



Opening minds
Impact update: 2008

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The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce
8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
T +44 (0)20 7930 5115
www.theRSA.org

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Key findings

“There is a clear and refreshing approach to learning, founded upon explicit teaching of learning skills. . .”

- Ofsted report on Opening Minds school, November 2007

- * 93% of comments made about Opening Minds in the most recent Ofsted reports for each school for which we have data have been positive
- * 74% of Opening Minds school for which we have data have had their curriculum rated as good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted reports. This contrasts with 67% nationally¹
- * Ofsted have noted the impact of Opening Minds on results and attainment in some schools where Opening Minds students have taken Key Stage 3 tests or GCSEs
- * 18.4% of Opening Minds schools feel that they had fully achieved the improvement in behaviour that they had sought from Opening Minds and a further 50% stated that good progress had been made
- * All respondent schools feel that Opening Minds had helped them to make at least some progress towards creating independent learners, which was also the most important aim for most schools
- * 26.3% of Opening Minds schools feel Opening Minds has fully enabled them to provide more creative teaching, with an additional 57.9% stating that good progress had been made
- * No school has reported negative feedback from any external source

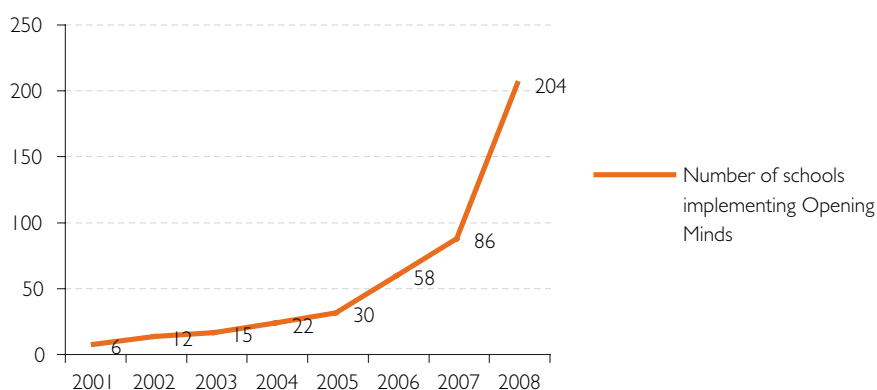
¹ <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/CS/committee/chserv/chserv12030815app2.pdf>. We have made enquiries of Ofsted to corroborate this figure and are waiting for a response at the time of publication.

Introduction

Opening Minds is a competence based curriculum framework being used in 204 schools that we know of as of September 2008. The Opening Minds curriculum is focussed on providing young people with life skills or ‘competencies’. These cover five main areas: citizenship, learning, managing information, relating to people and managing situations. The curriculum provides a broad framework in which the content of the national curriculum can be delivered in a creative and flexible way so that that young people are prepared for the real world.

Since the RSA first piloted Opening Minds in schools in 2000, the curriculum has been adopted by more schools each year with each developing its own content and model of implementation to meet the needs of their learners. Opening Minds is primarily used in secondary schools at Key Stage 3, although some schools do use it throughout Key Stage 4, and several primary schools also use the framework (see Figure 8 in Annex C).

Figure 1: When did schools begin to use Opening Minds?



This report summarises some recent survey and Ofsted data gathered by the RSA on how Opening Minds is being implemented in schools, and the impact it is having. The data in this report is based on the results of a survey of schools conducted in July 2008 as well as publicly available Ofsted data. 48 schools already implementing Opening Minds responded to the survey in July, as well as 28 schools planning to implement the framework from 2008 or 2009. We know of a total of 66 schools currently implementing Opening Minds that have been inspected by Ofsted since implementation and have analysed those schools’ most recent Ofsted reports with reference to the perceived impact of Opening Minds.

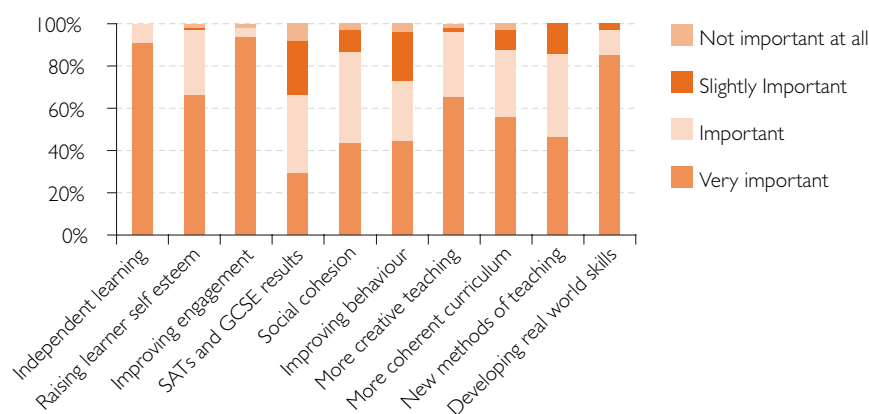
The RSA has long been receiving anecdotal evidence that Opening Minds has a positive impact on learners, on staff and on schools and has conducted two evaluations previously (Opening Minds: Taking Stock, RSA 2003 and Opening Minds: Giving Young People a Better Chance, RSA 2005).

It is important to note that because Opening Minds is initially implemented only in Year 7 in most schools, and because most schools began implementing Opening Minds within the last three years, we are not yet able to assess the impact of Opening Minds on external exam results in more than a tiny number of schools.

Why do schools introduce Opening Minds?

“It’s a healthy sign for Opening Minds when a school already deemed outstanding recognises the need, and the possibility, for further change and development that can enhance the experience of its students” – Opening Minds consultant

Figure 2: Why have schools decided to implement Opening Minds (implementing and planning schools)?



All but one of the 48 implementing schools that started the survey stated that producing more independent learners was a very important aim of introducing Opening Minds in their school. Over 90% of implementing schools also considered improving student engagement with learning, and developing skills students would need in the real world to be very important factors. Over 75% of implementing schools felt that raising self esteem among learners was also very important.

Interestingly 70% (28) of implementing schools cited having scope for more creative teaching to be a very important reason for implementing Opening Minds, and 51.2% (21) thought the same about changing methods of teaching.

The least popular reason for introducing Opening Minds in schools already implementing it was to improve results in end of key stage tests and GCSEs with only 32.5% of implementing schools citing this as a very important reason and 5% reporting that it was not important at all. SATs and GCSE results were even less important to many planning and interested schools’ interest in Opening Minds than they were to schools already implementing Opening Minds.

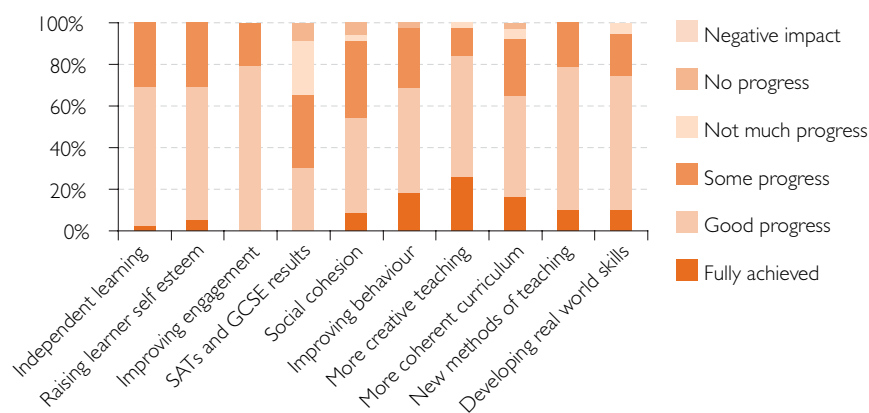
It is apparent, therefore, that schools implement Opening Minds with a view to improving the educational experience of young people without feeling that Opening Minds must directly impact on external test scores or the schools’ place in league tables.

How successful has Opening Minds been in fulfilling the aims of schools?

“Children are enjoying their learning - the effect on their engagement and behaviour has been profound.” – Teacher in Opening Minds school

“Our most disaffected, permanently excluded pupils have taken far more responsibility for their learning and see a point to what they are learning and feel a lot more in control” – Teacher in Opening Minds school

Figure 3: How far do schools implementing Opening Minds feel their aims have been achieved (Survey data)?



The graph above gives some indication of the views of teachers on how far their aims for Opening Minds had been achieved. However, there are some key areas where Ofsted have also noted the impact of Opening Minds in schools, notably in:

- * Learning skills
- * Meeting the needs of students
- * Aiding transition from primary school
- * Behaviour and engagement of students
- * Impact on teaching quality
- * Results and attainment

All quotes in this section are from Ofsted reports on Opening Minds schools. All comments made explicitly about Opening Minds in the most recent Ofsted reports for each school for which we have data can be found in Annex D.

Learning skills

Ofsted reports on schools implementing Opening Minds have most frequently mentioned the positive effect of Opening Minds on learning skills, sometimes linking this explicitly to student’s ability to progress well at the school.

“Students have very well developed competencies and learning skills. They are very cooperative yet independent learners, organise themselves well, and make decisions about their learning.

They demonstrate remarkable listening skills, both to each other and to staff, and show considerable patience in supporting their peers. Their speaking skills are very good."

"The 'competence curriculum' for Year 7 students develops the skills needed to succeed and progress through Key Stage 3."

Meeting the needs of students

Schools that have implemented Opening Minds have often been praised for meeting the needs of all their students, regardless of ability.

"The Year 7 curriculum inspires pupils with gifts and talents and suits the needs of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities."

"The curriculum has developed considerably in recent years with a number of innovative features that serve students well, and provides good flexibility in meeting the needs of individuals."

Transition from Primary school

Ofsted also notes the importance of Opening Minds in aiding transition from primary school:

"An innovative 'competency curriculum' in Year 7 aids transition from primary school, using a thematic approach to support the development of learning skills."

"The OM teaching in Year 7 is well received and popular; students are clear about the benefits gained from this approach. They feel comfortable with teaching styles that mirror those used in their junior schools and appreciate how this eases their transition to the 'big school'. They value their extended contact with one teacher."

Behaviour and engagement

The effect of Opening Minds on behaviour and engagement is one of the most frequently cited benefits by teachers. Improving behaviour was considered fully achieved by 18.4% of survey respondents with a further 50% stating that good progress had been made. More schools reported good progress in improving engagement with learners than with any other aim of Opening Minds (79.5%), but no school reported that engagement had been fully achieved.

Ofsted have also noted the positive effect, even with very disengaged students at Pupil Referral Units.

"The new Opening Minds course in Year 7 is clearly having a positive impact on improving behaviour and engaging pupils more imaginatively in lesson activities."

"The curriculum is now more interesting and relevant to students' needs and this means that students enjoy college far more than they used to and are more willing to attend regularly."

“Another strong feature is the personalised, thematic approach to planning that ensures younger pupils successfully re-engage in learning. As a result, many are able to return to their mainstream schools.”

Effect on teaching

One of the more surprising impacts of Opening Minds has been on the teachers who teach it. Providing scope for more creative teaching was the aim that most implementing schools considered fully achieved with 26.3% stating that they had fully achieved it and 57.9% stating that good progress had been made.

Ofsted reports also commented on the impact of Opening Minds on teaching: sometimes noticeable where Opening Minds is taught and sometimes noticeable throughout the school.

“Teaching is better in Years 7 to 9 [where Opening Minds is used], where teachers plan more thoroughly and are beginning to see the need for a wider range of tasks and approaches to enhance learning and enable greater progress.”

“The effective strategies for independent learning and personal development in this course were also reflected in good and outstanding teaching elsewhere in the school.”

Results and attainment

The question on whether Opening Minds had improved SATs or GCSE results was only answered by around half of the total respondents to this question in the survey, perhaps reflecting the lack of importance accorded to this aim by many of the respondent schools. Of those that did respond to this question, none thought that improvement in external tests had been fully achieved, 30.4% felt that good progress have been made and 34.8% that some progress had been made. 26.1% saw little progress, and 8.7% no progress, although none of the respondent schools had seen Opening Minds have a negative impact on external test results. As explained in the introduction to this report the majority of schools currently implementing Opening Minds have not had any students that have been taught through Opening Minds take exams yet and so cannot make any comments on the impact it might have on results.

Ofsted have made several positive comments on the impact of Opening Minds on attainment in schools that have been implementing for several years, but no comments on potential negative impact.

“There is evidence of impact of the curriculum in Year 7 on achievement at the end of the year, at the end of Key Stage 3 and on GCSE results”

“Year 7 students learn how to learn and this knowledge is a key factor in their academic success in later years.”

External feedback

“The curriculum is outstanding. An innovative approach in Year 7 provides integrated work across subjects, developing students’ personal skills and competencies excellently.”

- Ofsted report on Opening Minds school

Schools surveyed reported that external feedback on Opening Minds has been overwhelmingly positive. None of the survey respondents reported negative feedback from any external source (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: External feedback on Opening Minds

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Ofsted	81% (17)	19% (4)	0% (0)
Local Authority	80.8% (21)	19.2% (5)	0% (0)
Other schools	96.6% (28)	3.4% (1)	0% (0)
Parents	83.3% (25)	16.7% (5)	0% (0)
Other community organisations	78.6% (11)	21.4% (3)	0% (0)
Other	75% (6)	25% (2)	0% (0)

We know of a total of 66 Opening Minds schools have been inspected by Ofsted since the implementation of Opening Minds. In 40 of the most recent Ofsted reports for these school explicit mention was made of Opening Minds, and comments were positive in 93% of cases.

Three schools that were not among the survey respondents received negative comments about the difficulties for children transferring from Opening Minds in Year 8 to the National Curriculum in Year 9 reflecting the difficulty schools sometimes find with switching from a competence based to a content based curriculum. No other negative remarks were made by Ofsted in the most recent reports for each school.

Importantly, 74% of Opening Minds schools for which we have data have had their curriculum graded as good or outstanding in their most recent report by Ofsted. This contrasts with 67% of all schools nationally².

² <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/CS/committee/chserv/chserv12030815app2.pdf> We have made enquiries of Ofsted to corroborate this figure and are waiting for a response at the time of publication.

Annex A: Survey data

102 started survey

84 completed survey

42 implementing schools started survey

28 planning schools started survey

25 interested schools started survey

1 not interested school started survey

Annex B: Ofsted statistics

Schools for which we have data: 66

	Curriculum	Schools
Unsatisfactory	0	5
Satisfactory	9	27
Good	37	15
Outstanding	12	11
% Good or outstanding	74.24	39.39

Comments

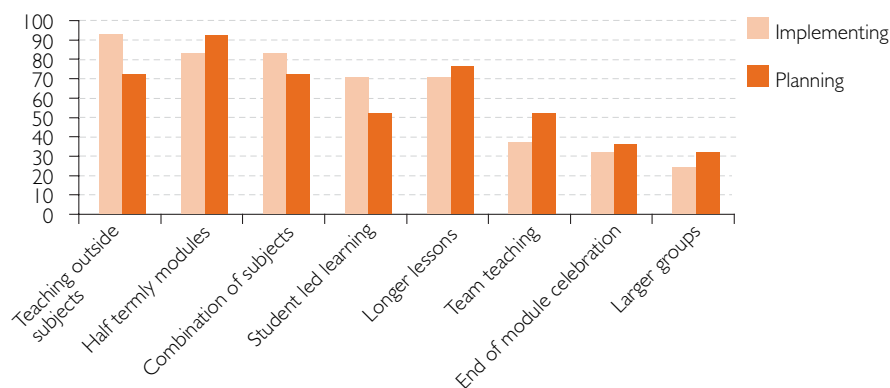
% Comments positive	92.5
% Comments positive	7.5
Total comments	40

Annex C: How is Opening Minds used in schools?

Although the Opening Minds competencies can be taught in many different ways and every school develops its own curriculum based on the competencies, there are certain pedagogical, timetable and other organisational implications that have led many schools to rethink the way teaching and learning is organised. Schools have often learned from one another in this regard, and the pattern of implementation seems broadly to follow that of schools evaluated in 2003 and 2005.

The below data is taken from the survey conducted with Opening Minds schools in July 2008 and as such only represents 48 of the 86 schools that were implementing Opening Minds last year, and 28 of the schools planning to implement Opening Minds from 2008 or 2009. In total this data represents 94 of the 204 schools implementing Opening Minds from September 2008. As such it gives an indication of how Opening Minds is used, and in what types of school.

Figure 5: How is Opening Minds delivered in schools? (Survey data: percentage of respondents using each method)



Opening Minds schools have most frequently chosen to integrate the humanities, citizenship and English into the competence curriculum. Schools vary enormously in the subjects they choose to integrate, for reasons to do with the ease of integrating content and the commitment of various subject staff. Some schools choose to bring all subjects within the remit of the competencies, others only one or two.

Figure 6: What subjects is Opening Minds used in? (Survey data: percentage of respondents integrating each subject)

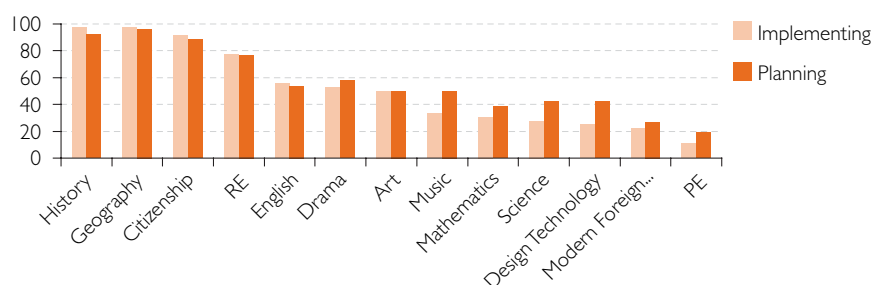
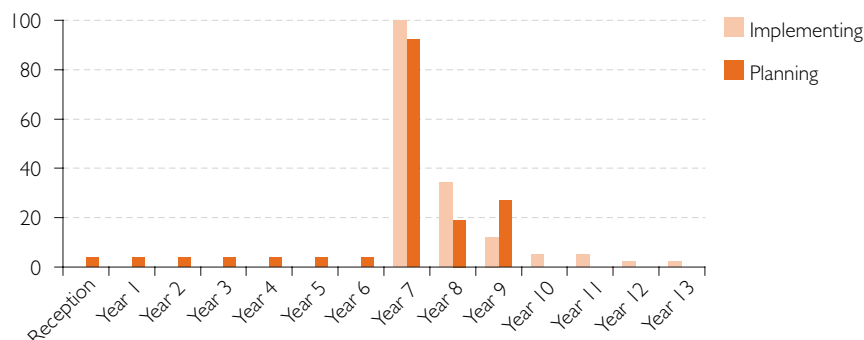


Figure 7: What year groups is Opening Minds delivered to? (Survey data: percentage of respondents teaching Opening Minds to each year group)



Opening Minds is most frequently delivered in Year 7, in part reflecting its particular strengths in assisting transition from primary to secondary education. We do know of some schools that teach Opening Minds alongside qualifications through Key Stages 4 and 5, as well as several primary schools teaching Opening Minds to younger children. One of the key aims of the RSA Academy in Tipton (opened September 2008) is to explore the use of Opening Minds throughout the whole school.

Figure 8: Percentage of schools that use Opening Minds by age range

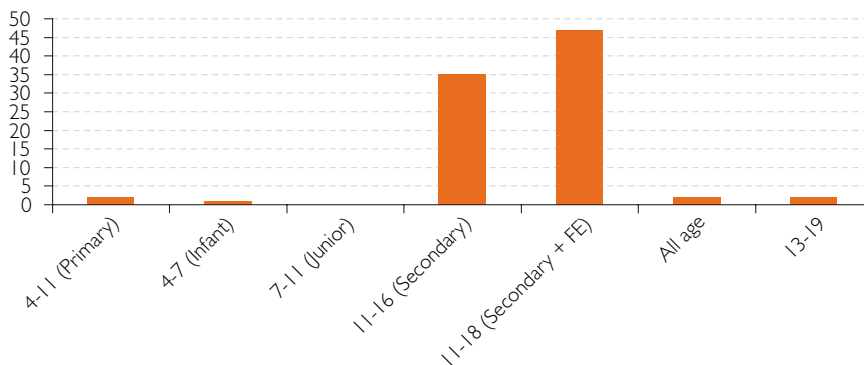


Figure 9: Percentage of respondent schools of type.

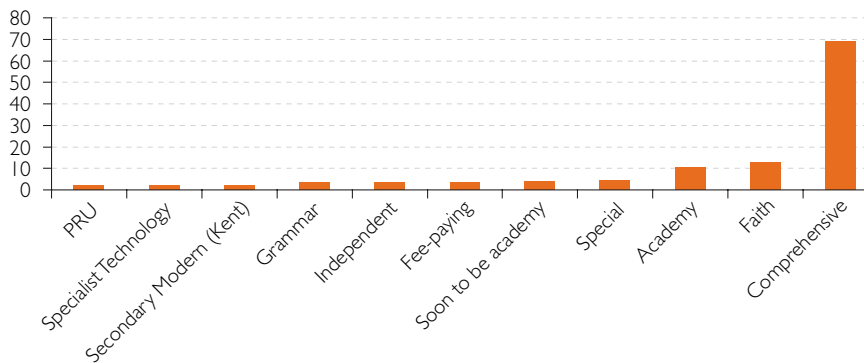


Figure 10: Number of schools with grouped percentage of students with SEN (national average 21.2%)

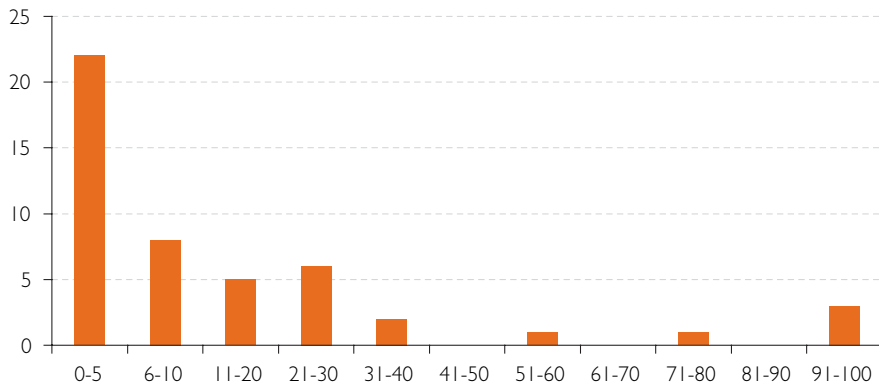
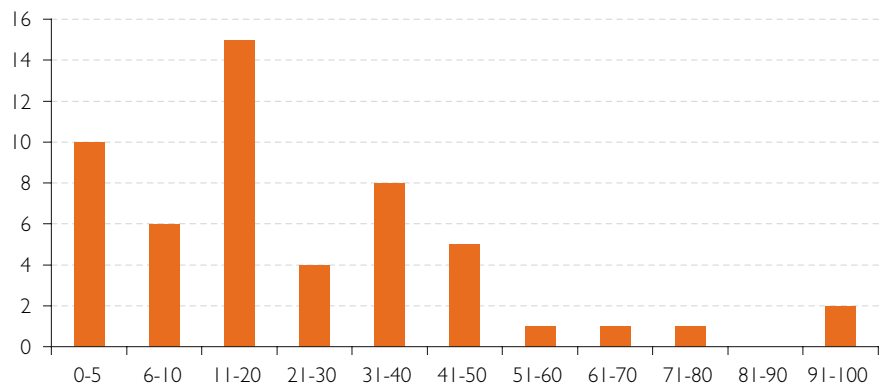


Figure 11: Number of schools with grouped percentage of students receiving free school meals (national average 16%)



Annex D: Ofsted comments

A total of 66 schools have been inspected by Ofsted since they implemented Opening Minds. The most recent reports for 40 of these schools explicitly mention Opening Minds, and all 40 schools received positive comments.

“The curriculum is outstanding. An innovative approach in Year 7 provides integrated work across subjects, developing students’ personal skills and competencies excellently.”

Three schools also received mildly negative comments about the difficulties for children transferring from Opening Minds to the National Curriculum, and about the consistency with which subjects had been integrated, but these were comments on the specific implementation of Opening Minds in these schools, rather than a criticism of the content of the framework or its effect on learning. No school received a negative comment about Opening Minds in the absence of a positive comment.

Learning skills

Ofsted comments often praise the impact that Opening Minds has on the thinking and learning skills of students:

“The ‘opening minds’ curriculum for students in years 7, 8 and 9 continues to be have a positive influence on pupils’ learning and their personal development.”

“The innovative ‘opening minds’ programme (making links between subjects in ways that help students to make sense of their learning) has engaged the interest of Year 7 students and is enabling them to develop skills for learning as well as literacy and communication skills.”

“The Year 7 ‘Bemrose Way’ initiative promotes independent learning and enhances speaking skills.”

“The ‘competence curriculum’ for Year 7 students develops the skills needed to succeed and progress through Key Stage 3.”

“The curriculum...has improved since the last inspection at Key Stage 3 where the LAP [Opening Minds] thematic course is enabling the development of better study skills and greater self-confidence.”

“There is a clear and refreshing approach to learning, founded upon explicit teaching of learning skills. ...”

“Students have very well developed competencies and learning skills. They are very cooperative yet independent learners, organise themselves well, and make decisions about their learning. They demonstrate remarkable listening skills, both to each other and to staff, and show considerable patience in supporting their peers. Their speaking skills are very good.”

“The ‘Opening Minds’ course in Years 7 and 8 develops students’ awareness of wider issues and their ability to work collaboratively.”

“The curriculum is innovative and lively in meeting the needs of students throughout the school. The ‘Opening Minds’ programme in Years 7 and 8 promotes independent learning and makes up for deficiencies in basic skills through linking literacy to other subjects.”

“At Key Stage 3, imaginative curriculum development is promoting increased enjoyment of learning and developing students’ study skills well”

“Interesting links are made across subjects to encourage the development of pupils’ personal and social skills and to make learning more relevant for them.”

“Under her leadership the commitment to inclusion, the promotion of equality and the concern for the individual are outstanding features of the education provided. A key factor in this is a curriculum which is innovative, responds imaginatively to changing requirements and which promotes high levels of achievement as well as an enjoyment of learning...Attitudes to learning from all students of all ages and abilities are outstanding and the emphasis on learning skills in Years 7 and 8 provides a strong base for students’ academic success in other years...right from the start of their schooling,”

“An ‘Opening Minds’ curriculum in Year 7 helps new students to understand different ways of learning...In Key Stage 3 Year 7 students following a highly effective ‘Opening Minds’ curriculum that helps them to understand their own preferred ways of learning.”

“The college has developed an innovative Year 7 curriculum which is focused on developing students’ independent learning skills. This is beginning to have a positive impact on their rate of learning.”

“Pupils enjoy the challenge of an outstanding curriculum that has fully tackled the issues from the last inspection. Statutory requirements are met and the curriculum contains a number of innovative features. ‘Funky Friday’, in particular, gives Year 7 pupils a breadth of decision-making and group work skills which help them through their school career.”

“The restructuring of the Year 7 curriculum to include the ‘Opening Minds’ programme to develop students’ learning skills across a range of subjects is a major development. Year 7 pupils speak enthusiastically of how it is helping them to learn. However, it is too early to evaluate its impact fully.”

“The school’s Opening Minds curriculum in Key Stage 3 provides a competency-based curriculum which is being delivered very effectively to develop the learning skills of younger students and give them an excellent base from which to develop their life-long learning skills.”

“In Key Stage 3, the Opening Minds curriculum is designed to impact positively on the students’ independent learning and communication skills, but the school still awaits its full impact on students’ personal development or on the standards they achieve at the end of each key stage”

Meeting the needs of students

Opening Minds schools are often praised by Ofsted for their ability to provide for the needs of their students:

“The Year 7 curriculum inspires pupils with gifts and talents and suits the needs of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities.”

“there is a shared commitment at all levels within the school community to provide an interesting, enjoyable and relevant education for young citizens of the 21st century.”

“The curriculum has developed considerably in recent years with a number of innovative features that serve students well, and provides good flexibility in meeting the needs of individuals.”

“The curriculum, which is balanced and imaginative, meets the needs of all students. The school is developing an innovative approach to the curriculum. For example, ‘Thinking Smart’, a competency based curriculum in Year 7, links studies in music with those in English, drama and art.”

“Challenging and innovative approaches to teaching and learning are central to the academy’s strong improvement and motivational culture. For example, the Raising Attainment Project in Years 7 and 8 (RAP) seeks to match work more closely to the needs of students... The imperatives of the Every Child Matters agenda, alongside the academy’s five key enterprise capabilities, provide a coherent rationale for the curriculum’s design. This is exemplified clearly in the development of the two year Key Stage 3 RAP programme aimed at raising students’ literacy levels and their cognitive skills. Pertinent themes are delivered through an integrated approach to literacy and the humanities together.”

Transition from Primary school

Ofsted also notes the importance of Opening Minds in aiding transition from primary school:

“An innovative ‘competency curriculum’ in Year 7 aids transition from primary school, using a thematic approach to support the development of learning skills.”

“The OM teaching in Year 7 is well received and popular; students are clear about the benefits gained from this approach. They feel comfortable with teaching styles that mirror those used in their junior schools and appreciate how this eases their transition to the ‘big school’. They value their extended contact with one teacher.”

“Through the ‘Opening Minds’ programme, there are arrangements to support students as they make the transition from primary school. Many Year 7 students are taught by the same teacher most of the time, with an emphasis of ‘learning to learn’ in core subjects.”

“The curriculum is good. It has been improved in the last two years through some innovative initiatives. For instance, in Year 7 the introduction of the ‘opening minds’ project has been well received by students. This brings together English, ICT, religious

education and history and is taught by one teacher. This takes up a quarter of the taught time for a Year 7 class. This helps to smooth the transition for students from a small primary to a large secondary school. It also helps students to form links between these subjects.”

Behaviour and engagement

The impact of Opening Minds on behaviour and engagement is also noted:

“The new Opening Minds course in Year 7 is clearly having a positive impact on improving behaviour and engaging pupils more imaginatively in lesson activities.”

“The innovative new Personal Competence Development course in Year 7 is successfully developing pupils’ abilities to work and learn constructively and responsibly with each other.”

“The curriculum is now more interesting and relevant to students’ needs and this means that students enjoy college far more than they used to and are more willing to attend regularly.”

“The imaginative initiative to develop learning and enquiry skills in Years 7 and 8 has had a positive impact in improving students’ attitudes to learning, and the quality and regularity of homework submitted.”

“Although not yet impacting fully on pupils’ achievement and personal development, the revised curriculum is successfully helping pupils to become more positive about their learning and belief that they can achieve. In particular, the wide range of visits and visitors enhances pupils’ spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Another strong feature is the personalised, thematic approach to planning that ensures younger pupils successfully re-engage in learning. As a result, many are able to return to their mainstream schools.”

Effect on teaching

The influence of Opening Minds on teaching is noticed by Ofsted

“The effective strategies for independent learning and personal development in this course were also reflected in good and outstanding teaching elsewhere in the school.”

“Teaching is better in Years 7 to 9 [where Opening Minds is used], where teachers plan more thoroughly and are beginning to see the need for a wider range of tasks and approaches to enhance learning and enable greater progress.”

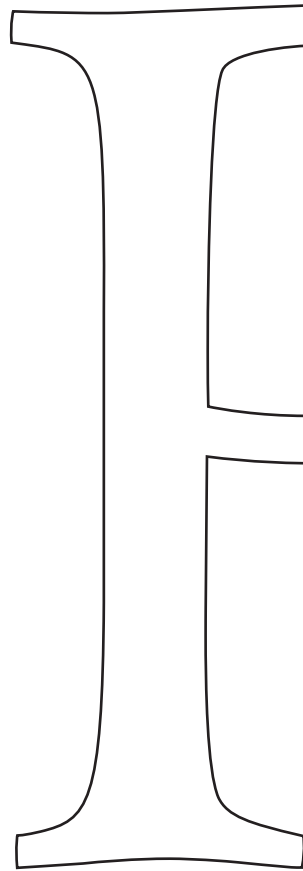
Results and attainment

In some schools that have been implementing Opening Minds for long enough, the impact on results is noted:

“There is evidence of impact of the curriculum in Year 7 on achievement at the end of the year, at the end of Key Stage 3 and on GCSE results”

“Setting by ability across Key Stage 3 and a more cross curricular approach through the Opening Minds project in Year 7 have been effective.”

“Year 7 students learn how to learn and this knowledge is a key factor in their academic success in later years.”



RSA

The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce
8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
T +44 (0)20 7930 5115

www.theRSA.org