



Evidence Based
Education

THE GREAT TEACHING TOOLKIT



What happens when teachers focus deliberately on improvement?

A report from the summer '26 Great Teaching Toolkit Questioning Challenge

Executive summary

The Summer '26 Great Teaching Questioning Challenge brought together 558 teachers from 80 schools to explore how focused, evidence-informed professional learning can improve classroom questioning.

Key findings (from 147 surveyed teachers)

- 97% reported improvements in their questioning practice.
- 98% were confident those improvements positively impacted pupils' learning.
- 80% found the professional learning manageable alongside their existing workload.
- 93% said continuing this kind of professional learning would be valuable.
- The most commonly reported classroom changes were:
 - Increased student participation
 - More students contributing responses
 - Better insight into student understanding



Introduction

Teachers know that professional development matters. But too often, the CPD they experience still does not feel close enough to the real work of their day-to-day teaching, or to the students who need great teaching the most.

In 2025, the Teacher Development Trust's report, *Teacher Development: The CPD Landscape in 2025*, highlighted to us all the scale of this challenge. Over a third of respondents - **39%** - reported that CPD had not clearly improved their ability to perform their job. Where CPD was seen as less effective, respondents described it as lacking relevance, giving little professional agency, lacking follow-up, and increasing workload pressures. Where CPD had the greatest impact, it was described as relevant, tailored to context, collaborative and reflective.

This matters because effective, inclusive classroom practice cannot be improved sustainably without better professional learning than that reported to the TDT. Teachers need professional learning that helps them build their knowledge and skill, notice barriers to learning, adapt their teaching to reduce those barriers, check whether their adaptations are working, and refine practice over time.

There is a better way to do professional learning: focused, evidence-informed, connected to classroom reality, manageable for teachers, and useful for strengthening inclusive teaching.

The Summer '26 Great Teaching Toolkit Questioning Challenge was designed as one example of what this can look like in practice.

Participating teacher:

"I didn't realise I needed to work on my questioning until I started this. It's very interesting how valuable a positive and productive atmosphere is in encouraging the pupils to think. I guess I've been so busy rushing through things to never stop and think: 'Are my pupils thinking?'"

Great questioning is one of the most powerful ways teachers can activate students' thinking and check for understanding. But it is also an inclusion issue. Questioning reveals who is participating, who is opting out, who is copying, who is waiting for others to think, who needs more preparation, and who may be present in the room but peripheral to the intellectual life of the lesson.

In the Great Teaching Toolkit, questioning involves using questions and dialogue to promote elaboration, elicit student thinking, get responses from all students, and use assessment evidence to guide what happens next.



The Challenge gave participating teachers a structured way to work on this important area of practice. Teachers selected a goal, explored practical techniques, tried them in their classrooms, reflected on their practice, and used the GTT platform to support their development over time.

Across a few weeks from April to June 2026, the Challenge engaged teachers across a wide range of schools:

- **495 new users** registered from **80 schools**
- **63 existing GTT users** were also invited to join
- New users logged into the platform **2,552 times**
- They made **1,505 visits to technique pages** and **1,306 visits to other resources**

Teachers learned about and adopted practical questioning techniques including multiple-choice questions, cold calling, hinge questions, exit tickets, statements as alternatives to questions, free recall and show me boards. The most commonly-selected goals were to use questioning to assess student thinking, use questioning to promote student learning, and design effective questions.

What did the teachers tell us?

At the end of the Challenge, **147 participants** completed a post-challenge survey and agreed for their data to be used in reporting.

Among these post-challenge survey respondents:

- **97%** reported that their questioning practice had improved
- **98%** were confident or very confident that their improvements had had a positive impact on students' learning
- **80%** said the weekly commitment was manageable or very manageable
- **93%** said continuing this kind of professional learning over time would be valuable or very valuable
- **91%** said they would use the GTT if their school had access

Teachers also reported noticing practical changes in their classrooms. The most commonly-reported improvements were:

- **Increased student participation**
- **More students contributing responses**
- **Better insight into student understanding**
- **Deeper or more extended student answers**
- **Improved classroom discussion**



These are not just “nice to have” changes. They are central to inclusive teaching. More students participating means fewer students are allowed to disappear from the learning process. More students contributing means the teacher gets better information about who understands, who is unsure, and who needs support. Deeper answers and better discussion mean more students are being invited into meaningful learning, not simply completing tasks on the edge of the lesson.

Participating teacher:

“I have been focussing on ensuring that all children are active learners, including pupil premium and SEN children”.

Why this kind of professional learning matters

The Questioning Challenge reflects a broader conviction behind the Great Teaching Toolkit: **if professional learning does not build expertise, it probably is not school improvement.**

Professional learning should not be treated as a bolt-on. It should be part of the core work of school improvement, because improvement happens when the quality of classroom interactions improves: when teachers ask better questions, create better inclusive conditions for learning, respond better to students’ thinking, and help more young people learn more.

This is also increasingly reflected in external expectations of school leadership. Ofsted’s *State-funded school inspection toolkit* places professional learning and expertise within leadership and governance. It says inspectors consider whether leaders have a coherent professional learning programme for all staff, rooted in purposeful collaboration, focused on building collective expertise, and enabling expert teaching across subjects and phases. At the expected standard, professional learning should be evidence-informed, high quality, designed to build expertise, include planned opportunities to apply and embed practice, and be supported by protected time. At the strong standard, leaders develop a highly effective culture of professional learning and expertise, informed by the best available evidence and matched to whole-school, team and individual needs.

This matters because professional learning is one of the most powerful ways effective leaders build the capacity of their school. It helps staff understand priorities, work together on the right things, develop expertise, evaluate what is changing, and improve students’ experiences over time.

And it is particularly important for inclusion in its broadest sense. Inclusion is not lower challenge. It is high expectations made achievable through high support. It is not about removing students from ambitious learning; it is about building better bridges into it.



Participating teacher:

"Active learning has soared; every child now thinks because anyone might be asked. Engagement is high. Previously silent students now explain their halving strategies with confidence".

Questioning is one of those bridges. Used well, it can help teachers:

- **expect every learner to think**
- **prepare students before public contribution**
- **surface misunderstanding early**
- **protect students' dignity when answers are incomplete**
- **adapt teaching in response to evidence**
- **notice whose barriers are reducing, and whose are not**

The EEF's guidance on effective professional development makes the point that high-quality PD should help teachers build knowledge, stay motivated, develop teaching techniques and embed practice through mechanisms such as goal setting, feedback, modelling, rehearsal, action planning and context-specific repetition. It also emphasises the importance of implementation: professional development needs to fit the school context, align with priorities, have leadership support, and be feasible within teachers' busy routines.

The Questioning Challenge was designed to reflect these principles. It gave teachers:

- **A clear focus:** improving questioning
- **An inclusive purpose:** increasing access, participation and contribution
- **A practical route in:** specific techniques to explore and try
- **A classroom connection:** application in live teaching, not just reflection outside it
- **A feedback loop:** self-reflection and evidence to support next steps
- **A manageable structure:** professional learning that fits into the normal flow of school life
- **A leadership connection:** a model of professional learning that can help schools build collective expertise, support purposeful collaboration, and understand whether professional learning is making a difference

This matters because teachers do not need more professional development that simply adds activity. They need professional learning that helps them make better decisions, improve classroom interactions, reduce barriers, and build expertise that travels with them into future lessons, classes and years of their career.



What are we learning from the Questioning Challenge?

The findings from the Summer '26 Questioning Challenge are encouraging.

They show that teachers voluntarily engaged with focused, practical professional learning through the GTT. They found the time commitment manageable. They reported improvements in their questioning practice. And they noticed changes in classroom interactions that matter for inclusion: more participation, more students contributing, deeper answers, better discussion, and better insight into students' understanding.

Among the **206 participants who completed more than one self-reflection**, average endorsement ratings increased for almost every item. These changes were statistically significant for all but one item, though generally small in real terms which is unsurprising for PL undertaken over such a short period.

All of this shows us promising evidence that teachers engaged well with the GTT, valued the experience, and reported meaningful changes in their questioning practice, classroom interactions and inclusive participation.

What next?

The Questioning Challenge focused on just one element of great teaching. Discover how the Great Teaching Toolkit supports sustained professional learning across the full Model for Great Teaching, helping teachers build knowledge, skill and professional judgement over time.

Find out more at: evidencebased.education/great-teaching-toolkit

Evidence note for publication

Findings are based on platform engagement data, teacher self-reflections and post-challenge survey responses from the Summer '26 Great Teaching Toolkit Questioning Challenge. They should be interpreted as evidence of engagement, perceived value and self-reported improvement, rather than as causal evidence of impact on pupil outcomes.