The Teaching Quality Blueprint

A Six-Step Collaborative Process for Defining What Good Looks Like.

Introduction

Schools everywhere are committed to improving the quality of teaching. Strategic plans reference it. Professional learning focuses on it. Leaders speak about it. Yet in many schools, one essential foundation remains underdeveloped: a clear, shared understanding of what good teaching looks like in practice.

Without clarity, expectations vary. Feedback becomes inconsistent. Professional learning fragments. Improvement depends on individual interpretation rather than collective precision.

The Teaching Quality Blueprint is designed to address this problem directly.

It is not a compliance tool.
It is not a checklist.
It is not a performance framework.

It is a disciplined, collaborative process for defining, with clarity, what good looks like in your context.

The Blueprint helps schools to:

- Develop shared language about teaching quality.
- Identify the practices that matter most for their learners.
- Translate abstract ideas into observable skills.
- Establish consistency while preserving professional judgement.
- Align feedback and professional learning to clearly defined practice.

The process begins with learners, not labels. It requires evidence before solutions. It moves deliberately from student need to teaching skill, from aspiration to observation, and from definition to growth.

Improvement does not begin with effort alone. Educators already work hard. Improvement begins with clarity.

This framework is intentionally structured to prevent drift. Each step includes "Signs of Clarity" to ensure the work moves forward only when shared understanding has been achieved. Progression is based on precision, not on time, comfort, or surface agreement.

When schools define what good looks like together, conversations become sharper. Feedback becomes actionable. Professional learning becomes coherent. Teaching quality strengthens over time.

The Teaching Quality Blueprint places professional ownership where it belongs: with the educators doing the work.

Clarity is the standard.
Consistency is the outcome.
Improvement is the result.

How to Use This Guide

The Teaching Quality Blueprint is designed to be used collaboratively. It is not intended for individual completion or isolated reflection. Its strength lies in disciplined professional dialogue.

Schools may work through the six steps:

- Across a series of leadership meetings.
- Within Collaborative Teams.
- During whole-staff professional learning sessions.
- As part of a strategic planning process.

Each step builds on the previous one. For this reason, the process should be followed sequentially. The clarity achieved in early steps directly shapes the quality of decisions made later.

When using this framework:

- Maintain focus on practice, not personality.
- Anchor conclusions in evidence rather than opinion.
- Prioritise precision over speed.
- Move forward only when clarity has been reached.

The purpose is not to complete the document. The purpose is to define what good looks like with shared understanding.

Time pressures will tempt teams to move on before clarity is secured. The "Signs of Clarity" at the end of each step are designed to prevent this. If the conditions are not met, remain in the step. Depth at each stage protects the integrity of the whole.

Schools may complete the process over several weeks or across a term. The timeline matters less than the discipline of the discussion.

This framework is not a one-time exercise. As student needs shift and practice evolves, clarity should be revisited and refined. Used well, it becomes a living guide for feedback, professional learning, and continuous improvement.

The real impact will not come from the document itself. It will come when its language becomes part of everyday professional conversation, in meetings, in classrooms, and in reflection.

Commit to clarity.
Hold the line on precision.
Let improvement follow.

The 6-step process:

Step 1   Start with Learners, not labels

Step 2   Examine the evidence

Step 3   Identify high leverage teaching skills

Step 4   Make practice visible

Step 5   Establish consistency with professional judgement

Step 6   Connect definition to growth

Step 1: Start With Learners, Not Labels

Purpose

To develop a shared and realistic understanding of student learning needs within the specific school context, moving beyond generalized descriptors to specific requirements for success.

Core Question

What do our students need to be able to do as learners to be successful in our school?

Learner Lens

Inquiry Prompt: When students describe their own learning hurdles, what specific habits or supports do they identify as essential for their success?

Guiding the Conversation

- Anchor the discussion in student learning needs rather than teacher preferences, styles, or legacy programs.
- Define successful learning in clear, observable terms (e.g., "Student can self-correct during independent writing" rather than "Student is a good writer").
- Identify patterns of success and challenge across different cohorts and subjects.
- Analyze the cognitive, behavioral, and social demands currently placed on learners.
- Interrogate the "Labels": Identify common labels used in the staffroom (e.g., "disengaged," "low ability") and challenge the team to replace these labels with descriptions of the specific skills the students lack.
- Deliverable: Produce a grounded, evidence-informed description of learner needs across the school.

Deepening the Discussion

Use these prompts to move beyond surface agreement and test the clarity of your thinking.

- What patterns do we see in how students respond to challenge?
- Where do students require the most support to remain engaged and successful?
- Which learner habits most strongly influence achievement in our context?

Threats to Clarity

- Shifting the conversation into the evaluation of individual teachers.
- Creating an aspirational "wish list" that is disconnected from the current classroom reality.
- Relying on generalizations rather than specific evidence.
- Focusing narrowly on one cohort without considering whole-school patterns.

Pro-Tip: *As a leader, your role is to act as a "Label Interrogator." When a team member uses a general label like "unmotivated," ask: "What specific learning habit is missing that makes them appear unmotivated?" This shifts the focus from a student's character to a teachable skill.*

Signs of Clarity

You are ready to move forward when:

- Learner needs are described in clear, observable terms, not labels.
- You can explain these needs consistently without adding new interpretations.
- Patterns across subjects or cohorts have been identified, not just isolated examples.
- You agree on which learner needs are the highest priority.

If these conditions are not met, allocate further time to this step before progressing.

Evidence-Informed Description of Learner Needs

Record your grounded description here, focusing on the cognitive, behavioral, and social demands identified across the school cohorts:

Step 2: Examine the Evidence

Purpose
To use available evidence to understand how students are responding to current teaching practices and where the gap between need and practice exists.

Core Question
What does our current evidence tell us about how students are responding to our teaching?

Learner Lens
Inquiry Prompt: What does student evidence confirm, challenge, or contradict about our assumptions?

Guiding the Conversation

- Insist on evidence over opinion: If a practice is claimed to be "effective," look for the trace of that effectiveness in student work.
- Draw from multiple data sources: triangulate student work, assessments, observations, and student voice.
- Identify trends: Look for recurring patterns across the school rather than isolated examples of excellence or failure.
- Separate assumptions from verifiable information: Challenge "we think" with "we know because..."
- Maintain a professional stance: Improvement is a response to learner need, not a judgement of effort.

Deepening the Discussion
Use these prompts to move beyond surface agreement and test the clarity of your thinking.

- Where is student learning strong and consistent?
- Where is progress uneven or fragile?
- What does student work reveal about depth of understanding and misconceptions?

Threats to Clarity

- Using data to assign blame or shame.
- Confirmation Bias: Selecting only the evidence that confirms existing beliefs about a certain program or teacher.
- Dismissing student voice as "too subjective" or "unreliable."
- Overcomplicating discussion with excessive data without clarity.

Pro-Tip: *To ensure psychological safety, start the session by stating: "Today is about student response, not teacher effort. If the evidence shows a gap, it is information for us to use in our design, not a critique of how hard anyone is working."*

Signs of Clarity

You are ready to move forward when:

- Conclusions are based on evidence, not opinion or assumption.
- You can point to specific examples in student work, assessment data, or observation.
- You have identified clear patterns, not just standout successes or failures.
- You can clearly explain the gap between learner need and current practice.

If these conditions are not met, allocate further time to this step before progressing.

Key Evidence Trends vs. Assumptions

Record your verified findings and contrast them with previously held assumptions:

Step 3: Identify High-Leverage Teaching Skills

Purpose
To define the specific teaching skills, not personalities, that most directly support student success based on the needs identified in Steps 1 and 2.

Core Question
Which teaching skills most directly support our students to learn successfully?

Learner Lens
Inquiry Prompt: Based on student feedback, which specific teacher actions do they report as having the most significant impact on their understanding?

Guiding the Conversation

- Focus on observable, improvable skills rather than personality traits or innate "charisma."
- Align identified skills directly to the learner needs surfaced in previous steps.
- Prioritize high-leverage practices that have a broad impact across all subject areas.
- Limit the scope: Ensure the list is realistic and actionable for every teacher in the building.

Deepening the Discussion
Use these prompts to move beyond surface agreement and test the clarity of your thinking.

- Which practices consistently support student understanding?
- What deliberate actions are evident in our strongest classrooms?
- If strengthened school-wide, which skills would have the greatest impact?

Threats to Clarity

- Creating an exhaustive, unmanageable "laundry list" of skills.

- Selecting skills that are disconnected from the evidence of learner needs.
- Defaulting to familiar initiatives because they are comfortable, rather than impactful.
- Naming strategies without defining what they look like in practice.

Pro-Tip: *Avoid "The Christmas Tree Effect." Don't try to hang every possible initiative on this framework. Focus on the 2 or 3 skills that will "move the needle" for your most vulnerable students. If it works for them, it works for everyone.*

Signs of Clarity

You are ready to move forward when:

- The teaching skills identified directly address the learner needs from Step 1.
- The skills are specific and observable, not personality traits or vague strategies.
- The list is focused and realistic (no more than 2-3 priorities).
- You can clearly explain why these skills will have the greatest impact.

If these conditions are not met, allocate further time to this step before progressing.

Priority High-Leverage Skills (Ranked)

List and rank the 2-3 most critical teaching skills identified by your team:

Step 4: Make Practice Visible

Purpose
To translate abstract skills into clear, observable classroom practices that any observer, and any student, would recognize.

Core Question
What would these teaching skills look like in action in our classrooms?

Learner Lens
Inquiry Prompt: If a student were filming a "Day in the Life" video, what specific teacher actions would they capture as "the moment I finally understood the concept"?

Guiding the Conversation

- Define Teacher Actions: What is specifically seen and heard? (e.g., "The teacher provides a worked example and leaves it on the board").
- Define Student Actions: What are students seen and heard doing? (e.g., "Students use the worked example to self-check their first three problems").
- Replace abstract language: Remove words like "engaging," "appropriate," or "effective" and replace them with precise descriptions of behavior.
- Ensure shared interpretation: Check that every leader in the room describes the practice in the same way.

Deepening the Discussion
Use these prompts to move beyond surface agreement and test the clarity of your thinking.

- What specific teacher actions demonstrate this skill?
- What student behaviors indicate the skill is working?
- How would we consistently describe this practice across classrooms?

Threats to Clarity

- Using vague descriptors such as "engaging" or "effective."
- Describing intentions ("Teacher wants students to...") rather than observable behaviors.

- Confusing compliance ("students being quiet") with evidence of learning ("students applying a skill").
- Allowing multiple interpretations of the same practice.

Signs of Clarity

You are ready to move forward when:

- Each high-leverage skill has been translated into specific teacher actions.
- You can describe what students would be doing or saying if the practice is working.
- Descriptions are concrete and free from vague terms like "engaging" or "effective".
- Different members of the team describe the practice in similar ways.

If these conditions are not met, allocate further time to this step before progressing.

The Observable Classroom

For each high-leverage skill from Step 3, describe the specific teacher and student actions that make it visible.

High-Leverage Skill	Observable Teacher Actions (What they do/say)	Observable Student Actions (What they do/say)
e.g., Checking for Understanding	*e.g., Asks "What is the most important word in that question and why?"*	*e.g., Explains their reasoning to a partner; uses 'thumbs up/down' to signal confidence.*

Step 5: Establish Consistency with Professional Judgement

Purpose
To determine the appropriate balance between shared expectations (the "floor") and contextual flexibility (the "ceiling").

Core Question
What level of consistency do our students need, and where is professional choice essential?

Guiding the Conversation

- Identify non-negotiable practices that support all learners.
- Clarify where adaptation for subject or learner needs is necessary and appropriate.
- Ensure alignment decisions are driven by student need, not teacher preference.
- Define expectations explicitly rather than leaving them implied.
- Frame consistency as support for students (reducing cognitive load), not control of teachers.

Deepening the Discussion
Use these prompts to move beyond surface agreement and test the clarity of your thinking.

- Which practices must be visible in every classroom to ensure a consistent student experience?
- Where should teachers adapt their practice for subject-specific or learner-specific needs?
- What inconsistency currently creates confusion for students as they move between periods?

Threats to Clarity

- Sliding into rigid standardization that stifles professional judgement.
- Avoiding alignment in the name of "teacher autonomy."
- Framing consistency as a compliance measure rather than student support.

- Leaving expectations ambiguous, leading to varied interpretations.

Pro-Tip: *Use the "Cognitive Load" test. If a student has to spend energy figuring out how a teacher wants them to participate because it changes every hour, that is energy not spent on the content. Consistency is a gift of time and focus to the student.*

Signs of Clarity

You are ready to move forward when:

- You have clearly defined which practices are non-negotiable in every classroom.
- You have clearly defined where professional judgement and adaptation are appropriate.
- Your decisions are grounded in student need, not teacher preference or convenience.
- You can explain how this balance provides consistency for students while respecting professional expertise.

If these conditions are not met, allocate further time to this step before progressing.

Agreed Non-Negotiables (The Student Experience)

List the practices that will be consistent in every classroom.

Areas for Contextual Adaptation (The Professional Choice)

List the areas where teachers will use their professional judgement to adapt practices.

Step 6: Connect Definition to Growth

Purpose
To ensure this shared definition isn't a poster on a wall, but a "living guide" that drives feedback, professional learning, and school improvement.

Core Question
How will this shared understanding support feedback, professional learning, and improvement over time?

Learner Lens
Inquiry Prompt: How will students experience the impact of these changes in their classrooms?

Guiding the Conversation

- Align observation processes so that every walk-through or observation looks for the practices defined in Step 4.
- Ensure feedback is evidence-based: Reference observable practices rather than personal interpretation or "gut feeling."
- Connect PL: Every professional learning session should link back to the high-leverage skills identified in Step 3.
- The Living Guide: Set specific dates to revisit this framework to ensure it still meets the evolving needs of the students.

Deepening the Discussion
Use these prompts to move beyond surface agreement and test the clarity of your thinking.

- How will feedback become more specific and actionable using this language?
- How will we monitor school-wide improvement in these specific skills?
- What structures will support collaborative refinement?

Threats to Clarity

- Treating the framework as a static compliance document.
- Allowing feedback to revert to opinion-based, subjective commentary.

- Disconnecting professional learning activities from the defined high-leverage skills.
- Failing to schedule and commit to revisiting and refining the framework over time.

Signs of Clarity

You are ready to move forward when:

- Feedback processes are clearly aligned to the practices defined in Step 4.
- Professional learning priorities connect directly to the identified high-leverage skills.
- There is a clear plan to revisit and refine this framework over time.
- You can explain how this work will improve student learning, not just teacher documentation.

If these conditions are not met, allocate further time to this step before progressing.

Implementation & Refinement Roadmap

Outline the key actions, timelines, and responsibilities for embedding and reviewing this framework.

Initial Implementation (Next 90 Days)

Mid-Year Review (Date: _____)

Annual Review & Evolution (Date: _____)