



ISEB
Independent Schools
Examinations Board

CASE STUDY

THE iPQ AT NOTTING HILL PREP SCHOOL: ASSESSING A BESPOKE CURRICULUM

“The iPQ has benefited our pupils in lots of ways ... it works well for us.”

Nicola Swales, Deputy Head (Academic) at Notting Hill Prep School

WHAT IS THE ISEB PROJECT QUALIFICATION (iPQ)?

The iPQ is a research-based project qualification that is carefully constructed to teach and assess essential independent learning skills for Years 5-8. It is divided into five sections: Define, Research and Review, Discuss and Develop, Reflect and Present.



THE IPQ AT NOTTING HILL PREP SCHOOL

For Notting Hill Prep School, the iPQ is used as a terminal assessment for all Year 8 pupils following the completion of a bespoke, integrated humanities curriculum developed by the school. Commencing in January of the academic year with final submissions due by May half-term, Year 8 pupils theorise, explore and present their projects to senior management, including the Deputy Head (Academic) and Heads of Department, answering questions to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise in a topic or area.

SOPHISTICATED QUESTIONS

Notting Hill Prep’s bespoke curriculum, now in its fourth year, involves integrating three core subjects, Geography, History, Theology, Philosophy and Religion (TPR), alongside others, with teaching and learning defined by a specific culture, country or location. The iPQ lends itself as an assessment tool for this individual curriculum due to its flexibility in implementation and the opportunity for pupils to identify and explore a topic of particular interest. Year 8 pupils at Notting Hill Prep begin to think about their overall iPQ question in January of their academic year, with lessons from staff exploring ‘what makes a good question’. Nicola Swales, Deputy Head (Academic) for Notting Hill Prep, adds, “We try to encourage our pupils to be specific in the questions they ask and seek answers for ... some project questions can be quite sophisticated”.

“We are really transparent with parents”, continues Ms Swales, explaining that parents and guardians are involved in the iPQ process and assessment, with clear timetables and deadlines set. Once a student has submitted a proposed first draft of their question, they will have a 1:1 with a teacher to explain their thought process and how they plan on conducting the research. At this stage, pupils can be offered more support when finalising their questions.

“We encourage our pupils to look at their question within the wider context of the curriculum”, continues Ms Swales, highlighting, however, that pupils do have the flexibility to explore any question of their choice, provided they can demonstrate the knowledge, skills and ability to answer it well.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNGER YEAR GROUPS

Pupils at Notting Hill Prep can develop and build on the skills needed to excel with their iPQ during Year 6 and Year 7 when they complete a mock project, allowing them to explore the structure and process required with an independent piece of work. When completing their mock projects in the Summer term of the academic year, the younger year groups engage in lessons focused on what makes a good question, what they might be interested in for next year, and how to research and identify the difference between sources effectively. “For the younger years, we are focused on the process, not the product/outcome”, states Ms Swales.



LEARNING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE TEACHER-LED

“The iPQ has benefited our pupils in lots of ways ... it works well for us”, states Ms Swales; pupils gain an understanding of how to tackle and produce a long-form project that is also academically rigorous, building on their skills to plan and deliver an outcome, learning time management skills along the way. In addition to the final project submission, Notting Hill Prep pupils present their outcomes and answer questions from the senior management team at the school, demonstrating their understanding of a topic and combating any worries they could have used generative AI during the project’s research phase. For their final project outcome, most Notting Hill Prep pupils decide to produce a piece of long-form content, like an essay or report, combined with a physical artefact or art piece to evidence their learning.

Notting Hill Prep School have also found that parents are often very positive and receptive to the iPQ, with the independence and self-directed nature of learning lending a grown-up, highly academic feel to the work completed by their children.

MINI-SUBJECT EXPERTS

When reflecting on previous projects and notable outcomes, Ms. Swales highlighted a couple that stood out to her. The first was a project completed in the first year of the iPQ at Notting Hill, whereby a student explored the impact of the First World War on women’s fashion. This project, in particular, provided a fantastic example of a question that covered everything required by the curriculum and assessment while also including a pupil’s genuine passion and interest - fashion. Some projects focus more towards contemporary or emerging topics; in 2020, a Notting Hill pupil explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global tea trade, labelled as “fascinating” by the Deputy Head. A more recent submission studied the Sakura period in Japan, as the pupil had previously lived in the country; Ms Swales recounted, “I knew nothing about this time period and remember learning something new while listening to the presentation... those stand out to me: when the children became mini-experts and teach us”.

When invited to theorise on the topic and question she might focus on if she were to complete an iPQ herself, “I got really interested in the Romanovs when our Year 8s last year were completing their ‘Russia’ module”, and suggested perhaps a project focused on exploring the influence and impact of Tsar Nicolas II wife, Alexandra, on his decisions, would be her current question and topic of choice.

To find out more about the ISEB Project Qualification that is inspiring staff and pupils alike, visit the ISEB website, www.iseb.co.uk/iPQ

For the Notting Hill Prep School website, visit: www.nottinghillprep.com

To read about the success of the iPQ at Cottesmore School, visit: IPQ Cottesmore School