



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

# Developing whole-school assessment

March 2009

QCA/09/4110

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# Five challenges

Getting assessment systems right in schools is not an easy task. We think there are five main challenges to meet, summarised here. The later section on auditing practice includes questions to test the state of play in your school regarding each of them.

## 1. Establishing coherence

Establishing coherence means covering the key dimensions of knowledge, understanding and skills in the national curriculum and making sure that the connections between the different elements are clear. It also covers making the right connections between the three types of assessment – day-to-day, periodic and transitional – so that the school's system runs intelligently and efficiently.

## 2. Gaining involvement

The principles on which the school's assessment practice runs need to be understood by everyone involved. This includes pupils and parents, as well as staff. We think it is important to declare and discuss those principles so that all parties have a chance to identify the key features and outcomes of good assessment. Discussion of this kind is a necessary preface to working through the operational arrangements that govern how assessment is carried out, recorded and reported.

## 3. Building consistency

Consistency is critical to effective assessment practice. Teachers of the same subject need to interpret national standards so that everyone involved can be sure that the basis of assessment is the same. Although there are natural differences in specific methods of assessment in different subjects, it is also important that there is consistency in the broad approach used – for example in the way pupils' views are gathered and used and in the way assessments are recorded and reported.

## 4. Securing manageability

As every teacher knows, good assessment takes effort and time. However, there is always the danger that assessment practice can become too complicated, from all the best motives. This applies to the systems and the paperwork teachers use to focus assessment – which can become too bogged down in detail. It applies to the collection and storing of evidence – which can become too unwieldy and cumbersome. It also applies to systems of reporting, which can be too complicated for the teachers, pupils and parents who are meant to use them.

## 5. Achieving impact

We can judge the impact of assessment in two ways:

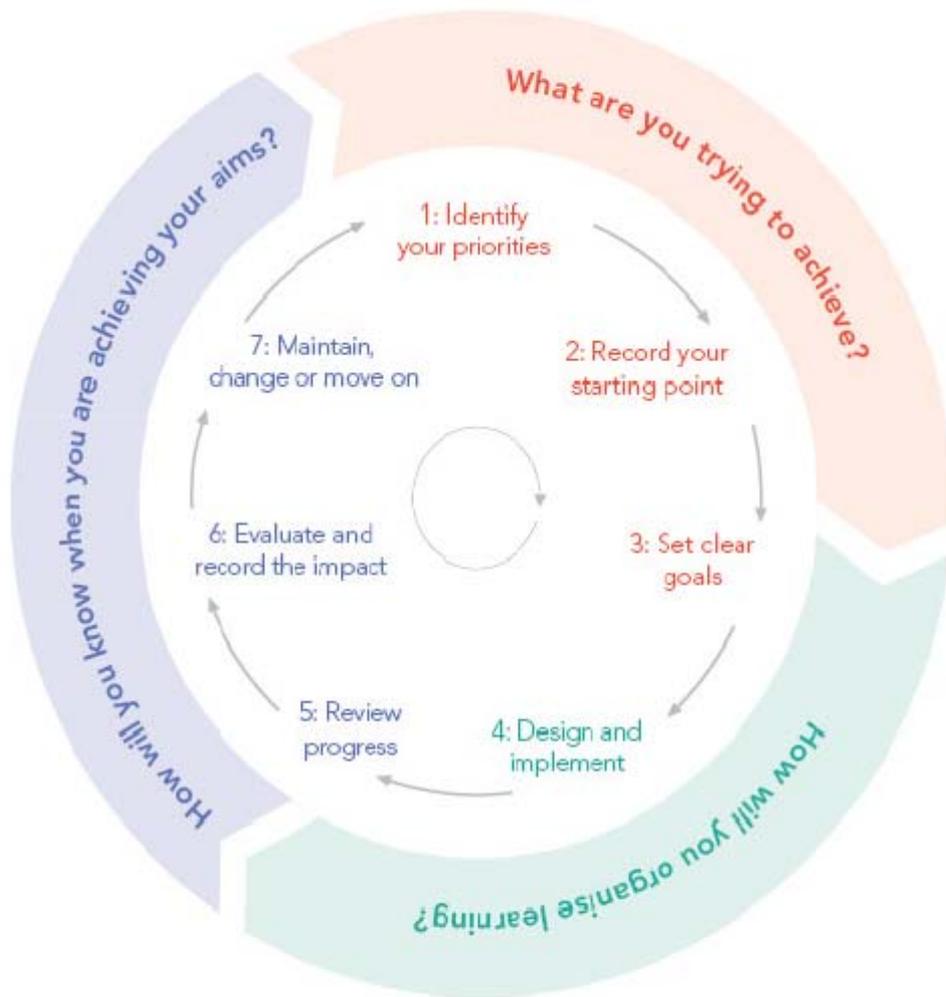
- Does it help us to plan the curriculum and meet individual needs effectively?
- Does it help us to understand the progress pupils make, the standards they achieve and what they need to do to improve further?

Judging assessment by its value in these two respects takes us from simply considering whether assessment is well organised. Of course it needs to be, but the system and the rigour with which assessment is carried out need to have clear payoff – that is, they must help us know where learners stand and what to do to improve their performance. This is the payoff in which, for one, Ofsted inspections are interested. They want assurance that schools really know their pupils well and use that knowledge to affect teaching and outcomes.

## Planning development work

QCA recommends a process for planning curriculum development that we think can apply equally well to assessment development – and indeed it makes sense to use the same model to align the development processes as closely as possible.

The diagram below shows the steps in the planning process – although, of course, the diagram may not always do justice to the need to pursue planning in a flexible way.



Schools representing all phases from three pilot local authorities: Rotherham, Warwickshire and West Sussex have been involved in QCA's Articulating Assessment project. The experiences of the schools involved identify a number of key factors about its management that help to ensure good headway. The key factors echo the questions recommended by QCA on curriculum review.

## Summary

### **Aims: What we are trying to achieve?**

- Develop closer links between assessment and teaching and learning in ways that will help the progress of the individual learner.
- Systematically link day-to-day (assessment for learning), periodic and transitional assessment.
- Establish a wider range of evidence to develop a clearer picture of what an individual learner needs to make as much progress as possible.
- Use an enlightened approach to assessment to reshape the curriculum offer.
- Have objectives that are derived from an audit of practice and matched to the school's improvement priorities.

### **Management: How will we get the best from the work?**

- Have the right people involved in the right way, with senior staff showing their commitment.
- Make sure the work is on the right scale and size and is regularly monitored and evaluated.
- Insist that activities and systems are kept as simple as possible.
- Make sure that developments are communicated to staff, parents and pupils and others with an interest in the school's work.

### **Impact: How will we know when we are achieving our aims?**

- Try things out and capture evidence of how they work 'on the go', as well as at predetermined milestones or evaluation points.
- Evaluate the benefits, identifying what needs to be adjusted and attempted next.

## **Aims: what are we trying to achieve?**

### **Working on the school strategy**

Every school wants to do its best to meet the four objectives spelled out in the *Assessment for Learning Strategy*:

- Every child knows how they are doing, and understands what they need to do to improve.
- Every teacher is equipped to make well-founded judgements about learners' attainment and how to plan to improve it.
- Every school has systems for making regular, useful, manageable and accurate assessments.
- Every parent knows how their child is doing, what they need to do to improve, and how they can support the child and their teachers.

Fundamental to achieving these aims is that schools know their learners as well as possible and use the knowledge they have to meet individual needs and ensure the best progress possible. This means putting assessment at the centre of the school's work and using it to deliver the aims of the curriculum and the school's commitment to every pupil's success.

Of course we recognise that unless yours is a new school or needs to redevelop its assessment practice more or less from scratch, there will be elements of current practice that are strong and ought to be retained and built upon. Identifying what works well is obviously the first step to take. The second involves defining the elements you need to improve.

### **Auditing practice**

These questions may help you carry out an audit of strengths and define the aspects of assessment that need improvement. They are grouped under the headings of the five challenges highlighted in the previous section.

The questions could be used in different ways – for example to provide the basis for a whole-school working party to review practice or to inform the collection of evidence for parts of the school's self-evaluation form (SEF). They could also be used selectively to consider assessment practice within a single subject and to plan action to improve it.

## **Auditing the school's assessment practice: Key questions**

### ***Establishing coherence***

1. Is assessment practice in our school integral to teaching and learning? Do our systems mean that staff know learners well and can use assessment to inform planning?
2. Does assessment in our school provide a view of the whole learner: what they are good at; what interests and motivates them; how they like to learn; what is getting in the way of making progress?
3. How well do we cover personal learning and thinking skills as well as subject-specific knowledge and skills?
4. How well do we connect day-to-day, periodic and transitional assessment so that the information from one flows into the next?
5. Do our systems enable assessment to include reliable judgements about how learners are doing related, where appropriate, to national standards and expectations?

### ***Gaining involvement***

1. Is the school leadership team committed to developing assessment practice and willing to be fully involved in the process?
2. Is everyone clear about the purposes of assessment in our school and the reasons we do things the way we do?
3. How often and how fully do teaching staff discuss the principles of effective assessment?
4. Are learners at the heart of assessment in our school: Do learners understand what is being assessed and the purpose of assessment? Do we encourage them to reflect on what they can do well and what they need to work on next? Are there opportunities for assessment dialogues between learners and teachers to enable progress? Do we provide opportunities for peer and self assessment?
5. To what extent are learners of different ages and levels of attainment productively involved in assessing their own work?
6. Do we inform and involve parents/carers as well as we might? Does this include a wider range of evidence that might provide clearer insights and generate more interest?
7. Do we draw on evidence about learners' involvement in activities outside school?

### ***Ensuring consistency***

1. Do we all share the same basic approaches to making, recording and reporting assessments?
2. Do teachers of the same subject use the same basis for judging attainment and progress?
3. What systems are there for moderating teachers' judgements?
4. Are there significant differences in the way assessment is managed between subjects and/or year groups? Are these differences justifiable?
5. Do we make good use of assessments made by the previous school?
6. How well do we pass on assessment information when our learners move on?

***Securing manageability***

1. Do our systems ensure that assessments are as uncomplicated as possible, do not dominate classroom work and do not use staff time unnecessarily?
2. Is the evidence on which we draw easy to assemble and analyse – and is it enough rather than too much?
3. Does the output of assessment enable people to see and understand the key points?

***Achieving impact***

1. Does our practice mean that every teacher in the school is equipped to make well-founded judgments about learners' attainment and progress and how to plan to improve it?
2. Does our practice ensure that every child knows how he or she is doing and understands what he or she needs to do to improve?
3. Do our systems allow us to make assessments that are regular, useful, manageable and accurate?
4. Does our practice help all parents know how their child is doing, what they need to do to improve, and how they can support the child and their teachers?

**Deciding where to start: illustrations**

The keys to successful work on assessment development are, first, establishing clear objectives that match with the school's wider improvement agenda and, second, designing the work so that it is working on the right scope and scale.

Most of the schools in the Articulating Assessment project started with overall priorities they had already identified – such as extending personalisation or establishing a more creative approach to the curriculum. They used QCA's project to take forward work on assessment in line with these priorities. For some schools, the work built on recognised good practice; in other cases it involved more fundamental action to improve assessment.

Reviewing their work at the end of the first stage of the project, schools commented on the importance of having a clear idea of what they wanted to get out of the project right from the start. Some noted that, in retrospect, they underestimated how much discussion had been needed to form a clear agreement about the purpose and the associated process. Many called attention to the importance of not stinting on the audit stage before launching into activity.

The illustrations of the work of the schools involved in the Articulating Assessment project show the different aims and starting points that they used. These are summarised here.

**Aim: Embedding assessment for learning**

Swinton Fitzwilliam Primary School in Rotherham is the product of a recent amalgamation. One of the cornerstones of the school's strategy to improve standards was in embedding the key principles of assessment for learning consistently across the school. The focus of the school's work was to foster better practice in planning, developing and assessing learners' PLTS and to enhance assessment practice within the classroom using video and audio technology.

The school also wanted to collate a wide evidence base of information to inform teachers, both during the year and at transition points of pupil levels and future targets for progression. The head supported by the staff ensured the work was carefully planned to be manageable and so selected a small group of learners with whom to try the new approach out to work with.

**Aim: Achieving greater involvement of learners**

The Oaks Primary School in West Sussex has been involved in a wide range of innovative practice linked to assessment and curriculum planning but was worried that teachers' judgements about learner progress in developing particular skills were sometimes inconsistent. They were also keen to involve learners more in the process and were looking for a simple and tangible way that children could see their strengths and weaknesses, for writing in particular.

The school adopted the use of the Apgar model (a way of presenting strengths and weaknesses in a form of a spider web) to support the assessment of writing. Staff found that the use of the model across all key stage 2 classes resulted in children being much more involved in the assessment of their own progress. One teacher remarked that learners have started to ask when they are going to be taught 'the next skill as I want to get on'. Once The Oaks staff became fully engaged in the work, they realised that they would have to revisit schemes of work and their approach to medium-term planning.

**Aim: Assessing the effectiveness of learning**

At Winterhill Comprehensive School in Rotherham, development work on assessment was built around an 'Effective learners' project initiated in 2007. Teachers identified key learning skills that they felt Winterhill learners ought to acquire. They then engaged in action research, developing new approaches to teaching and learning and contributing to a 'teachers' toolkit', which included key principles, case studies and resources.

The development work on assessment had the potential to promote the inclusion of skills in the explicit content of the key stage 3 curriculum and to develop an approach to self-assessment that would be integrated into day-to-day learning. The work built on a strong focus on assessment for learning in the school including objectives-led lessons with clear learning outcomes, a focus on written feedback, systematic monitoring of curriculum area practice and emphasis on five-part lessons with clear guidelines on consolidation strategies.

**Aim: Assessing personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS)**

Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls, a three-form entry school in Warwickshire, focused on developing creative ways of assessing with the specific aim of providing more challenge for the gifted learner and addressing PLTS, with particular reference to the three elements of independent enquirer, creative thinker and reflective learner. The project leader worked with a small group of colleagues to develop ways of assessing creative thinking and collaboration within these subjects and to work up a process of pupil reviews that would encourage reflection on learning.

**Aim: Improving assessment in a single subject**

Redscope Primary School in Rotherham focused on developing appropriate strategies and enhancing staff skills in assessing pupil progress in mathematics, with the aim of producing higher expectations of achievement for all learners. The development work was intended to enhance learners' capacity to use self-assessment and peer assessment to inform target-setting and the next steps in learning. During the course of the work, teachers and support staff were trained and supported in using a range of assessment strategies to assess and then inform planning. The project was underpinned by involving parents as partners in their children's learning.

**Aim: Stepping up the involvement of parents**

Southwater Junior School in West Sussex wanted to do more to involve parents in dialogue about assessment. Southwater wanted parents to share greater understanding of the ways in which progress in the core subjects is gauged; what the expected levels are for children at each stage of their schooling and why they wanted to find a way of measuring and celebrating the other attributes that help their child to succeed. The school held workshops to give parents a broader understanding of how and why children are assessed. Parents' responses to the sessions were very positive.

# Managing the work: how will we achieve our aims?

## Scope and scale

Deciding on the scope and scale of the development work is vital. The experience of the schools involved in the Articulating Assessment project underlines the desirability of starting small but not too small: that is, making the project manageable but not so modest in scope and ambition that the outcomes lack significance. In many cases the schools focused the development on trials with year groups and/or subjects so that the work would be manageable. In a few cases there were clear plans from the outset to extend the work across the whole school in due course, once the outcomes of trials were known.

This issue of scope and scale is linked with the need to select the right participants for early involvement in the development work. In development work like this, it is usually better for the initial work to be carried out by a few staff keen to be involved, rather than, as one manager of a school in the Articulating Assessment project put it, 'attempting to crack the hardest nuts at the start'.

That said, it was also important to ensure continual communication about the development work to staff not directly and immediately involved to keep them up to date, draw in ideas from a wider group and prepare the ground for future development. An early briefing for staff is very helpful, so that they know how the work fits in with broader school aspirations and appreciate where it is hoped the work will go. Initial and subsequent briefing of this kind helps prepare for later extension of the work.

## Support from senior leaders

As ever, the full support and commitment of the head and the rest of the senior management team is crucial to the management and success of development work on assessment – and particularly when the head is seen as personally committed and presents it as a key driver for the school's next stage of improvement. When this support is evident, staff teams tend to be collectively highly committed and able to influence the wider staff team as well. In turn, this means that the influence of the development work on whole school practice is accelerated.

Sign up and support by senior leaders implies a full understanding of the work and a preparedness to engage, not merely saying 'yes go ahead'. It means finding ways of actively accommodating the work – for example by providing time at meetings and looking for other ways in which the work can be connected into the school's routines and systems. It can also

mean encouragement for the staff involved to take well-managed risks, and to work outside existing approaches is particularly helpful.

## Leading the work

The question of who leads the operational development work on assessment is an important one. Schools often have a member of the senior leadership team who is responsible for assessment, and this person needs to be involved. However, development work of this kind is also an opportunity for other staff to take on a leadership role. It can also be valuable to establish a small team who can work together to develop ideas and move things on in different parts of the school. Most schools in the Articulating Assessment project recommend having two or three people working as ‘change partners’, which enables them to develop and test ideas quickly and carry weight in discussions with senior leaders and other staff.

The project shows the value of organising opportunities for reflection and joint planning with other schools involved in assessment development. This included making connections between primary and secondary schools, where tackling common issues from different perspectives was a very instructive process.

## Defining and timetabling the key steps

In dealing with complex areas of school work, such as assessment, with all its links to the curriculum and teaching and learning, time spent at the outset working out, in a precise way, what needs to be done by what time pays dividends later – for example in establishing how changes in target-setting processes can be worked into the timetable for review and reporting.

Planning like this tends to highlight the need to dovetail the work with all the relevant episodes in the school cycle. It also encourages the team to keep processes as simple as possible to meet any deadlines.

## How to manage the work: illustrations

### Management: Managing change – key factors

Staff at The Mill Primary School in West Sussex made clear the conditions for success in improving assessment practice. They identified a number of key features for their development work, including:

- being clear about the outcomes you want from the start
- having two people involved in leading the work so that they could work on the ideas together and fill in for one another when necessary at meetings

- keeping the initial team fairly small, working with enthusiasts and supporters first, but planning how to roll out the project more widely early in the project and getting others onside in preparation for doing so
- gathering evidence from the start in as simple a way as possible
- trying to anticipate those inevitable interruptions to the smooth progress of the work.

### **Management: Setting up the staff team**

At Stratford High School, an 11–18 school in Warwickshire, the focus was on PLTS delivery and assessment in key stages 3 and 4. The project was primarily designed to tackle variation in the attention given to PLTS and to allow learning processes to be the key focus of lesson planning. The intention was that, after trials, the delivery of PLTS was to be tracked by embedding assessment of the skills in routine internal assessment procedures, with reports to parents and target setting periods with students.

The project was managed by two assistant heads through a weekly meeting. Two school improvement groups (SIGs) set up to improve teaching and learning and the assessment and data procedures acted as focus groups. Each group contained 11 members of staff, including newly qualified teachers, support staff and experienced curriculum leaders. To facilitate the running of the SIGs, two honorarium posts were offered after an interview process to two staff as one-year development opportunities.

### **Management: Developing communication strategies**

The Oaks Primary School in West Sussex put the success of its development work with key stage 2 classes down to good quality communication with all concerned right from the start. They held regular meetings, and clearly stated the expected outcomes so that everyone was on board. Regular feedback proved useful in adjusting the work as it progressed. The school is now scaling up the project to involve key stage 1 and foundation stage classes.

### **Management: Involving the leadership team**

At Littlehampton Community School in West Sussex, development work on assessment was led by a deputy head working with an assistant head with a broad remit for assessment. This combination provided an appropriate level of status for the project and signalled the leadership team's commitment to the work. It was also useful that there was the opportunity for the project leaders to share thinking and arrive at solutions together.

### **Management: Deciding the role of senior leaders**

The leadership team of Hazelwick School, a large 11–18 school in West Sussex, was fully behind the school's work on developing assessment from the start, with a senior deputy taking a lead at the set-up phase. This support proved to be of great value when it came to changing the organisation and delivery of science teaching in year 7 due to findings from the project.

Staff involved in the project noted enhanced motivation and enthusiasm as achievements for learning in year 7 science lessons, coupled with improved communication between year 7 science teachers and learners.

### **Management: Developing assessment in a single subject**

At Redscope Primary School in Rotherham, work on improving teaching, assessment and achievement in mathematics was led by the head and deputy head, who for the past three years brought together two schools through amalgamation. They linked the project to already planned improvement priorities and built on previous successful work on English.

The development work on mathematics had well defined objectives from the outset, based on a rigorous audit of practice and data, and with tightly defined outcomes clearly matched with the school's improvement agenda. The senior leadership team gained the commitment of the whole staff team. Activities were clearly defined throughout the project and included research with teachers and learners, to identify gaps in learning through a range of methods – questioning, observation, video recording, pupil feedback. Staff meetings throughout the project focused on the project, particularly the use of assessment activities, questioning and observation.

Work with parents were introduced from the outset, with a focus on assessing the impact of parental involvement and its impact on improved outcomes for children in maths, particularly a target group of borderline level 3/4 learners. The school also looked to involve 'hard to reach' parents in the project with some success.

### **Management: Assessing effective learning**

At Winterhill Comprehensive School in Rotherham, development work progressed from an earlier 'Effective learners' project. The project built on a strong focus on assessment for learning in the school, including objectives-led lessons with clear learning outcomes, a focus on written feedback, with systematic monitoring of curriculum area practice in this respect, and emphasis on five-part lessons with clear guidelines on consolidation strategies. The new stage of development work was seen as aligning work on general learning skills with coverage

of the content of the key stage 3 curriculum, and as developing an approach to self-assessment.

The project aimed to develop a skills-based approach to delivery of year 7 information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum, through enhancing pupil awareness and opportunities within lessons for PLTS, related criteria and subject-specific objectives and learning outcomes. It involved learners in continuous, day-to-day assessment of their own development of the skills, and enabled and informed periodic tracking of progress by both learners and teachers and the identification of learning priorities.

The school developed a generic framework for skills-based learning and pupil self-assessment which could be applied throughout the year 7 curriculum. The school targeted a small group of learners looking at year 7 ICT learning outcomes and matching these to PLTS, which were given pupil-friendly descriptors. Access to the assessment framework was electronic. This enabled them to reflect upon and record their progress throughout lessons, and learners became increasingly confident in using it as a self-assessment tool. This work was widely disseminated within the school and has thus provided a model for assessment in other curriculum areas, as well as the integration of the PLTS into schemes of work.

### **Management: Assessing personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS)**

Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls, in Warwickshire, focused on developing and assessing creative thinking and collaboration and encouraging reflection on learning. Two main projects on creativity were run in conjunction with the work-related learning coordinator, developing enterprise education in English and in design technology, while the English department also ran a media day in collaboration with the ICT department.

In the autumn term project, the head of English and the work related learning coordinator collaborated on a joint creative project with a year 10 class designing charity advertising campaigns for two local charities. Over a series of lessons, students collaborated in their creative planning and drafting of their campaign ideas, developing ideas in 'office mode' when in role-play and reverting to 'classroom mode' only when they needed to discuss their progress or the requirements of the task with the teacher. The outcomes were judged in presentations to representatives of the two local charities, who joined the teachers in awarding the campaign. The level of creativity and independence achieved by some groups far exceeded expectations.

Exploring creativity, the three forms in year 9 all undertook the same business enterprise project in design technology, with randomly selected groups offering the opportunity to exhibit creative thinking PLTS, as well as team work, independence and self-management. Students

delegated enterprise responsibilities within their teams according to interests and skills and set about researching, designing, manufacturing and marketing a hand-held ball-bearing game. The teacher's use of video captured some of the work in progress, including evidence of creative thinking as it happened and examples of student leadership of their teams and self-management as students negotiated the fulfilment of the tasks. Students also engaged in peer assessment of these skills using a peer assessment sheet.

Plans for the future include building on the use of PLTS and working further on capture of evidence for self- and peer assessment. The project leader will have time for wider, whole-school assessment brief with the aim of developing a 'common language' and understanding across different subjects, among both staff and students. The Pupil Review Working Party is still developing the approach to the evolving review system, with the shift from review mentors working with different groups of students to form tutors taking over responsibility for their tutees. The school aims to coordinate the review schedule with periodic assessment.

### **Management: Leading whole-school change**

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, a one-form entry school in Warwickshire, the aim of the assessment development activity was to improve the standard of children's writing by involving children in determining their personalised writing targets and for parents to support their child at home in achieving these targets. The activity was sponsored and directed by a working group consisting of staff, parents/carers, governors and children. The group met regularly to monitor and evaluate progress; it drew up a simple vision statement that was shared with all involved, including parents, whose involvement was actively sought:

'Children at our school enjoy writing. We will be independent, confident and capable writers. We will know what makes a good writer and recognise, with support from our parents, the next steps we need to take to improve our work.'

In addition:

- all teaching staff reviewed marking policies to ensure teachers' marking practices related to children's writing targets
- they informed and engaged children in assemblies and in classes
- they revised the format of the existing target-setting material was revised
- they offered appropriate support material to parents so that they can support their child at home in achieving writing targets, with the initiative and the materials being warmly welcomed.

Progress towards achieving targets is monitored on a day-to-day basis through marking and this information contributes towards periodic assessment. Targets are reviewed each term, with parents informed of their child's new target at the end of each term and pointed towards sections of the support material which can help to pursue the target.

### **Management: Building change across the school**

At Stratford High School, an 11–18 community school in Warwickshire, the focus was on PLTS delivery and assessment in Key Stage 3 and 4. The project was primarily designed to tackle variation in the attention given to PLTS and to allow learning processes to be the key focus of lesson planning. The intention was that, after trials, the delivery of PLTS was to be tracked by embedding assessment of the skills in routine internal assessment procedures, with reports to parents and target setting periods with students.

The project was managed by two assistant heads through a weekly meeting. Two school improvement groups (SIGs), set up to improve teaching and learning and the assessment and data procedures, acted as focus groups. Each group contained 11 staff, including newly qualified teachers, support staff and experienced curriculum leaders. To facilitate the running of the SIG, two honorarium posts were offered after an interview process to two staff as one-year development opportunities.

The work involved:

- creating a pupil-friendly version of the wording of PLTS, tested with staff and learners
- putting a 'Tweak of the fortnight' on teaching strategies into the staff bulletin, which offered practical tips and had PLTS as a running theme
- devising and using a new lesson plan format for all observations undertaken over the academic year, with PLTS explicitly specified
- focusing on PLTS assessment during the target setting periods in December
- creating a pupil newsletter that emphasised PLTS, provided examples of each skill and was sent to parents
- offering a whole-staff training day about creating 'a zone of challenge' to measure thinking and learning skills in lessons objectively and to inform the next round of lesson observations
- investigating ways of delivering and assessing PLTS through homework in key stage 3

- reflecting with learners on PLTS as part of a target review day in June, with a two-hour programme by way of preface
- developing guidelines for staff about expectations with reports, which included staff commenting both formatively and summatively on PLTS
- mapping of opportunities in the year 7 curriculum to introduce and assess PLTS
- evaluating lesson observations and the target review day
- producing PLTS postcards and posters for subject teams and learners for use within lessons and peer and self-assessment.

# Impact: how will we know when we are achieving our aims?

## Linking aims and outcomes

Establishing the objectives of the development activity links very closely to the means by which the outcomes of the activity will be assessed.

Schools involved in the Articulating Assessment project generally had clear ideas about the difference they were hoping the work would make in terms of teaching methods, pupil engagement, target-setting, the range of evidence to be gathered and reporting to parents – although there were often surprises along the way as the developments were pursued.

Crucial to the work was capturing evidence of how trials were going, using interviews, group discussion, lesson observations and scrutiny of work. They also used learning journals and notebooks. Important in some schools was the use of audio and video technology. All were keen to ensure that evidence gathering was manageable and useful and a number gathered evidence at the point of learning, and in many cases, by the learners themselves.

Some looked at creative ways in which technology could make this an easier and more responsive process. Most refined previous means of collating assessment evidence, whilst others developed more generic mechanisms to assess skills in subject learning and personal development. Latterly the project schools have developed means by which day-to-day assessment informs periodic assessment – and they have identified this as a key priority to further develop in the second phase of the project. The issue of moderation of judgements among teachers working together across age groups and subjects is one key issue.

## What outcomes can be expected?

The headings given in the section on auditing practice can also be used as a basis for analysing the effects of development work. The first four – establishing coherence, gaining involvement, ensuring consistency and securing manageability – can all contribute to the fifth – achieving impact.

Impact is defined by the four criteria drawn from the [Assessment for Learning Strategy](#), namely:

- does our practice mean that every teacher in the school is equipped to make well-founded judgments about pupils' attainment and how to plan to improve it?

- does our practice ensure that every child knows how they are doing and understands what they need to do to improve?
- do our systems allow us to make assessments that are regular, useful, manageable and accurate?
- does our practice help every parent to know how their child is doing, what they need to do to improve, and how they can support the child and their teachers?

The schools involved in the Articulating Assessment project identified a range of benefits from their work – although it is important to say that it is still very much work in progress.

Among the benefits they identified were:

- teachers talking about assessment more purposefully and in greater depth
- increased knowledge of individual learners, including their attitudes to learning, specific gaps in knowledge and skills and barriers to learning
- learners starting to talk and engage with assessment as something on which they had a handle and that was not seen as punitive but helpful
- changes in classroom climates for learning
- lesson planning redesigned to focus more on learning outcomes and individual needs
- a wider range of evidence of learning for use in assessments
- better links between day-to-day and periodic assessment linked to national standards
- more productive reporting to and dialogue with parents.

All the schools, whatever their focus, have ended up doing more talking to learners about their learning. This has been a major feature of the work. Overall, the development work has broadened and strengthened the debate about assessment across the school as a whole.

## **How to judge impact: illustrations**

The illustrations from schools involved in the Articulating Assessment project show how the schools were able to judge the impact of the development work they were doing – recognising that the work was at an early stage and was often not yet showing benefits in terms of better achievement. The key areas beginning to show impact are summarised here.

### **Impact: Improving the consistency of assessment**

Swinton Fitzwilliam Primary School in Rotherham wanted to use assessment for learning as a basis to improve standards. The focus of the project was better practice in planning for, developing and assessing learners' PLTS and to enhance assessment practice within the classroom using video and audio technology.

The school sought to collate a wide evidence base of information to inform teachers both during the year and at transition points of pupil levels and future targets for progression. The school gathered evidence in a range of forms, including video and digital camera. The head was keen from the outset to ensure that evidence-gathering was manageable and useful and gathered evidence at the point of learning, and involving the learners themselves. The school refined its previous means of collating assessment evidence, while also developing more generic mechanisms to assess skills in subject learning and personal development. Over the first year of the project, the school developed the means by which they used day-to-day assessment to inform periodic assessment and is now exploring the possibility of learners having a developing electronic evidence base of their progress.

The school is clear that pupils' learning experiences have been enhanced as a result of developments and through the development of schemes of work to integrate the PLTS. Collaboration and consultation between teachers have enhanced awareness and consistency of learning assessment and outcomes. All school staff contributed through discussion, trialling methods and feedback. Alternative approaches to assessment processes and the observation of the learning characteristics of individual learners, are enabling teachers to 'scaffold' activities accordingly to support learning. Staff have been able to review pupil interactions and replay them as a valuable and powerful assessment tool. The project has enabled teachers to assess the learning characteristics of individual learners and to effectively scaffold activities.

### **Impact: Developing assessment in a single subject**

At Redscope Primary School in Rotherham, work on mathematics broadened and strengthened the debate about assessment in the school. It had a significant impact on staff confidence and competence in the assessment of mathematics, and enhanced the use of observation and questioning from assessment processes. Links with the local comprehensive school were developed and are planned to develop provision in mathematics and PLTS further. Parents and learners are more effectively engaged in the target-setting process across key stages and year groups.

The project resulted in assessment practice being more effectively applied in the school, and staff have a more focused understanding of the needs of individual learners and also how they

will assess their progress. Day-to-day assessment is now informing periodic assessment and target-setting for individuals and groups of learners in maths and English in the school, and this will be further embedded in whole-school assessment practice.

**Impact: Leading whole-school change**

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, in Warwickshire, the aim of assessment development was to improve the standard of children's writing by involving children in determining their personalised writing targets and for parents to support their child at home in achieving these targets.

The monitoring of the initiative involves the head, literacy coordinator and the working party to assess the impact this is having on children's writing, with a full evaluation planned for the end of the new school year. Monitoring of writing shows early signs of impact on children. It shows that children have knowledge of their personalised writing targets and know the next steps to improve their writing. The full evaluation will focus on the effects on achievement and on whether staff find the system manageable and parents are enabled to support their children well at home. A key criterion for the school will be whether the vision statement is being realised, with learners enjoying their writing and being more confident and independent in what they write.

The success of the project so far is rooted in the effectiveness of the working party that represents all stakeholders, supported by the school leadership team. The vision statement provides a shared statement of what the school set out to achieve. As a result of the project, children are more aware of what they need to do next to improve their writing further, and the school is confident that with the support of parents in the next academic year the rate of progress will increase further.

**Impact: Connecting curriculum, teaching and assessment**

Hazelwick School, West Sussex, found that the nature of assessment they were involved in moved them towards a more active and participatory approach to science teaching in year 7, one that focused more closely on developing an individual learners science skills rather than merely on the coverage of subject content. In turn, this led to fairly significant changes in work schemes and teachers' planning.

**Impact: Capturing assessment evidence**

At Durrington High School, West Sussex, 'learning conversations' are an integral part of the weekly catch up meetings, and learners are encouraged to take responsibility for the

collection of evidence. Durrington have also started to use Busbi cameras, still cameras, audio recordings as well as paper based notes to record progress.

**Impact: Assessing learning skills**

The work at Winterhill Comprehensive School in Rotherham on general learning skills increased pupil motivation, engagement and independence. Learners became far more confident in reflecting upon and assessing their own work. Learners' feedback was that their learning experiences were enhanced as a result of changes in the scheme of work. Collaboration between teachers enhanced awareness and consistency on learning outcomes. Good progress was made in the school in integrating the PLTS into schemes of work and exploring ways in which they can be assessed. The project is to be extended to all key stage 3 ICT schemes of work and then included in the school's 'Effective learners' toolkit.

**Impact: Providing evidence of learning skills**

Southwater Junior School in West Sussex started using video in order to capture evidence about children learning and to find ways of assessing learning skills as well as subject specific skills. They videoed children accessing learning activities to allow their own assessment of themselves and their effectiveness – particularly noting 'before' and 'after', focusing on a particular learning skill.

Southwater found the benefit of video is far-reaching, ensuring that the child is able to observe their learning behaviours and see where they impact on others – particularly useful when discussing the skill of absorption. It was clear to children when they were becoming side-tracked by others or indeed, when they were the one doing the distracting. For teachers, children and parents this has proved a powerful tool for discussing the ways forward for children to improve their learning skills.

**Impact: Connecting subject and general learning skills**

Durrington High School West Sussex, an 11-16 high school with a business and enterprise specialism, aimed to bring together level descriptors for business and enterprise with PLTS in order to mesh the aspirations of the project with the school's existing development plan. They found that the process of gathering evidence became cumbersome. The school tackled this by designing an interactive PowerPoint presentation that supported the learners rather than showcasing the final product.

### **Impact: Linking learning skills within subjects**

Hazelwick School, West Sussex, a large and high performing 11–18 school, focused on the assessment of skills within science in year 7. They found that learning skills, as well as their assessment, cannot be bolted on to an assessment routine already in place, as they require time for both teachers and learners and need specific opportunities in the subject's scheme of work. In addition, they found that the number of skills to be focused on needs to be carefully selected and limited in number both for the benefit of the learner, who will be concentrating on a small range of associated skills at any one time, and the teacher, who has limited time. Learners also need to revisit the same skills, and the assessment opportunities need to be included in schemes of work. Hazelwick also found that assessment should be closely guided for peer assessment to be effective.

### **Impact: Building dialogue around skills**

At Stratford High in Warwickshire, evaluation of its new PLTS focus during lesson observation produced a large number of interesting insights, such as:

- '[There] is still some uncertainty about [what] higher order thinking skills are, because when I was observed I thought I had planned these in (students evaluating studies, engaging in discussions, justifying a point of view), but I am not sure that my observer saw these things in the same light ... I think further clarification would be nice' (from a teacher)
- 'I used all the PLTS from our training session and handouts and tried to incorporate it into my lesson. I managed to step out of my comfort zone effectively, thanks to all the info I had been given. I specifically focused on some of the areas that I was weakest on [in my] last observation, but equally tried to focus on some new areas' (from a curriculum leader)
- 'It's really made me think about how I learn in the lessons' (from a year 10 pupil).

The aims of the project were met. PLTS are now embedded in both learning conversations and assessment procedures. Staff and students are now entering into meaningful conversations about learning processes while at the same time setting and monitoring PLTS targets. The impact can clearly be seen in school documentation, displays and reports, with evidence of assessments of PLTS seen on a daily basis in the records of the electronic tracking system which are communicated to parents. PLTS are embedded in new planning processes for curriculum delivery for the new school year and every pupil in years 7–10 has a PLTS target to work on from September.

**Impact: Involving learners**

Staff at Littlehampton Community School, West Sussex, feel that their involvement in the Articulating Assessment project has been a real success, not least because the year 7 learners involved in the trial are able to articulate how effective they are as learners and most importantly what they need to do to be more effective learners. The self-assessments that the learners do are now informing teachers' planning.

**Impact: Reading responses of learners**

Summerlea County Primary School, West Sussex, identified that, as a result of the development work, children are a good deal more aware of skills and are very positive and engaged during skills-based assessment week, notably in their business and enterprise projects.

The overall response of children is very positive. They like the fact that they are looking more at themselves as a person as opposed to what they can or cannot do academically. They are also beginning to look beyond the classroom in terms of themselves outside of school, as well as their career when they leave school in the future. Because time has been a barrier before, the school recognised the need to plan time for work on PLTS within a weekly timetable. This helped with keeping momentum and gathering evidence, for example through guided reading sessions.

**Impact: Making reliable judgements**

Summerlea Community Primary School, West Sussex, did a great deal of work on assessment for learning and felt that it was embedded across the school, but they wanted to broaden the range of evidence that supported judgements around progress in PLTS within periodic assessments. Initially, they were worried about the amount of evidence they might have to keep. As the assessment project lead put it: 'I really struggled with how to gather the evidence at the beginning of the term. I was very anxious about collecting evidence just for the sake of it, which then sat in a filing cabinet and served no purpose. The evidence has got to be purposeful to inform future planning – if not it is a waste of time and teachers would not do it.'

The school decided that a 'period' is likely to last approximately six weeks or half a term, during which evidence will be gathered appropriate for each of the strands. This evidence will be in the form of children's learning journals, photographs and video, among other varieties. At the end of the period, the class teacher and the child will make assessments using the Apgar model. As a result of this assessment, targets can be set for individuals, children can be grouped accordingly and adjustments made for future planning/teaching. The evidence that

has been used to make this judgement does not necessarily need to be kept. A new bank of evidence will be collected during the next period.

### **Impact: Broadening the assessment dialogue**

Easebourne Primary School is a rural school that wanted to use the project to understand assessment within the context of their students' learning and to provide additional opportunities for them to self-, peer- and group-assess. The staff came to the view that assessment based on skills that could be transferred across all subjects would be far more manageable and have a greater impact on the children's learning. Easebourne based their approach on what they term the four Rs: resilience, reflection, relationships and resourcefulness. They used a version of the Apgar model to capture, in a strongly visual way, the progress individual children made in developing the four Rs on a residential trip. As the school noted: 'It quickly became clear that the use of Apgar and its creation of a new dialogue between everyone at Easebourne (children, teachers, parents/carers and governors) was going to revolutionise the way we think about learning.'

### **Impact: Connecting forms of assessment**

At Wath CE Primary School in Rotherham, the project was developed to build on past work to introduce a system that integrated day-to-day assessment to inform periodic assessment, pupil target setting, transition data and to support planning and curriculum delivery. It was intended for learners, parents and staff to be involved in and aware of individual education targets, and for learners to be able to evaluate their own progress, within and between levels.

The head and deputy led the project, but the whole school staff owned and developed it. The school's development priorities identified the need for children to be more informed about their learning journey, understand achievements made and recognise targets for improvement. The goal of the work was to develop informed assessment to be used to inform future planning, involving children and parents, to empower them to take control of their learning and support them to challenge themselves. Information was collected through a range of methods. This included learning conversations between children, staff and parents, and included a focus on personal skills to raise their profile within the curriculum.

Assessment has been a key focus at staff meetings and staff development. Assessment moderation enhanced consistency in assessment practice throughout the school. Lesson plans were redesigned to focus more on learning outcomes and were shared with learners. Staff developed an increased knowledge of individual learners: barriers to learning, confidence, attitudes and specific gaps in knowledge and skills. Enhanced processes for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning with a focus on assessment for learning had a

particular impact on the introduction and plenary aspects of lessons. All staff contributed through discussion, action research and feedback and children started to talk and engage with assessment as something they understood and owned.