## Project summary

- Opening Minds was introduced in 2006/7 as a pilot scheme with a group of 27 year 7 students. The success of this scheme encouraged the implementation of the scheme for the whole of year 7 from September 2007. Opening Minds lessons are taught in a thematic, cross curricular approach, they embrace Geography, History, RE Literacy, PSHCE and ICT as 8/25 lessons per week. The themes are also reflected in Art, Drama, Music and Dance. Opening Minds, therefore, covers 44% of the weekly timetable and lessons are timetabled in 2 and 3 hour slots to enable planning for extended tasks.
- The school uses the student's version of the competences developed for RSA by Barrie Wyse, but with some minor modifications. These competences are divided into five areas, Citizenship, Learning, Information, People and Situations. The emphasis is on skills rather than content, the rationale being that given the skills, the students become independent learners able to access content. The competences also enable provision for a range of learning styles.
- Opening Minds clearly works; it provides an innovative and creative approach to learning, counteracting disaffection. It is constantly being reviewed, re-evaluated and developed to make it as accessible, purposeful and relevant as possible.

## Specific aspect of practice to be accredited?

- Curriculum Innovation
- Staff development and collaborative working within a team of dedicated teachers
- Integrated humanities schemes of work

## Aspect of Every Child Matters addressed:

- [ ] Be healthy
- [x] Stay Safe
- [x] Enjoy and achieve
- [x] Make a positive contribution
- [ ] Achieve economic well-being
## What were you hoping to achieve?
- Ease of transition from KS2 - KS3 therefore reducing early transition problems.
- Creation of a competencies led curriculum designed to promote independent learning.
- A team of informed staff involved in planning and delivery of the programme.
- Development of a competence led curriculum encompassing all learning styles and engaging all learners.
- Development of an interactive curriculum where students are able to make links across subjects.
- Promotion of team work.
- Promoting an ethos of inclusion by developing cultural awareness and active citizenship.

## How did you identify the need for this practice?
- Data analysis, student tracking across the school, lesson observations and staff comments indicated that our students had low level independent learning skills. Students were reliant on instruction from staff and wanted to be 'spoon fed'. Lesson observations also demonstrated the need for a more creative approach to teaching and learning. Low level disruption and disaffection was also an issue. From this the school identified a need to promote students to enable them to work 'smarter' and independently.
- Research into learning to learn programmes indicated that an 'Opening Minds' programme implemented in year 7 would develop those skills necessary for students in our school to become independent learners, therefore improving their opportunities to be more responsible for their own education.
- Although we had begun transition work through the Arts Status, there was a need to make whole school Cross Phase transition as easy as possible, with a more cohesive approach similar to primary school. Findings of schools involved in the original RSA pilot experienced success in all these areas.

## What did you do?
- Jan 2006 visit from Barry Wyse RSA to deliver whole Staff INSET
- Feb 2006 AHT inclusion plus other staff visited Rivington & Blackrod, Bolton, Penwortham Priory Preston, St Johns Marlborough schools and worked in collaboration with Moorhead High School Accrington who were involved in same project.
- July 2006 identification of pilot group.
- September 2006 implementation of pilot with 27 year 7 student all CAT scores 95-100 and low level 5 scores.
- July 2007 visit Bishops’ Park School, Clacton where the Opening Minds project was adopted throughout the school.
- May 2006, May 2007 and March 2008 - residential staff training with interested staff in the design of an alternative curriculum pathway for year 7 students, schemes of work, themes, resources, assessment etc.
• Regular meetings of staff Opening Minds Team to plan, share practice and reflect.
• March 2008 Whole Staff INSET led by J Mayor i/c Opening Minds with input from year 7 students in the form of a DVD which they created

Which members of the establishment and/or wider community have been involved and what was their role?

• SLT - research, oversight and timetabling, in particular AHT Inclusion
• Opening Minds Staff Team - development of Schemes of Work linked to competences, production of resources and development of thematic approach.
• Middle leaders - materials, residentials, identifying key points in Schemes of Work.
• Barrie Wyse (RSA) - adviser, completed 2 reviews and provided feedback 2007 and 2008.
• Teacher i/c Opening Minds - training day.
• Moorhead High School – collaboration.
• Preston LIG and South Ribble Leading Edge Partnership received training led by teacher i/c Opening Minds and visited lessons.

How has the practice been modified or improved during development?

• September 2007 implementation of the programme with the whole of year 7 following residential staff training and success of the 2006 pilot
• All year 7 now experience mixed ability setting in opening Minds rather than being of similar ability as was the case with the pilot scheme
• Formation of a discreet Opening Minds team of teachers including form tutors, with lessons taught by form tutors
• Reduced number of teachers delivering the programme - 7 teachers on the team
• There has been a more creative approach to teaching with staff willing to take more risks

What has been the impact of the project on pupils’ learning, achievement or enjoyment and how has this been measured?

• The attendance of the 2006 pilot group was 3% higher than any other year 7 group
• Opening Minds has aided transition - there have been no issues with the current year 7
• Behaviour, general discipline and attendance are better in the current year 7 than in previous years
• The extent of students’ support for and empathy with each other is remarkable and was particularly apparent during the residential visit to Whitehough.
• Students regularly self evaluate and peer evaluate against the competences; they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the competences and what they need to do to achieve others. They also complete levelled assignments linked to humanities, speaking and listening.
• Students in Opening Minds are more willing to talk/discuss and are more outgoing. They have greater self esteem and confidence. Their independent learning skills are already well developed.
• Students are more demanding of their teachers, are not afraid to make mistakes and enjoy the Opening Minds Programme.
• In order to inform Primary schools about the programme they have produced a newspaper and DVD.

What are the next stages in the development process?

• The programme will be developed to include year 8 and will eventually roll out throughout KS3. This ties in with the National Secondary Strategy for 2008. Opening Minds competencies and National Strategy thinking skills are very similar and these strands will be incorporated into the Opening Minds schemes of work to complement the competencies by September 2008.
• The arts will be more integrated into the programme rather than mirroring the themes.
• Additional Cross Phase units of work developed through the Arts Status will be written to reflect the Opening Minds Curriculum following the success of the one produced for the 'I am unique' theme July-September 2007.
• Science teachers are now using an Opening Minds approach to delivering the subject (although not the themes).
• The long term view is to integrate English and Science.

What aspects of this practice may be useful for other establishments to consider?

• Opening Minds needs a dedicated team who are passionate about it. The programme, once started becomes infectious. Staff should be prepared to take risks, to teach out of their comfort zones, to share practices and spend time making resources. There is a definite need to work collaboratively and complete support from SLT, in particular the Headteacher, is a necessity. This is an innovative and exciting approach to learning.

Any Other Comments:

Staff involved in teaching Opening Minds says that it is the most exciting time in their careers - and these are not all young teachers! Relationships are good, students demand more of their teachers and are hungry to learn, they enjoy the programme- in particular the group work - and they have empathy for each other and speak with real passion about their work. In the words of one student "Opening Minds is different...it's unique"