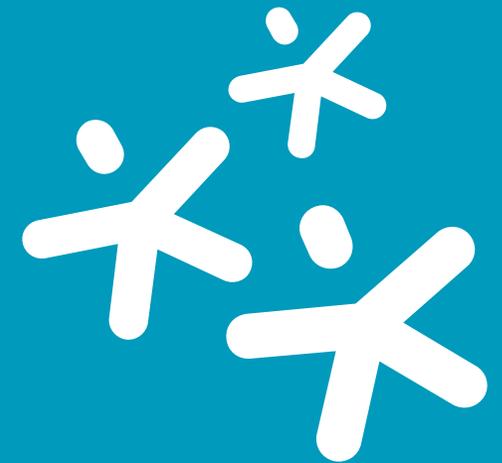


Assessing the curriculum: recent findings from Ofsted's research programme

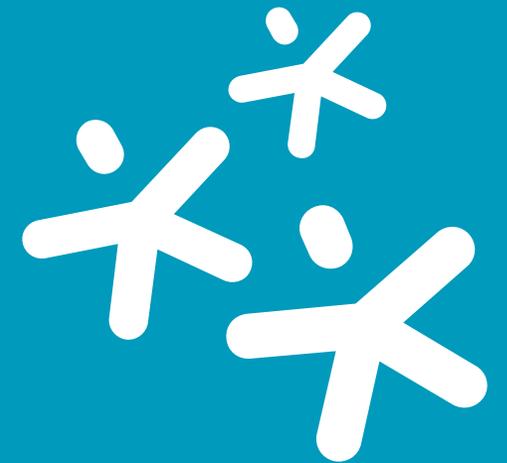
Alan Passingham
Senior Research Lead



Introduction

- How has Ofsted been researching curriculum?
- Research to feed into the development of the EIF
- Not to be confused with piloting or stress-testing the new framework – we didn't know what we didn't know!

Curriculum research: phase 1



Ofsted's working definition of curriculum

'A framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage **(intent)**...

...for translating that framework over time into a *structure and narrative*, within an institutional context **(implementation)**...

...and for evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations **(impact)**.'

Distinguishing curriculum from teaching and assessment

Curriculum:
WHAT is taught

Teaching activities:
HOW curriculum
content is taught

Assessment
Desired high level outcomes
and measures of those
outcomes

The research

- Large-scale research programme on curriculum completed across three phases (an iterative approach)
 - Phase 1: providing a baseline
 - Phase 2: what might curriculum quality look like
 - Phase 3: can curriculum quality be assessed

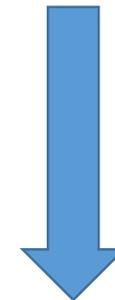
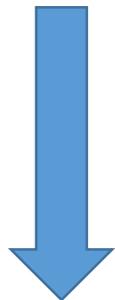
- Phase 1: 40 schools visited in the summer term 2017 to gain a broad picture of the ways schools deal with curriculum

Phase 1 findings

Lack of curriculum knowledge and expertise



Curriculum being confused with assessment and qualifications



Curriculum narrowing

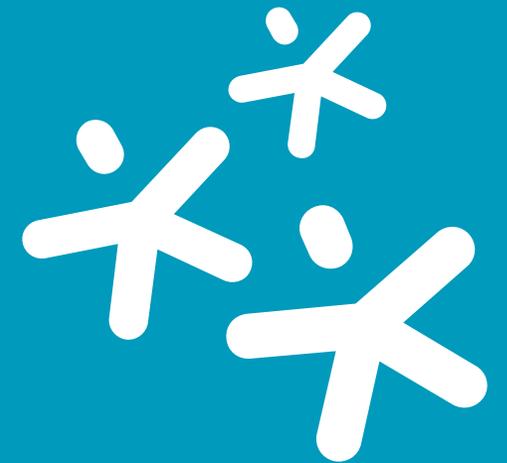
Teaching to the test

Social justice issues

Findings link with research literature on other education systems

- Berliner, D (2011). Rational responses to high stakes testing: the case of curriculum narrowing and the harm that follows. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(3)
- Polesel, J., Rice, S., & Dulfer, N. (2014). The impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum and pedagogy: a teacher perspective from Australia. *Journal of Education Policy*, 29(5)
- Barnes, J., & Scoffham, S. (2017). The humanities in English primary schools: struggling to survive. *Education 3-13*, 45(3)

Curriculum research: phase 2



Phase 2 method

- 23 schools visited as part of a purposive sample in spring term 2018
 - Criteria 1: School must be 'particularly invested in curriculum development'
 - Criteria 2: Good or outstanding at last routine inspection
- Two hour discussion with curriculum experts in the school (ranged between two to ten individuals)
- Questions focused on curriculum management and development (primarily intent)

All 23 schools had differing models of curriculum, but some similarities also exist

- **Knowledge-rich**

- Acquisition of knowledge was seen as the vehicle for developing skill.
Both intrinsically linked

- **Knowledge-engaged**

- Both knowledge and skills considered important, but seen more as a dichotomy. Knowledge often ran alongside other curriculum aims and ways of organising the curriculum.

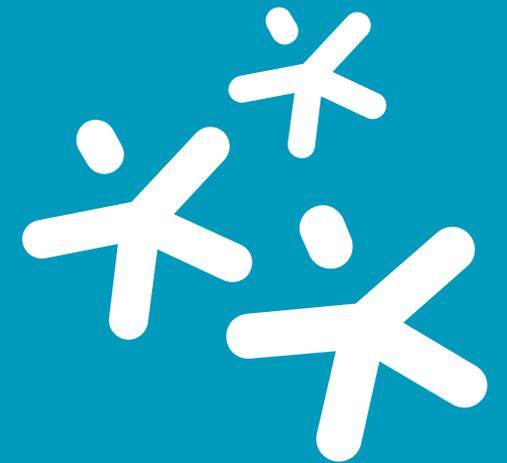
- **Skills led**

- No apparent knowledge focus articulated. Curriculum designed around skills, learning behaviours and 'generic knowledge'.

Phase 2 findings – important components of curriculum?

- Local context and pupil backgrounds
- Focus on subjects
- Curriculum content (depth and breadth)
- Progression model
- Purpose of assessment (not just doing assessment)
- Review and evaluation of curriculum design
- Curriculum leadership (often distributed) and ownership

Curriculum research: phase 3



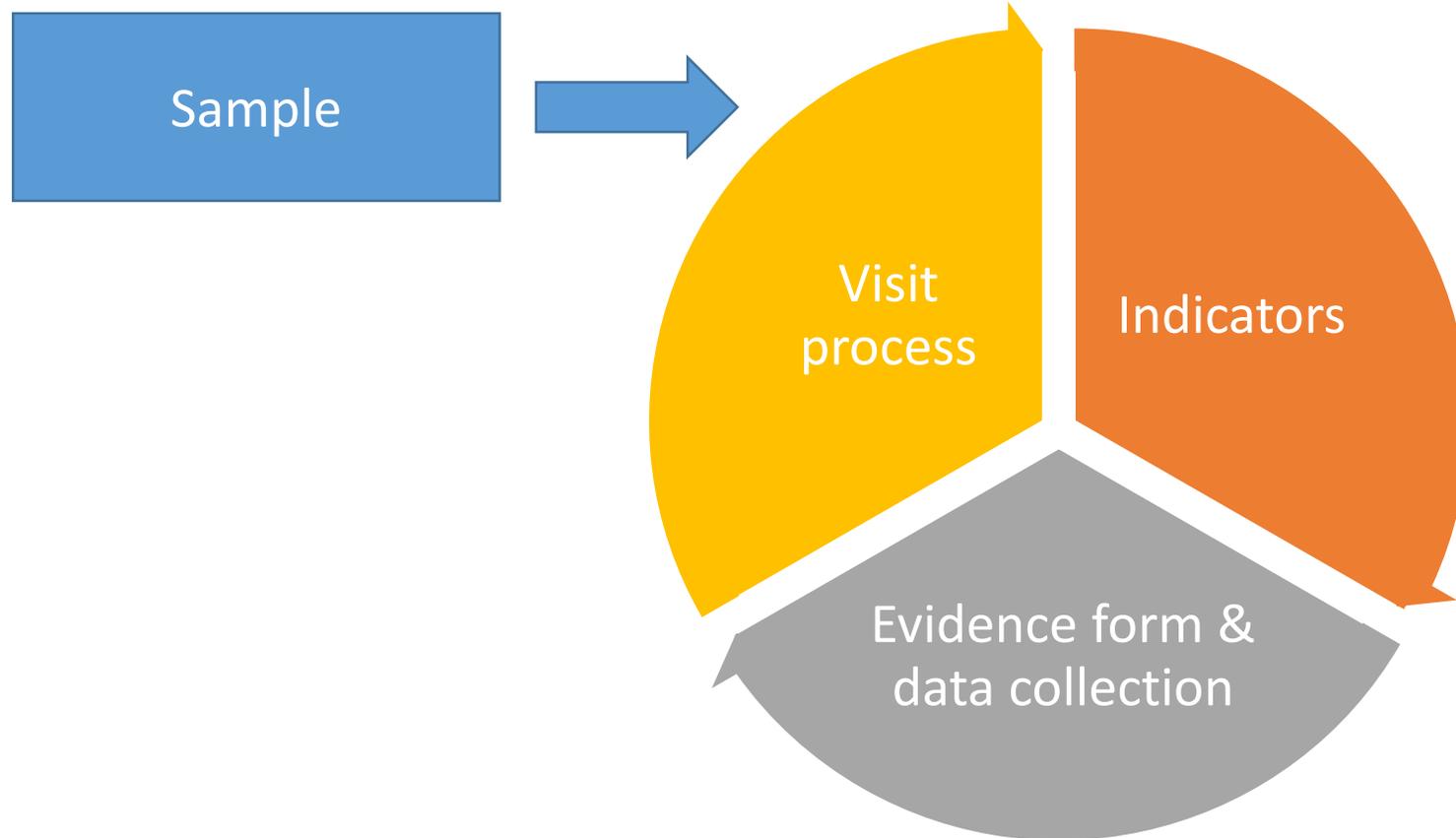
Focus and objectives – phase 3

- Focus:
 - How do you create a research model to assess the intent, implementation and impact of curriculum? (**curriculum quality**)
- Objectives:
 - Test a series of curriculum indicators that could potentially (if found valid) underpin the evaluation criteria in the new framework
 - Test inspection practices to determine what is observable, what the effective evidence collection methods are and what the practical limitations might be in the context of routine inspection
 - Understand if the indicators and inspection practices allow inspectors to distinguish between curriculum intent and implementation/impact

Sampling criteria

- Balanced sample of schools
 - previous inspection judgements (outstanding, good and RI only)
 - school type (LA maintained/academies)
 - geographical location (Ofsted regions)
 - current attainment scores (at KS2 and KS4)
 - level of deprivation (IDACI quintiles)
 - **school size** (number on role)
- Provide variety of schools with differing curriculum models to test how well the indicators work across different contexts.
- 64 visits in total (33 primary schools, 29 secondary schools and two special schools)

Methodology



Indicators

- We created 25 curriculum indicators from the phase 2 findings, the research literature and policy & inspector expertise
 - Eight intent indicators
 - 15 implementation indicators
 - Two impact indicators
- Also asked inspectors to provide an overall banding score (often turned out to be the same as the impact indicator score)
- These indicators were designed for research purposes only to test validity.

Data collection

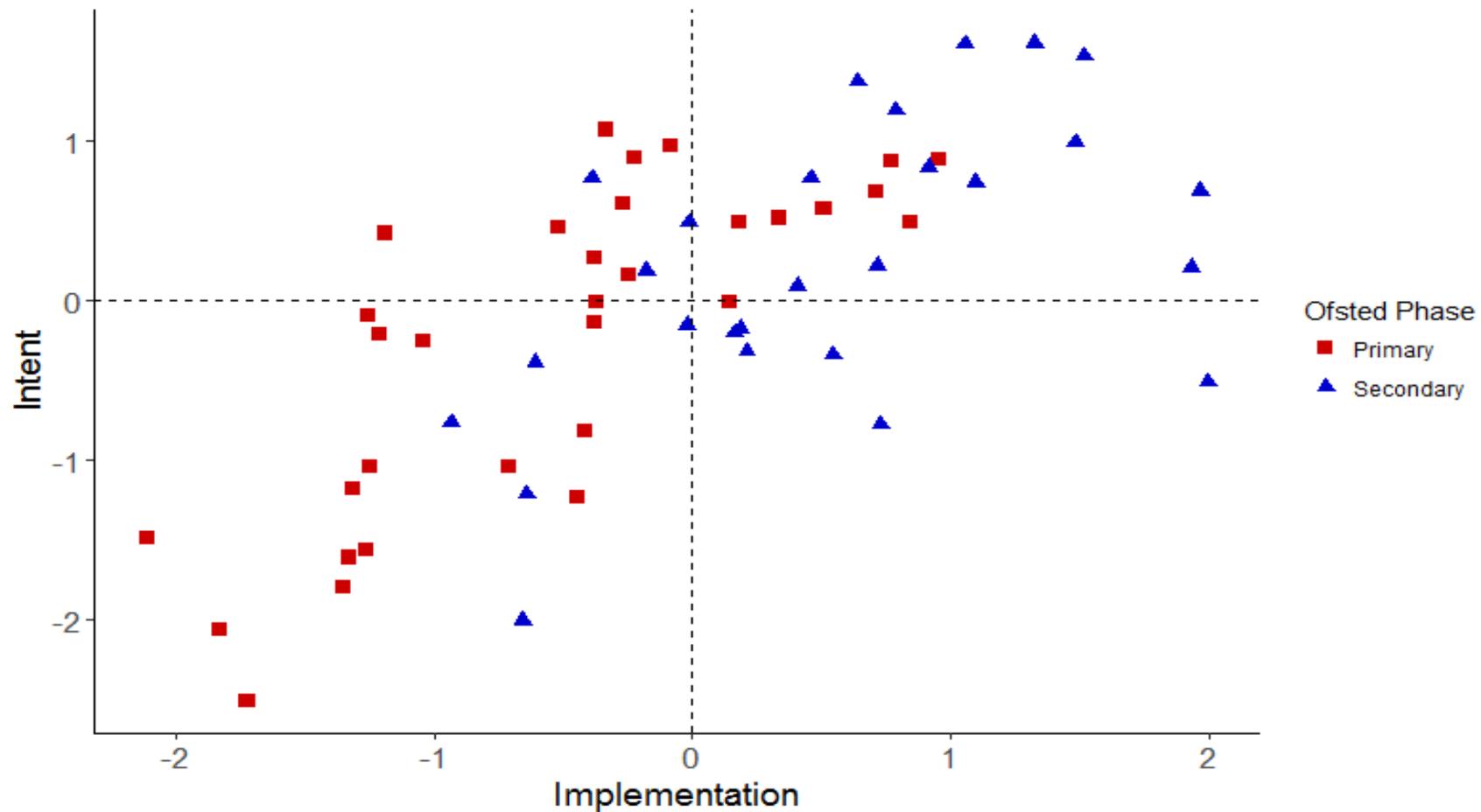
- Qualitative and quantitative evidence to be collected
- Structure placed around the indicators to enhance validity
 - Proposed rating scale for evaluating indicators
 - Detailed rubric
 - Professional judgement required

5	4	3	2	1
This aspect of curriculum underpins/is central to the school's work/embedded practice/may include examples of exceptional curriculum	This aspect of curriculum is embedded with minor points for development (leaders taking action to remedy minor shortfalls)	Coverage is sufficient but there are some weaknesses overall in a number of examples (identified by leaders but not yet remedying)	Major weaknesses evident in terms of either leadership, coverage or progression (leaders have not identified or started to remedy weaknesses)	This aspect is absent in curriculum design

Visit process (pre-cursor to the 'deep-dive')

- Discussion about curriculum intent with the those leaders responsible for curriculum
- Meeting with four subject leads to investigate what is actually implemented:
 - Conversation on what is included in the curriculum and how it is sequenced – what do they want pupils to know?
 - Work scrutiny with subject lead – curriculum documents
 - Looking at pupils' workbooks with subject leads
- Triangulated by conversations with pupils
- No observation took place – follow up study
- Deliberate decision not to look at data.

The evidence identified a mismatch between curriculum intentions and the actual implementation of the curriculum



The primary schools visited generally featured weaker aspects of curriculum quality

Figure 1: Curriculum overall banding by school phase

School phase	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Total
Primary	3	12	10	6	2	33
Secondary	-	3	10	15	1	29
Special	-	-	-	2	-	2
Total	3	15	20	23	3	64

Foundation subjects in primary schools were frequently scored lower than English and mathematics

There is a correlation with overall effectiveness, although not all outstanding schools appear to have an 'outstanding' curriculum



Figure 3: Curriculum overall banding by overall effectiveness

Overall effectiveness	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Total
Outstanding	-	2	7	7	3	18
Good	2	7	9	12	-	30
Requires improvement	1	6	4	4	-	15
Total	3	15	20	23	3	64

The focus on curriculum is not correlated with deprivation

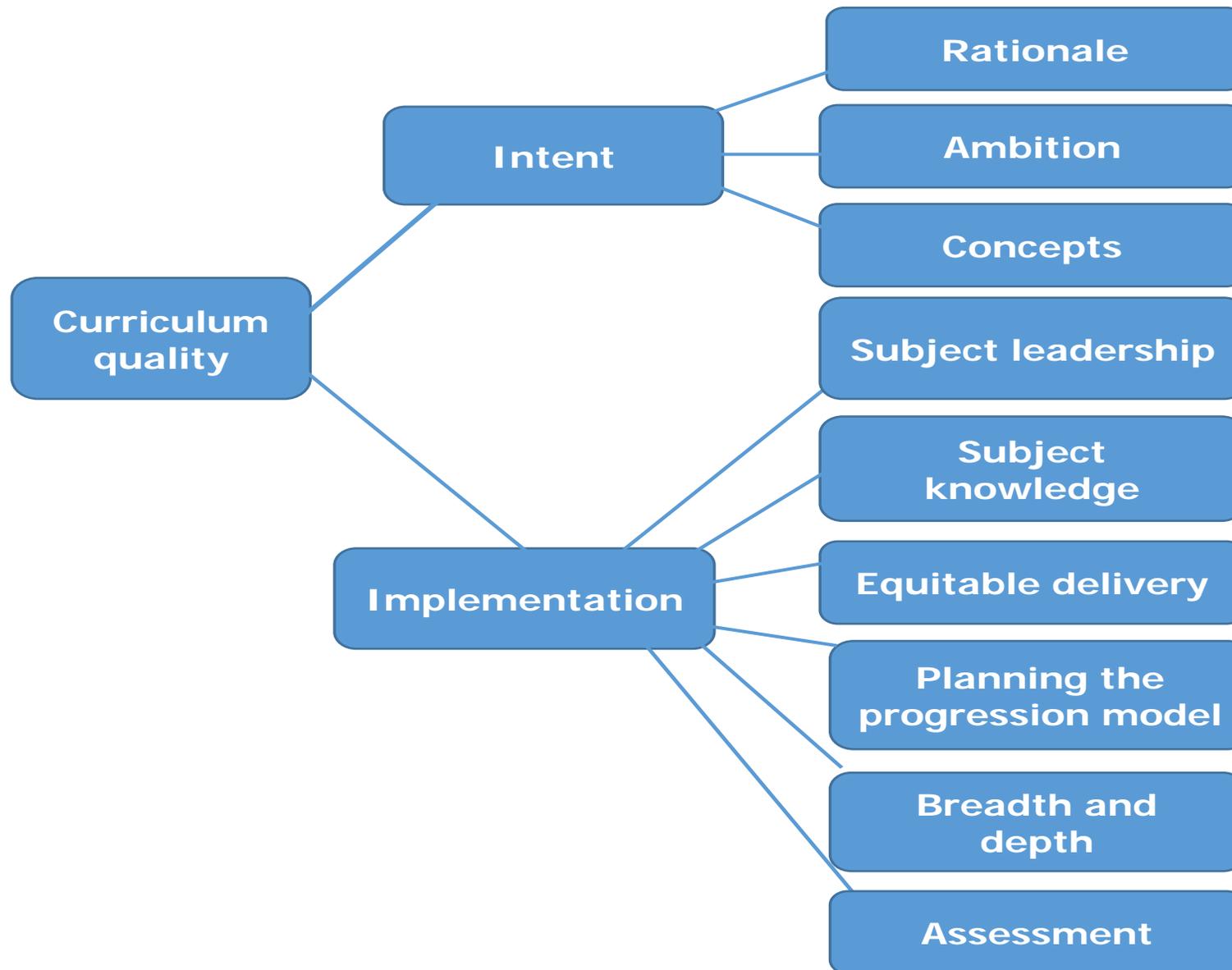
Figure 4: Curriculum overall banding by the IDACI quintile of each school visited

IDACI	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Total
Quintile 1 (least deprived)	1	4	4	4	-	13
Quintile 2	-	4	5	2	2	13
Quintile 3	-	-	5	5	1	11
Quintile 4	1	4	3	5	-	13
Quintile 5 (most deprived)	1	3	3	6	-	13
Total	3	15	20	22	3	63

	Implementation	Intent
Indicator 1a		0.92
Indicator 1b		0.91
Indicator 1c		0.78
Indicator 1d		0.80
Indicator 2a		0.70
Indicator 2b		
Indicator 2c		
Indicator 2d		0.80
Indicator 3a		
Indicator 3b		
Indicator 3c	0.72	
Indicator 4a	0.71	
Indicator 4b	0.71	
Indicator 5a		
Indicator 5b	0.88	
Indicator 5c		
Indicator 5d	0.81	
Indicator 6a	0.99	
Indicator 6b	0.97	
Indicator 6c	0.96	
Indicator 7a	0.99	
Indicator 7b	0.92	
Indicator 7c	0.86	

Results of factor analysis conducted on the 25 indicators suggested that there were two factors underlying the data.

This suggests that the indicators do appear to have been grouped correctly and are investigating what they set out to.

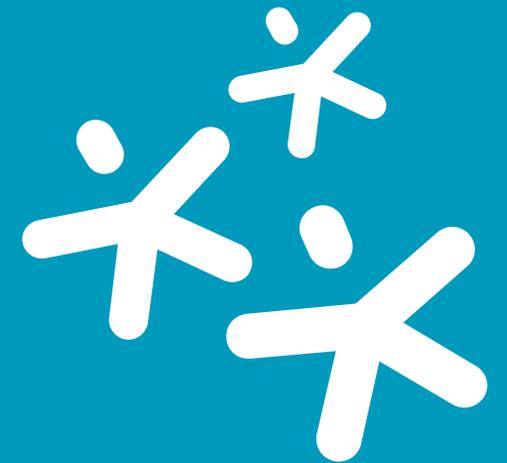


Curriculum issues – some examples from the research



- Curriculum confused with assessment
- Confusion that the National Curriculum *is* the curriculum rather than a framework
- Focus on delivering content but without consideration of sequencing
- Focus on narrow selection of content linked to SATs/GCSE syllabus and passing exams
- Lack of leadership oversight leading to some differing curricular implementation across subjects within the same school
- Non-experts in subject lead roles
- Lack of subject knowledge and CPD in some foundation subjects

Curriculum and the Education Inspection Framework



Conclusion

- The evidence suggests we are able to validly assess curriculum quality
- These findings fed into the design of the Education Inspection Framework – indicators and inspection methodology
- So far reaction to EIF has been very positive.

The curriculum **isn't...**

- ...just the subject or qualification offer
- ...what is assessed
- ...the same as teaching activities: the curriculum is **WHAT** is taught and not how it is taught
- ...about devising extra or more elaborate or creative activities
- ...something to sort out once you have decided your intent
- ...vague – it is a specific plan of what children need to know in total, and in each subject.

New inspection myths

- Every school needs to develop its own curriculum?
 - A good curriculum can be developed by the school, buy a group of schools (such as a MAT), be bought in and used, or be bought in and adapted.
- Ofsted have a preferred curriculum?
 - What we are expecting is that schools can articulate why they are doing what they are doing. We do, however, have a set of minimal expectations:
 - At least as ambitious as the NC, inclusive of as many pupils as possible (we make allowances for SEND) and following good design principles like proper sequencing.
- We don't expect schools to write 'intent statements' or develop any specific documentation on curriculum for us.
- While EIF focuses on QofE and curriculum, pupil attainment still matters – a good curriculum should not lead to poor results.

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