Independent learning and the benefits for pupils

Key issues addressed by the study

◆ The study aimed to
  - identify robust and relevant research to show the impacts of independent learning
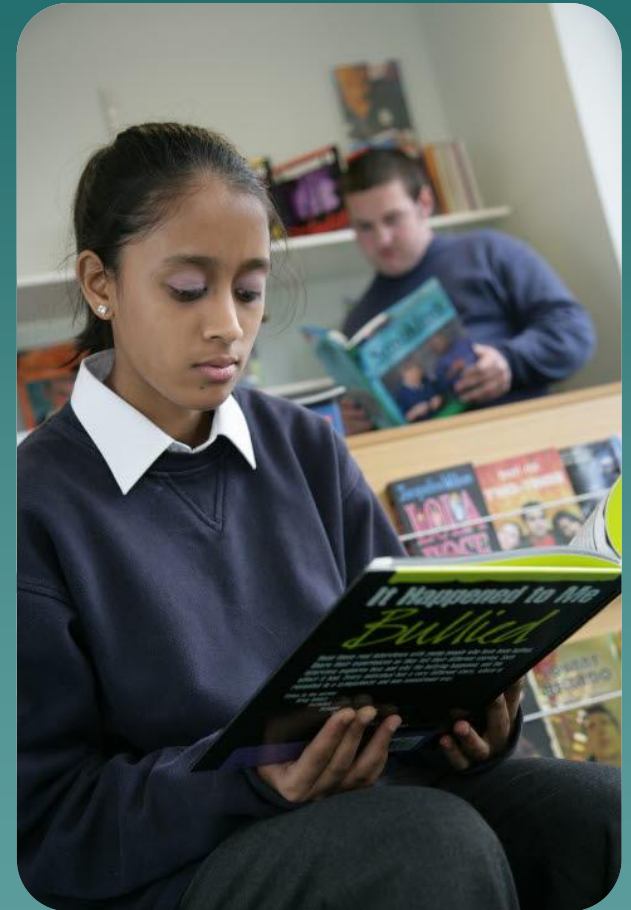 - highlight the benefits of independent learning for pupils

RESEARCH BITE

Key elements of independent learning

◆ The study found that independent learning was characterised by
  - a shift in responsibility from teacher to pupil
  - teachers enabling and supporting independent learning
  - a strong trusting relationship between teachers and pupils

Successful independent learning

◆ Successful independent learning was underpinned by factors including

- – a strong ICT environment
- – cognitive and problem-solving skills
- – Meta-cognitive skills (ability to identify and articulate how learning occurs)

Benefits of independent learning

◆ The review found that independent learning

– improved academic performance

– increased motivation and confidence

– encouraged more pupil awareness of ways of overcoming personal challenges

– enabled teachers to provide differentiated tasks

Skills fostered by independent learning

◆ Independent learning helped develop

- – pupils' cognitive and problem-solving skills

- – meta-cognitive skills and reflection on what they had done to take responsibility for their own learning

- – affective skills and the motivation to learn independently
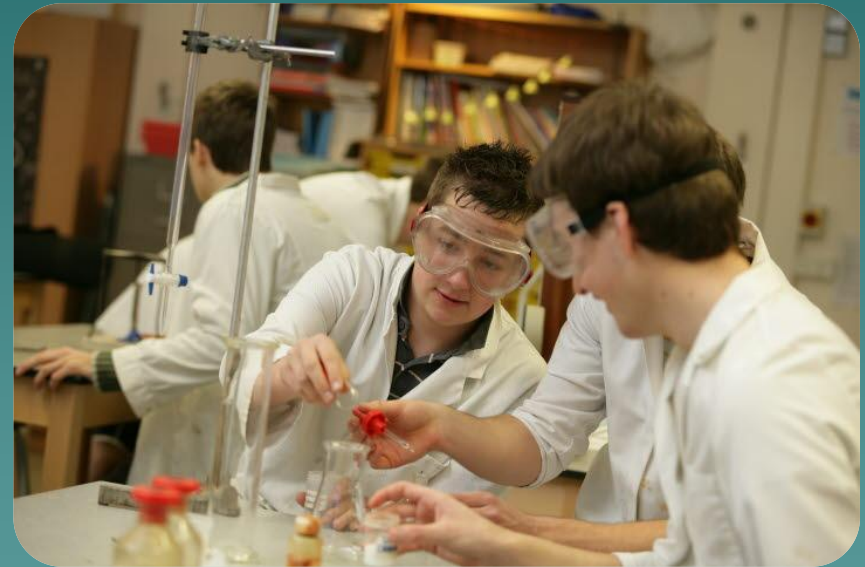
The role of ICT in independent learning

◆ ICT resources
  – offered opportunities for self-directed learning
  – increased the speed of access to information
  – facilitated interaction between learners and between learners and their teachers

How teachers promoted independent learning

◆ Teachers promoted independent learning by

– building a supportive environment

– providing pupils with the opportunity to monitor themselves

– encouraging pupils to model their behaviour on teachers

– providing feedback on homework to improve confidence

How schools promoted independent learning

◆ A whole-school approach to independent learning included

– support for teachers

– study support by enabling pupils to voluntarily choose their learning activities

– empowering pupils to self-regulate their learning

How was the information gathered?

◆ The authors conducted a systematic review and synthesis of evidence which included case studies, control trials and cohort studies

How can teachers use this evidence?

◆ Moving from whole-class directive teaching was a key step in fostering independent learning

◆ *Could you start by identifying from within a topic a problem for pupils to tackle on their own or in small groups?*

◆ *You could improve pupils' confidence in tackling independent learning tasks by building in opportunities for self-monitoring and showing them how to do it*

How can school leaders use this evidence?

◆ The review emphasised the key role of teachers in making independent learning work

◆ *How familiar are your colleagues with the elements of independent learning such as thinking skills?*

◆ *You could provide colleagues with development opportunities by grouping teachers to coach each other in the skills needed for designing independent learning experiences*

Follow-up reading

◆ Meyer, B, Haywood, N, Sachdev, D, & Faraday, S. (2008). Independent Learning: Literature Review. *Research Report 051*, Department for Children, Schools and Families: London