# Focus On...

Subject Leadership Across the Curriculum

In a truly broad, balanced, ambitious, and engaging curriculum, the subject leader has always been a key figure.

For many, subject leadership is exciting and allows them to share their passion and enthusiasm. Subject leadership can also provide a platform through which expert, specialist knowledge can be shared and best practice role modelled.

Under the latest iteration of the Education Inspection Framework, the profile and role of the subject leader has, without doubt, been elevated exponentially. Following the overarching "top-level" conversation (paragraph 8) with senior leaders in the school, inspectors are very much focusing their attention to the work of the subject leader.

Whilst this shift demands more of an individual or subject team, it should not be viewed negatively. It should be viewed as an excellent opportunity for subject leaders to champion their subject, demonstrate their systemic thinking within the curriculum, highlight their influence on colleagues and share the positive impact they are having on the children and young people in their subject across their setting.
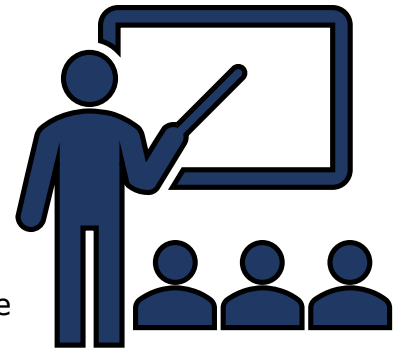
Subject leadership can be seen as an additional layer of work to an already super-busy class teacher, particularly in smaller settings where an individual is leading two or even three subjects. The balance between class and subject responsibilities is not easy but the impact can be powerful; when pupils enthuse about a subject, articulate their learning with confidence and use specific language and vocabulary, the evidence is clear to see!

In a recent Ofsted webinar (28th March 2022), inspectors acknowledged the demands that multiple roles necessitate. When talking to a subject leader, they expressed a willingness and desire to "understand the context" in which that leader is operating.

During this online seminar, three elements of subject leadership are highlighted:

- leaders' enthusiasm and passion;
- leaders' clarity about **what** pupils will learn (and in what **order**);
- leaders' use of CPD to increase subject knowledge and support subject development.

In addition, other sources of intelligence (such as verbal feedback from recent inspections and published reports) provide an insight in to the themes and strands being explored by inspectors at subject leader level.
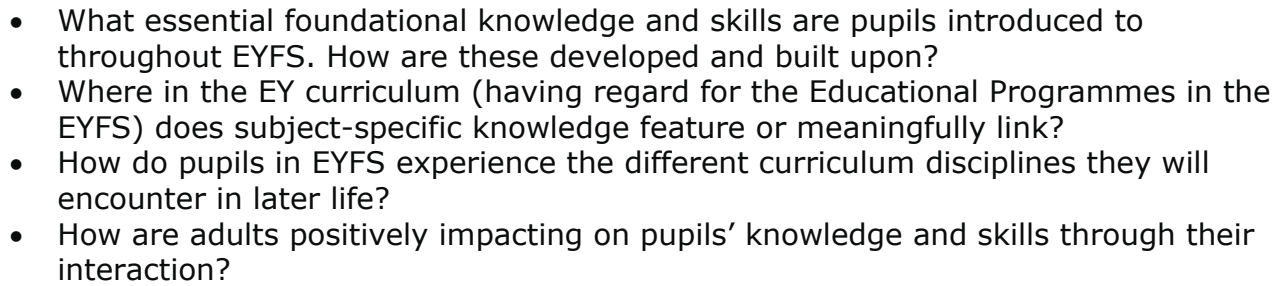
Designed as a thought-provoking and reflective toolkit, the below questions aim to provide subject leaders with a framework upon which to structure and articulate the three I's for their subject discipline:-

Vision & Intent

- What do you want to achieve in your subject?
- What knowledge and skills do you want pupils to know and remember?
- Does the curriculum match or exceed the breadth of the national curriculum?
- Is the curriculum broad and balanced for all pupils?
- What key drivers underpin your intent and why?
- How do individual subject intents align with and support the school's overarching curriculum intent?

Structure

- Have the small building blocks of knowledge that allow pupils to understand more complex ideas been clearly identified?
- Are they organised in a logical sequence to make later learning possible?
- Do curriculum plans make it clear what must be known by key end points throughout the year, phase or key stage?
- Do teachers make sound pedagogical decisions?
- Do activities achieve the intent of the subject?
- Do pupils remember the long-term content knowledge?
- Do teachers use retrieval and recall to ensure lessons are accurately pitched and build on previous lessons?
- Do teachers repeat and emphasise what pupils need to know in the long term?

Inclusion

- How is the curriculum adapted to meet the needs of all pupils?
- How are vulnerable learners, including pupils with SEND accessing and enaging in the curriculum?
- Is there a climate of high expectations so that all pupils can flourish and succeed?
- How do teachers get the best from all pupils?
- How are subject leaders working with the SENCo to adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND?
- Have the essential core knowledge and skills been identified and broken down into smaller steps?
- Are the 'golden nuggets' clearly understood by all those delivering the curriculum?

Pupil Voice

- What do pupils say about the curriculum?
- Do pupils enjoy the subject you lead?
- Do pupils understand what it means to be a good learner in each curriculum area?
- Can pupils make links between subjects and connect key knowledge and skills?
- Can pupils talk about their learning and identify how learning is deepening and building over time?
- Do pupils use technical, subject-specific vocabulary and language?
- Do pupils remember long term essential knowledge and skills?
- Do discussions with pupils show that the school's curriculum intent is being achieved for all?

Policy

- Do whole school policies accurately reflect the intent and implementation of the curriculum?
- Are policies translated and demonstrated in practice?
- Is there consistency in the delivery of the curriculum?
- Are the agreed approaches to pedagogy/teaching and learning seen across the setting?

Assessment

- How has assessmentt been built into the curriculum plan/map?
- Does assessment have a clear purpose?
- Is there a clear rationale for 'when' and 'what'?
- Is formative assessment fit for purpose?
- Does assessment check whether component knowledge has been remembered so that misconceptions or gaps in pupils' learning can be precisely identified?
- Is assessment aligned to the identified end points of learning?

CPD

- Is there a strategic overview plan for CPD?
- Is there a consistent approach to staff training?
- What are the systems for staff support, training, subject CPD and pedagogical development?
- How do you ensure consistency in articulation?
- How is the impact of CPD demonstrated?
- Does staff analysis take place – knowledge, skills and confidence?

Impact

- Is what you are doing working?
- Is what you are doing making a posiitve difference?
- How do you know?
- What monitoring is being used to evaluate and explore impact?
- What evidence do you have to demonstrate impact and support your evaluative judgements?
- How is imapct evaluation being used to inform and drive further changes and/or improvements?

It should not be forgotten that the curriculum begins with our youngest pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Ofsted very much view the EYFS as the bedrock upon which foundational knowledge and skills can be built over time. In fact, the 'EYFS in schools' document states, "*what children learn in the early years is incredibly important for their future success; it is the foundation of children's learning.*"

It is therefore crucial for subject leaders in infant or primary settings to have a clear understanding and knowledge of the EYFS curriculum, as well as how it relates to their subject in the building of key knowledge and skills. Infant and primary subject leaders would therefore benefit from considering the following questions:

- What essential foundational knowledge and skills are pupils introduced to throughout EYFS. How are these developed and built upon?
- Where in the EY curriculum (having regard for the Educational Programmes in the EYFS) does subject-specific knowledge feature or meaningfully link?
- How do pupils in EYFS experience the different curriculum disciplines they will encounter in later life?
- How are adults positively impacting on pupils' knowledge and skills through their interaction?

In conclusion, given the centrality of the curriculum to the overall quality of education provision, subject leaders are crucial in raising the profile of their subject, igniting a passion for their subject, and offering an engaging, well-designed, and carefully crafted curriculum offer.

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