

**Common Curriculum Questions.** Tom Sherrington @teacherhead

English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should all classes be taught the same texts or can teachers decide based on their preferences or knowledge within a framework?</li> <li>• The selection and sequence of texts: classic texts, the canon, contemporary fiction.</li> <li>• E.g. is Holes acceptable? Is it more acceptable if all the other texts are 'classic texts'?</li> <li>• How much Shakespeare? Whole plays or extracts?</li> <li>• Can texts be said to be 'equivalent' as alternatives. – e.g. Of Mice and Men vs To Kill A Mockingbird?</li> <li>• Do we sacrifice some classics in order to feature more modern texts or texts with more positive representations in terms of gender, ethnicity, different cultural perspectives?</li> <li>• How far do we go to teach historical context or rely on what is taught in History? E.g. Can we teach WWI poetry before the war is covered in history? What do we need to teach as context for A Christmas Carol?</li> <li>• Is there room for Beowulf, the Iliad?</li> <li>• Does it help to teach genres with their chronology in mind?</li> <li>• Is it better to sample lots of texts or cover fewer texts in depth?</li> <li>• Where do speaking and listening, reading and non-fiction/English language content get woven in with the literature?</li> <li>• Do we use the language of GCSE-style assessment objectives?</li> </ul>
Maths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it meaningful to plot out a time-specified topic order in the context of a mastery model, teaching students from where they are?</li> <li>• What is the system used for setting questions, checking answers, setting homework – e.g. using specific textbook scheme plus say Hegarty Maths or MyMaths?</li> <li>• If there is a bought-in scheme such as White Rose, is it owned by the team – do they understand and support the topic order and general rationale?</li> <li>• Algebra or Number to start in Year 7?</li> <li>• Setting? If so, what does this mean for topic selection, sequence and the use of standard tests between classes?</li> <li>• Is there room for maths investigations? Even just one? What's the rationale?</li> <li>• How far do we go with context – e.g. famous mathematicians, historical origins of maths ideas?</li> </ul>
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a central/ common scheme – textbook/resources/set practicals/tests and revision materials?</li> <li>• Do we understand the building blocks -e.g. organ/tissue/cell; particles; energy, elements, conservation of atoms in chemistry?</li> <li>• Do the concepts spiral well from Y7-Y11?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we talk ‘science’ or physics/chemistry/biology – and develop teachers along specialist or generalist lines?</li> <li>• What are the links with maths and geography?</li> <li>• Do we include space given that it does not feature in Combined Science GCSE or extensively in the national curriculum for KS3? (Yes!)</li> <li>• Which set practicals and demos should be mandated to ensure coverage? Is there a good balance of practicals for tacit knowledge/experience vs for concept building?</li> <li>• Does everyone know and understand key concepts in climate change, process of greenhouse effect?</li> <li>• What is the value of grouping units as themed umbrella topics beyond being a neat-feeling label for a group of rather different concepts?</li> </ul>
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which selection of specific events and episodes within British and world history gives a strong platform - both for students who will go onto GCSE/Alevel and those that won’t. Does it feel like a good cross-section? Is it all Kings, Queens and Wars or is there enough other themes and perspectives woven in?</li> <li>• Do we have a good balance of themes across time and the deeper dives into specifics? Do we balance building secure foundational knowledge with debate/alternative perspectives/uncertainty within some or all topics?</li> <li>• Do we have to teach chronologically to reinforce chronology?</li> <li>• Do we adjust curriculum to provide emphasis on people and places that link to students from different communities in the school – e.g. Caribbean, South Asian?</li> <li>• Are we sure to teach about the Holocaust and aspects of WWII at KS3 - knowing students will be dropping History after KS3? What else is so important that it must be included? E.g. Black History?</li> <li>• Are we clear to teach disciplinary knowledge and skills – e.g. evaluating provenance/bias of sources – in context of the topics rather than as ‘ history skills’ with all the problems with that concept?</li> <li>• What links are made as context for other subjects or where chronology can be reinforced – science, geography, English, arts?</li> </ul>
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the blend of human and physical content appropriate and well sequenced, building a good spiral, providing a solid ‘Key Stage 3 only’ education as well as a platform for further study at KS4/A level?</li> <li>• How rigorously do we develop fundamental ‘skills’ around mapping and graphing, knowledge of local geography/UK and general world-map locational knowledge?</li> <li>• Is climate change knowledge developed in a thorough way, referencing physical and human elements, linking to sound science knowledge of greenhouse effect and climate/weather distinction? Is this a stand-alone topic and/or does it get woven in across a series of other topics?</li> <li>• Is sustainability/energy dovetailed with the science curriculum?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we include a good range of in-depth country case-studies developing breadth of knowledge of physical/human phenomena across the world without fuelling stereotypes (Africa = poor)? Might it be better to explore fewer places from a range of perspectives, for example?</li> <li>• What are the opportunities for field-trips - hands-on geography?</li> </ul>
RS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it RE or RS or Philosophy and Ethics?</li> <li>• How much time is given – e.g. is it part of PSHRE or taught discretely?</li> <li>• Is the Agreed Syllabus/SACRE guidance a driving factor?</li> <li>• Is there a balance of learning about and from a range of faiths and personal reflection? What is the knowledge content that all students have learn?</li> <li>• Do we balance coverage of major faiths with learning about a smaller number in depth?</li> <li>• Are teaching controversial areas appropriately – e.g. existence of God vs atheism; LGBT rights, the fact of evolution, abortion.?</li> <li>• Is this compatible with messages given in SRE/PSHE?</li> </ul>
MFL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we teach one language with the full time allocation or try to split the time and teach more than one language?</li> <li>• Do we offer a choice or just be content with being a school that specialises in one language?</li> <li>• Are we building fluency through sentence-level recall as a foundation (e.g. the Gianfranco Conti method?) or are we sticking with single-word vocab lists and grammar paradigms?</li> <li>• Which historical/cultural/literary references do we include alongside functional communication topics?</li> <li>• How committed are we to high percentage target language use and intensive choral work and ‘books closed’ recall practice?</li> <li>• What’s are the opportunities to improve listening and build confidence with speaking? What can students do to practise between lessons?</li> </ul>
PE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we make a technical distinction between PE and sport? What does this look like in practice?</li> <li>• Do we use actual sports as a framework – e.g. (football, cricket, tennis, gymnastics) or generic descriptors (solo performance, invasion games, rackets)</li> <li>• Is there progression from Y7-9 in terms of ‘games for understanding’, tactical awareness, individual performance.</li> <li>• Is there provision for elite performance – possibly linked to school teams and competitions – or is that entirely separate?</li> <li>• Do we worry about GCSE-style knowledge around cardio-vascular function and anatomical terminology – skeleton/muscle groups?</li> <li>• Do we provide the recommended minimum 2 hours per week?</li> </ul>

Arts/DT Common Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, do students have enough time in each area? Do we have the right balance of breadth of experience across art/DT areas versus depth in each?</li> <li>• Is there a carousel? If so what does this do to continuity year to year?</li> <li>• Is there a period per week? If so, does this allow time to sustain development of skills across a range of projects?</li> <li>• Is there the possibility of a Year 9 option structure where, before GCSE options, students choose an art/DT subject or two to specialise in?</li> <li>• What does excellence look like? Are we pitching high in terms of student outcomes compared to other schools at KS3 (given absence of official moderation process?)</li> </ul>
DT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the areas we can cover: Food, Resistant materials, textiles, electronics, graphics? Is there time/resource/expertise? What gets priority?</li> <li>• Is CAD/CAM integrated into the curriculum – or even taught discretely?</li> <li>• Do our projects offer experience with good range of materials, reference good range of designers, blend rigour of skill development with room for real creativity at the right point?</li> <li>• Do we assess knowledge of terminology, concepts in design process, the work of designers?</li> </ul>
Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What range of media will be included? Do we have capacity for ceramics, photography, digital – at KS3? – alongside more traditional media.</li> <li>• Are we referencing a good blend of art movements, the key artists that serve as reference points for art history? Does this mix reference a good range of cultures?</li> <li>• Do we include an appropriate/exciting mix of contemporary art and artists?</li> <li>• Might we do better to specialise in something specific and classic – like drawing skills – in Year 7 rather than going down the ‘lots of different media’ path?</li> </ul>
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this primarily a classical education focused on knowledge of classical composers -for listening and performance – or is there a strong compositional /performance element that is more contemporary?</li> <li>• Which composers will all students learn about? Which musical genres will all students study? Does this have elements that reference communities within the school population?</li> <li>• What instruments are available for performance to allow both ensemble and solo performance to be developed?</li> <li>• What’s the extent of instrumental tuition to feed into music curriculum?</li> <li>• How strong is the singing culture? Does everyone sing?</li> <li>• What’s the exposure to music tech for composition and/or recording?</li> </ul>
Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the curriculum have a good structure covering individual, small group and then ensemble performance?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a good balance of improvisation/ devised drama versus scripted drama?</li> <li>• Do we cover a good range of theatre movements/playwrights? How does this link to the English curriculum coverage of plays and poetry?</li> <li>• Do we assess student knowledge of drama concepts in writing or focus on performance?</li> </ul>
PSHE/ Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this taught by trained specialists or rotating teams of teachers who develop specialisms or by form tutors who teach everything or through 'drop-down days'? (Can you really do SRE seriously on one day per year?)</li> <li>• Is there a sensible mix of topics that can be taught in some depth or is it becoming a dumping ground for too many issues?</li> <li>• Do the people teaching SRE have the knowledge and confidence to this properly including handling LGBT students' needs? Is SRE planned in tandem with science curriculum?</li> <li>• Do we worry about formal assessment of PSHE knowledge or is it all a series of activities and discussions?</li> </ul>
Computing/IT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a good blend of computing/computer science and old-style ICT?</li> <li>• Is there an element of application training – e.g. word, PowerPoint, database, web design– or have we taken some of those things out in favour or more time for coding, networks etc</li> <li>• Do we have good provision for e-safety curriculum?</li> <li>• Which language(s) do we teach? Most schools seem to focus on Python – but what else might be included?</li> <li>• What are the key projects and products student will produce across the year – and is the curriculum sufficiently hands-on versus theoretical?</li> <li>• What are the links do DT, maths, science – e.g. with control systems, logic etc?</li> <li>• Do we include a thread about the history of computing – Turing, Lovelace, Berners-Lee et al.</li> </ul>