

The six steps of curriculum design™

Designing a curriculum isn't easy. It is a complicated process that needs to be carefully thought through and involves much strategic decision making. With 10 years' experience supporting over 2000 primary schools, we have identified six crucial steps of effective curriculum design. Follow these steps to design your curriculum, whether you are starting from scratch or reviewing your existing curriculum.

Review and evaluate

Decide what works well and where there is room for improvement

You now have an established curriculum. The next step is to regularly review its impact on teaching and learning, making any adaptations or changes you need to improve it further. At this stage, you may also identify Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs for your staff. For example, the knowledge of subject leaders might need to improve to make sure that each area of the curriculum is well taught and supported.

Tip: Check that monitoring subject coverage and assessment for learning is a live and integral part of your curriculum.

Resources

Source high-quality resources to deliver your curriculum

Your curriculum should not be let down by poor quality or ad-hoc resources, for example, those that ask children to perform a skill without having learned the specific knowledge required. They will dilute the power of your carefully sequenced plans, which often have to be tweaked to meet the restraints of the resource. Sourcing the best quality resources is a must if you want children's learning to be engaging and ambitious. To make your curriculum the best it can be, insist on high-quality resources and the best practical equipment. Don't reduce the impact of your curriculum by accepting less than the best.

Tip: Create or source high-quality resources to support your lessons, rather than the other way around. Keep a schoolwide overview of resources to avoid unnecessary repetition and ensure that content builds in complexity

Teaching narrative

Plan the delivery of your curriculum

After creating your long-term plan, you will need to plan the context for the delivery of your schema. At Cornerstones, we call these projects. Your projects or units of work should provide a context for learning. For subjects, such as history, the national curriculum sets out a range of contexts that must be covered, such as the ancient Egyptians. However, for subjects like art and design, you can create your own engaging contexts. The teaching narrative within your projects or units should set out how learning will be delivered, making sure that it is sequenced, cohesive and based on sound pedagogical practice. It should detail the starting point for each project and explain how it will develop. Your planning also needs to show how subject knowledge and skills will be taught, revisited and built upon. This process is very complex and takes time to perfect. However, when completed, it will set out your medium-term plan, which you can elaborate on in short-term plans if required.

Tip: Make the planning process easy so that teachers can create, adapt and share plans with others. Ideally, this stage should be supported by integrated, quick assessment for learning tools.

Step 1

Principles and purpose

Set out the intent of your curriculum

Begin by establishing your curriculum principles. Your curriculum principles need to reflect your school's values, context, pedagogical approaches and needs. In essence, your principles should clarify the vision for your curriculum.

Tip: Hold plenty of discussions to define and share your curriculum principles, vision and intentions with stakeholders.

Step 2

Entitlement and enrichment

Develop your pupil entitlement

After clarifying your principles and purpose, you should set out your pupil entitlement (sometimes known as pupil offer). Your pupil entitlement should explain how you intend to broaden your curriculum with educational visits, extracurricular activities and other curriculum enrichment experiences.

Tip: Consider what pupils will experience as they move through school and map these out. Entitlement should link to your curriculum principles where possible.

Step 3

Breadth and balance

Curate the content of your curriculum

You now need to arrange your curriculum content into subject schemas. Begin by looking at the programmes of study and make important choices about what you will teach and when. You will need to make strategic decisions about what your curriculum covers, how it is sequenced, how each schema progresses and how it interconnects with other subjects. These decisions will eventually form your school's long-term curriculum plan.

Tip: You should underpin each subject schema with a sequenced skills and knowledge framework. You can do this by breaking the national curriculum programmes of study into progressive steps that provide subject endpoints. The aim is to help children build a deep body of knowledge that enables them to perform increasingly complex skills.

Do you want help to design your curriculum?

Since 2010, we have helped over 1600 schools in England and Wales to design, deliver and manage their curriculums. Contact us on

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to book a free online meeting with a curriculum adviser