Six steps of curriculum design™

Designing a curriculum is not easy. It is a complicated process that needs to be carefully thought through and involves much strategic decision making. With over 2000 schools now using the Cornerstones Curriculum, we have identified six crucial steps of effective curriculum design. These steps can be used by any school including those wanting to design their curriculum from scratch and others wishing to review their existing curriculum.

Starting with ‘Principles and purpose’ and adding a bit of your own creative sparkle, follow our six steps to design or to refresh your curriculum.

1. Principles and purpose
   - Knowing what you want to achieve and why you want to achieve it.
   - Each school should begin the design process by establishing their curriculum principles. The curriculum principles should reflect the school’s values, context, pedagogy and needs. Schools should be able to explain the purpose or intent of their principles.
   - For example: ‘We believe in a broad and balanced curriculum where all subjects are valued. A broad and balanced curriculum will equip our children with a breadth of knowledge and skills in all areas of the curriculum.’

2. Entitlement and enrichment
   - Deciding what you consider to be non-negotiables for your children.
   - After clarifying its principles and purpose, a school should set out its core offer. A school’s core offer should explain how it intends to enrich its curriculum with educational visits, extra-curricular activities and specific entitlements.
   - For example: ‘All children in our school are entitled to two educational visits a year.’

3. Resources
   - Identifying the resources you need to deliver a high-quality curriculum.
   - Schools will need to arrange their curriculum content into a range of exciting themes and projects. Its themes or projects should enable the school to deliver on its curriculum principles and entitlement, while ensuring coverage of the statutory requirements of the national curriculum. A school will need to make strategic decisions about what it covers, how it covers it and in how much depth to achieve both breadth and balance. These choices and decisions create a school’s curriculum structure or long-term plan.

4. Teaching narrative
   - Developing a series of lessons that deliver your curriculum content.
   - After deciding how its curriculum content will be organised, a school will need to check that all statutory aspects of the national curriculum are covered. Where there are gaps in coverage, schools will need to make strategic choices about ways to manage them.
   - For example: Can you show how and where all aspects of science are covered?

5. Check and review
   - Reflecting on your choices, and checking your coverage.
   - Schools can develop their medium-term plans by picking and choosing the most relevant activities from the series of lessons planned in the curriculum projects. They can map out their plans using the medium-term planning templates provided.

6. Curriculum design
   - Finally, schools need to identify the resources they need to deliver their curriculum. A good curriculum needs good quality resources. Resources include human resources, practical equipment and teaching resources.

How Cornerstones can help

1. The Four Cornerstones of Learning provide schools with a clear whole school pedagogy that they can embed and adapt to reflect their principles and purpose.

2. The Cornerstones Memorable Experience Map helps schools identify a range of relevant educational visits. Each Cornerstones project begins with a suggested memorable experience which adds to a school’s curriculum entitlement.

3. The Cornerstones Curriculum provides over 80 themed projects. All projects identify the national curriculum programmes of study and age-related skills.

4. The Cornerstones Coverage Checker and Gap Analysis helps schools check their curriculum coverage by showing schools which programmes of study are and are not covered by their curriculum design.

5. The Cornerstones Hub houses thousands of bespoke teaching resources to help schools deliver the content of the curriculum.