

Secondary School Teacher interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for secondary teaching roles are usually run by a panel that includes the principal or deputy principal and a head of department or faculty leader. Panels want evidence you can plan and deliver curriculum-aligned lessons, manage a classroom of adolescents day to day, and handle the pastoral and communication side of the job, not just subject knowledge.

- **Behavioural:** Questions asking you to describe a specific past situation, usually around behaviour management, collaboration or supporting a struggling student.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical classroom situations that test how you'd respond in the moment, particularly around disruptive behaviour or disengaged students.
- **Process / technical:** Questions about how you actually plan units, differentiate content and assess student work against curriculum outcomes.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about handling parent or guardian conversations, especially difficult ones about grades or behaviour.
- **Pastoral / wellbeing:** Questions probing how you notice and respond to student wellbeing concerns outside pure academic performance.

Expect an initial screening call or short panel interview covering your background and availability, followed by a longer panel interview at the school covering the question types above. Many schools also ask for a short teaching demonstration or a sample lesson plan, and will follow up with reference checks and confirmation of your Working with Children Check and teacher registration status before making an offer.

1. Tell me about a time you managed a challenging behaviour incident in your classroom.

Why they ask

Behaviour management is one of the core tasks of the role and panels want to see you have a consistent, calm approach rather than an ad hoc reaction.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the specific behaviour, your task or responsibility in that moment, the action you took including any escalation or follow-up, and the result for the student and the class.

Example answer

"I had a Year 9 student who regularly called out and distracted others during instructions. Rather than escalating in front of the class, I used a private, low-key redirection first and followed up with a one-on-one conversation after the lesson to understand what was going on. We agreed on a signal I could use to redirect him without singling him out publicly. Over the following weeks his disruptions dropped noticeably and other students stopped following his lead, which meant I lost less instructional time overall."

2. A student refuses to participate and becomes disruptive halfway through a lesson. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests real-time judgement under pressure, since panels know behaviour issues come up regularly and want a considered, not punitive-first, response.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your immediate priorities in order: de-escalation, protecting the learning of the rest of the class, and follow-up, explaining the reasoning behind each step rather than just listing actions.

Example answer

"My first priority is keeping the rest of the class on task, so I'd give the student a clear, low-drama choice, like taking a short break at the back of the room or continuing with the task, rather than confronting them in front of everyone. If the disruption continued I'd follow the school's behaviour management procedure, which might mean calling on support staff or year coordinator involvement. Afterwards I'd always follow up privately to understand what triggered it, because a one-off outburst usually has a cause worth addressing rather than just consequences worth applying."

3. Walk me through how you plan a unit of work for one of your subjects.

Why they ask

Curriculum and lesson design is a core specialist skill for this role, and panels want to know your planning is structured and aligned to outcomes, not improvised week to week.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walkthrough of your planning process, from checking curriculum outcomes through to how you build in assessment and differentiation.

Example answer

"I start with the relevant curriculum outcomes for that year level and subject, then map out roughly how many lessons I have and what the summative assessment will be, working backwards from there. Within each lesson I plan the core content everyone needs, plus an extension task and a scaffolded version for students who need more support. I build in at least one formative check, like a short quiz or exit ticket, partway through the unit so I can adjust before the final assessment rather than only finding out at the end who's struggled."

4. How would you handle a parent who is unhappy with their child's grade?

Why they ask

Parent communication is a regular part of the job and panels want to see you can stay professional and constructive under pressure from families.

How to structure your answer

Describe how you'd prepare for and run the conversation: acknowledging the concern, presenting evidence, and agreeing on next steps.

Example answer

"I'd start by listening to their specific concern rather than getting defensive, then walk them through the assessment criteria and where their child's work sat against it, using examples from the marked task itself. If there's a genuine case for reassessment under the school's policy I'd explain that process clearly. Either way I'd end the conversation with a concrete next step, like a follow-up meeting or extra support session, so the parent leaves with something practical rather than just an explanation."

5. Describe how you support the wellbeing of a student who seems to be struggling outside of class.

Why they ask

Pastoral care sits alongside academic teaching in this role, and panels want evidence you notice and act on wellbeing signals, not just marks.

How to structure your answer

Use a brief STAR-style answer focused on how you identified the concern and who you involved, since pastoral matters usually require appropriate escalation rather than handling everything yourself.

Example answer

"I noticed a student's work quality and attendance had dropped noticeably over a couple of weeks, which was out of character for them. I had a low-pressure conversation after class to check in, without demanding details, and let them know I was there if they wanted to talk. I also flagged it with our year coordinator and pastoral care staff so the right support could be put in place, since that's outside what I can address alone in a classroom setting. Attendance improved once additional support was arranged, and the student later told me they appreciated that I'd noticed."

6. Tell me about a time you worked with colleagues to develop teaching resources or a cross-curricular project.

Why they ask

The role involves ongoing collaboration with a faculty or department, and panels want to see you contribute to shared work rather than operating in isolation.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, focusing on your specific contribution to the collaboration and the practical outcome for the department or students.

Example answer

"Our English and History faculties wanted to run a joint project on a shared historical period, so I worked with a colleague to align our assessment tasks so students could draw on research from one subject for the other. I drafted the shared resource pack and rubric criteria, and we tested it with our own classes before rolling it out more broadly. It cut down duplicated marking criteria across two subjects and gave students a clearer sense of how the two subjects connected."