A Curriculum for Excellence: Overview of Recent Research-Based Literature for the Curriculum Review Donald Christie and Brian Boyd, University of Strathclyde

A Curriculum for Excellence identifies three factors upon which the opportunity for children to develop the four capacities will depend - the environment for learning, the choice of teaching and learning approaches and the ways in which learning is organised. In their review of the research-based literature the authors identified a number of common themes across the different 'areas' of the curriculum and grouped them under the three factors. The themes are listed below together with some key questions.

The environment for learning

Respect - to what extent is the integrity of individuals and groups safeguarded and enhanced by the learning experiences provided?

Pupil voice - to what extent are pupils consulted and encouraged to express their views about, and hence shape, their own learning experiences through constructive dialogue?

Experiential learning - how can we create an environment in which students are allowed to interact in real life contexts, to construct individual meaning and to engage in complex actions that reflect life outside school?

Relevance - can learners relate the purposes of the learning to their own needs and interests arising out of their individual experiences of life – in school, in their families and in their communities?

Clear goals and feedback - to what extent can pupils share in setting targets for their own learning and how is attainment and progress tracked and effectively communicated to learners in ways that can enhance their learning processes?

The choice of teaching and learning approaches

Active engagement - how can learning activities be designed in order to provide a stimulating context for the active engagement of individual learners?

Meaningfulness - how can we ensure that the learner can make the necessary connections with new information, and make sense of the learning experiences provided?

Motivation - is there a willingness on the part of pupils to engage with the process of learning? How can we make the learning challenging, enjoyable and/or seen as worthy of effort?

Metacognition - how can pupils be encouraged to be reflective – to 'learn how to learn'?

ICT and learning - how can we use ICT tools to enhance and transform pupils' learning?

The ways in which learning is organised

Cooperative and collaborative learning - what opportunities are provided for peer mediated learning? How can a collaborative learning community be constructed in order to reap the advantages of a classroom culture within which teachers and students support one another in pursuit of clearly articulated goals?

Problem-based learning - how can we provide pupils with the challenge of real problems to solve as individuals or in collaborative groups, thus fostering the motivation which comes from a genuine 'need to know' the answer?

Grouping - how can the needs of individual pupils best be met by differentiation and organisational strategies that do not themselves create negative consequences?