

What Adaptive Teaching Really Means (vs Differentiation) - SCRIPT

"Welcome to our first session in the Adaptive Teaching series.

Adaptive teaching has become one of the most frequently used terms in education.

It's referenced in the Teacher Standards.

It's highlighted by Ofsted.

It's supported by the Education Endowment Foundation.

Yet despite all of that, it's probably one of the most misunderstood ideas in teaching.

If you ask a room full of teachers what adaptive teaching means, you'll often hear answers such as:

'Giving easier work.'

'Having three different worksheets.'

'Or planning separate lessons for different groups.'

But that's not what adaptive teaching is.

In fact, many of those ideas reflect an older model of differentiation that educational research has gradually moved away from.

Today's session is about understanding what adaptive teaching **really** means.

More importantly, it's about recognising that adaptive teaching isn't about creating more work for teachers.

It's about making better decisions during teaching so that every pupil can access ambitious learning.

By the end of today's session, I hope you'll feel much more confident about what adaptive teaching looks like—and perhaps just as importantly, what it doesn't look like."

Slide 2 – Safeguarding Spark

"Let's begin with today's safeguarding question.

What is radicalisation?

Take a minute to discuss your understanding with the person next to you."

(Pause for discussion.)

Slide 3 – Safeguarding Answer

"Radicalisation is the process by which someone is influenced to adopt extreme beliefs or ideologies that may lead to harmful behaviour.

This process is often gradual.

It can involve grooming, manipulation, feelings of isolation or vulnerability and exposure to extremist ideas.

As school staff, our role isn't to investigate or challenge these beliefs ourselves.

Instead, we remain vigilant to signs that a child may be vulnerable and report concerns through our safeguarding procedures.

Early support through the Prevent duty is designed to safeguard children before harm occurs.

As with all safeguarding concerns, early identification and appropriate action are key."



Slide 4 – Adaptive Teaching Is About the Whole Child

"Before we begin talking about teaching strategies, it's important to remember that adaptation isn't only about academic ability.

Every day, children arrive in our classrooms with different experiences, needs and challenges.

Some pupils have SEND.

Others may be learning English as an additional language.

Some may be anxious after something that happened at home.

Others may be carrying safeguarding concerns that affect their concentration or emotional regulation.

Adaptive teaching recognises the whole child.

Sometimes the most important adaptation isn't changing a worksheet.

It's changing the pace of a lesson.

Providing reassurance.

Adjusting questioning.

Or recognising that a child needs additional support to access learning that day.

Adaptation is holistic because children are whole people—not simply learners."

Slide 5 – Why This Matters

"So why has adaptive teaching become such an important focus?

Because every classroom contains enormous diversity.

No two pupils learn in exactly the same way.

They arrive with different prior knowledge, different experiences and different starting points.

The challenge for us isn't deciding who deserves ambitious learning.

Every child deserves that.

The challenge is ensuring every child can access it.

That's why adaptive teaching is now embedded within the Ofsted framework, the Teacher Standards and the Education Endowment Foundation guidance.

It's not an optional extra.

It's an expectation of excellent teaching because it helps ensure equity, access and progress for all learners."

Slide 6 – What Is Adaptive Teaching?

"So what actually is adaptive teaching?

One sentence summarises it perfectly.

Adaptive teaching means adjusting teaching in real time to meet pupils' needs.

Notice the phrase *in real time*.

This isn't about planning five different lessons.

It's about being responsive.

Perhaps you notice pupils looking confused, so you explain something differently.

Perhaps your questioning shows that understanding isn't secure, so you provide another example.

Perhaps one group is ready for greater challenge, while another needs a worked model before continuing.

The learning objective remains the same.

The curriculum remains the same.

It's the support that changes—not the ambition."

Slide 7 – What Adaptive Teaching Is Not

"This is probably the biggest misconception surrounding adaptive teaching.

It does **not** mean creating different worksheets for every group.

It does **not** mean lowering expectations.

It does **not** mean teaching completely different content.

And it certainly doesn't mean assuming some children are permanently 'low ability.'

Historically, differentiation sometimes resulted in pupils completing easier work simply because of where they were placed.

Research now suggests that approach can unintentionally limit progress and reinforce fixed expectations.

Adaptive teaching moves away from that thinking.

Every pupil studies the same ambitious curriculum.

We simply vary the support that helps them succeed."

Slide 8 – Differentiation vs Adaptive Teaching

"This comparison helps illustrate the shift in thinking.

Traditional differentiation often focused on different tasks for different groups.

While well intentioned, this sometimes led to lower expectations and reduced opportunities for some pupils.

Adaptive teaching takes a different approach.

Everyone works towards the same learning goal.

The difference lies in the scaffolding.

The questioning.

The modelling.

The explanations.

The feedback.

The support changes because pupils' needs change—not because our expectations change.

That's an important distinction.

We're adapting the journey, not changing the destination."

Slide 9 – What Adaptive Teaching Looks Like

"So what might adaptive teaching actually look like during a lesson?

Perhaps you simplify your explanation without simplifying the learning.

Perhaps you provide a worked example before asking pupils to practise independently.

Perhaps you ask carefully targeted questions to identify misconceptions.

Perhaps you adjust your modelling because pupils need another example.

Notice that all of these decisions happen while teaching.

They're responsive.

They're informed by assessment.

Adaptive teaching isn't something we finish planning the night before.

It's something we continue doing throughout the lesson."

Slide 10 – High Expectations for Everyone

"This slide captures one of the most important principles of adaptive teaching.

Support does not mean lower challenge.

Every pupil should have access to the same ambitious curriculum.

Our role is to adapt how pupils access that learning—not to decide that some pupils are only capable of less.

Think about a child using sentence stems during writing.

The scaffold supports them in expressing ambitious ideas.

It doesn't replace ambitious thinking.

Scaffolds should help pupils climb higher—not reduce the height of the climb.

Ultimately, our adaptations should move pupils towards greater independence."

Slide 11 – Common Pitfalls

"There are several common mistakes that can unintentionally weaken adaptive teaching.

Over-scaffolding until pupils become dependent.

Keeping pupils in fixed groups for long periods.

Lowering challenge.

Or confusing adaptation with simplification.

The purpose of adaptation is always to help pupils access ambitious learning.

Good adaptations should be flexible.

Responsive.

Temporary where appropriate.

And always focused on helping pupils become increasingly independent learners."

Slide 12 – Reflection

"I'd like you to reflect on your own classroom practice.

How do you currently adapt your teaching?

Do all pupils have access to the same ambitious learning?

Where might you unintentionally lower expectations?

And perhaps most importantly...

Think about one lesson you'll teach this week.

What small adaptation could you make that supports access without reducing challenge?

Remember...

Adaptive teaching isn't about creating more resources.

It's about making better instructional decisions in response to what pupils need."

Slide 13 – Research

"Today's session draws together evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation, Ofsted, the Teacher Standards and Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction.

Across all of this research, the message is remarkably consistent.

High-quality teaching is the greatest support we can offer every learner.

Adaptive teaching strengthens that teaching by making it responsive, inclusive and ambitious.

It's about ensuring every child has the opportunity to succeed through carefully considered support—not through reduced expectations."

Closing Reflection

"I'd like to finish with one final thought.

For many years, teachers were encouraged to think about differentiation as producing different work for different pupils.

Today's evidence encourages a different question.

Not,

'How can I give different children different work?'

But,

'How can I teach this ambitious learning so that every child has the opportunity to succeed?'

That's a subtle shift.

But it's a powerful one.

Adaptive teaching isn't about lowering the bar.

It's about building better pathways for pupils to reach it.

Every carefully chosen explanation.

Every scaffold.

Every question.

Every adjustment based on what we notice.

These are the moments where adaptive teaching happens.

So I'd like to leave you with one final question:

'Tomorrow, what will I adapt—my expectations, or my teaching?'

Because the answer should always be the same.

We keep expectations high for every pupil.

And we adapt our teaching to help every child get there."