Teaching and Learning at The Spires College

Contents

Statement of Intent

At The Spires College we believe that learning is the process by which students acquire, assimilate and retain knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes to enable them to make greater sense of the world. We expect teachers to deliver high-quality and stimulating lessons that challenge each and every student to make excellent progress.

Students will be given equal opportunities to learn in order to achieve their full potential. Our purpose is to create a learning environment that fosters motivation, curiosity and self-belief, allowing students to flourish. We strive not to simply teach knowledge, but to empower our students by teaching them how to learn and inspiring them to do so.

Teaching and learning are central to our work as educators and our approach stems from the College's vision, values and aims. The College's aims are:

Every young person achieves their true potential.

This means:

- Outcomes are strong across the curriculum.
- Students make good progress in every year group.

Our community shares a love of learning and we develop and celebrate every member of our College community as an independent learner.

This means:

- Our students enjoy learning. They know how to learn and develop the resilience and determination to tackle all the challenges that they will meet – at school and beyond.
- The College enjoys a culture of professional growth. Teachers talk about pedagogy and enthuse about their subjects. They are confident to take risks and evaluate their effectiveness in order to improve learning. We prioritise the professional development of our teachers so that their knowledge is current; their skills are honed, refreshed and invigorated.

Our students are involved in every aspect of College life beyond the classroom and so leave the College as rounded, confident, independent, young adults, ready to take up responsible positions in society and equipped with the means to seize their futures.

This means:

- Our extra-curricular provision is of a high quality. Participation rates are very high.
- Students take an active role in shaping the future of the College through a wide range of student leadership activities.

Guiding Principles

Although ostensibly a 'policy', this document will read quite differently from one. The approach to teaching and learning at The Spires College means that a document setting out a single approach to teaching is not appropriate. For example, we do not ask every teacher to start their lessons in a certain way, or every Head of Department to follow a specific curriculum structure. We believe that department and teacher autonomy is important because it allows subject specialists to acknowledge the requirements of their own subjects in their planning and it allows teachers to respond to the needs of the students in front of them.

It also guards against the 'silver-bullet' approach to teaching and learning policies, whereby senior leaders seize upon a methodology that appears to be effective elsewhere and then insist that all teachers adopt this. This can, of course, be effective, but more frequently leads to the original idea becoming so mutated that any benefits are quickly lost. If leaders always look elsewhere for ready-made approaches, we also risk creating a deskilled profession. Too often, we are asked, 'Where did you get that from?' or, 'Which book are you basing [X] policy on?' Of course, there is nothing wrong with reading widely and exploring what other schools are doing, and we do. One of the most positive developments in education in recent years is the growing focus on research, so that we can examine the evidence behind each approach. However, these approaches are equally susceptible to lethal mutations if no considered critique is applied. Similarly, we have visited other schools and trusts and been informed and inspired by their work. However, we have not then taken their work and implemented it in our setting. We have taken all of our reading and all of what we have seen, and used it to inform our own thinking, so that everything we do at The Spires College, whether it is our literacy strategy or our rewards and sanctions policy, takes consideration of what works elsewhere but is designed to meet the needs of our students.

According to recent studies, teachers are 16 percentage points less likely than similar professionals to report having 'a lot' of influence over how they do their job despite teacher autonomy being strongly associated with improved job satisfaction and a greater intention to stay in teaching (Worth and Van den Brande, 2020). The College's approach is that teachers are professionals who should use their professional expertise to carry out their job to a high standard.

So, if there is not a prescribed approach to teaching at the College, why have a Teaching and Learning Policy? Because teacher autonomy comes with risks. If teachers are trusted to teach in the way that they believe is best, they need to be sure that it is genuinely effective: children need to be learning and making good progress. This document serves as guidance for teachers rather than prescription. It does not tell them how to teach but signposts resources to help them, and it explores how teachers can tell if their methods are effective. There are some aspects of the College's approach, particularly routines and expectations, that *are* prescribed and, where these relate to classroom practice, they are also outlined here.

The Curriculum, or, *what* we teach:

> 'Curriculum is not a component of education: it *is* education. Start a discourse in your school, in any school, and it will lead you back to the thought, design and direction of the curriculum. It acts to inform every decision we make, at every level, to ensure that the intention and purpose of schools remains clear'
>
> (Howard and Hill, 2020, p.17).

At The Spires College, the curriculum is central to everything that we do. Making key decisions about what our students learn and when, is one of the most crucial aspects of effective education and is both a privilege and a responsibility. If we think of the curriculum as the vehicle by which we transmute knowledge into learning, it is clear that curriculum design is fundamental to the success of our students.

One of our key responsibilities is to ensure our curricula are broad and rich, providing students with a wide and diverse range of opportunities that enrich their learning experiences. As Myatt (2020, p.17) says, 'There is a lot of talk about entitlement and it means this – that we are depriving our young people of intellectual, artistic and physical nourishment if they are not given proper access to these.'

The curriculum should map out what our students will learn, in what detail, and when, specifying the order in which knowledge is acquired. It should enable all teachers to answer questions, including:

- Why am I teaching this?
- What do I want my students to learn here? What is it for?
- Why am I teaching this now? How does it link to my students' prior learning?
- Why is it important that students can master this?

Students should also be able to articulate what they are learning and why, making sense of learning objectives and understanding how new knowledge links to prior learning. Coherence is a key descriptor of effective curricula that supports students to make sense of their learning. When the content of their lessons aligns with the national curriculum, textbook content, resources and assessments, the learning is more likely to make sense as each aspect reinforces the others. This means that learning is more likely to stick together, leading to retained knowledge.

The curriculum should describe how the learning is structured to encourage the retention of knowledge, and where links are made to prior learning. Let us be clear though, a curriculum it is not a map, a table or a diagram. Whilst the form of documentation can be unquestionably helpful when communicating and sharing the curriculum, the deep and considered thinking that sits behind the curriculum is what matters.

Our method of curriculum design rejects genericism, instead adopting a disciplinary approach. Research is clear that there is no silver bullet; there is no 'one way' to educate. Therefore, those responsible for curriculum design are asked to thoughtfully identify the unique combination of knowledge that is required for students to succeed in their subjects. This is complex and time consuming but is so very important.

To do this, an understanding of types of knowledge and their properties is important; as Ashbee says, 'just as the architect builds well with an understanding of her materials, so curriculum work is fed by an understanding of the knowledge being dealt with' (Ashbee, 2021). This document is not the place to explore these in depth but chapter 3 of Ruth

Ashbee's *Curriculum: Theory, Culture and the Subject Specialisms* does this very well. In brief, **substantive knowledge** is the agreed set of facts within a subject: its substance. **Disciplinary knowledge** is the knowledge we use to explore substantive knowledge and thus create new knowledge: 'It's a toolkit of ideas and approaches with which students can ask questions of the claims made by others and frame their own responses to the substantive knowledge they encounter' (Didau, 2021). We also need to distinguish between **declarative knowledge** (also referred to as **propositional knowledge**) and **non-declarative, or procedural knowledge**. Declarative knowledge may be substantive or disciplinary; it is knowledge that can be recalled or articulated, it is the '*knowing-that*' (Ashbee). Procedural (non-declarative) is the '*knowing-how*', the knowledge of how to perform procedures, or carry out a process, and is sometimes called skill. However, for procedural knowledge to genuinely become a skill, we must practise it to the point of fluency. A difficulty for us as teachers is that we have become fluent in the skills that we seek to develop in our students and, having reached this point, it can be difficult to see the component knowledge it took to get there. We may therefore attempt to teach students to simply 'acquire skills' without teaching the required declarative and procedural knowledge they need to carry out the skill as we can. Hence the importance of considering types of knowledge in the process of curriculum design: various types knowledge are the building blocks to students acquiring skills and understanding and the curriculum must consider what these are and when and how they are taught.

Regardless of subject, all curricula should be universally rich, coherent and ambitious for all. One aspect of ensuring this is to ensure that we place powerful knowledge at the heart of our curriculum.

> 'Everyday knowledge is dependent on the context in which it was learned, whereas school knowledge – powerful knowledge – can help us move beyond confines of our personal experiences and open up new ways of thinking about aspects of the world which would otherwise be unknown and inaccessible.'
>
> (Didau, 2021, p.85)

Heads of Department must identify the core knowledge that we want students to retain in long term memory, but to do so must consider the role of substantive knowledge, disciplinary knowledge and procedural knowledge in this learning process. This should be considered in the context of the curriculum as a whole, thinking about the progression of knowledge and skills through a five or seven year programme. Curricula that prioritise important knowledge support students to have expert, technical and precise knowledge in each subject. Students should understand that knowledge is powerful and that it is crucial to learning.

> 'Knowledge is considered powerful if it:
> - Provides reliable explanations, a sound basis for making judgements and generalisations about the world beyond the narrow limits of experience
> - Is developed systematically by specialists within subject disciplines
> - Changes our perceptions, values or understanding
> - Provides a language for engaging in political, moral and other kinds of debates
> - Allows us to think the "unthinkable" and the not yet thought."'
>
> (Didau, 2021, p.84)

The acquisition of knowledge is often the first step in learning, and shortcuts cannot be taken here to prioritise the acquisition of skills; indeed, the latter is unlikely to be successful until knowledge has been learned effectively and securely. Beyond this, the curriculum should also specify what students will do with the knowledge they have acquired, making it clear how they are expected to transform it and apply it in different contexts.

At this point it is worth mentioning the pitfalls of the 'knowledge organiser', a single page list of all of the knowledge that students need to know about a topic. A popular response to an increased awareness of the importance of knowledge is to move to a system of compulsory knowledge organisers. In their own right, there is nothing wrong with providing students with a list of core knowledge to shape revision or understanding. However, their use can be problematic. At The Spires College, departments are free to decide if knowledge organisers have a place in their teaching but should be aware of how this can go wrong:

- KOs can work better for some subjects than others. Learning lists of information by heart can be useful and, in these cases, KOs can be a helpful resource for students. However, obligatory usage can result in KOs that are filled with unnecessary information or information that is too complex to sit in isolation.
- There is confusion between the role of the curriculum and the role of the KO. A curriculum is not just a series of KOs.
- There is confusion regarding who the KO is for: the students or the teachers.
- KOs can be mistakenly used to replace effective teaching. Giving students a list of facts to learn is very different from carefully sequencing pieces of knowledge and planning the best way to teach these so that students can access, understand, retain and use this knowledge.

All of the above demands that Heads of Department maintain an up-to-date and in-depth knowledge of their subject and of pedagogical research. Heads of Department also have a responsibility to share this knowledge with their teams through well-planned, effective and developmental subject CPD. They should also communicate their thinking with their SLT links who will support them to quality assure their curricula, and with their departments to ensure they are equipped to implement the curriculum to a consistently high standard.

Our aim is for our curricula to be ambitious for all and to inspire students to love our subjects. This means that curriculum plans must go beyond exam specifications to introduce students to inspirational elements that spark curiosity and set them up for success *beyond* examination points. This is especially true once students have selected their option subjects. Key stage four should provide an opportunity for students to explore their chosen subjects in both depth and breadth, beyond the GCSE specifications. This means students fully grasp key concepts that underpin knowledge identified in specifications and develop expertise that leads to academic curiosity. Skills can be honed and students are provided with an opportunity to discover their passion and enthusiasm for their chosen subjects whilst also being set up for success in examinations. This should also develop cultural capital, exploring knowledge that often sits outside specifications but opens doors to students socially and academically. Hirsch describes cultural capital, or cultural literacy, as an unspoken language. 'Exclusion from this shared cultural knowledge is a major barrier to equal opportunity.' We know that, in order to compete on a level playing field, our students need to develop their cultural capital and the skills required to apply and articulate this knowledge. Our curricula should make clear the cultural capital we want students to hold, as well as the order in which they should acquire this to ensure it can be used and retained.

Alongside discrete subject knowledge, our curricula also teach students about the world around them and how to contribute to society as responsible, happy, safe and kind citizens. We teach these values through the whole curriculum, exploiting the opportunities that each subject presents to discuss how the content relates to the real world and our lives. 'The elements of spiritual, moral, social and cultural describe those aspects of the curriculum and school life which should be threaded throughout the daily practice. They are not add-ons

and should not entail additional work' (Myatt, 2020, pp. 124-125). This work is sometimes referred to as the teaching of 'British values' but this is not a term we use at the College. Labelling values such as democracy, tolerance, liberty and respect as being 'British', implies that they are *uniquely* British, something that is patently untrue and seems to promote imperialist ideologies.

The curriculum should also promote, *where appropriate and relevant*, links to careers that open our students' minds and inform them about the endless opportunities they have to join the workforce in areas that inspire and motivate them. By providing genuine opportunities to explore where their subjects could take them, our curricula become truly aspirational.

With both SMSC and careers, it is important that these are part of careful planning. In some schools, a 'requirement' to make each lesson relevant to careers/SMSC/'British' values/literacy/[insert current buzzword] leads to horrible incoherence, where things are shoe-horned in because they have to be. This is to be avoided.

Our staff CPD library is equipped with a broad range of texts on the subject of curriculum. Some suggested reading is indicated below:

- Ashbee, R., 2021. *Curriculum: Theory, Culture and the Subject Specialisms*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Myatt, M., 2020. *The Curriculum: Gallimaufry to Coherence*. John Catt.
- Howard, K. and Hill, C., 2020. *Symbiosis: The Curriculum and the Classroom*. John Catt.
- Didau, D., 2021. *Making Meaning in English*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Nicholls, D., 2022. *Closing the disadvantage gap | Curriculum as the lever*. [Blog] Dan Nicholls, Available at: <https://dannicholls1.com/2022/02/11/disadvantage-gap-curriculum-as-the-lever/> [Accessed 14 July 2022].

Pedagogy, or, *how* we teach:

Much has been written about what truly excellent teaching and learning looks like. In recent decades, many approaches have been hailed as 'silver bullets' but have become, often through a process of lethal mutation, nothing more than the next bandwagon.

At The Spires College we do not prescribe any singular approach to teaching and learning, preferring, instead, to encourage teachers to engage in subject and pedagogical research, trusting them to make judicious, cogent choices about their approaches and the methodology they deploy within their classrooms. In its simplest form, effective teaching and learning is that which leads to improved student achievement, with outcomes that matter to their future successes. This must reside at the core of our approach and practice. We have broadly defined the behaviours that are representative of excellent teaching and learning within our setting in our Principles of Teaching (see attached) but are cognisant of the fact that, in practice, each subject and teacher may demonstrate them differently. Whilst professional autonomy is fundamental to our approach to teaching and learning, this can only be successful within a culture of rigorous and accurate self-evaluation and quality assurance. In order to assess the quality of the teaching and learning within their classroom, teachers must identify and utilise effective sources of data that help them to evaluate their teaching and the impact of this on learning. Through reading, CPD and coaching, this should be used to drive a continuous cycle of professional development. Having autonomy means that each and every teacher is responsible for the quality of teaching and learning within their classroom, and the professional learning required to secure this consistently. In this way, our teaching and learning and professional development models are inextricably linked.

The organisation of knowledge within the curriculum or schemes of learning is vital to students' effective learning. Knowledge must be organised in a manner that renders it easier to remember. Applying an element of narrative or logic (e.g. chronology or problem-solving) to the order in which content is taught within a lesson and across sequences of lessons can support students to understand what is being taught. This should be made explicit to the students themselves so that they are aware of the schema to which new knowledge is being applied. This also helps them to break the learning down, make sense of it and articulate it.

> 'Long-term memory… is the foundation for incorporating and making sense of new knowledge. Material sits in the long-term memory when it has been 'chunked', or sorted, into meaningful schemata or concepts'
>
> (Myatt, 2020, p.35).

When designing a scheme of learning, the acquisition of knowledge should be prioritised before the acquisition of skill. This ensures students understand information, concepts and ideas from the outset. As Tom Sherrington (2017, p.107) puts it, 'Factual knowledge precedes skill… It means you can't think about, analyse, interpret, evaluate, juxtapose, critique or debate things unless you have factual knowledge on which to base these things.' The genuine acquisition of knowledge may dictate the pace at which the teaching and learning progresses. Some concepts and classes may move at a faster pace if there is robust evidence that students have grasped the knowledge being taught. Where the evidence suggests the acquisition of knowledge is less secure, the pace must slow to allow time to address misconceptions or re-teach key material before moving on to the teaching of skills. Students are more likely to grasp and remember knowledge when it sticks to previously learned material. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers make the links between new material and prior learning explicit, explaining how ideas connect. 'This idea that new knowledge accumulates around prior knowledge is vital; the more you have, the more you can get. And

you can't have too much knowledge. The implication is that knowledge acquisition needs high priority in a student's learning, especially for those with the least to start with' (Sherrington, 2017, p.109).

Remembering what has been taught is fundamental to the success of students and is, in fact, a benchmark of genuine learning. 'Learning is a change in long-term memory. This means that we can't really assume our students have 'learned' something unless, at some point later, they can show that they can remember it' (Sherrington, 2017, p.107). There are a variety of strategies that can be deployed within the classroom to support students to remember what they learn and teachers are encouraged to make judicious choices about which to use. This may be directed by the Head of Department. A common characteristic of effective memorisation is consolidation:

> 'Initial encoding of information is held in short-term working memory before being consolidated… Consolidation reorganises and stabilises memory traces, gives them meaning and makes connections to past experiences and to other knowledge already stored in long-term memory. Retrieval updates learning and enables pupils to apply it when they need it' (Brown et al, 2014).

Frequent and regular opportunities should be provided for students to consolidate their learning within lessons and across sequences of lessons.

Ensuring teaching and learning is appropriately challenging for all students is a key skill. As adults, we often take pride in finding something difficult, struggling, making an attempt, getting things wrong, trying again and then succeeding. This is possible when the tasks we undertake are challenging and exist within our zone of proximal development. The satisfaction we take from overcoming challenges when learning is only possible when our resilience and self-esteem are high enough to allow us to cope with the feeling of struggling. It is equally important that students are provided with opportunities to struggle and succeed. This demands that teachers understand their students and have up to date assessment information that allows them to accurately design appropriately challenging tasks. It is also crucial to create a learning environment that celebrates this struggle and supports students to demonstrate tenacity and determination.

Questioning is a key component of teaching and learning; it allows teachers to assess students' understanding and can also help students to learn. Students should be challenged to provide full responses to questions that represent the best of what they know and understand, both orally and in writing. Providing opportunities for students to ask questions of themselves, each other and the teacher is also an important aspect of teaching and learning. This allows students to express their academic curiosity, challenge each other in a collegiate manner and clarify understanding. Indeed, the ability to ask meaningful questions is arguably one of the most important learning skills a student can acquire and can often lead to an improvement in students' motivation, independent thinking and ability to communicate complex ideas. Teachers must make thoughtful choices with regards to the types of questions they ask based on the purpose of each passage of a lesson. Questions should be specific and encourage students to engage in higher order thinking. In order to elicit considered and thorough responses, teachers must give students thinking time and may need to use follow up, probing questions to encourage deeper consideration.

Literacy is crucial to learning and academic success. However, it is important that teachers acknowledge and understand that each subject has a unique way of communicating its specific discourses. In order for students to be successful and to prepare them to pursue

subjects into adulthood, it is crucial that they are taught how to read, write and speak like experts in each subject. This requires specific and explicit literacy instruction, and for learning to be supported by a wide range of authentic, challenging texts. Teachers must use data to accurately identify students who may require additional support to access the texts selected and deploy carefully chosen strategies to achieve this. Similarly, students who have excellent literacy skills must be encouraged to read increasingly challenging texts and hone their writing and oral skills to master expertise. Teachers at The Spires College understand that teaching students to write is as important as teaching students through writing, and they ensure that opportunities to support students with both pursuits are provided.

We have a wide range of books on the subject of teaching and learning in our staff CPD library. Some suggested reading is indicated below:

- Christodoulou, D., 2014. *Seven Myths About Education*. London: Routledge.
- Kirschner, P., Hendrick, C. and Caviglioli, O., 2020. *How Learning Happens*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Morrison McGill, R., 2022. *The Teacher Toolkit Guide to Memory*. Bloomsbury Education.
- Sherrington, T. and Caviglioli, O., 2017. *The Learning Rainforest Fieldbook*. John Catt Educational Ltd.

Homework:

Homework can be a divisive issue, with parents having very varied views on what constitutes the 'right amount' of homework. As well as being unable to please everyone, homework brings other challenges. If homework needs teacher feedback, this can add to workload. Complete teacher autonomy can also result in some classes getting far more or less homework than others, which is unfair (the students receiving more homework may believe they are being hard-done-by whereas the reality is that those receiving less are probably getting the worse deal). Some schools have attempted to address these issues by having a whole-school approach such as learning information from a knowledge organiser for every subject, which is then checked by a quiz. However, this works better for some subjects than others and does not allow subjects the flexibility they may need to use homework for other purposes. One approach would be to set no homework at all, and this would certainly be better than setting homework for the sake of compliance with a school policy. Such tasks are not based on learning and thus do little to convince parents or students of the importance of homework completion.

So, what do we do? We follow the evidence. In his book *Visible Learning*, education researcher John Hattie seeks to dig into the evidence base behind various educational practices and suggests an 'effect size' for each to suggest impact. At first glance, Hattie's work suggests homework has a fairly small impact on student progress, with an effect size of 0.29. However, the evidence base shows a notable divide between primary and secondary, with the effect size at primary being 0.15 and at secondary 0.64, which suggests that by secondary school, homework has a positive impact on progress.

Tom Sherrington's blog, 'homework-what-does-the-hattie-research-actually-say,' is useful as it explores the detail of Hattie's work and extrapolates some key points. He stresses that what Hattie's work really shows is that it is the type of homework that determines effectiveness, and suggests that measuring impact of 'homework' as a homogenous entity is unhelpful:

> 'At secondary level [Hattie] suggests there is no evidence that prescribing homework develops time management skills and that the highest effects in secondary are associated with rote learning, practice or rehearsal of subject matter; more task-orientated homework has higher effects than deep learning and problem solving. Overall, the more complex, open-ended and unstructured tasks are, the lower the effect sizes. Short, frequent homework closely monitored by teachers has more impact that their converse forms and effects are higher for higher ability students than lower ability students, higher for older rather than younger students. Finally, the evidence is that teacher involvement in homework is key to its success'
>
> (Sherrington, 2012).

Hattie himself added further critical comment to Sherrington's blog:

> '*Visible Learning* is a literature review, therefore it says what HAS happened not what COULD happen… The key is that this highlights the importance for schools to now evaluate the effectiveness of its primary homework practice… to try an alternative set of practices re. homework – and evaluate their impact on learning, involvement in learning, and increasing students' (and parents') understanding about the language of learning… most of all the invitation is to "Know thy impact".'

So the conversation must turn to the type homework being set as it seems that greater impact will derive from specific types of tasks.

Our approach, then, should be guided by this set of principles:

- That homework has to be useful in the teaching and learning process. It should not be an afterthought or an add-on that is done for the sake of compliance.
- That the type of homework set should be based on what we know works:
    - Tasks should be as specific and precise as possible.
    - Tasks involving rote learning or rehearsal/practice of subject matter have a higher effect size.
    - Complex, open or unstructured tasks tend to show less impact.
    - However, complex, more open tasks can be effective for older and more able students.
    - Short, frequent homeworks are more effective than longer, infrequent homeworks.
    - Teacher involvement is important for impact.
- That homework should prepare students to work independently, with demand increasing with age. It should not prevent young people being able to engage in activities outside of College but should build good working habits. Given what we know from Hattie, the act of setting homework does not develop students' time management skills but students will not suddenly be able to study independently at A level if we have not built up to this practice during the preceding years. Setting aside home learning time needs to become habitual.
- That homework should not require parents to contribute expensive resources. The challenge here is with online platforms, which can be very useful for some subjects. In this case we can address inequality in internet access by providing opportunities to do this work on the College site.

The way that homework is used will differ by subject and by student age but all homework should be in line with the above principles. Each department should have a clear rationale for how homework is used for that subject.

To ensure that the quantity is consistent and reasonable, departments should follow this guide:

- At Key Stage 3, there should be weekly homework for English, mathematics, science, history, geography and MFL. Each piece should take about 30 minutes.
- At Key Stage 4, each GCSE subject should set homework weekly. This may take up to an hour, although this is likely to build up from 30-40 minutes at the start of KS4.
- At Key Stage 5, students are expected to devote at least nine hours per fortnight to each subject.

Teachers should record homework set on Class Charts. Students are expected to record homework in their planners so they have a written record of what they have to do and by when. They should be able to copy this, either from the board or from Class Charts. Teachers should check this is done.

Some suggested reading is indicated below:

- Hattie, J., 2009. *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to achievement.* London: Routledge.
- https://teacherhead.com/2012/10/21/homework-what-does-the-hattie-research-actually-say/#:~:text=improving%20the%20rate%20of%20learning,of%20students%20not%20given%20homework.

Assessment:

Assessment is a broad term that is used to describe the range of tools educators use to evaluate and measure the progress, learning, acquisition of skill, or academic readiness of students. When done well, assessment can give pupils better information about their performance and teachers better information about the impact of their teaching on students' learning. In some cases, assessment can also be a mechanism by which the success of the curriculum can be evaluated as it allows teachers and leaders to review its impact.

Whilst most teachers understand the basic principles of assessment, for various reasons, often political (including its diminishing prominence in initial teacher training programmes and the government's narrow focus on the scrutiny of *terminal* assessments), the nuances and complexities of assessment as a pedagogical practice are sometimes overlooked. Despite this, research is clear that, when designed and implemented thoughtfully and effectively, assessment is fundamental to the processes of teaching and learning:

> 'Assessment is one of the most powerful educational tools for promoting effective learning. But it must be used in the right way. There is no evidence that increasing the amount of testing will enhance learning. Instead the focus needs to be on helping teachers use assessment, as part of teaching and learning, in ways that will raise pupils' achievement.'
>
> (Beyond the Black Box, pg 1)

Understanding the differences between formative and summative assessment is crucial; this helps to ensure we design assessments that are fit for purpose, reliable and valid, and that inferences drawn from any resulting data are equally so.

Put simply:

- **Summative assessment** is that which allows us to make meaningful comparisons between a student's and a larger cohort's performance against a set of standards.
- **Formative assessment** is used diagnostically and provides information about how students can make further progress so that teachers and students can adjust to learn even more. The aim of formative assessment is to improve a student's performance, not just to measure it.

Broadly speaking, summative assessment is sometimes referred to as the assessment *of* learning, whilst formative assessment may be thought of as assessment *for* learning, or assessment that *informs* learning. Although, of course, most assessments can and should be used to inform future learning; this will be explained in more detail later.

Research suggests that effective formative assessments should be high frequency and low stakes, focusing on specific elements of the curriculum. They should allow for repetition and practice, keeping the results in raw form to track the details of what has been learned and what the next steps might be. Teachers can sometimes find it hard to quantify the formative assessment strategies they use in their classrooms. This may be, in part, because they are so inherent in what we do. The examples below illustrate how simple, everyday tasks allow teachers to gather data on what students know, understand and can do, in a manner that allows them to respond by adapting their teaching:

- Observing students in paired or group discussions, listening to how they explain what they have understood
- Using open questions that invite students to explore their understanding, ideas and reasoning. Responses could be given verbally or in whole-class responses using whiteboards etc.
- Asking students to summarise their learning through appropriate but alternative methods of communication (e.g. drawings, diagrams or concept mapping)

Teachers may, of course, collect information in these ways yet not use the information in a way that increases learning. What's important is how the teacher adapts to this formative assessment data: the decisions they make about what students can do to take their next steps and the actions they take that support students to do so.

Effective summative assessments need to be carried out in standard conditions to be reliable, scan a large knowledge domain and ideally use scaled scores rather than grades to allow for meaningful comparisons. It is vital that teachers understand the differences between these two modes of assessment and, perhaps even more importantly, when to use each one. This is rooted in an understanding of what teachers want to find out. Teachers should ask themselves questions when they are considering assessing students:

- What am I trying to find out?
- What do I plan to do with this information?
- What will be done differently as a result of having this information?

Whilst lots has been written about the differences between summative and formative assessment, it's important to note that the same assessment can be used for both formative and summative purposes; that what matters is how we *use* the information that is collected. For example, a test could be created to assess students' knowledge of a topic and award a grade. Summative, right? However, if the teacher then used the data from individual questions on the test to identify gaps in knowledge and inform their teaching in the next lesson or set a personalised homework task for a student, they are then using data from an assessment that was designed for summative purposes, formatively. In short, the way we use assessment data can determine whether the impact is formative or summative, but teachers need to make informed choices based on the purpose and intent of each assessment. In secondary education, it is unusual for assessments, other than terminal examinations such as GCSEs or A Levels, to be solely summative; all other assessment points should, if designed well, be an opportunity to respond to the data in order to further students' learning and progress, improving outcomes.

In Beyond the Black Box (1998), Black and Wiliam argue that intentionally designing assessments to inform learning, and responding to the data to improve students' learning or skills, is of vital importance:

> 'The important message now confronting the educational community is that assessment which is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool we have for both raising standards and empowering lifelong learners.'

Their research indicates that 'improving learning through assessment depends on five, deceptively simple, key factors:

- the provision of effective feedback to pupils;
- the active involvement of pupils in their own learning;

- adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment;
- a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning;
- the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.'

Whilst the first three of these factors are rooted in a teacher's practice, the latter two are more inherently linked to culture, and teachers' ideological beliefs about students' potential as well as the students' commitment to continual improvement. These factors should be intrinsically linked to the design of the curriculum and the planning of assessment that occurs simultaneously.

If we accept the key factors above as being vital to the success of assessment as a mechanism to improve learning, it is possible to identify characteristics of assessment that will help achieve these aims. For example:

- assessment is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part;
- assessment involves sharing learning goals with pupils;
- assessment aims to help pupils to know and to recognise the standards they are aiming for;
- assessment involves pupils in self-assessment;
- assessment provides feedback which leads to pupils recognising their next steps and understanding how to take them;
- assessment is underpinned by confidence that every student can improve;
- assessment involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data.

Beyond the distinction between summative and formative assessment, teachers must consider why they are assessing students and what they hope to learn by doing so. Gianpiero Rusconi, writing for Cloud Assess in 2024, identified several different modes of assessment:

- **Diagnostic assessment** is a formative assessment tool that allows teachers to diagnose individual learning needs and make plans for how to support students to address these needs. Diagnostic assessment involves checking for understanding with a focus on how to modify teaching, using this information; it is a form of assessment for learning. This type of assessment is often used before the introduction of new content or skills to assess the students' prior knowledge or starting points. Teachers are then able to respond to this data by adjusting planning to meet the needs of the students.
- **Criterion-referenced assessments** are based on a predetermined set of criteria or on an agreed standard. The assessments are designed to simply measure whether students are meeting an agreed standard at a particular moment in time. This can help students to focus on achieving mastery of a particular criteria. The resulting data can be used to make comparisons between students but also to provide formative feedback that supports the student to move closer to the agreed standard.
- **Norm-referenced assessment** is when students are assessed against the performance of the norm group (other students, often a broad cohort including national samples, who have completed the same assessment). These assessments can be used to identify a student's rank within the norm group and, when results are contextualised with prior attainment data, identify underachievement and overachievement. This

generally involves using standardised assessments and being aware of their inherent limitations. Examples of this in practice include the way we assess students' reading, when Heads of Department evaluate departmental outcomes at KS4 or KS5 against others within SWIFT, or when the Heads of Maths, English and Science compare Year 9 progress test results against a national cohort. Whilst this type of assessment can be valuable, due to the reliance on standardised assessments and the fact that norm-referenced assessment is most relevant when looking at large groups of students, this type of assessment can be difficult to administer and must be used for very specific purposes. Data resulting from norm-referenced assessments can also be used to evaluate the efficacy of the curriculum. This is especially true where a cohort's results within a subject are being compared against a wider sample that includes external data and national benchmarks.

- **Ipsative assessment** can be used formatively to assess a student's progress as an individual, without referencing external standards. This is achieved by measuring a student's performance against previous results to assess their individual development. Research has shown that ipsative assessments have a positive impact on students' motivation and self-esteem, and that they encourage teachers to provide personalised and detailed developmental feedback.
- **Confirmative assessment** is used to check that students have learned what the teacher expects them to have learned. Consequently, it is anticipated that all students will achieve full marks or close to this; the next phase of teaching will be altered in accordance with the outcomes of the assessment. This can be seen as a summative assessment as it typically occurs at the end of a teaching 'episode' to check understanding and is therefore an assessment *of* learning and retention. However, it should also be used formatively to identify any students who require additional support.
- **Interim assessments** are conducted periodically throughout the teaching of a particular topic to evaluate the impact of teaching on learning as it occurs. This can be useful as it allows teachers to identify misconceptions or insecure knowledge swiftly and provides actionable data that can be responded to with immediacy.
- **Assessment for certification** is a summative assessment whereby students sit external tests or examinations. Some of these compare student results against a national sample to determine an outcome (e.g. GCSEs or A Levels) whilst others are awarded in recognition of a certain standard being reached against pre-determined criteria (e.g. music grade exams). This is, arguably, the only mode of truly summative assessment.

When designing assessments, teachers need to think carefully about the skill or body of knowledge they want to measure. This might sound obvious, but many tasks that students undertake are incredibly complex and assessments can be used to measure specific elements individually. Teachers should then adapt their input accordingly. Because complex skills can be broken down into smaller pieces, there is often value in designing assessments which try to capture progress in these individual elements. For example, if a student needs to write an essay as a summative assessment, it might be tempting to ask them to write one paragraph of the essay as an earlier formative assessment. Teachers might hope that this would identify their strengths and areas for improvement without committing students to a more time-intensive task such as extended writing. The issue here is that this formative assessment is simply a mini version of the summative assessment, and is unlikely to provide additional or more specific information. In order to improve at complex tasks, sometimes we

need to practise other types of task that focus on precise skills or bodies of knowledge. Dylan Wiliam (2011) comments on this in the context of baseball:

> 'The coach has to design a series of activities that will move athletes from their current state to the goal state. Often coaches will take a complex activity, such as the double play in baseball, and break it down into a series of components, each of which needs to be practised until fluency is reached, and then the components are assembled together. Not only does the coach have a clear notion of quality (the well-executed double play), he also understands the anatomy of quality; he is able to see the high-quality performance as being composed of a series of elements that can be broken down into a developmental sequence for the athlete'
>
> (Embedded Formative Assessment, p.122).

Wiliam calls this series of activities 'a model of progression'. Each step in the model of progression should be an element that contributes to the complex task but, in isolation, might not look like the final activity. When feedback is provided on these individual steps, students are often more likely to understand it and compute their actions into long term memory. This progression should be identified in the design of the curriculum and an assessment framework that represents student progress and enables an evaluation of the efficacy of the curriculum itself. Assessment should be as useful and relevant to students' learning as it is to the teacher's evaluation of practice; 'Testing doesn't just help measure understanding; it helps develop understanding' (Christodoulou, 2017). So, returning to the essay-writing example, it might be that earlier formative assessments focus on and measure students' ability to structure their paragraphs effectively, apply specific types of knowledge (such as context) effectively, or accurately reference research or sources. Of course, the formative assessment task would need to be designed to explicitly foreground the chosen assessed skill. Data could then be used responsively to ensure students make progress in this skill or area of knowledge prior to the summative assessment where essay-writing is assessed more holistically.

Where relevant, teachers should also consider what frame of reference or agreed standard students are being assessed against. For example, in subjects like English or the creative arts, teachers may adopt the 'quality model', where students' work is judged against a set of standards or an agreed criterion. In these instances, careful consideration needs to be given to the selection of agreed standards to ensure they are appropriate and meaningful within the context of the assessment. For example, it can be tempting to apply GCSE (or alternative) marking criteria to KS3 assessments 'off the peg' and, whilst there are some circumstances in which a version of this might be helpful, this is not necessarily or always the case. In subjects like Maths, the 'difficulty model' (where the level of challenge is inherent in the questions that are set and the students' ability to successfully answer them determines the standard) might be more appropriate. Here, careful consideration should be given to the appropriateness of the intended level of challenge within the assessment itself as well as the conditions under which students sit the assessment, including any support or scaffolding provided.

When designing assessments and drawing inferences from the resulting data, two key concepts must be considered: validity and reliability. Wiliam argues that validity is 'the central concept in assessment', and defines it as follows:

> 'The really important idea here is that we are hardly ever interested in how well a student did on a particular assessment. What we are interested in is what we can say, from that evidence, about what the student can do in other situations, at

> other times, in other contexts. Some conclusions are warranted on the basis of the results of the assessment, and others are not. The process of establishing which kinds of conclusions are warranted and which are not is called validation'
>
> (Wiliam, 2014).

The implication is that the results of assessments are not particularly interesting; what matters is the inferences that can be drawn from those results, and it is these that can either be valid or invalid.

The reliability of assessment data also needs to be considered. Here, consistency is key. If a student were to sit different versions of the same assessment, they should get similar results. This is most often true when students take the tests under similar conditions. For example, in order to generate reliable data that can be compared across classes within a subject, it might be helpful to reach an agreement beforehand about the amount of support available or the time provided to complete the test. In practice, tests and testing conditions can never be entirely identical so there will always be an element of error. What matters is the extent to which this margin of error affects the results or the inferences we draw from them.

Suggested wider reading on the topic of assessment includes:

- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). *Beyond the Black Box*. University of Cambridge School of Education.
- Christodoulou, D., 2017. *Making Good Progress?* OUP Oxford.
- Donarski, S., 2020. *The ResearchED Guide to Assessment*. Melton: John Catt Educational.
- https://primarytimery.com/2022/05/02/dont-mix-the-six-thinking-about-assessment-as-six-different-tools-with-six-different-jobs/

Feedback:

Feedback is one of the most important tools available to both teachers and students. When done well, feedback is central to a student's progress and to their understanding of themselves as learners.

For feedback to be meaningful and impactful, it must focus on identifying and explaining, clearly, how students can improve. These improvements need to be achievable for the student, and the teacher must, therefore, take into account what the student is likely to know, understand or be able to do. For example, asking a student to improve a paragraph by including a greater range of details relating to the Battle of Hastings might sound specific and achievable, particularly when the teacher knows the wealth of information that was taught to the student. However, in most cases it is likely that, if the student had known or remembered that information, they would have included it in their paragraph. Therefore, this feedback is likely to render the student dependent on the teacher or other resources, or unable to complete the task or make progress. This is something Dylan Wiliam discusses with regards to his observations in secondary schools:

> 'Typically, the feedback would focus on what was deficient about the work submitted, which the students were not able to resubmit, rather than on what to do to improve their future learning… This kind of feedback is accurate – it is describing what needs to happen – but is not helpful because the learner does not know how to use the feedback to improve'
>
> (Wiliam, 2011, p.120).

Conversely, if multiple students had left out similar information relating to the Battle of Hastings, a more appropriate model of delivering feedback might be to re-teach the content to the class before asking students to attempt the task again. This is an example of how the model of feedback selected is often as important as the tasks that are set.

A common misunderstanding with regards to feedback is that, in order for it be thorough or effective, extensive written comments must be provided for students. This is often the case with parental interpretations of what constitutes feedback. Didau (2021, pp41-2) argues: 'The purpose of marking and correcting students' work is that it should provide them with feedback on how to improve, but writing extended comments for each student is a particularly inefficient and ineffective way of going about this.' Teachers at The Spires College are encouraged to make thoughtful choices about the type and efficacy of feedback provided to students, and the mode in which students are expected to respond. For us, high-quality feedback can take many forms and is simply characterised by progression in students' knowledge, understanding or skill.

Didau makes a good point about selecting what to feedback upon:

> 'Giving someone feedback on something they already know is pointless… Lack of knowledge is not the problem; the problem is caused by practice. The more we practise something the more automatic it becomes. If we practise doing something badly we get better at doing it badly. Many students have become superb at not using capital letters…'
>
> (Didau, 2021, pp.60-61)

When students repeatedly make mistakes through carelessness rather than a lack of understanding, feedback should shift the burden of responsibility back to the student to break them of this cycle:

> ‘When we circle missing capital letters children become dependent on us to do it for them. Students need consequences for neglecting to do what they know how to do; otherwise why would they bother?
>
> ‘The solution is to expect students to proofread work before it’s handed in… If work makes it through to the teacher and there are still missing capital letters there should be some sort of sanction that makes it clear that missing out the basics first time round is more onerous in the long term…
>
> ‘Using appropriate pressure is not about cruelly forcing children to use capital letters, it’s about creating conditions where they become more responsive and more willing. It’s about never lowering our expectations and saying, “that’ll do.”’
>
> (Didau, 2021, pp.60-62)

This practice supports students to build independence, diligence and resilience as a learner, but also reminds them of our high expectations and, over time, encourages them to hold themselves to the same high standards.

Students must take responsibility for their own learning and should, therefore, understand and be actively involved in the process of assessment. In order to do this effectively, they must understand what standards they are aiming for. ‘Thus assessment for learning must involve pupils, so as to provide them with information about how well they are doing and guide their subsequent efforts. Much of this information will come as feedback from the teacher, but some will be through their direct involvement in assessing their own work. The awareness of learning and ability of learners to direct it for themselves is of increasing importance in the context of encouraging lifelong learning’ (Beyond the Black Box (1998), Black and Wiliam).

Student self-assessment is an approach that students can apply to gauge how they are performing. It can ask students to evaluate their work, performance or behaviour, as well as understanding what they’ve learned and what they still need to learn. When used effectively, research suggests that self-assessment can encourage students to take ownership of their learning as it fosters accountability. However, as teachers know, assessment is a complex skill so careful attention must be paid to the conditions of self-assessment if and when it is used. For self-assessment to be effective, clear criterion against which students are assessing themselves needs to be agreed. These are most often successful when there is a binary, correct or incorrect, answer that does not demand students to apply judgement. In these circumstances, self-assessment can enable students to easily understand how they have performed and to potentially compare this against previous similar assessments to measure progress. However, as with all forms of formative assessment, the risk here is that the data is not responded to as students may not independently know how to do so. This is where the responsibility transitions back to the teacher to direct an appropriate response that leads to progression.

Teachers are often asked to provide feedback on work that demanded complex skills and higher order thinking from students. In some cases, where work falls well below the expected standard, it can be difficult to provide meaningful feedback that fulfils the requirements above with regards to a student’s ability to respond independently and make progress. Whilst it can be tempting to provide students with feedback on an entire piece of work (and each individual skill or area of knowledge involved in producing it), this can often be overwhelming and hinder the student’s comprehension of the feedback. As Dylan Wiliam (2011) argues, feedback must enable students to make such manageable adjustments in order for it to be formative. In these instances, teachers should be mindful of the students’

starting points, where they are now, and increments that will move them closer to the end goal; teachers should give feedback on individual skills or areas of knowledge, allowing the student to focus their response on improving specific aspects of the work. 'In order to develop skill, we need lots of specific knowledge and lots of deliberate practice at using that knowledge' (Christodoulou, 2017) and, therefore, feedback that focuses on one area of specific knowledge or practice in applying this knowledge is likely to support progress.

Our approach to feedback is not prescribed across the College. We encourage staff to deploy methods of delivering feedback, and encouraging students to respond to this, that are efficient and effective, being mindful of the pressures on workload. Teachers and subject leaders should ask themselves questions about the impact and efficacy of their chosen methods for delivering feedback and root decisions in whether it is likely to lead to genuine and sustained progress for students.

Suggested further reading:

- Christodoulou, D., 2017. *Making Good Progress?* OUP Oxford.
- Donarski, S., 2020. *The ResearchED Guide to Assessment*. Melton: John Catt Educational.
- Didau, D., 2021. *Making Meaning in English*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Wiliam, D., 2011. *Embedded Formative Assessment*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Adaptive Teaching:

An awareness of the needs of all students, including those with SEND, sits at the centre of our curriculum and approach to teaching and learning. Within the community of Torbay the College has a reputation for our inclusive culture and the outcomes we support SEND students to achieve. This is because we firmly believe that all teachers are teachers of SEND and all leaders are leaders of SEND. We foster and promote a culture of inclusion where every student has an equal opportunity to succeed and become the best that they can be. We have high expectations for every single student regardless of background or circumstance, and we want to foster a belief in our students that they can break any aspirational glass ceilings. Some SEND students may have to work harder or differently than their peers but know that all staff have high expectations of them, and their needs do not have to be limiting. Our curriculum takes account of individual needs, and diversity is viewed as a positive. We aim to build the knowledge in individuals that failures and mistakes are part of the learning process and any setbacks in academic progress can be overcome.

Differentiation is often thought of as a means by which the needs of students with SEND can be met. However, the term has come to be synonymous with lowering expectations; as well as differentiation being hugely time-consuming for the teacher, it can translate in practice as expecting less of some students than we do of others – in other words, as dumbing down or reducing the curriculum on offer. Instead, academic research is focusing on the term 'adaptive teaching'. According to Standard 5 of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011) adaptive teaching is when teachers 'adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils.' Specifically, adaptive teaching requires teachers to:

- Know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively.
- Have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit students' ability to learn and how best to overcome these.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils' education at different stages of development.
- Have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils – including those with SEND, those of high ability, those with English as an additional language – and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.

The Early Career Framework also encourages teachers new to the profession to consider how to meet the needs of every child in front of them by breaking new information down, using formative assessment and communicating with the SENDCO. However, unlike 'traditional differentiation', adaptive teaching asks teachers to consider how all students can be supported to reach the same end point. In short then, whereas traditional differentiation focuses on individual students or small groups of students, adaptive teaching focuses on the whole class. It asks teachers to identify the end point and the desired standard of work students produce and teach to the top, supporting all students with appropriate scaffolding to reach that standard. Crucially, additional support offered in the guise of scaffolding should be reduced over time so that all students can become increasingly independent. Unlike some forms of differentiation which can perpetuate attainment gaps by capping opportunities and aspirations, adaptive teaching promotes high achievement for all. In fact, according to the 2015 PISA results, "adaptive instruction" is one of the approaches most positively correlated with student performance.

The EEF identify key strategies for supporting students with SEND in mainstream classrooms.

- **Create a positive and supportive environment for all**: This is about removing barriers to participation and learning for all students to ensure they are able to engage positively and feel confident to do so.
- **Understand your students:** Assessment can be a key tool here. The EEF suggest that 'assessment should be regular and purposeful rather than a one-off event, and should seek input from parents and carers as well as the pupil themselves and specialist professionals. Teachers need to feel empowered and trusted to use the information they collect to make a decision about the next steps for teaching that child.'
- **Flexible grouping**: Teachers should consider how to group students within their seating plans and in group work. If teachers work too intensively with individual students (whether they have SEND or not), the other students in the room may suffer. Similarly, grouping for interventions needs careful consideration. The EEF suggest that 'small-group and one-to-one interventions can be a powerful tool but must be used carefully. Ineffective use of interventions can create a barrier to the inclusion of pupils with SEN.'
- **Quality first teaching is vital**: If teachers deliver high quality instruction and are meeting the needs of the learners, the need for additional support or intervention beyond the classroom is significantly reduced.
- **Cognitive and metacognitive strategies**: Teaching all students about how they are learning as well as strategies for remembering learned content can act as a shortcut in the future and help students feel in control of their progress.
- **Scaffolding**: This is strategy most teachers are very familiar with. The important thing here is to assess students' comfort levels and remove scaffolds over time to build independence. The EEF's learning behaviours specialist, Kirsten Mould states (2021): 'It is important to monitor task, effort required and independent working time given as these can impact pupil effort, attention and persistence in the classroom.'

In practice, adaptive teaching can take many forms. It might be that for some tasks, some students work with additional or different support materials or stimuli. In other cases, adaptations might be made to students' starting point by adjusting the number of steps within a task or by allowing some students to start a little 'further along the road'. This is particularly true where tasks might be new to students or where they are building on existing knowledge in new ways. In some instances, the dialogue between a student and the teacher may be a crucial feature to consider; the vocabulary and complexity of language used may vary for different students. Whichever approaches are used, they should be appropriate for the students in the room and, crucially, gradually withdrawn to build independence and resilience. It may be worth considering whether any adaptations made would be detrimental to the learning of other students in the class and, if not, whether it might be worthwhile teaching the entire class in that way. If, for example, chunking content down would not be detrimental to the rest of the class, consider deploying it universally rather than as a targeted intervention for a small number of students.

In his work on 'Visible Learning' (2012), Hattie identified five attitudes and beliefs demonstrated by expert teachers. One of these was the belief that all students, regardless of SEND status or starting point, can reach the success criteria. He argued that expert teachers believe that knowledge and attainment is changeable, not fixed, and that they show respect for their students when they teach to the top and support every student to reach the same standard. He further argued that students are able to detect this passion and belief in

teachers as students felt that they made more progress in classes where teachers: care, control, clarify, challenge, captivate, confer, and consolidate.

At The Spires College, students with SEND are fully integrated into the mainstream and are supported to succeed within the classroom; students are rarely extracted from lessons as we know they are most likely to make progress when taught by subject specialist teachers. In the rare occasions where SEND students are removed from classrooms, this is only ever replaced with high quality targeted intervention which has a measurable impact on progress. In these cases, the teacher works closely with the learning support assistant to plan and assess interventions.

A selection of wider reading on adaptive teaching can be found in our CPD library. We recommend:

- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers*. London: Routledge.
- https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-assess-adjust-adapt-what-does-adaptive-teaching-mean-to-you
- https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/send
- https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/adaptive-teaching-explained-what-why-and-how-pedagogy-classroom-teachers-curriculum-differentiation-teachers-standards-pisa/

Literacy:

The Spires College has a continued and consistent focus on the literacy development of its students and staff. We passionately believe that it is the right of every child to read, write and speak with confidence, clarity and accuracy, and deftly wield language to express themselves. We know that securing excellent standards of literacy for every student is one of the key determining factors in ensuring they are able to compete on a level playing field with students nationally. It also opens doors both socially and academically.

Literacy instruction is often associated with students who struggle to read and write effectively. This is an important element of our literacy strategy and is often the first step. However, it is important to acknowledge that for most of our students, building upon a solid foundation of literacy knowledge and skills, developing and refining their abilities towards mastery, is the focus of classroom practice. We know that literacy can also be a limiting factor in the academic success of students with high prior attainment, so it is important to carefully consider the needs of each student we teach.

Teaching children to read, write and speak like experts requires a disciplinary approach that is mindful of the unique challenges and opportunities in each subject. Therefore, teaching staff work collaboratively within department teams to share knowledge and expertise in this area. Heads of Departments have dedicated time to critically evaluating their curricula and the teaching and learning within departments to ensure literacy education is consistently effective.

Similarly, teachers are asked to review the likely 'literacy journey' of a student in their subject, asking themselves what challenges a student might face when studying their subject at undergraduate level, for example. If we are truly aspirational for our students, our literacy instruction should provide them with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to take each step in their academic career with confidence. The disciplinary nature of literacy demands that teachers have a thorough understanding of the nuances of reading, writing and speaking in their subject. For example, writing in History is very different to writing in Art, Science or Spanish. If we are to teach students these discrete distinctions, we must be familiar with them ourselves; this requires teachers to be well-read.

Whilst we adopt a disciplinary approach to literacy instruction within classrooms, there are some common characteristics of effective practice that we expect from all teaching staff.

- The first priority should be to understand one's students with regards to literacy. CAT and reading test data is available; teachers are asked to review this carefully and use it to inform their planning. Where reading tests have indicated unusual gaps in students' knowledge or skills, individual profiles are available with a detailed breakdown of their data and suggested teaching and learning approaches. In addition, some students will have learning passports that may indicate suggested strategies for literacy instruction, and some students will be receiving additional literacy interventions. Where this is the case, the Head of Literacy will work with staff to keep them informed of the students' progress and provide guidance where appropriate. This data should be used to inform planning for individual students and classes, supporting all students to make excellent progress in literacy.
- Developing and deploying a rich vocabulary is a key building block in literacy instruction. Explicitly teaching students tier 1, 2 and 3 terminology alongside definitions and spellings helps students develop autographic recognition which, in turn, supports reading fluency and written accuracy. Departments have the freedom to utilise a range of strategies for teaching vocabulary in a disciplinary manner with the aim of ensuring that all students are explicitly taught ambitious language, are able to remember this, and are provided with authentic opportunities to practise using it.

- Reading is a complex task that incorporates an intricate combination of skills. Whilst practise is key to improvements in reading, research is clear that progress is greater and more sustained when explicit strategies are utilised to teach approaches to reading. Teachers are, therefore, asked to carefully consider how to engage students in active reading that develops students' comprehension, inference and fluency. Again, a disciplinary approach is often most useful here although there are some generic reading strategies that can be universally beneficial.
- Teachers should consider the texts that are used within their classrooms in terms of their authenticity, length, complexity, challenge and range. The texts chosen should develop students' knowledge of the subject and reading skills, and should be carefully selected with the students' reading data in mind to ensure they are accessible and appropriately challenging for all.
- As well as considering how to support students' academic reading, we expect teachers to promote a wider love of reading through the tutor reading programme and drop and read. The latter is delivered to all Year 7 and 8 students daily, and should be planned to engage students effectively and encourage them to discover their own reading interests. Resources have been provided separately to support teachers in the delivery of drop and read and the tutor reading programme.
- Writing should be seen as the other side of the same coin to reading instruction. Therefore, the texts that are selected for use within the classroom should represent the best of authentic writing within each subject, modelling what we aspire for our students to achieve. Writing provides an opportunity for students to assimilate and express their knowledge, deploy vocabulary effectively and practise disciplinary approaches to communication. It is important that teachers see writing tasks as opportunities to foreground the writing itself as a learning activity rather than simply as an outcome of learning; it should be perceived as a process whereby students present their knowledge skilfully, refining and improving this until it accurately reflects the best of what they know and can do. The process of refinement is crucial and students should be encouraged to persevere with this to support learning where appropriate. Providing opportunities for students to engage in extended writing is also important in developing resilience and independence whilst preparing them for the challenges of academic study. Of course, the accuracy of one's writing is also of crucial importance. Being able to accurately organise and structure paragraphs or texts, and use punctuation to control meaning ensures students are able to express themselves with precision and clarity. This requires that teachers explicitly teach the organisational features and grammatical elements common to texts within each discipline.
- It is also important that students are able to articulate themselves orally with confidence and clarity. Students should be provided with appropriate opportunities to discuss topics within subjects, applying and exploring their knowledge. Again, developing extended responses that assimilate and synthesise knowledge is crucial; students should be challenged to improve, clarify and extend under-developed responses. Other behaviours associated with effective oracy should also be modelled and explicitly taught; it is important that students learn how to listen and respond, challenge and build upon the responses of others with respect, and accept this challenge in return. Speaking and listening are often effective learning processes but can also provide useful outcomes that help teachers to assess students' knowledge and skill.

It is important that, as professionals, our own literacy is highly accurate and effective. Not only does this ensure we practice what we preach, modelling exemplary practice for students, it also means we have the necessary knowledge and confidence to teach others. As with any area of knowledge or with any skill, perseverance and practice are key.

Therefore, we encourage staff to engage in professional learning regarding literacy; the staff CPD library has a number of books on the subject with practical strategies, and support from peers is always available.

The College has a literacy strategy document that should be reviewed separately. This is in addition to the documentation that supports the tutor reading programme and drop and read.

A selection of wider reading on adaptive teaching can be found in our CPD library. We recommend:

- Crystal, D. (2004). *Making Sense of Grammar*. Longman
- Crystal, D. (2004). *Rediscover Grammar*. Longman
- Lemov, D., Driggs, C., & Woolway, E. (2016). *Reading Reconsidered: A Practical Guide to Rigorous Literacy Instruction*. Wiley-Interscience.
- Mortimore, K. (2020) *Disciplinary Literacy and Explicit Vocabulary Teaching*. John Catt.
- Quigley, A. (2020). *Closing the Reading Gap*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Quigley, A. (2018). *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*. Taylor & Francis Group.
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Quality Assurance:

If we are to work in a high trust environment, quality assurance (QA) and our attitudes towards it really matter. The purpose of QA at The Spires College is to check that what we are doing is having the intended effects: i.e. are students learning and retaining what we are teaching? Are they able to use that knowledge effectively? Do they read, write, speak and listen well? Are they behaving in ways that are conducive to learning? Are they developing into well-rounded citizens? In highly prescriptive schools, the QA process is often a fairly simple matter of checking that all staff are following what has been prescribed. The problem is, the focus is then on compliance rather than effectiveness.

The College's approach to both teaching and its QA is one of genuine curiosity: for teachers to carefully consider the most effective ways to teach and to then engage in the process of exploring how well this is working. This is why attitudes to QA are so important. If quality assurance activities are met with defensiveness, evasion or an 'I've always done it like this so why would I change now' attitude, then a culture of high trust and professional autonomy can never survive. If teachers have autonomy to teach as they wish, they have to be interested in checking that it's working and open to finding out when it's not. QA should not be a 'top down' process but rather a process that all teachers and leaders actively engage in with open-minded curiosity and a desire to do the very best job that we can.

At The Spires College, overall responsibility for QA sits with the Extended Leadership Team (ELT), that is Heads of Department and Heads of Year. We have a Monitoring and Self-Evaluation Process, which has become known as the MSEP. The process is one that evolves as the College does to ensure it meets the needs of the current context. The MSEP sets out lines of enquiry that ELT explore with support from their line managers. How they gather evidence to find out about a specific line of enquiry will depend on both the questions they want to answer and on the context of the department, but may include visiting lessons, talking to students/teachers/parents, looking at work and discussions within departments or year teams. Heads of Department evaluate their findings and use them to inform their Department Self-Evaluations (DSEF) and Department Improvement Plans (DIP), which are live documents. Heads of Year also use their findings to contribute to a self-evaluation and action planning process. SLT line managers are there to support and challenge. They draw together findings to complete an overview report of the department or year group, also a live document, which ensures senior leaders and governors have an accurate and current picture of every aspect of the College.

It is therefore important that the evidence gathered to inform the MSEP is accurate reflection of daily practice. Philosopher, Will Durant (1957), said, 'We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.' One-off lesson observations do not feature as part of College QA because they judge the act not the habit. Punitive QA systems encourage just this: some teachers devote hours of planning time to putting on a 'show' lesson intended to impress, but which gives the observer no idea of the normal daily experience of children in that classroom. This brings us back to the importance of buy-in: our systems rely on everyone leaving negative experiences of QA (and social media is awash with people asserting that all QA is inherently evil) at the door and actively engaging with the MSEP because we must be honest with ourselves if we want to do the best by our students.

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Principles of Teaching

Principle of Better Practice	So that…
1. High behavioural expectations and routines	
a) Teachers create a warm, friendly, respectful and positive classroom culture	a) Students feel respected, safe and happy to participate in lessons
b) Teachers demonstrate effective classroom management	b) No lesson time is wasted dealing with disruption or disorderly transitions
c) Teachers consistently apply sanctions and rewards according to the behaviour policy	c) Students can think hard about their learning, free from distraction. Achievements are rewarded
d) Teachers ensure that all students are able to participate and engage in their learning	d) Students are engaged in thinking hard about key learning
e) Teachers reinforce effort and provide recognition	e) Students understand the connections between effort and achievement
f) Teachers model the college attributes, discussing these with students	f) Students play an active role in creating a positive, respectful culture and feel safe
2. Quality of instruction	
a) Teachers give highly effective explanations	a) Students quickly grasp key ideas
b) Teachers present new knowledge in small steps	b) Each step can be mastered before students move on
c) Teachers model thinking and processes to a very high standard	c) Students know what excellence looks like as well as how to achieve it
d) Teachers ask questions that promote engagement and deep thinking	d) A high proportion of students are asked and answer challenging questions
3. Subject expertise	
a) Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn and explore beyond course specifications	a) Students are inquisitive learners who develop cultural capital across the curriculum
b) Teachers promote and model reading widely and well	b) Students read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension
c) Teachers demonstrate expertise in their subject, including exam specifications	c) Students enjoy a broad curriculum in each subject and are successful in examinations
d) Teachers anticipate, plan for and address misconceptions	d) Students overcome common misconceptions
e) Teachers sequence and interleave content appropriately	e) Students revisit material in a way which promotes long term memory
f) Teachers promote and uphold the highest standards of literacy and oracy	f) Students communicate in a manner that is clear, confident and accurate
g) Teachers ask questions which are specific and encourage higher order thinking	g) Students are encouraged to think hard and can provide high quality answers
h) Teachers set meaningful homework that develops students' knowledge and skills	h) Students engage with homework and have opportunities to practise what they learn
4. Making it stick	
a) Teachers' planning shows an understanding of how children learn and remember	a) Students can embed learning into their long term memory
b) Teachers guide students as they begin to practise new material	b) Students can develop fluency and accuracy in new areas of learning
c) Teachers plan opportunities for students to practise with increasing independence	c) Skills and knowledge become automatic for students
d) Teachers ask questions which make links with prior learning	d) Students are encouraged to draw on prior knowledge
e) Teachers explicitly teach study skills	e) Students know how to study effectively and do so, demonstrating independence
5. Adaptive teaching	
a) Teachers provide appropriate scaffolds for demanding tasks	a) Students are able to succeed in challenging tasks
b) Teachers pitch high every lesson	b) Students are challenged to reach aspirational goals
c) Teachers adapt teaching as needs emerge	c) All students make exceptional progress
d) Teachers have a developed understanding of students with diverse needs	d) All students with SEND/EAL/other learning needs make exceptional progress
e) Teachers ask questions that are appropriately pitched and directed	e) Students are challenged to answer appropriately demanding questions
6. Responsive teaching	
a) Teachers give highly effective feedback in line with College policy	a) Student actions are refocused or redirected to achieve a goal
b) Teachers judiciously identify and utilise appropriate feedback strategies	b) Students understand what they have done well and how to make progress
c) Teachers accurately gather information on student learning in a variety of ways	c) Teachers know which topics to re-teach that were not grasped first time
d) Teachers provide students with opportunities to act upon feedback	d) Students can swiftly develop further knowledge and skills