# Inspector guidance: primary languages

## The purpose of this document

This document has been created for training and supporting inspectors to conduct subject deep dives in schools. The training guidance provides a structure to explain variation in subject-level impact. It should be used in conjunction with handbooks for section 5, section 8 inspections of good and outstanding schools, and section 8 no formal designation (subject-specific) inspections.

<u>**Points to consider when examining the evidence:**</u>

School leaders may not be able and should not be expected to articulate their intent **as it is outlined** in this document or to provide documents which neatly provide the evidence for these focus areas.

Inspectors should always investigate claims that issues affecting quality of subject education are outside of the school's control. It should be evident that the issue has been identified prior to the inspection and that the school has taken steps to mitigate the ill effects. For example, in the case of text books, it should be clear that leaders have previously identified the issue and raised it with senior leadership, investigated funding, identified texts they would prefer, identified the specific weaknesses of the current text and taken specific action to mitigate against those weaknesses.

## The six focus areas

The six focus areas below provide a structure to explain reasons for the quality of subject education as identified by inspection activities. Inspection activities are likely to be an iterative process as inspectors consider evidence of impact and evidence which explains that impact. Under each focus area are three columns.

**Column 1:** This provides examples of useful questions inspectors might ask of people or evidence to explain reasons for the quality of subject education. This is **not** a comprehensive list of questions which may be asked. Inspectors should use their own judgement but will find these suggestions useful.

**Column 2:** This is an outline of potentially stronger practice in the area each question explores.

**Column 3:** This is an outline of weaker practice in the area each question explores. It also provides likely responses and other evidence inspectors may hear or encounter, and gives explicit guidance on how these responses can be interpreted.

**Inspectors are likely to use the following sources of evidence in making their judgements:**

**They will generally use:**

- interviews with curriculum leader (if there is one) and/or the appropriate senior leader, such as the headteacher
- curriculum plans
- pupils' work

- discussions with pupils
- interviews with teachers
- lesson visits, including conversation with teachers, if possible.

**Where appropriate, inspectors may use:**

- the school's own records of lesson visits in the subject
- the resources available for teaching languages (incl. school library, ICT facilities etc.)
- the school's assessment policy
- assessment instruments, including mark schemes if there are any (not internal data)
- how the school provides pupils with feedback on their work
- how the school promotes the value of the subject, including via enrichment activities

- forms of support for inexperienced, non-specialist or struggling staff
- any support provided for the curriculum leader
- performance management's role in improving languages provision
- details of the timetable and staffing (including details of experience and qualifications of staff)
- school policies on teaching, assessment, homework and behaviour
- documents analysing strengths and weaknesses of the subject and any associated improvement plans.

# Contents

## 1. The school's understanding of progress in languages and how that informs its approach to the curriculum

| Focused questions to ask the evidence | Outline of potentially stronger practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for | Outline of weaker practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for |
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| 1) Scope: does subject planning give meaningful attention to all categories of knowledge in which progress is made (is this commensurate with that outlined in the NC)?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br>If I take one of the aims from the KS2 NC, for example, 'describe people, places, things and actions orally and in writing', can you show me how this is covered? | The language course is seen as one continuous event with language being built step by step and progress being planned across time. Schemes of work show steadily increasing complexity of language (both understanding and producing language, written and oral forms).<br><br>The main tasks for beginners are to internalise knowledge of the **phonics, vocabulary and grammar of the language**, and to be able to understand and produce these elements when they are combined into sentences. Through learning and practice, the range and complexity of the grammatical features and the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge will increase over time, as will the length (and complexity) of utterance or text being understood or produced.<br><br>At a primary level this includes aims such as:<br><br>▪ engage in conversations; ask and answer questions; express opinions and respond to those of others; seek clarification and help<br><br>▪ speak in sentences, using familiar vocabulary, phrases and basic language structures<br><br>▪ describe people, places, things and actions | **Schemes of learning are based around different vocabulary topic areas only.**<br>Expectations are of an increase in vocabulary but not in linguistic complexity (sentence building, simple manipulation of sentences, for example). Work shows that moving beyond word level responses is rare.<br><br>**Little thought is given to teaching phonological rules and pronunciation.**<br>Sometimes pupils do not have enough phonics knowledge to read unfamiliar words with appropriate pronunciation and know how to apply phonic knowledge to spell words (e.g. in French pupils still pronounce the 't' if they read 'chat').<br><br>**The course is a 'taster course' that does not allow pupils to access the full NC.** |

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| | orally and in writing. | |
| | **Phonics** | |
| | Explicit consideration is given to developing knowledge of phonics and pronunciation across time. Phonics links sounds to writing – the sound-spelling link. | |
| | **Vocabulary** | |
| | A range of commonly used words, especially simple and common verbs, are introduced systematically. These are revisited regularly and in different contexts across the key stage. | |
| | **Grammar** | |
| | There should be a clear sequence of simple grammar running through the course which is revisited regularly and in different contexts. | |
| | At key stage 2 schools may teach an ancient language, and some aspects of the NC do not apply. However, steady increase over time in understanding of vocabulary and grammar is pivotal. | |
| | Some languages, such as Mandarin or Modern Hebrew, have a different script and this too needs to be systematically learnt to automaticity to avoid overloading pupils' working memory. | |
| 2) Scope and components: Does the school choose a wide-ranging and expanding knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and phonics and | **Vocabulary taught should be chosen strategically**.<br><br>This could be, for example, a bank of words that will help across the key stage, or to help transition to KS3. Sometimes non-specialist teachers are following a local authority course or a scheme from a local languages network designed to help them to deliver languages. | **There is no rationale for vocabulary being covered outside the confines of the course book or bought package.** Lists of words are long and potentially unnecessary. There is little focus on common, high frequency words.<br><br>**There is little opportunity for pupils to** |

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| pronunciation?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br>Can you show me where we will be in the SOW in the lessons that I will be visiting? What exact language will you be expecting pupils to produce or understand in this lesson? (i.e. tell me exactly in Spanish.) How does this build upon vocabulary, grammar and phonics from previous learning? What is new, what is recycled? | Nonetheless, a balance of vocabulary should be introduced that includes both topic words (typically seen are pets and food) and a focus on common words (e.g. I am, we are, you have, and, the, often).<br><br>Common words should be covered in the early stages and very frequently repeated so that they are securely remembered. Common words should be foregrounded as they are generally more useful than topic nouns.<br><br>Whilst the use and memorisation of whole phrases (chunks) is known to be a normal part of language learning and useful as a quick way of getting pupils to produce short sections of accurate language, chunks are *most* useful once they are broken down into their constituent parts so that pupils can re-use them and manipulate them to make their own sentences.<br><br>**Pupils should be taught to understand and use simple grammar so that they manipulate simple sentences** not only recite them. (For example, with guidance being able to translate simple sentences such as 'the table is blue, the chair is green', in addition to simple rehearsed question and answer exchanges.) Curriculum plans should consider what pupils need to produce and understand in Year 6 and build step by step towards this grammatically.<br><br>**Sound-spelling links in the language are covered systematically in planning.** They are introduced gradually with appropriate practice and revisited regularly. Sound-spelling links are more complex in French than in Spanish or German. | **manipulate language themselves. Curriculum plans do not, therefore, highlight basic grammatical knowledge.** Pupils can only participate in rehearsed exchanges. They are not taught to apply even the most basic grammatical understanding on their own (adjectival agreement, for example).<br><br>**No systematic approach is taken to teaching pronunciation or phonics.** |
| 3) Components and sequencing: Does | **Planning ensures that pupils engage with language through speaking, listening, reading** | **No evidence is found of simple sentences generated by pupils or engaging in simple texts** |

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| teaching ensure that the language content within the schemes of learning is integrated so that it is used in speaking, listening, reading and writing?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br>Show me how the content in the lesson I visited was used in listening, speaking, reading and writing. | **and writing.**<br>Opportunities to use the language are built into the scheme of learning (speaking and writing). In planning it is usual that teachers ensure that any language in focus is met through reading and listening, and simple language produced orally and in written form. | **in the language.**<br>Most evidence shows copying and drawing vocabulary, matching words to pictures, or completing simple word searches.<br>**Pupils are not given the opportunity to see the words that they hear; 'we only do speaking and listening'.**<br>This can lead to difficulties once the written word is introduced. Seeing the word helps pupils to remember it, and it supports the teaching of the sound-spelling link. The above stance does not match the scope of the NC (see 1, above). |
| 4) Memory: Do teachers identify, emphasise and repeat crucial content so that pupils know more and remember more (make progress)?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br>Give me an example of key vocabulary and grammar, and show me how this is revisited in the SOW'. | **Teaching and planning ensure that pupils remember what has been taught previously**.<br>Progress is considered in terms of what has been learned in the longer term. Leaders do not overload the curriculum with vocabulary or grammar but ensure that pupils remember what has been learned. Teachers plan strategically to revisit content so that pupils remember it long term. | Pupils do not readily recall previously learned material and are not able to build upon this.<br><br>Opportunities to speak and write from memory or to manipulate structures are rare and often unsuccessful.<br><br>Pupils repeat words and remember them at the time but these do not enter their long term memory. |
| 5) Memory: How do you ensure those pupils who find it most | **Teachers should ensure that they are aware of the prior knowledge necessary to understand new language or structures.** | **Pupils struggling to learn (e.g. with SEND) are moved on through the curriculum before key components are given sufficient emphasis so** |

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| difficult to learn languages (e.g. with SEND) are given the best chance to keep up?<br><br>NB: Inspectors will always include a sample of pupils with SEND in their subject deep dives. | Teachers need to ensure that pupils who find it difficult to learn languages understand the basics before moving on.<br><br>**Where necessary the components of the subject curriculum should be carefully identified and broken down into manageable chunks.**<br><br>For example, when leanring the perfect tense, pupils need to have a strong grasp of auxiliary verbs (to have and to be, for example). | **that they are understood.**<br><br>**Schools talk about pedagogical adjustments for those with SEND but are not aware of 'cumulative dysfluency' created as pupils have gaps in knowledge they need for subsequent learning.** |

## 2. The extent to which teaching supports the goals of the languages curriculum

| Focused questions to ask the evidence | Outline of potentially stronger practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for | Outline of weaker practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for |
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| 6) How do pupils use previously learned language and content?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br>In the lesson I visited what was new? What was recycled? How did pupils use material that they already knew? | **Lesson activities should successfully prompt the use of previously learned material.**<br><br>To build on language step by step, previously learnt material needs to be incorporated.<br><br>Planning should differentiate so that all pupils engage with material according to their ability. | Not enough repetition or deep learning is evident to make sure that pupils can re-use language. Gaps in prior learning indicate teachers are not building knowledge from the current understanding of pupils. |

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| 7) How does teaching ensure that pupils move from word level responses to writing in sentences and participating in simple dialogues (in line with the NC)?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br><br>Give me an example of what you expect pupils to produce at the end of the year. Show me how this moves from single words to simple paragraphs. | **Lessons should focus on developing greater knowledge**<br><br>Over time there is a focus on: learning words that can be used in a wide variety of situations; manipulating simple language; moving on from rote learning; extending writing and speaking in line with expectations at key stage 2; engaging with longer written and spoken texts; engaging in simple conversations. | Lessons are based (only) on: choral repetition; matching of vocabulary items to their English equivalent; breadth of vocabulary <u>at the expense</u> of increasing grammatical understanding or complexity of sentences. |
| 8) What is the role of the target language in lessons?<br><br>**School friendly questions:**<br>What Spanish will you be using in the lesson? Is this carefully planned? | **English should be used where pupils would otherwise be confused, in order to maximise learning time.**<br><br>Use of and exposure to the target language should be well planned in order to be effective. Consistent and well-planned use of the target language builds to retention and synthesis over time. There should be a focus on developing pupils' use of the language rather than on that of the teacher. | **Overuse of the target language.**<br><br>This leads to confusion.<br><br>In addition, injudicious use of authentic materials can lead to confusion. Pupils can spend too much time guessing and being led towards meaning, not maximising teaching time. |
| 9) How do teachers ensure that lessons do not overload pupils' | **Teachers should plan their use of target language and how much new material is introduced at a given moment, so pupils are not** | **Pupils are required to focus on too many stimuli and this detracts from learning**.<br><br>The use of words, pictures, sounds, repetition, etc. |

| | **confused.** | together leads to confusion for some pupils. |
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| **School friendly questions:** How is it that you make sure that pupils do not get confused because they are expected to do so many things at once? | Too many resources, and other support (models, examples, visuals, gestures) to help understanding may simply confuse pupils. Often a clear explanation in English will be more helpful. Teachers should ensure that pupils have learnt previous material well, so that when moving on their working memory is not overloaded by grappling with both the basics and new material. | The introduction of vocabulary can be quick, engaging and varied, but still leave some pupils behind. When pupils have not learnt previous material well enough, their memory can become overloaded when new content is introduced. These issues are further exacerbated for those with related SEND. |

## 3. The effectiveness of assessment

| Focused questions to ask the evidence | Outline of potentially stronger practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for | Outline of weaker practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for |
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| 10) What is your rationale for assessment in languages? What is the system? What are you checking? Does this link with your scheme of learning? | **Assessments should check the content in the schemes of work.** Frequent low stakes testing should be used to build memory through repeated recall. Assessment should check pupils' ability to produce sentences and manipulate simple structures as well as their understanding and production of vocabulary. Assessments should avoid giving too much credit to rote-memorisation of simple fixed phrases a the expense of capacity to recall learnt vocabulary and grammar to construct novel sentences. | **Assessment is not used to check pupils have learnt the intended curriculum.** <br>▪ No assessment at all happens in languages <br>▪ Assessment does not align with the scheme of learning (checking phonics, vocabulary and grammar, and how these link in sentences and questions, for example) <br>▪ Assessment is not used to shape future planning or to support transition into KS3 <br>▪ Assessment focuses only on checking pupils' memory of vocabulary alone |

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| | Assessments include testing of speaking, listening, reading and writing. | **Little concrete learning or reflection takes place on the part of teachers as a response to pupil assessments**. |
| | Helpful information should be available for partner secondaries. | **No useful information is given to partner secondaries in relation to languages.** |
| | Assessments are used to help teachers to reflect on structures and vocabulary that is taught, and shape the scheme of learning. | |
| | Any major issues identified feed into CPD offered to members of staff (pupils' pronunciation, for example). | |

## 4. The extent to which there is a climate of high subject expectations where a love of languages can flourish

NB: This focus may well help explain the success of some schools, but a lack of evidence for 'climate where a love of the subject could flourish' could NOT reasonably be deployed to explain weakness given the challenge of identifying this during inspection.

| Focused questions to ask the evidence | Outline of potentially stronger practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for | Outline of weaker practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for |
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| 11) What is the profile of languages within the school? | **Languages club, links to languages country, trips to the country in place can be indicators of a strong profile for languages.**<br>Inspectors would hope to hear pupils talk with passion about subject; displays show cultural awareness and linguistic progression. Extra curricular activities should be available to all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. | It may be more possible to identify presence of a strong profile of languages within school than to state with confidence that this feature is absent. Conversations with pupils can be helpful here. |

| 12) How does the school ensure that there are high expectations for all pupils with languages? | Leaders should ensure that pupils with SEND or lower prior attaining pupils have equal access to languages to their peers. Lessons support their needs.<br>The experience of pupils who speak English as an additional language is built upon where appropriate (and they access language learning). | **Not all pupils have equal access to the languages curriculum**.<br><br>Interventions for other subjects take pupils out of languages lessons. The school should have thought very carefully about such choices, given the likely narrowing of the curriculum involved. |
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| 13) What is the vision and rationale for any languages taster days or international programmes? Do these support progress in the chosen language for key stage 2? | **Engagement in different languages should allow pupils to compare and contrast those with the languages studied at school.**<br><br>International programmes link explicitly to the languages(s) offered.<br>International programmes enrich the curriculum but do not replace the need to make progress in languages. | **There is little rationale for international links. Taster days replace the KS2 curriculum rather than widen pupils' general experience of languages**. |

## 5. The quality of systems and support for staff development

| Focused questions to ask the evidence | Outline of potentially stronger practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for | Outline of weaker practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for |
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| 14) What is the quality of the subject level processes, including of curriculum construction, debate and renewal? How does the school / subject leader evaluate the | **Curriculum development should be a normal part of activity and clearly evident in curriculum discussions**.<br><br>All teachers, even non-specialists, are encouraged to identify problems and if possible suggest solutions. In addition, the best leaders systematically elicit pupil feedback on their learning, which feeds into curriculum | **Languages is not part of whole school improvement planning**<br><br>Languages-specific documentation and improvement planning are based on limited evidence gathered from whole school processes. |

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| strengths and areas for development (if there is an identified leader)? | reform. | Improvement planning is generic and based on whole school priorities (uninfluenced by subject-specific requirements).<br><br>There is no evidence of a focus on languages or no review of the success of any provision. |
| 15) Who is teaching languages in school? Are they languages specialists? How are non-specialists supported? How do leaders ensure that staff maintain competence in languages? | **Where there are no languages specialists, teachers have access to detailed schemes of learning and sequenced resources.**<br>Support must be available to help teachers address any gaps that exist in subject teaching methodology. Support is available to help teachers maintain a good level of ability in the target language. Specialist teachers share their expertise with others so that provision does not deteriorate should these staff leave. | **No support is given to develop teachers' subject methodology or linguistic ability.**<br>No thought has been given to helping teachers maintain a good level of ability in the target language. Succession planning for languages is not in place and expertise will be lost if the teacher responsible changes school.<br>Other teachers do not learn from the specialist teacher who teachers languages during PPA. |

## 6. The extent to which whole school policies affect the capacity for effective languages education

| Focused questions to ask the evidence | Outline of potentially stronger practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for | Outline of weaker practice in terms of intent, implementation and impact<br>NB: answers will take many forms. Below are common findings to look out for |
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| 16) Is enough time given within the curriculum for the school to achieve its curricular aims and meet the requirements of the NC | **Leaders should ensure that enough curriculum time is given for the aims of the NC to be met.**<br><br>Best practice might involve weekly languages lessons plus regular review of language throughout the week. Work scrutiny evidences progress towards writing in sentences, manipulating simple language and a | **Not enough time or priority given to language learning.**<br><br>There may be no evidence of concern when pupils do not make strong progress towards meeting the aims of the NC.<br>Carousels and 'taster' sessions may engage pupils well |

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| (or equivalent)? | broadening of vocabulary across time. It evidences pupils reading short texts rather than single words. Pupils by the end of Year 6 can engage in simple conversations in the language. When asked about language learning, they move beyond repeating learned phrases. | but not support them to make progress in the target language.<br><br>A specialist teacher may cover languages in PPA but with sessions that are often missed due to theme days and special events.<br>Languages may be taught on curriculum days which are spread out across the year. Pupils forget language in between the sessions.<br>Pupils may start learning in Year 6 and therefore not enough time is given to ensure the whole NC is covered. |
| 17) What is the impact of timetabling and staff deployment decisions on the teaching of languages? | Leaders should ensure that a specialist teacher is in place (or that a non-specialist is receiving a strong package of training in both language and pedagogy). Non-specialist teachers learn from specialists and thread languages through their teaching week. | Languages has not been a priority and the teacher with the most exposure to languages has been given the responsibility with little or no training.<br>No regular timeslot has been made for languages.<br>Languages is lost in topic days with other subjects. |
| 18) When is languages introduced at school? What is the rationale for this? | Leaders should have a rationale for this which allows pupils to make linguistic progress across the key stage. Progression ought to be evident across year groups or across time through work scrutiny, schemes of learning and discussions with pupils. | Provision in each year is reliant on the ability of the class teacher (e.g. some Spanish in Y4, little languages in Y5, and French taught during PPA by a specialist teacher in Y6). No strategic approach is in place for when languages is introduced. |
| 19) Which languages are on offer? Why? Does this allow for progression into key stage 3? | Primary schools are working as a group with their partner secondaries to align language learning to facilitate progression into KS3. The choice of language is strategic and based on the need for progression KS2-4. | The choice of language is incidental or linked to staff ability (although this may be the best decision in that setting).<br>Primary schools offer a different language to their partner secondaries so pupils 'do not need to start again'. |
| 20) Do whole school policies on teaching, | At line management meetings, discussions around progress include all subjects, in addition to the core. | Pupils who need intervention in English miss languages to do so. |

| | Systems for assessment, feedback, lesson monitoring, etc. are flexible enough to meet the needs of learning in languages. | Systems and procedures are not flexible enough to meet the needs of this subject area and have a negative impact on provision. |
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| assessment, homework etc. support or impede the languages curriculum? | Languages specific policies (target language/grammar) contextualise whole school policies to learning in this subject. | |

## Glossary

| Term | Description |
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| **Automaticity** | Ability to recall and deploy (facts, concepts and methods) with **accuracy and speed** and without using conscious memory; frees the working memory for higher-order processes that require holding a line of thought. |
| **Components** | The building blocks of knowledge or sub-skills that a pupil needs to understand, store and recall from long-term memory in order to be successful in a complex task. See Automaticity. |
| **Composites** | The more complex knowledge which can be acquired or more complex tasks which can be undertaken when prior knowledge components are secure in a pupil's memory. |
| **Cumulative dysfluency** | Educational failure caused when pupils do not have enough opportunities to recall knowledge to gain automaticity with the use of that knowledge. Over time this may prevent or limit pupils' acquisition of more complex knowledge. |
| **Cumulative sufficiency** | Sufficient coverage of significant topics in the curriculum, particularly where identification of individually significant topics is not possible. |
| **Deep structure** | The underlying syntactic structure—or level—of a sentence. |
| **Dictogloss** | A classroom dictation activity where pupils are required to reconstruct a short text by listening and noting key words, which are used as a base for reconstruction. |
| **Disciplinary knowledge** | Methods and conceptual frameworks used by specialists in a given subject, e.g. knowledge of history or geography as a discipline. |

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| **Memory** | Two types:<br><br>• working, or short-term memory: where conscious processing or 'thoughts' occur. Limited to holding 4 to 7 items of information for up to around 30 seconds at a time.<br><br>• Long-term memory: where knowledge resides in integrated schema, ready for use without taking up working memory. |
| **Modalities** | Forms in which language occurs, such as written, oral and physical (gestures) i.e. in the written modality, we use language for reading and writing. In the oral modality, we use language for listening (aural) and speaking (oral). |
| **Phonics** | The study of the relationship between the spoken and written language. Each letter or combination of letters represents a sound or sounds. The information is codified, as we must be able to recognise which symbols make which sounds in order to read the language. |
| **Progression model** | The planned path from the pupil's current state of competence to the school's intended manifestation of expertise. |
| **Schema/schemata (pl)** | A pattern of thought that organises categories of information and the connections between them. |
| **Substantive knowledge** | Significant concepts; knowledge that carries considerable weight in a given subject domain, e.g. concepts such as 'empire', 'civilisation', 'parliament' and 'peasantry' in history. |