# Good question! (From Beasley, J. (2014) ‘The Perfect (Ofsted) Science Lesson’, p 77.)

How do you know the pupils know and understand what they are doing and are making progress?

**Ask the pupils - endlessly!** Make sure that this becomes habitual! When questioning the pupils’ understanding make sure that:

* Your questions are clear, jargon-free, relevant and open
* You give less able pupils enough time to answer. (It’s a fact that teachers give less able pupils less time than able pupils to answer questions before they jump in and give the answers.)
* You question pupils of different abilities
* You never ask ‘Do you understand?’ and just carry on regardless

**If a pupil asks a question**, thank them, repeat it, wait up to five seconds to let the question sink in – then ask other pupils to answer it.

### Questioning strategies

‘**No opt out’**. [[1]](#footnote-1) Use this always. If you ask a question, don’t answer it yourself, letting the pupil or the class opt out. If pupil X says ‘I don’t know’, do one of these four things:

1. Give pupil X a cue (a recently used phrase or symbol) or a clue (‘Remember when…)
2. Ask another pupil to do this
3. Ask pupil Y for an answer and go on asking others until you get a correct answer. Then get pupil X to repeat the correct answer in his or her own words. (If you find no-one can answer, this is feedback to you showing you need to rephrase either your question, original explanation or both!)
4. Give the answer and get pupil X repeat it

**Directly question individual pupils**. Don’t vaguely address questions to the whole class. And directly question pupils *whether or not they have their hands up (see ‘No hands up’ below*. Never allow shouting out of answers by anyone.

**Have a ‘No hands up’ policy.** There are lots of reasons for this: Without one, quicker thinkers answer before slower ones have had a chance to think a question through; too many pupils hide behind others; pupils with hands down might just be unsure but can’t say so and shy pupils are reluctant to volunteer to put hands up. This technique, used often, makes *all* the pupils pay attention. All the pupils will have to mentally rehearse answers to all your questions in order not to be ‘found out’. They can’t let someone else do the work and stay in their comfort zones!

**Think pair share.** Ask a question, tell the pupils to pair up, think about the answer and discuss it together. You then ask pairs for responses and ask other pairs to explain, justify or expand on the answers. This makes the learning safer as the discussion is just between the pair – not in front of everyone. Also pairs come up with more ideas and it’s easier for a pair to admit they don’t know.

**‘Yes / No’ questions.** Bear in mind that they will be answered correctly 50% of the time by pupils who haven’t a clue!

**Follow up pupils’ answers.** (Especially to ‘Yes / No’ questions) with supplementary ‘Why?’ ‘Can you explain how?’ questions which gauge not only knowledge but deeper understanding.

**Randomise questioning.** Use ‘Lolly Lotto’ (names on lollipop sticks that you draw out) or have ‘hot seats’ with numbers under them, corresponding to a list of prepared questions or simply to the order you ask the class questions. Or fix numbered questions under their seats before pupils enter the room. Old hat perhaps but easy to do. There are also ICT tools for this. (You could also give these out randomly as pupils enter the class.)

Remember to treat their answers as feedback on your teaching. Use this to alter your strategy or lesson plans going forward. Show that you are flexible and responsive to their needs.

1. See Lemov, D (2009), *Teach like a Champion Field Guide* p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)