



## Innovation, Aspiration and Excellence

### Learning and Teaching Policy

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## **1. Aims and Principles: Approaches to pedagogy and expectations**

At Houlton School, we aim to build a partnership between parent/carer(s), pupils and teachers that puts learning first. One of our five aims is to be 'Excellent in our provision of transformational learning experiences' and day-to-day pedagogy and practice is a key element of securing this. Our teachers are passionate about learning and are experts in their subjects. This policy is the method through which we deliver our curriculum and its implementation is the responsibility of all the members of our academy's community.

**The aim of learning is to generate a persistent change in knowledge (Kirschner *et al.*, 2006).**

**Thinking is the process that leads to such a change, a process governed by our working memory. We attend to information in our environment (or in our minds) and in attempting to make sense of it, we alter the very fabric of our memory (Cowan, 2010).**

Learning and Teaching are central to life at Houlton School. The quality of teaching has the greatest impact on pupils' learning and the standards that they attain. This is, therefore, a key policy for our school. We acknowledge the importance of on-going research into how people think and learn in what we do and value the strengths of individual children, teachers and support staff. As such, our teaching is adapted and flexible so as to respond to the developing needs of learners in the classroom, by varying instruction accordingly, so that we are 'excellent in our expectations for, and from, every pupil'.

Our teaching is driven by our values of innovation, aspiration and excellence. The protocols, routines and development of good learning habits are embedded and consistent in their application across classrooms within our academy. The mantra is an important part of the teaching and sets the tone for the learning that follows.

Effective teaching at Houlton starts with 'Quality First Teaching'.

## **2. Quality First Teaching<sup>1</sup>**

Research demonstrates that the key to success with all learners is 'Quality First Teaching', the key characteristics of which are:

- Highly focused lesson design with sharp academic objectives;
- Clear links to purpose, the 'bigger picture' and strategically sequenced learning;
- High demands of pupil involvement and engagement with their learning;

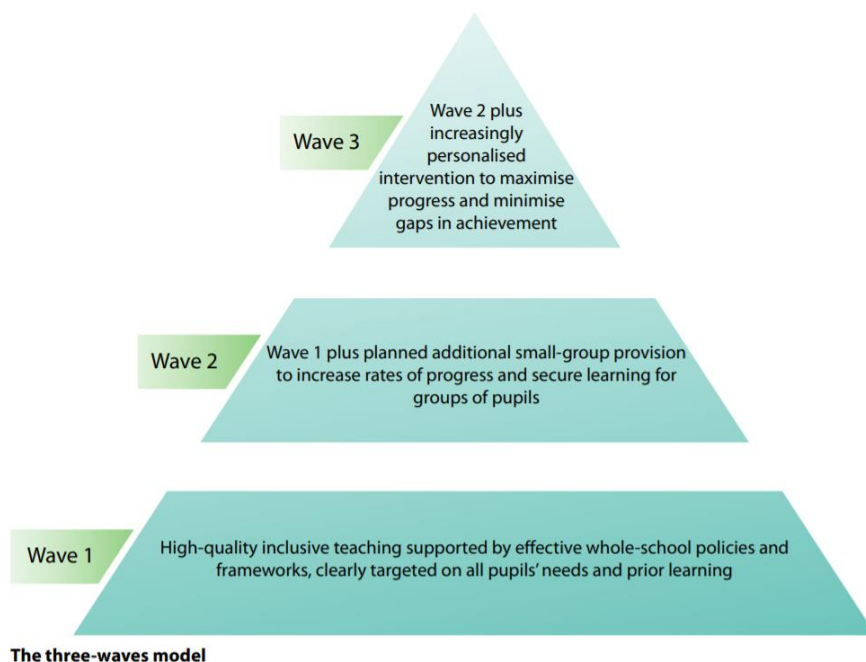
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<sup>1</sup>[Excellence for All: Quality First Teaching and the Waves Model of planning and intervention \(2009\)](#)

- High levels of interaction for all pupils;
- Appropriate use of teacher questioning, modelling and explaining;
- An emphasis on learning through dialogue, with regular opportunities for pupils to talk both individually and in groups;
- An expectation that pupils will accept responsibility for their own learning and work independently; and
- Regular use of encouragement and authentic praise to engage and motivate pupils.

Quality First Teaching defines the minimal expectation of Houlton’s offer for all children: the effective inclusion of all pupils in high-quality, every day, personalised learning. The application of the ‘waves’ model forms part of the Houlton ‘Learning and Teaching Agreed Principles’.

### Waves model for planning and intervention



### 3. The Big Question

‘The Big Question’ is used to define the academic purpose of all learning at Houlton School. The concept is based on research on the efficacy of ‘fertile questioning’<sup>2</sup> as a framework for learning. Its principles are that each lesson (or sequence of lessons) should seek to answer an intellectually curious enquiry within the subject discipline. This avoids lessons that focus on ‘what we will learn today’, solely framed by learning objectives; instead ‘the Big Question’

<sup>2</sup> <https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/teaching-and-learning-resources/teaching-tools-resource-guides/fertile-questions> and [https://yoramharpaz.com/pubs/en\\_learning/teaching-learning.pdf](https://yoramharpaz.com/pubs/en_learning/teaching-learning.pdf)

promotes an enquiry-based, problem-solving approach so that pupils are regularly challenged to apply the knowledge and skills that they learn.

Tom Sherrington & Oliver Caviglioli (2022) note, in their 'Five-Step Guides to Instructional Coaching', that this is a 'powerful idea in curriculum design' that supports the connection of 'subtopics into a coherent narrative and provides a recurring focus for stock-taking: how does this help to answer our Big Question?' Therefore, providing our pupils with a broader sense of purpose and direction with regards to exploring and finding answers to the Big Question.

In order to avoid learning objectives simply being reframed as (not so big) questions, the following principles will be considered when planning an individual lesson, or sequence of lessons. Not all 'big questions' address all of the principles, but all big questions would likely interact with these ideas in some way in order to make clear the academic purpose:

How 'big' are the questions I am using to frame my learning?

- **Open** — Big Questions may not have one, definitive answer but rather several different (and possibly competing) answers.
- **Undermining** — Big Questions may cast doubt on individual assumptions or 'common sense' (e.g. I look out of the window, and the ground appears flat; therefore, the world is flat).
- **Rich** — Big Questions may require research and grappling with a range of information/ideas rather than a straightforward skill or single item of knowledge.
- **Connected** — they are relevant to the learners and the world in which they live, and particular disciplines and fields.
- **Charged** — Big Questions are often effective when they have a controversial/ethical dimension with emotional, social and/or political implications.
- **Challenging** – Big Questions should **always** have the highest aspirations for what pupils can achieve, with appropriate adaptations, interventions, scaffolding and interleaving used to support all pupils in being able to answer them so that all pupils have the opportunity to enter the zone of proximal development, without the learning being 'out of reach'.
- **Varied** in terms of **metacognition**<sup>3</sup>, **interleaving**<sup>4</sup> and **regular recall**.

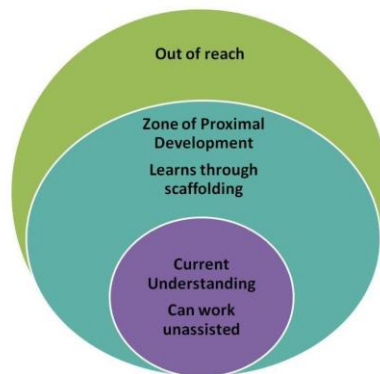
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[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Metacognition/Summary\\_of\\_recommendations\\_poster.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Metacognition/Summary_of_recommendations_poster.pdf) (2017)

<sup>4</sup> <https://researchschool.org.uk/bradford/news/interleaving-more-than-just-mixing-things-up/> (2019)

## Zone of Proximal Development

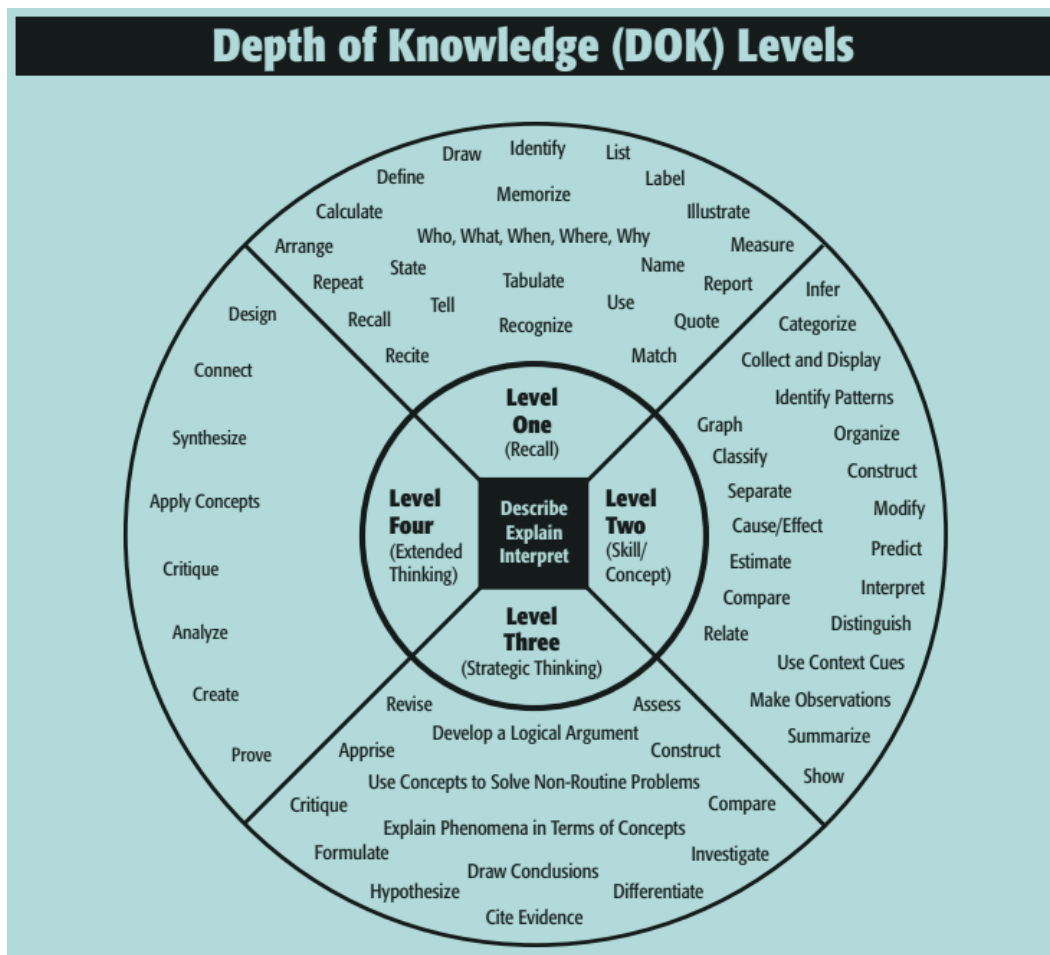


An example of a question that is not 'big' might be to take a traditional learning objective, for example, 'To understand refraction' and simply change this to 'What is refraction?'. This subtle change does not increase the depth of the enquiry. A bigger, more inspiring question, which may be applied to a single lesson or series of lessons might be 'How and why are rainbows formed?', which would be a bigger question that requires the application of knowledge, subject-specific skills and understanding to be able to answer it fully (an understanding of refraction would be part of the answer, but not the full answer).

Using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK)<sup>5</sup> levels will support teachers with framing learning using appropriately aspirational question stems in order to promote transformation learning experiences and attention to detail.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.windham-schools.org/docs/DOK%20Wheel%20Slide%20for%20Teachers-0.pdf>



#### 4. Schemes of Learning – how learning is organised and sequenced

The curriculum will be organised into long-term (Key Stage/Academic Year) and medium-term plans that reflect the National Curriculum programmes of study/relevant qualification specification (see Curriculum Policy). Teachers will then be responsible for designing lessons (short term plans) that meet the needs of individual classes and pupils in their care.

#### 5. Pupil Groupings

As articulated in more detail within our Curriculum Policy, all pupils are grouped in mixed-attainment classes at Houlton School in order to promote a personalised experience, where teaching is responsive. Successive research demonstrates that whilst this may seem counter-intuitive, pupils make more progress, more quickly when grouped in this way, and are happier at school as a result of the removal of anxieties around formal setting. Pedagogy and practice is, therefore, based on [adaptive, quality first teaching](#) principles (Teacher Standard 5, Early Career Framework TS5).

## 6. Learning Environment

Classrooms and learning spaces should be neat, orderly and organised in order to demonstrate this expectation to pupils. Displays should contain a balance between established Learning and Teaching aids and recent, relevant celebration of current pupils' work.

## 7. Houlton iStudy Daily Habits (see Appendix 2)

Regular reference should be made to the pillars of the iStudy daily learning habits to promote pupils' independent study skills and the habit of regularly revisiting key knowledge/memorability. At Key Stage 3, pupils *begin* to explore the iStudy habits through PHRSE, which are then *embedded* at Key Stage 4 and within the Sixth Form with subject-specific habits.

## 8. Houlton School's 10 Learning and Teaching Agreed Principles

Our vision for consistently **compelling learning experiences** for all pupils at Houlton is achieved through the commitment and quality of the teachers and support staff at our academy; we will work in close partnership with parent/carer(s) in a caring and open manner. Learning and teaching at Houlton School is evidence informed and guided by highly regarded academic educational research which is disseminated to staff through continued professional development sessions .

All teachers at Houlton School will be committed to the following principles:

- 1) **Planning and Evaluation** - Planning high quality, compelling learning experiences for every lesson and every pupil through:
  - following the curriculum and planned schemes of learning;
  - sharing the planned learning (and their role within it) with any additional adults;
  - considering the Trust's SEND policy when planning for SEND and high-needs children; and
  - evaluating pupil learning and progress to facilitate the amendment of planning to ensure its efficacy in supporting responsive teaching and learning.
  
- 2) **Lesson Structure** - Ensuring safe, efficient and purposeful learning experiences through:
  - meeting and greeting students at the door with a smile (meet and greet);
  - checking uniform and equipment;
  - having a purposeful 'bell task' to be completed on arrival;



- completing registers on SIMS within the first five minutes to ensure safety;
  - sharing the 'Big Question' every lesson so that pupils understand the context of learning with the programme of study;
  - encouraging positive behaviour through rigorous use of the rewards and consequences system for supporting pupil conduct; and
  - ensuring pupils are ready to leave and are dismissed calmly when the bell sounds (end and send).
- 3) **Responsive Teaching** - utilising a responsive and adaptive approach to learning and teaching through:
- using a range of pedagogical approaches to maximise pupil engagement;
  - specifying explicitly what pupils will be taught and what they will learn;
  - using a range of formative assessment (AfL) strategies to actively check individual progress throughout lessons and address misconceptions as part of a dialogic feedback cycle which informs future teaching and learning; and
  - responding to individual needs and utilising scaffolding approaches and stretch and challenge tasks to ensure progress for all pupils.
- 4) **Interventions and Seating Plans**
- Maintaining an up-to-date list of interventions for all pupils on provision maps using the waves model.
  - Having accurate and detailed seating plans using Edulink.
- 5) **Empowering Pupils**
- Ensuring pupils can verbalise their next learning steps and their progress towards their end of year target grades.
- 6) **Homework**
- Planning and setting challenging homework, using Edulink/Google Classroom, so that parent/carer(s) are engaged and empowered to support their child or children.
- 7) **Feedback**
- Using a DTTR style approach for feedback which incorporates diagnosis, therapy, testing and retesting during dedicated improvement and reflection time (DIRT)

- Utilising a formalised 'blue sheet DTTR' approach to feedback and DIRT at least once per half-term.
- 'Green-pen' work will be evident in books as a result of a dialogic feedback approach that focuses on the closure of learning gaps, removal of misconceptions and progress towards pupils' targets (see Assessment Policy for further detail).

#### 8) **Schemes of Learning**

- Delivering schemes of learning that include interleaving and memorability through revisiting content at regular intervals to ensure that knowledge, skills and concepts are securely encoded in the minds of pupils so that they are able to recall what they have learned and apply it in examinations, but also in their everyday lives.
- This is supported by regular, explicit references to the iStudy habits (Appendix 2) and cycle of independent learning at the appropriate level for the Key Stage (Appendix 1).

#### 9) **Literacy/Numeracy Support**

- Supporting pupils' literacy by embedding disciplinary literacy practice throughout the learning, feedback and intervention cycle. This will be guided by the whole school literacy strategy and each faculty's personalised literacy policy.
- Modelling standard English in our explication within lessons and having the same expectation of pupils in their responses.
- Supporting pupils' decoding, reading for meaning and reading for pleasure by promoting disciplinary reading in each area of the curriculum and a robust focus on vocabulary learning. See separate Reading and Vocabulary strategy and individual subject literacy development plans.

#### 10) **Professional Development**

- Regularly engaging in purposeful professional development which supports the continued positive development of their pedagogy.

### 9. **Monitoring Practice**

Effective Learning and Teaching results from collaboration and support. Whilst learning should be tailored to individuals, pupils can expect a consistency of experience at Houlton School. This will be monitored through:

- regular learning visits from middle and senior leaders;
- formal review through Challenge Partner, Trust and internal reviews;
- the support of our School Improvement Partner (SIP) and the trust;
- progress data against targets;
- regular work scrutiny;
- communication with children, parent/carer(s) and the rest of the school community;
- Faculty/Subject review programme, inc. TLET Health Checks;
- staff Professional Learning reviews and appraisal; and
- reviewing practices and having a shared language.

#### **10. Baseline testing – on entry and mid-year/phase**

Baseline testing on entry will take a combination of published KS2 data (Aspire FFT20 and FFT5) and GL Assessment Testing. The combination of this will set ambitious academic targets for pupils' progress.

#### **11. Tracking system and pupil level data handling**

Tracking data from each collection will be monitored and quality-assured by subject leaders and the SLT to identify, highlight and disseminate good practice, and to address underperformance promptly. This includes the monitoring of the performance of key groups of pupils. See the Assessment Policy.

## 12. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Cycle of Independent Learning



## Appendix 2 – iStudy

### Houlton iStudy Daily Habits (Generic)

	<b>i</b> <b>Identify the gaps</b>	<b>S</b> <b>Set measurable goals and targets</b>	<b>t</b> <b>Try new methods</b>	<b>u</b> <b>Undertake extended work</b>	<b>d</b> <b>Do review</b>	<b>y</b> <b>Yes to test!</b>
<b>Monday</b>	Look at your last HW task score and identify three things you could do to get more marks.	Set one measurable target to challenge yourself above and beyond what you have been set for HW.	Use a mnemonic or Loci method to help you remember something.	Ask another pupil or a teacher to give you a one minute speed teach of a question you find hard.	Re – write your notes from your lesson in less than half a side. Pick out only the key points.	Team teach: Tell a friend what you know and get them to ask you questions on what they don't understand.
<b>Tuesday</b>	Review the EBI's from the last piece of work you got back and see if you can write yourself one more EBI to complete.	Make a weekly plan where you allocate an appropriate amount of time for each subject. Don't forget to put in things you do for fun!	Find an online resource that you have not used before.	Find out a new fact on your subject and write it in the back of your folder under 'new knowledge'.	Spend 30 minutes reading through what you have done in class.	Practice writing stamina in test conditions. Aim for as many words as you can in 15 minutes on a topic of your choice.
<b>Wednesday</b>	Check your class work against the persons sitting next to you, have you got enough detail / missed anything?	Identify one thing you can't do. Note it in your planner and find three things that will help you tackle this.	Use either mind mapping or chunking to revise a lesson you have done this week.	Read a newspaper or journal. Pull out one thing that could help you in one of your subjects.	Re read your HW answers before you hand it in. Add three points in a different colour to make it better.	Practice planning an answer before you write it for a question that is worth 6 marks or more.
<b>Thursday</b>	Ask at least one question either on something you don't understand or something you want to know more about to a teacher or a study buddy.	Aim to get 2 consecutive Excellence Slips for outstanding pieces of work.	Summarise one section from your lesson using pictures or symbols and not words.	Visit the library and find three things that will help support your learning this week.	Go back over a HW task and identify where you missed out information.	Redo any test that is below your target and keep going until you get it to where you want it to be. Do this with notes if you are struggling then without notes.
<b>Friday</b>	Add in three pieces of missing knowledge or detail to your notes.	Work in silence for at least 45 minutes and then summarise in 100 words or less what you have done in that time.	Make a song / rhyme or game with your friends to help you learn one new thing this week.	Use the internet to find out what someone else thinks about the topic you are studying. Why do they think that? Do you agree?	Flick revise every time you open your book.	Revise smart. Identify the bits you got wrong and review these parts only.