

How do children learn at St Francis?

The key to learning is to know more and remember more. This is the golden thread that runs through our curriculum. We provide children with opportunities to practice what they learn and become confident, independent learners. We strive to ensure that children are not cognitively overloaded while at the same time striving for rigour and excellence.

Memory is crucial to learning. We have used key research to inform our curriculum. Our curriculum is built on sequential knowledge and skills. We believe that Quality First Teaching is forged on high quality, inclusive teaching with ongoing assessment informing future learning. We are always mindful of children's cognitive load and plan sequences of learning that build on prior learning. Our "sticky" learning is evident through pre and post teaching; and the explicit teaching of key vocabulary to aid long term retention.

What does the research say?

German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus wanted to understand more about why we forget things and how to prevent it. His research produced the Forgetting Curve – a visual representation of the way that learned information fades over time. Key findings are:

- Memories weaken over time
- The biggest drop in retention happens soon after learning
- It's easier to remember things that have meaning
- The way something is presented affects learning
- How you feel affects how well you remember

To support children's memory and the building of knowledge and skills over time we use the Spiral Curriculum approach in most subjects. This cognitive theory was developed by Jerome Bruner as a way of revisiting learning and embedding it in the long term memory. A spiral curriculum is one in which topics, subjects or themes are revisited throughout the course. A spiral curriculum is not simply the repetition of a topic taught. It requires also the deepening of it, with each successive encounter building on the previous one.

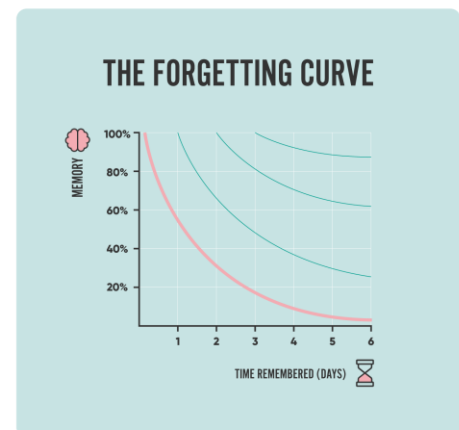


Diagram edited from: Spiral Curriculum; Jerome Bruner

The spiral approach to curriculum has three key principles:

1. Cyclical: Students should return to the same topic several times throughout their school career;
2. Increasing Depth: Each time a student returns to the topic it should be learned at a deeper level and explore more complexity
3. Prior Knowledge: A student's prior knowledge should be utilised when a topic is returned to so that they build from their foundations rather than starting anew.