



Widening the Curriculum with PBL

Valley Gardens Middle School

Project Summary

PBL was introduced in 2019 in response to pupil voice and a drive to ensure the curriculum catered for the needs of the pupils, above and beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum.

In each Year there are 3 units, which students cover as part of a 6 session carousel. The PBL lessons employ a unique pedagogy within School, with the focus on independent, research based enquiry around topics identified in Pupil Voice responses.

Despite the different approaches employed in PBL sessions, there is rigour in planning through the application of the underlying learning objectives that underpin each unit.

The medium term planning will focus on the identification of learning and skills development that takes place within each unit and which is made explicit to the children during the course and also reviewed by the children at the end of the unit, through the self evaluation that takes place.

At the end of each unit, children upload their project outcome, along with their evaluation which is set as a final Google Classroom homework, then completed and uploaded by the child onto their project Smart Portfolio.

Learning Objectives

- Students will work within the parameters of each unit to complete a project either individually or collaboratively applying a range of skills to meet the agreed objectives and outcomes.
- Students will obtain, critically select and use information from a range of sources.
- Students will solve problems, take decisions critically and, where applicable, collaboratively achieve outcomes.
- Students will evaluate both the outcome and the process in relation to their own learning and skills development and application.

Skills development

These projects develop a range of social and cultural capital skills, as they draw on the local area and incorporate local history and authentic links with local businesses and industry. The projects also develop transferable skills such as leadership, teamwork, problem solving and resilience. Students work in their year groups with a small team of teachers on cross-curricular projects with a “big question” to inspire them and engage them in a research process. They are encouraged to work as a team but also develop independent learning skills. At the end of the year, they showcase to their peers, and products are displayed for students and school visitors to see.

Project Based Learning Skills Bank

Skill	Explanation
Communication	This is written and spoken communication. It's about being clear and concise and focused on the task. As well as making your point, you need to listen to what others in your group say.
Teamwork	You need to show that you can work as part of a team, but also that you can delegate tasks and take the lead. You need to make sure everyone feels included and listened to so you can achieve the end goal.
Negotiation	Can you explain what it is you think you should be aiming at and what you would like to achieve in the end? Can you understand what others in the group are saying and work your way through to a compromise that everyone is happy with?
Problem solving	You need to show that you can take a practical and logical approach to solving problems and resolving issues that come up in your project.
Leadership	At times you might need to take a stronger role in your team and become a leader. Can you motivate your team and clearly set out what you need to do and how you are going to do it? Can you set a good example and work to deadlines?
Organisation	Can you show an ability to prioritise, work efficiently and productively and manage your time well? Can you encourage others in your group to do the same?
Perseverance or resilience	Project based learning can present many challenges. Show that you are the kind of person that can find a way through a problem and stick at it. DO you think of the final end result and carry on through the hard parts to achieve that?
Analytical skills	Can you look at a problem or task and understand what you need to do to achieve? Can you break the task down into smaller parts?
Enterprise	Can you suggest ways to improve the outcome and come up with new ideas?
Working under pressure	When the going gets tough and deadlines are looming, can you continue to get the project finished? Do you rise to the challenge, or drop out?
IT skills	Are you able to demonstrate your IT skills in the project? This of examples where you have done this, either at school or at home when researching or working on the project. Actively search out opportunities to show these skills.
Research skills	Can you explain how you researched your ideas for the project? Did you look online, consult other people or do any wider reading around your topic?

Gatsby Benchmarks

- BM4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
- BM 5: Encounters with employers and employees
- BM 6: Experience of workplaces
- BM7: Encounters with further and higher education



Project activity plan

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8
Poster/documentary	Plastic positive (art installation) based on environmental issues and coasts. Finance Y6 Survival skills/forest school	Monologue	Documentary
Play		Conspiracy theories and fake news	Drama script
Wellbeing booklet		Journalism	Rap

- Teachers work in Year Group teams – almost all teachers in school are involved in delivery of PBL.
- Students rotate around three different projects, one per term. These projects are facilitated by the same teacher each time so the teacher can adapt and revise the project according to the resources available, reflection and review with colleagues, and pupil feedback.

Launch event/ Final product and showcase

Launch event: Each project has an individual launch event in the first lesson of each term.

Showcase: Products from each project are showcased initially to the project groups, then to the wider year group and finally displayed to the wider school community.

Project feedback

“The skills our kids are displaying are amazing”. (Teacher at VGMS)

“We asked [the teachers] to start being reflective and what worked, what didn't work, what we could change, and the idea was by the time we got to the end of this year, we really would have it fine tuned because the projects would have run two or three times.” (PBL Coordinator)

“It's really important to have the whole staff on board. It's a completely different way of teaching and as long as you've got everybody working together, it's really good fun as well.” (PBL Coordinator)

“You've got to embrace the failures as well as the successes and I think that's what we've done as we've gone through.” (PBL Coordinator)

How PBL is communicated to parents on the VGMS website:

Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning has been introduced this year to widen and extend the curriculum; to inspire curious learners, foster a collaborative based approach to interdisciplinary learning, to develop independent learning and to expand and develop pupil experience.

In week 2 of our timetable, all pupils will be engaged in PBL activities around school. Each year group has a different focus and within each year a carousel of 3 termly activities operates, so pupils participate in all 3 projects throughout the year.

Pupils will be taught the necessary content and given information needed, but will also have opportunities to work autonomously, developing their projects within their groups and utilising their skills, whilst developing and learning new ones such as problem solving, decision making, communication skills, research skills, ICT and time resource and time management.

The outcome will be different in each project, some producing a written piece, whilst others produce a documentary or a piece of drama. These will be showcased throughout the year on Twitter, in the Newsletter, on the Website and in live performances.

Examples for Year 7:

Drama – Voice for the Voiceless

In this Project Based Learning module, we develop performance and drama skills with an aim to creating and performing a short monologue about a group that cannot easily speak up for itself. Pupils will study and perform existing monologues, learning key drama techniques such as inflection, accent, intonation and phrasing; pace, pause and timing; projection, pitch and emotional range. They will study and research groups as varied as human refugees, animals on the verge of extinction or even forests facing destruction – constructing a monologue to explore the issues and performing it. Through this module pupils will learn empathy for others and more awareness of the world around them, as well as practical performance skills which will aid them in all aspects of their life.

Conspiracy theories

Pupils will develop their critical thinking skills whilst analysing things they might see and hear around them: conspiracy theories, news articles, fake news, advertisements and more. During this module, pupils will use a wide variety of skills: analysing graphs and data, manipulating information, writing to persuade and presentation. Pupils will create their own misleading article, advertisement, news story or presentation using the skills they have acquired.

Journalism

In this session small groups of pupils will research and produce journalistic reports on areas of interest to them. Pupils will be investigating types of journalistic articles and styles of writing and presentations found in them, discussing features of newspapers and magazines and considering the type of articles needed to make their product interesting and relevant to their target audience. Each group will work collaboratively to produce a single issue newspaper/magazine constructed from the articles produced by their group.

Useful information

For more information on PBL at Valley Gardens Middle School, see their website valleygardensmiddle.org/curriculum-areas/projectbasedlearning

Find further ideas on how to integrate PBL into both specific curriculum areas and with a wider cross-curricular focus at research.ncl.ac.uk/pblgoestouniversity