

THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM

by

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1. A new curriculum for a new world!

The world is changing – and fast. The pace of technological advancement, the globalised marketplace in which we must all now compete, the depletion of the world’s natural resources and the ever-present threats from global warming call for skills beyond literacy, numeracy and knowledge retention.

We need innovative, intellectually curious, revolutionary thinkers leaving school with their creativity and courage still intact, and that means changing how we prepare children for the Common Entrance Examination through an inspiring and creative curriculum.

For education to be relevant and effective for the future demands a curriculum which not only imparts knowledge but affords learners the opportunity to discover it for themselves, to scrutinise it, to apply it within creative, problem-solving situations and then debate, discuss and communicate it to others.

These principles underpin the Independent Curriculum (IC) and this Broadsheet outlines what it is, how it works and how pupils are properly assessed.

2. What is it?

The IC is a rigorous process of discovering, applying and communicating, and its ultimate goals reach beyond preparation for examinations, towards preparation for life.

3. Structure

The IC comprises the following components:

- Knowledge strands
- Learning skills
- Qualities for life

3.1 Knowledge strands: laid out as a discrete programme of study for each subject, the knowledge strands in the IC set out the information, concepts and processes to be taught and learned.

Together they make up the canon of knowledge expected from a rigorous, academic education, laid out in incremental steps through the age phases, with cohesion and progression built in. The knowledge strands show teachers and pupils *what* is to be learned.

3.2 Learning skills: running parallel to the knowledge strands are the learning skills. These show teachers and pupils *how* each specific knowledge strand may be discovered, applied and communicated.

They comprise:

LS1: DISCOVERING	LS2: APPLYING	LS3: COMMUNICATING
Reading	Writing	Speaking
Recognising	Creating	Listening
Connecting	Developing	Responding
Assimilating	Expanding	Discussing
Understanding	Problem-solving	Debating
Reasoning	Planning	Explaining
Researching	Designing	Summarising
Interpreting	Evaluating	Presenting

In every subject in the IC, these generic learning skills are developed within the context of each knowledge strand – that is to say activities are offered in which students can *discover*, *apply* and *communicate* the knowledge being taught.

Matching learning skills against knowledge strands in this way ensures that the IC is more than a syllabus of topics to learn; it is a programme for active learning – a genuine scheme of work for teachers.

3.3 Qualities for life: education is not just about the knowledge and skills one picks up at school. It is about the qualities that our pupils develop that will equip them for life. The IC recognises the following qualities as the ultimate goals of a good education:

Curiosity – Independent thinking – Creativity – Self-motivation – Self-respect – Confidence – Discernment – Resilience – Tolerance - Global awareness

While these are subjective and can be difficult to assess, they are the qualities which parents, teachers and ultimately employers would like to see in young people, and it is these qualities which ultimately lead to happiness and fulfilment. So from its conception through to its detailed compiling by many subject specialists, this curriculum has been built with these qualities for life firmly in mind.

4. The IC in Action

A unique feature of the IC is the interactive way it is accessed by school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. The curriculum is presented through a combination of different content forms and is surrounded and augmented by online forums, online resources, guidance and reviews, teaching tips, training courses and regular updates.

The Independent Curriculum comprises a series of curriculum grids that map the knowledge a child should learn during his or her prep school education against classroom activities which help the child to develop learning skills in the course of discovering, applying and communicating that knowledge.

The IC is more than a syllabus of knowledge – it's a scheme of work too. The knowledge strands in the IC differ in every subject, but the learning skills remain the same. For instance, the chart below shows how the IC Maths curriculum works – from the CE learning to the 'Applying' and 'Communicating' the knowledge.

Figure 1 – IC Mathematics curriculum, Year 5.

[INSERT GRAPHIC . . .See separate attachment]

5. Assessment

One of the major strengths of the IC will be its comprehensive pupil assessment system. Teachers will be offered a rigorous assessment programme that will provide them with a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of individual children across all subject areas - focusing on their knowledge retention, their honing of generic learning skills and their progression towards the qualities for life. In addition to the teacher documentation there are a set of self-assessment grids for pupils to continually evaluate their knowledge, skills and qualities for life term by term.

The tools and systems for this assessment system will be rolled out following the official launch in September 2011.

6. Costs

As a proportion of a school's curriculum annual investment, annual subscription to the IC is extremely good value:

IC Basic – Key Stage 2	£2,500 + VAT
IC Basic – Key Stage 3	£3,500 + VAT
IC Basic – Key Stage 2 & 3	£4,500 + VAT

And as Chris Jones, Headmaster of Copthorne Prep – an IC adopting school – recently said, 'If one child goes home saying how much they enjoyed their learning that day, and that's because of the *active* learning which the IC encourages, then it's money well spent. Similarly, if just one member of my staff feels refreshed and invigorated by the IC grids, then it's worth the expense.'

7. For more information. . .

Visit www.i-curriculum.com

The author of this article, Andrew Hammond, is an ex-Deputy Head and has published more than 40 forty educational titles for several publishers.