

# Primary School Curriculum: Case study of good practice

**Middleton Park Primary School  
City of Aberdeen Council**

For Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators

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## 1. Context

Middleton Park Primary School is located in the Bridge of Don area of Aberdeen. There are currently eight classes in the primary school. The school is an open plan building where each of six primary classes has a teaching area and a shared wet area. In addition, there is an independent annexe consisting of two further primary classrooms. A purpose built nursery was opened in August 2001.

In 2016, the school won the TES Creative School of the Year award for their creative curriculum model. Additionally, the school was inspected in March 2016, and received positive feedback including 'children benefit from a broad, rich and highly relevant curriculum, which takes full account of Curriculum for Excellence' and 'the outstanding use of digital technology to develop and share learning.' The school created a short film to share their curriculum with their families and community. <https://vimeo.com/245082481>



## 2. Curriculum rationale

In 2014, the school identified that the rationale for the curriculum was unclear, and needed to be developed further. Stakeholders felt there was a lack of understanding about the structure and organisation of the curriculum. It was agreed that development work was required, to create a shared understanding of how the curriculum should be organised and delivered. Clarity was needed in how the curriculum can offer coherence and relevance, yet provide flexibility which reflects the context of the school, and is firmly focused upon the needs of all children.

Based on the school's robust self-evaluation, focused areas for development were identified for session 2014/15. These included improvement to the curriculum. School staff began to work with stakeholders, to review the curriculum, in order for it to take full account of national and local guidance as well as the school's unique context.

Building upon the school's vision, values and aims, which were developed and agreed in consultation with all stakeholders, work took place to create the school's curriculum rationale. Core to this development was recognition of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence, and every child being entitled to a broad general education. Additionally, and as well as there being a continued focus upon literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, the rationale for the curriculum at Middleton Park was driven particularly by the use of digital technologies. This reflects the unique context of the school and the relentless pursuit within the school and local community to make effective and creative use of digital technologies. The school community has

a strong belief that this specific focus will help to equip children with the necessary skills to be successful in the future.

Feedback from all stakeholders shows that the vision, values, aims, and rationale are now understood clearly by the school community. They provide a strong foundation upon which to develop the school's curriculum and learning pathways. Parents feel more involved in the life and improvement work of the school. This is helping them to provide better support for their child's learning.

### 3. Courses and programmes

Staff at Middleton Park worked collegiately to develop a curriculum map that takes full account of equity of opportunity for all children. Rather than create detailed definitions of content or prescribed hours of study, the staff developed a map which sets out clearly what children should be able to do and the experiences and outcomes that contribute to their learning as they progress through the school. The curriculum is dynamic and constantly evolving to reflect relevant events and celebrations.

In developing learning pathways, staff began by looking at the four contexts of learning, as defined in Building the Curriculum 3. Being mindful of the revised vision, values and aims and curriculum rationale, staff decided which areas of the curriculum were to be explored as part of the ethos and life of the school and its community. They then agreed which areas were more suitable to be taught as discrete subjects. At Middleton Park this includes a particular focus on numeracy. This is because it was identified, through analysis of the school's attainment data, as an area for focused improvement.

Clear learning pathways have been developed for all areas of the curriculum whether they are taught within the ethos and life of the school, discretely or as part of an interdisciplinary theme. This ensures that there is coherence and progression across all areas of the curriculum as children move through the different stages of the school. Teachers and children work together, using the experiences and outcomes, to plan flexible and responsive learning pathways.

The school community identified the need for a focus on global citizenship within the curriculum. As such, the school has worked in partnership with a school in China where staff and children across both schools participated in collaborative activities including the study of Mandarin and also a 'Macbeth – from China to Aberdeen' project. This provided a genuine purpose for everyone to explore and learn about different cultures.

Staff at Middleton Park work together very closely and share their particular interests, skills and talents for the benefit of learners. They plan together across the Curriculum for Excellence levels and then regularly deliver aspects, for which they have particular talent or interest, to other classes across the school. Not only does this allow the school to utilise and value teachers' particular interests, skills and talents, it also considers the workload of teachers and ensures improved consistency and progression in learning and teaching across the school.

The development of the curriculum at Middleton Park has involved fostering effective working relationships with a number of partners. The headteacher recognises the valuable contribution that partners can bring. Staff work together to identify and plan rich learning experiences which provide a coherent package of learning based around the context of local needs and circumstances. For example, collaborative between staff and a church schools' worker has resulted in a pioneering programme to explore delivering 10 Bible Stories as contexts for learning across the curriculum. This has greatly enriched the curriculum at the school as well as

developing into a national resource developed by St Columbus Church and supported by a website called Ten Bible Stories. <https://tenbiblestories.org/>



Assessment is an integral part of planning learning and teaching, helping to provide an emerging picture of children's learning as they develop skills and knowledge across all curriculum areas.

#### 4. Interdisciplinary learning (IDL)

Staff at Middleton Park have developed IDL learning pathways for the first and second levels of Curriculum for Excellence. Experiences and outcomes are grouped across nine 'high-level' contexts which children visit within a three year cycle from primary two to primary seven. They visit each context twice, that is, once at first level and then again at second level. In considering the context of the school, health and wellbeing, numeracy and sustainability are all planned within these contexts. Children working at early level in the nursery class and primary one, have their own play-based learning approaches. However, they also participate in and contribute to the contexts, as relevant and meaningful to their learning experiences.

The focus of whole school contexts for learning is to provide children with a wide range of rich, stimulating learning experiences that offer breadth, relevance, challenge and depth to learning.

The nine whole-school contexts are The Human Body, Aberdeen -Past and Present, Structures, Making a Splash, A World of Imagination, World of Work, Conflicts, Habitats and Inventions and Discoveries. These are planned for using the experiences and outcomes, taking account of the principles of curriculum design. This approach provides children with enhanced levels of challenge and different contexts in which to apply their learning. As a result, staff report that this is deepening children's understanding and ensuring they are secure at a level before progressing to the next level.

In creating their curriculum map, staff have paid particular attention to cross cutting themes within these contexts. Staff plan together and embed Sustainability, Enterprise and Employability Skills in the whole school contexts. Sustainable development is a core element with key themes being visited as part of the whole-school, three year cycle. Themes such as water, litter, waste management and bio-diversity are planned for progressively.

Partners visit the school regularly and provide support and learning activities which are related directly to the whole-school contexts for learning. This provides scope for partners to offer their expertise and help plan appropriate learning and teaching experiences using the experiences and outcomes. It provides children with rich learning experiences whilst supporting teaching staff with the delivery of more specialised aspects of the curriculum.

For example, during the whole-school context, Aberdeen, Past and Present, P5 – 7 pupils worked with the Union Street Regeneration Scheme to learn about the area's historical importance and came up with concepts to conserve the historic buildings on the street and bring them back into

use. They met with experts including a local historian, an archivist, an architect and a visual merchandiser, taking their knowledge on board to design their businesses before presenting ideas to local councillors. The pupils created a film to share their learning, <https://vimeo.com/306805804>

Middleton Park has developed its own approach to outdoor learning. The school has access to an area of ground known as 'our wee green space'. Depending on the current whole-school context, the space changes to offer relevant and meaningful outdoor learning experiences related to the context. For example, it becomes a forest art gallery during 'A World of Imagination' and is used for den building when the context is 'Conflicts'. Outdoor learning is embedded in the curriculum and a core part of the school's learning pathways. Children talk confidently about the learning experiences and opportunities they have when they visit 'our wee green space'. The school has created a short film to share more about their outdoor learning. <https://vimeo.com/194348479>

## 5. Skills for learning, life and work

The curriculum at Middleton Park offers a significant number of opportunities to support children's development of skills.

Within the curriculum map, teachers outline the skills children will learn and share this with them. The skills come from a progression framework which ensures there are increasing levels of challenge as children progress through the school. The skills are linked to the experiences and outcomes, knowledge and understanding and assessment. They are planned, tracked and evaluated over a defined block of time.

Initially, the school had identified the 'World of Work' as one of its whole-school contexts. This provided a focus on employability, helping to develop children's awareness of the jobs market and skills they need for life and work. However, after an evaluation of the impact of this context, it was decided to embed a focus on Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) within all the contexts, where it was relevant. Every class undertakes a regular enterprise project where the children take responsibility for creating and implementing a business plan.

As part of the curriculum, the school has developed progressive opportunities for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) through their three year cycle of whole-school contexts. For example, through the whole-school context 'Wars', engineers visit the school and work with upper school classes to explore the aeroplanes used in World War Two. Children at first level study the tanks used. Every child in their last term of primary seven completes a science investigation which involves planning and conducting investigations to test a hypothesis. The local secondary school has reported that children's science skills are now better developed and children are more prepared for the science activities in the first year of secondary school.

The school's innovative use of digital technologies has created numerous opportunities for children to develop skills for learning, life and work. An initiative called 'Live Learnings' has been created to develop, enhance and share learning. Every week a film is made by children about learning activities they have participated in during the week. All classes watch the film on a Friday and provide feedback to the children featured in the film. The film is then uploaded and the link is shared on the school website with parents, the local community and the wider world. The films span all curricular areas and may be about a whole-school learning activity or an event from a particular class, stage or group in the school. Additionally, the films may focus upon particular events that are happening in the school at a given time of year. For example, films are made to welcome and support new primary one children and help new staff settle into the school. All children participate regularly in the films and in the film-making activities. As well as the technical

skills used to make the 'Live Learnings' films, the skills of communication, problem solving and leadership are applied. The school has over 400 films which have had 160,000 hits online and have been watched in over 140 countries. The films make up a bank of evidence about the learning experiences of children. This is now being used by older children to teach younger children in the school. The films are also used as one of several ways of reporting to parents about their child's progress. The Live Learning films can be viewed on <https://middletonpark.aberdeen.sch.uk/category/live-learning/>

## 6. Next steps

Staff at Middleton Park have embraced the opportunity provided by Curriculum for Excellence to create a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum which enables children to develop the four capacities at every stage of their learning. This has resulted in a bespoke curriculum structure which reflects local needs and circumstances. Opportunities for sharing learning experiences and to provide and receive feedback, have also been designed as an integral part of the school's revised curricular offer.

Moving forward, the school recognises the need to continue to review and refresh its curriculum regularly to ensure it is focused firmly on the needs of every child. This will include an on-going focus on providing high-quality, relevant and motivating learning experiences which provide space for imaginative teaching. Staff will continue to consider any new local and national guidance and reflect on how it can be applied to improve their curriculum framework.

## 7. Conclusion

Staff at Middleton Park have a shared understanding of the need for a curriculum map that offers coherence and progression. They are passionate about seeking out new opportunities that allow them to continue to be creative and innovative in their approach to curriculum design and implementation. Teachers note that children are more engaged and motivated by the learning experiences planned as part of revised approaches to the curriculum.

The headteacher reports that children's progress and attainment have improved across the curriculum as a result of the aspirational way teachers are using the experiences and outcomes. This is evidenced through the school's robust self-evaluation, and through discussions between staff and the headteacher. The headteacher and staff have created a revised curricular model where pathways are designed to be more engaging and to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of all learners.

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