

Notes on 'Inspecting the Curriculum'

In May 2019 Ofsted released their new educational inspection framework; and alongside it a document that explained how they would inspect the curriculum. This document is a brief summary of the document 'Inspecting the Curriculum'.

The most significant change from current arrangements is a quality of education judgement. This combines aspects of the previous key judgements of 'teaching, learning and assessment' and 'outcomes' to provide a more holistic view of standards, particularly focusing on the curriculum.

The new educational inspection framework puts a single conversation about education at the heart of the curriculum. This conversation draws together curriculum, teaching assessment and standards. This draws on a definition of curriculum that uses the concepts of 'intent', 'implementation' and 'impact' to recognise that curriculum passes through different states: it is conceived, taught and experienced. **The end result of a good, well-taught curriculum is that pupils know more and are able to do more.**

The new inspection method has three elements:

- **Top-level view:** exploring what is on offer, to whom and when, looking at leaders' understanding of curriculum intent and sequencing, and why these choices were made.
- **Deep Dive:** gathering evidence on curriculum intent, implementation, and impact over a sample of topics or aspects. Aim is to interrogate and establish a coherent evidence base on quality of education.
- **Bringing it Together:** inspectors will bring the evidence together to widen coverage and to test whether any issues identified during the deep dives are systemic. This will usually lead to school leaders bringing forward further evidence and inspectors gathering additional evidence.

The pre-inspection telephone conversation will be used to understand:

- The school context and progress made since the last inspection.
- The headteacher's assessment of the school's current strengths and weaknesses – particularly in relation to the curriculum.
- The extent to which pupils have access to the curriculum.
- Discussion of specific areas of the school that will be a focus of attention during the inspection.

The deep dive is important as the primary focus of the inspection is on the education that pupils are actually receiving day-by-day in classes, rather than simply being about the ambitions or intentions of senior leaders. A key mantra used by inspectors is 'let's see that in action together'.

One deep dive is insufficient to form evidence on the school's provision; but a collection will allow inspectors to form a reliable view of the education on offer. In primary school inspectors will always carry out a deep dive in reading, and deep dives in one or more foundation subjects that are being taught during the time that inspectors are on-site. In addition, there will often be a deep dive in mathematics.

In Secondary schools' deep dives will typically focus on a sample of four to six subjects, looking at a wide variety of pupils in different year groups.

The deep dive includes the following elements:

- Evaluation of **senior leaders'** intent for the curriculum in this subject, and understanding of its implementation and impact.
- Evaluation of **curriculum leaders'** long and medium term thinking and planning, including rationale.
- Visits to a deliberately and explicitly connected **sample of lessons**
- **Work scrutiny** of books or other kinds of work produced by pupils who are part of classes that have also been or will be observed.

- Discussions with **teachers** to understand how the curriculum informs their choices about content and sequencing to support effective learning.
- Discussions with a group of **pupils** from the lessons observed.

Context matters, so inspectors will want to know where each lesson fits into a sequence of lessons. Inspectors need to know the purpose of lesson, how it fits into a sequence of lessons over time, and what pupils already know and understand. The sequence of lessons, not an individual lesson, is the unit of assessment.

Each deep dive is likely to include four to six lessons visited, discussions with the curriculum lead, and teachers. Inspectors should review a minimum of six workbooks per subject per year group and scrutinise work from at least two-year groups.

The deep dive will look at lots of evidence; and there will not be any specific sequence to bring them back together; it does however provide rigorous triangulation. Bringing the evidence together will be a key inspection skill. Any weaknesses that are found in one deep dive will try to be replicated elsewhere in the school to establish whether they are systemic. Inspectors will not reach judgements based on any single inspection activity, rather judgements will be reached once inspectors have connected the different types and pieces of evidence.

Ofsted have also carried out research on the validity of lesson visits and work scrutinies, which is due to be published this month (June 2019).

The Full Ofsted Document can be downloaded from here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-the-curriculum>