



Department of  
**Education**

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# Transform**ED**

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAY

# RESOURCE PACK





# Dear Principal,

## TransformED Development Days – Supporting Resources

On 30 January 2026, I wrote to you to provide information on the use of the two TransformED Development Days to be used during the remainder of the 2025/26 academic year. In my January correspondence, I provided links to key materials relevant to TransformED that may be useful in structuring the days and advised that further material would be provided.

As you know, the TransformED days will be non-contact days and are additional to your existing Baker and School Development Days and are intended to be used flexibly. Schools may choose to use them to focus on any aspect of TransformED that best supports their current priorities, including:

- Curriculum, including literacy and numeracy
- Qualifications
- Assessment
- School improvement
- Teacher professional learning
- Tackling educational disadvantage

I recognise that there has been a significant amount of activity related to TransformED in recent months. These days are therefore intended to provide an opportunity for staff teams to come together to discuss and familiarise themselves with the different aspects of the TransformED Programme, and how they relate to your school context.

To further support this, I have appended a series of optional resources covering key aspects of TransformED, namely:

- An introduction and overview of TransformED
- Explaining Curriculum Reform

- Global Learning for Transforming Curriculum
- Unpacking the Literacy Framework for Primary Schools

Each resource includes a short overview of the topic, a video presentation with an accompanying slide deck, additional supporting materials and suggested reflection questions. The topic overview and video should be a useful starting point. Optional further reading is also provided for those who wish to explore particular areas in more depth.


Schools are welcome to use one or more of these resources during the Development Days to support discussion and reflection. Of course, you may already have plans in place, and schools are not required to use the attached materials.

Ahead of the summer term, the Department will provide resources on further topics, including pedagogy, qualifications and assessment. We would also welcome your suggestions on what would be most helpful.

Further information on TransformED, alongside a wide range of existing resources, is available at [TransformED | Department of Education](#).

I fully appreciate that our education system has been under sustained strain for a considerable period, and that this pressure inevitably takes its toll. Real terms budget reductions, an ageing school estate, recruitment and retention challenges, increasingly complex pupil needs and the lingering impact of COVID-19 on attendance and engagement continue to place significant demands on schools.

I want to acknowledge the intensity of these challenges and the professionalism, commitment and resilience you demonstrate every day. It is precisely for this reason that the vision underpinning TransformED is so important. We cannot continue to rely on the extraordinary efforts of teachers and school leaders alone to hold the system together. That approach is neither sustainable nor fair.



The ambition of TransformED is to better support, empower and enable schools so that every classroom can deliver high-quality teaching and learning. Achieving this vision requires meaningful reform; a carefully sequenced curriculum that is progressive over time, and ambitious yet manageable.

It means qualifications that meet the needs of our students, that allows for deeper learning through reduced content and fewer exams. It means assessment that genuinely measures progress without being high-stakes or adding unnecessary bureaucracy. It means sustained investment in high-quality professional development. Above all, it requires ensuring teachers have the time and space to teach, and school leaders have the resources and tools to lead effectively.

I would assure you that reform will be appropriately paced, phased and supported with resources, professional development and investment aligned to each stage of implementation. Over coming weeks, the Department will provide more detail on the precise timing and phasing of reform.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your engagement and all that you do for our children and young people.

Yours faithfully,



**Suzanne Kingon**

Deputy Secretary

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**FEEDBACK**

# Resources

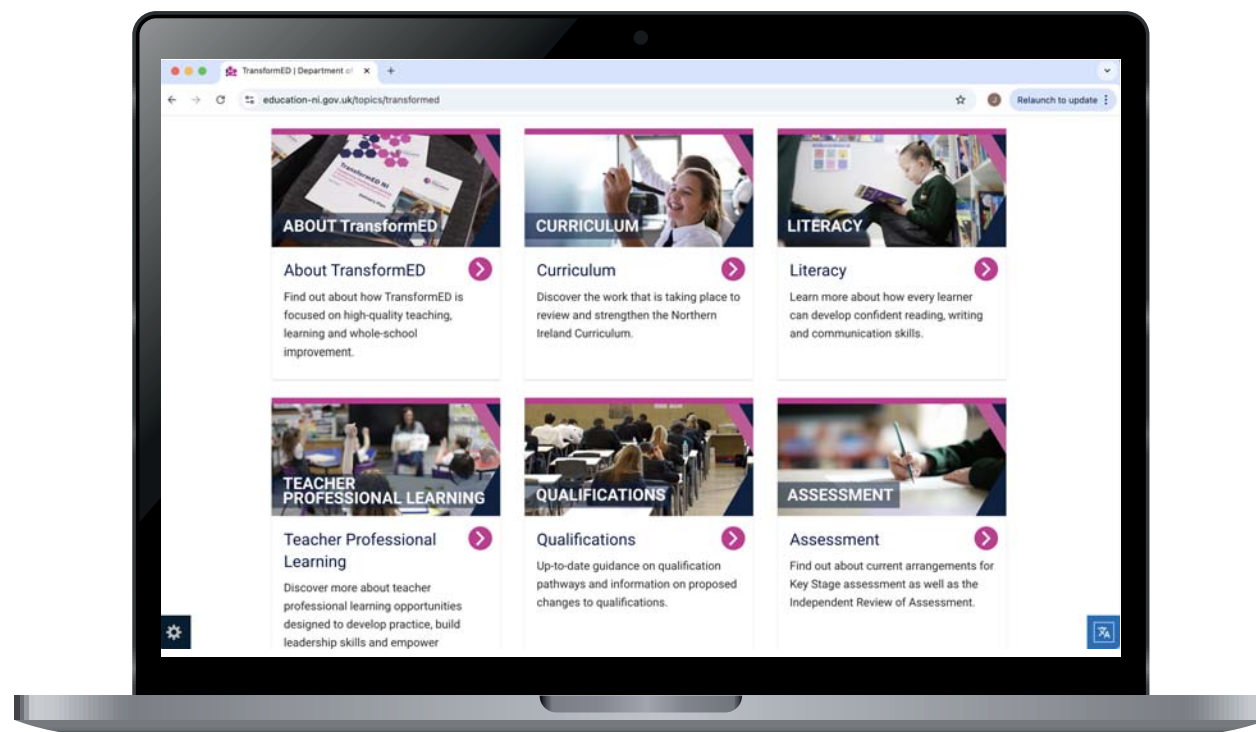
A **TransformED hub** has been created on the Department of Education's website to provide educators, school leaders and stakeholders with a wide range of resources and information.

The hub lays out the core TransformED strategy, explaining how reform across curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement, teacher professional learning and tackling educational disadvantage will be delivered.

It features dedicated sections offering up-to-date guidance on curriculum work, literacy development, qualifications pathways, assessment arrangements, support for tackling educational disadvantage and whole-school improvement approaches. There's also direct access to a growing library of resources and videos designed to help schools explore and understand TransformED priorities.

By bringing all TransformED updates and resources into one accessible space, the hub provides teachers with a central point to stay informed and engage with the changes shaping education in Northern Ireland.

**[CLICK HERE](#)** to visit the hub or scan the QR code below.





# TOPIC ONE: An Introduction to TransformED

## Background

TransformED is Northern Ireland's system-wide programme for educational improvement, shaped by the Department of Education's response to the Independent Review of Education and grounded in international evidence about what makes education systems high-performing.

TransformED aims to bring together a coherent set of reforms across curriculum, assessment, qualifications, teacher professional learning, school improvement and tackling educational disadvantage, all underpinned by sustained investment in the teaching profession.

A central message of the strategy is that high-quality teaching is the single most important factor in improving outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged learners. For this reason, TransformED places teachers, school leaders, and professional learning at the heart of every reform strand.

It also introduces a more internationally informed approach to policymaking, drawing on research showing that top-performing countries set high expectations for all learners, provide clear curriculum structures, design for depth as well as breadth, and support autonomy with strong, non-punitive systems of improvement.

The reform programme also includes a new school improvement policy, updated literacy and numeracy strategies, a review of qualifications, improved data and accountability arrangements, and legislation to ensure all learners remain in education or training until 18.

TransformED's vision is clear: an education system characterised by excellence and equity, in which every learner benefits from strong teaching, coherent curriculum pathways, and the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in life.

## Overview of the topic

In the video for this topic, Suzanne Kingon, Deputy Permanent Secretary with policy responsibility for Curriculum, Qualifications, Assessment, Teacher Professional Learning and Capital, provides an overview of the TransformED Programme.

## Why TransformED is needed

The programme arises from the Department's response to the Independent Review of Education and the Minister's decision to prioritise curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement, and disadvantage, supported by sustained investment in teacher development.

While Northern Ireland has strong performance in primary literacy and numeracy and a highly committed workforce, the system has faced long-term structural challenges. These include stagnation in PISA outcomes across reading, maths and science at age 15, widening variability between schools with similar levels of disadvantage, long periods without inspection or system-level data, and a decade of limited investment in curriculum renewal or professional learning.

TransformED reframes these challenges through an international lens: many countries are improving faster than Northern Ireland and have smaller socio-economic gaps.



## Work to Date

Significant progress has already been made.

More than 750 school leaders engaged in nine regional roadshows, helping shape refinements to timelines, implementation planning, and support.

A £31 million Teacher Professional Learning Fund has been rolled out, alongside an online science of learning programmes for primary and post-primary schools, new induction and early-career programmes, science-of-learning newsletters, a quarterly research publication, and partnerships with the Chartered College of Teaching.

In curriculum reform, subject working groups of NI teachers, academics and international experts are drafting the new curriculum framework.

Major initiatives are also progressing in literacy and numeracy, qualifications reform, system-level sample assessments for each Key Stage, adaptive testing, inspection reform and measures to tackle disadvantage through the RAISE Programme.

## Responding to school leaders and the wider system

Feedback from school leaders has emphasised the need for careful pacing, clear communication, and robust support.

In response, the Department is reviewing programme timescales and will publish a clear roadmap. We are also offering monthly webinars and providing an additional optional TransformED Development Day each term during 2025/26 and 2026/27 to help schools manage change.

TransformED is committed to support, not sanctions; its underlying philosophy is one of professional trust, equity and inclusion, recognising the profession's existing strengths while addressing long-term systemic challenges.

## A shared vision of excellence and equity

TransformED sets out a vision for a high-performing education system, one in which teaching is strengthened at every phase, curriculum and assessment are coherent and connected, and learners experience well-sequenced, ambitious content that builds strong knowledge foundations.

This aligns with international evidence: high-performing systems invest in early years, set high expectations, teach for depth and mastery, and focus relentlessly on teaching quality.

TransformED adopts these principles while recognising Northern Ireland's unique context, aiming to combine global insight with local values and community strengths.

## Next Steps

In the coming months, the Department will publish its roadmap for reform, continue drafting the new curriculum framework, expand opportunities for practitioner engagement, and develop the professional learning and resource infrastructure required for implementation.

Further work will also be undertaken on Qualifications Reform, a new approach to statutory assessment and a new policy for School Improvement. Strategies to improve literacy and numeracy will also be rolled out.

Whilst significant work has been undertaken in recent months, the Department is committed to ensuring the implementation of reform is at a manageable pace, with clear sequencing, sustained investment, and multiple channels for feedback and co-design.

TransformED is a long-term, collaborative effort: one that relies on the knowledge, insight and professionalism of those working directly with children and young people every day.



# Resources

**[CLICK HERE](#) to access a video and other resources related to this topic.**

## Optional reading materials

- [Newsletter 1](#) (April 2025)
- [Newsletter 2](#) (June 2025)
- [Newsletter 3](#) (September 2026)
- Book: Lucy Crehan, *Cleverlands: The Secrets Behind the Success of the World's Education Superpowers*
- [McKinsey, \(Spark & Sustain: How all of the world's school systems can improve learning at scale | McKinsey](#)
- [OECD, World Class. How to build a 21st century school system](#)
- Book: Daisy Christodoulou, *Seven Myths About Education*

## Reflection questions

You may wish to use some of the following questions to aid discussions and reflections:

- **What aspects of TransformED's vision for excellence and equity resonate most with my own beliefs about education in Northern Ireland?**
- **What do we see as the key issues and challenges in regard to curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement and teacher professional learning in Northern Ireland?**
- **What types of professional learning would most help me improve outcomes for my pupils, and what makes professional learning most effective for me?**
- **Which elements of the TransformED Ten Point Plan for Educational Excellence will have the most significant impact on our school, and how prepared are we to engage with those changes?**
- **Which aspects of the TransformED Programme feel most exciting or beneficial from our school's perspective?**
- **Which aspects of TransformED raise concerns for us, and what support would help us feel more confident about the changes ahead?**
- **What early actions could we take as a school to engage positively with TransformED and prepare for future changes?**



# TOPIC TWO: Explaining Curriculum Reform

## Background

The Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum commenced in November 2024 and was a key commitment within the TransformED Strategy and Delivery Plan.

The review was carried out by Lucy Crehan, an educational consultant and former teacher with experience in working in high performing education systems.

The final report, “A Foundation for the Future: Developing Capabilities Through a Knowledge-Rich Curriculum in Northern Ireland”, was published on 3 June in three parts, as follows:

- [Five Principles for a New Curriculum in Northern Ireland](#)
- [Summary Report](#)
- [Full Report](#)

Across the system, practitioners consistently reported that the existing statutory curriculum was overly high level, lacked clear expectations, and placed a disproportionate planning burden on teachers.

The review concluded that Northern Ireland required a new curriculum framework that more clearly set out what pupils should learn and when, and that better aligned with the science of learning and international best practice.

## Overview of the topic

Suzanne Kingon, Deputy Permanent Secretary with policy responsibility for Curriculum, Qualifications, Assessment, Teacher Professional Learning and Capital, provides the background to the Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the ongoing reform programme.

## Why do we need a new Curriculum for Northern Ireland?


Northern Ireland needs a new curriculum because the current framework, introduced in 2007, has significant structural weaknesses that hinder progression, manageability, and equity.

While the original intent, to reduce prescription and emphasise skills, was laudable, the framework suffers from three core flaws:

- **Lack of specificity:** It does not clearly articulate what should be taught and when, leading to inconsistencies across schools and gaps in pupils’ learning.
- **Lack of coherence:** The curriculum does not support the systematic building of knowledge over time, making transitions between key stages difficult.
- **Failure to connect knowledge and skills:** It underplays the role of connected sequenced knowledge as the foundation for developing complex skills like critical thinking and problem-solving.

Further to this, the curriculum is outdated (in parts), and many practitioners are concerned regarding ‘curriculum overload’.

A new curriculum for Northern Ireland will have content that is meaningful and manageable, provide clarity on what should be taught and when, and ensure knowledge is carefully sequenced as to progressively build over time.



## What is the purpose of the new Curriculum for Northern Ireland?

The TransformED Strategy is built on two core aims: Equity and Excellence. These principles underpin the new curriculum.

### **EQUITY: A PROGRESSION MODEL FOR ALL PUPILS**

A knowledge-rich curriculum is not a philosophical preference; it is grounded in cognitive science. Research shows that learning depends on building long-term memory and structured schemas because working memory is limited and easily overloaded. When pupils have secure, sequenced knowledge, they process new information more efficiently and engage in higher-order thinking.

Skills such as problem-solving and critical analysis are not generic, they rely on deep, domain-specific knowledge. A coherent, cumulative curriculum is therefore essential for durable learning. This approach is also a powerful lever for equity.

Explicit teaching of foundational concepts and language closes these gaps. Pupils who are disadvantaged often start school with less prior knowledge and vocabulary across a range of subjects. This means that they struggle to tackle newer concepts and more complex tasks than their peers. Access to high-quality, structured content can bridge the knowledge gaps that often arise from socio-economic disparities.

A knowledge-rich curriculum sets out a progression model for all pupils, so that we can work towards closing these educational gaps.

Embedding strategies such as retrieval practice, spaced repetition, and explicit instruction helps all learners (especially those who struggle) move knowledge into long-term memory and achieve automaticity. This frees cognitive resources for reasoning and creativity, rather than constantly grappling with basic facts.

This model guarantees that “powerful knowledge” is shared with all, making it one of the most effective strategies for tackling educational disadvantage. Powerful knowledge is not just information; it’s the kind of knowledge that enables young people to understand, critique and shape the world around them.


### **EXCELLENCE: DRIVING IMPROVEMENT FOR EVERY PUPIL**

International evidence shows that knowledge-rich curricula raise standards.

- Singapore, consistently top globally, combines rigorous content with cognitive principles like mastery and spaced practice, achieving the highest proportion of top performers and one of the lowest proportions of low achievers.
- Estonia, which emphasises core knowledge and teacher autonomy, ranks first in Europe for maths, science, and reading, with strong equity outcomes.
- Canada offers similar success: provinces such as Quebec, which maintain structured syllabi and emphasise foundational knowledge, outperform most OECD peers in PISA, particularly in mathematics and reading.
- England’s shift in 2014 coincided with a sharp rise in PISA rankings: from 28th in maths and 25th in reading in 2009 to 14th and 13th respectively in 2022.
- Portugal improved dramatically during its knowledge-rich phase (2011–2015), then declined when shifting to a competency-based model.

By contrast, skills-heavy curricula have faltered.

- Scotland’s “Curriculum for Excellence,” focused on generic skills and wellbeing, saw severe PISA declines – maths down the equivalent of 16 months’ learning since 2012, science down 18 months.
- Wales, with its vague, skills-led approach, now scores below the OECD average in all domains; its average pupil performs at the level of England’s most disadvantaged students.

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- Similar trends are evident elsewhere: parts of the USA that adopted “21st-century skills” frameworks without strong content foundations have struggled to raise achievement, while states that retained knowledge-rich standards (e.g., Massachusetts) remain among the highest performers nationally.
  - Australia and New Zealand, after moving toward competency-based curricula, have experienced steady declines in PISA scores over the past decade, prompting calls for a return to explicit teaching and structured knowledge.

## What will it look like in the classroom and for teachers and pupils?

The content and concepts will be meaningful for pupils. Replacing outdated content from the current framework. Providing ‘powerful knowledge’ for all pupils so they understand their context and place as well as equipping them to become global citizens and contributors to society and the economy.

The Curriculum will be carefully sequenced to ensure knowledge and skills progressively build over time. Knowledge is mapped and revisited over time to build deep understanding.

There will be clarity for teachers on what should be taught and when, embracing subject integrity (history is history, science is science) giving pupils clarity on what is being taught.

The reformed curriculum will be ambitious for all learners, with high expectations for all with appropriate adaptations and flexibility (over content and pace) as appropriate.

## Will new teaching materials be provided?

Yes. In the context of concerns about teacher workload, we need to recognise that, up until now, much curriculum design and planning have been devolved to individual teachers adding significantly to their burden.

Following the public consultation of the draft curriculum, the Department will ensure that high-quality classroom resources are developed to support the new curriculum, in advance of roll-out. These materials will align with the framework, reduce planning burdens, and help teachers deliver lessons with confidence.

A programme of professional development will also be provided.

## Will this increase teacher workload?

No. The new curriculum will be designed to reduce workload by providing greater clarity and structure.

Teachers will spend less time deciding what to teach and more time focusing on pupils. Clear sequencing and high-quality resources will ease planning pressures and support classroom delivery.

Greater commonality across schools about what is taught and when will also enable the development of shared resources, supported and facilitated by the Department.



# Resources

**[CLICK HERE](#) to access a video and other resources related to this topic.**

## Optional reading materials

- [The value of a knowledge-rich curriculum: An essay collection \(Civitas, 2025\)](#)
- Book: Ruth Ashbee – Curriculum: Theory, Culture and the Subject Specialisms
- [Tim Surma et al – Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking \(Springer | Open Access\)](#)
- Book: Michael Young, Knowledge and the Future School
- Book: E.D. Hirsch, Why Knowledge Matters?
- Book: Natalie Wexler, The Knowledge Gap

## Reflection questions

You may wish to use some of the following questions to aid discussions and reflections:

- **What aspects of the Review of the Statutory Northern Ireland critique – such as lack of specificity, lack of coherence, curriculum overload – most resonate with our experience as teachers and leaders?**
- **Which areas of our curriculum currently work well and which lack clarity or consistency?**
- **How clear are we as a staff on the non-negotiables for knowledge, skills and dispositions for pupils?**
- **Where is progression strongest - and where is it weakest - across and within key stages?**
- **Where do pupils, especially those disadvantaged, struggle because of gaps in prior knowledge or vocabulary?**
- **How would clearer expectations about “what pupils learn and when” improve my planning, teaching, and pupils’ outcomes?**
- **How do I feel about the shift toward clearer curriculum expectations that support rather than constrain teachers?**
- **Which parts of my workload currently stem from unclear, inconsistent, or overly devolved curriculum planning?**
- **What centrally developed resources or materials would make the most difference to my classroom practice?**
- **What questions or uncertainties do I still have about the direction of the curriculum reforms?**



# TOPIC THREE: Global Learning for Transforming Curriculum

## Background

Lucy Crehan is an internationally respected education consultant, author and speaker whose work focuses on global education systems, curriculum reform and evidence-informed policy. She began her career as a science and psychology teacher in a London secondary school, before becoming increasingly interested in the gap between policy claims and classroom reality.

This led her to undertake an ambitious, ethnographic journey through six of the world's highest-performing education systems, where she lived with teachers, observed lessons, and explored the classroom-level effects of national policy. Her findings became the basis for her acclaimed book *Cleverlands: The Secrets Behind the Success of the World's Education Superpowers*, which was named one of *The Economist's* Books of the Year within a week of publication.

As the independent lead for the Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, Lucy Crehan carried out a comprehensive, system wide evaluation commissioned by the Department of Education. Her remit was to make policy recommendations on the curriculum's purpose, design, content and implementation, drawing on extensive evidence from lesson observations, school visits, 70 focus groups, 149 submissions, and a teacher survey with over 1,400 responses.

Her final report, *A Foundation for the Future: Developing Capabilities Through a Knowledge-Rich Curriculum in Northern Ireland* (June 2025), concluded that Northern Ireland needs a curriculum that is purpose-led, knowledge-rich, continuous, coherent, specific, focused, flexible and inclusive, and offered 21 recommendations guiding future reform.

Lucy's work is characterised by a commitment to high expectations, careful curriculum design, and the translation of global evidence into practical approaches that improve experiences for teachers and pupils alike.

## Overview of the topic

This presentation explores how global evidence, particularly from high-performing education systems, can inform curriculum development and educational improvement in Northern Ireland.

The video for this topic will explain PISA, the OECD's major international assessment of 15-year-olds, which measures not rote recall but the application of reading, maths and science skills. In the 2022 cycle, 28% of Northern Ireland pupils performed below Level 2 in mathematics, signaling a need to strengthen foundational learning before students complete compulsory education.

Drawing on her visits to successful global systems, Lucy seeks to identify common features that underpin strong educational outcomes. These include clear curriculum expectations that specify what all students should know by the end of schooling, combined with a philosophy of high expectations for every learner. This aligns with cultures, such as those influenced by the Confucian tradition, where effort rather than innate ability is seen as the path to achievement and where all children are believed to be capable of success.

The presentation seeks to connect these insights with cognitive science, emphasising the importance of knowledge in supporting thinking and overcoming the limitations of working memory.

Working memory can only handle a small amount of new information at once, which makes it vulnerable to overload. In contrast, long-term memory is vast and stores knowledge as interconnected schemas, networks of ideas that help learners interpret and process new material efficiently. When pupils have well-developed schemas, they can activate them quickly, and each schema functions as a single “chunk” in working memory, freeing up capacity for understanding and applying new concepts.

As strong schemas reduce cognitive load and support higher order thinking, they enable pupils to reason, infer, solve problems and be creative without being overwhelmed by unfamiliar information.

Schema theory therefore highlights the importance of a carefully sequenced, knowledge-rich curriculum in which new learning builds deliberately on what pupils already know. This cumulative approach strengthens and deepens existing schemas, helping learners retain information more securely and achieve better long-term outcomes.

This theory should inform curriculum development.

The presentation explains how high-performing systems design curricula with focus, depth, and coherence. They typically teach fewer topics each year but explore them in greater depth, giving students time to practise, consolidate, and truly understand core concepts. Examples such as the contrast between Japanese and U.S. maths textbooks illustrate how a narrower, deeper curriculum supports mastery.

A well-sequenced curriculum also ensures children always have the schema they need to make sense of new content.

Northern Ireland can learn from these lessons, strengthening pupil outcomes by aligning curriculum design with global best practice, prioritising depth, clarity and coherent progression across the system.





# Resources

**[CLICK HERE](#) to access a video and other resources related to this topic.**

## Optional reading materials

- [Education Endowment Foundation \(EEF\): Cognitive Science Approaches in the Classroom Downloadable summaries, animations and explainers on memory, cognitive load, and classroom application.](#)
- Book: Daniel T. Willingham – Why Don't Students Like School?
- Book: Lucy Crehan – Cleverlands: The Secrets Behind the Success of the World's Education Superpowers
- [Inclusive Teaching—Securing Strong Educational Experiences and Outcomes for All Students by Peps McCrea, Dr Jen Barker & Josh Goodrich \(2025\)](#)

## Reflection questions

You may wish to use some of the following questions to aid discussions and reflections:

- **What struck you most about the way high-performing systems set shared expectations for all pupils?**
- **What would “high expectations for every learner” look like in our daily lessons, routines, and interactions?**
- **How could your curriculum or resources be adapted to make better use of schema-building—ensuring new learning connects to prior knowledge?**
- **What would it mean to build more coherence across year groups or key stages in your subject?**
- **Where might our curriculum be too broad or overloaded, and how could we create more space for depth?**
- **Do we intentionally revisit and strengthen key knowledge over time, or does content disappear once taught?**
- **How clearly do we identify the ‘big ideas’ or concepts in our subject, and how well are they sequenced across year groups?**
- **Where do pupils struggle because they lack essential prior knowledge and how might a more sequenced curriculum address this?**
- **What small, high-impact changes could we make that align with the global lessons shared in the presentation?**



# TOPIC FOUR: Unpacking the Literacy Framework for Primary Schools

## Background

The Department of Education has published Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework in Primary Schools, offering clear, evidence-based guidance to strengthen oracy, reading and writing across all primary schools in Northern Ireland. Rooted in international research and tailored to local needs, the framework provides practical strategies for teachers, leaders and parents. Together with accompanying Guidelines to Support a Coherent Approach to Literacy Development, the Framework aims to ensure every child leaves primary school with the skills, confidence and enjoyment needed to thrive as a reader, writer and communicator.

Literacy is more than reading and writing, it refers to the set of skills that help learners understand, communicate and create in today's world. It includes traditional abilities such as decoding text and writing clearly, as well as modern skills such as using digital tools and information responsibly. UNESCO (2025) defines literacy as:

A continuum of skills, extending beyond traditional reading, writing and counting to include digital, media and information literacy. It is the ability to identify, understand, evaluate, create, communicate and compute using both print and digital materials.

The Framework is underpinned by five core principles that shape effective literacy practice:

1. **Coherence and consistency:** Literacy teaching should be a whole-school priority, aligned across year groups, with consistent routines, clear language and planned progression.
2. **Inclusion:** All pupils should have access to high-quality literacy teaching, regardless of background, starting point or home language. This means recognising cultural and linguistic diversity, supporting multilingual learners and using texts that reflect varied experiences.

3. **Evidence-informed practice:** Teaching should be guided by robust research and proven methods. Approaches with limited evidence should be replaced with structured, explicit instruction.
4. **Literacy across the curriculum:** Literacy should be embedded within all Areas of Learning across the curriculum recognising that literacy skills are both general and subject specific. It is important to develop disciplinary literacy, supporting pupils to read, write and communicate using the conventions and reasoning of each subject, such as scientific explanation, historical argument or mathematical precision.
5. **Self-evaluation and continuous improvement:** Schools should regularly reflect on and review current practice using the Looking Inward, Outward, Forward model to identify strengths and weaknesses, compare with best practice and plan next steps.

## Overview of the topic

The session is presented by Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke, a literacy specialist from St Mary's University College, currently working on secondment within the Department of Education. It explores the core ideas underpinning the Literacy Framework and the wider TransformED NI programme.

The Framework is not an additional initiative or a set of prescribed programmes. Instead, it brings together what the evidence tells us about effective literacy practice, providing greater clarity, confidence and coherence across schools. The session is designed to support professional discussion and shared understanding.

At its heart, literacy is not a discrete part of the timetable. It underpins how children understand, express and participate in the world. Strong literacy foundations shape access

to learning across maths, science and history, and supports confidence, independence and wellbeing, not just attainment.

The guidance and presentation focus on getting the fundamentals right and keeping them right, from Foundation Stage through Key Stage 2. They emphasise strong spoken language, systematic reading instruction, and the development of confident writers through explicit modelling, scaffolding and practice. Assessment is used to inform teaching and targeted intervention that is purposeful and proportionate.

A key aim of Strong Foundations is to bring greater coherence and consistency through:

- shared language, routines and expectations;
- evidence-informed approaches that are stable across year groups; and
- a common understanding of what progression in literacy looks like over time.

The Framework supports teachers and leaders by clarifying what works, why it works and what pupils need next. This reflects a wider system direction towards greater coherence, with stronger alignment across curriculum guidance, assessment, professional learning and school improvement.

Schools are not expected to address every aspect of literacy or implement multiple changes at once. The focus is on identifying a small number of high impact refinements, embedding them well, and sustaining them collectively, so that all children develop secure foundations in language, reading and writing that support learning across the curriculum.

## How schools might use this session

This session is intended to support professional discussion about the Literacy Framework. Schools may wish to use it to reflect on current literacy practice, identify strengths and areas for development, and agree one or two priority actions. The focus should be on shared understanding, manageable improvement and sustaining effective practice over time.





# Resources

**[CLICK HERE](#) to access a video and other resources related to this topic.**

## Optional reading materials

- [Presentations from Literacy Symposium \(December 2025\)](#)
- [Literacy Webinars | Department of Education](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation \[EEF\] \(2021\) Improving Literacy in KS2 – Guidance Report. London: EEF.](#)
- [Stewart, L \(2024\) The Science of Reading: Evidence for a New Era of Instruction. Syracuse, NY: The Reading League.](#)
- [The Reading League \(2022\) Science of Reading: Defining Guide. Syracuse, NY: The Reading League.](#)
- [The Reading League \(2026\) Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines \(3rd edition\). Syracuse, NY: The Reading League.](#)
- [Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers](#)
- [Fivefromfive: The Academy for the Science of Instruction](#)
- [The Reading League](#)

## Reflection questions

You may wish to use some of the following questions to aid discussions and reflections:

- **What are the key features of literacy practice across our school, and which approaches are having the strongest impact on pupils' learning?**
- **To what extent is purposeful, structured talk embedded in classroom routines, and how effectively is it used to develop thinking, language and comprehension?**
- **Across phonics, fluency, vocabulary, background knowledge and comprehension, where is our practice most secure and where do we see clear gaps or inconsistencies?**
- **How effectively do we balance foundational skills (e.g., decoding and fluency) with language comprehension and knowledge building?**
- **Do pupils have sufficient opportunities to read widely, regularly and with increasing independence?**
- **What is the current reading culture in the school? Do pupils see themselves as readers?**
- **How consistently do we teach and model planning, drafting, revising, monitoring and evaluating writing across the school?**
- **Which pupils benefit most from our current literacy practice, and which groups are not experiencing the same success? What evidence tells us this?**
- **How well does our literacy curriculum ensure clear progression and continuity across year groups and key stages, and where do we notice breaks or duplication?**
- **Which evidence-informed practices from the Literacy Framework resonate most with what we want to strengthen?**
- **What two or three changes could make the biggest difference without overwhelming us or our pupils?**
- **What support do we need to embed the Literacy Framework?**
- **How effectively do we involve parents/carers in supporting literacy development?**



# Feedback

We want to hear your feedback. Both in terms of how you found the resources, how they could be improved and what TransformED related topics you would wish to consider in future sessions.

We would also like to hear any reflections from your discussions, including how DE (and its partners) can better support you in these areas.

Please provide feedback by [CLICKING HERE](#).

