



LAURUS
GRACE

Teaching & Learning Policy

Written by: Dr Mark Sackville-Ford

Reviewed: July 2024

Next Review: July 2026

Overview

Our vision is for all of our students, regardless of background and circumstance, to make outstanding progress and achieve grades which will open the door to the future of their choice. We want our students to be curious and develop a thirst for knowledge; we want them to be resilient and to value effort; we want them to understand that sometimes failure is an essential part of the learning process and to recognise that developing a positive, 'can do' attitude will help them to set and achieve aspirational goals.

This is true for our students who attend our alternative provision offer within the Trust. Despite some additional challenges these young people may have faced we know that the highest quality of teaching and learning will be the most important factor in their future success. Our academic curriculum on offer within our specialist offer matches that of our mainstream offer. This is further enhanced through a restorative, therapeutic offer.

The classroom is at the heart of everything we do in Laurus schools. If we are to achieve our vision, we need to ensure that we are developing a thirst for knowledge in all of our students. Excellence should be expected.

The purpose of this Teaching & Learning policy is an attempt to promote a consistency of practice, ensure clarity of purpose and engage staff in an ongoing debate. It is an opportunity to reflect upon aspects of our practice that, as a school, we hold to be effective.

"...one of the main tasks of the teacher - to introduce children to the best of what has already been discovered or thought." Tom Bennett

It is important that we recognise the role of the teacher as an expert and build upon this.

There is not a recipe for expert teaching. The following information should be viewed as a guideline for staff to work within and beyond.

Threshold Concepts for Teachers

“A threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress.” (Meyer and Land, 2003)

Threshold concepts apply to all subject disciplines. Once we start thinking about the idea of threshold concepts, it seems likely that the concept also applies to our understanding of teaching. We wish for teachers to consider threshold concepts with teaching and learning carefully. These ideas will irreversibly transform our view of teaching. These ideas may be interrelated & troublesome. We expect teachers to consider these during professional learning and utilise their implications in the classroom.

1. Cognitive load theory & its implications for instructional design

‘Learning is a change in long term memory’ (Sweller et al, 1998, 2019)

‘Memory is the residue of thought & Understanding is learning in disguise’ (Willingham, 2009)

2. Performance and learning are not synonymous. The need for desirable difficulties

‘Learning is the long-term retention of knowledge and the ability to transfer it to new contexts’ (Bjork, 2015)

3. Novices and experts think in qualitatively different ways. (Kalyuga et al. 1998)

‘A skill is the ability to use one’s knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance. Reasoning, problem solving and creative skills are largely domain specific and enabled by deep knowledge of the subject.’ (Tricot & Sweller, 2014)

4. The potential and limitations of (formative) assessment

Assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning - Use evidence about learning to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs. (Wiliam, 2013)

5. Epistemic authority is vital in the classroom (Young, 2018)

Utilising these threshold concepts is not a simple process. We therefore have considered the fundamentals of expert classroom practice. There is not a recipe for expert teaching. The following information should be viewed as a guideline for staff to work within and beyond.

Expert teaching requires....

....knowing the students

Knowing your students enables you to assess their needs and effectively raise their expectations. When is their engagement drifting? Why might this be happening? Do they need some help or should you leave them to figure this out? These questions can only really be answered if we know our students well. Our assessments of their SEND needs a commitment to adaptive teaching means that the needs of students are well understood by staff. Our relational approach means that staff know our pupils extremely well.

Learners need a trusting, fair and safe environment that acknowledges that they 'may not know' and will make errors in learning. Learning takes time but one of the teacher's roles is to maximise the efficiency of the time available, to provide many opportunities to learn the same idea over time, and to ensure time is spent on 'learning' and not merely doing 'something'. Our students feeling emotionally safe in the classroom is an important feature of Laurus Grace.

.....high levels of challenge

"A successful teacher establishes a student's expectations of their abilities but then dispels those expectations by telling them they can do better". Prof J. Hattie

Appropriate challenge ensures that students have high expectations of what they can achieve. At Laurus Grace we are able to plan a curriculum that allows a balance between comfort and nurture and appropriate challenge which is the zone that learning takes place.

Robert Coe contends "Learning happens when people have to think hard." This seems like a great starting point and is directly connected to Daniel Willingham's proposition that "Memory is the residue of thought." What we think about is what we will remember and thinking 'hard' is more likely to produce long-term retention.

....engagement

We need our students to engage in what is happening within the classroom. Engagement means that 'they will be thinking about that we want them to think about' and therefore learning is more likely to take place. Teachers design their lessons using an approach that considers how and when students have to think hard. Lessons must get off to a focused start, with students purposeful from the beginning.

....explanation & modelling

It is critical that new material is effectively explained in order for students to be able to move to other aspects of the learning process. If not, often you will find yourself returning to further explanations or students will need to look elsewhere for additional support. Once information has been explained to students, they need to know what to do with it. The best way for students to see what to do is for an expert to model the process. The emphasis of the modelling stage is on building procedural knowledge.

....opportunities for autonomy

"Don't practice until you get it right. Practice until you can't get it wrong." Unknown

This is the phase in learning where students will be working most independently of the teacher. Within this stage, students should be completing activities that have been carefully designed to allow application and intelligent practice of key principles. Intelligent practice is designed to develop the thinking process rather than a repeated mechanical activity. There may be further conceptual and procedural development taking place.

....effective questioning

Questioning is a key part of what takes place in the classroom. Effective questioning can spark discussion, assess current performance and provide deeper levels of challenge. Through expert questioning, we can force our students to think. This is a key part of the learning process. We are far more likely to transfer something to long-term memory if we think about it. Effective questioning can also ensure that students are accurately using subject specific language within their answers.

Skilled questioning can be used to assess current performance. These 'hinge' questions, on which the next stage in the lesson depends, should be carefully planned in order to assess if students are ready to move on as well as diagnosing potential misunderstanding. Our smaller class sizes allow our students to be access high quality questioning more frequently with teachers able to adapt questioning to support individual needs.

....feedback

Marking is planning, marking is differentiation.

Effective marking and feedback are crucial in order to determine the next steps a student needs to take and in communicating these appropriately. Sound marking and feedback practices lead to high levels of differentiation as students work on the particular content or skill that will move them forward.

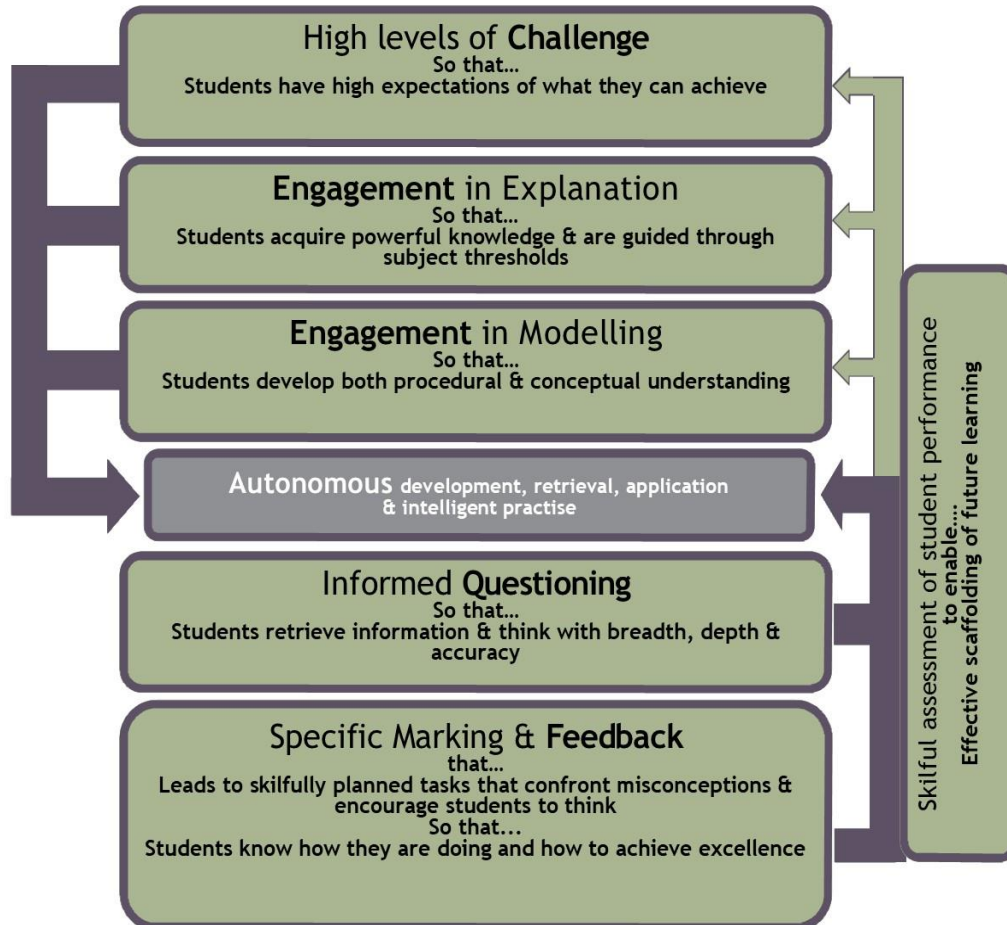
....skilful formative assessment of student performance

Adaptive and responsive teaching will enable the effective scaffolding of next steps within the lesson and beyond.

Formative assessment is a means to consider the improvement in performance that a student is making. Expertly used it will enable a teacher to judge where next to take the lesson.

It is important to acknowledge that learning takes place over time. We need to reflect on this carefully as teachers and consider how we will change this improved performance into learning.

Expert teaching requires...



This is not a lesson structure.

It shows the different components that will enable expert teaching and A development of powerful substantive & disciplinary knowledge over time.

Professional Learning in Laurus schools

'Every teacher needs to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better' Dylan Wiliam

In Laurus Schools we take staff professional learning extremely seriously. We believe that the best educators are the best learners and we therefore expect staff to be avidly engaged with their own professional learning within a dynamic learning community. We value high quality dialogue and insightful reflection between all members of staff with regards to their classroom practice. Teachers should actively seek opportunities to observe others both formally and informally and share good practice. A focus always on 'what can I make better?' and 'what does better look like?' help organise the mental models required for teacher expertise.

Staff should actively connect with research in order to best inform their own classroom practice and in turn the professional learning provided as a trust is informed by research. We recognise and embrace the complexity involved in professional learning. Changing practice is an intricate process, sometimes we have to stop doing something good to do something better, but the impact that can be had on student success make it a priority.

Equality Impact Statement

Names and titles of people involved with this assessment	Rachel Robinson Assistant Trust Director of Inclusion														
Impact assessment carried out with regard to identified characteristics	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Race</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disability</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gender</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Age</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Religion & belief</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sexual orientation</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SEND</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gender	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Religion & belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SEND	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Summary of any issues/proposed changes	N/a														
Date	July 2024														
Date of next review	July 2026														