

Questions for teachers

This is an expanded set of questions for teachers 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.

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

1. LEADERSHIP

1. How do you contribute to a culture of development by making changes and evaluating the impact, or supporting others to do so, to improve pupil outcomes?
 - a. When have you made a change, or supported others to make a change, that improved pupil outcomes within school?
 - b. How do you evaluate the impact changes like this have, in terms of the desired outcome (pupil progress)?
 - c. Where could you proactively make changes within school that, when evaluated, could demonstrate positive impact on pupil outcomes?

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

1. How do you actively seek development opportunities and ways of improving your practice (both formal and informal)?
 - a. How often do you seek support to improve your practice?
 - b. What processes are there in your school to provide formal or informal support to teachers?
 - c. How do you take responsibility for your own development?
2. How do you contribute to your colleagues' understanding and knowledge of the curriculum?
 - a. When have you supported colleagues with their curriculum knowledge?
 - b. How do you know your curriculum knowledge is up to date?
 - c. What opportunities are there for you to support colleagues' development, either formally or informally?
3. How confident do you feel in sourcing high-quality resources, robust evidence or external expertise to enhance your teaching of different subjects?
 - a. How do you know what you are looking at is a high-quality resource or piece of evidence?
 - b. How do you review the impact of the resource, evidence or expertise on your teaching and pupil outcomes?
4. How often do you observe and evaluate your own and others' practice?
 - a. How do you provide feedback to others and be open to professional discussions of your practice?
 - b. How often do you invite others observe and challenge your teaching?
 - c. How do you act upon evaluations of your teaching practice and monitor the impact of any changes you make?

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

1. How do you work with your colleagues to improve your planning – including focusing on learning and ensuring progression for pupils as they move up the school?
 - a. What is your current planning process?
 - b. How much of your planning is clearly focused on ensuring progression for pupils' learning?
 - c. Have you discussed planning with colleagues to find ways to improve each other's planning process?
2. How much time do you spend in lessons engaging in whole class interactive teaching as described in the main report? Can you identify ways to make more use of this approach?
 - a. What do you understand by whole class interactive teaching?
 - b. How do you ensure all pupils are able to access whole-class teaching through corrective teaching, targeted group work, practise and pre-teaching?
3. How well do you understand where each of your pupils is currently at in their learning and what they need to do in order to progress? How often do you discuss expectations and progress with your pupils?
 - a. How do you know what your pupils need to do to reach the next stage of their learning?
 - b. What discussions do you have with pupils about your expectations and steps to achieve those expectations?

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

1. How do you develop your teaching of subjects across the curriculum, including developing your knowledge and using subject leaders and other resources to support you?
 - a. How do you enhance your understanding of subjects across the primary curriculum?
 - b. How do/could you make use of the subject leaders in your school to enhance this understanding?
 - c. What other high-quality resources do/could you use to enhance this understanding?
2. If your school does not use subject leaders, how do you create opportunities to pool knowledge and skills with colleagues teaching other year groups, to promote pupil progress?
 - a. What opportunities are there within your school to share knowledge and skills with teachers in other year groups?
 - b. How can you ensure that when these opportunities arise, discussions are centred around how to promote better pupil outcomes across the school?

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

1. How do you create time for spacing (learning the same content multiple times with breaks in between) and interleaving (careful mixing up of teaching and practice of different topics or concepts); and revisiting the most important content, concepts and techniques?
 - a. How do you factor these effective techniques into your teaching, where relevant?
 - b. How does your mid- and long-term planning account for the need to space, interleave and revisit content, concepts and techniques?
2. How do you ensure you prioritise your time on activities that make the most difference to teaching and pupil outcomes?
 - a. How do you make the most of your limited planning time to focus on activities that make the biggest direct difference to pupil progress?
 - b. How could you evaluate the effectiveness of your planning time, to ensure that this time is always spent in the most productive way?
 - c. How do you ensure that you spend your PPA time in an effective meaningful way, and seek support to help you make the most of this time?

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

1. How often, and in what ways, do you direct and deploy TAs to specific tasks in the classroom?
 - a. How do you currently direct TAs in your classroom?
 - b. Is your deployment of TAs in line with the evidence base around effective use of support staff, and the evidence around effective interventions?
2. How do you monitor the value that TAs add to your lessons, and the impact they have on pupil learning?
 - a. How do you currently evaluate the impact your TAs have?
 - b. How often do you direct and deploy TAs differently, after evaluating where they have been most useful in supporting pupil progress?
 - c. Are your TAs currently having a demonstrable impact on your pupils' learning?
3. How do you involve TAs in planning lessons and teaching?
 - a. What role do your TAs play in planning?
 - b. How could you involve your TAs more in the planning process, with both parties sharing knowledge of the curriculum and the needs of your pupils?

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

1. How do you think about your classroom layout to support specific learning objectives or tasks?
 - a. Does your classroom support your teaching?
 - b. Have you discussed using different layouts for different types of teaching with colleagues?

2. How have you used different layouts to support your teaching and measured their impact?
 - a. Do you see your classroom layout as fixed?
 - b. How do you evaluate the impact that any changes to the layout have on your pupils' learning?
3. How purposeful are your classroom's displays? Are they organised; do they balance permanent and fresh elements; and do they promote pupil engagement?
 - a. Can you clearly explain the purpose of your classroom display? How do you know they are serving that purpose effectively?
 - b. Have you considered your classroom from a pupil's perspective? Is it supportive and useful, but not distracting and cluttered?

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

1. How do you use technology in different subjects and consider how to use effective approaches in different subjects?
 - a. How do you evaluate the impact of using technology on pupil outcomes?
 - b. How do you tailor your use of technology to suit different subjects?
2. How do you use technology to target individuals or specific groups and how do you decide who to target and measure impact?
 - a. How do/could you assess the impact of technology to identify whether it continues to be of use, or could be improved?
 - b. Have you measured the impact that technology has on different pupil groups and if not, how could you gather this?
 - c. Could you do more to target individuals, groups or classes to greater effect?
3. If you lack confidence in the use of new technology in certain subject areas, how could you take responsibility for developing your confidence in this – for example, are there other members of staff from whom you could learn?
 - a. What are the specific tasks or subjects where you lack confidence to use technology to enhance teaching?
 - b. Who could support you within school to enhance your confidence using that technology?
 - c. What external sources can you to boost your knowledge and skills?
4. Is your use of technology based solely upon the learning you want to take place in the classroom? Is any additional pupil engagement brought about by new technology being translated into improved learning?
 - a. How do you decide how and when to use technology?
 - b. How do you know that your use of technology not only suits the desired learning, but enhances it?
 - c. How do you measure pupil engagement and how this might bring about greater pupil learning?

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. How do you ensure your current approach reflects what your pupils need to learn and balances learning through play with more formal approaches?
 - a. Can you clearly describe your approach to teaching in reception?
 - b. How do you ensure that this approach is focused on the learning pupils need, rather than activities?
 - c. How do you decide when to use more formal, or more play-based activities?
2. How do you plan for what your pupils will learn and what difference is this making to their outcomes?
 - a. What is your planning process in reception?
 - b. Are you confident, and can you evidence, that this planning is making a difference to improving outcomes?
3. How confident are you that, at any one time, your pupils could explain what they are doing and why (if those pupils have the necessary communication skills)?
 - a. Do all of your pupils understand the learning goal of the lesson and how they will achieve it?
 - b. How often do you check that pupils understand what they are doing and why?

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

1. How do you set expectations so that they are equally stretching and challenging for all pupils?
 - a. How do you know that your expectations are challenging all pupils in the classroom to achieve?
2. Have you considered moving away from setting or streaming pupils and any support you might need to do so effectively?
 - a. What evidence do you have to justify setting or streaming your pupils?
 - b. How could you trial using a different grouping approach and monitoring it to assess the impact on pupil outcomes?
 - c. What support would you need from others to achieve this and how could you obtain it?
3. How do you reward effort from all pupils and help them understand mistakes are an important part of learning?
 - a. How often do you reward your pupils' effort rather than ability?
 - b. How do you promote a culture in your classroom where making mistakes is an essential part of learning?
 - c. How do you know that all of your pupils share this mentality?

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

Whether to use homework

1. How do you encourage pupils to understand the school's homework policy and the purpose behind each piece of homework?
 - a. What is your school's homework policy and how do you know that your pupils understand this?
 - b. How do you explain the purpose of each piece of homework, and how do you check that your pupils understand this?

2. Are you able to use your school's homework policy to impact positively in your classroom?
 - a. What impact does homework have on your pupils?
 - b. How do you know that homework is the best way of meeting its specified aim – such as enhancing pupils' understanding?
 - c. Have you considered alternative approaches that might have similar or greater impact, but generate less workload for you or your pupils?

3. How do you ensure that children who may have barriers to accessing, or completing homework, are not disadvantaged?
 - a. Do you know which pupils in your class may have greater difficulty in accessing or completing homework?
 - b. How do you ensure that these pupils can still work towards the same objective that your homework sets out to achieve?
 - c. Have you considered alternatives to achieving the same outcome?

4. How do you ensure that the homework you set has a positive impact without distracting you from your core purpose of the delivery of teaching in the classroom?
 - a. How much time do you spend planning and marking homework?
 - b. How can you best use this time to impact positively on your pupils' learning?
 - c. Are there other, more time-effective ways of achieving the same purpose?

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