The Power of Effective Questioning - SCRIPT

“Welcome to Session 1 of our **Questioning and Thinking Skills** series.

Across this half term, we're going to look closely at something every teacher does every day:

ask questions.

Questioning is so woven into teaching that it's easy to stop noticing it.

We question pupils during explanations.

We question them to check recall.

We question them while circulating.

We question them during discussions.

And sometimes we question almost automatically.

But the focus of this series isn't going to be on **asking more questions**.

It's going to be on asking **better questions**.

Questions that reveal what pupils understand.

Questions that expose misconceptions.

Questions that make pupils explain and justify.

Questions that create dialogue rather than simply produce answers.

And questions that gradually move pupils towards deeper, more independent thinking.

Today's session lays the foundation for the whole series because if the quality of the question is weak, techniques such as cold calling or extended wait time can only take us so far.

So today we're starting with one central idea:

Effective questioning doesn't simply check thinking. It helps create it.”

Slide 2 – Safeguarding Spark

“As always, we'll begin with our Safeguarding Spark.

Today's question is:

What is child exploitation?

Take a moment to think about how you would explain that term in your own words.

We hear phrases such as child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation regularly within safeguarding, but the broader principle underneath them is important for every member of staff to understand.

Discuss with somebody near you:

What makes a situation exploitative?

What might make a child particularly vulnerable?

And importantly, why might a child not necessarily recognise themselves that they're being exploited?”

Slide 3 – Safeguarding Spark: Answer

"Child exploitation is when somebody **coerces, deceives or forces a child into activities for personal gain**.

And it's important to recognise that exploitation doesn't always look like obvious force.

A child may initially believe that they're in a friendship or relationship.

They may receive gifts, money, attention, status or a sense of belonging.

Over time, that relationship can become controlling.

They may feel they owe somebody something.

They may be frightened of what will happen if they try to leave.

That's why exploited children should always be understood first and foremost as children who need safeguarding.

As staff, we're not expected to investigate the situation ourselves.

If something a child says, does or presents with causes concern, we follow our safeguarding procedures and report it promptly.

As ever, the important principle is professional curiosity.

We don't need certainty before we share a concern."

Slide 4 – The Journey

"Let's look at where we're heading across the six sessions.

Today we're beginning with **the power of effective questioning**.

Next week, we'll focus on cold calling and no-hands-up strategies—how we create the expectation that **every pupil thinks**, rather than only those who volunteer.

Session 3 looks at wait time and extending answers.

Then we'll move into critical thinking and curiosity.

Session 5 focuses on how questioning can support differentiation and adaptation.

And finally, we'll bring everything together by thinking about how higher-order thinking can become part of ordinary everyday lessons.

There's an important progression here.

We're going to move from the **quality of the question**, to who participates, to how long we allow pupils to think, and eventually to the types of thinking our questions create.

So today is about getting the foundation right."

Slide 5 – Why Questioning Matters

"This half term, we're refining how we use questioning to **drive thinking**.

And this slide makes an important distinction:

Questioning doesn't just check learning. It creates learning.

Of course, questioning is a valuable assessment tool.

It can reveal misconceptions.

But it can also **guide thinking**.

It can promote reasoning.

It can build dialogue.

Think about a pupil solving a problem.

If we immediately tell them what to do when they're stuck, we've done the thinking.

But imagine instead we ask:

‘What do you already know that might help?’

or:

‘Which part of the problem could you solve first?’

The question has become a scaffold.

We're not simply testing the pupil.

We're helping them think.

That's why high-quality questioning is such a powerful teaching tool.

Used well, it shifts pupils from being passive receivers of information towards becoming active participants in constructing understanding.”

Slide 6 – The Problem With “Lots of Questions”

“One misconception we need to challenge immediately is that lots of questioning automatically means good questioning.

It doesn't.

We could ask fifty questions in a lesson and still generate very little meaningful thinking.

Imagine a rapid sequence:

‘What is this?’

‘What comes next?’

‘What's the answer?’

‘What colour is it?’

‘What did we learn yesterday?’

There's nothing inherently wrong with those questions.

Some may be completely appropriate.

But if almost every question simply asks pupils to retrieve a short answer, then the lesson can sound interactive while the thinking remains relatively shallow.

The slide describes poor questioning as potentially **repetitive, superficial and focused only on recall**.

The alternative is deliberate questioning.

We ask because we know what we're trying to find out or what thinking we're trying to generate.

So one useful habit throughout this series will be asking ourselves:

Why am I asking this question?

If we don't know, perhaps the question isn't doing enough work."

Slide 7 – Quantity Does Not Equal Quality

"This slide develops that idea further.

It's very easy to fall into rapid-fire questioning because pupils are responding and the lesson feels energetic.

But **participation isn't necessarily the same as thinking**.

A pupil might fire back a one-word answer immediately.

Another pupil does the same.

Another pupil does the same.

There's plenty of classroom interaction—but potentially very little depth.

If our questions only check recall, thinking stays at surface level.

And if our questions are unclear or unfocused, they can actually create confusion.

Strong questioning is **intentional**.

It's planned with a purpose.

It anticipates what pupils might misunderstand.

It gives us information about how they're thinking.

And it provides opportunities for us to extend that thinking.

So the distinction we're making today isn't:

few questions good, lots of questions bad.

It's:

every question should earn its place.

The number matters far less than what those questions actually cause pupils to do mentally."

Slide 8 – What Makes a Question Powerful?

"So what actually makes a question powerful?

The slide gives us four useful characteristics.

Effective questions:

have a clear purpose, require thinking, allow multiple entry points and encourage explanation.

Let's think about those.

Firstly, purpose.

Are we checking recall?

Diagnosing a misconception?

Generating discussion?

Prompting comparison?

Stretching reasoning?

We need to know.

Secondly, strong questions **require thinking**.

There may not be an immediate answer available.

Thirdly, multiple entry points can be particularly useful.

A question such as:

'Which method would you choose and why?'

allows different pupils to access the same thinking from different starting points.

And finally, effective questions encourage explanation.

We want to hear something about the thinking behind the response.

The key balance is that questions should **stretch without overwhelming**.

We're trying to move pupils beyond recall into reasoning—but with enough prior knowledge and structure that they have something meaningful to reason with."

Slide 9 – From "What?" to "Why?" and "How?"

"One useful way of reflecting on our questioning is to notice how often we ask **what**, **why** and **how**.

Let's start with **'What?'**

What questions are essential.

They check foundational knowledge.

For example:

'What is the capital city?'

'What is the next step?'

'What does this word mean?'

We shouldn't stop asking these questions.

Secure knowledge matters enormously.

Pupils can't reason deeply about something they know nothing about.

But if we only ever stay at **what**, we risk staying at recall.

Imagine a maths lesson.

'What is 6 multiplied by 8?'

The pupil says 48.

Useful.

Now we know they can retrieve the fact.

But we don't yet know much about their understanding.

That's where **why** and **how** begin to take us further."

Slide 10 – Moving into "Why?"

"Now let's move from **what** to **why**.

Why questions require pupils to justify, connect ideas and demonstrate conceptual understanding.

For example:

'Why does this method work?'

'Why did the character behave this way?'

'Why is this the most efficient strategy?'

Immediately, the cognitive demand changes.

The pupil can't simply retrieve an isolated fact.

They need to organise what they know and explain the relationship between ideas.

Imagine the difference between:

'Which character left the house?'

and:

'Why do you think the character chose to leave?'

Both questions may be useful.

But they're doing different jobs.

The second invites interpretation, evidence and reasoning.

So a helpful habit is sometimes taking the original question we were going to ask and adding:

'Why?'

Not automatically—but where the learning requires pupils to understand meaning, reasoning or relationships."

Slide 11 – And Then "How?"

"'How?' questions give us another window into thinking.

They often reveal **process, sequence and strategy**.

For example:

'How did you solve that?'

'How does this link to previous learning?'

'How could this be improved?'

These questions are particularly useful because they expose the pathway behind an answer.

A pupil may have the correct final answer but an insecure method.

Another pupil may have made an error in the final calculation but demonstrate excellent reasoning throughout.

If we only look at correctness, those differences remain hidden.

‘How?’ allows us to see whether understanding is secure or fragile.

And it also encourages metacognition.

We're asking pupils to become aware of **how they approached the problem**.

So across our lessons, a conscious shift from predominantly asking **‘What?’** towards deliberately including **‘Why?’** and **‘How?’** can move pupils from remembering towards reasoning.

Again, we need all three.

It's the balance that matters.”

Slide 12 – Probing for Depth

“This is where questioning becomes particularly powerful.

Often, the first answer a pupil gives shouldn't be the end of the conversation.

The slide gives a very simple example.

Instead of:

‘What is the answer?’

try:

‘How do you know?’

or:

‘Why does that work?’

Then we can probe further:

‘Can you explain that further?’

‘What makes you think that?’

‘Is there another way?’

Those follow-up questions are where we often discover the real level of understanding.

Imagine a pupil gives the correct answer.

We say:

‘Brilliant.’

And move on.

We've confirmed that one pupil can produce the answer.

But ask:

‘How do you know?’

and suddenly we may discover that they guessed.

Or we may discover beautifully secure reasoning that can benefit the rest of the class.

Correct answers deserve probing too.

And wrong answers can be just as valuable.

Instead of immediately moving to someone else, we might say:

'Talk me through how you got there.'

Now the misconception becomes visible.

That's incredibly useful assessment information."

Slide 13 – Planning Questions Like We Plan Tasks

"One of the strongest messages from this presentation is that questioning deserves **planning**.

We carefully plan tasks.

We choose resources.

We think about scaffolds.

We anticipate timings.

But some of our most important questions are sometimes invented entirely in the moment.

Of course, responsive questioning will always matter.

But there are certain questions that are worth deciding in advance.

The slide suggests three purposes.

Firstly:

Target misconceptions.

What are pupils likely to get wrong?

What question could expose that?

Secondly:

Build challenge.

Sequence questions from simpler to more complex and gradually increase cognitive demand.

And thirdly:

Extend thinking.

Plan follow-up questions that probe reasoning, invite justification or introduce alternative perspectives.

The line that captures this really well is:

High-quality questioning is not spontaneous luck—it is professional design.

We don't have to script every question.

But identifying two or three high-value questions before a lesson can make a significant difference."

Slide 14 – Building Question Sequences

“It's also useful to think about questioning as a **sequence**, rather than a collection of isolated questions.

We might begin by checking the knowledge pupils need:

‘What do we know about…?’

Then deepen:

‘Why does that happen?’

Then probe:

‘How do you know?’

Then challenge:

‘Would that always be true?’

Then extend:

‘Can anyone think of a different example?’

Each question builds on the previous one.

This is very different from asking lots of disconnected questions because a sequence takes pupils somewhere.

There's a destination in mind.

Think of it almost like steps.

The first question ensures pupils have a foothold.

The next asks them to explain.

The next asks them to justify.

And eventually we're asking them to apply, evaluate or make connections.

That's how questioning can scaffold thinking **without doing the thinking for pupils**.”

Slide 15 – Reflection

“Let's now reflect on our own practice.

The slide asks two very straightforward questions:

What questioning habits do I already use well?

And:

What will I improve this week?

Start with the strength.

Perhaps you're already good at asking pupils to justify.

Perhaps you probe incorrect answers rather than simply correcting them.

Perhaps you plan questions in advance.

Perhaps pupils know that ‘How do you know?’ is going to come next, so they're already preparing to explain.

Then identify **one refinement**.

Not six.

One.

Maybe you'll replace some rapid-fire recall questions with one deeper question.

Perhaps you'll deliberately plan two key questions before tomorrow's lesson.

Perhaps you'll ask **'Why?'** once more than you normally would.

Or perhaps you'll stop accepting a correct answer as the end of the conversation and ask:

'How do you know?'

Today's goal is simply to sharpen the **quality** of our questions.

Next week, we'll begin thinking about how we ensure **every pupil** is doing the thinking."

Slide 16 – Key Research & Evidence

"The evidence underpinning today's session reinforces several of the principles we've explored.

The presentation highlights research suggesting that questioning can support learning gains and deeper understanding.

It also emphasises **intentional questioning**—carefully planned questions that help pupils construct knowledge and progress cognitively.

And importantly, the strategy doesn't operate in isolation.

Planning matters.

Wait time matters.

Feedback matters.

What we do after the response matters.

Questioning also connects strongly with dialogic teaching and oral language development, because good questions create opportunities for pupils to articulate ideas, listen to alternative thinking and develop understanding through classroom dialogue.

So the evidence isn't telling us:

'Ask lots of questions.'

It's telling us to think carefully about the quality of the questions and the classroom conditions surrounding them."

Slide 17 – Final Reflection

"I'd like to finish by returning to the central idea of today's session.

The power of questioning isn't really found in the **question mark**.

It's found in the thinking that happens afterwards.

A strong question can make a pupil stop.

Retrieve.

Connect ideas.

Notice a misconception.

Explain.

Justify.

Reconsider.

Or become curious enough to ask another question themselves.

And that means our success isn't measured by how many questions we've fitted into a lesson.

It's measured by what those questions made pupils **think about**.

So before your next lesson, perhaps choose just one important moment and ask:

‘What do I really want pupils to think about here?’

Then design the question around that thinking.

Not simply:

‘What answer do I want them to give?’

but:

‘What thinking do I want this question to create?’

That's the shift we'll build on throughout the rest of this series.

Next week, we'll move from the quality of the question to the **participation architecture around it**—using cold calling and no-hands-up strategies so that the expectation to think belongs to everybody.

For this week, though, keep the Spark Forward simple:

Plan one question that you believe will genuinely deepen the learning. Ask it. Give it space. Probe the response. And notice where the thinking goes.

Because effective questioning isn't about filling lessons with questions.

It's about using carefully chosen questions to move learning somewhere it couldn't have reached quite so easily without them.”