

Understanding Curriculum 2028

September 2026

TransformED
TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING



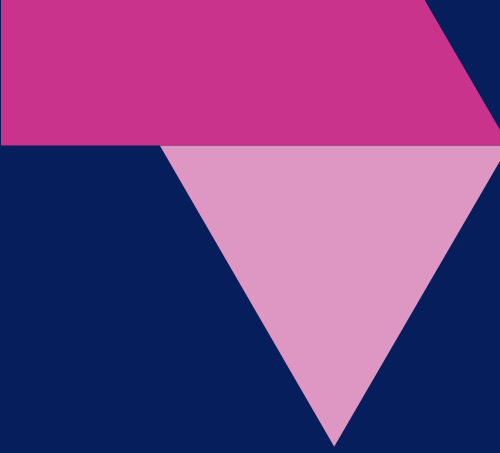
Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk



**Centre for Educational
Excellence & Improvement**
Northern Ireland

Entitlement and equity through design

- **Many learners are disadvantaged when curriculum content lacks clarity and coherence because gaps in knowledge can widen overtime.**
- **Curriculum 2028 seeks to support inclusion through strong sequencing, secure foundations and a focus on mastery.**
- **By identifying essential knowledge clearly and building learning progressively, it aims to improve access for all learners.**
- **The intention is to maintain a common entitlement while responding to the different needs and contexts of learners and schools.**



Greater specificity not greater prescription

A clearer common entitlement, with professional flexibility retained.

WHAT BECOMES CLEARER

- ✓ **essential knowledge and vocabulary**
- ✓ **what pupils should learn**
- ✓ **progression across phases**
- ✓ **core entitlement for every learner**

WHAT REMAINS FLEXIBLE

- ✓ **how content is taught**
- ✓ **choice of examples, texts and case studies**
- ✓ **teaching approaches and local content**

More specific about what all pupils are entitled to learn. Flexible about how learning is designed and delivered.



Why knowledge-rich?

GROUNDING IN HOW WE LEARN

There is a growing body of evidence, backed by cognitive science, that knowledge is not just nice to have it is the bedrock of all learning.

PROVEN TO WORK

The more students know the easier it is for them to learn new things including skills because they have context to hook new ideas onto. This supports thinking (problem solving, creativity).

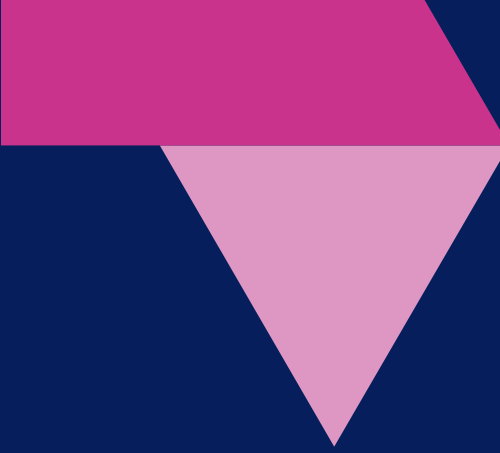


STRUCTURED AND SEQUENCED

Determining core concepts that are vital in supporting the progressive acquisition and application of deep learning. Connecting knowledge in long-term memory and supports thinking.

EQUITY

Access to high-quality, structured content can bridge the knowledge gaps that often arise from socio-economic disparities. Reducing cognitive load helps free working memory.



Addressing misconceptions

"Children become creative because they know things, become confident writers because they have mastered language."

✗ MISCONCEPTION: *"Knowledge-rich means memorising facts"*
REALITY: Knowledge is valued because it enables understanding, participation and deeper learning.

"A curriculum exists to change the pupil, to give the pupil new power."

✗ MISCONCEPTION: *"A knowledge-rich curriculum is only for the most academic pupils"*
REALITY: Every child is entitled to access powerful knowledge, regardless of background or prior attainment.

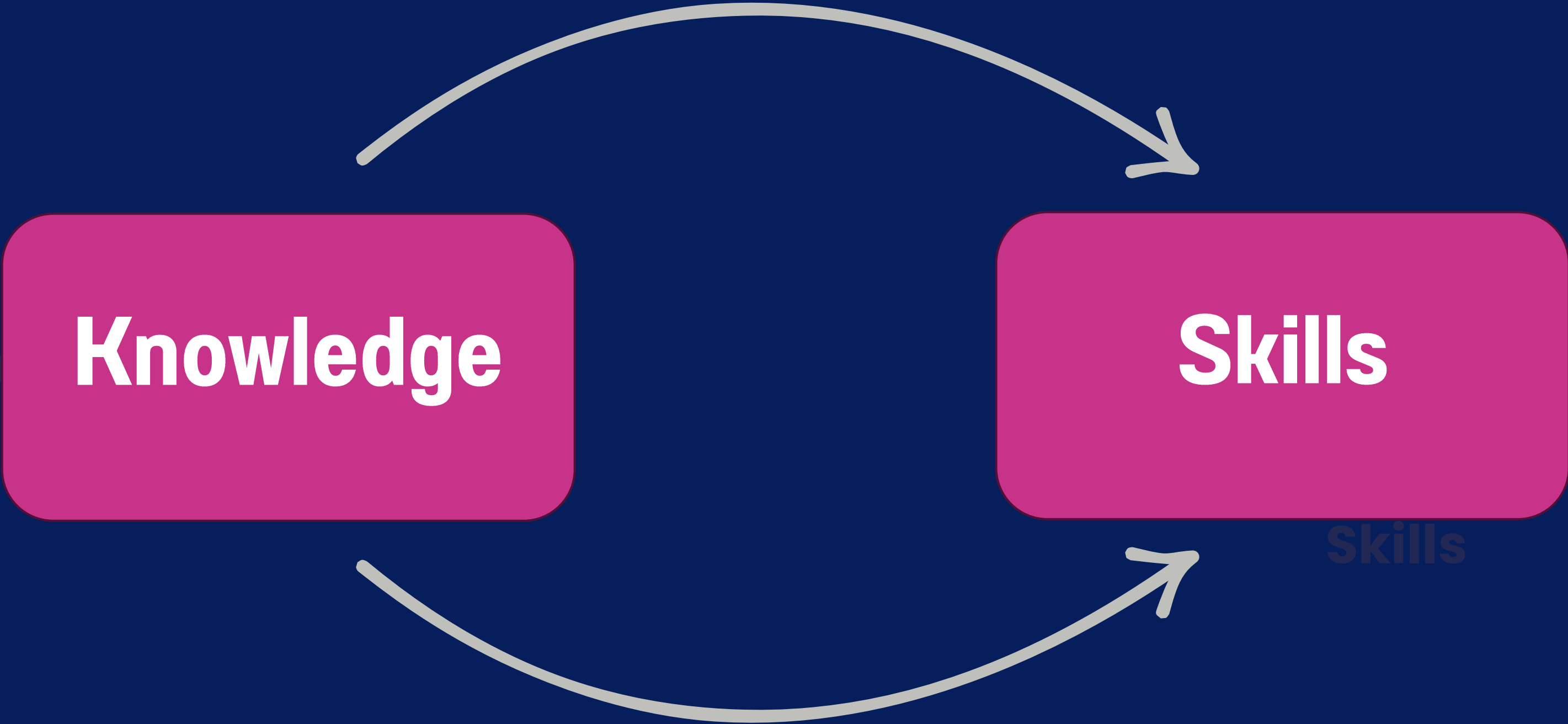
✗ MISCONCEPTION: *"Knowledge-rich means teaching to the test"*
REALITY: A knowledge-rich curriculum focuses on long-term learning and understanding, not short-term performance.

"The Curriculum is not the timetable. Nor is it what we think might be on the exam."

"Knowledge is not simply another ingredient alongside skills; knowledge is necessary to think critically."

A knowledge-rich curriculum is not about learning more facts. It is about ensuring all children develop the knowledge that enables understanding, critical thinking, creativity, participation and future learning.





Knowledge

The diagram features two magenta rounded rectangular boxes, one labeled 'Knowledge' on the left and one labeled 'Skills' on the right. Two curved, light grey arrows connect them in a clockwise cycle: one arrow starts at the top of the 'Knowledge' box and points to the top of the 'Skills' box, and the other starts at the bottom of the 'Skills' box and points back to the bottom of the 'Knowledge' box.

Skills



Department of
Education

TransformED



Centre for Educational
Excellence & Improvement
Northern Ireland

Why subjects matter

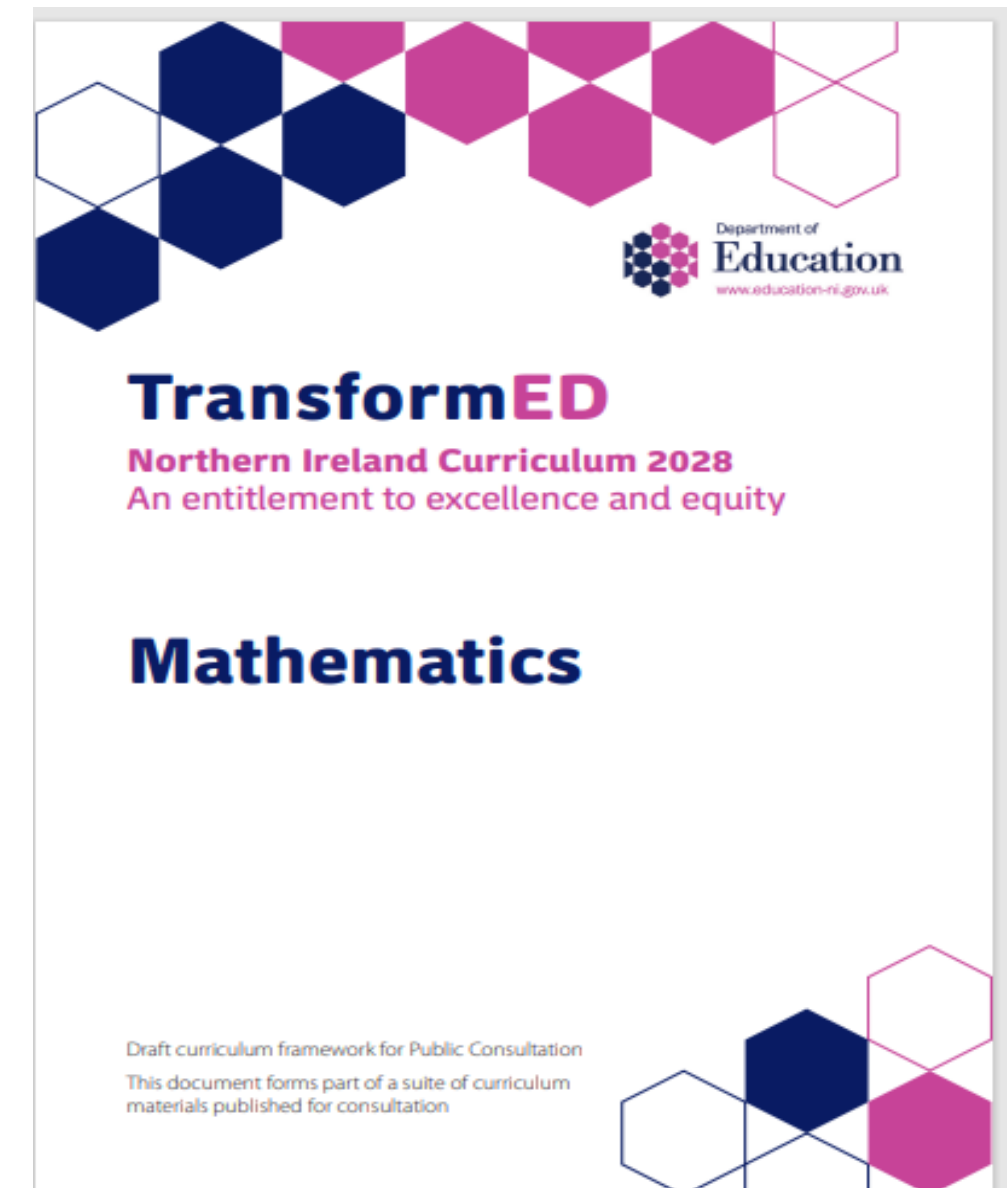
- **Subjects give pupils access to distinctive bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking;**
- **They provide clearer progression from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3;**
- **A subject-based curriculum makes pupils' entitlement clearer and reduces gaps and unnecessary repetition;**
- **Each subject contributes something distinctive to a broad and balanced education.**

Framework Structure

Vision – why does the subject matter and what will it provide.

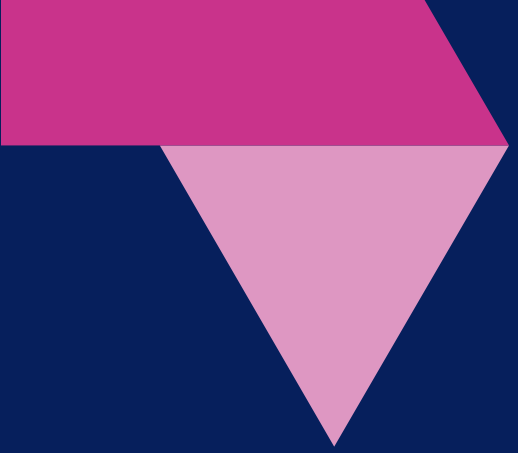
Categories – subject-specific, helps to organise, audit and ensure balance.

Content – specific items on what pupils should learn and when; sequenced and progressive.



Reading the frameworks

- **The frameworks set out what pupils should learn;**
- **The "Pupils should learn..." statements define the statutory entitlement;**
- **Schools retain flexibility over how learning is planned and taught;**
- **Learning is designed to build progressively across the key stages;**
- **Examples are illustrative, not prescribed, and capabilities emerge through subject learning.**



The role of the vision statement

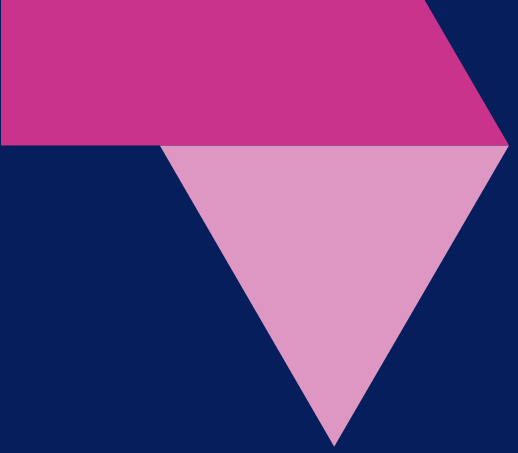
The vision statement explains:

- **why the subject matters;**
- **what pupils gain from studying it;**
- **the distinctive contribution the subject makes to education;**
- **the long-term aspirations for pupils.**

The role of the vision statement

Schools use it to:

- **shape curriculum thinking;**
- **evaluate whether their curriculum reflects the aims of the subject;**
- **explain the value of the subject to pupils, parents and stakeholders.**



Subject specific categories

TELL US HOW THE SUBJECT IS ORGANISED

History

- **Substantive knowledge**
- **Disciplinary knowledge**

Geography

- **Place knowledge**
- **Human and physical geographical knowledge**
- **Geographical skills, enquiry and fieldwork**

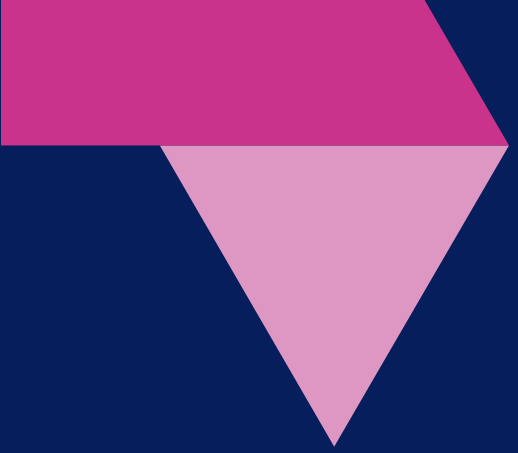
Mathematics

- **Number and algebra**
- **Geometry and measure**
- **Probability and statistics**

- **Help us to understand the subject and plan progression**
- **Ensure balance and avoid gaps in learning**

Why are they important?

- ✓ **To audit existing provision**
 - ✓ **To plan progression and sequence learning**
 - ✓ **To identify strengths and gaps**
- 



What does this look like?

SUBJECT: Geography

CLEARER SEQUENCE AND PROGRESSION

CURRENT CURRICULUM

- broad, theme-led outcomes
- progression left largely to interpretation based on changing verbs (identify to describe to explain to evaluate, or communicate becomes communicate effectively)

CURRICULUM 2028

- coherent progression from local to national and global contexts
- knowledge of places, processes and environments build across key stages
- maps, fieldwork, GIS and enquiry develop with increasing sophistication

CLEARER GEOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURE

CURRENT CURRICULUM

- geography embedded within The World Around Us at primary
- broad themes: interdependence, place, movement and energy, change over time
- lack of specific content or vocabulary
- Key Stage 3 geography framed through broad contexts, opportunities and skills

CURRICULUM 2028

- standalone geography framework from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3
 - three connected categories: place knowledge, human and physical geographical knowledge and geographical skill, enquiry and fieldwork
 - clearer minimum entitlement to geographical knowledge, concepts, vocabulary and practice
- 



The capabilities

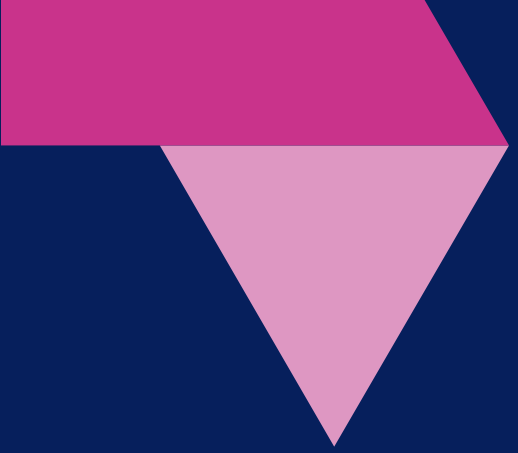


Department of
Education

TransformED



Centre for Educational
Excellence & Improvement
Northern Ireland

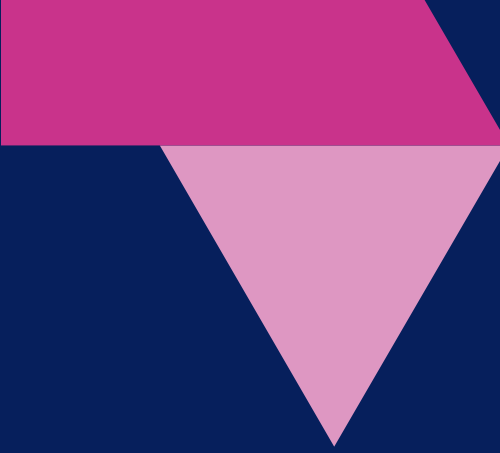


What are capabilities?

Capabilities are the emergent qualities and attributes that young people develop through a well-constructed and well-taught curriculum.

They are not:

- separate subjects;
- additional curriculum content;
- generic skills taught in isolation;
- competency frameworks to be tracked;
- assessment criteria; or
- checklists to be audited.



What are capabilities?

Instead, capabilities arise when pupils engage with knowledge and participate in rich learning experiences across the curriculum.

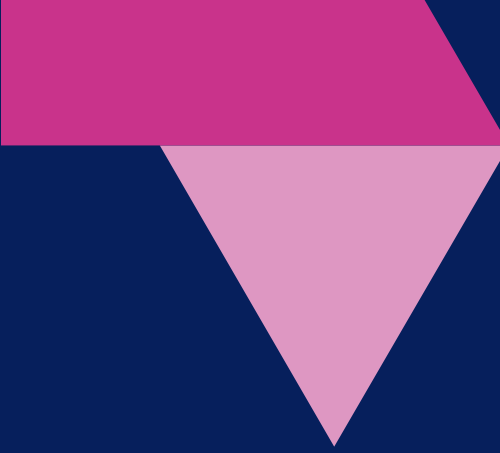
Since the capabilities emerge from subjects taught well, schools should **not** create separate systems for assessing, tracking, auditing or evidencing them.

Addressing misconceptions

- **The framework is a scheme of work or specification –
The framework sets out what should be learned, not how it should be taught.**
- **Every content statement is a separate topic or lesson –
Schools decide how content is sequenced, connected and taught in depth, whether through discrete units or integrated approaches.**
- **The examples provided are mandatory –
Schools choose the examples, texts, case studies, stories and contexts that best support learning.**

Addressing misconceptions

- **Greater specificity means less flexibility –
Clearer content expectations provide greater consistency while still allowing professional agency in curriculum design. Working from a common entitlement of core knowledge.**
- **Greater specificity means curriculum overload –
More explicit content does not require superficial coverage; schools retain responsibility for prioritisation, sequencing and depth. When to integrate and when to isolate.**



Addressing misconceptions

- **The curriculum is to be implemented immediately –**
Practical implementation will require consideration of curriculum planning, timing, professional learning and classroom resources.

Discussion

What opportunities / challenges do you think the proposed curriculum presents and why?

