

3.3 The Routines

Cue to Start

The Cue to Start is the signal that brings the class to attention. It is a whole-school cue – identical in every room – so students respond immediately and without confusion.

Why the Cue to Start is powerful

- removes the need for raised voices
- replaces “settling the class” with a precise signal
- establishes teacher presence and authority calmly
- allows all routines to begin smoothly.

The Cue to Start feels deceptively simple, yet requires practice. Many leaders intentionally model their learning curve (“*I find this part challenging too*”) to build staff confidence.

Entry Routine

The Classroom Entry Routine transitions students from unstructured time into learning readiness quickly, safely and calmly.

Students learn:

- where to line up
- how to enter
- how to prepare equipment
- how to sit and orient toward the teacher
- what “ready to learn” looks like.

Benefits

- eliminates wasted minutes at the start of every lesson
- reduces noise and movement
- builds student independence
- frames the lesson as purposeful.

For many schools, implementation of an Entry Routine is the signature of their culture shift. Staff observe that within weeks, students demonstrate predictable, calm movement into classrooms and teachers gain substantial instructional minutes per lesson.

Exit Routine

The Classroom Exit Routine closes the lesson purposefully and releases students into unstructured space safely.

Key outcomes

- prevents chaotic endings
- reinforces responsibility for the learning environment
- ensures transitions between classes remain calm
- signals the completion of learning.

The Exit Routine stabilises the end of lessons, which is often where fatigue and distraction peak.

Consistent exit routines can significantly reduce corridor or yard incidents and unstructured time problems.

Routines are carefully engineered tools that reduce uncertainty, set clear expectations, and free both teachers and students to focus on learning.

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Voices Routine

The Voices Routine gives teachers a consistent way to set and reinforce volume expectations.

A typical Voices Routine includes:

- Silent Voice
- Partner Voice
- Group Voice
- Class or Presenter Voice

Why it works

- instantly reduces noise
- provides clarity for collaborative tasks
- gives students language for self-regulation
- prevents escalation in group work.

Students may hear the phrase “Silent Voice” five times in a day. This is intentional. Repetition builds mastery, reduces cognitive load, and supports students who need explicit boundaries to maintain focus.

Answering Questions Routine

The Answering Questions Routine structures how teachers ask questions and how students respond, ensuring maximum engagement and equitable participation.

The routine typically includes:

- teacher pauses
- teacher gives the prompt or question
- thinking time
- cold-call or non-volunteer response
- affirmation or elaboration

Impact

- builds deep thinking time
- increases student attentiveness
- reduces calling out
- supports high-level discussion
- ensures all students – not just the most vocal – engage.

This routine is about equity.

Many schools use the Answering Questions routine not only in classrooms but also in staff meetings, modelling high-quality interaction and reinforcing the schoolwide expectation.