

Top 10 questions teachers are asked at job interviews

Headteachers share what questions they ask when recruiting new staff – and what answers they hope to hear.

When evaluating a lesson, candidates must show that they can be self-critical, but also recognise when things go well. Photograph: Martin Godwin.

Which is more important, teaching or learning? If you saw a fellow teacher out buying fruit in the market with a sixth-form student, what would you do? How might the current political climate affect your teaching?

When we asked readers what questions they'd been asked at job interviews, the responses we received were testament to the variety of skills and responsibilities that teachers have. From providing pastoral care to pedagogical expertise, working in a school is tough – and so too is the interview process.

To help you prepare, we've surveyed readers and headteachers to find out what questions crop up during the recruitment process. You can [browse our reader submissions by clicking here](#), or read our headteachers' tips below:

If I walked into your classroom during an outstanding lesson, what would I see and hear?

"I'd like to hear about: animated discussions, students clearly making progress as evidenced in oral and written contributions. High quality visual displays of students' work showing progress. High levels of engagement. Behaviour that supports learning."

Helen Anthony, headteacher, [Fortismere school](#)

"After hearing a candidate's response I try to get them to talk about their experiences in the classroom. I try to get a sense of the impact that they have had on pupils' achievement."

Tim Browse, headteacher, [Hillcrest primary school](#)

Why do we teach x in schools?

"This question really throws people. If it is maths or English they sometimes look back at you as if you are mad. They assume it is obvious – a very dangerous assumption – and then completely fail to justify the subject's existence.

"Whatever the subject, I expect to hear things like: to improve skills and independent learning; to encourage team work; to gain a qualification; for enjoyment (very important, rarely mentioned); to enhance other subjects; to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills; to improve career

prospects; self discipline; memory development; to encourage life-long learning in that subject. The list goes on..."

John Kendall, headteacher, [Risca community comprehensive school](#)

Can you tell me about a successful behaviour management strategy you have used in the past that helped engage a pupil or group of pupils?

"This allows candidates to give a theoretical answer – one that anyone who swotted up could give you – balanced with a personal reflection that shows how effective they are."

Tim Browse, headteacher, Hillcrest primary school

If you overheard some colleagues talking about you, what would they say?

"This is one of my favourite questions (it's based on a question my National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) coach used to ask me) because it gets candidates to think about their contribution to the school organisation and their team spirit. If I'm interviewing for a senior leader I would follow this up with: what would you want them to say about you in three years time? This way I can get a sense of where they want to develop as leaders."

Tim Browse, headteacher, Hillcrest primary school

Why do you want to work in special education?

"We're looking to see that the person genuinely recognises that we're in the business of education as opposed to simply caring for the children (surprisingly, some applicants don't really see it that way)."

Sean O'Sullivan, headteacher, [Frank Wise school](#)

Why do you want to work in this school?

"We want to see clear indications that candidates have done background work about our school and can talk about why the way we work appeals to them. We'd always want candidates to have visited the school so they should be able to flesh this out with specific examples of what they thought based on their visit."

Sean O'Sullivan, headteacher, Frank Wise school

A question that is specific to the candidate's letter of application

"A candidate may have made a grand statement in their letter, but not gone into details about 'how' or the impact it had."

Tim Browse, headteacher, Hillcrest primary school

What are the key qualities and skills that students look for in teachers?

"Liking young people. Fairness. Consistency. Sense of humour. Passion for their subject. Good at explaining new concepts/ideas. Able to make the topic or subject relevant. Able to make everyone feel comfortable and confident about contributing."

Helen Anthony, headteacher, Fortismere school

Evaluate your lesson

"Teaching a one-off lesson in an unfamiliar school with students you have never met before is a difficult task, but a useful one for candidates and those making the appointment. The evaluation of the lesson by the candidate is crucial. I need to see someone who can be self-critical but who also recognises when things go well. Someone who makes suggestions as to how the lesson may have gone better, what they would do differently with hindsight. I like to hear them talk of the individual student's progress in the lesson, and how they would follow it up. Remembering pupils' names is always impressive. I'd rather see an ambitious lesson that goes a bit awry than a safe boring one."

John Kendall, headteacher, Risca community comprehensive school

If we decided not to appoint you, what would we be missing out on?

"This is great as it enables candidates to sell themselves and really tell us what they are about."

Brett Dye, headteacher, [Parc Eglwys school](#)

Taken from The Guardian Teacher Network.