

A-hoy! Pirates onboard

The International Primary Curriculum covers all ages from early years to secondary and is now used in over 350 schools in the UK. Here we take a look at how one school is using the early years treasure unit.



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PICTURE THE scene. It is raining. The classroom is bursting with 40 five-year-old pirates. Teachers and assistants are also dressed the part. There is plenty of noise and plenty of action, but it is all engaged, collaborative and absorbing noise and action; there is no doubt about that.

These are the early years children of Kentish Town Primary school in Camden, London. They are participating in an Entry Point activity designed to introduce them to their new unit of work from the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) – the treasure unit (there will be more of the IPC later).

Land a-hoy

Early years teachers Flora Grant and Karen Trussler have one group of children creating a desert island out of shredded paper and PVA glue. Another group are eagerly writing messages to drop into plastic bottles on strings, which will then be thrown 'overboard' to allow other children to reply.

Other children are involved in a 'walk the plank' role-play, in the pirate ship they have built from large wooden blocks. In the middle of all these activities, other children are creating their own treasure maps, having collaboratively brainstormed all of the things they might include, from beaches, rivers and palm trees to treasure.

Later in the afternoon, all hands will be on deck for the clean-up, before the entire crew sit down to listen to Pirate Flora reading *Tim Ted and the Pirates* in her best pirate brogue.

Cross-curricular learning

All of this activity marks the start of four weeks of cross-curricular learning themed to the subject of treasure, which will involve all of the foundation subjects, as well as significant links to numeracy and literacy, all of which is cross-referenced to meet the relevant guidelines.

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'Using the IPC has helped us to give more structure to our learning,' explains Flora once all her little pirates have headed home. 'Among all the staff we had felt for a long while that the QCA units sometimes just did not work and so it was decided, across the school, to replace them with the IPC.'

'We could immediately see the benefits across all the ages. The IPC offers so much more freedom to the learning so the children learn in the way that suits them best. It is more fluid and fluent in its approach and much less restricted to paper and pen in later key stages. There are so many activities that involve imaginative and creative learning, group learning, and freedom to investigate and enquire.'

'It is great for our really talented children because it enables them to take their learning another step forward and it is engaging everyone because the themes are so relevant for our children today.'

Treasure is just one of the IPC's thematic units, but there are plenty more to choose from; a total of 16 Early Years IPC units in fact, all spanning between four and six weeks of learning, all cross-curricular, all relevant for children of every ability.

Others include: Clothes, Up and Away, All About Me and Shopping. But it is not just the appealing range of units that is exciting children and teachers. 'It is the way that the IPC is so focused on helping children become better learners,' says Gaynor Coles, early years coordinator at Albert Primary School in Penarth, South Wales; the first school in Wales to take on the IPC back in 2005.

Gaynor describes some of the learning that occurred when her class began the treasure unit: 'Following the Entry Point – which involved a fantastic treasure hunt down to the beach with everyone dressed as pirates – came the Knowledge Harvest.' Here the children are encouraged to think for themselves; to decide what they want to find out about the unit. IPC encourages mind-mapping to achieve this process.

'When we mind-mapped our treasure unit, the children, with a little gentle direction from me, decided they wanted to find out all about pirates,' explains Gaynor. 'It was they who decided what they were going to learn about. That is what engages kids. They really believed that they were deciding what they wanted to learn.'

'We also looked at treasure from many different perspectives. We made our own treasure islands



The treasure unit of the International Primary Curriculum starts with four weeks of themed cross-curricular foundation-aged learning

and decided where in the world they could be. We visited a local jeweller and were able to see many of the treasures from around the world, including gold and pearls. We discussed what we understood by the word treasure [before] the children made their own treasure boxes and filled them with their own personal treasures.

'The children were then recorded standing up and telling the rest of the class what they had put in their treasure box and why. Imagine getting an infant to stand up and talk in front of a video camera for five minutes! They all did it! The children love their work because it means something to them; the learning makes sense and it is a style of learning that they will take with them into key stage 1 and beyond.'

Gaynor is referring to the knowledge, skills and understanding that are introduced within the IPC's early years learning tasks that children will go on to develop and master as they progress through their primary education and beyond.

'The IPC's early years curriculum is influenced by two fundamental ideas,' explains director of the IPC, Theresa Forbes. 'First, the results of lessons learnt from a decade of research into the brain and the development of brain-friendly learning and

teaching strategies, and second the key concepts of independence and interdependence, which underpin our view of what it is to have an international mindset.'

A global perspective

IPC adopts a global perspective because it was originally designed and created to provide an international curriculum for a group of 14 schools around the world, serving mobile families in remote locations. However, since its introduction in 2000 that figure has grown to over 500 schools in 50 different countries, including 350 state primary schools in the UK who all recognize the value of teaching today's children in an internationally-minded and thematic, cross-curricular, rigorous way.

'The IPC focuses on a combination of international, personal and academic learning for children worldwide,' continues Theresa. 'It is a current and highly relevant curriculum that is continually evolving. No-one can properly predict the nature of work that will be available for today's children by the time they are adults.'

'Many of the jobs they will have do not exist yet; especially in the fields of ICT, technology and



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science. So, the IPC focuses on developing adaptable and resilient, globally-minded, lifelong learners, prepared for the fast-changing world that they will be living and working in.'

Lifelong learning, of course, begins in the early years. 'The sooner that children believe that learning is fun, that it is relevant to them and that it is meaningful, the more they will benefit, the more they will enjoy their time in school and the more likely they will become lifelong learners,' adds Theresa.

Flora Grant from Kentish Town Primary could not agree more: 'The IPC is not only getting our children excited about their learning, it is getting the parents involved too. The children are going home enthusiastic about what they have done with their days.'

'I am seeing more extended learning with the family, which is sparked directly from the children's enthusiasm of what they are doing in the classroom. That is helping parents' attitudes, which can sometimes be very rigid based on their own experiences of school.'

'Once they see their children's enthusiasm for what they are learning and see the skills that they are developing, they become much more interested themselves. Now there is not a single parent here that does not know exactly what their child is doing.'

Key points

- The IPC is a curriculum designed for children, from early years to early secondary. To date 350 primary schools throughout England and Wales have incorporated it
- The IPC includes over 80 different thematic units of work (each spanning about four to six weeks of teaching), which have been cross-referenced to meet relevant national guidelines

As for supporting teachers, Gaynor Coles at Albert Primary says the teaching framework that backs up each IPC unit gives her more time to focus on the creative side of her teaching. 'Much of the lesson planning is already done for you but it is done in a way that allows you to make it as creative and as fun and as relevant for your own class as you want. I use the IPC plan as the start point and then go where I and the children want to take it. It is wonderful to let our imagination and our interest lead our learning.'

So what is the IPC?

The IPC is a curriculum designed for children, from early years to early secondary. To date 350 primary schools throughout England and Wales have incorporated it at a cost of around £10,000. This cost includes over 80 different thematic units of work (each spanning about four to six weeks of teaching), which have been cross-referenced to meet National Curriculum and other relevant guidelines. The cost also covers membership, which provides ongoing support, web-based networking, including resourcing support, and training for teachers and school leaders.

Many IPC member schools around the world are working together, through virtual learning platforms and video conferencing to share their local experiences linked to the specific units of IPC work and to strengthen the global perspective. The IPC has received praise from Ofsted, HMI, the University of Bath, Campaign for Learning and the QCA. The IPC also works in conjunction with many respected learning establishments including the Science Museum.

To visit an IPC school near you, or for a free sample of units, and for more information about the IPC go to www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com or call IPC at 020 7531 9696.

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