



One Head's Story

Tracey Tresler, Head of Wilmington Academy

1. The context

I am Head of Wilmington Academy which is a non-selective secondary modern surrounded by grammar schools so that our students are of mid/low ability. So, we start from a basis that is lower than the national average starting point. Nor are we short of competition: North West Kent College is a big draw and some of our most able students leave to go to the grammar schools. Before our move to the CP, we had 130 students in the Sixth Form and we offered them three post-16 pathways, academic, which meant A Levels, vocational, which meant BTECs and a combination. Although we were continually reviewing our offering, we were not content, and this was brought to a head by the reform of A levels.

We thought that the reforms were both uninspiring and risky, with terminal exams in a small number of subjects. We feared that we would be returned to a world of content drilling in subjects with no cross-curricular links. However, what we wanted was to offer an

engaging post-16 programme of study that could help students achieve genuine and lasting success but also enriches their lives.

At this point, Tony Smith, the former Head of Dartford GS, visited and told me about the IB CP. He explained the different elements, the Diploma subjects, the vocational qualifications, the Core and the completely different approach to teaching and learning – and a curriculum that didn't change every five minutes. He presented this to me as a modern qualification which would develop the attributes that young people need to be successful.

2. The IB CP Pilot scheme

So, I was convinced and we took part in the second phase of the Kent pilot. This required intensive training for the teachers with a focus on post-16 pedagogy. This was unprecedented for us but the teachers came back buzzing, full of enthusiasm in a way that I hadn't seen for a long time.

There is no doubt that being on the pilot scheme was good for the school, and for its teachers: we felt we were at the vanguard of something exciting as the CP

was being developed in Kent: our involvement helped with the retention and recruitment of staff. On the other hand, it was a challenge to educate parents and students so we were delighted that 40 students signed up for September 2017, a great start.

None of this was easy but we were lucky, but we also made our own luck. The governors were 100% behind project and the Leigh Academies Trust committed funding and support. We have a strong IB team, teachers and a SLT who were passionate and committed to the cause. Even so, this whole thing took a huge amount of planning before during and since authorization visit to make sure this is a success.

So, now we offer three pathways, and none of them are A levels. We offer the CP and some students do only BTECs and a few combine BTECs and some IB Diploma subjects but don't put them together to make the CP.

3. The Impact of the CP

Although I am not a dreamer or prone to hyperbole, the impact has been remarkable in a number of different ways, for our teachers

and our teaching, for the students and for the whole school. These are some of the ways in which the impact has been felt:

- The teachers really have recovered the joy of teaching. The Diploma subjects are far less rigid in structure, so there is less drilling and more freedom to concentrate on questions, independent learning, research. There is no doubt that teaching and learning has improved: our Chief Executive, who is an OFSTED inspector recently did some lesson observations and said there had been a noticeable and significant change.
- Students are doing more than just studying individual subjects: they can see the connections between subjects; the Learner Profile runs through everything we do; the international dimension really does matter. There is no doubt that the students are thinking about things from a wider perspective and the school is working hard, through an audit of all it does, to be true to the IB philosophy, principles and language.
- The Core of the CP programme really does develop the students and it is preparing them for university/the world of work. So,
 - some sessions are delivered in the lecture theatre, which more closely resembles university teaching.
 - students really are working together and reflecting on what they have done.
 - learning Italian is giving them not only something new but its design enables them to be competitive and creative in learning and in understanding the culture.
 - service learning projects are creative and imaginative and enables students to link with businesses in a way they could not have done in the past.
- In general, all of this means that students are thinking harder about the long-term benefits of what they are doing: 3 students did a presentation to the governors and they made it clear how the programme would really benefit them.

- It's not just the post-16 students who have benefitted. All of the staff received CP training and, by embedding the IB Learner Profile, enquiry-based learning and international-mindedness across the academy, we have improved teaching and learning in the lower years, too.

4. Conclusion

Of course, none of this comes easy, but we have benefitted enormously from Kent County Council's commitment and from the support of other schools. There are challenges ahead: we have to get assessment right and that's not going to be easy at the first attempt; there is always the issue of funding the costs of registration, resources and training; and we have to keep on working hard at raising awareness amongst parents and students through marketing. However, even after all that, the change brought by the CP to this school has been remarkable and worth all the time, effort and belief.

