

In the know ...

Further to our work on developing our own curriculum, here is an extract from the document “Education

Inspection Framework 2019: inspecting the substance of education” which sets out Ofsted’s rationale for its focus on the school curriculum.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



Focusing on the curriculum

The curriculum is the substance of what is taught. It is the specific plan of what learners need to know and should be able to do. The curriculum shapes and determines what learners of all ages will get out of their educational experience. For this reason, the curriculum is at the heart of the proposed quality of education judgement.

For our extensive curriculum research over the last couple of academic years to support discussions with providers, we have been using a working definition of the curriculum which recognises that it passes through different states: it is conceived, taught and experienced. The working definition was that the curriculum is:

- the framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and skills to be gained at each stage (intent)
- the translation of that framework over time into a structure and narrative, within an institutional context (implementation)
- the evaluation of what knowledge and skills learners have gained against expectations (impact/achievement)

That definition informed the development of the quality of education model now set out in the draft framework and inspection handbooks. The curriculum covers the intent and much of the implementation of the quality of education provided, but it is distinct from the impact, which is a measure of how well the curriculum has been learned. The curriculum is, therefore, integral to but not the whole of a judgement on the quality of education.

The curriculum is also distinct from pedagogy, which is how the curriculum is taught. Furthermore, it is distinct from assessment, which is a means of evaluating whether learners are learning/have learned the intended curriculum, although of course the curriculum and assessment need to work hand in hand. In so doing, the curriculum becomes the progression model.

Learning has been defined in cognitive psychology as an alteration in long-term memory: “If nothing has altered in long-term memory nothing has been learned.” Progress, therefore, means knowing more (including knowing how

to do more) and remembering more. When new knowledge and existing knowledge connect in learners' minds, this gives rise to understanding. As learners develop unconscious competence and fluency, this will allow them to develop skills. Progress should not be defined by hitting the next data point. Rather, if learners attain within a well-sequenced, well-constructed curriculum, they are making progress.

A divisive debate has emerged in some quarters that creates an unnecessary opposition between knowledge and skills, suggesting they are separate alternatives. In reality, knowledge and skills are closely interconnected. Ofsted considers a skill to be the capacity to perform complex operations, whether cognitively or physically, drawing on what is known. The education inspection framework and inspection handbooks ask inspectors to consider what providers are doing to develop both learners' knowledge and their skills.

Ofsted recognises that providers take different approaches to the curriculum. Different approaches to the curriculum will be judged fairly. We recognise and support the importance of providers' freedom to choose their own curriculum approaches within the appropriate legal parameters.

"Education Inspection Framework 2019: inspecting the substance of education" updated July 2019

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