



Humanities curriculum rationale

Curriculum rationale

Why are scope, rigour, coherence and sequencing the drivers of the Opening Worlds humanities curriculum?

Each subject curriculum and its associated teaching approaches needs to secure the highest possible quality of education for pupils. Four closely related curricular attributes – scope, rigour, coherence and sequencing – are our measures of quality. These four curriculum attributes are the means and measure of strong curricula because they ensure that the subject properly reflects the academic practices, outside of school, to which the subject refers and they ensure that this is organised in the best way to allow pupils to make progress and to thrive in their study of the subject.

For these reasons, scope, rigour, coherence and sequencing are now explicit expectations of Ofsted. In their pursuit of the 'quality of education', these four ideas will drive their questioning about content in these subjects, as in all subjects.

*What is the difference between substantive and disciplinary content?
How do these two types of content structure each subject in the Opening Worlds humanities curriculum?*

Just as in the sciences, when pupils learn humanities subjects they tackle two closely linked types of content, each dependent on the other. In school curricula, these types of content are known as substantive content and disciplinary content. Any inadequacy in one will weaken the other, and each plays a vital part in securing scope, coherence, rigour and sequencing.

1. Substantive content

This is the substance that pupils learn in each subject – the building blocks of factual content expressed through accounts (stories, descriptions, representations, reports, statistics, source material, commentaries, explanations and analyses) and the vocabulary (concepts, terms, technical language) that enable pupils to move about within their own knowledge, to read and to communicate. Thus pupils gain the internal reference points that allow them to recognise the patterns, notice the contrasts, ask the questions and discuss the options that the disciplinary content will demand.

If you study the detailed the plan, you will notice that it is:

- ambitiously broad in **scope** (meeting and exceeding the demands of the National Curriculum in cultural, geographical and religious breadth and representation; *for example*, the KS2 Geography NC requirement to gain place and locational knowledge across the UK, Europe and the Americas is served not in a minimal or tokenistic way, but by ensuring that pupils gain, over the four years, an in-depth knowledge of diverse reference points on which to draw from across the world, from California, Jamaica and the Amazon Basin, to the Rhine, the Mediterranean and the Alps, to Wales, Birmingham and London, to the Indus Valley + the coastal communities of the Indian Ocean, with further underpinning from the historical and religious dimensions of these places); *for example*, pupils will gain a multi-faceted understanding of empires, conquest, oppression, power structures and their links with migration and the diverse cultural experiences of those caught up in migration, settlement and conquest, through revisiting these issues over and over again: this will lay solid foundations for understanding that Britain as we know it is the result of migrations over millennia, that this has always included diverse ethnicities, and that stories of different kinds of struggle against injustice are often silenced, so we must keep asking good *questions* to uncover them, which brings us to rigour....
- meticulous in **rigour** (responsive to up-date scholarship in history, geography, culture, religion and worldviews, and related fields such as philosophy and social science; current questions being pursued and the insights of scholars in these fields; *for example*, the extensive work on Islamic Civilisations, on the Byzantine Empire, the Maya, the ancient Mesopotamians will be scrupulously worded to ensure that claims are worded cautiously, with due regard for what scholars can be certain about and what remains informed conjecture and imaginative reconstruction from the relics and records the past leaves behind);
- highly **coherent** (intricate links have been built within and across subjects so that nothing sits in isolation but rather is supported and enriched both horizontally and vertically; *for example*, by Year 6, when pupils are examining the arts within religion, they will not be loosely speculating on the bases of vague themes and the stimulus of a few examples; they will know enough about (say) the history of Christianity in Britain and the world, and its many manifestations, to appreciate, interpret and reflect on poetry, music and art in context; they will be able to relate ancient stories to each other, across civilisations, for example Beowulf, the epic of Gilgamesh and the Ramayana, understanding common features of stories that reflect and shape the various civilisations and their evolving beliefs about how to solve problems and how live together justly and peacefully)
- very carefully **sequenced** (so that pupils' ability to build a comparison and reach a critical judgement, say, across sustainable use of natural resources or the impact on climate change by Year 5, will have been served by the repeated and explicit focus on all the foundational geographical knowledge that serves informed understanding of climate change/resource use – the role of rainforests, the behaviour of oceans, the impact of land use)

For the scope, coherence, rigour and sequencing to achieve its full benefit for pupils, the substantive content must be taught with 'high-leverage' activities, so that pupils think hard about the substance itself, so that they assimilate and retain material efficiently and so that they gain confidence from their fluency in foundational concepts, terms and reference points. In this way vocabulary will become extremely secure, with the range of vocabulary that pupils recognise growing all the time and creating resonance as pupils'

encounter it again and again, both consolidating that vocabulary and freeing up memory space for pupils to make sense of new material.

Knowledge is highly 'sticky'. The cumulative effect of being secure in rich stories, a detailed 'sense of place' and a profound 'sense of period' is that pupils' curiosity is on fire. Their hunger for yet more knowledge, as relationships, connections and relationships multiply, soon grows very naturally.

2. Disciplinary content

This is all that pupils learn about how knowledge is constantly renewed in the subject's ongoing development, outside of school, by its practitioners (historians, geographers, philosophers, theologians, artists). It teaches pupils that the sum of our knowledge is not fixed, that it is constantly being tested and renewed, that there are standards of truth for such renewal. This constant quest for better and better understandings of our world inspires both awe and humility in all of us.

Every time pupils are reminded of how geographers are collaborating to establish the serious extent of climate change, both teachers and pupils are humbled and challenged. Every time pupils are reminded how historians are making us view the past differently or foregrounding the voices of the disadvantaged, oppressed and marginalised, both teachers and pupils are inspired and spurred to new curiosity for unearthing hidden voices. Every time pupils are shown how scientists and geographers have worked together to reach a particular finding or how religious communities have built great art, architecture and music and changed our standards of artistic achievement, we are all inspired.

The disciplined pursuit of truth, in itself, is also all about values – it depends on them and it fosters them. Society must trust the products of scholarship and scholars must work collaboratively with mutual respect and confidence in shared values such as being honest in all claims, analysing data rigorously and avoiding all forms of exploitation in the pursuit of their goals.

The disciplinary aspect of the subject therefore directly fosters the critical and creative aspects of learning, and these are strengthened by the distinctive demands of the subject. Pupils must learn how to shape good geographical enquiries, how to build or judge an historical argument from evidence and how to recognise different kinds of philosophical and theological questions and understand why these matter for themselves and others. In doing these things, pupils are being introduced to the subject as a long tradition of enquiry, argument, debate. They are being introduced to a disciplined and relentless quest for truth that forms an endless conversation between human beings over time. Armed with growing substantive knowledge and increasingly understanding the subject as a living, breathing, vibrant discipline, pupils are being taught how to take their future place in that ongoing conversation: joining in the arguments, pursuing the enquiries, respecting the efforts of others and judging the results.

More specifically, this works in the three humanities subjects as follows. It results in the constant practice of various subject-specific skills, each of which interacts with some aspect of disciplinary knowledge (for history and geography these are consistent with the requirements for subject skills which are found in the 'Aims' of each National Curriculum):

In studying history as a discipline, pupils will:

- use the concepts of continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance, in order to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses;
- practise the methods of historical enquiry, understand how evidence is used rigorously to make historical claims, and discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed.

In studying geography as a discipline, pupils will:

- think about geographical questions using concepts of place, scale, diversity and variation over space, change, interaction and relationships; pupils tackle questions in which they solve problems concerning place, pattern, position and processes;
- collect, analyse and communicate with a range of data gathered through experiences of fieldwork that develop their geographical skills and deepen their understanding of geographical processes;
- interpret a range of sources of geographical information, including maps, diagrams, globes, aerial photographs and digital technologies;
- communicate geographical information in a variety of ways, including through maps, numerical and quantitative skills and writing at length.

In studying religions through multiple disciplines, pupils will:

- learn about and learn from the different kinds of question human beings can ask about religious origins, beliefs and practices, namely questions that derive from philosophy, theology, social sciences and history (*for example*, when studying a particular religion in a particular place, asking the following different kinds of question: how does this story from the sira or Quran help Muslims to understand this precept from the hadith? What does this New Testament story mean to Christians? What are the big ideas that this Hindu story reflects (eg dharma);

How are these ideas expressed in other stories and in diverse religious practices across time and space? Or, how does this religious community perceive matters of justice? How has this religious tradition tackled the challenge of injustice to one another? How does this community's beliefs shape its approach to injustice? What does this community teach about injustice and why? What insights about injustice can we gain from this religious communities' texts, art, traditions and practices? While we are not expecting pupils of primary age to distinguish explicitly between these four disciplines, the programme will always be clear to teachers about whether the question being pursued is being examined as philosophy, theology, social sciences and history, so that the conditions under which valid claims can be made are very clear.

How does the study of history, geography and RE support literacy?

As with all subjects in the curriculum, the humanities provide the powerful knowledge that, *if thoroughly and securely taught*, builds the wide and secure vocabulary acquisition that underpins literacy and all successful communication. We know that pupils only read with the speed necessary for fluency when they have adequate prototypes for abstract words and phrases, and when their densely structured schemata allow them to 'chunk' the

incoming text for meaning. Vocabulary size is the outward sign of the inward acquisition of knowledge.

Moreover, the types of account that form each subject's processes and products – its narratives, analyses, arguments – give pupils continuous, focused practice in reading and writing, both fiction and non-fiction. Pupils' reading and writing will always be richly grounded in stimulating content in which pupils will be increasingly secure, and always driven by a clear disciplinary purpose.

Every history, geography and religion lesson is therefore a lesson playing a central part in improving reading, even when a text is not actually being read! And the range of reading pupils do in these lessons will be extensive. Pupils' extended speaking and writing is likewise transformed by the richly diverse vocabulary and the secure, fascinating stories that have underpinned that vocabulary acquisition.

How does the study of history, geography and religion directly foster moral values, attitudes and the disposition to challenge and improve our world?

The material relevant to values that threads through the Opening Worlds humanities curriculum will be clear already from the above. But let us look more closely at how this works by considering what the humanities uniquely offer the development of values, attitudes and dispositions, and some specific examples of particularly strong threads within the Opening Worlds humanities programmes. (You can track these further and find many more threads in the detailed outline of substantive content in Appendix 1.)

Given that they uniquely address the study of humans in society through time and their interaction with the planet, the humanities subjects provide distinctive contributions to pupils' overall education. If scope, rigour, coherence and sequencing are properly configured, these subjects foster the knowledge, skills and dispositions for pupils to:

- thrive through informed curiosity about the world;
- view human challenges, quests and achievements through the lens of the long traditions that have shaped them;
- think critically about how to change the world for the common good;
- gain the language and concepts to notice, analyse and question how power works in society, and how inequality or suffering arises;
- understand and value the diverse experiences and contributions of others who may be very different from themselves;
- enrich their own sense of identity as they look across time, space and culture and see many positive versions of themselves;
- understand the power of learned communities working collaboratively to seek truth in their claims about the world;
- gain the concepts which give them the tools for precise thought and rigorous argument with which to describe, explain and change the world;
- build strong standards of truth about the conditions under which valid claims can be made about the world, society, culture and belief, on multiple scales;
- appreciate and participate in the arts – music, art and literature – through richly diverse artistic outputs within the many sources studied, properly understood in

their cultural, temporal and geographical contexts and providing richly informed stimulus for pupils' own creativity.

It is through a rigorous focus on scope, rigour, coherence and sequencing that these are secured for all pupils.

Let us cut across the subjects and examine how this works for three major themes whose threads you can start to track across the detailed substantive content outline in Appendix 1.

Climate change (understanding it and being prompted to informed, responsible action on various scales)

- scope: the overall geography programme builds a comprehensive knowledge base for ensuring that pupils are in a position to understand the problem geographically and scientifically (and in future this can draw directly on specific science knowledge in a good science curriculum). In each year pupils come at this issue from many angles – rain forests, oceans, climate, land use, human interaction with resources and sustainability are addressed again and again, in contrasting regions of the globe, until the more sophisticated problem-solving and enquiries pupils will undertake in Year 6 are based on very firm foundations of pupil knowledge, interest and motivation.
- coherence: the overall geography programme ensures that pupils' encounters with themes pertinent to climate change are not random and complement each other explicitly; moreover, the additional knowledge pupils gain about human action, human exploitation of other humans and the land, beliefs associated with resources and the land, ensures that pupils gain a rich sense of period and sense of place that makes the study of those regions of the globe where climate change is most visible or being accelerated is not superficial, forgettable and abstract, but richly memorable in its visual colour and stories of human interaction (e.g. Antarctic, Amazon basin, various tourist areas, immediate local references in community procurement of food in local areas)
- rigour: understanding climate change demands proper geography and proper science; instead of superficial arguments reliant only on the moral case, pupils will understand how geographical data has shown us climate change at work, how specifically *geographical* questions have shaped enquiries which help geographers to gain the new knowledge that they need to establish the causes, pace and effects of climate change, how patterns of interaction and interdependence make bad habits hard to break and what geographical thinking can do to help us tackle this.
- sequencing: simply parking lots of references to climate change or lots of topics on climate change all over the curriculum would be a woefully inadequate and inefficient way to build a curriculum. Instead, each new geographical issue or topic builds on the last and prepares for the next so that the cumulative effect of knowledge about and disposition to act for climate change is powerful.

Multi-culturalism and diversity (understanding the origins of diversity, valuing the multiple contributions, contributing positively to harmonious diverse communities, challenging racist assumptions wherever we find them)

- **scope:** multi-culturalism, across the globe, and especially in Britain is probably the most salient and constant theme of the whole programme. The study of ancient civilisations, each taken seriously (as the NC requires) is fundamental to understanding what unites rather than divides us, while also celebrating its diverse manifestations. The cradle of civilisations in the Middle East – from where Jews, Christians and Muslims all emerge – points to our common ancestry, to how valued traditions emerge, to the bigger patterns of human interaction. On this foundation, the stories and settings chosen for history repeatedly show examples (e.g. depth on Cordoba in Southern Spain) of contrasting faith communities collaborating in life and work, and displaying mutual respect, or failing to collaborate, failing to comprehend one another, initiating fear and suffering the consequences. The very strong central thread of multi-cultural Britain is woven throughout the history programmes, so that by Year 6, in history, geography and RE, sophisticated studies of the diversity of London, especially the rich contributions of diverse communities to the arts, is possible.
- **coherence:** in this programme – multi-cultural settings and multi-cultural Britain never just surface from nowhere. The temporal, geographical and religious dimensions are carefully taught so that pupils can see the bigger picture and respect complexity in their enquiries.
- **rigour:** understanding that even the questions we ask are affected by our assumptions. How do we make sure we are listening to the ways in which certain stories have been silenced? Are we asking better and better questions in order to tackle issues in how silent voices are heard, how certain peoples have been (and still are) oppressed, how our own values might be shaped by narrow assumptions? Across the programme, pupils will learn how historical questions, geographical questions, religious and philosophical questions, and so forth, can help us to do justice to our study of the past, our study of place and our study of cultures and beliefs.
- **sequencing:** simply parking lots of references to multi-culturalism or topics on multi-culturalism all over the curriculum would be an inadequate and inefficient way to build a curriculum. Instead, each new component of knowledge that relates to this issue builds on the last and prepares for the next so that the cumulative effect of knowledge about and disposition to protect, nurture and value diverse societies has very strong roots in knowledge and in disciplinary thinking.

Social injustice (hearing the voices of the disadvantaged, the marginalised and oppressed; understanding how power can work; challenging exploitation and injustice)

- **scope:** the history topics are socially broad, going way beyond the high political narratives one might have seen in history courses 50 years ago; instead all types of people are giving voice, made visible and understood in the context of the wider power structures and ideas that affected how they lived. Examples of the disadvantaged and oppressed are extensive in the Opening Worlds humanities programme with very particular case studies used to deepen knowledge, combat stereotypes and think through problem-solving solutions in the past and possibilities for the future, for example, in geography, the study of the favelas in Bolivia, in history the study of the poor in all the societies covered, the treatment of the poor and attitudes towards the poor (positive and negative) in various religious communities and a constant return to London so that the local impact of global trends and shifts is surfaced, with its consequences for diverse peoples.
- **coherence:** the above links up profoundly within and across subjects. By understanding the context of South America, the reasons why settlements grow, the patterns of power and land-use, pupils have a huge amount of knowledge to draw on when they reach their study of how and why the favelas emerged, why stereotypes emerge and why they are damaging and how possibilities arise for improvement through empowerment.
- **rigour:** good historical and geographical questions will foreground the causes, consequences, patterns of change, significance and diversity within communities that were oppressed and marginalised within the past. Pupils will learn how to interrogate diverse sources of evidence and to understand that a central challenge for historians is to render past suffering visible, when very often the poor leave far fewer traces behind them in buildings, art and writings, than the wealthy.
- **sequencing:** while the incidence of stories about and problems concerning disadvantage will be extensive in all three subjects, simply parking lots of references to poverty or oppression all over the curriculum would be an inadequate and inefficient way to build a curriculum. Instead, each new component of knowledge that relates to this issue builds on the last and prepares for the next so that the cumulative effect of knowledge about disadvantage, power imbalances and suffering, and ways of making claims about these things with rigour, leaves pupils with better questions, more curiosity and more intellectual tools with which to act.

