

Humanities: Information

Introduction

The National Curriculum Framework states that humanities comprises History and Geography; the information in this document focuses on relevant knowledge for these two subject areas but also considers the wider handing of humanities through 'Topic' lessons in primary education.

The inclusion statements in the National Curriculum (2014), in line with the SEND Code of Practice (2015), assert teachers must plan lessons so that all pupils with SEND can study every national curriculum subject. Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset of work. Ofsted's EIF (2023) asserts that the Intent of a school's Quality of Education will require leaders to construct a curriculum that ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly those with SEND or high needs, the cultural capital they need to succeed in life. This statement resonates profoundly with teachers of humanities who are aware through inquiry of their subjects, pupils have a chance to develop culturally emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually.

The History Association highlights that pupils in England have an entitlement to study history or geography until the age of sixteen. However, increasingly, some pupils seem to be discouraged from taking up this opportunity as it can be seen as too challenging; the worth of a qualification is mis-measured in terms of graded outcome, rather than formative educational experience.

Common considerations for teaching of humanities

Teachers of the humanities will be aware of the distinct features of their subject area and how it is unique. Nonetheless, there are several overlapping aspects of humanities teaching that can be considered broadly in relation to pupils with SEND. Below are some initial comments for consideration.

Quantity of knowledge

The curriculum content for humanities subjects can appear overwhelming, particularly when large amounts of information are narrated in a single text. Consideration of which content requires **explicit instruction** and which content should be delivered using **cognitive and metacognitive strategies** will help develop strategic curriculum and lesson planning. Knowing how to **chunk** knowledge and structure the learning and teaching in a way that supports retention is a key strategy to support all learners, particularly those with SEND.

Pupils with SEND may often find that their **working memory** is overloaded. Cognitive overload will increase the likelihood that content may be misunderstood and not effectively encoded in the long-term memory. The history and geography curriculum lends itself to **spaced review** or **distributed learning**. Spaced review involves revisiting a topic after a 'forgetting gap' and strengthens long-term memory. A simple way to manage this is to build in review time, including reviewing learning from the previous lesson at the start of the next one or over longer periods (at the end of each week, month, or topic). This also links with **retrieval practice** and combining spaced review and retrieval practice can lead to great benefits in retention in the long-term. Retrieval practice involves retrieving something you have learnt in the past and bringing it back to mind. You can use retrieval to review past learning before introducing new related learning. **Elaboration** involves describing and explaining in detail something you have learnt. This

approach supports learning by integrating new information with existing prior knowledge, helping to embed it in the long-term memory. This is useful as pupils progress in their understanding of a concept.

Spaced learning, retrieval practice and elaborative interrogation provide routine, structure and effective conditions to improve working memory, key features of effective classroom strategies for pupils with SEND.

Relevance of curriculum content

Some topics covered in humanities subjects (as in other subjects) may appear abstract to some learners. This highlights a particular need for teachers to explicitly illustrate the relevance of the study by relating the content to pupil's experience. The purpose of this is not only to increase motivation and engagement but also to make learning more meaningful and therefore more memorable.

Inquiry and elaborative interrogation

Role-play, sequencing, debate and cross-curricular exploration of topics are all instructional methods of an effective teacher's toolkit. Knowing the individual needs of the pupils in your class, identifying the best method of inquiry can enhance the relevance of the curriculum content, increase memorability, and deepen learning. Elaborative interrogation is asking learners about how and why things work. The process enables learners to make connections with multiple ideas and explain how they work together. Evidence suggests that this enhances learning by integrating new information with existing prior knowledge, activating schemata.

Questioning

Questioning is a huge area of pedagogical knowledge. Consider what to do when you do not get the answers you are looking for:

1. **Wait...** By waiting, you are showing that you really want to hear what the learner has to say. Remember that some people think as they talk; others think and then speak, and it is important to allow for both.
2. **Repeat** the question softly, so as not to interrupt what the learner might be thinking. Gentle persistence is another way of showing that you genuinely want the learner to answer.
3. If your learner is struggling to answer an open question, perhaps your question lacked focus. Try **rephrasing** it to make it a little more specific but keep it open. Avoid rephrasing it as a leading question because this would signal that you are looking for confirmation of your own point of view, rather than hearing from the learner.

Sequencing and visual representation

Sequencing instructions, descriptions and events should be supported by summaries and knowledge organisers. **Dual coding** can be particularly useful here. Dual coding is about combining verbal materials with visuals in your teaching practice. Research suggests that **dual coding** allows learners to access and encode new information in a way that better allows them to remember and later access what they have learned. **Dual coding** can be a good way to make complex ideas more manageable.



Fieldwork

It is important to pre-empt how an unfamiliar learning environment may affect pupils with SEND in terms of both behaviour **and learning**. Seek advice from the SENCO and other professionals on the best way of adapting fieldtrips to make the consequent learning more accessible. Consider how assistive technology can support learning (audio/ video recording, dictation software, photos, ear defenders). A well-planned field trip with a thorough risk assessment should seek to utilise methods and strategies for pre-trip learning to enable access and improve the outcome of the fieldwork.