INNOVATING D&T: WEST MIDLANDS

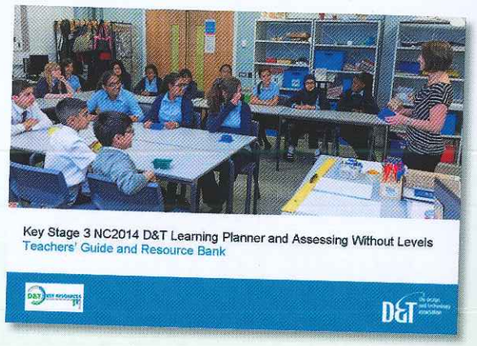
Heidi Ambrose-Brown, Regional D&T Advisor

This exciting new initiative is aimed at helping schools implement a modernised D&T curriculum that is fit for purpose and leads into the new D&T GCSE content. It is designed to provide D&T teachers with the necessary professional development and 'tools' to meet the needs of students and employers. As a research and development project, it will investigate the impact that intervention and support provided by a dedicated, locally based D&T advisor can have on the quality of teaching and learning in school. It also aims to raise the profile of the subject with wider stakeholders, especially senior leaders in school, employers and parents.

Successful Schools:

The following schools were selected to form the initial network – together they cover a range of circumstances across D&T departments in terms of strengths and weaknesses whilst fitting a reasonable geographical area across the west Midlands:

- Southam College, Southam Warwickshire (mixed 11-18 comprehensive.)
- Coundon Court School, Coventry (mixed 11-18 comprehensive.)
- President Kennedy School, Coventry (mixed 11-18 comprehensive.)
- Wood Green Academy, Birmingham (mixed 11-18 comprehensive.)
- Kings Heath Boys, Birmingham (11-16 boys' comprehensive.)
- Handsworth Grammar School, Birmingham (11-18 boys' grammar.)
- Wolverhampton Girls High School, West Midlands (11-18 girls' grammar.)
- North East Wolverhampton Academy, West Midlands (mixed 11-18 comprehensive.)



First steps

Heidi Ambrose-Brown has been appointed to run the initiative during 2016-17. Using the D&T Association's Self Review Framework together with the Key Resources curriculum materials, teachers will plan and deliver progressive KS3 schemes of work, that will help prepare students for the new single title D&T GCSE. New on-line CPD courses are also planned which will be trialled as part of the programme.

Initial visits to the participating schools were made during the early part of the Autumn term. Heidi was keen to reassure department members what the purpose of the project was. Open Evenings are a perfect opportunity to promote D&T, both as a subject and as a career route so it is important that displays reflect this, informing future parents and senior leadership teams. Heidi provided all departments with careers posters and suggestions for getting a career wall up and running alongside alumni displays.

For the iD&T:WM schools, the goal is ultimately to achieve the Design and Technology Mark by fully completing the Self Review Framework. All the hub schools showed some good practice but this wasn't evident across the whole of the curriculum – which

is the case in most schools nationally. The starting point then is to identify what works wells currently – what is the key learning taking place here? Is the department well-resourced and skilled to deliver this learning effectively?

To arrive at an accurate picture across KS3, the lead teachers were asked to map their curriculum against a long-term planning document that refers to the coded learning objectives derived from the KS3 Progression Framework for the 2014 Programme of Study. This clearly flags up where the gaps are and most importantly where repetition is taking place.

Designing, Making or Both?

Why is there so much emphasis on pupils having to make something to take home? These outcomes can be predetermined and often stereotypical. "I'm in Year 8 so I must be making cushions in Textiles because my brother did that two years ago".

iD&T: WM is promoting the use of the KS3 Key Resources that the Association has developed. These are units of work that have been broken up into hourly blocks and cover the key areas of Mainly Designing, Mainly Making, Designing and Making, and Technology in Society. Each of these are available for different year groups across the specialist areas of Textiles, Product Design, Systems and Control and Food.

The iD&T: WM schools have chosen to use those which will help plug their curriculum gaps and are using them as a scaffold on which to develop their own schemes of work that are fit for their pupils and their resources in the time allocated within their timetables.

Heidi has also asked the departments to consider why there are gaps in their KS3 curriculum. Is it because of the need to upskill teachers to deliver this learning? From the evidence gained by the schools' planning sheets, the areas of concern were Mechanisms, Structures, Fibres and Fabrics, and Programmable Components. Schools were also forgetting about Sustainability and the Circular Economy.

Lesson Observations

All schools have agreed to pilot some of the KS3 Key Resources and Heidi has been visiting to observe how pupils have responded. Non specialist teachers have found them helpful to use as a starting point and others have gone on to develop them further to meet the needs of their pupils or link with existing projects.

Year 9 boys at Handsworth Grammar School took risks with their rapid modelling for their 'Floating Gardens' (based on the Practical Action project) – something that teacher Maria Hill admitted she wouldn't have done previously. Great fun, teamwork and lot of learning took place, with the boys clearly enjoying the freedom they were given in developing their solutions.

Twilight Sessions

Bringing together teachers for regional networking – not a novel idea but we all agree that is what's sadly lacking within our D&T community. Social media to some extent has filled that gap but nothing beats a group of teachers coming together face to face, to support each other and share ideas for D&T practice and pedagogy.

The focus for the first gathering was "What does Good D&T Look Like?" Does it always have to be an end product that determines this? Surely the process is the important factor?