

## Critical Skills

November 2001



**SCHOOL** → **Dalbeattie Primary School, Dumfries & Galloway**

**FOCUS** → **Brain Based Learning in Practice**

*What initiatives are in place to encourage active pupil participation in decision-making and in the promotion of a more positive approach to discipline?*

The **Critical Skills Programme** places a heavy emphasis on practical tools for classroom use and promotes the involvement of practising teachers in training other teachers. 'Critical Skills' was initiated in New Hampshire in 1981 by a high school teacher and began as a partnership between education and the business community. Both groups looked at the skills and dispositions needed by young people on leaving school and entering the workplace. Both arrived at a consensus on skills such as problem solving, decision making, communication and organisation and on fundamental dispositions such as ownership of life-long learning, self-direction, collaboration and community membership. A group of practising classroom teachers then developed a course which would translate the vision of achieving these skills and dispositions into

effective practice.

Mrs Kirkland used the approach once a week to begin with, creating trust and respect in the class through circle time before offering a series of challenges to pupils. The programme sets pupils challenges in small groups, allowing them to discuss and set standards for behaviour and work. This has been found to enable them to take far more control over their learning and to lead to more time on task.

*How are these initiatives being monitored and evaluated?*

School Council Meetings and representatives from each class monitor the 'healthy tuck shop' organised by a teacher, eight pupils and four parents. All discipline referrals and test results are being monitored by the Head Teacher.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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***What are some of the biggest challenges faced by teachers and young people in implementing these initiatives?***

Finding time to organise extra duties

***What worked well?***

- Maths visual aids, designed and produced by two pupils, Sheona Lindsay and Emma Inglis
- Favourite Fiction – P4/5 children recommending books they have enjoyed, designing posters and book reviews to put in the school library
- Parents are a great support. They are willing to supervise to ensure safety and hygiene when handling food.
- All these initiative have been met with enthusiasm from pupils. Children are eager to give up their free time to work on these.

***Future plans?***

- To continue in our drive to provide a constant supply of fresh water for each child. We are writing to companies to help sponsor this.
- To become aware of other areas where pupils can contribute

***Any materials the school is willing to share?***

Maths visual aids designed by Sheona Lindsay

***References***

Henderson, David 'US lesson plan lifts primaries.'  
TES, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2001

Weatherley, Colin 'Leading the Learning School.'  
Net Press, 2000