes to a greater or lesser extent and also found the ideas inspiring, effective and useful. My main observation in terms of leadership is that I needed to regularly reflect on and reassess the process as it was happening; I would have thus been able to implement many of the improvement ideas in this conclusion i.e., develop the project as it progressed.

As regards enthusing the Head and the SMT, it might have been helpful to make a presentation to them before doing so to the whole staff. This would have hopefully encouraged the management team to support the project, both amongst staff and through individual participation. An additional presentation to the governors would also have put pressure on the Head to make the project a whole school undertaking. To both of these groups, the presentation would have communicated Meyer’s assertion that, “The promotion of independent learning requires (…) process-oriented teaching, which ensures that pupils are actively involved in the learning process and become life-long learners: where effective, independent learning depends on productive interactions between pupil and teacher. The promotion of independent learning however is most effective when a whole school approach is taken and teachers are supported by senior managers” (Meyer, 2010, p2).

As regards staff participation, this could have been improved if I had shown a video of a lesson in which I had used an independent learning activity, (making the process and the benefits ‘real’), and if staff had been invited to observe me using independent learning activities before doing so themselves. Both approaches would have alleviated any lack of clarity or a sense of pressure to use new methodologies (if staff did not feel competent to deliver them due to a lack of understanding or opportunity to observe techniques). The project might also have been more successful if the activities had been limited to just the pink sheet. Some staff appeared fazed by the existence of two sheets, so just one would have reduced the confusion and the dilemma of choice. Additionally, the pink sheet listed only ‘easy to incorporate’ activities, which may have been easier to ‘sell’ to the staff. For these reasons also, the PowerPoint presentation needed to be simplified and delivered at a more digestible pace; a number of staff spoke with me afterwards and expressed that they were ‘unclear’ about the project or what I wanted.
In terms of managing the staff, a mid-term presentation from me conveying the (positive) results of staff that had trialled to date may have galvanised others. Also, a prominent, appointed notice board in the staffroom could have been used to display weekly feedback on either a successful activity from participating staff or information on a new, suggested activity – and may have inspired others to take part. Personal support of staff might also have encouraged more to take part; many staff seemed unnerved about being asked to try new activities, i.e., going out of their comfort zone and away from the safety of their habits. It may have been that they felt threatened by their changing role - that is, moving from teacher to “learning manager, counsellor or even learning resource or consultant” (Ciel, 2000). This project required them to work in a different way, which was perceived by many as challenging; I could have offered to (give moral support and) help individuals with the planning and (team-)teaching of new ideas. I did not do this as I felt it would appear patronising, but in retrospect, any offer of support might have gleaned more results.

The future success of independent learning in the school depends on many changes. There needs to be a policy framework at both institutional and departmental levels, which must address the implementation of the policy and the resources required in order for independent learning to be delivered in a coherent manner and to receive commitment from the staff. An appointed individual or team must manage and coordinate the policy - with staff involved in its development both at inception and continually thereafter, and with its effectiveness regularly evaluated. Staff will require training before and in the future, and there needs to be means of comparing and sharing ideas as well as ICT training. The pupils will need training, too; sessions on specific areas such as learning strategies, study skills, and teamwork are required to increase their confidence and skills set. One effective method that could be used is Dweck’s Brainology course - a computer-based, six-module programme on the brain and how to make it work better. It incorporates study skills and growth mindset activities, and pupils who have undertaken the course have shown clear improvement in terms of their motivation, engagement, effort, and focus.

In addition, pupils will need resources as well as an ‘enabling’ physical environment besides the current ICT suite. This could be a resources centre, areas within classrooms where pupils could undertake independent learning activities, and accessibility to lap-tops/iPads for all pupils. Staff will need to support this process by pooling ideas and resources in a central location (both on the network and physically). Finally, and crucially, each subject curriculum will need to be designed with independent learning in mind: “the design of the curriculum is crucial to the implementation or otherwise of independent learning. The other key factors (…) can be optimally in place, but without a curriculum which values the development of independent learning and makes time and space for it in the academic timetable, there is likely to be limited success (…) If the links are not in place, only the most dedicated of learners will prioritise independent learning in order to take charge of their own future” (Ciel, 2000).
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INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

HOE BRIDGE SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION
Hoe Bridge School

Full Name of School: Hoe Bridge School
DfE Number: 936/6395
Registered Charity Number: 295808
Address:
Hoe Bridge School
Hoe Place
Old Woking Road
Woking
Surrey
GU22 8JE

Telephone Number: 01483 760 018
Fax Number: 01483 757 560
Email Address: headmaster@hoebridgeschool.co.uk
Headmaster: Mr Nick Arkell
Chair of Governors: Mr David Hemley
Age Range: 3 to 13
Total Number of Pupils: 462
Gender of Pupils: Mixed (334 boys; 128 girls)
Numbers by Age:
3-5 (EYFS): 106
5-11: 305
11-13: 51

Number of Day Pupils: Total: 462
Number of Boarders: Total: 0
Head of EYFS Setting: Mrs Linda Renfrew
EYFS Gender: Mixed
Inspection dates: 22 Mar 2011 to 23 Mar 2011
PREFACE

This report is according to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM inspections. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school’s next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school’s previous inspection was in March 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

(a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
(b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
(c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
(d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
(e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
(f) Premises and accommodation
(g) Provision of information
(h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

(i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
(ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
(iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

(i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
(ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
(iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
(iv) an in-depth investigation of the school’s compliance with employment law.

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INSPECTION EVIDENCE
1. **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

1.1 Hoe Bridge School is a co-educational day school for pupils from the age of three to thirteen, set in twenty-two acres of landscaped and natural grounds in Woking, Surrey. At its centre is a seventeenth-century mansion, Hoe Place, which is steeped in history connected with royalty. It was a private residence until 1928, when Hoe Place Preparatory School for boys was established. This became St Michael's School in 1962 and was privately owned. Hoe Bridge School was formed in 1987 through the merger of St Michael's School with Allen House, another local preparatory school. The new school was set up as a charitable trust, administered by a board of governors. It became co-educational up to Year 6 in 1999. It is founded on Christian beliefs and principles, and welcomes pupils from all faiths, or none.

1.2 The current headmaster was appointed in September 2009 and he takes overall responsibility for the whole school consisting of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for pupils aged three to five, the pre-preparatory department (pre-prep) for pupils aged three to seven and which includes the EYFS, and the preparatory department (prep) for pupils aged seven to thirteen. The pre-prep has its own head, to whom day-to-day leadership and management have been devolved. Since the previous inspection, new classrooms have been constructed and science laboratories and changing rooms have been refurbished, in addition to the installation of a lift in the sports hall block.

1.3 At the time of the inspection, there were 462 pupils on the roll, with 106 children in the EYFS, of whom 52 attend part time. Approximately seven-tenths of the pupils are boys, who generally remain at the school until the age of thirteen; girls leave at the age of eleven. Most pupils come from business and professional families and live within ten miles of the school. Approximately one-quarter of the pupils are from a background other than white British, and twenty-seven speak English as an additional language (EAL); of these, eighteen are at an early stage of learning English. Sixty-three pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) of whom one has a statement of special educational needs (SEN); of these, forty-three receive additional support with their learning. From the results of nationally standardised tests, the ability profile of the school is above the national average.

1.4 Within the overall aim of pursuing academic success and encouraging each pupil to realise his/her potential, the school seeks to maintain a safe environment where pupils are self-confident and happy, are eager to learn and have an optimism and enthusiasm for life. It strives to promote respect, courtesy, and consideration for all. It aims to create a friendly relaxed atmosphere between pupils and staff, with a firm underlying discipline, whilst combining warmth, care, good relations, purposefulness and pride in achievement. It seeks to work in partnership with parents to promote the welfare of all the pupils and to establish sound relationships based on trust.
1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the pre-prep and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

**Early Years Foundation Stage Setting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>NC name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twigs</td>
<td>Pre-Nursery (age 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash, Aspen</td>
<td>Nursery (age 3-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beech, Cedar, Chestnut</td>
<td>Reception (age 4-5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-preparatory Department**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>NC name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elm, Maple, Mulberry</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak, Pine, Rowan</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils’ achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

2.1 Pupils achieve consistently well, in line with the aims of the school of pursuing academic success and encouraging each pupil to realise his or her potential. The pupils’ successes in academic work, sport and music, both individually and in groups, are due in part to their excellent attitudes to learning. Pupils are confident as individuals; they are extremely articulate and use information and communication technology (ICT) and numeracy skills effectively in their work. Their skills in reading and writing are strong, and creativity, as seen particularly in displays around the pre-prep, is of high quality. The presentation of the pupils’ work is excellent. In many lessons, pupils had good opportunities to think for themselves, which they did effectively. In a few lessons that were less successful, the pupils’ independent learning skills were restricted, particularly in the prep, because of the style of teaching and too narrow a concentration on preparation for senior school entrance examinations. The pupils’ knowledge, understanding and skills are developed well in many different subject areas and in their extra-curricular activities. Pupils have been successful in junior and primary mathematics challenges and some qualify for the Olympiad. They also achieve strongly in instrumental music examinations and in local music festivals. The sports teams do exceptionally well and some become the champions in county and national competitions. Individual pupils are successful in theatre and television productions.

2.2 Pupils’ attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be high in relation to national age-related expectations. The pupils follow a wide curriculum and, on leaving the school, they transfer to independent day and boarding schools, many of which have high standards of entry. Each year, on average, fifteen pupils gain scholarships and awards to their senior schools. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability, as assessed in lesson observation and pupils’ written work. Their behaviour in lessons is extremely good. They are given some opportunities to work co-operatively in pairs and groups. Pupils are quick to settle, sustain concentration and take pleasure in their work, showing good application and perseverance.

2.3 The school provides a good education; the curriculum is broad, covering all the requisite areas of learning, including a high quality programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) which reflects its aims and ethos. Planning is thorough throughout the school and contributes to smooth transfer between years and across departments. The provision for pupils with LDD, SEN or EAL is good and they are given detailed individual education plans, and gifted and talented pupils are generally well catered for. There is a comprehensive programme of clubs, hobbies and extra-curricular activities, enabling pupils to develop a wide range of skills and interests. An outstanding programme of educational and recreational visits to a variety of places both near and further afield enriches the curriculum and makes a strong contribution to the pupils’ achievements and personal development. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

2.4 Effective teaching generally enables pupils of all abilities, including those with LDD, SEN or EAL, to make good progress in their studies, encouraging them to put maximum effort into their work and to behave very well. Teachers have a good
knowledge of their subjects and lessons are often conducted at a brisk pace. In the best lessons, teachers provide well-planned, challenging tasks. They know their pupils’ strengths and weaknesses well and they use this knowledge to help move them forwards and overcome any difficulties. The classroom is often seen as a lively place for learning, although, on occasion, too much focus is given to the introduction of the task and pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to demonstrate what they already know and can do. This results in less rapid learning, particularly for the more able pupils. Praise and encouragement are widely used in marking, which adds to the pupils’ enjoyment and builds on their self-confidence, but there are few pointers given on how work can be improved. Assessment procedures are good and help to inform staff of what the next steps in learning should be as well as identifying those who may need extra support.

The quality of the pupils’ personal development

2.5 The pupils’ personal development is excellent. They have high levels of self-esteem, are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and are tolerant of differences. Their strong sense of spiritual matters is developed through assemblies and visits to local places of worship. Their sense of justice is well developed, and they understand the difference between right and wrong, as seen in their excellent behaviour around the school. Pupils are very aware of those less fortunate than themselves, and are keen to be involved in fund-raising for a variety of local, national and international charities. They are enthusiastic about taking individual responsibility, particularly in the pre-prep, but, from Years 3 to 7, there are less formalised opportunities to do so, and pupils made this view known in the questionnaires. However, a very active school council has made significant improvements to school life; for example, by requesting the provision of further equipment for playtimes and clocks to help with their daily personal organisation, the funding for which was provided by parents. Pupils play together very well, and move around the school sensibly. When visiting speakers are invited to the school, the pupils show them the utmost respect. They have an excellent awareness of their own culture through trips to museums and art galleries, and they have a good knowledge of the celebrations of other cultures and traditions.

2.6 Supporting the pupils’ strong personal development are the effective arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Pupils say they feel confident that there is an adult to turn to should they have a problem with which they need help. They say that, on the rare occasions when bullying happens, staff will deal with the issue constructively. Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are strong although, in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a significant minority of pupils said that teachers do not treat all pupils equally and are unfair in giving rewards and punishments. There was no evidence on the inspection to justify this concern. The staff have focused on pastoral care issues in recent months and evidence from a staff meeting observed indicated that pupil concerns are high on their agenda. Suitable policies safeguard pupils and, whilst they are strong in content, they have not always been implemented robustly in the past concerning recruitment checks on staff. All staff have undertaken the safeguarding and health and safety training relevant to their responsibilities. Risk assessments have been completed on all areas of school life, and all appropriate measures have been taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards. A suitable medical room is available for those pupils who fall ill during the school day. Attendance and admission registers are completed and stored correctly. The accessibility plan for those with special educational needs or a disability details the improvements which
the school intends to make. Pupils understand the need for healthy eating and physical exercise, and school meals are nutritious.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

2.7 The school is governed satisfactorily, supporting the aims of the school. Governors are committed to ensuring a high level of educational achievement and pastoral care for the pupils. The board receives regular reports from the headmaster, the head of the pre-prep and the bursar at its termly meetings which enable it to make informed decisions concerning human and material resources. Their strong financial control can be seen in the improved accommodation since the previous inspection. Whilst the majority of parents indicated that they are satisfied with governance in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents commented that they had little knowledge of the governing body. There are few opportunities organised for governors to meet with parents or for governors to observe the work of the school at first hand. Some governors have undertaken training to endeavour to keep abreast of their responsibilities, including those for the regulations, although they are aware that they do not yet have a sufficiently robust system for monitoring the school’s compliance.

2.8 Overall, the school is well led and managed. Strong features include the sharing of information on academic and pastoral matters between staff, a cohesive senior management team and a clear vision promoted by the new leadership. This vision reflects the current priorities for development well, and is portrayed through the objectives in the school development plan, but the steps required to achieve those objectives, the person responsible for each and the success criteria have not yet been formulated. Whilst management processes, such as the monitoring of teaching and learning through lesson observation, are undertaken in the pre-prep regularly and effectively, they are less rigorously carried out in the prep. The appraisal system is suitably linked to professional development.

2.9 A centralised register accurately records the recruitment checks undertaken on the appointment of staff and all have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. However, the school has not been rigorous enough in the past in ensuring that all required recruitment checks have been carried out on staff and governors before their appointment, although these have now been rectified as far as possible. The high quality premises which have many strong features are well maintained. The school grounds are used exceptionally well for educational and recreational play.

2.10 Links with parents are excellent. Parents of current and prospective pupils have access to all relevant information, and parents’ evenings and regular reports provide detailed information about pupil progress, as well as useful guidance for improvement. Regular newsletters and an informative website both aid communication. Parents and pupils are welcomed each morning by the headmaster and the head of pre-prep, and can be involved in the life of the school by attending matches, concerts and other events, and by participating in the fund-raising activities of the parents’ association. From their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents are positive about the educational provision and the care and guidance given; in particular, all parents who responded are satisfied about the curriculum, and many feel able to talk to staff, believing their concerns are listened to. A small number of parents do not feel adequately involved in school life, do not believe they receive enough information about their children’s progress, are not happy about homework, and are concerned about the provision for those pupils with LDD and SEN. There was no evidence to justify these concerns. The complaints
procedure is appropriate and available to parents, and concerns are handled sensitively. Appropriate records are kept.

2.11 The pupils’ questionnaire responses indicated that they believe they are making good progress, teachers help them to learn, they can join in a good range of extra-curricular activities and the school is well run.
3. ACTION POINTS

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

3.1 The school does not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010, and therefore must:

- ensure that all the required checks are carried out on staff and governors before appointment [Part 4, paragraphs 19(2)(a) and (d), 19(3), 21(6)(b)(i), 22(3)(e), under Suitability of staff and proprietors; and, for the same reason, Part 3, paragraph 7(a) and (b), under Welfare, health and safety].

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

3.2 In addition to the above regulatory action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure that the school development plan contains the steps necessary to achieve the objectives, names the person responsible and includes the success criteria.

2. Share best practice in teaching, and formalise provision, to ensure that the needs of more able pupils are always met.

3. Give consideration to the development of independent learning beyond the constraints of preparation for senior school entry.

4. Devise a system for governors to monitor rigorously the school’s policies and procedures, and become more involved with the whole school community.

5. Allow children in the EYFS more time to develop and review the learning which they have initiated.
4. **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

4.(a) **The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.1 The effectiveness of the EYFS provision is outstanding. All the children’s needs are met exceedingly well so they make excellent progress in their learning and development. All staff have a strong knowledge of the children and provide a stimulating environment in which each child thrives. Rigorous self-evaluation enables existing high standards to be maintained and also identifies areas for further development. Since the last inspection, a new EYFS co-ordinator has been appointed and many improvements have been made to the outdoor play areas of both the Nursery and Reception.

4.(b) **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.2 Leadership and management are outstanding. Highly effective policies to safeguard children and eliminate discrimination are implemented rigorously and all staff have been suitably checked. The children’s welfare and development are enhanced greatly by the exceptionally strong links with parents, the local authority and other agencies. The responses of the parents of children in the EYFS to the questionnaire show that they are highly supportive of the school. They appreciate the open-door policy that exists, as well as the detailed written reports and parents’ evenings that enable them to be fully informed of their children’s progress. A clear vision of the way forward is shared by the extremely effective staff team, who meet regularly to reflect upon current practice and make plans for further improvements. Each child has an equal opportunity to succeed, supported by the imaginative use of a wide range of appropriate resources.

4.(c) **The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.3 The quality of the provision is outstanding. The welcoming and stimulating environment together with a carefully planned curriculum enable children to learn and make rapid progress. The wide range of resources, both in the classrooms and in the accessible refurbished outdoor areas, provides children with many opportunities to develop their imagination through role play. Although there are plenty of opportunities for self-selection of activities both inside and outdoors, sometimes the children are not given enough time to develop and review their discovery and learning. A balance is struck between child-initiated and adult-led activities and an accurate profile of each child informs staff about the next steps in learning. Children are cared for extremely well and taught about keeping safe and healthy in many contexts, for example the routines of hand-washing before meals. Regular checks of equipment both outside and in the classrooms create a safe environment. Risk assessments for visits are carried out thoroughly.
4.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.4 Outcomes for children are outstanding and they make substantial progress from their different starting points. By the end of Reception, most children achieve high standards in all six areas of learning, exceeding the expectations for the early learning goals. They clearly enjoy their learning and are very keen to take part and succeed in any activity, both individually and co-operatively. Children in Nursery settle well and soon make choices and gain independence. By the end of Reception, most children write with a cursive script, read fluently and are articulate. They are able to use computers to drag and make pictures, type their name and use the 'print' and 'save' facilities. The range of painted clay thumb pots and various styles of paintings on display demonstrate their excellent creative skills. Children care for and respect each other, taking turns and sharing willingly. They develop a strong sense of personal safety, as is shown by the careful way they use cycles and scooters and how they safely cross roads. They understand that healthy eating, personal hygiene and physical exercise are all required for a healthy lifestyle. They are developing considerable skills for the future, displaying exemplary behaviour and relating extremely well to one another and adults.

Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.
INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a (small) sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils’ work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors elect, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Elizabeth Coley Reporting Inspector
Mr David Edwards Deputy Head, IAPS school
Mr Richard Balding Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector
Ms Kathryn Bender Early Years Team Inspector
(Head of Pre-Prep, IAPS school)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Name of School</th>
<th>Hoe Bridge School</th>
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<tr>
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<td>936/6395</td>
</tr>
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<td>Registered Charity Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Hoe Bridge School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hoe Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old Woking Road</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Surrey</td>
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<td></td>
<td>GU22 8JE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Number</td>
<td>01483 760018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax Number</td>
<td>01483 757560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address</td>
<td><a href="mailto:headmaster@hoebridgeschool.co.uk">headmaster@hoebridgeschool.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Mr Nick Arkell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of Governors</td>
<td>Mr Ian Katté</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3-5 (EYFS): 91</td>
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<td>11-18: 43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of EYFS Setting</td>
<td>Mrs Linda Renfrew</td>
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PREFACE

This inspection report follows the ISI schedule, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in March 2011.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed on the website www.legislation.gov.uk. Additionally, inspections will consider the school’s accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Education (DfE) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

(i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
(ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
(iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
(iv) an in-depth investigation of the school’s compliance with employment law.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school’s work at the beginning of each section. These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors ‘excellent’, ‘good’, ‘sound’ or ‘unsatisfactory’, and where Achievement is ‘exceptional’ that term may be used for the top grade. Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology (‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘requires improvement’ and ‘inadequate’) as Ofsted reports.
INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils’ work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors and a representative governor for the EYFS, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Lady Fiona Mynors  Reporting Inspector
Mrs Anne Camm  Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Jane Crouch  Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr David Edwards  Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Michael Higham  Team Inspector (Former Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Julie Jackson  Team Inspector (Head of Pre-Prep, IAPS)
Mr David Sibson  Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Miss Mary Regan  Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>parents, carers and guardians</td>
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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

1.1 Hoe Bridge School is a co-educational school for pupils from three to thirteen years created from the merger in 1986 of two former proprietorial boys’ schools, Allen House and St Michael’s School. In 1987 it became a charitable trust administered by a board of governors, and developed to include girls up to Year 6 in 1999. The school, based in a seventeenth century house, is set in its own grounds in Woking, Surrey. The headmaster has overall responsibility for the whole school. The head of the pre-prep has delegated responsibility for the day-to-day management of the pre-prep department. Since the previous inspection, plans for a new pre-prep department had been agreed, and building was taking place at the time of the inspection.

1.2 The school aims to work closely with parents to provide a Christian environment in which happy children can develop as self-reliant, confident individuals, fulfilling their potential in academic, sporting and creative activities. A particular emphasis is placed on respect for others, courtesy and kindness and giving pupils the skills and experience to prepare them for life beyond school.

1.3 The ability profile of the pupils is above the national average as indicated in standardised assessments. The majority of pupils come from business and professional families of white British origin who live within a six-mile radius of the school. About one sixth of the pupils come from families of minority ethnic backgrounds.

1.4 At the time of the inspection, there were 486 pupils on roll, of whom 91 were in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which is an integral part of the pre-prep department for pupils from the Nursery to Year 2. There are 115 pupils in Years 1 and 2 (pre-prep). The prep department caters for Years 3 to 8, with 237 boys and girls in Years 3 to 6 and 43 boys in Years 7 and 8. At the age of 11, most girls and a few boys transfer to independent day schools. The remaining boys leave at the age of 13, transferring to independent day or boarding schools.

1.5 The school has identified 66 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 40 receive additional support. Four pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Nine pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), and five receive extra support.

1.6 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following table.
### Early Years Foundation Stage Setting

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<td>Ash, Aspen</td>
<td>Nursery (age 3-4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beech, Cedar, Chestnut</td>
<td>Reception (age 4-5)</td>
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### Pre-preparatory Department

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<tr>
<td>Oak, Pine, Rowan</td>
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2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

2.1 The quality of the pupils’ achievements and learning is excellent. Pupils are extremely well educated in line with the school aims. From the EYFS onwards, pupils achieve high standards and make excellent progress, including those with SEND and EAL. More able pupils make rapid progress in relation to their abilities. Pupils almost always gain places to their first choice of senior school, many with extremely competitive entry requirements. Each year, a significant number of pupils gain academic and non-academic awards. Preparation for senior school entrance examinations is meticulous. Pupils display extremely positive attitudes to their learning and activities, and achieve well as individuals and in teams.

2.2 The pupils’ experiences, including in the EYFS, are strongly supported by the excellent curriculum. A particular focus is given to developing a firm foundation in literacy and numeracy. Although the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment has been enhanced, pupils have insufficient opportunities to use it consistently across the curriculum. The systems to identify and support pupils of all ages with SEND and EAL are excellent. The more able are identified and their needs are well met. Opportunities for pupils’ independent learning have improved since the previous inspection. Pupils of all ages are extremely well prepared for transition across the school. The pupils’ educational experience is enhanced by the well-planned extra-curricular programme. The quality of teaching is good, and a significant proportion of lessons observed were excellent. Much teaching is exciting, encouraging pupils to think independently. It is less successful when it is over directed and there is a lack of variety of tasks set, which restricts the opportunity for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

2.3 The personal development of pupils is excellent. They exhibit high standards of personal confidence and consideration for others. The quality of pastoral care is excellent. Staff provide extremely effective support and guidance for the pupils, and relationships across the school are strong. The arrangements for welfare, health and safety are highly efficient. Great care is taken to safeguard all pupils. The quality of governance is excellent, a significant improvement since the previous inspection. The governors are effective in discharging their responsibilities for statutory requirements, including a thorough annual review of safeguarding and child protection arrangements. The quality of leadership and management is excellent. Strong, approachable leadership has a clear vision for the school which is shared across the whole school community. At all levels, managers carry out their responsibilities conscientiously. Middle management roles have been strengthened. In the pre-prep, the appraisal system works efficiently. In the prep, the allocation of responsibilities for senior managers is uneven, as they do not all undertake staff appraisals. As recommended at the previous inspection, development planning has been strengthened. Links with parents are excellent. Parents overwhelmingly support the education and care that their children receive.
2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Develop ways to exploit further the breadth of the use of ICT in lessons, and increase the opportunities for pupils to interact and undertake open-ended activities to match the most effective practice in the school.

2. Ensure a greater balance in the roles and responsibilities for senior managers, including the use of systems for individual appraisal.

3. In the EYFS, enhance children’s learning and progress by developing the use of available assessment data to inform teachers’ future planning.
3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning

3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is excellent.

3.2 Pupils are extremely well educated in line with the school aims to promote their confidence in an environment which enables them to achieve high standards. In the EYFS, children, including those with SEND, make excellent progress in their learning and development relative to their starting points. They are highly confident and relate well to adults. By the end of the Nursery, children can express objects to ten and often beyond, and can talk about familiar shapes. By the end of Reception they are confident ordering numbers to 20 and can recognise and count many of the numbers on a 100 square. They are confident using coins in role play. Most of them can tell the time on the hour and half hour. All children are reading at their own level with increased fluency. They can write independently using a sound mat while the most able use word books. By the end of Reception, most children reach expected levels of achievement while the more able exceed expectation in some areas of their development.

3.3 From Year 1, pupils' literacy and numeracy work is of a high standard. Pupils are highly articulate, speaking clearly and expressing their opinions thoughtfully and logically. Their linguistic, reasoning, analytical and investigative skills are well developed. Pupils write imaginatively and can apply their mathematical skills. Their ICT skills are good. They are beginning to develop their learning and independence through evaluating their own learning. All pupils take great pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils' physical skills are excellent. Pupils demonstrate high standards of creativity in the art and design and technology (DT) work on display. They have excellent musical skills as demonstrated during choir practice and musical ensembles.

3.4 Over half the pupils learn musical instruments, achieving well in external music examinations in a range of instruments. They have been successful in winning prizes for inter-school design and engineering projects, and are involved in an exciting kit car building project in collaboration with a local engineering firm. Successful drama productions, such as Bugsy Malone, demonstrate the pupils' commitment to public performance and strong artistic achievement. Pupils almost always gain places to their first choice of senior school, many with extremely competitive entry requirements. Each year, a significant number of pupils gain academic and non-academic awards.

3.5 Pupils achieve well as individuals and in teams. Among many sporting achievements pupils won the 2014 IAPS national championships for Under 11 girls' netball and boys' hockey, and as athletics finalists. Pupils also demonstrate competitive spirit in weekly matches against other local schools and initiate and organise many charity events.

3.6 Pupils with EAL show a high degree of language fluency and understanding. Those who are more able or who have SEND achieve extremely well. The school's analysis of assessments indicates that most pupils with SEND or EAL make excellent progress. This was confirmed by evidence from inspection activities. Early identification of individual needs and excellent provision for intervention contribute to
high outcomes for these pupils. Pupils who are more able make similarly rapid progress in relation to their abilities.

3.7 The pupils’ attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests, but based on standardised tests, lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils’ work and discussions with pupils, it is judged to be excellent in relation to pupils of similar ability, and they make rapid progress.

3.8 EYFS children are highly motivated and engage enthusiastically in many well planned activities. From Year 1, pupils are successful in their academic work and the wider curriculum through their strong motivation to do well. They are enthusiastic, confident and self-aware, with extremely positive attitudes to learning.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular, and extra-curricular provision.

3.9 The contribution of curricular and the extra-curricular provision is excellent.

3.10 In the EYFS, the educational programmes for the prime and specific areas of learning help all children to reach the level of development typical for their age, while the more able children exceed expectation in some areas. All children receive very good support so that they develop the necessary skills to learn effectively through play, exploration and active learning. They benefit from access to the school’s facilities, and increased use of the outdoors for learning. From Year 1, the broad curriculum is well matched to pupils’ abilities and needs, supporting the school’s aims to enable them to be successful academically and to be confident for transfer to senior school. It enables the pupils to use the school’s excellent facilities and resources. The overwhelming majority of parents are extremely pleased with the curriculum and the wide range of activities available to their children.

3.11 In Years 1 to 2, the curriculum includes all requisite areas, and supports the pupils’ enthusiasm. A particular focus is given to developing a firm foundation in literacy and numeracy. Creativity is at the heart of the curriculum, harnessing the pupils’ love of learning and relating it to their own experiences. However, there is an imbalance in the provision of physical activity with younger pupils having fewer opportunities for physical development. From Year 1, pupils benefit from being taught by specialists across a range of subjects and their individual needs are supported by careful setting and streaming which begins in Year 2.

3.12 From Year 3, the curriculum maintains the emphasis on literacy and numeracy, while ensuring appropriate balance. Pupils’ linguistic skills benefit from learning French from Year 1, and Latin from Year 5. Many opportunities are available for the pupils to develop their investigative and practical skills. Sports opportunities are plentiful, and from Year 5 all pupils have the chance to play for a school team. A comprehensive scheme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) underpins the pupils’ personal development, and Year 8 benefit from an appropriate leavers’ course. Although the provision of ICT equipment has been enhanced, pupils have insufficient opportunities to use it consistently across the curriculum.

3.13 From the EYFS onwards, the systems to identify and support pupils with SEND and EAL are excellent. Their progress is closely tracked and appropriate work is set in classes and for individual lessons. All teachers are involved in devising pupils’ individual educational plans which are reviewed and evaluated most efficiently. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and their needs are very well met. Opportunities for pupils’ independent learning have improved since the previous inspection.
3.14 Pupils of all ages are extremely well prepared for transition across the school. In the EYFS, all teachers are well known to the children, and they are given an opportunity to spend time with their new teacher in their classroom prior to the new term commencing. Preparation for senior school entrance examinations is meticulous, as the curriculum is tailored to meet the individual demands of the wide range of senior schools to which the pupils transfer.

3.15 The pupils’ educational experience is enhanced by the good quality and well-planned extra-curricular programme. Clubs which enable pupils to develop high level sporting skills, and hobbies, are much enjoyed by pupils and cover a broad range of activities. Pupils’ creative experiences are enhanced by activities in music, DT, art and drama. A wide variety of speakers and workshops enrich the pupils’ learning experience, giving them opportunities to investigate and learn independently. The pupils’ emotional intelligence and resilience are strengthened through a number of exciting residential trips, as diverse as visits to France or a bushcraft camp where pupils create and sleep in their own shelters. Pupils gain an understanding of the local and wider community through supporting a variety of charities, links with a local hospice and an international school, as well as events such as inviting senior citizens from the local community into their Pre Prep Harvest Festival and the Prep school choir sing at Christmas time for a local church group.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

3.16 The contribution of teaching is good.

3.17 Most teaching is at least good, and a significant proportion of lessons observed were excellent, fostering pupils’ enthusiasm to learn and promoting their excellent progress in support of the school’s aims. In the EYFS, teaching strategies and timely support and intervention ensure that many children make very good progress. Teaching is often carefully matched to children’s individual needs, encouraging them to be highly motivated and engage enthusiastically in many well-planned activities. In some areas of children’s learning and development, there is not such a good match, and on these occasions children’s progress is limited. Teachers use the excellent resources efficiently.

3.18 Across the school, teachers are dedicated, well qualified and knowledgeable. Relationships in lessons are excellent, and teachers know their pupils and their needs extremely well, and have high expectations. At its best, teaching is exciting. Lessons are carefully planned, a brisk pace is maintained and time used effectively. Good questioning is used to confirm pupils’ previous learning, and open-ended questions encourage them to think independently. Teaching is less successful when it is over directed and there is a lack of variety of tasks set, which restricts the opportunity for pupils to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. Classrooms are well equipped and staff use the resources well. Although interactive whiteboards are used effectively for teaching, pupils have limited opportunities in lessons to use ICT across the curriculum to support their learning.

3.19 Teaching ensures that the needs of pupils with SEND and EAL are met extremely well, which enables them to make particularly good progress, and additional challenges for the most able are usually planned. Teaching is well supported by a large number of highly efficient teaching assistants. Useful cross-curricular links are made in teaching, enriching pupils’ understanding on topics such as the recent focus on the First World War linking history, DT, art and English.
3.20 In the EYFS, teachers carry out and record regular observations of the children as part of ongoing assessment, but these observations do not always identify the areas of children’s learning and development being observed. As a consequence progress in these areas is limited. The school’s clear marking policy is not consistently implemented across the school. Marking is consistently good in Years 1 and 2. From Year 3, it is regular, and at is best pupils are given explicit advice on ways to improve and meet individual targets. However, at times, it is more cursory and less helpful. In discussions, pupils stated that they greatly valued the verbal feedback and support they received from their teachers, who were usually willing to give them extra individual attention when needed.

3.21 From Year 1, a comprehensive assessment system allows the pupils’ progress and development to be tracked efficiently. Pupils take standardised and school assessments. The recent introduction of a new management information system, and the appointment of a senior manager to take overall responsibility for assessment analysis, are intended to extend the school's ability to use pupil data to inform planning.
4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS’ PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.

4.2 Pupils thrive in an environment where they feel safe and secure, supported by all members of the community in line with the school’s aims. In the EYFS, children are happy at school and arrive with great enthusiasm for the day ahead. They trust all the adults in school and enjoy being with them. They gain independence and have high self-esteem. Children understand why it is important to listen to others, to show respect, to share, cooperate and take turns.

4.3 From Year 1, the pupils have a well-developed sense of spirituality that reflects the school's pervading Christian ethos. Pupils are confident and friendly, express themselves and their feelings clearly and have high self-esteem which is encouraged by the effective system of rewards, praise and celebration of success. Pupils’ imagination, inspiration and insight are enhanced by the opportunities to participate in a variety of musical and dramatic productions and in their art work. In religious education (RE), circle discussion times, PSHE and assemblies, pupils are encouraged to reflect on the non-material aspects of life. Pupils explore feelings and emotions, developing values and principles to embrace their future life.

4.4 Pupils’ moral development is well advanced. They develop a strong moral code through the school's clear ethos, and the excellent example set by staff. As a result, pupils justify their opinions, actions and decisions, and contribute ably to discussions on matters of democracy and current affairs such as the comparison of Ebola to the Black Death. Pupils understand and readily accept the need for rules and boundaries for the good of the community, and are clear on ways in which to resolve disputes. Pupils are encouraged to look after each other and manage their emotions. They explore sensitive or personal issues within the curriculum, confident that their views and experiences are respected. Their behaviour is always good, and frequently exemplary, reflecting the moral code of the school.

4.5 Pupils develop a happy, caring disposition from an early age reflecting their strong social development. They play and work together harmoniously, helping others when needed. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and pupils are confident and articulate when speaking to adults. All are proud of their school, their personal achievements and feel valued and appreciated. Pupils accept responsibility with enthusiasm, responding well to leading and helping. Pupils display an excellent appreciation of those less fortunate than themselves, demonstrated through the involvement of the pupils in raising a substantial amount of money each year for charity. They understand about British institutions and the value of democracy through their work on the school council and in discussions on current affairs.

4.6 Pupils have an excellent appreciation of cultural diversity as it is a feature of their everyday lives within the school community. They are strongly aware of Western traditions through music, art and drama. Cultural differences are readily accepted and celebrated through RE, assemblies and celebrations, where pupils learn about other faiths, cultures and traditions. They happily share their personal experiences, and parents and speakers visit to enable a deeper understanding and tolerance of a variety of beliefs, cultures and faiths. A sense of tolerance and harmony pervades the school community.

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4.7 The pupils’ excellent personal development means that by the time they leave the school they exhibit confidence, have clear understanding of the needs of others and are well prepared for the next stage of education. EYFS children are thoroughly prepared for the transfer to Year 1.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care

4.8 The quality of pastoral care is excellent.

4.9 Staff provide extremely effective support and guidance for the pupils in accordance with the school’s aims, contributing to their excellent personal development. The efficient, well recorded and monitored pastoral system involves all staff, and clear lines of communication between staff, senior management and parents are maintained. Relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves are excellent, and pupils feel confident that staff are available and approachable. In the EYFS, teachers and support staff ensure that all children, including those in need of additional support, enjoy very positive relationships with adults and form secure emotional attachments.

4.10 Pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and exercise. In the EYFS, children understand the importance of physical activity and eating appropriate snacks and meals. They are increasingly independent and can confidently manage their own personal hygiene. From Year 1, concerns were expressed by pupils and parents in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses about the quality of the school food. Food is nutritious and plentiful, but menu options are not always attractive nor do they always provide a healthy balance. Pupils benefit from regular exercise through an extensive physical education programme.

4.11 The school is highly effective in promoting excellent behaviour and guarding against harassment and bullying. The anti-bullying policy is appropriate, providing a clear message that the school should be a kind environment. In responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority of parents and pupils expressed concern about the way the school handles cases of bullying. Careful scrutiny of documentation and discussions with pupils indicate that the school has robust yet sensitive procedures for managing bullying and developing positive behaviour.

4.12 A detailed and thorough action plan is in place to improve educational access for pupils with SEND.

4.13 Although a small minority of pupils in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires felt that school did not ask for nor respond to their opinions, inspection evidence indicates that this is not the case. As observed on inspection, staff and senior managers are easily accessible to pupils who feel confident to approach them, and the school council provides a formal forum for pupils to share their views. However, class representatives have yet to meet in the term of the inspection. Pupils described examples where their opinions and suggestions had been acted upon, such as a change to the summer term hobby afternoon for seniors, and changes to the lunch menus.

4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

4.14 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.

4.15 Efficient policies and procedures for the whole school, including the EYFS, ensure that pupils are well looked after in an extremely well-maintained and safe
environment. The provision for children’s well-being in the EYFS is excellent and a particular strength of the setting. Parents overwhelmingly recognised that their children were well looked after and felt safe in school. Great care is taken to safeguard all pupils, including the EYFS children, and the school’s policy is implemented effectively. Designated senior staff who have had appropriate specialist training ensure that all staff have regular training, and are clear about what to do and whom to approach if they have any concerns about the safeguarding of pupils. Strong links have been established with local agencies, and a knowledgeable designated safeguarding governor gives support to the school.

4.16 All necessary measures to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards are in place. Systematic checks of safety equipment are carefully recorded and regular fire drills take place. Appropriate risk assessments are prepared for activities, and trips are meticulously planned.

4.17 Many staff have first-aid qualifications, including paediatric training for EYFS, and the first-aid policy is appropriate. Pupils who are ill or injured are well cared for, and detailed records of accidents are maintained.

4.18 The admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and correctly stored, and efficient systems are in place for following up any pupil absences.
5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.

5.2 It has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The governing board, under shrewd leadership, maintains effective oversight of the school to ensure that it is extremely successful in achieving its aims and ensuring that the pupils achieve high standards. Committed governors, many of whom are current or past parents, have a broad range of expertise and skills to support the school. Governors’ support and understanding of the learning and development requirements of the EYFS are excellent. Plans to formalise the current induction process are being developed, and governors are involved in appropriate training for their roles. They receive informative reports from the school’s leadership about all aspects of the education, standards and care provided for pupils. Through exercising stringent financial controls, and as part of comprehensive development planning, the school has been able to embark on an exciting project to rebuild the pre-prep which will be completed in the term following the inspection. This will enable the EYFS setting to be located in one place. Governors have ensured that excellent investment has been made in staff, well-maintained accommodation, and comprehensive learning resources.

5.3 Governance has been strengthened by the creation of an efficient committee structure. Detailed minutes from meetings indicate that governors are highly effective in exercising their monitoring role, providing support and pertinent challenge for senior leaders to provide a good stimulus for the growth and improvement of the school. In response to recommendations in the previous inspection, governors are now fully involved in the life and work of the school. They are regular visitors to the school, attending formal and informal events, observing lessons, and designated governors take a particular interest in the EYFS and safeguarding. An appropriate system for appraising the heads and bursar is in the early stages of implementation.

5.4 The governors are effective in discharging their responsibilities for statutory requirements, including a thorough annual review of safeguarding and child protection arrangements throughout the school. The monitoring of regulatory policies is effectively assigned to different committees.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians

5.5 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents and others, is excellent.

5.6 The school is extremely successful in achieving its stated aims to enable pupils to become self-reliant, confident individuals well prepared for transfer to their senior schools. Strong, approachable leadership has a clear vision for the school which is reflected in all its policies which are implemented effectively. This vision is shared across the whole school community. Great care is taken to ensure that staff, including those in the EYFS, are properly trained for their roles in the safeguarding, welfare and safety of pupils. All necessary checks on the suitability of staff and governors have been carried out and recorded appropriately. New arrangements for
checking whether those in teaching positions are prohibited from teaching were suitably embedded by the end of the inspection.

5.7 At all levels, leadership and management carry out their responsibilities conscientiously. Regular meetings across the school ensure that communication and systems work well. Senior managers work well together for the benefit of the school, creating a common sense of purpose and a united community. Middle management roles have been strengthened since the previous inspection. Curriculum co-ordinators in the pre-prep work closely with heads of department in the prep to ensure that the curriculum and pupils’ learning is continuous. Curriculum co-ordinators and heads of department undertake regular lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils’ work. An excellent development is the regular opportunity for teachers to undertake lesson observations across the school to enhance their own practice.

5.8 The school is successful in recruiting well-qualified staff. The induction process for newly appointed staff is efficient. They are appropriately mentored and made to feel extremely welcome by the whole school community. Gap students receive good training and enjoy their work, enhancing the community feel of the school. Professional development training for staff is good. In the pre-prep, the appraisal system works efficiently. In the prep, the allocation of responsibilities for senior managers is uneven, as they do not yet share responsibility with the head for undertaking staff appraisals, which represents a significant imbalance in management workload.

5.9 As recommended at the previous inspection, development planning has been strengthened. An ambitious whole-school development plan is supported by shorter two-yearly plans which indicate those responsible for implementation and outcome evaluation.

5.10 Leadership and management of the EYFS are excellent, ensuring that the setting is welcoming, safe and stimulating. A commitment to evaluating practice and to securing continuous improvement is evident in the detailed development plan, which highlights priorities and helps determine future necessary action. Effective systems are in place for supervision, staff appraisal and the continuous professional development of staff. A positive and effective partnership has been established with parents, and local agencies to ensure that children receive the support that they need.

5.11 The EYFS setting has made good progress since the previous inspection. New leadership and governor involvement in the setting is in place, and the role of the key person has been implemented. Resources have been updated and more learning takes place in the outdoor environment. The recommendation to allow children in the EYFS more time to develop and review the learning which they have initiated has been achieved.

5.12 Links with parents, carers and guardians are excellent. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents overwhelmingly support all aspects of the education and care provided, and they are particularly pleased that their children feel happy and safe at school. In the EYFS, parents are kept well informed about their children’s achievements and progress through informative written reports. Parents’ meetings are arranged termly, and the parents are actively encouraged to discuss and share information and observations about their children in their progress books.
5.13 The school maintains an extremely constructive relationship with parents in accordance with its aims, and handles any concerns or complaints with care, in accordance with its published procedures. All staff are approachable, and during the inspection, parents were frequently observed speaking to staff raising any concerns. Working parents are supported by the school’s provision for before- and after-school care. The welcoming atmosphere of the school is enhanced by the extremely efficient administrative team who respond to enquiries promptly and courteously.

5.14 Parents have many opportunities to be actively involved in the work and progress of their children. Induction sessions for pupils and parents and a Year 2 and 3 parents’ meeting help to allay anxieties about transfer across the school. Teaching and learning evenings are held for parents to support their children, and excellent guidance is given on appropriate destinations for senior schools. Parents are invited to school functions and have opportunities for assisting in special events. The strong family atmosphere is enhanced by the parents’ organisations which contribute positively through their range of social and fund raising activities.

5.15 Parents of pupils and of prospective pupils are provided with the required information about the school. The school’s website is informative and parents benefit from regular communication, not only through the daily availability of the senior leaders in the playground, but also by weekly bulletins. Parents feel that they are kept well informed about the school’s activities.

5.16 Parents receive clear and useful frequent written reports about their children’s work and progress. Formal parents’ evenings are also held to enable them to discuss their children’s learning and attainment during the year.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.
**Appendix 3**

**Independent learning Questionnaire**

**Core question:**
How would you personally define the term *independent learning*?

PART A

According to Hoe Bridge policy, in terms of independent learning the following terms are “the qualities* we want to focus on”, as we aim to “produce thoughtful, creative and self-confident children”.

Please tick the appropriate box for each word, as relates to an average week of your teaching.

*based on qualities as defined by C J Simister

**How frequently does your teaching promote/inspire/encourage:**

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**PART B**
Are there other ways in which you promote/inspire/encourage independent learning in your teaching?

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**PART C**
Are there ways in which you would like to promote/inspire/encourage independent learning but are unable to do so? If so, what are these and why/how are you constrained?

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**MANY THANKS FOR TAKING PART**
Independent Learning at Hoe Bridge School

At Hoe Bridge School we are committed to Independent Learning and to developing intellectual character. Through the delivery of our curriculum we are aiming to produce thoughtful, creative and self-confident children.

To help us to achieve this, and to make the children aware of our aims, we have made a list of the qualities we want to focus on:

- Curiosity
- Thoroughness
- Originality
- Judgement
- Flexibility of Mind
- Initiative
- Focus
- Risk-Taking
- Persistence
- Resilience
- Reflectiveness
- Empathy
- Collaboration
- Self Assurance
- Responsibility

This list is based on qualities defined by C.J. Simister Educational Consultant.

To raise the profile of independent learning in the school, each term two words from the list will be chosen and displayed in each classroom.

Term 1 – Reflectiveness
- Responsibility

Teachers can refer to these where appropriate, and as the list develops children will develop an increased awareness of how their thinking is developing.

This will be reviewed as it progresses.

Term 2 – Initiative
- Judgement

Term 3 – Curiosity
- Thoroughness

Term 4 – Originality
- Focus

Term 5 – Resilience
- Persistence
Term 6 - Risk taking

Collaboration

Term 7

Empathy

Self assurance

Flexibility of mind

PR/June 2012/September 2014
Independent learning: questionnaire feedback and autumn term project
Some thoughts

- “A lot of people never use their initiative because no-one told them to.” Banksy
- “Spoon feeding, in the long run, teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon.” E. M. Forster
- “The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.” Plutarch
Independent learning

• “..is not a mental ability or an academic skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills.” (Gershon, 2014)

• “…creating independent learners is a long-term project. It is about cultivation; the development of habits of mind over the course of months or longer.” (Gershon, 2013)
How HB staff define independent learning and the policy qualities they promote

- 46% defined it as ‘pupils working alone/doing research alone to discover/gain information from a variety of sources with occasional support’

- 27% described independent learning as ‘pupils taking responsibility for their own learning by seeing/thinking evaluating for themself – not being told what to see/think/evaluate’

- 19% defined it as ‘student-led learning - pupils explore/experiment /develop without being led by the teacher’

- ‘Pupils working together’ was the least frequently given definition, with 8% of staff.

- The most frequently promoted quality was focus, followed by curiosity, persistence, thoughtfulness, judgement, resilience, responsibility, flexibility of mind, reflectiveness, self-assurance, and empathy (in that order). The least frequently encouraged qualities were risk-taking, originality, initiative, and collaboration.

- Although ‘working together’ and ‘collaboration’ match in that they are low in occurrence, the most popular definitions and most frequently promoted policy qualities do not entirely tally as the definitions require and may encourage but do not guarantee the development of the skills of focus, curiosity and persistence etc. Equally, the development of flexibility of mind, self-assurance, and empathy are not assured through activities in which pupils work, think and evaluate alone. In addition, attention needs to be given to promoting risk-taking, originality, initiative, and collaboration.
What is it?

- "The ability to take charge of one's learning." (Holec, 1981)

- “Independent study is a process, a method and a philosophy of education: in which a student acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation.” (Forster, 1972, in Candy, 1991)

Some other terms for independent learning:

Self-regulated learning, learner independence, student-centred learning, self-directed learning, active learning, learner autonomy
What characterises an independent learner?

- are self-reliant
- can make informed decisions about their learning
- are aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- connect classroom learning with the real world
- take responsibility for their learning
- plan their learning and set goals
- are intrinsically motivated by making progress
- often reflect on the learning process and their own progress
What are the benefits to pupils?

- improved academic performance
- increased motivation and confidence
- greater awareness of own limitations and how to manage them
- acquire and deploy information
- communicate effectively using different media
- organise themselves
- solve problems
- relate to others
The weight/focus is not on you – you are not ‘the sage on the stage’ but ‘the guide by your side’: you are a facilitator, mentor, coach and guide.

The teacher’s role becomes one of leader - rather than controller - of learning.
The pink sheet and the yellow sheet

- Optional involvement
- Easy-to-use (pink) and quite easy-to-use (yellow)
- One term only!
- Benefits staff and pupils (and me, admittedly)
- Feedback: Easter 2016
Examples of the ideas

- **Pink sheet**
- **Refuse to help:**
  - (a) ask pupils to find three ways to answer the question
  - (b) only give a hint/clue
  - (c) ask pupils what they think the answer is/how they are going to proceed to find it

- **Yellow sheet**
- **Speed debating:** Some examples:
  - (a) pupils have a card with a list of times on and make ‘appointments’. Teacher then says “find your 3pm appointment” and then sets the task/asks the questions etc. Pupils work randomly with different people.
  - (b) Once a topic has been finished, pupils can engage in a speed debating activity using a worksheet with a list of questions/tasks from the topic (to ask each other/to solve together). They have five minutes time to work then change partners.
What would we like to do more of and what impedes us

- More time to complete topics and for pupils to self/peer assess – constraints of pace, restrictiveness of structure, exam preparation
- Use of tablets/laptops in lessons as well as more IT hardware – budgets
- Clubs/clinics/workshops - lack of time, pressures of exams, constraints of timetable and of duties
- Setting tasks for pupils to prepare ahead of lessons - preps done in school with no research access possible, the lack of a VLE
- Work with small groups – need for more TAs and more possibility for team-teaching
- Activities requiring more space
- Encourage independent learning with a whole-school, structured initiative
- Better cross-curricular links
- Training in IT and in maximising IWB use
Independent learning

- “..is not a mental ability or an academic skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills.” (Gershon, 2014)

- “…creating independent learners is a long-term project. It is about cultivation; the development of habits of mind over the course of months or longer.” (Gershon, 2013)
Thank you!
Appendix 6

EASY TO INCORPORATE WAYS TO PROMOTE INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Please keep this in your mark-book/on your desk or wall. If you use one of the ideas, please briefly record below any observations about its effectiveness etc on the table overleaf. HB independent learning policy qualities possible to address are shown bold blue print.

1. Ask questions:
   (a) Whole class brain blast: Start the topic/lesson by asking a question which leads to what you want to teach. “Who would have supported Cromwell, who would not, and why?” “Here is a maths problem you can’t solve with the methods we have seen so far - how would you solve it?” Compile all answers on IWB as basis for lesson. Initiative, flexibility of mind, curiosity
   (b) Group ideas share: Pupils work in pairs/small groups to answer a question or series of questions using common sense/experience/prior learning. Pupils can all have the same or different questions. Discussion can last 1 minute or 20. You can also start this by asking each pupil to write down their thoughts before sharing. Collaboration, empathy, reflectiveness, judgement
   (c) End of lesson summary: Ask individuals or the whole class: How could you make your work better? What could you improve? How did you deal with the challenges? Judgement, reflectiveness, focus

2. Refuse to help:
   (a) ask pupils to find three ways to answer the question
   (b) only give a hint/clue
   (c) ask pupils what they think the answer is and how they are going to proceed to find it

   Initiative, reflectiveness, self assurance, resilience, persistence

3. Give out instruction slips: (at the door/on the desk). These could be all the same, tailor-made for each pupil or a mixture (so pupils can compare in groups later, for example). Thoroughness, judgement, responsibility

4. Celebrate failure: talk about the benefits of failure; give your own examples; ask, who made the biggest mistake? Discuss the correct method etc. Flexibility of mind, resilience, persistence, reflectiveness

5. Give choices – task A or B? /Choose someone to work with/Answer 3 of 5 questions. Discuss why they chose what they chose at the end. Initiative, responsibility

6. Round the room. Each pupil has a minute to speak about what they have discovered/describe their experiences/express and explain their views. Students can ‘pass’ if they wish. Self assurance, empathy, focus

7. Pupils plan the (next) lesson/take the lesson Ask the pupils what they want to know/revise/extend about a topic. If some pupils can lead/teach/explain, let them be you. Collaboration, reflectiveness, judgement, focus

8. Give regular formative feedback: at the end of an essay/topic/test (in addition to general target setting). Use a prepared sheet structured to the topic/pupil and showing what the pupil needs to address, and how and when the pupil can achieve this. Alternatively, make it simple and clear with indicators in the margin such as ‘Spot on!’ or ‘Bull’s-eye!’ and ‘Improvement Point(s)’ and comments written alongside on positive and development areas. Reflectiveness, focus, self assurance
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INDEPENDENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES REQUIRING PLANNING

HB independent learning policy qualities possible to address are shown bold blue print.

1. **Three step questioning**. 80% of instruction involves asking questions. If teachers spend so much time asking students questions, then an easy way to improve student learning is to improve the way we ask the questions.

   **Step 1**: Instead of “leading” a discussion, why not teach your students how to discuss; break your class up into groups of four or five pupils, so they can then discuss the issues (and report back).

   **Step 2**: Prepare the questions you want to ask as an integral part of the lesson. If questions are not prepared in advance, most the questions you ask or provide for the pupils will be knowledge and comprehension questions because it is extremely difficult to create higher order thinking (analysing, evaluating, creating) questions "on-the-fly".

   **Step 3**: Design the questions so that they scaffold through difficulty levels, from easy to hard.

   *Curiosity, reflectiveness, self assurance, risk taking, empathy, resilience, collaboration*

2. **Connect-extend-develop**. This idea comes from Visible Thinking. Visible Thinking is a flexible and systematic research-based approach to integrating the development of pupils’ thinking with content learning across subject matters. Visible Thinking has a double goal: on the one hand, to cultivate pupils’ thinking skills and dispositions*, and, on the other, to deepen content learning.

   *Thinking dispositions = curiosity, concern for truth and understanding, a creative mindset, not just being skilled but also alert to thinking and learning opportunities and eager to take them.*

   **CONNECT**: How are the ideas and information presented CONNECTED to what you already knew?

   **EXTEND**: What new ideas did you get that EXTENDED or pushed your thinking in new directions?

   **CHALLENGE**: What is still CHALLENGING or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?

   *Curiosity, reflectiveness, judgement, persistence, flexibility of mind*

3. **Speed networking (speed debating, speed sharing)**. Some examples:

   (a) Pupils have a card with a list of times on and make “appointments”. Teacher then says “find your 3pm appointment” and then sets the task/asks the questions etc. Pupils work randomly with different people.

   (b) Once a topic has been finished, pupils can engage in a speed debating activity using a worksheet with a list of questions/tasks from the topic (to ask each other/to solve together). They have five minutes time to work then change partners.

   *Reflectiveness, collaboration, empathy, resilience*

4. **De Bono’s OPV – Other Person’s View**

   1. Identify and list the people involved
   2. Find out their view by “stepping into their shoes”. Objectively look at the world from their point of view, do an APC (Alternatives, Possibilities, Choice) of their possible view.

   *Empathy, reflectiveness, originality*
5. De Bono’s PMI – Plus, Minus, Interesting
Create a spreadsheet with the questions/topics in columns and plus, minus and interesting cross rows. Pupils can work on this independently or in pairs or in groups.
Judgement, reflectiveness, focus, collaboration, originality

6. The Harkness table method: This is very popular at Wellington and Exeter Uni, to name a few...!
- Pupils sit around a large, oval table (we could use a rectangular formation), in order to discuss ideas in an encouraging, open-minded environment - with only occasional or minimal teacher intervention to guide the discussion.
- The main goal is to encourage students to come up with ideas of their own and learn good reasoning and discussion skills.
- Pupils normally prepare independently in advance of the lesson (reading, research, working on a topic or issue). However, although our older pupils can do this, maybe we can use this method if we give pupils information on a card or if they had done research/preparation in a previous lesson or for homework. Of course, if all pupils are reading the same book or have studied the same topic, this method can be used at appropriate junctures.
Risk taking, self assurance, initiative, resilience, responsibility, collaboration, focus

7. Decisions, decisions
Pupils, working in pairs, are given a text or watch a video etc, along with:
- ‘Summary cards’ which purport to summarise key points from the text, some of which are true and some of which are false.
- ‘Consequences cards’ which state consequences of the facts given in the text. These consequences are not actually stated in the text itself. Again some are true and some false. The pairs of students must decide which cards are correct, and what is wrong with the incorrect ones.
Risk taking, thoroughness, empathy, resilience, focus

8. Jigsaw (a co-operative learning activity)
1. Divide a topic into 4 (or 5) sub-topics/questions/viewpoints/angles.
2. Divide pupils into 4 (or 5) groups. Each group researches/discusses one of the subtopics/questions/viewpoints/angles, with the help of texts and worksheets etc. All take notes.
3. Next, make 4 (or 5) new ‘jigsaw’ groups, taking one pupil from each of the original groups. (Any extras act as pairs.)
4. The new groups now complete an activity that requires them to peer teach/explain/present what they learned in their first groups. This should also require them to cooperate in a combined task that integrates the 4 (or 5) topics/answers/information.
Collaboration, empathy, judgement, persistence, self assurance, flexibility of mind

NB – a potentially useful resource: Question Dice: thinkingdice.com
Pack of six dice – remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, creating (eg Analysing question – why would someone think that? Applying question – where else would you see..?) Focus, reflectiveness, thoroughness, judgement, flexibility of mind
## FEEDBACK

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