



CURRICULUM

The 'what'

Ofsted: intent

- Knowledge / skills
- Aims and rationale: curriculum 'big ideas'
- Content choices (why?)
- Sequencing (why now?)
- Making links (coherence)
- Schema and memory
- Components and composites
- Mastery / fluency
- Assessment

PEDAGOGY

The 'how' (delivery)

Ofsted: implementation

- Sequences of learning
- Cognitive Load Theory
- Schema and memory
- Retrieval and recall
- 'Overlearning' – fluency and mastery
- Assessment – diagnostic
- Precision explicit teaching (knowledge/vocab)
- Teacher subject/pedagogical knowledge



"One who knows more, loves more" St. Catherine of Sienna

What is pedagogy?

Pedagogy is the method and practice of teaching and refers to the manner in which teachers deliver our knowledge-engaged curriculum to students in their classes. Teachers can effectively deliver content to students and develop their knowledge within the specific subject area. These principles are further outlined within this document.

What is learning?

"Learning is a change in long-term memory." – Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006

There are three key pedagogical principles each with a series of sub-concepts:

1. Subject Expertise
 - a. Subject knowledge
 - b. Passion and enthusiasm - storytelling - Motivation and engagement
 - c. Direct instruction - explanations, modelling and questioning
 - d. Subject-specific vocabulary (Tier 2 and 3)
2. Responsive Teaching
 - a. Checking for understanding
 - b. Scaffolding Learning (SEND)
 - c. Feedback
3. Teaching for Memory
 - a. Dual Coding
 - b. Interleaving
 - c. Spaced Practice
 - d. Retrieval Practice (high success rate)
 - e. Split attention theory

Pedagogical Principle 1: Subject Expertise

a. Subject knowledge

Research shows that strong subject knowledge is central to raising achievement. The Sutton Trust notes that deep expertise—and understanding how pupils learn within a subject—has more impact than generic teaching skills. Rosenshine's Principles add that knowledgeable teachers give clearer explanations, stronger demonstrations, and more relevant examples. Subject expertise also drives effective planning: selecting content, anticipating misconceptions, and scaffolding learning.

b. Passion and enthusiasm - storytelling - Motivation and engagement

Passion signals competence and motivates students. Great teachers bring learning to life through storytelling, role-play, humour, and real examples. Far from dull, direct instruction becomes engaging when delivered with energy and authenticity. High expectations, warmth, and belief in students foster safe classrooms where risks and mistakes fuel growth. When expertise combines with genuine enthusiasm, even dry topics become memorable.

c. Direct instruction - explanations, modelling and questioning

Explanations

The Sutton Trust's *What Makes Great Teaching* stresses that discovery learning is less effective than explicit teaching when introducing new knowledge. At Cardinal Wiseman, "direct instruction" means clear explanations, modelling, questioning, and guided practice—I do, we do, you do—rather than scripted programmes. Breaking content into manageable steps, sequencing carefully, and using worked examples prevents overload and supports long-term retention (Kirschner et al., 2006). The goal is steady progression from teacher-led support to confident independence.

Modelling

Modelling is central to direct instruction and takes many forms in RE: a model exam answer, a step-by-step ethical argument, or the teacher narrating their thought process when interpreting scripture or evaluating dilemmas. Models may also be conceptual, such as a diagram of the Trinity, a timeline of salvation history, or a comparison of pilgrimage sites to highlight shared spiritual purposes. Linking abstract ideas to concrete experiences—artefacts, visits, or liturgical practices—helps students anchor understanding.

Engelmann highlights the power of examples to build conceptual knowledge, while Rosenshine stresses that experiential activities work best once core knowledge is secure. Teachers can model by:

- Concrete analogies (e.g. St Patrick's shamrock for the Trinity).
- Tacit knowledge (e.g. using rosary beads or stations of the cross).
- Thinking aloud (narrating thought processes to show self-regulation).
- Organising knowledge (sequencing and connecting ideas).
- Worked examples (reducing cognitive load and clarifying processes).

Questioning

Questioning drives pace, engagement, and assessment. It checks understanding, tests memory, and prompts deeper thinking. Effective questioning is interactive, responsive, and purposeful.

Doug Lemov (*Teach Like a Champion*) identifies key strategies:

- Cold calling – selecting students rather than relying on hands up.
- No opt-out – returning to students to secure correct answers.
- Say it again, better – encouraging improved responses.
- Think, pair, share – giving time for rehearsal and reflection.
- Whole-class response – using whiteboards to assess and target support.

While these methods are often associated with Lemov, they reflect long-standing hallmarks of effective teaching.

D. Reading and promotion of subject-specific vocabulary (Tier 2 and 3)

E. D. Hirsch argues that reading and subject-specific vocabulary are the foundations of knowledge: to comprehend a text, students must know around 95% of its vocabulary. The more words they know, the easier it becomes to infer the meaning of unfamiliar ones.

Research (Didau, Quigley) divides vocabulary into three tiers:

- **Tier 1** – everyday spoken words (table, slowly).
- **Tier 2** – high-frequency academic words in written texts (beneficial, maintain).
- **Tier 3** – subject-specific terms (atonement, evangelisation).

Tier 2 vocabulary is the biggest challenge, as it is common in texts but rarely taught directly. Beck (2002) highlights around 7,000 word families that are frequent in writing but uncommon in speech—vital for success in exams and academic reading. Didau's example of words like *benevolent* and *required* shows how students can miss meaning without this knowledge.

The solution is systematic, high-quality exposure to challenging reading and explicit teaching. Teachers in RE will:

- Pre-teach key Tier 2 and Tier 3 words in student-friendly language, using examples and visuals.
- Scaffold reading with glossaries, highlighting, and discussion.
- Revisit vocabulary through retrieval practice, discussion, and extended writing.
- I say, you say. Embedding vocabulary through spoken rote learning.

By embedding vocabulary instruction in this way, students gain the language tools needed to understand, analyse, and apply knowledge with confidence.

What does subject expertise look like in RE?

- Teachers have expert content knowledge in the subject(s) that they are teaching. They also have a solid pedagogical knowledge and use appropriate strategies to support learning. In RE, teachers bring the subject to life through story-telling, artefacts, visits to places of worship and external speakers. Teachers have expert knowledge in the content that is taught, and a passion for the subject that motivates the students to do well. Our pedagogical philosophy is to 'teach to the top' and allow all students to have access to higher-level concepts, ideas and knowledge whilst using strategies such as scaffolding to enable all learners to reach their full potential.
- Teachers enable students to understand key concepts, presenting information clearly to encourage appropriate discussion. Consideration is given to how students will remember their learning. Teachers provide effective explanations, demonstrations and concrete examples. Teachers preempt obstacles and misconceptions through careful planning.
- Direct instruction is used by all RE teachers, with planned teacher explanation being at the heart of good teaching. By explaining concepts clearly, this ensures that a student's first encounter with new knowledge is accessible. Alongside direct instruction, teachers will often use an image, piece of music, graph or diagram as a stimulus for discussion and where possible, use concrete examples to explain abstract ideas.
- Modelling is an important feature of all RE lessons, using the 'I do, we do, you do' structure. Live modelling gives an opportunity for students to see how an answer is formulated and shows them the correlation between the thought and writing processes. Providing model answers demonstrates how to meet the success criteria and gives students a target to aspire for.
- KS4 students are given opportunities to apply GCSE mark schemes to a variety of different answers which enables them to draw comparison between the standard of answers and consider what makes good writing in RE. Using non-examples as part of this process also encourages students to engage with common errors in order to avoid them in their own responses.
- Booklets at KS4 are designed to enable students to 'build' up to the complex essay questions on the GCSE paper which require students to write critically. Booklets will begin with an exemplar answer and mark scheme to ensure students have a clear vision, building up to worked examples where students will fill in parts of a missing answer, to writing with some scaffolding such as structure strips/writing frames to eventually being able to complete an answer independently.

- Scaffolds enable all students to access the powerful knowledge of the lesson, by giving SEN/LA students access to drastically reduced reading material alongside sentence stems, structure aids and chunked activities that may not be necessary for the majority of students in the class.
- RE lessons are often a place of discussion and polite disagreement. Our curriculum deliberately addresses contentious issues in order to provoke debate or test the strength of opposing arguments. This is crucial to build the skill of evaluation which is necessary for successful GCSE writing.
- At the heart of good RE is the ability of students to interpret scripture, ask questions, look at issues from a multitude of lenses and question their own perceptions and beliefs. The intention is to create learners who are curious and inquisitive.
- Using real life examples and case studies helps students to identify practices as 'lived religion' and help students make connections between what they learn in the classroom and what they encounter in the outside world.

Pedagogical Principle 2: Responsive Teaching

What is responsive teaching?

Responsive teaching means setting clear goals, planning carefully, and adapting lessons to what students actually understand. Dylan Wiliam describes it as blending cognitive science—how students learn—with formative assessment, so teaching adjusts in real time to address gaps and misconceptions.

The curse of knowledge

Teachers must design lessons for novices, not experts. This requires breaking new learning into small, clear components, ensuring each is mastered before combining them into more complex composites. Without this, students struggle to build secure knowledge and skills.

Success depends on practising components, not just whole tasks. A runner preparing for a marathon, for instance, trains stamina and technique in stages before tackling 26 miles. Likewise, responsive teaching builds mastery step by step, ensuring strong foundations for long-term success.

a. Checking for understanding

Checking for understanding is essential because without it, teachers cannot know if students have actually grasped the key knowledge. As Rosenshine reminds us, *"It is not enough to ask one or two students and then assume that all the others will also know the answer."* In Religious Education, where abstract concepts and specialist vocabulary are common, this becomes even more vital: if students miss a key component (such as "atonement" or "sacrament"), they will struggle to build more complex ideas like salvation.

Teachers should avoid simply asking "Have you understood?" Instead, they should probe with *"What have you understood?"* and check responses from multiple students. In RE, this might involve:

- Asking students to explain a concept in their own words, such as describing the Trinity using an analogy.
- Using low-stakes quizzes or mini whiteboards to check the meaning of key terms.
- Asking students to compare answers, e.g. "What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?"
- Encouraging elaboration: "Why might Catholics see the Eucharist as a sacrifice?"

Tom Sherrington points out that when students rehearse and explain their understanding, they not only reveal gaps but also strengthen long-term retention by making deeper connections between ideas. For RE teachers, this ensures that students can build from core vocabulary and concepts towards confident analysis and evaluation.

b. Scaffolding learning (SEND)

Rosenshine describes learning as a kind of *cognitive apprenticeship*, where teachers model, coach, and support students until they can work independently. Novice learners, with less developed schema, need different support than experts; this is less about “ability” and more about the stage of schema development.

Scaffolding reduces the load on working memory and allows all students—including those with SEND—to access new learning. While some pupils may need greater support or reasonable adjustments, the principle is the same: carefully structured guidance helps everyone.

Like stabilisers on a bike, scaffolds are temporary. They provide guided practice until students are ready for independence, ensuring they build secure knowledge without becoming reliant on support.

c. Feedback- (See RE assessment and feedback policy 25/26)

5. Whole-Class Feedback

Whole-class feedback is a formative approach where teachers review a set of pupil responses and provide collective guidance instead of detailed individual comments. In Religious Education, this highlights common strengths, recurring misconceptions, and patterns in reasoning or evaluation. Teachers use exemplar responses, typical errors, and targeted improvement strategies. Pupils then act on feedback through reflection, redrafting, or focused tasks, usually evidenced in red pen.

6. Live Marking – Individual

The EEF’s *Teacher Feedback to Improve Pupil Learning* report stresses that effective feedback should be timely, targeted, and actionable. Live marking delivers this in real time as teachers circulate, observe work, and give concise feedback—verbally or in writing. This allows misconceptions to be corrected immediately, supports responsive teaching, and reduces workload by limiting extensive marking outside lessons. In practice, live marking may involve highlighting strengths, asking probing questions, or directing pupils to refine their work on the spot.

7. Live Marking – Whole Class

This approach projects a student’s work (via visualiser or tablet) for collective review. The teacher models evaluation by annotating, questioning, and highlighting areas for improvement, while protecting anonymity where needed.

Effective whole-class live marking is:

- **Planned and purposeful** – focused on a clear skill or objective.
- **Supportive and inclusive** – avoiding public criticism.
- **Interactive** – encouraging pupils to contribute to the editing and improvement process.

Responsive teaching

- Teachers set clear goals and plan the learning carefully for all learners. *The RE department works collaboratively to plan knowledge booklets for the next term. We meet before the creation/editing of a booklet to discuss the powerful knowledge and the most effective pedagogy to teach each lesson. Alongside the knowledge booklet, in weekly meetings, we also discuss the most effective way to teach each lesson, which may include updating the powerpoint and resources which run alongside the knowledge booklet. This collaborative approach draws on the expertise of the whole department and informs our decisions in the classroom. It acknowledges that whilst there is powerful knowledge that should be taught, each teacher is flexible in adapting their lessons to meet the different needs of individual students.*
- Teachers identify what students have understood and where they are struggling. Teachers routinely respond and adapt their teaching to support students to do better based on formative/summative assessment and continually dispel misconceptions. *Formative assessment is used regularly and effectively in lessons to check for understanding. This can be seen in knowledge booklets*

(whiteboard/clap icons/PP icons indicate where formative assessment has been pre-planned to preempt misconceptions) as well as on the powerpoint, once a misconception or gap in knowledge has been identified by a specific teacher. Through weekly CIA review, the department again works collaboratively to identify ways in which the curriculum and resources can be adapted for the next cohort based on the experiences of teachers after the delivery of the lesson. This level of reflection and evaluation is powerful for developing our curriculum and is another opportunity to share good practice across the department.

- Students are regularly provided with bespoke feedback. During written work, the teacher will routinely circle the room and offer specific verbal feedback as required. Following the piece of written work in knowledge books, teachers will read all student work to identify common strengths and weaknesses in order to plan next steps. For some pieces of work, reteaching may be necessary (e.g. if a common misconception has occurred) in order for students to develop their answers. The teacher may write a 'model' answer which is specific to the group (i.e. focuses on a part of the task that students were weakest on) and ask students to focus on only one or two improvements. On other occasions, if written work is heavily scaffolded or done particularly well, the 'model answer' may be more challenging and students are asked to identify how their own work compares to the exemplar whilst adding things to their own answers in red pen.

Pedagogical Principle 3: Teaching for Memory

Memories are organised into schemas—structures that store information efficiently, simplify complexity, and create links between related ideas.

Dylan Wiliam argues that cognitive load theory is the most important factor in learning: working memory is limited, and overloading it prevents new learning being stored in long-term memory. Teachers must therefore design instruction that reduces unnecessary load, allowing students to focus on the essential content.

a. Dual coding

“Dual coding is the process of combining verbal materials with visual materials... when you have the same information in two formats – words and visuals – this gives you two ways of remembering the information later on.” (*Weinstein & Sumeracki, Understanding How We Learn*)

Using both text and visuals strengthens memory because the brain processes them through separate channels. In practice, this means pairing explanations with diagrams, timelines, or concept maps to improve recall and understanding.

b. Interleaving

Around half of what we teach is forgotten unless revisited. Interleaving—mixing topics and varying the order of practice—creates stronger long-term learning than blocked practice, even if it feels harder at the time. “Interleaving involves taking the ideas you are trying to learn, and mixing them up... Typically, interleaved practice produces poorer accuracy and speed during learning, but improved accuracy and speed on a later testing session compared to blocked practice.” (*Weinstein & Sumeracki*)

Blocked practice can feel safe—students repeat the same skill and gain confidence, but often without deep learning. Interleaving, by contrast, feels less comfortable, yet this productive struggle forces greater focus and helps students build stronger links between ideas.

Interleaving is not simply re-teaching the same content. Repetition in the same format leads to complacency and weak recall. Instead, students must actively apply knowledge in new contexts and face fresh challenges. This strengthens memory, deepens understanding, and keeps learning engaging for both students and teachers.



Blocked learning



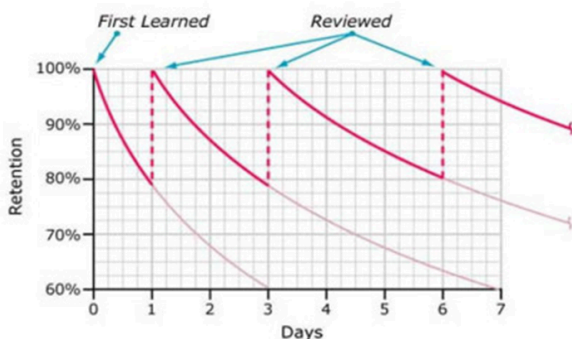
Interleaved learning



The process of interleaving was formed out of research into how we learn and importantly, how we can retain information over a longer period of time. Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve perfectly exemplifies how quickly new information is lost if it is not re-visited.

c. Spaced practice

Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information



Unless knowledge is revisited, it will be forgotten. As Weinstein and Sumeracki explain in *Understanding How We Learn*, "Spaced practice builds in opportunities to look over material and practise it weeks before the exam... Repetitions spaced out over time lead to greater retention than the same number of repetitions close together."

Cramming may boost short-term recall, but spacing strengthens *storage strength*—deep, long-term learning. Forgetting a little before revisiting material actually helps memory, as restudying strengthens those connections further.

- **Do Now tasks** revisiting prior components.
- **Homework** focused on previously taught content.
- **Self quizzing** – self-quizzing with dual coded flashcards at increasing intervals.

d. Retrieval practice

Rosenshine highlights that effective teachers engineer a high success rate, with around **80% accuracy** being optimal. At this point, students practise mostly error-free, strengthening fluency and confidence, while providing a secure base for new learning. If success rates drop too low, teachers should re-teach, re-model, and guide further practice until students reach that threshold.

Retrieval practice supports this process by both assessing and strengthening memory. Quizzes and recall tasks don't just check knowledge—they *improve* it, while also showing students what they know and what needs work. Retrieval practice is beneficial as it leads to:

- Improved retention and organisation of knowledge
- Identification of gaps and misconceptions
- Better transfer to new contexts
- Enhanced metacognition
- Useful feedback for teachers and students

e. Split attention theory

John Sweller's Split Attention Theory, part of cognitive load theory, explains that learning is less efficient when students must divide attention between multiple sources of information that need to be integrated. Divided attention increases cognitive load, making it harder to process and understand material.

Practical Strategies to Reduce Split Attention

- **Integrate text and graphics:** Place explanatory text next to relevant diagrams rather than on separate pages.
- **Use dual coding:** Combine verbal explanations with images or animations to engage both cognitive channels.
- **Avoid redundancy:** Ensure information in different formats complements rather than duplicates content.
- **Provide clear instructions:** Keep directions concise to prevent students from switching back and forth.
- **Structured layouts:** Use headings, bullet points, and numbered lists to break complex information into manageable chunks.
- **Interactive visual aids:** Use whiteboards and visual cues to present integrated information.
- **Minimise extraneous load:** Remove unrelated pictures, decorations, or side notes that distract.
- **Scaffold learning:** Offer step-by-step guides that combine text and visuals in one view.
- **Worked examples:** Show problem-solving processes with integrated explanatory notes.
- **Consistent formats:** Keep layouts familiar so students know where to find information quickly.
- **Scaffolding booklet:** Appendix can be used without having to turn pages over in the knowledge booklet

By reducing split attention, teachers help students focus on essential content, process it efficiently, and commit it to long-term memory.

Teaching for Memory

- Students embed key concepts in their long-term memory and apply them fluently, using strategies which may include spaced retrieval practice, dual coding, scaffolding, knowledge organisers and 'chunking.' In RE, every lesson begins with a 'do now' task which is based on spaced retrieval practice, focusing on 'powerful knowledge'. Dual coding is used both within the knowledge booklet and on Powerpoints, which are used alongside explanations to reduce cognitive load, which is more accessible for less able/SEND who struggle with reading and help explain abstract concepts in a more tangible way. Low-stakes testing is used in lessons to check knowledge retention and all topics finish with a 25 mark knowledge quiz. Immediately after each knowledge quiz, students are given the opportunity to 'gap fill' to rectify misconceptions and gaps in knowledge before moving on.
- Spaced retrieval practice is a feature of every lesson, and effective sequencing of the curriculum allows students to apply prior knowledge regularly. Students can be seen to connect new knowledge with existing knowledge. Within lessons, vocabulary that has been previously learnt, is regularly re-tested so that key concepts are over learned to the point of mastery. The sequencing of the curriculum has been carefully planned to help students build a coherent schema by identifying connections between previous and new knowledge. All lessons will contain an activity where students are asked to recall specific prior knowledge necessary for the new knowledge. This will allow students to 'hook' new information to prior learning expanding their schemata. Activities such as connection maps, where students have to explain connections between concepts/topics are explicit examples of how students connect new knowledge to existing knowledge.
- Students learn appropriate knowledge and do not memorise disconnected facts. In an RE lesson, students learn knowledge that is connected to big ideas, core beliefs, and practices rather than isolated facts, so they can see how concepts link together and apply to real life. For example, instead of just

recalling that Christians believe in the Trinity, pupils explore how this belief shapes worship, prayer, and identity, building a deeper and more meaningful understanding.