

A Guide to Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL)

As a school, we aim to develop learners who can effect positive change in our world. We believe that curiosity lies at the root of all positive change and so our curriculum should actively promote it.

One of our school's aims is:

'To develop lively and enquiring minds through an inquiry-based curriculum'.

This aim was agreed by our stakeholders when the school was founded in 2007. It is as important to our school now as it was then.

While there are some areas of our curriculum, like Phonics, where robust research has demonstrated that other teaching approaches are more effective, we have found that the inquiry-based learning approach can be used to create **depth, memorability** and a **love of learning** across many areas of our curriculum.

At it's very essence, IBL is the approach that people typically use in 'the real world' when new learning is involved: whether they're learning to drive, buying a house or getting to grips with a new job.

If this is people's default approach to learning, shouldn't it be taught and used in schools?

What does IBL mean at Recreation Road?

A clear intention, but a flexible path

The teaching team has a clear idea of the **learning destination** and the overall **direction of travel** that the learning will take. However, the children help determine the **route taken** to reach that destination. Children feel that they have ownership over their learning as a result; this creates **agency** and **investment**.

Carefully chosen stimuli

The teaching team employ carefully chosen **stimuli** – i.e. adults in role, books, non-fiction texts, objects, artefacts, video clips, artworks, musical clips – to ‘hook’ the children into the learning theme and set the **direction of travel**. Where an inquiry stimulus doesn’t attract the children, it’s up to the teacher to find a stimulus that does!

A process of investigation

There’s always some exploration and / or experimentation involved. In more sophisticated inquiries, this can involve developing a plan of action and a method for recording what’s been found out.

Investigations don’t always go as planned, though. Things go wrong, there are dead-ends and red herrings – but this is how the learning process works. Through working in an inquiry mode, children **build resilience** to challenges and mistakes by understanding that this is all part of the learning process.

Points of View

In more sustained inquiries, teaching teams ensure that the children investigate widely, in order to consider and evaluate points of view that could be useful to reach the learning destination. Considering different points of view promotes **empathy, criticality** and a **richer, more considered understanding** of what’s being learnt.

Purpose

People’s learning in the ‘real world’ is driven by motive – a **compelling reason** for doing it; perhaps a problem to be solved or a goal to be achieved. In schools, children can lack motivation to learn something, because they see no compelling reason for it.

Good inquiry-based learning activities always have a purpose; for example:

- Tackling a profound question;
- Developing a product;
- Finding a solution to a problem;
- Weighing up different options to make a recommendation.

Putting learning to good use

Sustained inquiries usually end with the learning being **applied, demonstrated or presented** in some way. Examples of this include:

- an art exhibition;
- a handbook;
- a set of instructions;
- a play;
- a celebratory event;
- a product launch;
- choosing the school’s ‘Charity of the Year’.

This motivates the learning process but also creates a **sense of audience**. Where there's an authentic audience, children have to think carefully about someone else's needs and be selective about what they include or leave out of their final product as a consequence. This involves high-level thought and makes the learning process richer and more challenging.

Individual lines of inquiry – sometimes better than what the teacher had planned!

When children embark upon an **inquiry journey** together, they inevitably create their own individual lines of inquiry along the way - things that they're inspired to find out for themselves. The teaching team encourages them to pursue these lines of inquiry. This encourages their **intrinsic motivation**.

Sometimes, a child's **line of inquiry** provides a better route to the **learning destination** than what the teacher had originally planned. When this happens, the teacher embraces this opportunity and changes their plans accordingly.

A cyclical process

IBL is a process which never really has to end, because the learning from one inquiry can become the impetus for the next!

Why Inquiry with an 'I' and not an 'E'?

When we use 'inquiry' in our documentation and not 'enquiry', we do so deliberately. In the UK, the word 'inquiry' (with an 'i') is generally used to define a sustained process of investigation, rather than a one-off question or query (enquiry with an 'e'). We very much see inquiry as a process and not a one-off event. We hope the table below helps to further distinguish between inquiry and enquiry.

Inquiry			vs	Enquiry		
Investigating				Enabling		
Interesting	Inspiring	In depth		Entry-level questions	Pre-determined answers	'Googleable'
Questions that are worth asking				Questions that are already answered		
<i>What do I need to know, do, learn, practice, develop, create, connect or test to be able achieve the goal?</i>				<i>What can I do with this information now I've found it?</i>		

<https://sjtylr.net/2018/01/30/inquiry-vs-enquiry/>

IBL in action

Inquiry happens across our school, at many times and in many different ways. It looks different in different year groups, based on the needs of the children and the curriculum. However, there are 5 common elements to Inquiry at Recreation Road.

Being Curious

The teacher launches an inquiry by choosing stimuli which provoke the children to think, ask questions and share their prior learning.

The inquiry has a purpose in mind; this is a purpose that the children understand and that matters to them.

Exploring

This may involve many different processes; for example, creating a plan, making predictions, finding things out, trying out different ideas, trial and error, carrying out experiments and recording what's been found out.

Making Sense & Meaning

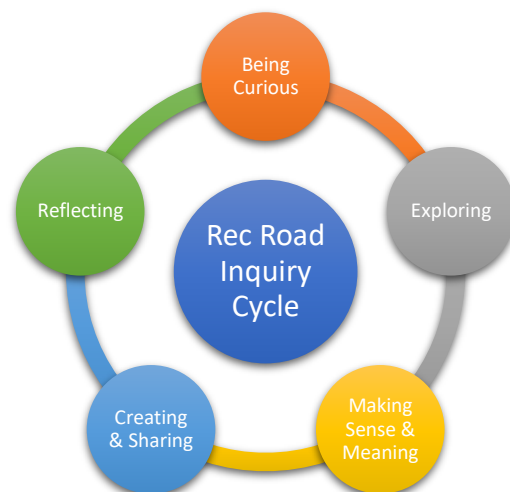
This involves gathering together, organising and interpreting what was found out in the previous steps of the process, with the end goal in mind.

Creating and Sharing

This involves thinking about the intended outcome and the needs of any particular audience, then putting all of the previous learning into action to create something of value.

Reflecting

This step is the one that younger children can find most difficult, but is really important. It's the point in the inquiry process where the focus is on what has been learnt, what went well, what could have been even better, and....



what could we investigate next?!