

### Curriculum conversations

At the end of April, our curriculum groups started a cycle of joint planning sessions facilitated by subject ambassadors. This was partly in response to staff feedback that they would like more time with colleagues, but also because it is a great place for teachers to have curriculum focussed conversations. In small settings such as ours it is quite common to have just one staff member per subject specialist, meaning fewer opportunities for discussion with colleagues from the same curriculum areas.

In larger staff teams, colleagues are able to bounce new ideas around or share improvement dilemmas with fellow specialists. If these conversations are focussed on curriculum content and pedagogy, it enables us to debate the different ways we may approach certain concepts or ideas, and is a great vehicle for quality improvement and continuous professional development. In the Japanese education system this happens on a big scale where subject teachers gather in large numbers to plan collaboratively, focussing on particular concepts or ideas. This can result in new approaches to teaching staple curriculum content that has gone unchallenged and unchanged for some time.

Our joint planning sessions are therefore aimed at giving staff the opportunity to interact in this way, helping develop effective plans for teaching specific topics targeted to certain students.

During the sessions our subject teachers have the opportunity to bring examples of students they are currently teaching, so that the group can collaboratively support design of a learning sequence. That way, they are doing their actual planning but also benefitting from focused professional discussion. I am convinced that the more we do this, the more impact we will have on young people attending our schools which is what we ultimately strive for.

For any further reading, OFSTED and the Dfe have made available some helpful materials that I thought would interest staff. These subject webinars and reviews give helpful insights into the specific way different subject curricula are arranged, along with insights from inspection evidence around the country. The links for these are provided below.

Best of luck in your groups, and I look forward to hearing about them in the near future.

Ed Hall  
Head of Education, Cygnets Schools

1. Webinars and subject curriculum insights

<https://www.youtube.com/@Ofstednews>

2. Curriculum research reviews

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/curriculum-research-reviews#subject-reports>



**Phoenix School (Sheffield), Excel & Exceed Centre (Bury) and The Summit (Coventry) are DfE registered special schools, providing education for young people admitted to their co-located hospital services.**

**Our schools are regulated by OFSTED and were all rated GOOD at their last inspection.**

[Excel & Exceed Centre](#)

[Phoenix School](#)

[Summit School](#)



### Staff News and Recognition

Welcome to:

**Brianne Gowland** who has joined Summit School as a Teaching Assistant

Summit completed a **Case Study for one of the YP who has recently been discharged**. This shows the YP's journey and support provided which has been [published](#) on both the Hospital and School websites.

Well done to:

**David Best**— Maths Teacher at Phoenix School, who received a Character of Care Award for "Fun"

**Excel and Exceed** — Gaby was on a SaLT student placement and visited Excel & Exceed as part of this —here's what she had to say after...

"I spent the day shadowing on Tuesday and I was really impressed! All the staff were very welcoming and included me in all activities. I was able to ask staff questions about how the school runs in general but also about different young people and they were all more than happy to explain / let me have a look at the young people's work which was really informative from a SaLT perspective. Shaneela also provided me with dyslexia assessments and resource examples which I was really grateful for as it will aid my presentation for uni. All the staff had a good understanding and knowledge of SaLT and how our roles can support each other, which I've found to be rare in other professionals!"



# SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

## What we've been up to this month.....

One of the young people at Excel & Exceed wrote a poem for the **Young Writers competition** in the autumn term. The competition asked students to use the words "I Am..." to write a piece of literature that would celebrate 'our shared humanity'.

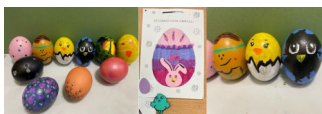
The "This is Me" book was published in the spring term and featured a vast array of works-including one young person from Excel and Exceed! Their poem, which details the trials of their mental health journey, was written in an option session and was later incorporated into the Friday music session in order to create a song.

This piece of work had many possibilities and the young person should be very proud of their achievement.

**I Am**

I am...  
I am still searching.  
I am definitely sure that I don't worry about my own issues.  
I am the one dealing with all of the problems created by who, me?  
I am scared as I don't know if it's ever possible for me to cope with all of this trauma.  
I am sure that it truly can end up being something that I know I can no longer handle.  
I am unsure about the help I receive, as I truly believe it is what I deserve.  
I am confused why, why it is me they want to help.  
I am certain I don't need it.  
I am nervous.  
I am still searching...  
I am confused about all these questions I ask.  
I am pathetically confused.  
I am searching but it doesn't seem to end.  
I am scared of what this truly will lead to, like I can't stop searching.  
I am devastated with what journey I've created.  
I am confused, will this ever end?  
I am asking questions that I don't think can ever be resolved.

Excel And Exceed Centre, Bury



To celebrate Easter this year, the Phoenix School hosted an **egg decorating competition** among its students. Students could choose to decorate a hardboiled egg or a paper template (or even both) however they wished. Our winners were Paige on Pegasus ward with her mixed-media entry, and Isaac on Unicorn ward with his hardboiled spectacular – both students received a chocolate Easter egg a prize.



The Phoenix School is constantly **striving to be as inclusive as possible, wishing to ensure that the school environment and culture allows young people of all backgrounds to reach their full potential.** In light of this, our April training day centred around training on understanding the barriers that some minority groups may face in order to better support the needs of our diverse range of students. We completed some fantastic training provided by Jayne Rowlands from our sister school Excel and Exceed in Bury. This focused on intersectionality and how various aspects of a person's background - such as race, disability, gender, sexuality and social class – might enable them to have a 'head start' in life compared to others. We explored privilege, and how this was lessened by each additional marginalised characteristic. Intersectionality was beautifully demonstrated by having staff take part in a race where the starting line varied depending on the characteristics of the participant. Staff were each handed a card at random outlining different characteristics and had to move backwards each time they identified with a marginalised group - for example someone with the "white, middle-class, able bodied, straight, cisgender male" card started much closer to the finish line than a "black, working class, disabled, gay, female". The message ultimately was that everyone is still in the race, but some groups have to work harder to get to the finish line.

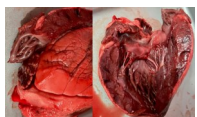
This led nicely on to training by Ant from Always an Alternative, who came in to discuss educational barriers to BAME students. Using his personal experiences of life and education, Ant was able to articulate how school might have been a different experience for him had he been exposed to more examples of positive role models that "looked like him". He explained how vital it is for us to have representation of successful people that all of our students can identify with, explaining that he had always assumed that university education was out of his grasp, as none of his family or close social groups had completed higher education. Ant also showed the statistics of school performance by ethnicity, but explained that these don't give a clear view of other aspects of a student's life such as household income or family makeup.



With the **Manchester Marathon being held on April 14<sup>th</sup> and the London Marathon** the following Sunday, Cygnet Bury held their own celebrations on the 19<sup>th</sup> April.



Throughout the day, both students and staff from the wider hospital contributed by walking and running to complete the target of 42.2km (26.3 miles) on the communal area of treetops. When the final numbers were added up, a grand total of 85.92km (53.38 miles) were covered collectively-equal to two marathons, or more commonly referred to as an 'ultramarathon.' Into the following week, Excel and Exceed will continue to record the miles covered on leave, in the gym or on walks in our day-to-day lives in order to continue to add to our growing total!



Our YP at Phoenix School enjoyed taking part in the **dissection of a lamb's heart.** They were able to feel how thick the walls of the ventricles were and so distinguish the right ventricle from the left ventricle – they understood the left ventricle had to have a much thicker muscular wall because its contraction forces blood all the way round the body. They also were able to see the valves inside the heart and feel how smooth the inside of the heart was, which allows the blood to flow easily as friction is reduced. And they could identify the coronary arteries! Our pumping heart model was a great success too.