

## Building 'layers of knowledge' – what makes a great history education?

Ofsted has published its latest research review looking at history education in schools.

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Today we have published a research review into history education, continuing our series looking at different subjects across the curriculum.

Read the [history research review](#).

The review draws on evidence from the education inspection framework (EIF) and other literature to examine what makes a high-quality history curriculum – including pedagogy, assessment and the impact of school leaders' decisions on history provision.

It shares a range of published work from history teachers who have wrestled with complex questions of history curriculum design, and the approaches they have taken to secure pupils' disciplinary knowledge of history.

The review explores how pupils get better at history. It emphasises how essential it is for pupils to develop 'layers' of knowledge, which they can draw on to make sense of more complex ideas, and to construct their own historical arguments and accounts.

The review finds that some forms of knowledge can be particularly useful for pupils to secure, such as knowledge of important historical terms. And it reflects on the importance of teaching pupils so that they retain what they have learned in the long term.

The review considers how teachers might avoid generic or formulaic approaches to teaching disciplinary knowledge, as these can leave pupils with misconceptions.

There are various ways that schools can construct and teach high-quality history curriculums. Our report identifies some common features that schools may want to consider in developing their history education, including:

- regular opportunities for teachers to discuss content selection and its purposes, supporting decisions about content and emphasis in teaching
- reflecting the relationship between ‘substantive’ and ‘disciplinary’ knowledge in teaching and curriculum design
- teaching that develops pupils’ historical knowledge and their historical analysis simultaneously
- giving pupils specific opportunities to develop their knowledge of some particularly important substantive concepts
- providing pupils with opportunities to read or hear appropriately challenging texts
- ensuring that teaching and curriculum design secure pupils’ chronological knowledge
- giving pupils opportunities to study aspects of the past in overview and in depth
- teaching that helps pupils to develop coherent historical narratives and organising frameworks for their knowledge of the past
- supporting pupils to learn new content through meaningful examples and historical context that makes ideas and concepts more familiar
- making sure pupils have repeated encounters with a wide range of important concepts in a number of different contexts
- providing rich stories and contextual details about the past to make abstract ideas more meaningful

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted’s Chief Inspector, said:

A good history education is so important to children’s education. Studying history helps children to understand their place in the world, and in the long story of human development. And it challenges them to make sense of the similarities and differences in human experiences across time and place.

I hope our review helps schools as they design and develop their own history curriculums. It will also feed into our own assessment of the quality of subject education in schools.

We plan to publish our findings from research into history education practice as a subject report in 2022.