

RURAL DIMENSION UPDATE

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welcome

As part of the continuing drive to make all aspiring and existing specialist schools aware of the potential of the rural dimension, this update will be distributed to all schools affiliated to the Specialist Schools Trust.

This edition focuses on:

- An update on specialist schools with a rural dimension;
- Details of the first national rural dimension conference to be held at Chatsworth House in March 2006;
- An innovative approach in Norfolk to develop the rural dimension across specialist schools in the region; and
- The opportunity for high performing specialist schools re-designating in 2005 to opt for the rural dimension within a vocational second specialism.

Mike Goodfellow

Plans for inaugural rural dimension conference

Exciting plans are developing for the inaugural rural dimension conference to be held at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire on 20-21 March 2006. Courtesy of the Duke of Devonshire, this conference will bring together all those interested in the various elements of the rural dimension within specialist schools. Representatives of the many stakeholders currently working with, and supporting, these schools will also attend the event. The conference will be for all affiliated schools and not just those formally designated as having a rural dimension within or across their subject specialism(s). The intention will be to share current practice across schools of all subject specialisms and to continue to develop an extensive network of specialist schools across the country with an interest in the rural dimension.



The conference will be organised in partnership with The Devonshire Educational Trust. The Trust aims to become one of the leading charities providing education about the economic, environmental, social and cultural contributions that landed country estates make to our society.

For regularly updated information, please go to: www.specialistschools.org.uk and click on the schoolsnetwork website.



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Specialist schools with a rural dimension

The schools below now have a rural dimension within their specialism(s).

School name	LEA	Specialism	Rural dimension through
Oathall Community College	West Sussex	science/arts	agriculture/horticulture
Worle Community School	North Somerset	arts	science
Wolsingham School & Community College	Durham	arts	leisure/travel & tourism
Cranbourne Business & Enterprise College	Hampshire	B&E	geography
Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School	Coventry	languages	rural & agricultural science at GCSE and BTEC in animal care
Saltash Community School	Cornwall	mathematics & computing/science	agricultural science as an enhancement
Neston High School	Cheshire	arts/science	environmental science
Stradbroke Business & Enterprise College	Suffolk	B&E	geography
New Mills School	Derbyshire	B&E	geography
Fakenham High School	Norfolk	technology	land management within science

Wolsingham, Stradbroke and New Mills were all successfully designated as specialist schools during 2005. Worle and Fakenham included the rural dimension within their proposals for re-designation from 2004.

Nigel Collins (King Charles I School, Kidderminster) is continuing as a rural dimension lead practitioner during 2005-6. He will be joined by John Spalton (Kirk Hallam Technology College, Ilkeston). Additional support will come from Andrew Shaw, the former headteacher of Kirk Hallam TC and former chair of the Trust's rural dimension expert panel. Together they are looking to map specialist schools' current, and potential,

interest in aspects of the rural dimension across the east and west midlands region. It is clear that, while the number of schools formally recognised as having a rural dimension within their subject specialism(s) continues to grow, there are, in addition, many specialist schools with relevant curriculum provision who are interested in sharing best practice across the network of specialist schools.

The lead practitioners will be piloting a questionnaire across these regions. It is hoped this will, in due course, be used across the country to develop

a full network of specialist schools with an interest in the rural dimension. It is also hoped that during the next year we can establish a formal recognition scheme for all schools in the rural dimension network, especially those with a formal rural dimension as part of their subject specialism(s).



Developing a rural dimension network

The spring edition of this update reported on discussions to set up a specialist schools rural dimension network in Norfolk. A briefing paper has now been prepared and discussed by key stakeholders including:

- the west Norfolk area Pathfinder group;
- the North Norfolk Federation of schools;
- the Norfolk LSC;
- the East of England Development Agency;
- Easton College.

The purpose of this paper was to explore a rationale for formalising some well-established links between Easton College and a number of Norfolk secondary schools. Schools wishing to become full members of such a network would agree to apply for 'rural dimension' specialist school status as a condition of membership.

Easton College already has long standing and valued links with many Norfolk schools. A strong foundation has been laid with, for example, over 2,000 primary school pupils who made school visits to the college farm and countryside facilities during the last academic year.

At present, over 30 secondary schools and one special school are formally linked to the college through key stage 4 increased flexibility (IF) programmes, often involving quite small numbers of students. Except in the case of the North Norfolk Federation of schools, arrangements for each school's programme are made individually with the college. One member of staff at Easton is responsible for these links and the pressure of work continues to grow.

Though the IF programme is the main point of contact with Easton, the college has other

resources and expertise which could be used more widely to support and enrich the key stage 4 curriculum and a number of post-16 subject areas. The college would like to develop a framework that allows it to develop a planned and coherent management of the demands from schools and develop and extend the contributions it makes to other areas of the curriculum.

A move towards a more structured partnership framework for these existing links might bring advantages to the college, schools and the region.

For the college these might include:

- Greater efficiency in managing an already extensive schools link programme, by setting up one planning/liaison body to replace the many individual arrangements which take place at present;
- Better planning should lead to a more cost-effective course delivery and a wider range of course options on offer;
- A better understanding of the issues affecting/constraining rural high schools;
- Enhanced progression to higher level courses.

For the school these might include:

- More coherent planning with the college, with a greater opportunity to influence future developments, and share development of present links;
- Wider range of delivery options giving enhanced learning options for learners;
- Opportunities for regular, sharing of perceptions with all network colleagues of the issues affecting or constraining rural high schools.

For both school and college these might include more effective responses to the provision of:

- Work-related learning; with the capability to provide work-related learning within Easton College's three main commercial operations:
 - the college farm, including the commercial dairy herd;
 - the leisure and fitness centre;
 - the 80 room residential accommodation.
- Curriculum delivery and enrichment: using the working countryside to provide examples and projects in business practice, use of IT, leisure and tourism topics, art and craft areas and throughout the science and design & technology curricula;
- Curriculum extension: providing a UK context for comparative work on global issues such as pesticide usage, GM crops, cattle grazing, soil erosion, woodland management, and sustainable farming;
- Curriculum progression to higher education: through taster experience of the degree and HND level programmes offered in partnership with Anglia Polytechnic University;
- Practical curriculum: with conservation and wildlife projects, on and off-site, in countryside or urban settings;
- Countryside experience: with both outdoor activities, and indoor facilities for contact with small animals such as lambs, pigs, and poultry and assignments associated with small animal care.

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For Norfolk and the east of England these might include direct and active contributions to priority agendas concerned with:

- The widening of choice for those learning in rural settings, so reducing social exclusion;
- The enhancement of skills and understanding applicable within a diverse range of businesses;
- Increasing the level of understanding of issues concerned with managing the environment, so enabling better informed choices;
- Improving the way the college contributes to 14-19 education, on a structural and geographical basis and developing the range of ways in which learning is delivered;
- Ensuring parity of choice is available to young people within each of the five sub-areas identified within the Norfolk Strategic Plan.

Opportunity for re-designating schools in 2005

DfES guidance for schools seeking re-designation in 2005 (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools) includes specific information for high-performing specialist schools re-designating in 2005. For 2005 there are four opportunities open to high-performing specialist schools. These are opportunities to:

- Take up a second curriculum specialism;
- Take up a vocational second specialism;
- Establish the school as a Training School; and
- Raise achievement with partner schools through targeted activities to address under-performance.

The guidance states that the DfES 'will be expecting all schools to play an increasing role in providing vocational education, but expect an enhanced role for high-performing specialist schools taking a second vocational option in developing provision itself as well as drawing on, or buying in, expertise from local colleges, training providers and employers to build on and expand the existing vocational provision in the area'.

Within this context the guidance also states that schools may wish to consider a rural dimension to their choice. The aim is to have 200 vocational second specialists by 2008 and an additional £30k per annum will be available for schools taking up the vocational second specialism to reflect some of the additional costs that they may incur as a result of choosing this option.

Events - at a glance

28 September 2005
Headteacher Specialist Steering Group Meeting
 Oathall Community College

10 November 2005
Expert Panel Meeting
 The Royal Society, London

23-25 November 2005
13th National Conference for Affiliated Schools
 ICC, Birmingham

23 November 2005
Rural Schools Network Forum (Headteacher Steering Group)
 ICC, Birmingham

20-21 March 2005
Inaugural Rural Dimension Conference
 Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

Further details for this term's events can be found at: www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk.
 Click on events.

e-forums - have you joined yet?

Make sure you sign up for one of the free discussion forums now up and running on the schoolsnetwork website. To sign up, go to: <http://www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk/main.asp?page=266>

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