

TRANSCRIPT: A topic based curriculum at key stage 3

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Jane Headland: We felt that the key stage 3 curriculum was causing one or two issues, two years ago, with low level disruptive behaviour, some pupils becoming disengaged from their learning, and we stopped and took a good close look at the key stage 3 curriculum and asked ourselves why we were having these issues and decided, quite radically, to abandon what we'd got and to start from scratch. We have gone back to a more topic-based approach, age appropriate topics I hasten to add, and we started to deliver it last year, linking in very much to individual tutor time and masses of social skills and communication.

Sandra Boardman: We felt that we wanted a more dynamic curriculum that would engage our pupils and give the opportunity for all of our pupils to participate in something that they really enjoyed.

Colin Esrich: The topic of space was chosen partly because it's a topic that pupils are interested in and excited about but it was also something staff felt that when we sat down and planned together, the different subject specialists felt they could plan some active and enjoyable and engaging learning activities within each of their subjects. Topic-based learning is particularly important for pupils with learning difficulties. It gives them a context for their learning and, within science for example, a whole term's work to do with the topic of space means that each time pupils come into class they're familiar with the language and the ideas and the images of space, and it just enables them to access their learning much more effectively than they would otherwise be able to do.

Sandra Boardman: It enables all the pupils to access the work and it engages them, it excites them and they are actually submerged in the same ideas across the curriculum. Last half term, we did a lot of creative writing on describing planets, describing aliens, sending postcards home from another planet, but this half term I'm going to do a lot of non-fiction work with them, and in drama I know that they have been dramatising extracts from *War of the World*, in music they will have been making music related to robotic sounds. Doing the same thing gives them the opportunity to over-learn, to consolidate their skills, to feel that they have been successful and to know that they've achieved something.

Jane Headland: At the end of last year, I'm pleased to say that not only was the behaviour much better, the engagement of the pupils was much higher and everybody felt that the pupils were making much more progress as a result of that very radical decision to abandon what had gone before and to start again.

