



TEACHING & LEARNING APPROACHES



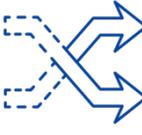
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Pre-Lesson

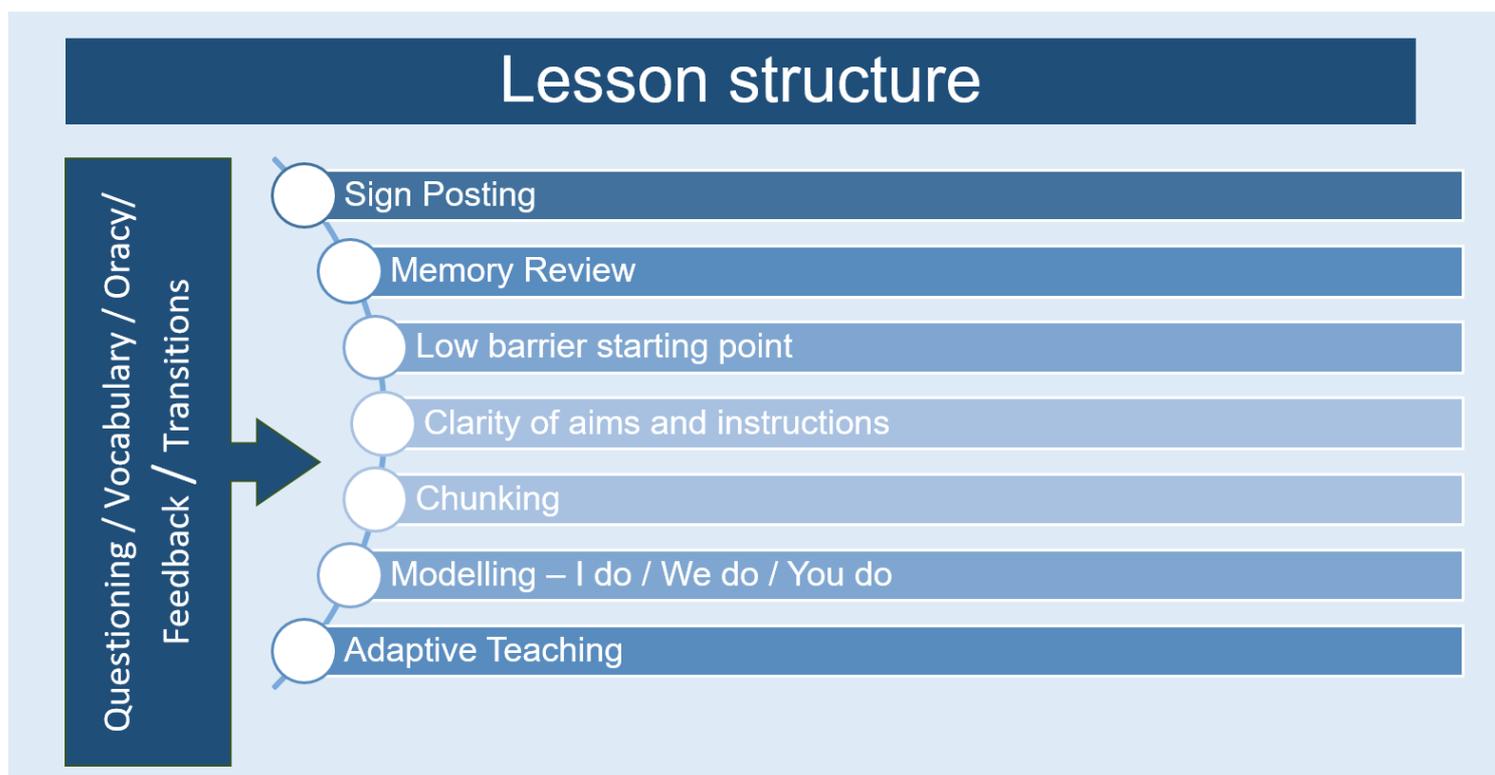
Before any lesson begins, the foundations for effective teaching and learning are already being laid. The classroom environment, our knowledge of pupils, and the expectations we set all shape how successfully learning will take place. By establishing consistent routines, thoughtful scheduling, and carefully planned transitions, we reduce uncertainty and create a climate where pupils feel safe, valued, and ready to engage. These pre-lesson strategies are not extras — they are essential building blocks that enable every child to access ambitious learning.

Classroom Environment		<p>A calm and organised classroom reduces distractions and creates a sense of safety. Pupils should know where to sit, where to find resources, and what is expected in the space. Displays and visuals should support learning, not overwhelm. Clear organisation means less wasted time and more energy for engagement. If the environment is chaotic, anxiety rises and learning is disrupted.</p>
Knowing Pupils Well		<p>Strong relationships and knowledge of pupils’ needs, strengths, and triggers are essential. Using pupil profiles, conversations with families, and shared staff knowledge helps anticipate difficulties before they arise. Recognising what motivates each pupil increases engagement and reduces conflict. When teachers know their pupils, support becomes proactive instead of reactive. Without this understanding, even well-planned lessons can miss the mark.</p>
Scheduling		<p>Scheduling is about clearly communicating the shape of the day and the structure of lessons so pupils know what to expect. Visual timetables, lesson signposting, and reminders of upcoming changes reduce anxiety and help pupils prepare mentally for what is coming. Advance warning of transitions, special events, or changes to routine is crucial for many learners with ASD or SEMH. This predictability supports calm, purposeful engagement. When scheduling is unclear, pupils may feel unsettled, leading to anxiety, avoidance, or behaviour difficulties.</p>

High Expectations		<p>Every pupil should experience ambitious goals and consistent belief in their ability to succeed. High expectations challenge pupils, raise aspirations, and help close attainment gaps. This doesn't mean ignoring barriers, but removing them so success is possible. When expectations are lowered, pupils disengage or internalise the idea that they cannot achieve. Getting this right signals that every learner matters.</p>
Consistent Routines		<p>Routines provide predictability and structure, helping pupils feel safe and reducing uncertainty. Entry routines, task structures, and clear endings set the tone for learning. Repeated use of routines frees up working memory for the actual content. Pupils with ASD or SEMH thrive on consistency, as it reduces anxiety. If routines are unclear or inconsistent, pupils may feel insecure and behaviour can deteriorate.</p>
Carefully Planned Transitions		<p>Transitions between tasks, lessons, or spaces can be difficult and anxiety-provoking. Planning them carefully ensures that pupils move calmly and purposefully. Clear signals, countdowns, and predictable steps help reduce stress. Structured transitions maximise learning time and maintain focus. When transitions are rushed or chaotic, anxiety rises, behaviour escalates, and valuable learning minutes are lost.</p>

Lesson Structure

Over the next section, you will find the ACER lesson structure broken down into a series of one-page guides. Each page provides a clear overview of a strategy, its key principles, and practical ways it can be applied in the classroom. These guides are designed to support teaching and learning, not to prescribe a rigid formula. Staff are not expected to use every element in every lesson, or to “shoehorn” strategies in where they are not needed. Instead, select the structural elements that will best support the learning and needs of your pupils in that moment, ensuring lessons remain purposeful, responsive, and effective.



Signposting

<p>Overview</p>		<p>Signposting is the practice of making learning pathways explicit so that pupils know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what is coming next. For pupils with SEND, particularly those with autism or SEMH needs, clear signposting reduces anxiety, increases engagement, and supports positive behaviours.</p>
<p>Benefits</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates predictability and reduces uncertainty. • Lowers anxiety by making transitions clear and manageable. • Builds trust between staff and pupils through transparent communication. • Improves engagement by showing purpose and relevance of tasks. • Supports emotional regulation by preventing unexpected changes. • Encourages independence as pupils learn to anticipate next steps.
<p>Implementation</p>		<p>Be consistent – always use the same visual/physical place to display the lesson sequence (board, screen, worksheet).</p> <p>Chunk the lesson – break learning into short, manageable stages. Visually show each stage and tick it off when complete.</p> <p>Use dual coding – pair simple visuals or symbols with text to aid understanding.</p> <p>Keep language simple – use short phrases like “Now”, “Next”, “Then”, “Finally”.</p> <p>Prepare for change – if something different is planned, give advance notice and a reason (e.g. “Today the hall is being used, so we’ll do PE outside”).</p> <p>Offer reassurance – explain that steps are achievable and celebrate small progress.</p> <p>Give agency – allow pupils to see how far through the sequence they are and how much is left.</p>
<p>Adaptive Teaching</p>		<p>Scaffold: Provide visual timetables, step-by-step checklists, or individual task cards.</p> <p>Scale: Reduce the number of steps shown at once for pupils who feel overwhelmed.</p> <p>Style: Use a mix of formats — visual schedules, verbal reminders, or individual prompts depending on pupil need.</p> <p>Synthesize: Connect the current activity to previous and future learning (“Last time we... Now we... Next we will...”).</p>
<p>ASD & SEMH FRIENDLY</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build in positive transitions — e.g. “Next is group work. Remember how well you worked with your partner yesterday?” • Include calm options — pupils can use a ‘pause card’ or request a short break if transitions feel difficult. • Avoid abrupt endings — give warnings before moving on (“Two more minutes, then we’ll finish this part”). • Keep tone encouraging, not directive, to reduce oppositional behaviours.

Do It Now / Memory Review

Overview		<p>The “Do It Now” task plays a crucial role in strategic knowledge retrieval, formative assessment, and responsive teaching. When implemented effectively, it sets the tone for the lesson, engages students immediately, and ensures that valuable class time is put to good use. By making this a consistent habit, pupils know what to expect at the start of every lesson.</p>
Benefits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages immediate action and reduces procrastination. • Provides a predictable and structured start to lessons. • Builds confidence by using short, achievable tasks. • Improves focus and concentration by reducing distractions. • Promotes independence through tasks that pupils can complete with minimal teacher input. • Creates a calm transition into learning, helping pupils settle.
Implementation		<p>Establish a routine – make this an expected and consistent part of every lesson, in the same place (e.g. top left of the board or first page of worksheet).</p> <p>Connect tasks with retrieval practice to maximise lesson time for new learning. Avoid multiple activities at once.</p> <p>Keep it purposeful and focused so pupils can begin promptly.</p> <p>Give clear, step-by-step instructions in both written and verbal form. Where possible, include visual prompts, checklists, or an example.</p> <p>Manage complexity – keep tasks short and achievable within the time given. Use a timer so pupils know how long they have.</p> <p>Allow processing time – pause after giving instructions before expecting answers.</p> <p>Plan for independence – tasks should be designed so pupils can succeed without additional teacher explanation, but support tools (e.g. word banks, sentence starters, worked examples) should be available</p>
Adaptive Teaching		<p>Scaffold: Provide structured prompts such as sentence starters, key words, visuals, checklists, or worked examples to make the task approachable.</p> <p>Scale: Adjust the length or number of questions. Break larger tasks into smaller steps and allow extra processing time to avoid overwhelm.</p> <p>Style: Offer different ways to show understanding, such as writing, drawing, matching activities, multiple-choice, or verbal explanation.</p> <p>Synthesize: Explicitly link the “Do It Now” task to prior learning with a clear recap or linking question (e.g. “Yesterday we learned..., today we will use that to...”).</p>
Autism & SEMH		<p>Keep tasks predictable in format so pupils know what to expect each time.</p> <p>Use clear, concise instructions supported by visuals or models.</p> <p>Start with low-barrier questions to create early success and raise self-esteem.</p> <p>Provide options for pupils to respond in different ways (writing, pointing, selecting).</p> <p>Allow extra processing time before expecting an answer.</p> <p>Avoid time pressure — reassure pupils that accuracy matters more than speed.</p> <p>Positively acknowledge effort and engagement, not just correct answers.</p>

Low Barrier Starting Point

Overview		<p>A low barrier starter is a short, accessible activity at the beginning of a lesson that all pupils can attempt successfully. For pupils with SEND, particularly those with autism or SEMH needs, this helps reduce anxiety, avoids negative behaviours caused by early frustration, and provides a calm, purposeful start to learning. By ensuring early success, these tasks raise self-esteem and create a positive mindset for the rest of the lesson.</p>
Benefits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates an inclusive entry point to the lesson. • Reduces anxiety by ensuring the first task is achievable. • Builds confidence and motivation through early success, raising self-esteem. • Helps pupils settle and transition calmly into learning. • Provides immediate engagement and focus without overwhelming demands. • Encourages a positive cycle of effort → success → motivation.
Implementation		<p>Keep it simple – short, clear, single-step tasks (e.g. matching, filling blanks, multiple-choice).</p> <p>Draw on prior knowledge – use retrieval practice from previous lessons, but frame it in an achievable way (e.g. word banks, sentence starters, scaffolded recall).</p> <p>Make instructions visual – include an example, use visuals or symbols alongside text.</p> <p>Plan for independence – design tasks that pupils can complete without heavy teacher explanation.</p> <p>Allow processing time – don't rush; give pupils a chance to think before expecting responses.</p> <p>Celebrate effort – reinforce positively that pupils have started well.</p>
Adaptive Teaching		<p>Scaffold: Provide prompts like key words, diagrams, or sentence starters.</p> <p>Scale: Reduce the number of questions or break them into smaller chunks.</p> <p>Style: Offer alternatives — writing, drawing, circling, or verbal responses.</p> <p>Synthesize: Link to new learning by bridging prior knowledge with what's coming next (“We’re starting with this idea because it helps us with today’s lesson on...”).</p>
Autism & SEMH Friendly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid starters that feel like a test or high-stakes recall — use accessible, success-focused tasks. • Use positively framed prompts (“What do you already know about...?” rather than “What did you forget?”). • Provide clear, predictable instructions supported by visuals, symbols, or worked examples. • Allow for choice where possible (e.g. “You can answer Question 1 or 2 to start”) to give a sense of control. • Keep sensory load low (simple layout, minimal distractions on the page/board). • Build in regulation options — a calm start, with the option to take a short pause if overwhelmed. • Celebrate small successes early to promote confidence and positive behaviour.

Clarity of aims and instructions

Overview		<p>Clarity of aims and instructions means pupils always know <i>what they are learning, why it matters, and what they need to do next</i>. For pupils with SEND, especially those with autism or SEMH needs, unclear instructions can create anxiety, disengagement, or challenging behaviour. Clear, consistent communication helps pupils feel safe, focused, and motivated.</p>
Benefits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces uncertainty and lowers anxiety. • Builds trust by making expectations explicit. • Improves engagement by showing purpose and relevance. • Helps pupils to work independently without repeated reminders. • Raises self-esteem through achievable and well-structured tasks. • Prevents frustration or behaviour issues caused by misunderstanding.
Implementation		<p>State the aim clearly – use pupil-friendly language (e.g. “Today we are learning how to...”).</p> <p>Keep instructions short and simple – break tasks into single steps.</p> <p>Use dual coding – combine spoken, written, and visual prompts.</p> <p>Check understanding – ask pupils to show or explain what they need to do before starting.</p> <p>Give time cues – let pupils know how long they have and show a visual timer.</p> <p>Repeat and reinforce – display instructions where they can be checked at any time.</p>
Adaptive Teaching		<p>Scaffold: Provide step-by-step checklists, sentence starters, or visual aids alongside instructions.</p> <p>Scale: Reduce the number of steps or simplify the language used.</p> <p>Style: Offer written, verbal, or pictorial instructions depending on pupil needs.</p> <p>Synthesize: Link today’s aim to yesterday’s learning (“Yesterday we practised..., today we are using that to...”).</p>
Autism & SEMH Friendly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame aims positively • Provide choices in how instructions can be followed (e.g. written list or visual sequence). • Build in processing time so pupils don’t feel rushed. • Avoid last-minute changes; if changes are unavoidable, explain calmly and give reassurance. • Use consistent phrasing and routines so pupils know what to expect. • Praise pupils specifically for following instructions well, reinforcing that success builds confidence. • Check understanding at eye level. • Chunk into small groups of instructions for those that are overwhelmed.

Chunking

Overview		<p>Chunking is the process of breaking learning and tasks into smaller, more manageable parts. For pupils with SEND, especially those with autism or SEMH needs, large or complex tasks can feel overwhelming and may lead to anxiety, disengagement, or negative behaviour. By presenting information and activities in short, clear sections, pupils can achieve success step by step, building confidence and independence.</p>
Benefits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces cognitive load and prevents overwhelm. • Provides a sense of early success, raising self-esteem. • Improves focus and concentration by tackling one part at a time. • Supports memory by making information easier to retain and recall. • Encourages independence through clear, structured steps. • Lowers anxiety by creating predictability in learning.
Implementation		<p>Break tasks into stages – present one instruction or part of the task at a time.</p> <p>Use visual organisers – checklists, flowcharts, or numbered steps.</p> <p>Model each stage – demonstrate what to do before pupils try it themselves.</p> <p>Give time markers – use a timer or clear signals to show how long each chunk will last.</p> <p>Review progress often – pause between chunks to check understanding and celebrate success.</p> <p>Keep transitions calm – provide short breaks between chunks if needed.</p>
Adaptive Teaching		<p>Scaffold: Provide step-by-step checklists, sentence starters, or visual aids alongside instructions.</p> <p>Scale: Reduce the number of steps or simplify the language used.</p> <p>Style: Offer written, verbal, or pictorial instructions depending on pupil needs.</p> <p>Synthesize: Link today’s aim to yesterday’s learning (“Yesterday we practised..., today we are using that to...”).</p>
Autism & SEMH Friendly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present one step at a time, with clear visual or verbal cues, so pupils don’t feel overwhelmed. • Use numbering, colour coding, or symbols to make the order of steps obvious and predictable. • Allow breaks between chunks if pupils show signs of fatigue, anxiety, or frustration. • Provide reassurance when moving from one step to the next, celebrating completion before introducing new content. • Keep transitions between chunks calm and clearly signalled (e.g. countdowns or a visual timer). • Reinforce that pupils don’t need to remember everything at once — they can focus on one part at a time. • Offer a way for pupils to check back on earlier steps (visual checklists, task cards) to reduce reliance on memory.

Modelling

Overview		<p>Modelling is the process of showing pupils how to complete a task before asking them to try it. Using the “I do – We do – You do” approach gives pupils clear guidance, shared practice, and independent application. For pupils with autism or SEMH needs, modelling reduces anxiety, builds confidence through guided steps, and prevents disengagement by making expectations visible and achievable.</p>
Benefits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides clarity by showing exactly what success looks like. • Builds pupil confidence through guided practice. • Reduces mistakes and frustration by breaking tasks into supported stages. • Encourages independence gradually and safely. • Reinforces positive learning behaviours by working together. • Creates early success that raises self-esteem.
Implementation		<p>I do – Teacher models the task step by step, talking through thought processes. Use visuals and worked examples.</p> <p>We do – Teacher and pupils complete an example together, with guided questioning and prompts. Celebrate small successes here.</p> <p>You do – Pupils attempt a similar task independently, with scaffolds in place for those who need them.</p> <p>Errors - Model errors and corrections openly to show that mistakes are normal and valuable for learning.</p> <p>Check and feedback – Pause after each stage to check understanding and give supportive feedback.</p> <p>Fade support gradually – remove scaffolds step by step as pupils gain confidence.</p>
Adaptive Teaching		<p>Scaffold: Provide sentence starters, diagrams, or partial worked examples to support independence.</p> <p>Scale: Adjust the size of the independent task depending on pupil readiness.</p> <p>Style: Model using different formats (visual, written, verbal, physical demonstration).</p> <p>Synthesize: Link modelling to prior learning (“We practised this yesterday, let’s build on it together”).</p>
Autism & SEMH Friendly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep language during modelling simple and consistent. Avoid idioms or abstract phrases. • Use clear visual prompts (step lists, diagrams, colour coding) alongside spoken explanations. • Allow extra processing time between stages. • Reinforce effort and participation as much as accuracy to build confidence. • Manage transitions carefully – signal clearly when moving from “We do” to “You do.” • Include deliberate errors and corrections during modelling to normalise mistakes as part of learning, reducing fear of failure. • Provide calm reassurance that mistakes are expected and helpful. • Offer pupils the option to check back with the model during independent work.

Transitions

<p>Overview</p>		<p>Transitions (moving between activities, lessons, or spaces) can be a source of stress for many pupils, particularly those with SEND. Carefully planning transitions helps reduce anxiety, supports focus, and ensures pupils remain calm and ready to learn.</p>
<p>Benefits</p>		<p>Reduces anxiety by making changes predictable. Helps pupils move calmly between tasks or environments. Maintains focus and reduces wasted learning time. Builds independence through routine and clarity. Improves behaviour by preventing uncertainty and frustration. Raises self-esteem by supporting pupils to manage change successfully.</p>
<p>Implementation</p>		<p>Use consistent cues – always signal transitions the same way (visual, verbal, or auditory). Give advance warning – provide countdowns (“Two more minutes... one more minute...”). Keep instructions clear and short – explain only the next step. Make expectations visible – show what happens now, next, and later (visual timetable). Structure movement – assign roles, routes, or seats to reduce confusion. Calm the environment – reduce noise or sensory load before moving on.</p>
<p>Adaptive Teaching</p>		<p>Scaffold: Provide checklists, visual prompts, or peer partners to support movement. Scale: Break transitions into smaller steps (e.g. pack away, stand up, line up). Style: Offer alternative prompts (visual symbols, verbal cues, timers). Synthesize: Link transitions to prior routines (“Just like yesterday, after maths we’ll go to assembly”). Solidify: Practise key transitions repeatedly until pupils are confident. Safety: Ensure safe, calm movement between spaces, particularly for pupils with sensory or mobility needs.</p>
<p>Autism & SEMH Friendly</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare pupils for changes in advance; avoid last-minute surprises. • Use positive framing (“Next we get to...”) rather than abrupt commands. • Provide choice where possible (e.g. which resource to carry). • Allow extra processing or calming time before moving on. • Model and rehearse transitions so pupils know what to expect. • Normalise difficulties — remind pupils it’s okay if transitions feel tricky and celebrate effort.

Questioning

<p>Overview</p>		<p>Effective questioning helps teachers assess understanding, challenge thinking, and keep all pupils engaged in learning. A <i>no-hands up</i> approach ensures every pupil is accountable for their learning and creates an inclusive classroom where everyone expects to participate.</p>
<p>Benefits</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes active engagement for all pupils, not just the confident few. • Encourages equitable participation and reduces learned passivity. • Provides teachers with accurate feedback on whole-class understanding. • Builds confidence and resilience by normalising mistakes as part of learning. • Reduces anxiety for some pupils, as questions are shared fairly and predictably.
<p>Implementation</p>		<p>No hands up: Select pupils to answer using a fair system (e.g. name sticks, random generator, teacher choice) so every child is included.</p> <p>Think time: Allow pupils time to process the question before expecting an answer.</p> <p>Cold calling with warmth: Select pupils by name, with supportive tone and positive framing.</p> <p>Scaffold responses: Offer prompts, sentence starters, or multiple-choice options to support those who need it.</p> <p>Follow-up questions: Use “Why?”, “How do you know?”, or “Can you add to that?” to extend thinking.</p> <p>Check for understanding: Ask several pupils the same question to gauge class-wide grasp, not just one answer.</p>
<p>Adaptive Teaching</p>		<p>Scaffold: Provide structured ways to respond (sentence stems, visual cues, word banks).</p> <p>Scale: Vary the complexity of questions, starting with accessible prompts and building up to higher-order thinking.</p> <p>Style: Accept different formats of answers (spoken, written on mini-whiteboards, visual).</p> <p>Synthesize: Link questions back to prior learning to reinforce connections.</p> <p>Solidify: Repeat key questions over time to embed core knowledge.</p> <p>Safety: Ensure pupils feel safe to attempt answers — value effort as much as accuracy</p>
<p>Autism & SEMH Friendly</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advance signals for some pupils who may need extra processing time (“I’ll come to you next”). • Keep language clear and avoid overly abstract phrasing. • Praise risk-taking and effort to reduce fear of failure. • Manage turn-taking calmly and fairly to prevent frustration or anxiety. • Allow alternative response methods (mini-whiteboard, pointing to options) for pupils who find verbal answers difficult.

Providing Feedback

<p>Overview</p>		<p>Feedback is most effective when it is timely, specific, and focused on moving learning forward. It should highlight what pupils have done well, identify clear next steps, and be delivered in a way that motivates and builds self-esteem. Adaptive feedback ensures that every pupil, including those with SEND, receives guidance they can act upon.</p>
<p>Benefits</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforces effort and progress, raising confidence. • Provides clarity on what success looks like. • Guides pupils to improve and refine their work. • Encourages independence and self-regulation. • Supports pupils in seeing mistakes as a natural part of learning.
<p>Implementation</p>		<p>Timely feedback: Provide feedback as close to the task as possible, so pupils can apply it immediately.</p> <p>Specific praise: Focus on precise elements (“You explained your reason clearly”) rather than general (“Good job”).</p> <p>Actionable steps: Give one or two clear improvements to work on, not a long list.</p> <p>Balance: Combine recognition of strengths with constructive next steps.</p> <p>Use models: Show strong examples and highlight features to emulate.</p> <p>Variety of methods: Feedback can be verbal, written, peer-to-peer, or self-assessment.</p>
<p>Adaptive Teaching</p>		<p>Scaffold: Provide structured improvement prompts (sentence starters, checklists).</p> <p>Scale: Adjust the level of feedback detail — from single-step prompts to deeper analysis.</p> <p>Style: Deliver feedback through different formats (spoken, written, visual symbols).</p> <p>Synthesize: Link feedback to prior targets and future learning.</p> <p>Solidify: Revisit previous feedback to check progress over time.</p> <p>Safety: Frame feedback positively to maintain trust and reduce anxiety.</p>
<p>Autism & SEMH Friendly</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep feedback language clear, simple, and unambiguous. • Avoid overwhelming pupils — limit feedback to one or two actionable steps. • Use positive framing to reduce fear of failure. • Give pupils processing time to absorb feedback before expecting changes. • Provide consistent routines (e.g. same marking symbols, visual cues) so feedback feels predictable. • Celebrate small improvements to build confidence and resilience.

Linked StepLab Targets for teachers

Strand	StepLab Area of Focus
Signposting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Routines Establish an entry routine Plan lesson timings
Do It Now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a Do It Now Task Streamline starter distribution Begin and end lessons with key knowledge
Clarity of aims and instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give clear directions Give memorable explanations Explain for deeper understanding Make objectives manageable Make objectives measurable
Chunking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set achievable sub-goals Increase the challenge Plan check points Prioritise independent practice
Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Modelling as a scaffold Prepare a model Explain the purpose of the model Narrate the model Live model the process Live model improvement Form a collaborative live model Fade modelling scaffolds Use checks for understanding whilst modelling
Adaptive Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add challenge and scaffolds while questioning Fade modelling scaffolds Use paired talk with Kagan structures Tailor tasks and scaffolds
Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use accountable questioning Add challenge and scaffolds while questioning Use paired talk with Kagan structures Use group discussion Use choral response in classes where appropriate
Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Script transitions Positively narrate entry Plan lesson timings
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a culture of feedback Specify success and plan for feedback Check-whole class understanding Circulate to check for understanding Give individual feedback Give whole-class feedback

