

In the know ...

Here is an important article by Matt Bromley about curriculum design under the new Ofsted regime.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



The new Ofsted inspection framework will see a focus on the breadth of your school's curriculum offer, including its 'intent', 'implementation' and 'impact'. In light of these changes, Matt Bromley looks at how schools might plan their curriculum.

It will not have escaped your notice that Ofsted has published a draft new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) which will come into effect in September 2019. A consultation has just concluded over the proposals and we await the outcomes.

However, the overall thrust of the new framework has been set out. In addition to an overall effectiveness grade, schools will receive a graded judgement for each of the following areas:

1. Quality of education.
2. Behaviour and attitudes.
3. Personal development.
4. Leadership and management

As such, "outcomes for students" and "teaching, learning and assessment" are no longer standalone judgements, instead incorporated into the new "quality of education" measure. This shift is not merely semantic: it recognises that exams are not paramount and that, while schools in challenging contexts might not always get good headline outcomes, they may still be providing a good quality of education.

Intent, implementation and impact

Inspectors will judge the school curriculum – within "quality of education" – under three headings:

- 1. Curriculum intent.**
- 2. Curriculum implementation.**
- 3. Curriculum impact.**

Curriculum intent is about curriculum design, the emphasis being on how effectively schools provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all students, opening rather than closing doors to future success.

The question schools will need to consider is: what knowledge and understanding do we expect students to gain at each stage of their schooling and in each subject?

Curriculum implementation, meanwhile, is concerned with curriculum delivery – in other words teaching, assessment and feedback, and crucially that which leads to long-term learning. Note that explicit mention is made of avoiding burdensome assessment and feedback practices and of protecting teacher workload.

The questions schools should ask are: how does our whole-school curriculum hang together and how does our institutional context inform the curriculum?

Curriculum impact, finally, is about student achievement as assessed by external test and/or exam results, not by a school's own data (hopefully reducing teacher and leader workload and the unnecessary and unhelpful production of reams of tracking and progress data, as well as avoiding bogus – i.e. massaged – data). Student achievement will also be assessed using progression and destinations data, recognising that good outcomes are not just measured in qualifications but in how successfully students are developed as well-rounded citizens.

Here, the questions to ask are: what knowledge and skills do students gain at each stage and over time and how does this compare to expectations?

Why is Ofsted introducing a new framework?

The purpose of the new framework is to tackle social justice issues – ensuring that all students, no matter their starting points, backgrounds and individual needs, are afforded the same ambitious curriculum and an equal chance to succeed. The new framework is also designed to address concerns around the narrowing of the curriculum (such as schools reducing the timetable to GCSE subjects at the expense of a broad and balanced curriculum) and teaching to the test (focusing on passing tests rather than on acquiring the knowledge and skills that will be meaningful to students in life and the world of work).

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman has been clear since she came to office that she wants Ofsted to be a force for good, promoting the real substance of education and ending poor practices such as off-rolling.

So, what are the implications of the new EIF on curriculum design? Well, I find it helpful to consider curriculum design in two ways: the whole-school curriculum and the subject-specific curriculum.

A whole-school, broad and balanced, curriculum

The 2002 Education Act requires schools to provide a “balanced and broadly based curriculum” which: promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of students at the school and of society, and prepares students at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

Within this rather vague legal framework, how can school leaders ensure that their curriculum is broad and balanced and will, therefore, produce well-rounded young people who can succeed in life and work? The regulatory standards for independent schools provide a useful way of thinking about breadth. The standards require schools to provide a curriculum that gives students experience in the following areas: linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative, so that it promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

A broad curriculum, therefore, might be regarded as one in which there are enough subjects on a student's timetable to cover all these experiences. Narrowing the curriculum for less able students or stretching GCSE study into key stage 3 clearly runs counter to this definition of breadth. A broad curriculum offers all students a wide range of subjects for as long as possible.

A balanced curriculum, meanwhile, might be regarded as one in which each subject is not only taught to all students but is afforded sufficient space on the timetable to deliver its distinct contribution. The danger here is that some subjects, such as art, music and languages, are squeezed out of the timetable by English,

maths and science. It is not uncommon for English to have five or more lessons on the timetable per week and art just one, or for the arts to operate on a carousel whereby a subject such as design and technology is only taught for one term of the year.

The local curriculum

The local curriculum is one that schools are free to adopt in order to complement the national curriculum (which is that prescribed by statute, consisting of the core and foundation subjects) and the basic curriculum (which describes the statutory requirements for curricular provision beyond the national curriculum, comprising the requirements in current legislation for the teaching of RE, relationships and sex education (from 2020), careers education, and opportunities for work-related learning) with other curricular elements that are determined at school or community level.

Often, a school's local curriculum will reflect the individual nature of the school and its community. It is not only about recognising the local economy and employment base, it is also about understanding the unique challenges faced by students from the school's community.

Schools should therefore consider the curriculum in its widest sense – it takes place in and between lessons, in subjects and in extra-curricular activities, and it develops students' skills in a range of areas including in the arts and sport, and – although important – it is not solely concerned with the pursuit of academic outcomes in the guise of key stage 2 SATs or GCSEs.

The hidden curriculum

There is an important caveat to bear in mind when assessing the intent, implementation and impact of the school curriculum: what is taught in schools is more than just the formal curriculum – rather, it is also about the messages students receive through the experience of being in school.

The unplanned parts of the curriculum that take place outside of lessons are often referred to as the “hidden curriculum” and this includes learning from other students, and the learning that arises from an accidental juxtaposition of the school's stated values and its actual practice.

When designing the curriculum, therefore, school leaders need to think carefully about all the ways in which students learn, not solely in structured lessons but also in the space between lessons, the wider school environment, and in the behaviours and values of all the adults working in the school.

The subject-specific curriculum

Within the whole-school curriculum there will be individual subject disciplines, perhaps clearly demarcated on the school timetable or taught as part of a thematic curriculum. Regardless of the method, students need to be taught specific knowledge and skills in, say, English, maths, science, geography, history, modern languages, art, design and technology, and so on.

Identifying end-points

The EIF says that inspectors will look to see whether or not each subject's curriculum builds towards clear end-points. In other words, inspectors will want to see clear

evidence of what students will be expected to know and do by each of these end-points, be they the end of a year, key stage or phase of schooling.

Here, I would recommend that teachers know what the end-points are for each subject discipline they teach. These end-points, the foundational knowledge on which our curriculum is built, may be derived from the assessment objectives or learning outcomes for that subject as defined by Ofqual and awarding bodies, or may be the key concepts that the teachers of that subject deem most important.

Essentially, identifying end-points is about planting a flag at some point in the distance and then planning a route towards it. That flag may be planted at the end of the key stage, or indeed 10 years after students have left school. If the latter, the question to ask is: what do we want our students to remember about our subject in 10 years' time that will be useful to them?

Once the end-points have been discerned, way-points need to be identified, too. Way-points should pinpoint the specific knowledge and skills upon which students' progress to the next level of study in any subject is contingent. In other words, way-points set out what students need to know about the current topic in order to understand and succeed in the next topic.

Way-points and end-points can be used as learning objectives and also as a means of assessing students' progress, particularly in the absence of national curriculum levels at key stage 3.

Planned and sequenced

Inspectors will also want to see evidence that each subject's curriculum is planned and sequenced so that new knowledge and skills build on what has been taught before, and towards those defined way-points and end-points.

Here, it is important to build a joined-up, progressive subject curriculum which builds on what has gone before and prepares students for what comes next. In particular, secondary schools need to know more about the primary curriculum so that year 7 consolidates and extends what was taught in year 6 and does not needlessly repeat prior learning in a confusing, contradictory manner. Here, we need to ensure that there is consistency – not just in what is taught – but in the language of learning and the language for learning.

Ambitious curriculum for all

As well as being clearly sequenced and building towards a clear end-point, Ofsted says that the curriculum should also address typical gaps in students' knowledge and skills. The curriculum should remain as broad as possible for as long as possible, too.

Here, it is crucial that key stage 2 does not become narrowed to a study of SATs subjects and "teaching to the test". Likewise, key stage 3 should not be – without strong justification – reduced to two years, forcing students to choose their GCSE options too soon and depriving them of the chance to study a broad curriculum for as long as possible.

Inspectors will want to see evidence that there are high ambitions for all students and Ofsted will want to see that the school does not offer disadvantaged students or students with SEND a reduced curriculum.

In short, schools need to “teach to the top” for all students, have the same high expectations of all students, and not dumb down.

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