
Bishop Creighton Academy and Peterborough Cathedral

PETERBOROUGH CURRICULUM **CASE STUDY**



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Introduction – what is an Area Based Curriculum Project?

RSA Area Based Curriculum projects are designed by schools in collaboration with a local community partner; supported by local expertise and context; and taught using the local area as a classroom.

In 2010 we recruited five schools in Peterborough to pilot this approach to curriculum development with the aims of:

- Creating learning experiences that were engaging for children from all backgrounds
- Increasing children’s understanding of and attachment to the place where they live
- Embedding schools more deeply within their communities and localities

The school

Bishop Creighton Academy has around 200 pupils aged between four and eleven, and is situated within walking distance of Peterborough Cathedral. Students are drawn from a range of faith backgrounds and many of the families served by the school are newly arrived in Peterborough.

The school is rated as outstanding by Ofsted. The school works hard to build confidence in its students through student voice initiatives. Bishop Creighton has engaged with a number of initiatives such as Building Learning Power and employ a ‘growth mind set’ approach to learning.

The school works hard to develop a sense of agency in its students, and staff were keen to build on this to develop a project that explored the role of the school and the Cathedral in the community of Peterborough. The school is physically very close to the Cathedral but in the past has made little use of it other than for RE visits.

The partner

Peterborough Cathedral is going through its own process of exploring its role as a faith institution in an increasingly diverse city, and staff viewed

the engagement with schools through the Peterborough Curriculum as an opportunity to engage young people in this process.

“How does the Cathedral interact with the rest of the community? – and that’s something important for the Cathedral because the Anglican church is there for everyone as a resource: for anyone to use as regards faith or belief and therefore our outward facing department works in conjunction with education.”

Mark Tomlins, Schools and Community Officer, Peterborough Cathedral

Peterborough Cathedral are developing a strong outreach programme with schools and the wider community and are keen to work closely with other faiths in the city as well. The vision is for the Cathedral to be a resource for learning across the curriculum, and to get beyond ‘pointing out the obvious artefacts’.

The partnership

Having met at a networking event organised by the RSA, staff from the school and the Cathedral started planning straight away. The Cannon Missioner, responsible for community relations was very keen that the Cathedral be used for ‘more than just Tudors and RE’ and had suggestions about using the façade and construction of the building to teach maths among other ideas.

After an initial scoping session, Mark Tomlins, Schools and Communities Officer at the Cathedral, took responsibility for engaging with the inter-faith council on behalf of the project, while John Laud, lead teacher at the school, started to plan in the time to the school year.

The school had always had a link with the Cathedral – it is named after a former Bishop of Peterborough, after all, and the chair of governors is a clergy member. However, through the Peterborough Curriculum the Cathedral and school embarked on a range of things together, including being involved in a promotional video for the Cathedral, and the school taking refuge in the Cathedral precinct on the occasion of a flood at the school.

“For the lead teacher the relationship with Mark was particularly valuable to the school community ‘because he’s been so open – and the other people as well – but him especially. Yeah, he’s – he’s – he’s made it approachable, whereas I think they thought it wasn’t before....’.”

John Laud

Mark also felt that the relationship was open enough to be flexible, despite having concrete plans for a project.

“And that’s what I like about the openness of it – that we’ve done it one way, if it doesn’t work we can change bits and pieces, we can keep what’s good, we can add new bits in, we can look again at using it in different ways, doing it with different people, and that to me – that is always the way anything should be, any kind of learning is open-ended.”

Mark Tomlins

The project

Summary

The project revolved around the production of a ‘Question Time’ style event in which members of the inter-faith council, and the school council, sat on a panel and answered questions from the audience of Year 4 and 5 students. In preparation for this event, all students visited the Cathedral to learn about its historic place in the community. Cathedral staff visited the school and developed the debating, and question and answer skills of students in preparation for the event. Through the visits and engagement the students learned “science and numeracy as well as the obvious history and RE, and using it as a very, very close by facility really – a giant classroom”.

The goals

The primary aim of the project was “To develop the children’s understanding of the role of the Cathedral and the school in Peterborough’s wider community”.

However, this was given additional focus because during the early months of the partnership development the English Defence League, an ultra-right wing anti-Islam group, held a march in Peterborough which deeply affected some students at the school. “Some of them were really scared” reported a teacher. This event strengthened the resolve of the Cathedral and the school to develop a project that allowed children of multiple faiths to explore their relationship with the wider community of Peterborough alongside the Cathedral and the inter-faith council.

“It has to be about children getting out and seeing their community – their worlds can be so small. The great thing will be for the children to meet people that they have never met before.”

The project was also intended to develop the writing and speaking skills of the students.

Activities

The classes met with Cathedral officers in the autumn term and have learnt about how the Cathedral came to be there and how it was built. Students discussed the work of the church as well as other faiths in the community and looked at what the Cathedral hopes to do.

In a skills-focussed session, students looked at forming an idea and arguing a point. They were encouraged to develop questioning and listening skills, and to develop their debating skills.

The event itself was a great success, with the Bishop of Peterborough and representatives from Hindu and Catholic faiths answering children’s questions about diversity, and tolerance, and ‘why people from different religions can’t live together all over the world – it isn’t fair!’.

For more detail on this event, see the RSA blog here www.rsablogs.org.uk/2012/education/opinion/.

Bishop Creighton Academy students in a workshop session at Peterborough Cathedral



How is this different?

“I think as I say for us it’s that understanding that this is a completely different way of working with schools and it will enable us to make permanent links.”

Mark Tomlins, Peterborough Cathedral

Both the school and the partner feel that this project was a profoundly new way of working for them. Notable differences from previous ways of working have included:

- The school and the Cathedral entered into a flexible and committed partnership which allowed for a range of activities and mutual support as well as the planned project
- The project built on existing links between the school and Cathedral to forge what both parties felt would be a permanent partnership between the two
- Both parties benefited from the project in a genuinely joint exploration of a topic of interest to both
- Students were granted a real audience and opportunity to debate matters of interest to themselves and the wider community

Impact

“The first time I went there I was scared... And I’m really, really, really, really glad I was going there because I’ve never been there in my life.”

Year 3 student, Bishop Creighton Academy

“I think there’s been a real shift in their perception of the Cathedral – which is what we focused on... it was a massive change in their ideas and understanding.”

John Laud, Bishop Creighton Academy

Despite the close proximity of the school to the Cathedral, many children had been unfamiliar with the building and the institution before this project. Students reported enjoying visiting the Cathedral, and looked forward to return visits.

“The children have been really positive. When I do go back to visit the schools they all say ‘that’s the guy from the Cathedral’ ... it makes me think that maybe what we’re doing is obviously something they value and that they’re enjoying.”

However, the project was always about more than simply enjoyment, and teachers felt that it achieved the goals of developing children’s sense of their own place in relation to Peterborough and its multiple faiths.

“In terms of raising the children’s awareness of themselves and where they stand in the community – that’s definitely changed because they’ve got a much deeper understanding about where we come from and where they come from, how they connect in to the Cathedral – some of the other [...] faiths that we met, and that’s been really, really useful”.

What does it mean and what have we learned?

This project demonstrates how the school curriculum can become a ‘social project’ which engages with the real issues facing a community, specific to time and place, through engagement with local institutions.

Issues that schools sometimes find it difficult to address, perhaps lacking confidence or expertise in complex political or faith-related areas, might be helped by partnership with relevant local agencies.

The partnership created by the school and the Cathedral has also demonstrated that educational and other institutions in a community often share common agendas that go unnoticed even where a relationship already exists.

What next?

The Cathedral and the inter-faith council plan to repeat and expand the event to include other topics and other schools in future years:

“[The Cannon Commissioner] and the other members of the interfaith council have all said, you know, that this is something that can grow ... this is something that is a really good idea and is going to work very nicely – but it’s also something that could expand...”

Mark Tomlins, Schools and Community Officer, Peterborough Cathedral

For the school, there is still a lot more that can be done together with the Cathedral, embedding the relationship further within the school, and plans are afoot for further work.

“The main thing is to continue our partnership with the Cathedral, develop our question time aspect but also using the Cathedral for a lot more curriculum work.... And I will get more staff involved – getting Mark in to talk to us all, put it on the table what he’s got, and we can get

started. We need to get out there a bit more as well and see what else is out there ... maybe doing the planning over there. We're going to carry on with it, definitely."

The Cathedral are also planning to work differently with more schools in the future.

"We'd like to continue working with the same schools, and work with new schools. The legacy for us is that we see this as a process that has been really valuable, really worked for both parties... we understand the process now and we know that it's something beneficial. So it's not selling it, it's just saying where do we go this time, what can we do?"

Food for thought

- Does your school have 'natural partners' that could be drawn upon to develop learning and curriculum-related projects?
- Are there current social issues affecting students that might be addressed through the curriculum?
- How might partnerships with local organisations help schools to develop a sense of identity among their students?

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