The West Bridgford School

Teaching & Learning Policy

Review date:	**Summer 2024**
Reviewed by:	**Local Governing Body**
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Aims

The West Bridgford School's Teaching and Learning Policy emphasises effective pedagogy, fully grounded in research and the understanding of the needs of all students. Teachers are expected to demonstrate current curriculum knowledge and to foster inclusive environments. Leadership supports staff through professional growth opportunities and clear curriculum guidance. Our priorities include promoting 'thinking hard' in lessons, effective questioning, and scaffolding for a variety of different learners. Evidence-based pedagogy highlights the importance of active learning (thinking), questioning techniques, and retrieval practice. This policy underscores accessibility, vocabulary development, and the helpful measuring of progress. Observation and feedback focus on student engagement and understanding. The appendices outline learning models, pedagogical principles, and practical strategies for quality teaching.

Responsibilities and Expectations

Teachers should strive to deliver consistently effective lessons by:

Having a clear understanding of the research on how learning happens and use this to inform their pedagogy. (See Appendix 1)

Having thorough and up to date curriculum knowledge of the subjects they deliver.

Having clear understanding of the evidence about what make effective pedagogy and applying that in the classroom. (See Appendix 2)

Having clear knowledge of the students in their classes and building effective relationships with them to make an inclusive classroom environment where students can thrive.

Prioritising and supporting deep thinking in lessons (See Appendix 2)

Leaders at all levels should support teachers in this by:

Providing effective professional growth opportunities to teachers to have access to and develop their understanding of the latest research.

Providing time for teachers to engage in these activities. All non ECT teachers have an additional non-contact period a fortnight for these activities.

Providing clear curriculum guidance and sequencing through shared schemes of learning and roadmaps.

Providing clear pedagogy expectations through best practice documents based around the Teaching and Learning principles. (See Appendix 3)

Providing shared resources in a way that reduces teacher workload.

Providing opportunities to share good practice in departments and through Peer to Peer low stakes lesson observations.

Providing coaching or mentoring where appropriate.

Providing clear information on students prior attainment, reading ages and SEND information along side advice and guidance on how to use this information.

Providing opportunities to visit and share practice with other schools in the trust, community and across the country through Challenge Partners and informal collaboration.

Carrying out regular lesson visits via Learning Walks and providing constructive feedback on what has been seen in the lesson. HODS and DHODs and AHODs have additional time to carry out fortnightly learning walks in their departments. HODS and SLT Line Managers should review Learning Walk feedback at the fortnightly line management meetings and use the information to plan professional growth activities.

Providing Quality of Education checks through line management and with working parties led by the SLT Curriculum Lead.

Providing CSG and CIG meetings for curriculum middle leaders to be used for leadership specific Professional Growth, to share good practice, and to set clear priorities for the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning.

Appendix 1. A model of learning

Before considering teaching it is important that we agree what we are trying to achieve. Learning can be defined in many ways but a useful summary can be found in the Early Career Framework :

"Learning involves a lasting change in pupils' capabilities or understanding. Prior knowledge plays an important role in how pupils learn; committing some key facts to their long-term memory is likely to help pupils learn more complex ideas. An important factor in learning is memory, which can be thought of as comprising two elements: working memory and long-term memory. Working memory is where information that is being actively processed is held, but its capacity is limited and can be overloaded. Long-term memory can be considered as a store of knowledge that changes as pupils learn by integrating new ideas with existing knowledge. Where prior knowledge is weak, pupils are more likely to develop misconceptions, particularly if new ideas are introduced too quickly." (Pope et al, 2020).

Meaningful mental models

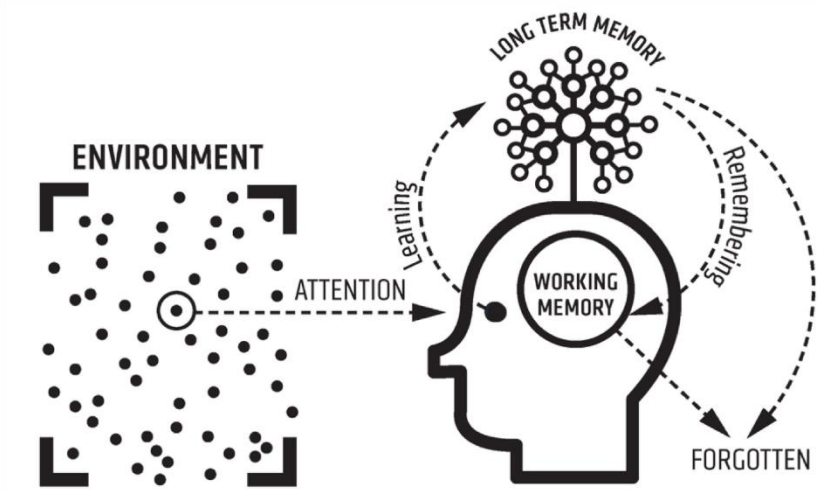
Cognitive science research has theorised that humans develop and store information in their long-term memory, and that this is done by categorising knowledge into mental models (also known as 'schemata') (Sweller *et al* 1998)

The shape and structure of these models varies depending upon the level of knowledge the learner has within a specific subject domain. For example, the schema for understanding electrical circuits changes and builds from KS2 where students can build simple circuits and make them work to considering the flow of electrons in key stage 3 and the interaction between current and voltage at key stage 4.

As experts in their subjects, teachers can help develop the depth and complexity of pupils' mental models. Teachers therefore need to help students build new schema, organise the information by linking it to other knowledge and reprogram parts of the schemata that are incorrect. There are 3 main ways teachers achieve this:

1. Add new information to address a lack of prior knowledge;
2. Fill in gaps of incomplete prior knowledge; or
3. Correct misconceptions of existing but incorrect prior knowledge (Chi 2009).

A useful way to summarise these ideas is using the diagrammatic model below (From Sherrington 2019):



As teachers we have (some!) control of the environment, and should prioritise activities that promote remembering and thinking using the working memory. This approach should give students the best chance at developing strong schema in the long term memory that can be retrieved and linked to new ideas. **This should be the main aim of our lessons**.

The act of remembering reinforces the schema by repeatedly pushing the information through the working memory. This strengthening of schemata by repetition is an important aspect of learning we can exploit as teachers.

Anticipating common misconceptions within particular subjects is an important aspect of curricular knowledge; working closely with colleagues within departments to develop an understanding of likely subject specific misconceptions is always a valuable professional growth activity, especially for those in the early years of teaching.

Appendix 2: Evidence based Pedagogy

Teaching: How do we use this model of Learning to work out the best strategies in the classroom?

Willingham in his 2008 paper on how to help students remember the things we teach uses the concept that when pushing ideas and knowledge through the working memory some will get left behind in long term memory. He uses a useful phrase to summarise this: "Learning is the residue of thought." Hughes (2014) takes this a step further to suggest that language is central to thinking and so is critical to the learning process.

We can develop 3 practical conclusions from this:

1. The more thinking in a lesson the more residue (learning) will be left behind.

2. The harder the thinking the more residue is left behind.

3. Communicating those ideas to others will increase the depth and quantity of thinking and therefore the learning.

How do we prioritise thinking?

It is our job to make the students think as long and as hard as possible in lessons.

Priority 1: The pitch of lessons is critical. Pitch the lesson high and scaffold to make the ambitious learning objectives accessible. All students should share the same objectives, however a very small number of students will need their curriculum expectations altered, this will be clear on provision maps. Where the pitch of the lesson is too low learning is likely to suffer as students do not need to think hard. Where the pitch of the lesson is too high, scaffolding can be used to support students to reach the ambitious learning objectives.
Priority 2: Effective questioning of students is perhaps the most important strategy teachers can employ to get as many students thinking as possible. Cold calling, process and probing questioning will encourage this. We need to model, scaffold and encourage quality student discussion in our classrooms.

Beyond looking at Neuroscience for clues to the best approaches we can also look at the habits of the most effective teachers and instructors. This approach led Rosenshine (2010) to develop his Principles of instruction from this evidence. Rosenshine suggested the most effective teachers repeatedly used the following strategies in their lessons:

- Daily review. ... Remembering promotes learning and prioritises the importance of prior knowledge.
- Present new material using small steps. ... reduces cognitive load in the working memory so allows students to avoid being overwhelmed.
- Ask questions. ... Checks for understanding but also promotes thinking.
- Provide models. ... Promotes thinking, using the working memory allows the pitch of lessons to remain high.
- Guide student practice. ... This supports using the working memory.
- Check for student understanding. ... Allows teachers to find out how secure the knowledge is and adapt what they are doing to address gaps or misconceptions.
- Obtain a high success rate. ... Retrieval practice works best when students successfully retrieve the information. This reinforces the memory and allows students to access it. 80% successful answers is considered a sweet spot.

- Provide scaffolds for difficult tasks. This allows your lesson objectives to be ambitious and promotes students to think hard but with support.

For a deep dive into Rosenshine's principles the commentary provided by Sherrington (2019) is a quick read and works through each principle in practical detail.

Retrieval Practice

Rosenshine (2010) prioritises regular review of prior knowledge. This retrieval practice reinforces the schemata by actively pushing the information back through the working memory. To work these activities should be low stakes and importantly successful. Where retrieval is unsuccessful teachers should plan to fill the gaps or deal with misconceptions. (See Didau 2023).

Adaptive teaching

The most effective classrooms are adaptive classrooms. This quote below from (Coe *et al* 2014) summarises what we should be aiming for in the classroom:

"Questioning is already one of the commonest things teachers do, and the key to quality is not the number of questions but the type and how they are used. The key point is that just asking lots of questions is not a marker of quality; it's about the type of questions, the time allowed for, and depth of, student thinking they provoke or elicit, and how teachers interact with their responses."

If teachers prioritise one area to develop their teaching and learning the way we ask questions, the quality of those questions and what we do with the answers is the area that will often have the greatest impact on learning (Sherrington, 2021).

Accessibility

At WBS we use the term vulnerable learners to describe students who are at risk of slower rates of progress in their learning. This would include SEND and PP students but also may include students with a low reading age, who are disaffected or struggling for health, attendance or other reasons.

We believe in inclusion and that all students should have access to an ambitious curriculum. Some students may need adjustments for them to access as much of the curriculum as they are able to. The majority of vulnerable learners needs can be dealt with in the classroom using the quality first teaching strategies (See Appendix 4). A low cost but high benefit strategy is making sure that materials are dyslexia friendly. Century Gothic or Comic Sans Font both have a single story letter a and helps with readability for many dyslexic students and those who do not have diagnosed reading issues. Low contrast buff backgrounds also help. Reducing the quantity of text to the minimum required helps manage cognitive load.

Copying off the board is a difficult and slow process for many students. It also doesn't promote thinking and leads to quiet classrooms but with little or no learning. Find alternative ways to provide information and glossaries. Exercise books should be used to carry out tasks that provoke thinking and therefore remembering.

Questioning and checking for understanding should prioritise vulnerable learners. Students who have anxieties that make cold calling inappropriate should be checked in on while students are on task.

Students with identified needs should be given the relevant adjustments on provision maps. Access arrangements need to be provided for all assessments when they have been identified for a student.

Vocabulary Development

One of the simplest and largest gap narrowing interventions for vulnerable learners comes around vocabulary development. Consider the language that you use in the classroom. Don't tone down the language but instead stop at any tier 2 or 3 terms you use and cold call to check for understanding of what those terms mean. Write on the board if they are key vocabulary. This will simultaneously challenge the most able students to define complex terms and support and make accessible the lesson for those without the vocabulary. The same strategy works with text that you provide. Modelling fluent reading and identifying the more complex tiers of language will always help support learners. See Didau (2014).

Reading strategies

Teachers need to use a range of techniques to encourage students to actively engage with texts and reading while making links with existing subject knowledge. Students following along with text can increase cognitive load and reduce decoding and comprehension so alternative should be considered for some students. Students should have fluent reading modelled with teacher read, choral and paired reading strategies all helping weaker readers develop fluency. Stopping to check on vocabulary and meaning regularly will help support comprehension. Independent practice is appropriate for skilled readers without additional scaffolds. Reading ages are available for all students on Class Charts.

Measuring progress and looking for Learning in lessons

We regularly visit each other's lessons. The purpose of these visits is focussed on the following:

To learn and share good practice.

To quality assure the Teaching and Learning.

To provide feedback on learning and effective pedagogy.

How to observe lessons and provide effective feedback

Lesson observations in learning walks should comment on how hard the students were thinking, comment on pitch, questioning and the depth of the discussion. Also consider the vulnerable learners, how well are they accessing the lesson and learning. Is vocabulary being developed? Is anyone left behind?

When assessing learning, ask students about what they were studying last term, and how it relates to this lesson. Students with well-developed schema should be able to narrate their learning showing evidence of learning embedded in the long term memory. Look at the quality of the assessed tasks. Can they apply their knowledge to novel tasks and questions?

Celebrate effective learning in the What Went Well (WWW) section. When writing Even Better Ifs try to prioritise the areas with greatest impact on student learning. The following sentence starters can help focus your WWWs and EBIs on the impact for students and away the Poor Proxies for learning.

When in the classroom I noticed that ….

This means that students ….

Over time this could lead to….

The problem with learning is that it is invisible. Much research has been done on the effectiveness of different approaches to assessing learning in classrooms summarised in Coe et al (2014). No one approach is accurate. However, when observing lessons we avoid using the Poor proxies for learning identified by Coe et al (2014):

Students are busy: Lots of work is done (especially written work)

Students are engaged, interested, motivated.

Students are getting attention: feedback, explanations.

Classroom is calm, under control.

Curriculum has been covered (i.e. presented to the students in some form)

At least some students have supplied correct answers, even if they

Haven't really understood them.

Could not reproduce them independently.

Will have forgotten them next week.

Already knew how to do them anyway.

Using assessment data to assess learning over time.

Leaders need to know what is happening in our classrooms well in order to support teachers. All feedback should be developmental and be used to determine effective professional growth at the whole school, departmental or individual level.

Outcomes are important when we are assessing learning. Progress measures are much more relevant than attainment which will fluctuate with cohort and classes, the SPI figures in SISRA are a useful guide. However, remember that most students at WBS have an advantaged background and so we should be risk assessing cohorts of students at approximately +0.3 SPI and below to adjust for this. This gives us a higher bar to consider if we are truly adding value by allowing students to make excellent progress. This is our internal approach to producing a contextual value added measure of student progress.

Appendix 3: The WBS Teaching and Learning Principles:

In the most effective classrooms at WBS it is expected that we see:

SEND and disadvantaged students are first in line.

Lessons are pitched high and scaffolded for the less able.

Cold call questioning will regularly check for understanding, and the lesson will be adapted based on the answers.

Materials and activities will be accessible and promote thinking.

Students use their books to practise skills and process learning.

There will be explicit reference to the learning and where it is happening in the lesson. Answering the question: Why do we do this?

The following lead to less effective classrooms:

Low pitched or less ambitious lessons.

Hands up questioning should be rare and only for ideas not checking for understanding.

Copying from the board or other tasks that are not focussed on thinking.

Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary not explicitly defined during the lesson.

Tiered learning objectives or sheets. Differentiation of tasks beyond support for specific SEND needs. Reducing the ambition for some learners.

Appendix 4: Quality First Teaching Characteristics (Source: DCSF Report (2008))

Highly focused lesson design with sharp learning objectives.

High demands of pupil involvement and engagement with their learning.

High levels of interaction for all students.

Appropriate use of questioning, modelling and explaining on the part of the teacher.

An emphasis on learning through dialogue, with regular opportunities for pupils to talk both individually and in groups.

An expectation that students will accept responsibility for their own learning and work independently.

Regular use of encouragement and authentic praise to engage and motivate students.

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