

HOW TO BE A HUMANITIES SPECIALIST STATUS SCHOOL

Things to know and things to think about

Notes to accompany the presentation slides

Slide 1

This presentation is designed to stimulate discussion of, and support planning for attaining Humanities Specialist School status. Each slide has a key question to prompt discussion or a task, followed by advice and information that may be of use to those considering or making a specialist application. For specific information about deadlines and paperwork associated with objective setting and bid writing refer to your SMT (senior management team) and SSAT, as the procedures and methods of application are subject to change. However, application for specialist status usually involves writing a bid that includes objectives for the specialist subjects. Departments should be involved in deciding these objectives and the bid should involve consultation, although often it is better if a single SMT person then writes the final bid. Check with your SMT and the latest SSAT guidance. This presentation focuses on the thinking that might happen in a geography department in preparation for an application for Humanities Specialist School status, and what geographers in a Humanities Specialist School might do. Making a bid usually involves setting objectives and targets for the departments involved.

Slide 2

Often a geography department may have had little choice in its involvement in a specialist school application, the decision may well be made and imposed on you by the SMT and you may welcome it, or not. It still might be useful to consider the reasons for taking on the specialism, the responsibilities and opportunities also. This slide is intended to aid discussion of the specific situation in your school.

Slide 3

Becoming a specialist school allows schools and departments to review and clarify their vision and ethos. Being Specialist will involve leading change in your subject and school and beyond so it might be timely to reconsider the underlying rationale, aims and values of your department and the needs of your staff and pupils. Writing a specialist bid is a great opportunity for geographers to review what they do and what they are about, especially when the curriculum at all Key Stages is changing. A shared and collaborative vision informs your endeavours as a department and as geography teachers. Having a shared vision can help in setting realistic and appropriate objectives when making a bid for specialist status, objectives that match the characteristics and needs of your pupils and their local and personal geographies.

Schools with geography in their specialism should develop an ethos of keen interest in global, regional and local issues and in how people and environments are interdependent. Having a Humanities Specialism should help our pupils make sense of their world, to appreciate the implications of long-term changes in the way we live and differences between value systems.

A vision for the department was discussed and the key ideas are below. This vision is intended to inform our endeavours as a department and as geography teachers. An example of a brief vision statement is given below

The Geographers at King Edward VI Five Ways School aim to:

Be the best Geography Department in the UK

Build an extraordinary learning community that goes beyond the curriculum.

Foster a spirit of enquiry and continual improvement.

Draw on the rich variety of experience and views to support a coherent and collegiate approach to teaching and learning

Nurture links with other schools and departments locally, nationally and globally

For pupils we seek to engender:

Knowledge and understanding of the planet Earth and its peoples.

Lasting awareness of the world around us.

Sensitivity and empathy towards all others.

Tolerance and independent thinking.

Preparedness for an active citizen's role in a changing world.

In our department every person's opinion counts and is valued, the pupil voice is encouraged and listened to.

Slide 5

Clear self evaluation can really help us set humanities objectives when applying for specialist status. It is good for the department to develop a shared understanding the department's and school's strengths and areas for development

Slide 6

The application process will vary from school to school but open discussion and consultation really help in setting clear, achievable and realistic objectives

Slide 7

These objectives are from a real and successful application for humanities specialist status. They are just examples, not 'good' or 'bad', but they worked for the school involved. Each objective, which is very general, is supported by a range of implementation ideas and these are the bits where you can get very creative! Can you spot which of the three is the 'community objective'? It is the third one. Could these objectives work for you? Would you prefer something else? Check with your SMT and SSAT guidance for the required format and number of objectives.

Slide 9

It might be a good idea to allocate these ideas to member of your department who, working individually or in pairs could draft possible ideas for developments and then bring these to a discussion meeting. Encourage people to be as creative as possible. See if any resulting ideas match the lists on the following slides.

Slide 10

These practical ideas could form part of the your specialist bid and activities as a specialist school

Slide 11

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Slide 12

Often great and novel ideas can be inspired by looking at what other schools have done.

Slide 13

Point for discussion: which of these challenges might be relevant in your school and department? How could you counter these? I think it is true to say that your workload will be affected by applying for and achieving humanities specialist status. Take care to manage this and consider it when planning and taking on projects. A collegiate and collaborative approach with departments, specialist staff and SMT working together in a planned and consultative way will do much to alleviate workload concerns. Recognising the endeavours of individuals and thanking publicly also goes along way. Keeping things in perspective and having realistic timeframes also help.

Slide 14

When all is said and done, Humanities Specialist Status is a positive experience. With a collaborative and planned approach all (pupils, staff, SMT, school) should see the benefits!

Slide 15

Remember that the point of humanities status is to give pupils the best possible learning experiences (with Geography at the heart!), not just to tick boxes or work hard. Don't be afraid to drop projects if they are not working or to pick up new ideas as they occur to you. A website was not part of my school's objectives but as we began working on the objectives we realised that a website was a great way to communicate with local schools and organisations and also to publicise and share our work. See www.ke5ways.bham.sch.uk/kegs
Also campaign to have protected time, absolutely necessary to develop projects and to go out and visit

Slide 16

Try www.ke5ways.bham.sch.uk/kegs We would be very happy to host visitors or help in any way, email pcooper@ke5ways.bham.sch.uk