



St Leonards  
St Andrews, Fife

## Deeper Learning, Richer Minds

William Goldsmith, Headmaster | Friday, 9 September 2016

The new academic year has started with dynamism at St Leonards Junior School, and whilst years 1-6 have begun their new Units of Inquiry with the Primary Years Curriculum, our Year 7s are the first group to begin the impressive Middle Years Curriculum, also part of the overall International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. As a new Prep School Head, it has been exhilarating to learn about and become fully involved in these two extraordinary curricula, and I can now - even after only a week - see first-hand how learning is brought to life, where children are having so much fun in class.

My deeper learning into the Primary Years Programme (PYP) took place over three days at an IB workshop at the University of Warwick in February 2016, and I want to share some of what I learned, and can now relate to the children and staff of St Leonards. If I arrived thinking I could listen at the back, take copious notes and not get noticed, I was truly mistaken. The entire workshop was set up as a mini Unit of Inquiry, with us - participants from schools right across the world, and in a variety of different roles - as learners modelling the learner profile. We were taken out of our comfort zone, were encouraged wholeheartedly to take risks, had fun, engaged collaboratively with others for 90% of the two days, questioned constantly, laughed, got stuck into a great number of activities, drew, created movies, and most importantly left being utterly invigorated, interested, engaged and completely fired up. Whilst I am not expecting our children to leave every class feeling like bursting - it would be exhausting for everyone - I got a real sense of what it must feel like to be an 'IB student', whether 5 years of age or 18. I have never left a Key Stage 2 or 3, GCSE, or Common Entrance conference feeling anything other than ready for a G&T, but these two days made me utterly excited.

One of the conditions of being a PYP accredited school, is that all teachers attend these two day workshops. It has taken my colleagues to Berlin, Barcelona and Brussels, and whilst I felt a little hard done by being sent to a town in middle England on a perishing February weekend, it had the same effect on me as it has done the teaching staff. The ideas we have all come away with and the passion and enthusiasm that has been installed in us will undoubtedly be passed onto the children, and this has to be a great thing.

What did I take from the workshop? Firstly, it was essential for the Learner Profile to be adopted by the whole school (firmly role modelled by the staff) and be used as a framework both in and out of the classroom. The staff at St Leonards Junior School will be challenged to display characteristics of all ten aspects of the Learner Profile and this will be displayed in the front hall, and we will be working (as a whole school community) over the year to develop our own 'habits of learning'. I also encourage our parents to role model the learner profile at home. If we, as parents, came up with the characteristics we would like our children to possess, and then compared our ideas with the IB Learner Profile, I think it would surprise and delight us how similar the results are.

The workshop reinforced some essential learning and teaching styles: Learning has to include real life experiences (such as our class trips to reinforce the Units of Inquiry), visualisation (we have



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been working on this in Maths), belief that you can do it, enjoyable and interesting, a willingness to dive in and make mistakes - and in doing so build up resilience by learning from these mistakes and turning them into genuine positives.

I couldn't have been more delighted when I arrived at St Leonards to see how every classroom was set up. Not with traditional linear desks facing the front, with the focus on the teacher instructing at the front, but with desks pushed together seating 4 or 5 around each, encouraging collaborative work with the teacher and children learning together. I can already see the classrooms filling up with post-it notes, student led work and evidence of constant questioning and curiosity. Posters in the classrooms are not there to stay, for in four weeks (after the first Unit of Inquiry) they will be refreshed, and the journey will start again. Starting with a blank canvas in the classroom allows children to take ownership of their learning, and to question as much as they possibly can.

Finally, to put to bed one myth of the IB. It is not topic based curriculum, which as interesting as it is, doesn't actually encourage children to be life-long learners. What engages the children's intellectual curiosity and emotional intelligence, increases their motivation and provides a much deeper understanding, is the overarching principle that the IB is a concept driven curriculum. One academic suggests the following 6 facets of education that, in my mind, sums it all up:

**'Teach it  
Use it  
Prove it  
Connect it  
Explain it  
Defend it  
Read between the Lines'**  
(Wiggins, 1998)

What a wonderful way to make learning fun.