

## Independent Learning Policy

**Independent Learning:** defined by DCSF in 2008 as “Self regulated learning” where pupils are motivated to take responsibility for their own learning and work with teachers to structure their learning environment. The DCSF recognised that Independent learning does not involve pupils merely working alone: teachers have an important role in enabling and supporting independent learning.

Independent learning is often cited in Inspection Reports as an area for improvement or development. This policy seeks to share examples of good practice to aid development in this area and also to note some examples of the Independent Learning taking place around school.

Independent Learning is inextricably linked to pupil development. We recognise that development of independent learning is key for success in future life.

### Aims:

- To create a sense of confidence and security for the learners, so that girls are willing to learn from each other, to take risks and explore, testing their powers of reasoning against and with other girls.
- To provide a safe environment in which independent learning can flourish.
- To effectively prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- To develop a range of character attributes, such as resilience and grit, which underpin success in education and employment.
- To foster in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves.
- To enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.
- To encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their own work and study.
- To encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely
- To encourage teachers to plan and teach lessons which promote a love of learning and children’s intellectual curiosity.

## **Background**

Key elements of independent learning are:

- A strong relationship between pupils and teachers involving trust and mutual respect.
- A collaborative partnership, fostering independent learning but within a supportive, secure environment.
- An enabling environment: material resources, social interaction and support, access to ICT.
- An awareness of different learning styles.
- An ability to plan, self-manage, self-monitor and self-motivate.
- The development of curiosity and creative thought.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically to opportunities for creativity and when challenged in their thinking.
- An appreciation that facing difficulties is integral to learning.
- Pupils respond well to constructive feedback.

Teachers can promote independent learning by:

- encouraging, fostering and celebrating independent thought;
- process orientated teaching;
- providing opportunities to self-monitor;
- providing models of behaviour;
- providing feedback on all aspects of work not necessarily grade related but always including ways to improve future performance;
- valuing effort;
- encouraging pupils to relish challenge;
- being part of a whole school approach to independent learning;
- not always teaching as a whole class;
- building a positive relationship with parents, educating them about independent learning;
- encouraging Independent Learning through Library, Assemblies, and resources;
- adopting a growth mindset approach;
- fostering a positive learning dialogue;
- well directed praise;
- encouragement of higher level responses and demands reasoning;
- encouragement of safe risk taking;
- encouraging critical thinking;
- providing opportunities for pupils to make choices.

## **Characteristics of effective independent learning**

We recognise that excellent pupil personal development will be demonstrated through very good attitudes to learning. Characteristics of effective Independent Learning seen in pupils will include:

- willingness to challenge their own understanding;
- resilience;
- high levels of initiative and independence;
- ability to apply knowledge with confidence;

- willingness to participate;
- comfortable making mistakes;
- acceptance that failure is an integral aspect of learning;
- drawing inter and intra-curricular links;
- application of basic skills to unfamiliar situations;
- ability to identify bias;
- proactive approach to school life.

### **Developing a Whole School Approach**

Dissemination of the type and amount of independent learning in a school can help to promote a culture of independent learning. For example, one school collected an example of independent learning from each subject for each year group and held an inset session where this good practice was discussed.

Departmental Handbooks and Schemes of work should have the specific opportunities for independent learning referenced clearly.

The whole school cannot follow a systematic scheme but an ethos of independent learning should be in place where and when appropriate within a subject.

Independent Learning should become a routine topic for discussion and should feature in school reports and be a focus for discussion at parents' consultations.

The Senior Teacher – Co-curricular and Senior Teacher – Academic Enrichment track and monitor opportunities for independent learning.

Independent Learning is a feature of the Staff Development programme in the following ways:

- Departmental and Teaching and Learning meetings where the implementation is discussed and good practice shared;
- Guidance document for new staff and inset training on developing independent learning;
- INSET sessions organised e.g. Ian Gilbert – Independent Thinking; CPD Book Club – Dweck.

### **Review of Independent Learning already in place**

Analysis of department documentation and monitoring lessons will give an indication of the amount and type of independent learning taking place in a school e.g.

#### **Pastoral**

- All girls are issued with a school planner which is designed to develop independence;
- Years 9-13 iPads;
- Pupil Review: bi-annual target setting across all Key Stages;
- Interim Report and Full Report reading by girls prior to reports being sent home;

- Use of home to school computer links to allow access to research materials and guidance;
- Provision of organisation and subject Sixth Form mentors;
- Presenting in Assembly;
- Fundraising activities;
- Parental engagement.

#### Within the Curriculum

- Blooms Taxonomy;
- Teacher feedback and T&L Dialogue;
- Various activities in lessons encouraging girls to see patterns, connections and to draw their own conclusions; to hypothesise and synthesise;
- Questioning in lessons avoiding an over emphasis on right/wrong answers;
- Encouraging open-ended questioning asking girls to justify their answers. e.g. How does this relate to what we have been talking about? What do you think causes? What evidence is there to support what you are saying? How could you look another way at this?;
- Group work:  
Group work is most effective when it encourages pupils to take an active role in their own learning, and encourages pupils to think and talk about their understanding, to question ideas and get ideas from others. So problem solving, project work, group discussion of issues, decision making tasks, tasks that involve sharing information, researching an issue, all stimulate learning;
- Opportunities in lessons / homework to make decisions e.g. choice in questions, tasks, approaches, presentation.;
- Independent Learning opportunities highlighted on worksheet;
- Departmental Projects;
- Cross Curricular Projects;
- Additional study periods for senior classes to work independently;
- Homework;
- Self-assessment;
- Peer assessment;
- T&L Dialogue and Teacher feedback;
- Research on the internet;
- In PSHE, Citizenship, Study Skills lessons;
- Development of presentation skills.

#### Resources:

- Use of the Library;
- Provision of Reading Lists and well-resourced Library across subjects at all Key Stages;
- E-journals/ resources/peer review links offered to students to access relevant issues and research studies;
- iPads integrated into curriculum to enable pupils to research and work independently;
- Challenge Walls with various activities in most classrooms;
- Development of facilities e.g. use of the outdoor area in Westbourne, use of the electronic screens around school;
- Extend, Enrich, Enjoy.

## Extra-curricular

- Wide range of clubs and activities available at lunchtime and after school encourages individual choice and self-motivation to pursue individual passions;
- Involvement in external and internal competitions;
- Research Essay competitions regularly updated on the notice board outside G12;
- Question of the Week – Stretch and Challenge Board;
- Revision study days and courses organised;
- Development of collaborative opportunities;
- Optional academic activities;
- House Events;
- Leadership roles in which girls are encouraged to show initiative;
- Career Initiatives to promote;
- Supporting Cross Phase Activities;
- Support Clubs;
- Academic Drop-In Clinics;
- Academic Support Drop-in Clinic;
- Revision Sessions;
- Off timetable Enrichment Days;
- Trips and educational visits;
- Opportunities to support local community projects and events;
- Use of a VLE, intranet.

A tracking document has been set up to record specific examples of Independent Learning which is overseen by the Senior Teacher – Co-curricular and Senior Teacher – Academic Enrichment.

## Methods of Evaluation

Senior Teachers, Heads of Department and Subject Teachers can evaluate provision in many ways including:

- Increased academic performance
- Lesson Observations
- Book Scrutiny
- Increased success in competitions
- Pupil and parental feedback
- Audit allows evaluation
- Pupils encouraged to think about learning through Student Learning Forum
- Scholar Reviews
- Pupil Reviews

Benefits of independent learning are listed as:

- Increased academic performance
- Increased motivation and confidence
- An awareness and willingness to manage expectations

Academic performance is easy to prove but the other outcomes can only be evaluated by pupils and staff by discussion. One school is monitoring a pilot group through school to assess the impact of this approach to teaching.

Annual analysis of the impact of strategies on the learning environment can provide a useful forum for plans for future development

## References

Information in the document was taken from the following:

Cognitive Development Programme Northwood College

Edgbaston High School, Independent Thinking and Learning Strategy

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How to teach Thinking and Learning Skills, SAGE 2007, C.J Simister

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Independent Learning, 2010 S. Felden

The Bright Stuff, Pearson 2009 C.J. Simister [cjsimister@btinternet.com](mailto:cjsimister@btinternet.com)

Dweck, Mindset: How you can fulfil your potential, 2012

Effective Pedagogies for Girls' Learning: A review of recent research, Mike Younger, 2016

<https://gsa.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Effective-Pedagogies-for-Girls-Learning-digital-GDST.pdf> [accessed May 2018]

What Makes Great Teacher, Robert Coe, Cesare Aloisi, Steve Higgins and Lee Elliot Major, 2014

## Linked Policies:

Homework Policy

Teaching and Learning Policy

Curriculum Policy

Independent Learning Mapping Document