

Key questions for school leaders for curriculum intent

What's curriculum intent?

Curriculum intent is basically **curriculum planning**.

Your curriculum intent is a specific plan of **what** you want pupils to know and be able to do, at key points and by the time they leave school. It's **not** a vision or mission statement. Each subject will have its own intent, or 'plan', of what you're going to teach, when, and why.

Ofsted's working definition of intent is:

A framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage ...

Inspectors will look at your curriculum intent as part of the new 'quality of education' judgement, coming into force in **September 2020** under the new inspection framework. Ofsted won't grade your intent, implementation and impact separately.

- What are the objectives for your curriculum? What do you want pupils to be able to know and do by the time they leave you?
 - How does your curriculum plan set out the sequence and structure of how it's going to be implemented?
 - Why is it shaped the way it is? What values have guided your decisions about the curriculum you have in place?
 - How does your curriculum reflect your school's context?
 - How does your curriculum reflect national policy (for example, British values and PSHE)?
 - How does it cater for disadvantaged and minority groups? Make sure these pupils aren't 'shut out' of pursuing subjects they wish to study because of too sharp a focus on exam results
 - To what extent have you made these objectives clear? Does everybody know them?
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- How good is curriculum coverage?
 - Have you identified the most important knowledge, skills and understanding?
 - How have you adjusted the curriculum so it is the best possible for the pupils in your school?
 - Where is the curriculum you lead strongest and where is it weakest, and how do you know?
 - Where it is weak, what are you putting in place to improve?
 - Where the curriculum is strong, how are you using this to improve further?
 - How do you ensure that all pupils' needs and interests are met?
 - Are you secure in your knowledge of teaching across the school, including that work and activities match pupils' varying abilities and needs based on prior, high-quality assessment?
 - Is the curriculum you lead 'stepped' or 'laddered' so that all teachers know what to teach when?
 - Do you have 'non-negotiables' (a set of basic skills, knowledge and understanding) that all pupils are expected to have mastered by the end of each year group? Are these simple enough so that all pupils, with the exception perhaps of one or two pupils with specific needs, are actually able to master them? (e.g. if children do not have a proper pencil grip or form letters correctly by the end of EYFS, they will always be catching up and not write fast enough at Y6 to complete the reading SAT paper.)
 - Do teachers plan lessons so that what is taught is achievable in the time available?
 - Are lessons taught as sequences of learning, rather than stand-alone inputs?
 - Are there opportunities to revisit, so that assessment can be made securely over time?
 - How do you know assessment is accurate?
 - If a pupil is at expected at the end of EYFS, are they still at or above expected at the end of every subsequent year group?
 - Is there a growing proportion of a cohort who work at greater depth? (around 8-14% more at the end of Y6 than the end of EYFS)
 - Are all opportunities to incorporate the curriculum area into others identified and taken?
 - What are the appropriate responses to the curriculum area you lead? (e.g. if a pupil is writing about Victorians, then writing is an English response to a historical input)

- How closely do you work with other curriculum leaders?
- Do you know the answers to these questions and feel confident in answering them?
- Do you lead (i.e. change and improve the way other adults work)?
- Have you analysed outcomes for pupils for the areas you lead? (e.g. assessments, pupil surveys, pupil focus groups, observations, etc.)

Ofsted say:

‘Our use of the term ‘intent’ has moved on following the curriculum research and piloting of the new framework.

Intent is about what leaders intend pupils to learn. It’s as simple as that. Intent is everything up to the point at which teaching happens. Good intent, according to our handbook, has the following features:

- a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils
- a curriculum that is coherently planned and sequenced
- a curriculum that is successfully adapted, designed and developed for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- a curriculum that is broad and balanced for all pupils

All of this can be found on pages 49–50 of the section 5 school inspection handbook.

So, intent is nothing new. There’s no need to write new statements, adapt websites or restructure staffing to cover intent. Intent is not the next big thing.

Intent is all the curriculum planning that happens before a teacher teaches the knowledge that pupils need to learn the next thing in the curriculum.

In evaluating the school’s educational intent, inspectors will primarily consider the curriculum leadership provided by senior, subject and curriculum leaders.

Inspectors will talk to senior leaders to find out whether the curriculum is broad and balanced. Is it at least as ambitious as the national curriculum?

In secondary schools, we will evaluate whether the curriculum is as broad and balanced as possible, for as long as possible. We will look at whether pupils (if appropriate) are able to study a strong academic core of subjects, such as those offered by the EBacc. We will consider whether there is high academic/vocational/technical ambition for all pupils and find out if some pupils or groups of pupils are missing out.

Ofsted does not advocate any particular curriculum model. A school may choose to ensure that its curriculum incorporates a particular ethos or inculcates certain dispositions. Inspectors will be interested in these plans. But at its heart, intent is about the ‘substance of education’: what do you want pupils to know? If your school is not doing so well in reading, mathematics, geography or religious education, then how strong is the curriculum in each of these subjects? Does it contain the right knowledge in the right order? Is the curriculum providing pupils with the building blocks of what they need to know and be able to do to succeed in each subject?

So, when we’re talking about intent, we’re talking about how ambitious, coherently planned and sequenced, how broad and balanced and inclusive the curriculum is. That’s all in a school’s curriculum planning, up until the point that a teacher teaches the curriculum.’

School inspection handbook

- During inspection, inspectors will probe leaders’ understanding further but, most importantly, they will focus on gathering first-hand evidence. Inspectors will visit lessons, talk to individual teachers and pupils, and look at pupils’ work (in its widest sense) together with curriculum leaders to see whether it matches leaders’ intentions. (95)
- inspectors will view lessons across a faculty, department, subject, key stage or year group and then aggregate insights as to how what is going on in lessons contributes to the school’s curriculum intentions. This will then provide part of the evidence for an overall view of quality of education or behaviour and attitudes. (99)

- Inspectors will consider the extent to which the school’s curriculum sets out the knowledge and skills that pupils will gain at each stage (we call this ‘intent’). (170)
- Inspectors will not grade intent, implementation and impact separately. Instead, inspectors will reach a single graded judgement for the quality of education, drawing on all the evidence they have gathered and using their professional judgement.

Intent

171. In evaluating the school’s educational intent, inspectors will primarily consider the curriculum leadership provided by school, subject and curriculum leaders.

172. The judgement focuses on factors that both research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to an effective education where pupils achieve highly. These factors are listed below.

- The school’s curriculum is rooted in the solid consensus of the school’s leaders about the knowledge and skills that pupils need in order to take advantage of opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. In this way, it can powerfully address social disadvantage.
- It is clear what end points the curriculum is building towards and what pupils need to know and be able to do to reach those end points.
- The school’s curriculum is planned and sequenced so that new knowledge and skills build on what has been taught before and towards its clearly defined end points.
- The curriculum reflects the school’s local context by addressing typical gaps in pupils’ knowledge and skills.
- The curriculum remains as broad as possible for as long as possible. Pupils are able to study a strong academic core of subjects, such as those offered by the EBacc.
- There is high academic/vocational/technical ambition for all pupils, and the school does not offer disadvantaged pupils or pupils with SEND a reduced curriculum.

Sources of evidence specific to curriculum intent

179. Inspectors will draw evidence about leaders’ curriculum intent principally from discussion with senior and subject leaders. Inspectors will explore:

- whether leaders are following the national curriculum and basic curriculum or, in academies, a curriculum of similar breadth and ambition
- how carefully leaders have thought about what end points the curriculum is building towards, what pupils will be able to know and do at those end points, and how leaders have planned the curriculum accordingly. This includes considering how the intended curriculum will address social disadvantage by addressing gaps in pupils’ knowledge and skills
- how leaders have sequenced the curriculum to enable pupils to build their knowledge and skills towards the agreed end points
- how leaders have ensured that the subject curriculum contains content that has been identified as most useful, and ensured that this content is taught in a logical progression, systematically and explicitly enough for all pupils to acquire the intended knowledge and skills
- how the curriculum has been designed and taught so that pupils read at an age-appropriate level.

180. Inspectors will bear in mind that developing and embedding an effective curriculum takes time, and that leaders may only be partway through the process of adopting or redeveloping a curriculum. If leaders have an accurate evaluative understanding of current curriculum practice in their school and have identified appropriate next steps to improve curriculum quality and develop curriculum expertise across the school, inspectors will evaluate ‘intent’ favourably when reaching the holistic quality of education judgement. They will recognise that the criteria for a judgement of good are the best fit.

181. Inspectors will also consider any documents that leaders normally use in their curriculum planning, but will not request materials to be produced or provided in any specific format for inspection.

Intent – Good, Grade 2

- Leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and including pupils with SEND, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. This is either the national curriculum or a curriculum of comparable breadth and

ambition. [If this is not yet fully the case, it is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing this about.]

- The school's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment. [If this is not yet fully the case, it is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing this about.]
- The curriculum is successfully adapted, designed or developed to be ambitious and meet the needs of pupils with SEND, developing their knowledge, skills and abilities to apply what they know and can do with increasing fluency and independence. [If this is not yet fully the case, it is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing this about.]
- Pupils study the full curriculum; it is not narrowed. In primary schools, a broad range of subjects (exemplified by the national curriculum) is taught in key stage 2 throughout each and all of Years 3 to 6. In secondary schools, the school teaches a broad range of subjects (exemplified by the national curriculum) throughout Years 7 to 9. [If this is not yet fully the case, it is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing this about.] The school's aim is to have the EBacc at the heart of its curriculum, in line with the DfE's ambition,⁷⁹ and good progress has been made towards this ambition.

Personal development

216. The curriculum provided by schools should extend beyond the academic, technical or vocational. Schools support pupils to develop in many diverse aspects of life. The personal development judgement evaluates the school's **intent** to provide for the personal development of all pupils, and the quality with which the school implements this work. It recognises that the impact of the school's provision for personal development will often not be assessable during pupils' time at school.

217. At the same time as the school is working with pupils, those pupils are also being influenced by other factors in their home environment, their community and elsewhere. Schools can teach pupils how to build their confidence and resilience, for example, but they cannot always determine how well young people draw on this. Schools are crucial in preparing pupils for their adult lives, teaching them to understand how to engage with society and providing them with plentiful opportunities to do so. In this judgement, therefore, inspectors will seek to evaluate the quality and **intent** of what a school provides (either directly or by drawing on high-quality agencies and providers, for example the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, Cadet Forces and the National Citizenship Service), but will not attempt to measure the impact of the school's work on the lives of individual pupils.

EYFS

283. Inspectors will particularly consider the intent, implementation and impact of the school's early years curriculum. They will evaluate the impact that the quality of education has on children, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with SEND.

Intent – Good, Grade 2

- Leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give children, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge, self-belief and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.
- The curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced. It builds on what children know and can do, towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for their future learning.
- There is a sharp focus on ensuring that children acquire a wide vocabulary, communicate effectively and, in Reception, secure a knowledge of phonics, which gives them the foundations for future learning, especially in preparation for them to become confident and fluent readers.
- The school's approach to teaching early reading and synthetic phonics is systematic and ensures that all children learn to read words and simple sentences accurately by the end of Reception.
- The school has the same academic ambitions for almost all children. For children with particular needs, such as those with SEND, their curriculum is designed to be ambitious and to meet their needs.
- (Implementation) Staff create an environment that supports the **intent** of an ambitious, coherently planned and sequenced curriculum. The resources are chosen to meet the children's needs and promote learning.