



SMART*curriculum* Case Study: Secondary School

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Trust: Sapientia Education Trust - Chief Executive Jonathan Taylor

Introduction

It is often said that necessity is the mother of invention. This can certainly be said of our case. Like many schools, the mechanics of our timetabling sat with a senior colleague. When this colleague left the school we looked to source scheduling expertise externally. It was this process that led to a completely new approach to curriculum planning. As a result, the learning journey is far more coherent, we have better buy in to the curriculum process from middle leaders and our curriculum is cost effective.

CJ Learning and the timetable

CJ Learning were initially engaged to help us with the mechanics of the timetable. Whilst their ability to do this was clear, the questions they asked at the start of the process made us aware of a significant opportunity for a better approach to our core business. Any good school leader will be conscious of curriculum review but this was something very different. We were encouraged to look at our curriculum planning in a completely different way.

Building on firm foundations

We already had a strong focus on teaching and learning. Over the last few years, we have investing in developing teachers as excellent classroom practitioners. We are very keen on action research, particularly with regard to pedagogy. We believe in an evidence based approach innovation. As a result our classroom methodology has been thoroughly researched. Peer mentoring and coaching has strengthened our ability to embed meaningful practice in our learning strategy. Action research would form the basis of a root and branch dissection of our curriculum policy, coupled with a robust analysis of the structure's ability to deliver.

Start with the end in mind

We began by exploring the efficiency of the curriculum model. Efficiency requires careful consideration. Too often it is used as a substitute for cheap. Curriculum efficiency was defined in terms of its ability to deliver on our vision and values. To achieve this we distilled the school's vision and values into a set of curriculum specifications. We outlined the following deliverables:

- be engaging so that young people enjoy their learning
- be inclusive so that all learners can follow courses appropriate to their needs and abilities
- be enriched by a diverse extra-curricular programme in which all participate
- be flexible enough to incorporate the growing range of academic and vocational opportunities
- prepare young people for further learning and the world of work and for active participation within the various communities in which they choose to live



The word efficiency is meaningless if you have not set out what you are trying to achieve. We now had a method for working with curriculum leaders. This common framework shaped all our curriculum development and leadership conversations. It was a truly effective way of getting everyone on board from middle leaders to governors.

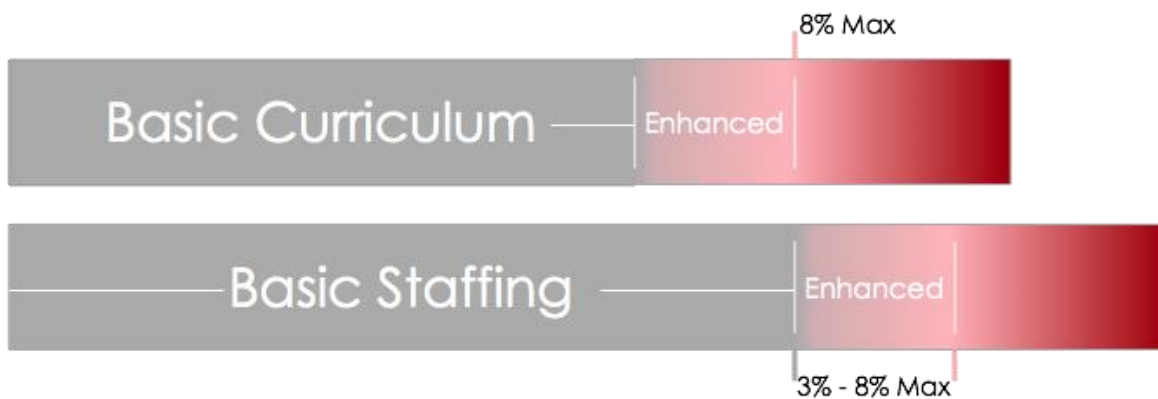
No More Guess Work

As previously stated, we believe in evidence based research and action. The CJ-Learning SMART*curriculum* App was pivotal in sharpening our focus and helping us evaluate our curriculum decisions. The SMART*curriculum* App dashboard displays three key metrics:

- the size of the curriculum compared to the DfE basic (Curriculum Enhancement)
- the size of staffing compared to the curriculum requirement (Staffing Enhancement)
- the per unit cost of teacher hours and support hours



Curriculum enhancement and staffing enhancement are critical factors in efficiency.



Understanding the concepts of curriculum enhancement and staffing enhancement gave us the ability to be far more intentional about our placement of resources.



Curriculum Efficiency

We have already defined curriculum efficiency in terms of a clear set of deliverables. As we drilled down within the app we gained a far better understanding of the consequences of our curriculum decisions. Knowing exactly where these enhancements lay was invaluable. In particular the app revealed that some of our more costly enhancements were directed towards the most advantaged students. In one example, the Key Stage four options resulted in a significant share of resources being directed to non PPG students. This was not the intention. Part of our vision is to serve the needs of our less advantaged students (without compromising the rest). The *SMARTcurriculum* App allows us to model different curriculum scenarios and test the enhancement implications. We were able to alter our options diet with pin point accuracy to allow a fairer distribution of resources. As a result, we are now able to target and accurately account for, our Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding, our SEND resource and our gifted and talented provision. The impact for our pupils, even though this is the first year of using the tool, is a cost effective curriculum and better Key Stage 4 options. We have released over £100,000 to fund enhancements that are more in keeping with our vision and values.

Better Leadership

The process of using the *SMARTcurriculum* App has made for much more meaningful dialogue with middle leaders and governors. I am particularly pleased with the enhanced use of evidence based pedagogical development across the school. I believe this is the most valuable element of the tool. Across the school, leadership conversations have a far better focus on student outcomes and our curriculum design is evidence based. In short, there is less guess work, and everybody knows what they are talking about when it comes to curriculum and pedagogy.

Concluding Comments

Curriculum design is all about the young people we serve. We owe it to them to ensure we have a clear understanding of the implications associated with our decisions. An essential element of great leadership is being well informed. We have embarked on a process that has enabled all our staff, and governors, to grow. The *SMARTcurriculum* App, alongside our work with CJ Learning, has set us on a path of continual improvement by removing guesswork and providing solid evidence for our decisions.

Andrew Fell, Headteacher

To find out more about how the **SMARTcurriculum** Method can support your school or MAT, contact us on:

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