




Smithycroft Secondary School

PRESENTS

Brilliant

LEARNING

5 KEY ELEMENTS






Our Learning &
Teaching Strategy



Background

We have worked hard to develop a **Learning and Teaching Strategy** specific to Smithycroft. We want to ensure all young people experience '**high-quality**' learning and teaching in all areas of their education. Our strategy aims to provide a high-quality learning environment that meets every young person's needs, placing them at the heart of our work.

We developed our strategy by looking:

-  **INWARDS** — utilising robust self-evaluation to highlight good practice and strategies currently being used at Smithycroft
-  **OUTWARDS** — learning from what others do elsewhere in Scotland to challenge our own thinking
-  **FORWARDS** — envisioning where and what we want to be, planning for continuous improvement to ensure every young person fulfils their potential and achieves their aspirations

In developing our approach, we consulted staff, young people, parents, other schools, educational resources and organisations, including The Education Endowment Foundation's [online toolkit](#), [How Good is Our School](#) (HGiOS 4), and the [National Improvement Framework](#) (NIF 2022).





Strategy

We have identified **Five Key Elements** we believe are critical to successful learning and teaching, which we aim to embed across the curriculum.

The Five Key Elements are:

1. [Effective Feedback](#)
2. [Classroom Atmosphere and Ethos](#)
3. [Challenge and Differentiation](#)
4. [Knowing How We Learn](#)
5. [Collaborative Learning](#)

We will display these five key elements in every classroom so that young people are aware of expectations for their learning. Staff members will use the information and guidance in this document to support delivery of these Five Key Elements. Appropriate training will be made available to ensure our new strategy is a success. As part of our Self-Evaluation and Quality Assurance processes, all classroom observations will look to identify successful examples of these five areas.

The suggested strategies in this policy are not exhaustive and may not suit every learner in every lesson. Many teachers will have their own strategies for implementing the Five Key Elements depending on the class, lesson content etc and it is encouraged that staff share strategies they find useful in order to further refine what Smithycroft celebrates as high-quality learning and teaching.



Effective Feedback

The best lessons are
when the teacher tells
you how you're doing.

S4 Smithycroft Student



EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK?

Effective feedback provides actionable information in relation to pupil performance. Effective feedback uses a range of sources including digital technologies and professional judgement, and should not be limited to written feedback. Feedback becomes effective when it not only points out mistakes, but praises good work. Effective feedback should be given during and after lessons and time should be allocated for pupils to reflect on feedback when it is given.

Examples of how to provide effective feedback include:

- **Be positive and specific** — Get 'Great job!' and 'Brilliant work!' out of your vocabulary. Instead, leave comments highlighting exactly what the pupil has done well. Including praise for the good is proven to be more effective than simply highlighting the bad.
- **Address their progress** — Telling pupils how they are performing against a level or target makes progress more tangible. Try tracking test scores across a series of related quizzes to chart progress on a graph, or tick off areas of the Benchmarks as they are achieved.
- **Feedback Sandwich** — Provide three pieces of feedback – compliment, correct, compliment/good, bad, good – to avoid disheartening or demotivating pupils.
- **Rubrics** — Use a rubric to highlight areas the pupil has done well in. This celebrates their success but also shows where they need to improve.
- **Non-verbal feedback** — Use emojis to show learners how they are doing – this can be done online or with the use of stamps or stickers for non-digital work.
- **'I noticed'** — Starting feedback statements with 'I noticed' can make your feedback more nurturing and shows pupils you value them and their effort.
- **Digital tools** — Tools like Forms, Kahoot, Blooket, Plickers etc. have options to provide you and/or learners with instant feedback, letting learners test their knowledge and identify areas for improvement.
- **Peer feedback** — Let learners offer each other feedback based on your lesson Success Criteria. This will test their own knowledge as well as allowing collaborative working.
- **Ditch the red pen** — Studies show that verbal feedback is more effective. Showbie allows staff to leave pupils voice notes on their work. Alternatively, try holding learner conversations.





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Classroom Atmosphere and Ethos

You can tell when a teacher
cares about you and the lesson:
they're enjoying themselves.

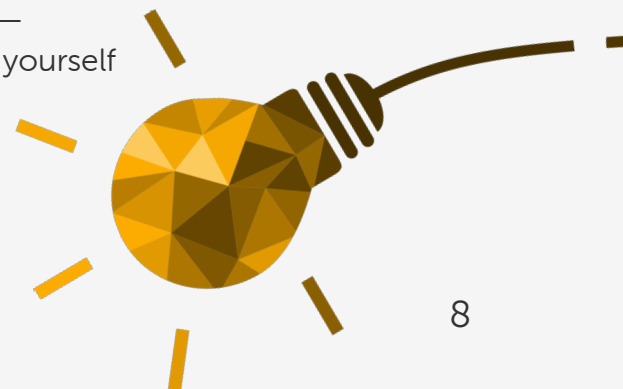
S5 Smithycroft Student

CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE & ETHOS

A positive **classroom atmosphere and ethos** contributes to attainment, engagement, and promoting positive behaviour. A brilliant classroom atmosphere will be respectful and motivational, encouraging confidence, resilience, and respect, and should reflect the ethos of the wider school.

Examples of how to establish a positive classroom atmosphere and ethos include:

- **Promote class discussion and peer interaction** — Peer/class discussion aids social development as well as understanding. Hold a debate, pose riddles and puzzles, or open the floor to their thoughts. Try putting pupils into teams or groups to work on posters, study guides, or designing their own quizzes.
- **Pupil-led learning** — Class votes on potential topics, activities etc. allows a shared ownership of learning and encourages pupil involvement. Try modelling life-long learning by challenging your class to take you on. Play Beat the Teacher or use Pupils as Teachers to share knowledge and learn together.
- **End of unit feedback** — Questions such as 'What was your favourite part of the unit?' or 'What activity helped you learn best?' allow us to reflect on our teaching and allows pupils to direct their learning.
- **Order and routine** — Order and routine help foster smooth transitions and can benefit pupils, especially those with ASN. Try meeting pupils at the door, having a standard lesson starter format, or give notice before a task is due to end.
- **Promoting positive behaviour** — Having clear, consistent classroom boundaries linked to department and school behaviour policies [\[S\(4\)\]](#) is important. Highlight pupils who follow instructions, give out House Points, play Secret Student, award class rewards, to focus on the positive as well as the negative.
- **Make learning meaningful** — Link lessons and units to real world examples and careers to show pupils the importance of their learning.
- **Celebrate mistakes** — 'Psychological safety' allows learners to engage with new topics and ideas without the fear of failure. Asking pupils to explain their thinking, playing Spot the Error, or asking pupils to choose their best mistake can be good tools.
- **Pupils should see themselves in their surroundings** — Check your content, displays, and textbooks, and ask yourself if all learners are reflected in them. Pupils engage best when they feel included.





Challenge and Differentiation

You can tell a good lesson because the teachers have done a lot of preparation.

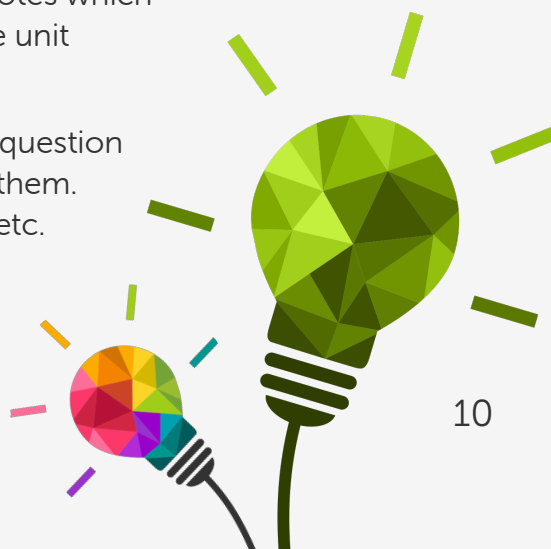
S3 Smithycroft Pupil

CHALLENGE AND DIFFERENTIATION

Challenge and differentiation is about taking the time to put learners at the centre of our lessons. Tasks, activities and resources should be differentiated to ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all learners.

Examples of how to provide challenge and differentiated resources include:

- **Extension tasks** — Extension tasks should be relevant, engaging and rewarding for learners who need further challenge in the lesson. Ask pupils to create a 'help guide' or a multiple choice test with marking scheme based on what they have learned.
- **Provide a word bank** — Providing key words from a topic can be a useful help guide for some pupils
- **Different difficulties of challenge** — Rather than setting one task for all pupils, give the class different difficulties to choose from. The success criteria should get more specific as they move through the difficulties.
- **Coloured overlays** — Some pupils find coloured overlays a helpful tool to help with reading. Different colours suit different pupils and many have an overlay already provided by Support for Learning. Check in and see if this would help.
- **Long-term learning** — Studies show that learning happens best when topics are revisited after a period of time. Try to revisit prior learning and re-teach. Pupils who struggle the first time often do better with a second attempt.
- **Thinking time** — After posing a question or a riddle, tell the class you won't accept any answers for five seconds to allow time for serious thought.
- **Learning stations** — Provide different types of content by setting up learning stations — divided sections of your classroom through which groups of students rotate. Each station should use a unique method of teaching a skill or concept related to your lesson, such as videos, creating posters, reading, puzzles, and teacher-led content.
- **Goal-setting** — Pupils set individual learning goals and work towards reaching them at a pace which suits them. They can create notes which evidence their learning and tick off their goals as the unit progresses.
- **Open response** — To demonstrate learning, pose a question pupils can answer in any format they feel best suits them. Presentations, videos, essays, posters, study guides etc.



Knowing How We Learn



Lessons are best when the teacher doesn't interrupt our thinking.

S2 Smithycroft Pupil

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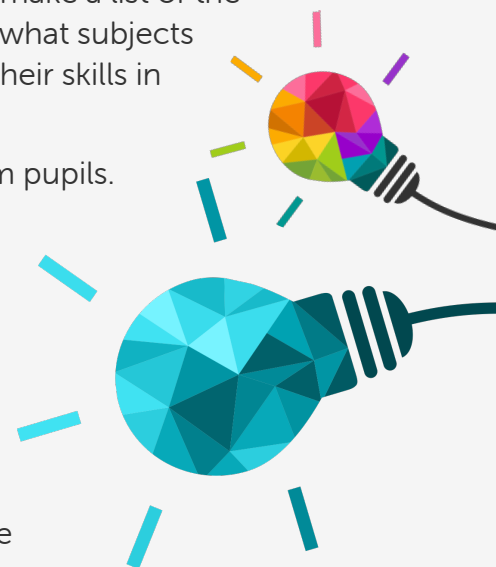


KNOWING HOW WE LEARN

Knowing how we learn is thinking about your own thinking. It means not just thinking about 'what' you are learning, but 'how' you are learning. Knowing how we learn helps pupils recognise their own abilities, direct their own learning, evaluate their work, understand what they did right or wrong, and learn new strategies.

Examples of how to include knowing how we learn in lessons include:

- **Share your own strengths and weaknesses** — Talk about your preferred study style. Explain what you feel helps you learn best. Share tactics that do and don't work for you, encouraging students to try them. This will help them understand that people naturally learn differently.
- **Step Inside** — A Making Thinking Visible strategy which builds empathy and understanding, Step Inside asks the learner to hypothesise what a displayed person or thing observes, understands, believes, cares about, and/or questions.
- **Link the learning** — When introducing a new problem, ask learners to first consider whether anything they have covered already might apply, and make a list of the suggested strategies used to solve those problems. Ask pupils what subjects might benefit from similar strategies or where they could use their skills in the wider world.
- **Learning plans** — Explain what end result you want to see from pupils. Then have them suggest a personal plan with strategies they might use to help them get there. At the end of the lesson, have them evaluate how successful their plan was.
- **Sentence scaffolds** — Halfway through a task, ask pupils to complete reflective sentence scaffolds such as 'I am doing this task successfully because...', 'This strategy is working because...', 'I am confused by...', or 'My next steps are...'
- **Modelling** — Write your own example for pupils, explaining the decisions you are making and how you correct and improve your work to create a second draft.
- **Weekly check-ins** — Ask learners to fill in a journal with these types of questions: 'What was easiest for me to learn this week, and why?', 'What was most challenging for me to learn, and why?', 'Which study strategies worked well?', 'Which study strategies didn't, and what could I do differently?'
- **Pupils as teachers** - Ask pupils who have demonstrated good use of their particular strategy to demonstrate to others. This consolidates their own learning while showing varied approaches to the rest of the class.





Collaborative Learning

When you work with your classmates it feels like extra support.

S4 Smithycroft Student



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING?

Built on a foundation of respect and teamwork, **collaborative learning** involves obtaining knowledge while working with other pupils in the class. Pupils work together to carry out a task or solve a problem, in a group small enough to ensure that everyone participates.

Examples of how to include collaborative learning in lessons include:

- **Jigsaw** — Give each member of the group a small piece of the overall information to learn and then teach their peers. Afterwards, the group collaborate to piece the information together and present what they've learned. Use differently coloured pens to show individual contributions.
- **Think, Pair, Share** — When you pose a question, build in time for pupils to think of an answer themselves and then pair them up to discuss their thoughts, then ask for one pupil to feed back a collaborative answer.
- **Brainwriting** — Ensure every pupil participates asking them to anonymously write down a question they have at the start of a topic. These questions are either collated or then handed around the class and pupils are asked to think of a possible response or alternate question. Collect them back in and discuss.
- **Peer marking** — Works best if you can anonymous the pieces of work. Provide a marking rubric and/or marking guidance and ask pupils to grade each other's work.
- **Snowballing** — Put pupils into pairs to research a topic. Pairs then join to become fours to discuss. Fours then become eights, and so on until the teacher feels it appropriate to bring the whole class back to them.
- **Placemats** — Put students into groups with one large sheet of paper which sits in the centre of their table. They write what they know on the section in front of them and then put any ideas-in-common in the middle.
- **Stump your partner** — Pair pupils and task them with coming up with a challenging question for their partner based on what they've learned so far.
- **Find someone who** — Give pupils a list of questions and ask them to find another pupil who knows the correct answer to each.
- **Snakes and Ladders** — Pair pupils and give them Snakes and Ladder boards and a bank of topic-specific questions. Pupils can only climb ladders if they choose and answer a question correctly.

