



# Enquiries of learning

The word ‘enquiry’ is defined as *‘a seeking for truth or knowledge’* or *‘seeking information through questioning’*.

An enquiry-based approach to learning therefore develops in young people the ability to ask questions, to research and generate useful knowledge, and to explore ways of answering the questions raised.

## Joined-up learning

In its delivery, enquiry-based learning should bring together different subject skills and knowledge and apply them through the projects being explored.

This approach leads to more discerning learners, to people who ask good questions. If we are to create a healthier, more sustainable future, we have to question and challenge the status quo of what we currently do and look for ways to improve it. That could be at a school or community level or even at a global level through projects that focus on issues that connect students around the world. When students learn in this way, it is, of course, likely to impact on their thinking and actions as they grow into adult life, too.

From our observations in schools, learning through enquiries is an extremely powerful and empowering way for students to learn. It motivates them to find out more. We can see that when learning is delivered in this way, the outcomes (providing the core skills and knowledge are secured and applied effectively through the learning process) can be outstanding. The challenge is getting the balance right between securing the skills and knowledge, and applying them in meaningful ways.

## Getting the timing right

In each year group, there is the opportunity to teach six enquiries of learning per year - one each half-term. These enquiries can be focused on projects linked to history, geography and science so that two history, two geography and two science projects are covered each year.

It is important to give some thought to what the right time of year is to teach each enquiry. For example, any enquiries linked to food growing may be planned for the summer months through to harvest-time. Bee and butterfly life cycles and the study of our local biodiversity may also be taught during the summer when plants and wildlife can be seen and identified. Conversely, projects about the Antarctic and Arctic may be studied during the colder winter months. If students are learning about Shackleton, they may find inspiration to write diaries of their adventures in Antarctica by getting out in the school grounds on a cold winter’s day with gloves and hats on! Learning about the stars and the solar system is well-suited to the winter, too, when it is darker and easier for students to see star constellations and planets in the night sky.

Thinking about what to teach when is a key part of making learning make sense.

## Capturing students’ imaginations

When approaching the enquiry question itself, it is important to ensure the question is phrased in a way that opens up a journey of exploration. If the enquiry question captures the students’ imaginations, they will naturally want to research and find out more. The question therefore needs very careful consideration.

In defining the enquiry question, it is always good to ask the students in the preceding weeks what they would like to learn about in relation to the enquiry. This helps generate further questions that can feed into the learning.