



# Curriculum and assessment: 101 ideas to support planning

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CURRICULUM AND WHAT SHAPES IT?

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| <p><b>1</b> Ensure you have an agreed definition of what a 'broad and balanced curriculum' means to you in your setting.</p> <p><b>2</b> Identify the personal, social and academic outcomes and experiences you want for your pupils.</p> <p><b>3</b> Recognise the curriculum is the totality of a pupil's daily experience - lessons, events and routines beyond and outside the typical school day.</p> <p><b>4</b> See the curriculum as the story you want to tell about your school as well as the learning you want to put before your pupils.</p> | <p><b>5</b> Engage all stakeholders in aligning your curriculum provision to your school's vision and aims.</p> <p><b>6</b> Ensure all staff and stakeholders can articulate your curriculum vision.</p> <p><b>7</b> Context matters - recognise there is no single model for a highly effective curriculum.</p> <p><b>8</b> Develop a confident narrative about what you include in your curriculum and why.</p> | <p><b>9</b> Recognise that the school curriculum is different to the national curriculum, and will evolve in response to social changes, technology, and changing patterns of employment.</p> <p><b>10</b> Think about the learning which may sit outside of specific subjects: the co-curriculum or parallel curriculum</p> <p><b>11</b> Encourage all members of the senior leadership team to fully understand how the curriculum fits together in its entirety.</p> <p><b>12</b> Ensure you have clarity over the objectives of your curriculum, how these are translated into practice, and the impact these have on pupils.</p> |
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## ENSURING PRINCIPLED AND ETHICAL CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

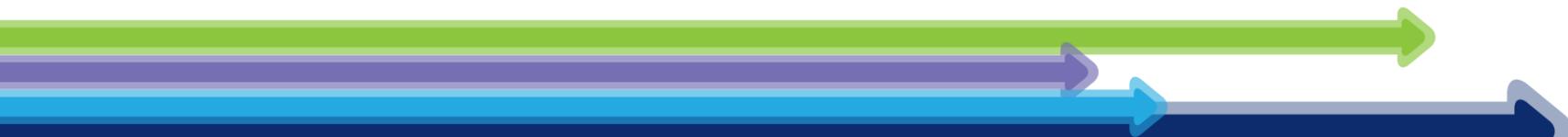
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| <p><b>13</b> Prioritise and have confidence in a curriculum designed to fit with pupils' needs and aspirations, rather than performance measures.</p> <p><b>14</b> Develop a curriculum flexible and responsive to individual needs and interests.</p> <p><b>15</b> Have a clear rationale for your groupings, and ensure options and pathways do not cap the ambitions of your pupils.</p> <p><b>16</b> Address any narrowing of the curriculum in any key stage for groups of pupils.</p> | <p><b>17</b> Build in quality assurance and system review – is the quality of curriculum delivery the same for all groups of pupils?</p> <p><b>18</b> If you describe your curriculum as broad and balanced, ensure this refers to the content delivered and pupils' curriculum entitlement, not just the curriculum offering.</p> <p><b>19</b> Ensure leaders make curriculum decisions which align with the school's vision and curriculum principles.</p> <p><b>20</b> Ensure your governing body holds you to account for the quality of your curriculum.</p> | <p><b>21</b> Try not to see the curriculum only through the lens of accountability.</p> <p><b>22</b> Involve all stakeholders in reviewing how your curriculum helps to deliver social justice.</p> <p><b>23</b> Ensure your curriculum facilitates progression to the next stage of pupils' educational journey, for all groups of pupils.</p> <p><b>24</b> Recognise Ofsted's view that a high Progress 8 score does not always mean a better deal for the student.</p> |
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## RESOURCING A CURRICULUM

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| <p><b>25</b> Ensure staffing and curriculum planning decisions are informed by funding levels and realistic projections when modelling curriculum provision over the next few years.</p> <p><b>26</b> Ensure all senior team members and finance directors understand the key costs and variables in delivering a curriculum, particularly the affordable pupil to teacher ratio.</p> | <p><b>27</b> Maximise curriculum delivery time by ensuring that the PPA time is 10% of timetabled sessions, not contract time.</p> <p><b>28</b> Flexibility may be achieved by teaching Years 9 and 10, or Years 10 and 11 together; this might enable smaller schools to offer more option choices.</p> | <p><b>29</b> Flexibility can also be achieved by supported self-study opportunities, master classes for key subjects, and effective use of a school's VLE for re-teaching, particularly post-16.</p> |
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## LEADERSHIP OF CURRICULUM PLANNING

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| <p><b>30</b> Create a climate which values curriculum design and curriculum thinking across the whole school.</p> <p><b>31</b> Create capacity for professional learning in curriculum design and implementation among middle leaders.</p> <p><b>32</b> Avoid the temptation to make a curriculum wide at the expense of depth.</p> <p><b>33</b> Encourage departments to really think about the curriculum they are designing - a timetabled subject does not guarantee a good curriculum experience.</p> <p><b>34</b> Encourage subject specialists to be clear on their subject – how their subject contributes to pupils' personal, social and academic outcomes.</p> | <p><b>35</b> Involve and challenge departments about their subject – what is history for? What are the most important ideas in history pupils should encounter?</p> <p><b>36</b> Encourage departments to think about the language they use to describe the curriculum. What do they mean by enrichment - a deeper understanding of a topic or additional activities?</p> <p><b>37</b> Encourage departments to recognise how knowledge and skills work together; almost all skills require knowledge, and skills are built on knowledge.</p> <p><b>38</b> Recognise that effective curriculum planning must take account of both knowledge and skills, including the provision of desirable knowledge and desirable subject-specific skills.</p> | <p><b>39</b> Be explicit about the skills you are developing in both the taught and wider curriculum. Are they subject specific or transferable?</p> <p><b>40</b> Plan for and facilitate a shared approach to teaching key skills and techniques across departments. Explore any common aspects of content and skills delivered elsewhere in the curriculum, coordinating where possible.</p> <p><b>41</b> Decide how teachers' subject knowledge will be reviewed and supported.</p> <p><b>42</b> Ensure your curriculum reflects your local context, and explore opportunities for local community resources to be linked to a school's curriculum model.</p> |
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## CURRICULUM PLANNING IN THE EARLY YEARS OF SECONDARY

- 43 Encourage curriculum plans for Key Stage 3 (KS3) which focus on ensuring teachers are developing the best possible historians, geographers and linguists.
- 44 Reflect on the whole curriculum narrative of KS3, paying attention to the background or 'hinterland' to support understanding and retention of core knowledge (Counsell, 2018)
- 45 Where possible, share schemes of learning at KS2 and KS3 between partner schools, and build continuity between Years 6 and 7.
- 46 Reflect on any gaps with literacy and numeracy early in KS3, and ensure this has a coordinated, cross-curricular approach.
- 47 Avoid rolling back GCSE assessment objectives to pupils in early years of secondary.
- 48 Keep in mind the flexibility offered in KS3 to make content as stimulating and horizon-widening as possible, to ensure pupils are motivated, and enjoy the subject.
- 49 Share meaningful assessment with primary colleagues, rather than relying on a number or label generated from narrow assessments. What can pupils do confidently and competently on their own, and in other contexts?
- 50 Recognise it is not the length but the substance of the early foundation years that is important.
- 51 Ensure pupils' curriculum experience in KS3 is of equal priority to that in other key stages.

## EXPERT CURRICULUM PLANNING AT SUBJECT LEVEL

- 52 Curriculum planners need to be experts in their subject with a clear understanding of the subject construct.
- 53 Curriculum planners should know how to build up subject knowledge, deliberately and incrementally.
- 54 Start with what pupils should know, understand and be able to do. Specify important knowledge and skills.
- 55 Select the most valid content: quality not quantity.
- 56 Decide on the essential knowledge you think all pupils should have and the fundamental concepts you want them to master. Encourage teachers to think: "The most important thing I could teach my pupils is ..."
- 57 When determining essential knowledge, also decide on the assessments to gauge pupils' level of mastery.
- 58 Avoid a reductionist approach, where GCSE specification is spread over five years. Separate the curriculum from the exam specification and start from first principles.
- 59 Recognise it is not always possible to have a generalist approach to teaching; the pedagogy required may differ between curriculum subjects.
- 60 Ensure subject knowledge is highly valued.

## ESTABLISHING A PROGRESSION MODEL

- 61 Encourage development of longitudinal progression models with an explicit breakdown of knowledge, giving teachers a clear rationale as to why and when particular objectives are taught.
- 62 Ensure logically-organised concepts in the progression model build on one another conceptually, are carefully sequenced and identify clear, measurable, pupil-centred objectives.
- 63 A strong curriculum progression model identifies pace for pupils from different starting points and aptitudes.
- 64 View curriculum as 'content structured as narrative over time' (Counsell, 2018).
- 65 Recognise that high quality, well-designed text books, and high quality published resources contribute to curriculum coherence within a subject, support relevant pedagogy and minimise workload.
- 66 Recognise some subjects will lend themselves more easily to a hierarchical structure of knowledge (such as maths), whereas others may require a more horizontal structure (such as social sciences), using different terminology, assumptions and starting points.

## LINKING CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

- 67 To make sense of and retain new information, pupils must have pre-existing knowledge to link to this new information - build this into planning.
- 68 Recognise that knowledge is generative (or 'sticky'), ie the more you know, the more easily you can learn.
- 69 Share teaching approaches within departments to tackle common misconceptions among pupils.
- 70 Don't make lesson planning overly complex. Brains have limited bandwidth so the less pupils have to think about, the more progress they are likely to make.
- 71 Ensure teachers understand when and how learning happens - to learn something, we have to think it through and engage.
- 72 For knowledge to be retained, pupils need several different interactions to then store it in their long-term memories.
- 73 Distinguish between the types of tasks that lead to learning (and those that don't). Prioritise active pupil participation and discussion.
- 74 Plan for learning rather than plan activities - of what will this make pupils think?
- 75 Recognise that effective planning is directing **what** we want pupils to think about, but also **when** that thinking occurs.
- 76 Steer away from teaching solely to the test - teach what is essential for pupils to understand and answer any question on any topic.
- 77 Encourage departments to support pupils in transferring information from their working memory to long-term memory (where it is stored and retrieved).
- 78 Familiarise departments with cognitive load theory - our limited ability to process new information requires carefully-managed, gradual progression through material (McCrea 2017).
- 79 Share cognitive science research on retrieval practice, spacing and interleaving aid recall (Dunlosky et al 2013).
- 80 Develop secure learning of subject-specific skills.
- 81 Ensure pupils have the opportunity to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts, linking together ideas not linked on the specification.
- 82 Ensure you are able to build in sufficient cross-topic, problem solving to support preparation for reformed GCSEs.

## CURRICULUM ALIGNED TO ASSESSMENT

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| <b>83</b> Identify key constructs in your curriculum, then identify a set of tasks which will demonstrate to what extent pupils have fully mastered the important content. | <b>86</b> Get a balance between frequent, short knowledge recall tests and synoptic assessment.  | <b>88</b> Encourage learners to reflect on their own learning in order to calibrate the security of their learning. |
| <b>84</b> Ensure assessments are chosen strategically to help pupils recall the right information.   | <b>87</b> Ensure there is clarification between formative and summative assessment: formative assessment produces a consequence for the teacher and the learner, summative assessment judges the extent of pupils' learning of the material. | <b>89</b> Use exemplar pupil work to clarify what success looks like in specific assignments.                       |
| <b>85</b> Ensure you have a clear purpose for assessment – does it measure what it is intended to measure?   |  | <b>90</b> Try to assess independent application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts.                                |
|  |  | <b>91</b> Ensure your assessment strategy contains synoptic assessment to support linear qualifications             |

## REVIEWING YOUR CURRICULUM AND ITS IMPACT

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| <b>92</b> Ensure all curriculum decisions can be directly linked to the school's vision and values.                     | <b>96</b> Agree on the metrics for quality assuring your curriculum.   | <b>99</b> When evaluating the impact of the curriculum, look at indicators such as outcomes from starting points for different groups, destinations, attendance, personal development and welfare. |
| <b>93</b> Start with a root and branch review of KS3 – what makes an excellent Year 7 course? Is it challenging enough? | <b>97</b> Consider involving pupils in reviewing aspects of the curriculum, for example level of challenge, successfully building on prior learning in Year 7. | <b>100</b> Build in support for developing teacher subject knowledge where required.   |
| <b>94</b> Consider whether your curriculum is too narrow for any groups of pupils in any key stage.                     | <b>98</b> Monitor engagement of groups of pupils in activities beyond lessons, contributing to the wider school experience.                                    | <b>101</b> Evaluate the impact your curriculum has on improving social mobility.   |
| <b>95</b> Consider evaluating your curriculum offer with parents.   |  |  |

## ANY QUESTIONS?



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Suzanne O'Farrell is ASCL's Curriculum and Assessment Specialist and prior to this role Suzanne was ASCL's Inspections Specialist for 18 months. Before joining ASCL, Suzanne was headteacher of a large secondary school in Staffordshire for seven years. Suzanne originally trained as a modern languages teacher and taught languages and English in a number of schools. Throughout her 27 year teaching career and prior to taking up her headship, Suzanne's previous roles also include head of a large sixth form (offering the IB and A levels), deputy headteacher, local leader of education and part time Tutor Fellow at Keele University supporting the delivery of the modern languages PGCE programme.

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