Questions for middle leaders

This is an expanded set of questions for middle leaders that build upon the high-level questions in the main Effective Primary Teaching Practice report. They are intended as a guide, a prompt for reflection for middle leaders. It is not intended (nor perhaps advisable) to go through the entire set of questions at once. Middle leaders may also find it helpful to consult the questions for senior leaders and teachers.

Conversations with headteachers and teachers suggest that reviewing the questions alongside a critical friend or external support might work best for schools.

1. LEADERSHIP

How do you understand your role and remit as a leader and are you able to quantify your impact on others?
   a. What is the scope of your role?
   b. In what ways do you impact on other staff as a leader?
   c. How, and how often, do you evaluate this impact?
   d. What could you do to improve your impact on others?

In effective schools, leaders lead teaching and learning. They have a clear vision for the school – informed by evidence – which is understood, owned, and implemented by all staff, and drives all decisions in schools. Leaders do not allow themselves to be distracted from the core business of teaching and learning.

2. EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Developing teachers and teaching

How do you support the development and improvement of others' teaching practice to ensure quality of teaching across the school in your subject/phase?

  a. How often do you observe and provide feedback on teaching and how often do you invite others to see your teaching and discuss?
  b. How do you evaluate the impact of you support for others' development?

The ongoing development of teachers and teaching within a school is critical. Strong staff development is structured around clear objectives to improve pupil outcomes, and is informed and led by the evidence of effective teaching practices.

Teaching: planning, teaching and review

How do you use evidence, and evidenced-based resources and other expertise to ensure that your teachers plan, teach and assess pupils effectively in your subject/phase?

  a. How do you assess the quality of resources and other expertise you use?
  b. How do you know that you are positively impacting your teachers' ability to plan, teach assess pupils effectively?

Planning should be purposeful, focusing on learning and have an end goal in mind. Teaching approaches that are backed by evidence, such as mastery and catch up interventions, show promising signs of boosting pupil attainment.

Developing subject teaching

Within your area of responsibility, how confident are you that your own practice is an outstanding model for others including how you develop your subject knowledge and expertise?

  a. What steps do you take to ensure your own practice is effective and drawing on evidence?
  b. How do you develop and maintain your subject knowledge?
  c. How do you develop your knowledge of how children learn your subject, and how to know when pupils know and understand that subject?

Subject leaders who oversee both planning and teaching across all year groups are an effective way to improve teaching. A teacher's understanding of a subject and how children learn that subject is very important. Many primary schools are using specialist staff to teach some subjects but at present there is no evidence that subject specialists are more effective at teaching core subjects than generalists.

3. MAKING THE MOST OF RESOURCES

Making the most of teachers' time

How do you support other teachers to make the best use of their time overall and act as a good role model?
    a. How do you challenge and encourage the targeting of effort?
    b. Have you considered whether your role creates, rather than reduces, unnecessary bureaucracy?
    c. How do you evaluate the impact of your support?

In effective schools, teachers use their time on those things that make the most significant difference to improving outcomes for all their pupils.

Using teaching assistants

How do you support and monitor the deployment of additional staff, such as teaching assistants, to support teaching, ensure a positive impact on pupils and provide value for money?
    a. Are you aware of the evidence about effective use of teaching assistants, such as the EEF guide?
    b. How do help ensure teachers are clear about how best to use and work with teaching assistants?
    c. How do you know your teaching assistants are having a positive impact on pupil progress and provide value for money?

Teaching assistants (TAs) are used most successfully where careful consideration is given to whether to use them at all and what to use them for: in particular the types of interventions they support. Effective schools avoid creating dependency with individual pupils and specific TAs – such as that known as the 'velcro' model.

Using the classroom: layout and environment

Within your area of responsibility, how do you encourage other staff to think about their classroom layout in terms of teaching and the learning environment to enable the best pupil outcomes?
    a. How often do you discuss the use of the classroom with your teachers?
    b. How confident are you that you understand current evidence about which layouts suit different types of teaching and learning?

The teaching and expected learning should dictate the classroom layout – rather than the layout dictate the learning. Effective classroom environments focus on pupil learning, providing reference points and scaffolds to support this.

Using technology to support teaching

How do you ensure effective use of technology within your area of responsibility and how confident are you in modelling use of this technology as necessary?
    a. How do/could you assess the impact of technology to identify whether it continues to be of use, or could be improved?
    b. How do you ensure you can confidently use any technology your teachers might use in the classroom?

Technology should be used to improve teaching – if it has a clear pedagogical purpose – rather than for the sake of using it in and of itself. Before purchase, effective schools are clear about how technology will be used, what training will be required, how will it be embedded and how the impact will be monitored.

4. ORGANISE, STRUCTURE AND PRIORITISE

Investing in reception

1. If you are the early years leader, how effectively are you demonstrating progress from the teaching approach used across reception? How does this prepare the pupils for key stage 1?
    a. What teaching approach(es) do you use in reception and how do you know these are having the desired impact on pupil progress?
    b. How do you assess whether your pupils are ready for key stage 1 and the approaches you use in year 1?
    c. What more could you do to introduce elements of year 1 into the reception classroom (when it is appropriate), to support pupils' transition to year 1?

2. If you are a middle leader with responsibility for another area or subject within school, how do you ensure you build and maintain a good understanding of reception practice?
    a. What do you do to keep your understanding of reception practice up to date?
    b. How could you ensure that you maintain strong links with reception teachers and leaders, even if they are not within your area of responsibility as a middle leader?

Effective schools invest in developing a strong reception year with a structured approach to teaching and a focus on planning for learning rather than aimless activities.

Whether to use setting and streaming

Within your area of responsibility, do you understand how pupils are grouped, when and for what, and how this impacts on pupil outcomes?
    a. How are pupils grouped in your subject or phase?
    b. Why are pupils grouped in this way and how have you evaluated the impact of this grouping on pupil progress?
    c. Have you trialled alternate approaches to grouping pupils to see if these have a more positive impact on outcomes?

Setting and/or streaming may not help all pupils to achieve.

Whether to use homework

As a leader in school, how do you ensure you are clear about how the homework policy impacts on your subject of responsibility and its impact on pupil outcomes?
    a. What is your school's homework policy and what purpose does homework serve at your school?
    b. Does it achieve it purpose, and what is the impact of this policy on pupil outcomes?
    c. How do you review whether homework is the best way of achieving the desired objective?

Homework should have a clear purpose, and be used only if it is expected that all pupils will achieve the learning objectives.