

# How to sequence the Curriculum to optimise learning for all pupils



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This article will explore the importance of a well sequenced curriculum in Primary and Secondary schools in achieving positive outcomes for all pupils. Having worked in Inner City London schools for 15 years I have seen the impact well thought out curriculums have on ensuring that no pupil falls through the gaps and key skills are embedded and built upon. I have also seen the results when this does not happen, deep rooted misconceptions around key concepts hindering our most vulnerable pupils from succeeding.

Since the release of the new Ofsted framework in 2019 educators in England have been talking about the 3 '1's' - Intent, Implementation and Impact. The quality of education measure now used in inspections looks at how curriculum, teaching and assessment come together to set high expectations for all pupils and the broader curriculum offerings which are available for pupils.

**To design and sequence a curriculum where the Intent secures high expectations for all pupils it must be:**

- Ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life
- Coherently planned to build upon prior knowledge and provide skills for future learning and employment
- Adaptable to ensure that for learners with high levels of needs, it is challenging and accessible.

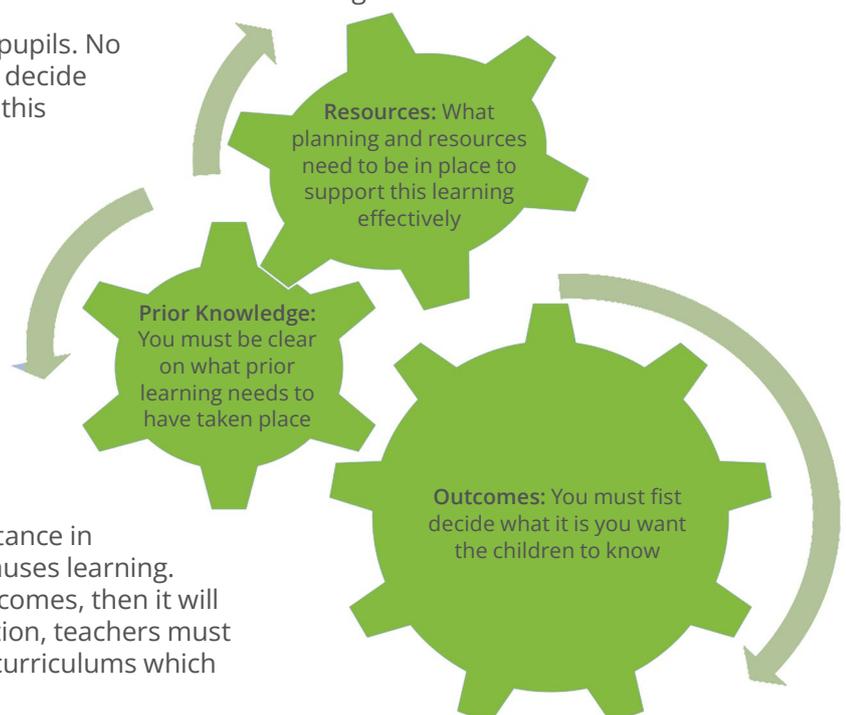
## **But what does this look like in practice? How do you know if your curriculum is sequenced in such a way to allow all pupils to progress and build upon prior learning?**

Sequencing the curriculum is all about knowing that what our pupils learn each year builds on what went before. It is not about teaching things in order but rather planning topics so that we are carefully considering what we expect our pupils to know and the things they need to know to learn these things!

It is important that you think about success for all pupils. No school community is the same and so the way you decide to sequence your curriculum must be reflective of this and the needs of your pupils. (Young, 2015)

The curriculum must allow pupils to learn beyond their experience and reflect a culture of high expectations for all. To support this when planning the curriculum, you need to think about the resources which will be required to support the learning and the quality first teaching which needs to be in place to achieve this.

Your school must have at its heart a culture where everyone is trying to achieve the best for your pupils. Hattie (2015) discusses at length the importance in Collective efficacy; the belief that it is "us" which causes learning. When teachers believe they can improve pupil outcomes, then it will happen. But it is not just teachers working in isolation, teachers must work together within school communities to plan curriculums which facilitate this success.



## So, when sequencing your curriculum involve your teaching staff and ask yourselves the following questions?

- What do we want the pupils to learn?
- What prior knowledge do they need to have to access this new learning?
- Why is the curriculum shaped the way it is? How does this show progression?
- Is there coherency across subjects in terms of terminology used, the connections made between concepts and when certain concepts are introduced?
- Does the volume of content in the curriculum make for a curriculum that is deliverable within the planned timeframe?
- Is there capacity for the curriculum to adapt in response to evidence of what students are and aren't learning?
- How does the content of this curriculum represent the values and diversity of my school?
- How does your curriculum reflect national policy, for example, British values?
- How does it cater for different pupil groups, such as pupils with special educational needs or disadvantaged pupils?

Armed with the answers to these questions you will be able to sequence a curriculum which enhances pupils' learning through rich and diverse experiences, accessible to all. (Hirsch, 2004)

### Case Study- North London Federated Primary

When I joined the school 5 years ago they had been through a period of turmoil and as a quick fix the Interim Headteacher had bought a scheme of work for Science to support the teachers delivering content.

It quickly became apparent that teachers were teaching the lessons as per scheme of work but were not adapting it to their classes or using assessment to change the sequence. Pupils were working through units but not building upon key skills and therefore it was clear that there were large gaps in pupils' knowledge, especially for the lower attainers. The Science results across the schools were very low.

I met with the Science lead who had never had the opportunity to develop the curriculum. They were told to use the scheme and that's what they did. We sat down over the course of a half term and mapped out each year group from start to finish. The sequence of learning built upon previous learning and she could really see how this would help improve results. When we brought it to teachers they could see that this made sense, we were not taking away resources and adding more work but just sequencing it to provide our pupils with the best learning opportunities possible.

As a consequence, the Science results over the past 3 years have improved year on year and pupils talk with such enthusiasm about their learning!

### Curriculum Sequencing post COVID

This is now even more challenging as you will have to consider the amount of learning lost during the pandemic and how to prioritise key skills to ensure that our most vulnerable pupils do not fall further behind. As subject leaders, teachers and SLT you will have to think about the content covered in a normal year and compare this to what was covered during the pandemic- identify the key concepts which need to be secured to provide all pupils with the chance to succeed and develop a basic knowledge so they can succeed.

According to the Department of Education (2020) schools run the risk of leaving pupils further behind if they try to reteach all core knowledge missed because of school closures. Instead, they believe that careful sequencing of the curriculum to identify opportunities to revisit problem content will support closing the gap and making up for lost learning.

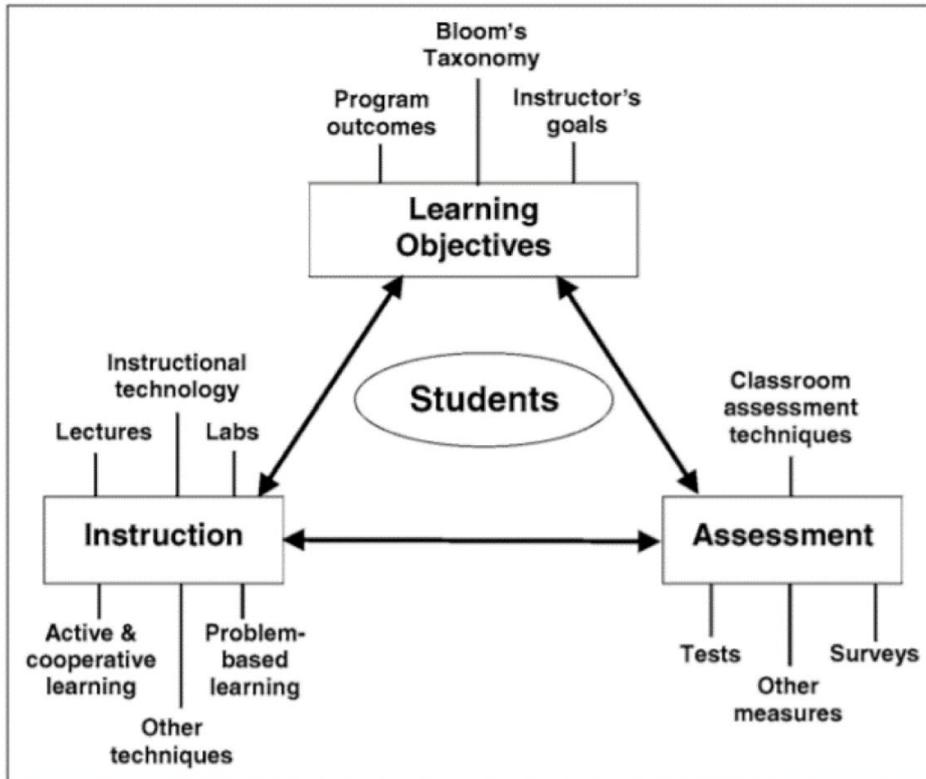
Work together to identify the sequence of learning and progression in each subject and use this to then revisit key concepts which were missed. This will enable you to teach to the gaps and give all pupils the opportunity to catch up and deepen subject knowledge to achieve their potential.

## Here are some steps to take when you start planning your curriculum:

1. Organise key skills and concepts into order
2. Think about where you will need to add in new concepts and vocabulary
3. Plan in places to draw links between previous learning and the new learning
4. Identify where you will assess pupils

## Using Assessment

Carefully consider the link between assessment, teaching and curriculum and remember that it is cyclical. Felder and Brent (2003) show that the triangulation between curriculum sequencing, assessment and teaching is key to positive pupil outcomes. The model below shows how you can use assessment data to work backwards and explore teaching and therefore curriculum design or start at curriculum design and work through to assessment.



(Felder, R. and Brent, R. 2003)

The importance is planning assessment points not only to identify progress but more importantly to identify gaps so that teachers can adapt future planning accordingly. Empower your teachers to use formative assessment effectively so that new concepts are not introduced before pupils are secure.

Remember that assessment data is no longer the key focus, Inspectors will want to see the evidence in pupils' books and how this demonstrates a progression of skills across a subject supported by well-planned lessons and resources. Assessment should be seen as a vital element in the sequencing of a curriculum.

Whichever way you choose to do it, the most important thing is that your school curriculum is sequenced so that pupils consistently build upon prior knowledge and are equipped with the language and resources they need to make progress and succeed.

If you would like further training on "Sequencing the Curriculum" please contact us at [cpd@veema.co.uk](mailto:cpd@veema.co.uk) to discuss your specific requirements.

## References:

- <sup>1</sup> Donohoo, J.(2016). Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning. Corwin
- <sup>2</sup> Felder, R and Brent,.R. (2003). Designing and Teaching Courses to Satisfy the ABET Engineering Criteria Article. Journal of Engineering Education.
- <sup>3</sup> Gibb,.N. (2017). The Importance of a knowledge-rich education. Department of Education
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- <sup>5</sup> McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by Design. Three Stages of Backward Design: Frequently Asked Questions. ASCD
- <sup>6</sup> Young M and Muller J (2015) Curriculum and the Specialisation of Knowledge. London: Routledge.
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/what-does-ofsted-really-want-see-school-curricula>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/curriculum-sequencing-for-primary-and-secondary>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://impact.chartered.college/article/a-knowledge-led-curriculum-pitfalls-possibilities/>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/knowledge-bank/curriculum-design/>

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**Date:** Tuesday 23rd Nov 2021



Delivered by  
**Jenny Bond**  
(Mathematics, Leadership  
& School Improvement  
Consultant)

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### Jenny's Biography:

Having studied Classics and History at Bristol Jenny went into teaching after spending some time working in schools in Ghana. Discovering a love learning she has worked in Inner City London schools for the past 12 years as a maths specialist and is now working as a consultant supporting schools in developing their maths provision to ensure that all children make progress and have the opportunity to succeed. Working alongside numerous charities as a researcher Jenny has written papers to support the implementation of tuition within schools to close the attainment gap and continues to work alongside maths hubs to keep abreast of the most recent research and practices. Jenny further supports leadership development through coaching and mentoring to implement sustainable change within schools for the benefit of all pupils.



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