TSC
Teaching Schools Council

Questions for leaders

This is an expanded set of questions for leaders 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 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 act as a leader of learning? Do all your staff see you as one?
   a. How often are you in classrooms to observe and evaluate teaching and learning?
   b. How do you use what you see in classrooms to inform your vision and priorities for the school?
   c. How often do you support and participate in discussions around teaching practice with your staff?
   d. How do you know your staff see you as a leader of learning?

2. How do you support all of your staff to share and understand the vision for teaching and how it affects pupils' learning and outcomes?
   a. How do you develop your skills and ensure your knowledge of effective teaching and learning is up to date?
   b. How do you ensure your staff understand how to address the barriers to learning faced by different pupils?
   c. Do all you staff know the school priorities for improvement and how they are linked to the needs of your pupils?

3. How do you enable staff to take risks and evaluate the impact of their teaching?
   a. How does this align with your clear, strategic framework for teaching and expected pupil outcomes?
   b. Can your teachers use and analyse data to evaluate the impact of their teaching on their pupils?
   c. How do you ensure that teachers have the right level of autonomy to trial new approaches and test the outcome?

4. How are you developing your staff into future school leaders and ensuring effective succession planning is in place?
   a. How confident are you in your ability to provide effective feedback to teachers to promote their development into leadership?
   b. How are you using layers of leadership and management to ensure effective monitoring and development, with all leaders clear on where they can support teachers to develop into leaders?
   c. How are you providing your teachers opportunities to develop the skills necessary for them to develop into leaders?

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 well do you use professional development time, including staff meetings, to ensure that your staff have the necessary subject knowledge and understanding of how children learn those subjects to best teach and assess pupils?
   a. Over the year, how many of your staff meetings are focused on teaching and teacher development rather than business or administration?
   b. How do you decide what training and professional development is required and how does it link to your vision?
   c. How do you ensure your understanding of subject knowledge and how children learn those subjects is up to date?

2. What evidence do you use to create your professional development approach for the whole school?
   a. What sources of research evidence do you draw from, and how do you support your school to be research informed?
   b. How do you know the evidence is of high quality?
   c. How do you ensure that the delivery and content of professional development is robust and having the desired impact?

> 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 characterise pedagogy in your school and how does it align with proven effective teaching approaches and your school vision and ethos?
   a. Would all of your staff be able to describe the pedagogy in your school?
   b. How consistent is this idea with current research evidence how do ensure this is kept up to date?
   c. How does your approach to pedagogy respond to evidence of weaker or less positive impact?

2. If your school does not follow a mastery approach, how can you develop staff to use this approach?
   a. Do all your staff have a shared understanding of what mastery is? Can everyone explain the difference between "mastery" and "depth"?
   b. If you have not followed a mastery approach before, in what ways could you introduce mastery methods to staff, demonstrating its positive impact from research?
   c. Have you thought about how you could use mastery approaches for subjects other than maths, taking account of the careful thought and sequencing required and the resources available?

OR: 2. If you believe your school does, how do you know that your teachers are actually teaching with a 'mastery' approach and are you using it in subjects other than maths?
   a. If you already use mastery approaches, what is your rationale for the subjects and year groups you follow a mastery approach in?
   b. Have you evaluated the impact of mastery approaches in these areas, and has the teaching been adapted as a result?

3. How do you ensure consistency of understanding about what sufficient progress looks like for specific pupil groups, years and subjects?
   a. What expectations do you have for your pupils in the arts, humanities and sciences – are these shared by all staff?

b. How often do you have discussions with middle leaders and teachers about pupil progress and support them to have discussions about expected attainment?
c. have you challenged or benchmarked your schools' expectation with highly successful schools?

4. How do you ensure all staff use effective teaching sequences to ensure all pupils make excellent progress?
   a. what resources and support do your teachers use to help in designing/determining the teaching sequences and planning?
   b. How are these quality assured?
   c. How regularly do your staff share their experience of effective practice, which they have developed through trialling, evaluating, changing and re-evaluating different teaching approaches?

> **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 understand and measure the impact of your approach to developing subject expertise and leading subject teaching?
   a. How are subjects taught in your school - why have you chosen to deploy subject teachers in certain areas, and not others (or not at all)?
   b. Have you got robust evidence to justify your current approach to the use of specialists and show that it improves outcomes for pupils and if not, what evidence could be gathered and substantiated?
   c. How are you developing subject expertise in your school and what use is your school making of external sources?

2. How do you work with subject leaders to ensure the quality of teaching in specialist subjects and measure its impact on pupils?
   a. How regularly do you work with subject leaders?
   b. How do you evaluate the quality of teaching in specialist subjects?
   c. How do you know which elements of your school's teaching practice are having greatest impact on pupil outcomes?

3. How do you ensure that your teachers have sufficient subject knowledge to challenge and stretch all pupils within the classroom, across the curriculum (and its changes)?
   a. Do your teachers have a strong understanding of how children learn a particular subject (including possible misconceptions), alongside knowledge of the subject itself?
   b. When a new topic is introduced in the curriculum, or a topic moves across year groups, how do you prepare your school for the change?
   c. When a topic is removed from the curriculum, how does your school reflect on the consequences of that gap?

4. If you use subject leaders, how can you be confident that they have sufficient subject knowledge and skills to support fellow staff and subject teaching across the school?
   a. How do you ensure that your subject knowledge is up to date and enables you to effectively oversee subject teaching in your school?
   b. How regularly do you discuss subject knowledge with your subject leaders, ensuring that they have the necessary understanding to develop your other teachers' knowledge?
   c. How do you work alongside your subject leaders to provide strong, effective professional development on subject knowledge that is rigorously evaluated for impact?

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 deploy your staff for efficiency and for greatest measurable impact?
   a. What evidence do you have that your current approach to staff deployment is effective?
   b. Do you make changes where necessary, after evaluating your approach?
   c. Have you discussed your staff deployment with others, considering different approaches?

2. How does your timetabling approach support pupil learning and progress?
   a. Why do you use your current approach to timetabling?
   b. What evidence do you have of its impact on pupil learning?
   c. How could you approach timetabling differently?

3. How do you ensure the effectiveness of teachers' time, especially time spent on planning?
   a. How do you support teachers to use the time effectively?
   b. How do you hold staff accountable for the outcomes of planning?
   c. How do you monitor the impact of planning time on pupils?

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 do you deploy your TAs to have greatest measurable impact, taking account of the evidence to support pupil progress?
   a. How does your use of TAs align with the evidence about effectively deploying TAs?
   b. Where can you demonstrate that your TAs are having greatest impact on pupil outcomes?
   c. How do you link the performance management of TAs to school needs (e.g. your development plan)?

2. How do TAs work with teachers in your school to support teaching?
   a. How are TAs involved in planning?
   b. How are TAs and teachers clear about their respective roles, and how do you know that is consistently the case?
   c. How do you ensure TAs are supported, developed and managed effectively?

3. How do you plan PPA time and cover staff absence (planned or unplanned)?
   a. How do you know your current approach to PPA is effective?
   b. Have you trialled alternative approaches to planning – such as joint planning, giving teachers small daily chunks of PPA time, or an extended period of time (a whole day a fortnight, or a week per half term)?

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.

Effective Primary Teaching Practice 2016

Using the classroom: layout and environment

1. How do you use your classrooms flexibly to create high-quality learning environments?
   a. How can you creatively manage any room size/shape limiting factors to ensure that learning dictates layout?
   b. How do you know which of your classrooms are high-quality learning environments?
   c. How do you consider how classroom appears to pupils as opposed to teachers and support rather than distract from their learning?

2. How do you support staff to use their classrooms flexibly to support their teaching and pupil learning?
   a. How often do you discuss classroom layout with your staff?
   b. What more can you do to encourage staff to be creative and flexible with their classroom layout, with a focus on teaching and pupil learning?

3. How do you ensure a consistent approach throughout the school to classroom environments in line with the school vision?
   a. How does your approach to classroom environments align with your vision?
   b. What evidence do you have that your approach is effective?
   c. Have you trialled alternative approaches to classroom environments?

> 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. When bringing in new technology, can you explain clearly how it will support teachers to teach and improve pupil learning and how you will measure impact?
   a. Before introducing new technology, how do you consider the impact that it will have on pupils' learning and how do you measure whether it does have the intended impact?
   b. Before introducing new technology, how do you consider the training that teachers will require to use it effectively in their classrooms?

2. How do you gather data and evidence about the impact of current use of technology on different pupil groups?
   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 obtained current data on 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 are considering new technology, have you considered what other resources could provide the same or better impact on pupil outcomes, which might be simpler, more reliable or cheaper to use?
   a. How do you challenge yourself to avoid being seduced by marketing or whizzy technology?

> 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 does your understanding of reception year, effective teaching and the reception curriculum, contribute to your leadership of reception and pupil outcomes?
   a. How clear is your vision for the standards of pupils leaving reception? Is this shared by everyone in school?
   b. How do you ensure your own knowledge and understanding of effective reception teaching is sufficient and developing?

2. How do you ensure your reception curriculum (and any schemes of work) including phonics, reading, writing (including handwriting) and maths in reception are most effective for teaching pupils?
   a. Do you benchmark the effectiveness of schemes in the most successful settings?
   b. How rigorously do you evaluate the impact of different approaches and how these contribute to effective pupil learning in reception?

3. How do you ensure **all** teachers in your school understand reception in terms of its expected outcomes and its potential in contributing to the outcomes of the school?
   a. How important do your teaching staff as a whole see the reception year as?
   b. For staff not involved directly in early years teaching and planning, how do you ensure they understand its importance and the level of expertise required to maximise pupil outcomes?
   c. How could you use the expertise of your early years staff to support this professional development for all school staff?

4. Do you apply the same rigour and high expectations in target setting, pupil reviews and appraisal in reception as you do for year 2 and year 6?
   a. Can you simply and clearly describe the link between expectations, targets, appraisal and development and accountability for your reception teachers?
   b. Do all of your staff share the same high expectations for your reception pupils as in other year groups?

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 ensure that any use of setting or streaming does not set limits for pupils to succeed and how do you monitor the impact on gaps between ability groups?
   a. Can you clearly explain and robustly evidence why and how you use setting or streaming within your school?
   b. How do you be sure that your use of setting or streaming is not inadvertently inhibiting some pupils' progress?
   c. Are there opportunities for you to trial different approaches and monitor the impact on pupil outcomes?

2. If you do not use setting or streaming, how do you know that your approach ensures all staff have sufficient knowledge to provide adequate stretch and support for all pupils?
   a. How do you support professional discussions about how to stretch and support all pupils?
   b. How could you provide meaningful, robust professional development in cases where teachers do not feel able to stretch and challenge all pupils?
   c. How could teaching approaches such as mastery provide the means to stretch your higher attainers, as well as support lower attainers in the same class?

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

Whether to use homework

1. How does your school policy identify the purpose of homework and how you measure its impact?
   a. Are you able to clearly explain the purpose of homework in your school?
   b. How do you monitor whether homework is achieving that purpose and is doing so for all pupils?
   c. Do you review whether homework is the best way of achieving the purpose in light of this?

2. How do you engage parents in the homework policy and discussions of other ways they can support their child's learning?
   a. Have you checked whether parents feel engaged by homework?
   b. What other approaches could you trial to engage with parents more effectively?

3. How do you guard against the risk that your homework policy may disproportionately add to teacher workload and/or pupil workload?
   a. How do you monitor your teachers' and pupils' workload?
   b. How do you know whether your homework policy adds to your teachers' and pupils' workload?
   c. Are there other means of achieving your homework policy's aims that would have less impact on workload?

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