

Curriculum Conversations

For subject leaders and senior leaders

Discussion prompts and readings for all
Key Stage 3 subjects



Key Stage 3:
The Ambitious Years

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Art

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching art at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What is the purpose of art in our school?
- 2 What do we want students to know, understand and be able to do by the end of KS3?
- 3 How do we ensure students develop technical and creative skills across projects?
- 4 How is the curriculum sequenced to enable progression from novice to expert?
- 5 How does our curriculum help students think and talk like artists?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: [art and design](#)
- [NSEAD Curriculum Planning Framework](#)
- [Powerful Knowledge in Art and Design Education: Why history and context are important for practice](#) by Jon Aye, Impact Journal (Chartered College of Teaching)

Resources curated by Jo Baker, a Secondary Teacher, Head of Art and Assistant Principal.

Biology

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching biology at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What should students know, understand and be able to do in biology by the end of KS3?
- 2 How do we ensure key concepts like cells, organisms, ecosystems and genetics are revisited and deepened over time?
- 3 How does practical work support and not distract from conceptual understanding?
- 4 What misconceptions do students commonly have in biology and how are they addressed?
- 5 How do we support non-specialists in delivering high-quality biology teaching?

Useful reading

- ***Powerful Ideas of Science and How to Teach Them***
by Jasper Green
- ***Cracking Key Concepts in Secondary Science***
by Adam Boxer, Heena Dave and Gethyn Jones
- ***National curriculum KS1–4 Science Programmes of Study***

Resources curated by Helen Slipper, Secondary Science Teacher and Head of Faculty.

Chemistry

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching chemistry at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What would we expect a student who has been well educated in chemistry to be conversant with at the end of year 9? Year 11?
- 2 What's the structure of knowledge in our subject and how does this influence how it's sequenced?
- 3 What are the key threshold concepts in chemistry? When do students encounter them and why are they taught at this point? How do we assess if they have been sufficiently understood?
- 4 What tensions need to be considered when planning the chemistry curriculum (e.g. breadth vs. depth, curricular aims vs. national curriculum/exam requirements)?
- 5 Can we talk through one strand of chemical knowledge, explaining how it develops through Key Stage 2 to 5?

Useful reading

- Ofsted subject report series: [science](#)
- ['What should schools teach?' UCL Press, chemistry chapter](#)
- [CogSciSci Symposium on Curriculum in Science](#)

Resources curated by Helen Skelton, Head of Science.

Classics

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching classics at KS3 in your school.

- 1 What are the aims of studying classics in a modern curriculum?
- 2 How do we balance linguistic study with understanding of ancient culture?
- 3 What's our rationale for our choice of texts and topics?
- 4 How is Latin or classical civilisation progression mapped from year 7 onwards?
- 5 How do we make ancient ideas meaningful to students today?

Useful reading

- [The Classical Association: Teaching Classics](#)
- [Why Teach Classics?](#) – Cambridge School Classics Project
- Ofsted Research Review Series: [classics](#)

Resources curated by Dr Lucy Cresswell, Head of Latin and Classics.

Computer Science

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching computer science at KS3 in your school.

- 1 How do we plan to build on the four cornerstones of computer science throughout our curriculum?
- 2 How do we balance computer science, digital literacy and ICT in our curriculum?
- 3 What would success in computer science look like for our learners at the end of their school life?
- 4 What programming languages do we expose students to and why did we choose them?
- 5 What do we plan to do to increase the number of girls taking GCSE computer science?

Useful reading

- [The national curriculum for computing](#)
- [‘What is Computational Thinking?’](#) – Teach Your Kids Code
- [Policy Briefing on teachers of computing](#)

Resources curated by Tristan Kirkpatrick, Director of Computer Science.

Dance

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching dance at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 How does dance at our school change lives?
- 2 What is our ideal KS3 dance timetable?
- 3 How does dance aid academic subjects?
- 4 How can we promote dance more in our local community?

Useful reading

- A Choreographer's Creative Process in Real Time by Wayne McGregor
- Dance Education around the World
edited by Charlotte Svendler Nielsen and Stephanie Burridge

Resources curated by Katie White, Head of Dance, and Chloe Bush, Teaching and Learning Lead.

Design and Technology

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching design and technology at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What is design and technology? Why is it on the curriculum?
- 2 What are the key concepts or big ideas in design and technology?
- 3 What does a high-quality KS3 design and technology lesson look like?
- 4 How do we structure and sequence design and technology learning over KS3?

Useful reading

- HildaRuth and Torben for D&T
- *Design and Technology: For the Next Generation*
by David Barlex
- Curriculum – D&T Association

Resources curated by Amanda Britton, Head of Design and Technology and Senior Leader.

Drama

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching drama at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What are the essential dramatic skills and knowledge we want students to learn and why?
- 2 What plays have we chosen to teach and why?
- 3 What role does drama have in the whole school curriculum?
- 4 What resources do we need to teach drama effectively?
- 5 Why should students learn drama in school?

Useful reading

- *The Drama Teacher's Survival Guide*
by Matthew Nichols
- *Learning to Teach Drama 11-18*
by Andy Kempe and Helen Nicholson
- *Structuring Drama Work*
by Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode

Economics

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching economics at Key Stage 3 in your school

- 1 How do we ensure pupils are able to understand economics as a discipline rather than just learning about the economy?
- 2 How do we make abstract economic ideas concrete for pupils?
- 3 How do we assess understanding in economics rather than recall of examples?
- 4 How do we help students connect economic concepts to real-world applications?
- 5 What professional readings or associations inform our curriculum design?

Useful reading

- *The Economist's Craft*
by Michael S. Weisbach
- The Economy - CORE Curriculum
- What Students Learn in Economics 101: Time for a Change -
Journal of Economic Literature

Resources curated by Yousuf Hamid, Head of Economics and Business.

English

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching English at Key Stage 3 in your school

- 1 What's wonderful about teaching English?
- 2 Outcomes aside, what do students gain from English as a subject?
- 3 What are the driving factors behind the text choices on our English curriculum?
- 4 What strategies do we have in place to ensure that the development of subject knowledge is prioritised and there's parity for NQTs, RQTs and more experienced teachers?
- 5 How does the English curriculum ensure students can learn, know, remember and do more at the end of each year?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: English
- Closing the Reading Gap
by Alex Quigley
- Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction
by Beck, McKeown and Kuca

Food and Nutrition, and Textiles

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching food and nutrition, and textiles at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What are the key disciplinary and substantive elements of food and nutrition, and textiles?
- 2 How do we balance practical skill development with theoretical understanding?
- 3 How do we ensure students understand nutrition and sustainability as part of our curriculum?
- 4 How do we assess success in these subjects beyond practical outcomes?
- 5 How do we support all students to achieve independence in practical work?

Useful reading

- [Design and Technology Association: Food and Textiles](#)
- [Food Teaching in Secondary Schools](#) – Public Health England
- [New report on the future of textiles education in schools](#) - UKFT

Resources curated by Garry Littlewood, Assistant Headteacher.

Geography

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching geography at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What's the aim of our geography education?
- 2 What do we want our students to be? How have we constructed our curriculum progression? Using what model and thinking?
- 3 Which locations do we study, and why?
- 4 What fieldwork do we need to be able to do, and how can the school support this?
- 5 What resources do we need to support the best understanding of place, and how can the school support this?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: geography
- Powerful Geography
by Mark Enser
- Handbook of Secondary Geography
by Mark Jones
- Leading Primary Geography
by Tessa Willy

Resources curated by Dr David Preece, Chartered Geographer, Teacher, Educator and Author.

History

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching history at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 How do we decide what to include in our curriculum?
- 2 How does our curriculum encourage students to use prior knowledge/disrupt prior assumptions?
- 3 How do we assess historical understanding in lessons?
- 4 What are the issues with literacy development in history and how are we trying to overcome them?
- 5 How do we think our curriculum will shape a student's historical understanding?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: history.
- What's the Wisdom on... Enquiry Questions - Historical Association
- No More 'Doing' Diversity - Teaching History 179 by Catherine Priggs

Resources curated by Catherine Priggs, Curriculum Leadership and History Consultant and David Hibbert, Head of History and Chartered Teacher of History.

Languages

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching languages at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What key principles underpin our languages curriculum?
- 2 How do we ensure students retain and apply key vocabulary and grammar over time?
- 3 What do we see as the balance between communicative competence and grammatical accuracy?
- 4 How do we ensure cultural understanding is integral and not an add-on?
- 5 How do we measure meaningful progress in languages?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: [languages](#)
- [Making Every MFL Lesson Count](#)
by James A Maxwell
- [Languages: The State of the Nation](#) – British Academy Report (2020)

Resources curated by Hannah Pinkham, Former Curriculum Director of Languages.

Mathematics

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching mathematics at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 How does whole-school learning and teaching policy correlate with what we know about mathematics teaching?
- 2 How do we structure our classes and why?
- 3 What can we do to support improvement in the mathematics department?
- 4 How do we develop conceptual understanding and procedural fluency together?
- 5 How do we use variation to promote deep mathematical thinking?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: [mathematics](#)
- [Teaching for Mastery](#) – NCETM

Resources curated by Chris McGrane, Head of Mathematics, Author and Consultant.

Music

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching music at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 How do we know if what we're doing is any good?
- 2 Where did we start in the process of designing our curriculum, and where are we up to?
- 3 Who are we listening to/reading?
- 4 What have we changed in our practice from this time last year?
- 5 What are we going to do next year to improve as musicians?

Useful reading

- Ofsted Research Review Series: [music](#)
- [*The Power of Music*](#)
by Susan Hallam and Evangelos Himonides
- [*The Music Teacher's Companion*](#)
by Paul Harris and Richard Crozie

Physical Education

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching physical education at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What are the core purposes of physical education in our school?
- 2 How do we ensure that all students, regardless of ability, experience success in PE?
- 3 How do we assess progression in physical education beyond performance?
- 4 How does PE contribute to the wider aims of the school?
- 5 How can the school help address the barriers we face in delivering high-quality PE?

Useful reading

- [*Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*](#) by Ratey and Hagerman
- Ofsted Research Review Series: [PE](#)
- [Association for Physical Education](#)

Resources curated by Guy Wnuk, Head of PE and Sport.

Physics

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching physics at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What's our teaching sequence for physics and why?
- 2 How have we ensured our curriculum is at least as challenging as the national curriculum?
- 3 How are we supporting non-specialists to teach physics?
- 4 Which areas of the physics curriculum are taught most/least effectively? How do we know?
- 5 What are our priorities in terms of curriculum development for the next week/term/year?

Useful reading

- *Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education*
by Wynne Harlen
- *Powerful Ideas of Science and How to Teach Them*
by Jasper Green
- Physics teacher blog

Resources curated by David Gash, Head of Science Faculty.

PSHE/RSE

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching PSHE/RSE at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What does progression look like across KS3 into KS4 for PHSE/RSE?
- 2 How do we reflect local context and pupil need in our teaching?
- 3 How do we safeguard students during sensitive teaching?
- 4 How are staff trained and supported to deliver PHSE/RSE confidently?
- 5 How do we ensure inclusion and adaptations for SEND students?

Useful reading

- PSHE Association – Full Programme of Study & Teacher Guidance
- IPSOS MORI and PHSE Association 'Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education Research Report'
- Developing Quality PSHE in Secondary Schools and Colleges by Sophie-Lauren McPhee & Victoria-Marie Pugh, eds

Resources curated by Dr Nasima Riazat, Teacher and Curriculum Leader.

Religious Education

Use these questions to prompt discussion about teaching religious education at Key Stage 3 in your school.

- 1 What religious and philosophical texts are we reading?
- 2 Does our feedback and assessment policy work for RE?
- 3 What do we understand by the term 'worldview'? How is that being translated into the classroom?
- 4 How can we support our colleagues with other subject specialisms to teach RE?
- 5 Which tools or disciplines do our students use to study religion education?

Useful reading

- ***Making Every RE Lesson Count***
by Louise Hutton and Dawn Cox
- ***Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum***
by Mark Chater
- The RE Chapter in ***Curriculum: Theory, Culture and the Subject Specialisms***
by Ruth Ashbe

Resources curated by Nikki McGee, Subject Specialist Leader Religion and Philosophy.



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