

Ark Curriculum+

English Mastery

Geography Mastery

Mathematics Mastery

Science Mastery

Enhancing teaching through subject-specific CPD: A practical guide for UK schools

Introduction

Effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is one of the most powerful levers for improving teaching and learning. Research consistently shows that CPD works best when it is sustained over time, subject-specific, and tailored to the real-world contexts of teachers and schools. This guide explores what makes CPD effective and illustrates how a partnership with Ark Curriculum Plus (AC+) exemplifies these principles in action.

What makes CPD effective?

1. Sustained over time

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) emphasises that the most impactful CPD is not a one-off workshop, but a sustained programme over weeks or months, with multiple opportunities for learning, application, and reflection:

> "Effective professional development is sustained over time, with repeated opportunities for teachers to revisit and apply learning."
> (EEF, 2021)

✓ AC+ CPD Provides Sustained and Structured Learning

Rather than a one-off event, CPD from AC+ is an integrated, multi-year process. Teachers engage in professional development that builds over time, enabling deep understanding and behavioural change. Our programmes include:

- **Initial Induction Training:** Comprehensive onboarding introduces teachers to the curriculum structure, pedagogy, planning tools and resources, to ensure consistent, confident delivery from the outset. We offer teachers the choice to access this in-person, live online, or on-demand.
- **Ongoing CPD Programmes:** Over the course of each academic year, teachers take part in structured sessions focused on subject pedagogy, curriculum planning, assessment and responsive teaching.
- **On-demand CPD Library:** An extensive collection of short, high-quality training videos supports just-in-time learning for time-pressed staff. Teachers can prepare for lessons, revisit key topics, explore specific challenges, or deepen their own subject understanding flexibly.
- **Collaborative planning:** We include guidance to help teaching teams plan together. There's content that models best practice in lesson delivery, and tools to encourage reflection on classroom experience and prompt peer discussion.

> "The CPD that we've had from the AC+ team has been brilliant.
>
> CRAIG DEWHURST HEAD OF HUMANITIES
> **ST AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY CATHOLIC ACADEMY**

2. Subject-specific and immediately actionable

Subject-specific CPD supports teachers in developing both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, enabling them to teach more effectively within their discipline. According to the Geographical Association:

> "Teachers need subject-specific CPD to maintain and update their understanding of curriculum developments, pedagogy, and subject knowledge."
> (Geographical Association, 2021)

Backing that up, the NCETM says:

> "CPD is most effective when it is rooted in the subject and focused on how pupils learn that subject"
> (NCETM, 2021)

In our experience of delivering subject-specific CPD over the past decade, teachers consistently tell us that they appreciate **tangible takeaways**. They value being able to take something they've learned in a training session and use it immediately in their classroom. We find this helps **motivate teachers**. They build confidence by trying new things straightaway and seeing the impact on pupils, so they feel **empowered to embed new practice**.

✓ AC+ CPD has Subject Expertise at the Core

Our CPD is always designed and delivered by subject experts with deep pedagogical knowledge and curriculum insight. The content is explicitly tailored to the unique requirements of each subject – English, maths, science and geography.

- Professional development draws directly from curriculum content and builds the **specific pedagogical knowledge** needed to teach it effectively.
- It helps all teachers, whatever their experience level, make the best use of the resources included in our programmes, to support **high-impact teaching**.
- **Exemplars, modelling and discussion** all reference **real lessons** and the learning materials that teachers will use in class, so new strategies can be implemented immediately.

> "Science Mastery training is in my opinion the best training I get from anywhere. I always come out of it bursting with ideas and often extremely excited to try new things.
>
> LIYANA WARBURTON KS5 CHEMISTRY LEAD
> **KING SOLOMON ACADEMY**

> "The CPD package is just incredible. The support you get is second to none.
>
> TERESA GARSIDE LEAD PRACTITIONER FOR MATHS
> **THE KEMNAL ACADEMIES TRUST**

3. Contextualised to school needs

The DfE's Independent Review of Teachers' Professional Development (Phase 2) underscores the importance of CPD being aligned with the unique priorities and challenges of each school (DfE, 2024). Programmes that lack this alignment often fail to embed lasting change. The Association for Science Education also highlights that effective CPD "responds to the unique circumstances, priorities, and strengths of each school" (ASE, 2021).

AC+ CPD is Tailored to School and Teacher Needs

Schools can access our CPD through a range of delivery models – on-demand, live online sessions, or in-school – and this includes options for bespoke sessions to meet each school's individual needs. This personalisation is made possible by the **close working relationship** between each school and their dedicated subject expert.

- **Subject experts** act as CPD coaches and partners, providing planning support, offering advice, delivering mentoring and co-creating CPD tailored to emerging staff and student needs.
- Our visits to partner schools include **joint learning walks** to review the impact of the CPD, and to build future training plans.
- The CPD is **designed with busy teachers in mind**. It is built into our programmes – so it's not a bolt on and doesn't add significantly to teacher workload.
- Importantly, everything focuses on **practical strategies** for immediate classroom use.

> "The professional development we've received has been the key to why [Mathematics Mastery] has been so successful so quickly in our school.
>
> LAUREN HARRISON TEACHER AND MATHS CHAMPION
> **ALDERMOOR FARM PRIMARY SCHOOL**

> "Our teachers are so much more confident in what they are teaching, standards across the school have been raised immensely and our children are really engaged in their learning.
>
> MICHELLE FORREST HEADTEACHER
> **HOLY SPIRIT CATHOLIC ACADEMY**

Our Programme Leadership CPD

When you partner with us, your Programme Leader (usually the subject lead or Head of Department) embarks on a **comprehensive CPD journey** (outlined below). This has been carefully devised to strengthen subject leadership, deepen pedagogical expertise and embed a culture of continuous improvement. We aim to design every training session to cover each of the EEF-identified top-level mechanisms that drive effective CPD:

A. Build knowledge
B. Motivate teachers
C. Develop teaching techniques
D. Embed practice

Source: EEF (2021)

The fourteen specific mechanisms that sit underneath these are typically addressed over each year of the programme and over the longer cycle.

The journey

YEAR 1
ESTABLISHING FOUNDATIONS

- **Induction training:** A structured onboarding programme introduces the subject lead to the full programme.
- **Live termly CPD workshops:** Focus on practical strategies for high-quality teaching.
- **On-demand CPD:** Access to a rich library of short video modules supports ongoing development.
- **Dedicated support:** The subject expert begins working closely with the Programme Leader, offering advice, observing lessons, and supporting implementation.

YEAR 2
DEEPENING PRACTICE AND DRIVING IMPROVEMENT

- **Leadership Development:** Focused training on leading a team, building subject knowledge across a department, and mentoring others.
- **Sustained Support:** Continued access to the on-demand CPD library and their dedicated subject expert, who now acts as a strategic partner.
- **Building Capacity:** Programme Leader continues to support the development of other teachers, embedding a self-sustaining CPD culture for their subject in the school.

YEAR 3
LEADING AND SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE

- **Advanced CPD sessions:** Deep dives into responsive teaching, assessment practices, and leading subject improvement.
- **Bespoke CPD:** Programme Leader and subject expert co-design training, for their school's evolving needs.
- **Mentoring and Coaching:** Regular coaching sessions build the Programme Leader's leadership capacity and support strategic planning.
- **Impact Reviews:** Mid-year and end-of-year reflections help assess impact and plan next steps.

Top tips for effective CPD

Do:

- Invest in long-term, cumulative CPD programmes.
- Ensure CPD is grounded in specific subjects and key phases.
- Align CPD with school-wide priorities and classroom realities.
- Include follow-up coaching and collaborative reflection.
- Empower teachers with immediately actionable strategies.

Don't:

- Rely on standalone, one-off INSET days.
- Offer generic CPD with no classroom context.
- View CPD as a compliance exercise.
- Ignore the needs of experienced or part-time teachers.
- Assume CPD is effective without measuring impact.

Conclusion

The most impactful CPD empowers teachers to grow professionally in a way that directly improves classroom practice. It should be:

- Sustained over time
- Deeply subject-specific
- Practical and actionable
- Tailored to school and teacher needs

The AC+ model of CPD is closely aligned with national best practice and research. Our approach ensures professional development training is not just attended but truly **embedded in teaching practice**.

References

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Speak with our team to explore how we can provide best practice subject-specific CPD in your school:

Book a call

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