

# Key Messages about history teaching in Ofsted history talks and 2021 research review

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## Curriculum questions about the breadth and ambition of the history curriculum



- is there sufficient **breath and depth** within each element of the curriculum e.g. Church, state and society in the medieval period.
  - is their sufficient breadth in terms of **scope and geography**. Are places **beyond the British Isles** and places around the **world taught in their own right** e.g. African Kingdoms. Is the **interconnectedness** of the world explored?
  - is there **breadth and balance in historical themes and perspectives** e.g. political, economic, religious and social history
  - is there sufficient **local history** that links to national and international history
  - does the curriculum **prepare pupils** for what they are going to learn in each topic?
- is there sufficient breath in terms of **people, groups and experiences**

the KS3 History National Curriculum requirement, 'for schools to **think about the way the past and its people are represented**' and, 'for students to explore the complex interrelationships between Britain and the rest of the world, inspectors will consider the stories that are told and it is naïve to deny the real resonance of the kinds of stories we tell for the present'.

- are teachers **clear about what is particularly important for pupils to learn** in each topic?
- are pupils taught **enough about the second order concepts**: are they taught across the curriculum; do students engage with these concepts in sufficient depth **in different contexts**'.



## Key messages from Ofsted talks from History Lead, Tim Jenner

### Progress

- teachers need to get pupils to the stage where they can take on new information
- teachers need to be clear about the **component parts** of the learning
- pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of the past (**substantive knowledge**) and how historians study the past and construct claims and accounts (**disciplinary knowledge**)
- progress in history is **not simply memorising disconnected facts**, it is developing knowledge and understanding
- emphasise particularly important content and concepts, **do not reduce the history curriculum to a number of concepts** and bits of content
- teach the different meanings of concepts through different meaningful contexts over the curriculum

**Substantive example:** to understand why barons were upset with King John in Year 7 pupils must first understand the criteria for successful **kingship** and its dependence on the support of barons. They must also understand the position, role and potential threat of a **baron**.

**Disciplinary example:** to understand why historian's **interpretations** on King John changed over time pupils must understand how a historian constructs claims and accounts and what their **evidential base** is for this period of time. They need to understand the influence of changing **societal attitudes** and role of new evidence.



## Key messages from Ofsted talks from History Lead, Tim Jenner

### Pedagogy

- **Balance** opportunities for pupils to work like historians through historical enquiry with more directly teaching aspects of historical enquiry
  - **Build** on what pupils know: pupils ability to understand their teacher or their reading will depend on what pupils know about the **concepts** within the description or explanation
  - **Teach rather than dumb down** new concepts as even a pupil with some idea of these concepts has a much better chance of developing new knowledge and building a more **complex schema**
  - Be aware of **possible misconceptions**, including misconceptions in **disciplinary knowledge**
- ### What is your rationale for what pupils are learning and how they are learning it?
- **Specific enquiry questions** help to focus on the content and disciplinary knowledge
  - Pupils need to learn about **both the substantive and disciplinary knowledge simultaneously** in building their complex understanding of the past
  - **Specific contexts** are important in developing disciplinary knowledge e.g. why is it hard for historians to explain why Christianity to spread to Anglo Saxon England?
  - Teach the **relationship between sources, evidence and how historians construct their claims and arguments**



## *Additional messages from Ofsted History Research Review*

### Effective teaching

- curriculum design and teaching ultimately **enable pupils to construct their own historical accounts and arguments.**
- disciplinary knowledge in history is **highly distinctive** and is likely to **require distinctive teaching approaches**
- pupils should have the opportunity to study the past in **overview and in depth**
- study **broader developments or overviews** to connect events and secure coherent narratives
- storytelling is a powerful vehicle for learning the historical **narrative**
- it is important to develop pupil's **contextual knowledge** by 'world building' to building their **'sense of period'**
- support pupils in **reading the work of academic historians**, helping pupils to see them as a mode of historical argument

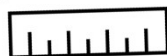
- Teachers and curriculum designers **identify knowledge that is particularly important** to secure for all pupils.
- Teaching develops the security of pupils' **'fingertip knowledge'** of topics, in order to support historical analysis and argument. This is knowledge they will need for the current topic perhaps for the outcome task
- Over the long term teaching will develop **'residual knowledge'** pupils can take forward into future learning. Consider where the **key concepts** and **chronological knowledge** will be taught and revisited
- **'Hinterland knowledge'** Pupils encounter rich stories and contextual details about the past, which make abstract ideas more meaningful.



## Additional messages from Ofsted History Research Review

### Effective teaching

- **Enquiry questions** are a sophisticated device for shaping curriculum content. High-quality enquiry questions organise historical content to enable pupils to develop disciplinary and substantive knowledge simultaneously
- Secure students **chronological knowledge** as gaps in pupils' mental timeline of the past might be a barrier to future learning or comprehension
- Disciplinary learning is **responsive to and consistent with significant shifts in historical scholarship.**



### SEND

- *'All pupils are entitled to a broad history curriculum. Any **adaptations** made to support pupils' learning in history usually should not be to the overall curriculum content but rather **to how the content is taught**. In the case of pupils with the most complex learning needs, **there may be occasions when it is appropriate to modify the curriculum**. However, this will be the exception.'*
- There is a lack of specific research on pupils with special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) and history education
- Adaptations for pupils with SEND are carefully considered and take into account the importance of background information in learning.



## *Additional messages from Ofsted History Research Review*



### Assessment

- Formative assessments are designed to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge of specific content and concepts so teachers can therefore meaningfully address them,
- **A range of different assessment approaches** are used together to assess pupils' knowledge. These assessment approaches might include **assessing pupils' knowledge of important concepts or important chronological knowledge, identifying misconceptions in a pupil's response, regular low-stakes assessment and essay questions**
- Pupils' disciplinary knowledge can also be assessed by their response to outcome tasks, such as **writing an essay in response to a historical question**. These tasks are a powerful learning tool: they require pupils to connect and transform knowledge to form arguments. This develops pupils' **substantive knowledge of a period but also their disciplinary knowledge of how arguments are constructed and communicated**.
- **Mark schemes and feedback are topic-specific** and recognise the interplay between different layers of knowledge in pupil outcomes.
- Curriculum design and teaching are not distorted by 'teaching to the test' but rather focus on developing the range, depth and security of pupils' knowledge.
- it is likely that an **undue focus on preparation for history GCSE examination questions in key stage 3** study will result in a **lower-quality curriculum** that does not develop the breadth of knowledge that pupils need either for these examinations or to meet wider aims, such as those outlined in the national curriculum for history.



## Additional messages from Ofsted History Research Review

### School systems



Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features:

- **Adequate curriculum time** is given to history to enable teachers to deliver a broad history curriculum that develops secure knowledge for pupils.
- Senior leaders assure themselves of the **quality and breadth** of the history curriculum. They understand **how pupils progress in history**, which allows them to support and challenge decisions at a subject level.
- Leaders are aware of and **mitigate against the potential downsides of whole-school policies** and their impact on the ability of teachers and departments to deliver a high-quality history education.
- Teachers and curriculum designers have secure and wide-ranging knowledge of the past, of academic history and of how to teach history to pupils. This is likely to be supported by **high-quality, subject-specific professional development**.

### Teaching for memory



- by identifying some knowledge that is particularly important and that will therefore be the focus of **explicit teaching** to support memorisation
- **draw attention** to particularly important terms and expressions, precise phenomena and broader frameworks [e.g. graphs of change over time, larger narratives summarised with key analysis]
- **Engage pupils analytically** with the content
- Use **retrieval and spaced practice** with low stakes testing of knowledge

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