

# Education Inspection Framework: Overview of Research

## Introduction and background

**Ofsted is committed to ensuring that its new education inspection framework (EIF) is informed by research evidence. In this paper, it summarises its research and explains which evidence on effective practice in schools and early years providers underpins the EIF criteria. The research review draws on a range of sources, including both Ofsted's own recent research programme and other existing evidence bases. It is structured to link to each of the four key judgements for the proposed new framework: quality of education, personal development, behaviour and attitudes, and leadership and management.**

## Key points

### Quality of education

- The new inspection framework will have an increased focus on the curriculum. The curriculum is defined by Ofsted as the framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education. It has 3 components: intent, implementation and impact. Intent encompasses the knowledge and skills to be gained at each stage. Implementation involves translating the framework into a structure and narrative within an educational context. Impact involves the evaluation of the knowledge and understanding which students have gained against expectations.
- Biesta (2009) argues that a lack of attention to the aims and ends of education has led to a reliance on a 'common sense' view of education which includes a focus on academic achievement in a small number of curriculum domains or subjects. In schools in the UK there is clear evidence of such a narrowing of the curriculum.
- International evidence shows that a focus on a limited number of measurable outcomes has had negative consequences in terms of curriculum design. It has led, among other things, to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds being discouraged from taking academic subjects.
- These negative consequences of curriculum narrowing can be seen in other countries. In the USA, curriculum narrowing has occurred in response to the pressures of high-stakes testing. In Australia there is evidence that curricular content has been adjusted to mirror test-related content. Furthermore, studies in a number of countries have shown that school inspection systems in Europe have led to a narrowing of the curriculum and an over-focus on test objectives.
- Ofsted's major 3-phase research programme on curriculum also found evidence of a narrowing of curricula, particularly at Key Stage 2, with humanities subjects being reduced or squeezed out of the primary curriculum. In secondary schools, there is a tendency to equate curricula with exam board syllabi or statutory tests.
- In phase 3 of its research project, Ofsted set out to examine how the curriculum in schools could best be inspected. They found that leadership from the headteacher and senior leadership team is central to curriculum development and to ensuring that the curriculum is implemented across a range of subjects, achieving the coherence which research has shown to be a key driver of effectiveness.
- In primary and secondary schools, teachers' subject knowledge was found to be key, with strong studies indicating relationship between subject knowledge and pupil attainment.
- Research shows that achievement is likely to be maximised when teachers: provide overviews and reviews of objectives; outline the content to be covered and signal transitions between different parts of the lesson; and review the main ideas.
- Although there is a significant amount of teacher talk in the classes of effective teachers, most of it is focused on academic content, and much of it involves effective questioning and feedback rather than extended lecturing.
- Group activities and paired work can contribute to learning, but to work together effectively pupils will require support, and tasks must be clearly structured. If it is to have benefits, group work requires both that pupils have sufficient prior knowledge to complete the task, and that the activity is sufficiently structured. Each pupil should have a distinct role to avoid 'free-rider' effects.
- Pupils make progress at different rates. However, in-class differentiation, with differentiated teaching, activities or resources, has generally not been shown to have much impact on pupils' attainment. On the other hand, adapting teaching in a responsive way, for example by providing focused support to pupils who are not making progress, is likely to improve outcomes. There is no evidence that pupils have distinct and identifiable learning styles. Trying to design tasks with this misconception in mind will increase teachers' workload but is very unlikely to improve learning.
- The 'learning sciences' provide a growing evidence base about how pupils learn. Evidence points to the importance of spaced or distributed practice, where knowledge is rehearsed for short periods over a longer period of time, rather than intense study over a shorter period. A related practice is interleaving. Traditionally, most schools use blocking, where practice of particular knowledge happens in blocks (e.g. AAABBBCCC). Interleaving involves mixing practice of A, B and C (e.g. ABCABCABC). There is



growing evidence that this can improve retention, and research in mathematics is particularly promising. Research in the area of cognitive load theory shows the effectiveness of teaching in small chunks and not organising activities that require too much memory capacity.

- Research shows that the use of low-stakes testing has value. There is strong evidence for the testing effect, that is, the positive impact of the mental process of learners working to recall knowledge they have previously learned.
- A misconception has arisen that assessment needs to consist to a large extent of the provision of detailed written feedback and so-called 'deep' marking or of the production of photographic evidence on every aspect of child development. This is not the case; verbal feedback is an appropriate form of feedback in many cases.

### Behaviour and attitudes

- The importance of high expectations is forcefully demonstrated by the 1968 Rosenthal and Jacobson study in which teachers' expectations of a particular group of pupils were manipulated; teachers were told that they were all potentially high achievers. Because of the teachers' high expectations of these pupils, they far outperformed the control group for whom no such expectations were set.
- One significant barrier to high expectations can be a data-driven culture which signals to teachers that a particular child is not likely to achieve highly. The teacher may then consciously or unconsciously reinforce the low expectations, for example by giving the pupils lower-level tasks or calling on them less frequently to answer questions. Expectancy effects can also manifest themselves through allowing pupils of whom the teacher has low expectations to behave worse and be off-task more often than high-expectancy pupils. By contrast, in a high-expectancy culture, school leaders emphasise that all pupils can learn and communicate that belief to pupils and staff. Teachers are aware of how often they call on different pupils and what tasks they give them.
- There is a clear link between attendance and attainment. Research by the DfE, for example, shows that, in 2013-14, while 51.5 per cent of pupils with no absences reached level 5 or above at Key Stage 2, this declined to 25.7 per cent among pupils who missed 10 to 15 per cent of lessons.
- The strongest evidence on improving attendance suggests the importance of providing clear pathways from education to next steps such as higher education or employment and providing a high-quality curriculum and teaching experience. There is a relationship between increased temporary drop-out from class and poor behaviour, suggesting that early identification of pupils and targeted intervention may be helpful. As well as attendance, time on-task and punctuality have also been shown to be linked to attainment.
- A number of research studies have highlighted key elements of effective behaviour management such as consistency and the need for a whole school approach which goes beyond the classroom.
- A study commissioned by the DfE (Bennett) identified a number of features of effective behaviour management in schools. These included: a clear understanding of what the school culture is and what values the school holds; effectively communicated, realistic and detailed expectations understood clearly by all members of the school; and highly consistent working practices throughout the school.

### Personal development

- Research shows that the impact of achievement on self-belief appears stronger than the reverse. Therefore, the key to promoting positive self-belief is to ensure that pupils experience successful learning in school.
- Drawing together research on personal development, it appears that it is not so much individual actions of the school, but attention to climate and culture that matter. School climates that are supportive and nurturing, while also promoting discipline and boundaries, and those which actively nurture belonging to school and pupil involvement, show widespread benefits.
- Where specific interventions are adopted, it is important to make sure that they fit the context of the school and are implemented thoroughly, consistently and with fidelity. Evaluations typically show that well-coordinated whole-school approaches are most likely to have an impact, while uncoordinated small-scale interventions are not. Support from the senior leadership team is essential.

### Leadership and management

- School effectiveness research has long shown that a factor that distinguishes highly effective schools is that they are underpinned by a clear, shared vision, which is driven by (but does not have to solely originate from) the headteacher or principal.
- The provision of effective continuing professional development (CPD) is one key component of effective leadership. A review of research by Cordingly et al (2015) identified the following features of successful CPD: it offers follow up and support so that learning can be embedded; it is relevant to the everyday lives of teachers; and it needs to be differentiated by teachers' starting points rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' approach. Longer-term programmes tend to be more effective than short-term interventions, and most effective CPD has to last at least two terms to have an impact.
- Research highlights the importance of creating consistency and minimising within-school variation (WSV). For example, it is not typically the case that schools that are ineffective do not have any effective teachers. Rather, they tend to show great variation in effectiveness, while highly effective schools have largely eliminated any ineffective practice and reduced variation.
- A study conducted in 2010 by Day et al showed that effective school leaders strive to develop positive relationships with staff and have a genuine concern for staff wellbeing.
- Ofsted research on occupational wellbeing in schools and colleges found that: 59 per cent of teachers, 35 per cent of senior leaders and 47 per cent of classroom assistants reported low to medium levels of overall occupational wellbeing. Over 50 per cent of teachers and senior leaders disagree or strongly disagree that they have an acceptable workload. Similarly, in a study conducted by the NASUWT in 2017, over 80 per cent of teachers said that they felt too tired to enjoy doing the things they like to do and only 10 per cent said that they had enough time and energy for hobbies.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework-overview-of-research>