

# Cultural Capital – What it is and how does a Governor Monitor it?

## What is cultural capital?

### How Ofsted defines it

Ofsted added the term 'cultural capital' to the [School Inspection Handbook](#) in 2019. In paragraph 249, it defines it as:

...the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement. In her [speech](#) in 2019, chief inspector Amanda Spielman explained what the term means in practice: By [cultural capital], we simply mean the essential knowledge, those standard reference points, that we want all children to have.

... So for example, it's about being able to learn about and name things that are, for many, outside their daily experience.

### Cultural capital can include experiences, art and knowledge from a variety of cultures

Cultural capital doesn't just come from British 'high' culture (e.g. trips to the ballet or opera, or an understanding of Dickens and Shakespeare). It can include experiences, art and knowledge from anywhere, and from popular culture as well as traditional sources (e.g. Indian dance or Nigerian cooking, or through an understanding of The Beatles or Stormzy).

These different forms of cultural capital should be included throughout your school's curriculum and enrichment activities, to avoid elitism, and it might be something your school leaders are doing already. Get inspiration for what questions you can ask your school leaders at the end of this article.

### Your school will decide on what's 'essential knowledge' for your pupils

Ofsted has said that it's up to your school leaders to decide what is 'essential knowledge' for your pupils. Your school leaders should consider how your school is preparing pupils to live and thrive in culturally and ethnically diverse modern Britain.

## How will Ofsted inspect it?

### It's a 'golden thread', rather than its own expectation

Inspectors won't be judging your school on it as a separate 'thing'. They will, however, expect to see it woven through everything your school does to teach children well.

### It will be considered as part of your school's wider curriculum intent

To evaluate your school's intent, inspectors will collect evidence from:

- Discussions with senior and subject leaders
- Any documents used in curriculum planning (there's no specific format expected for these)
- Deep dives into specific subject areas

This is set out on paragraphs 234 to 238 of the [School Inspection Handbook](#).

### It's necessary for 'good' or 'outstanding' judgements

In order to meet one of the criteria for a 'good' quality of education, your school's curriculum needs to give all pupils – particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) – the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life (as set out in paragraph 453 of the [School Inspection Handbook](#)).

This is also one of the criteria for 'good' early years provision (see paragraphs 460 and 461 of the [School Inspection Handbook](#)).

In order to secure an 'outstanding' judgement in these areas, your school must securely and consistently meet all the 'good' criteria too.

### How do I monitor it?

You don't need to monitor cultural capital as a separate area. Instead, embed questions about cultural capital as part of how you already monitor the curriculum. For example, if you're a link governor for a distinct subject/topic, include a question about cultural capital on your next visit.

### Questions to ask school leaders

Choose a couple of questions focused on cultural capital and slot them into any other questions you'll be asking your school leaders about the curriculum. The questions below are to give you a flavour of what to ask, and you don't need to ask all of them.

#### How do we deliver cultural capital to pupils? How do you embed it throughout the curriculum?

Your school leaders should be able to explain what cultural capital means in your school's context, and how it's embedded throughout your school's curriculum intent. They may have carried out a curriculum audit or other curriculum evaluation to identify how your school's curriculum intent is already delivering this.

#### Tell me about the different forms of cultural capital that are included in the curriculum

Your school leaders should be able to give you some examples of cultural capital in your school's curriculum. For example, this could be activities like tasting different foods from around the world in food technology, studying authors from various ethnic backgrounds in English, or if your school is in an ex-mining community, including the local history of mining in your school's history curriculum.

#### How do you make sure that cultural capital isn't 'elitist'?

Your school leaders should be able to explain how cultural capital isn't focused purely on British 'high' culture. For example, they may have:

- Built on your school's local heritage to focus on topics and individuals from different social classes
- Included role models in art or history – for example, those that have differing abilities rather than focusing solely on able-bodied people
- Included examples of literature, dance or music from different countries, rather than just focusing on those from Britain

#### What impact do you expect our curriculum and cultural capital to have on all our pupils?

Your school leaders should be able to explain the impact they want the curriculum to have on all pupils, and how the knowledge they learn at school will prepare them for their next stage of education.

They should be able to tell you how the curriculum is ambitious for all pupils, and how they know that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND in particular acquire cultural capital. For example, they might show you examples of pupils' work looking at different artists/authors around the world, including how all pupils are able to access these lessons.

