

# ESKDALE JUNIOR SCHOOL



**A CUSP partner school since 2021, Eskdale Junior School in Nottinghamshire is an average sized school made up of pupils from an area with proportionately high levels of social disadvantage. Rob Scruton, Headteacher, explains why joining the CUSP partnership was the right fit for Eskdale.**

**Rob:** Everything we do at Eskdale Junior School is rooted in our five core values, known as S.T.A.R.S or 'The Big Five': Skills and Knowledge for Life; Take Care; Aim High; Respond to Challenge; and Self Discipline. These values not only direct our work as staff but also shape pupil character, supporting their development as 'Eskdalers', both academically and personally. They're a living, breathing part of the school's ethos, understood by the whole school community.

Our school has higher than average levels of pupils from social disadvantage, minority ethnic groups and non-native English speakers, and as such, our focus as a school has always been consistently and rigorously focused on high quality teaching, rooted in research. During 2021, when we were planning the next phase of our curriculum development, one of our staff members mentioned using a book authored by CUSP Curriculum Development Director Alex Bedford's as a reference



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**Rob Scruton**  
Headteacher



for classroom practice. Driven by our S.T.A.R.S values and approach to defining a high expectation for all, the book led us to investigate CUSP and we quickly realised it presented an excellent fit for our school. The articulation for CUSP was almost identical to the conversations that we were having at SLT level, almost as if Alex had been listening to our conversations and vice versa!



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After two preliminary investigative calls and following the support of a generous donation from a parent governor, we were able to join the CUSP partnership and began using CUSP in earnest in September 2021.

The most notable benefit of CUSP is the focus on thinking about teaching and the actions/strategies that have the most impact on pupils knowing more and remembering more. The structure is second to none and staff find the content ambitious yet easy to adapt to the needs of all pupils. Pupils love the Knowledge Notes and the resources are designed with retention in mind - this works very well. The profile of teaching at Eskdale has continued to improve.

One of our favourite aspects of being in the partnership is access to the CUSP Padlets, which has been an unexpected bonus. They give us an opportunity to share work with other schools and learn from the collaboration, and they have also informed the structure of how we record content in books to aid pupils' retention.

As a school, we've been on a significant journey in developing our curriculum and CUSP has been integral to the progress. The challenge for our staff was to view CUSP materials as supporting them in thinking harder about their teaching, rather than viewing it as 'just another scheme to follow'. CUSP requires a much higher level of engagement than to just 'open the page and teach'. The explainer videos and subject lead resources have been invaluable in supporting staff CPD, helping them to engage with the research and theory behind CUSP which is essential to make sense of the purpose behind its design.

The payoff has been directly correlated to the time we have invested in the curriculum. Eskdale has delivered consistent year-on-year improvements in Reading SATS results across

2022/23/24, with our highest ever results at ARE+ in 2024. We have also been above national average values for both ARE+ and GDS in all three years. Numbers aside, we have noticed huge improvements in pupils retaining more of the content taught and making links within their knowledge, which is fantastic!

Our Ofsted inspection in October 2024 rated us outstanding for quality of education and the Inspector commented that out of his 70+ inspections and only four schools with this grade, Eskdale was the only one where there had been no debate as to whether the outcome could be outstanding. Although we don't use CUSP for all subjects, it is a notable component to our success in terms of workload for staff and pupil engagement. We are thrilled with our results and happily share that CUSP has made a profound contribution to our school's development.

## Rob's advice FOR CUSP SUCCESS

**Be clear and articulate about your curriculum. Use CUSP to inform and enhance your practice. Avoid over reliance on it; instead, use CUSP to strengthen weaker practice and further enhance practice that is already solid. CUSP is excellent and is unmatched in its theory, research and design. That said, do not see it as the sole answer to the challenge of improvements to curriculum development and the improvement to teaching.**

### Find Out More

For an informal discussion about joining our partnership or to request a quote for your school or trust, please contact the CUSP operations team at [cusp@unitysp.co.uk](mailto:cusp@unitysp.co.uk) and we will be very happy to help.