

Lesson Planning and Teacher Resources

Guidance at a glance

This guidance is relevant to senior leaders, governors and middle leaders in England and Wales. It is designed to support senior and middle leaders in reviewing and designing their lesson planning policies and teacher resources.

Purposeful, lean and effective lesson planning can have an enormous impact on student learning and help teachers to manage and reduce workload.

In March 2016, the Planning and Teacher Resources Policy Review Group (PTRPRG) developed five principles of planning:

- 1 Planning a sequence of lessons is more important than writing individual lesson plans.
- 2 Fully resourced schemes of work should be in place for all teachers to use each term.
- 3 Planning should not be done simply to please outside organisations.
- 4 Planning should take place in purposeful and well defined blocks of time.
- 5 Effective planning makes use of high quality resources.

This guidance will look in detail at the following:

Section 1 Overview

Section 2 Develop a 'lean' lesson planning approach

Section 3 Lesson planning with impact on pupils and teachers

Section 4 Make lesson planning more efficient

Section 5 Make effective use of resources

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1 Overview

There is no silver bullet in relation to workload reduction and the process of moving from a 'status quo' to a different planning paradigm may be difficult for some teachers. But the benefits of focusing on doing less with greater impact must be worth the effort. In March 2016, the PTRPRG, commissioned by the DfE, was established to consider effective practice in lesson planning and teacher resources in schools, which raises standards for pupils without creating unnecessary workload. Their report *Reducing Teacher Workload: Planning and Resources Group Report* contains principles and recommendations.

The group looked at the workload implications of certain lesson planning practices, developed a set of principles for lesson planning in schools and made recommendations about marking policies and practice.

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- Fully resourced schemes of work should be in place for all teachers to use each term.
- Planning should not be done simply to please outside organisations.
- Planning should take place in purposeful and well-defined blocks of time.
- Effective planning makes use of high quality resources.

The challenge is how to make planning both powerful and manageable.

The *Teachers' Standards* state that teachers must be able to plan and teach well-structured lessons that:

- impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
- promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity
- set homework and plan other out-of-class activities to consolidate and extend the knowledge and understanding pupils have acquired
- reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching
- contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s)

This standard promotes an outcome-focused approach to planning.

The group also recommended that high quality resources are available, valuing professionally produced resources as much as those created in-house.

2 Develop a 'lean' lesson planning approach

Create collective ownership of lean lesson planning and a shared sense of purpose

In *Lean Lesson Planning*, Peps McCrea outlines an approach to lesson planning as a thinking process: "habits of thought that you bring into play to prepare yourself for teaching."¹

This guidance builds on the concept of lean lesson planning at a whole school or whole group level. The lean approach is likely to be new to teachers, so you will need to build understanding and create collective ownership.

1 Peps McCrea, 2015, *Lean Lesson Planning: A practical approach to doing less and achieving more in the classroom*

Consider initiating this as professional development for your teaching staff. The evidence says that to be effective in producing profound, lasting change, professional development interventions have to be prolonged. The most effective professional development lasts at least two terms. This could begin as an INSET day and then build a 'rhythm' of follow-up, consolidation and support activities.

Ensure that the evidence for the lean approach is well understood. It is possible that teachers will be used to thinking of the lesson plan as planning. It may take time for teachers' theories, as well as their fears, uncertainties and doubts about a new approach to surface.

Consider the following:

- What is the purpose of lesson planning?
- What constitutes effective and ineffective planning?
- What are the traps of planning that lead to increased workload?
- How can marking be used to support lesson planning?
- How will teachers know whether lesson planning is having a positive impact on pupil progress and pupil confidence?
- How can plans be manageable and not place unreasonable demands on teachers?

Involve middle and subject leaders

Findings from the Teacher Development Trust's *Developing Great Teaching* shows that professional development focused at a generic level is insufficient. Professional development should always be underpinned by subject knowledge and input should allow for the consideration of teachers' existing theories, beliefs and practice, and for opportunities to challenge these in a non-threatening way.

Departments may differ in their specific approaches to planning. It is probably the case that lesson planning in maths looks different to lesson planning in history, and they do not automatically require the same planning format across the school.

The aim of this approach is to instil the habits of lean lesson planning and underlying principles which underpin a common approach across departments and faculties. Create room for professional discretion; buy-in from middle leaders and their leadership of planning, is crucial to the success of a whole school or whole group approach.

Clarify the role of lesson planning in judging teacher effectiveness

Ensure colleagues understand it is the quality, not quantity, of lesson planning that matters.

If the quantity of planning, or the filling in of the form, has been or is perceived to be a proxy for assessing 'good teaching', then this needs to be carefully unpicked.

Middle and senior leaders will need to be consistent in communicating:

- how the quality of teaching will be assessed and that excessive and ineffective lesson planning does not play a role in judging the overall quality of teaching
- that lesson planning should be viewed through the lens of 'how does this promote pupil learning and pupil confidence, and what is the impact on pupil progress?'



Make most effective use of teachers' time

Time is teachers' most precious commodity and time spent producing quantities of lesson planning which are not having a discernible impact on learning is time not spent wisely. Ensure you prioritise planning so teachers think about how to scaffold learning.

Consider aggregating planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) into units of time which allow for substantial planning. Aggregated time may also create the conditions for collaborative planning.

One of the most important lessons from *Visible Learning*² (John Hattie), is that there is great power from teachers learning from each other and talking together about planning, discussing everything from learning intentions, success criteria, learning progression to what it means to be 'good at' a subject.

There are a number of ways to engage teachers in collaborative discussions about pupil progression. However, the most successful method Hattie has encountered is the 'data teams' model in which small teams of teachers meet every two to three weeks and follow a specific structure to examine student data, set incremental goals, engage in discussion about goals and improving teaching, and create a plan to monitor learning and teaching. Hattie suggests that what is important about this method is that teachers are open to looking at evidence of their impact on pupils and critiquing each other's impact to better meet the needs of pupils.

Communicate your lesson planning policy to inspectors

Ofsted has clarified their position regarding planning: Ofsted does not require schools to provide individual lesson plans to inspectors. Equally, Ofsted does not require schools to provide previous lesson plans.

It is advisable to ensure inspectors fully understand your policy and approach to lesson planning, its application and monitoring arrangements, particularly if you have slightly different approaches across different subjects.

Monitor, evaluate and quality assure

Monitoring is checking that things are going as planned; this would be monitoring the consistent use of the school's lesson planning approach so that leaders are confident this is happening across the school.

Evaluation is assessing the impact of the policy on outcomes and impact is always evidence-based. Work with middle leaders to identify ways to evidence effective planning. Evidence may be gathered by sampling lesson planning across the school or group, and talking to teachers to assess whether mindsets are shifting.

Quality assurance is surety that the approach is coherent and meets accepted quality standards. Lean lesson planning does not mean no lesson planning or poor lesson planning. Ensure you define what 'quality' means in your context, specifying what 'good' lesson planning looks like. The definition of 'good' can be co-constructed with your teachers and/or middle leaders to ensure collective ownership.

Encourage middle leaders to lead discussions on quality assurance with your senior team and your governors to help you understand where a subject or phase-specific approach may be most appropriate.

2 John Hattie, 2012, *Visible Learning Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. Routledge.

3 Lesson planning with impact on pupils and teachers

Ineffective lesson planning

Planning does not necessarily result in good learning. Just because a lesson plan has been scrupulously filled in does not mean pupils will learn optimally.

Ross Morrison McGill, drawing on Peps McCrae's work, argues that there are three 'classic traps' of lesson planning (via McGill's blog [Teacher Toolkit](#)):

- Activity-focused planning: when teachers find a 'good' activity and then reverse engineer the lesson objectives to match the likely outcomes of the activity.
- Coverage-focused planning: this begins with someone else's learning objectives rather than considering pupils' needs. It can mean an exercise in getting through the curriculum, or aiming towards an assessment.
- Over-planning: too many activities or too many objectives. Failure to break down the objective and trying to cover too much.

This is ineffective planning.

Effective lesson planning

John Hattie asserts that teachers need to recognise that they mostly talk about teaching and instead they need to learn how to discuss student learning. He summarises the four critical parts of effective planning, based on what the evidence says:

- Prior achievement: the levels of pupils at the start
- Targeted learning: the desired levels at the end
- Progression: the rate of progress from the start to the end
- Teacher collaboration

Or, with a slightly different emphasis, Peps McCrae says:

- Where are the learners starting from?
- Where do you want them to get to?
- How will you know when they are there?
- How can you best help them get there?

Where are the pupils starting from?³

We know from Hattie that a pupil's prior achievement has a powerful impact on their achievement ($d = 0.67$). What this means is that what pupils bring to the classroom is a powerful predictor of how well they will achieve. The role of the teacher is to change this, and ensure that those who are 'behind' in their learning achieve just as much. For this reason, any lesson planning must begin with teachers developing a deep understanding of what pupils already know and can do.

3 This section draws on both McCrae and Hattie. It is summarised from John Hattie's *the main ideas of visible learning: a summary of the summary*.
<http://www.tdschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/The+Main+Idea+-+Visible+Learning+for+Teachers+-+April+2013.pdf>



Where do you want the pupils to get to and how will you know?

In planning lessons, there are two parts to consider in thinking about targeted learning, or where teachers want pupils to end up:

- 1 Be clear about what is to be learned – the learning intention or objective.
- 2 Have a way to know that the learning has been learned – the success criteria.

Hattie argues that both these must be visible for the teacher and the pupils.

The teacher needs to know not when the pupils have completed the activities, but rather, when they have learned the concepts and understandings.

How can you best help them get there?

Effective planning involves deciding on appropriately challenging goals and then structuring learning situations so pupils can reach those goals. Having clear learning goals is vital if we want to develop a good assessment and provide accurate feedback to pupils about how to be successful (see ASCL's guidance *Marking and Feedback*).

If we want pupils to achieve learning goals, teachers must start by communicating clear goals to pupils. This involves much more than having pupils chant the learning intentions at the start of class. Instead, we must help pupils develop a deep understanding of what they are supposed to learn, help them understand what success will look like, how the lesson's tasks relate to the intention, and at the end of the lesson, how much closer they have come to achieving the success criteria.

Marking is planning

When marking, teachers inevitably draw useful conclusions about what pupils can do now and what they may be able to do in the future. Marking should inform future planning and enable teachers to decide what needs to be taught again or better.

4 Make lesson planning more efficient

Build and embed lean habits

Peps McCrae identifies six lean lesson planning habits ⁴:

- 1 **Backward design:** start with the end in mind. Hattie argues that one of the best ways to optimise learning is to use backwards design. McCrae says that in the context of lean lesson planning this means two things. Firstly, starting planning with the question: "What do I want my students to have learnt by the end of the lesson?" Secondly, spending more time on this activity than you think you should. Effective teachers spend more time identifying outcomes than selecting activities.
- 2 **Knowing knowledge:** establish the route towards expertise. Pupils need to learn both conceptual knowledge and technical proficiency. McCrae advises that teachers get in the planning habit of asking: is this a lesson about building tools or learning to use them better? Both are important.

4 Peps McCrae, 2015, *Lean Lesson Planning: A practical approach to doing less and achieving more in the classroom*

- 3 **Checking understanding:** build on what they know, not what they don't. Teachers should get into the habit of reliable strategies to check pupil understanding, for example entry assessments, transition assessment, exit assessments. McCrae also gives examples of different types of questioning techniques and traffic-lighting, strategies that balance speed with reliability for checking pupil understanding.
- 4 **Efficient activities:** select and streamline for the shortest path. This is the lesson that in planning for learning, less is more. McCrae argues that effective teachers treat pupil attention as a scarce commodity. He suggests planning questions like: 'What is the least amount of explanation my pupils need before they can move on?' 'What is the least amount of deliberate practice they need to make progress?'
- 5 **Lasting learning:** build memory that lasts and is easy to recall. McCrae proposes that we need to build planning around how memory works. This is not because we want pupils to learn by rote, but because we want pupils to assimilate or anchor thinking. Deliberate practice supports effective learning.
- 6 **Inter-lesson planning:** plan for the past and into the future. Hattie finds that "expert teachers plan lessons as interlinked."⁵ McCrae proposes that teachers get into the planning habit of asking: "What previous learning do we need to revisit in today's lesson?" "What prior knowledge do I need to assess today so that I can plan properly for my next lesson?"

Encourage planning in sequences of lessons

The PTRPRG concluded that planning a sequence of lessons is more important than writing individual lesson plans.

We have established that planning is a thinking process: habits of thought that teachers bring into play to prepare themselves for teaching. Individual lesson plans may be useful but it is unlikely that they will be the norm in a lean approach. Lean lesson planning suggests that thinking of planning in sequences may be more effective than an individual lesson plan.

And better still, leaders could create the conditions for co-planning. Hattie finds: "The co-planning of lessons is the task that has one of the highest likelihoods of making a marked positive difference on student learning."⁶

5 Make effective use of resources

The PTRPRG recommends that, as a default expectation, a fully resourced, collaboratively produced, scheme of work is in place for all teachers for the start of each term. They state that school leaders should make clear who will be planning new schemes of work and associated resources, what time they will have available to do so, and how this will be made available to all staff in a timely fashion.

The principle of 'lean habits' can and should also apply to schemes of work. Good schemes of work are design tools that support the scaffolding and incremental building of content and conceptual knowledge over a period of time.

They should:

- use backward design
- establish a route towards expertise
- build on what pupils know

⁵ John Hattie, 2013, *Visible Learning and Science of How we Learn*, p. 104.

⁶ John Hattie, 2011, *Visible Learning for Teachers*, p. viii



- select and streamline for the shortest path
- link to the past and into the future.

They are a guide, and should not constrain, limit or coerce teaching planning.

The PTRPRG concluded that high quality resources support good teaching but too much time is spent trawling for resources. They make the case for schools to place more emphasis on quality assured resources, including textbooks (which often include digital supplementary resources, student books or teacher guides), reducing the time teachers spend on searching for ad hoc resources and allowing them to focus on the intellectual exercise of planning sequences of lessons.

6 Further information

DfE, *Reducing Teacher Workload: Planning and Resources Group Report*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teacher-workload-planning-and-resources-group-report>

DfE, *Teachers' Standards*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/teachers-standards>

Steve Higgins, Philippa Cordingley, Toby Greany and Robert Coe, 2015, Teacher Development Trust, *Developing Great Teaching*

<http://tdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/DGT-Summary.pdf>

Ross Morrison McGill

<http://www.teachertoolkit.me/2016/03/03/lesson-planning-cpd/>

ASCL guidance, *Marking and Feedback*

<http://www.ascl.org.uk/help-and-guidance/guidance-papers/ascl-guidance-marking-and-feedback>

How ASCL can help

If you are considering a professional learning programme for your school or group of schools to implement a new approach to lesson planning, ASCL is able to help you by:

- developing a bespoke one-day training day to initiate your professional learning programme
- designing a full professional learning programme over two or three terms for your school or group
- designing a full programme to help you manage and reduce teacher workload in your school or group, including all three elements of marking, planning and data management

Visit our website www.ascl.org.uk/consultancy or contact ASCL Professional Development on **0116 299 1122** for more information.

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