



Guidance

Curriculum and
Standards

Key Stage 3

National Strategy

Organising a work sample

Headteachers and
school Key Stage 3
strategy managers

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The purposes of work sampling

- 1 Studying a complete collection of pupils' work across the subjects is a key tool in a school's pursuit of self-evaluation and improvement. It provides tangible and immediate evidence of how pupils are doing and enables staff to plan improvements with confidence.
- 2 Work sampling gives the school a solid understanding of its current strengths and weaknesses, complementing understanding it already has from its data and from first-hand professional experience. It can also help to explain more precisely the judgements made by external inspection about achievement, progress and teaching. It can corroborate anecdotal impressions about trends, explain statistical anomalies and tell the staff whether planned improvements really worked. Using benchmark data, it can also illuminate the extent to which national trends and issues apply to the school, and point the way forward in tackling under-performance and disadvantage. It is part of an inclusive philosophy which is willing to recognise strengths and seek improvements. Whatever the reasons for initiating a sample of pupils' work, it offers, when properly directed and organised, a key perspective on the central matter of how far pupils are fulfilling their potential.
- 3 In a nutshell, sampling pupils' work helps a school to:
 - gain insights into the range of achievements and progress of pupils at important stages in their education;
 - monitor the variations in achievement of pupils in different subjects;
 - identify strengths and weaknesses in what pupils know, understand and can do;
 - monitor progress made by different groups of pupils and the levels of challenge and demand placed on them as reflected in work at school and at home;
 - pursue the values of educational inclusion and know how it is meeting the full range of needs and overcoming any barriers to learning;
 - find additional evidence for pupils' attitudes to school, behaviour in lessons, motivation and commitment as reflected in their written work.

Establishing the context

- 4 Sampling pupils' work is most useful when it is not an arbitrary solo event but forms part of a regular pattern of school self-evaluation, which is fully understood by staff and expected by pupils and parents. All schools should consider routine sampling of each year group once a year as part of the evaluation leading to the annual revision of the School Improvement Plan. But in addition to this, there are some good reasons to conduct a sampling exercise to track priority pupils, for example, under-attainers, to see if they are benefiting from interventions offered. Another prompt may be an external finding that requires investigation, such as a comment made during an Ofsted inspection. A school may look closely at pupils' written work for a variety of purposes and points of reference. This could be at a single class level ('How well has this Year 7 class adapted to secondary school in the first term?'), at a year group level ('Have Year 8 made the progress we expected, now that we are half-way through the year?') or to answer a specific subject question ('How well are pupils in Year 9 writing about investigations in science, following our changes in the units of work?'). The skills developed as part of the regular examination of pupils'

work are a positive extension of teachers' professional skills; they enable teachers to stand back from individual subject marking and assessment and discern broader trends and patterns in pupils' work. Schools make a good investment when they support and train teachers in the close examination of pupils' work. The skills of work sampling are learned by doing, in an atmosphere of productive evaluation and appraisal. They dovetail with, and are similar to, the skills needed in departmental moderation procedures, where, at key points in the year, standards and levels are agreed and established with the direct evidence of pupils' work as the basis for judgement.

Identifying the focus for a work sample

- 5 This is of fundamental importance for the whole exercise and must be done with clarity and explicitness. Without this clear purpose and direction the work sample cannot produce useful and accurate judgements which take the school forward. The decision about the focus for the work sample usually stems from preliminary discussions, often involving a number of staff and covering a series of issues about which the school feels it needs to know more. It may also take as its starting point an external critique such as an Ofsted report, an influx of new data or an LEA review. Some potential priority issues which could trigger a work sample might be:
 - how effective the school is in identifying and meeting the needs of high ability pupils;
 - how well the school is making progress in raising minority ethnic achievement;
 - the reasons for and extent of a perceived under-achievement by boys at the end of Year 7;
 - the differences between progress made by boys and girls in Year 9 and their patterns of achievement;
 - the features of an 'anti-achievement' culture in both boys and girls;
 - the effectiveness of mentoring strategies with 'borderline' candidates in raising achievement;
 - how far new behaviour and attendance policies are having an impact on achievement;
 - how far pupils with special needs have made progress in mainstream lessons, following targeted support;
 - how far pupils from refugee or asylum-seeker family backgrounds are achieving their potential.
- 6 Having identified a priority, the activity itself needs to be carefully planned and organised.

Planning and organising a work sample

- 7 The following steps will help the work sampling to be carried out smoothly and effectively. Once the key area of enquiry is identified then the school should:
- establish who is to manage the work sampling, be the point of reference, chair the meetings, and coordinate and communicate the findings;
 - decide on the number of pupils whose work will form the sample;
 - consult with teachers to identify the particular pupils whose work will provide the evidence pertinent to the matter being pursued;
 - put together the work sampling team and a rationale for its membership;
 - organise in good time the collection of pupils' work, with a note, where appropriate, to the parents of pupils involved explaining the nature and purpose of the work;
 - organise a suitable room in which to work, and notify participants of the time, date and purpose;
 - agree what is to be included in each collection of pupils' work – exercise books, homework diaries/planners, art/design portfolios, tape or video, and so on;
 - agree if processes should also be sampled through observation, e.g. reading, ICT in action;
 - prepare an aide-memoire for the work sampling team, providing an appropriate framework and focus for the work.
- 8 The size of the team to carry out the work can vary according to purpose and circumstances but it is generally most effective when 6–8 teachers are involved. The composition of the team is similarly flexible, but will usually include:
- a deputy headteacher or an assistant headteacher or an advanced skills teacher;
 - a senior member (HoD or 2 i/c) of English, mathematics and science departments;
 - the special educational needs coordinator;
 - the literacy coordinator or Key Stage 3 coordinator;
 - head of lower/upper school, head of year;
 - any other teacher whom the school believes can provide a valuable perspective, given the scope of the enquiry.

The members of the team are normally best organised into pairs so that there is the benefit of constant discussion and varying viewpoint as the pupils' work is examined. Each pair looks at all the work in the sample, with rotation organised by the sample manager. The scale of the sample must be realistic in the time available – perhaps ten individual collections of work in one session. A prepared aide-memoire provides a framework for finding and recording evidence and helps makes good use of time. It also provides an agenda for the concluding discussion.

Devising an aide-memoire

- 9 The aide-memoire should establish clearly the main emphasis of the enquiry and identify the key areas where evidence can be found. It coordinates the coverage of the team and gives consistency in prioritising and evaluating the evidence. There are a wide range of possibilities and approaches, as the aide-memoire must reflect the purposes of the work sampling, but some useful common features for judgement might include the following:
- How far are pupils making progress in continuous writing?
Evidence from writing – instruction, explanation, information, persuasion, discussion, analysis, evaluation, description, account, narrative.
 - How far do pupils show progress and confidence in technical and presentational features, handwriting and layout?
Evidence from spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, sense of purpose in writing, coherence and continuity.
 - The extent of unfinished, incomplete work and work which lacks commitment and interest.
 - The extent of copying from blackboard or worksheet.
 - The nature, challenge and appropriateness of homework set.
Are standards in homework the same, higher or lower, than those reached in class?
 - The extent to which pupils develop independent note-making skills.
Evidence from the range of source material read and used, any support for developing close reading, reading for information, skills of research, synthesis and interpretation, from print or ICT, the use of library resources.
 - The quality of marking and assessment.
Evidence from the impact of marking on progress, attitudes and effort, the quality of on-going monitoring, pupils' self-assessment.
 - Overall evaluation, identifying key points for action on the basis of sampling the work.

Using the evidence from the work sample

- 10 The main conclusions agreed by the sampling team will have a direct bearing on the issues behind the work sample enquiry. The manager of the activity should coordinate the collective findings and proposals for addressing them through the usual quality assurance and development arrangements. It would be good practice then, for the actions arising to be integrated into routine development plans, accompanied by suitable training with which to support any shifts in practice. The credibility of work sampling depends critically on the rigour and effectiveness of the follow-up action and the extent to which the school, as a body, enables it to happen.

Like all action plans, this one will need SMART objectives, timelines, resources and responsibilities allocated to it. But especially important is the need to monitor it. Issues that merit work sampling can be complex and deep-rooted, so keeping a critical eye on the impact of actions is particularly important. There is a simple method, of course, which is to resample the same pupils to identify longitudinally how they are responding. In this sense, the work sample is the start of a feedback process on the impact of teaching on learning.

Sampling pupils' reading skills

- 11 Hearing a number of pupils from the sample read is a valuable accompanying activity to the examination of the collection of written work. It gives further evidence for progress and development and is a useful addition to the subject teacher's awareness and understanding of pupils' confidence, fluency and skill in using a wide range of reading material.
- 12 Hearing pupils read will add further first-hand evidence to what the school knows about:
 - pupils' reading strategies;
 - their ability to use inference and deduction;
 - their understanding beyond the literal;
 - their ability to make connections between different parts of the text;
 - their clarity and expression in reading aloud;
 - their ability to prioritise information, identify salient features and detect bias, opinion and objectivity;
 - their appreciation and understanding of literary texts;
 - their awareness of a writer's attitude or points of view.

Pupils should read to the teacher from fiction and non-fiction with which they are familiar, preferably related to current work. It will be most useful when:

- the setting and atmosphere is as friendly as possible and the occasion does not have the overtones of a reading test;
- there is sufficient time and skilled questions to allow the pupil to enlarge on the text, speculate, consider and reflect on the material he/she is reading;
- the reading of the particular texts chosen is linked to other reading in school and at home, for learning, pleasure and entertainment;
- the teacher concerned has sufficient professional skill to evaluate the pupils' achievements in reading accurately and sensitively.

The accumulated evidence about reading skills from hearing pupils read should be considered alongside the evidence for the level of reading skill indicated by the pupils' written work. It is particularly useful, for example, to know whether pupils have a wide range of skills that are not sufficiently employed in class, or conversely whether the pupils are confused and uncertain with the reading tasks which form part of the day-to-day work. In either case, with this information, the school is in a position to plan improvements.

Six golden rules for effective work sampling

- Begin with a clear and explicit focus, hypothesis or lead question.
- Establish who is to be responsible for the organisation, management, coordination and evaluative summarising of the activity.
- Prepare a guiding aide-memoire which provides a framework for enquiry.
- Select a sample of pupils' work, based on existing knowledge, which will provide the best evidence, within the constraints of time available.
- Discuss and agree the main features which emerge from the work seen.
- Draw up a practicable action plan which can be implemented by subject departments, and track its impact by resampling pupils over time.

With thanks to John Taylor, former HMI, for his help with the video and guidance.

Sample aide-memoire

Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Layout and neatness• Length• Consistency• Handwriting• Use of ICT• Graphic work	
Literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expression (quality of sentences)• Style• Paragraph• Structure of writing• Vocabulary• Spelling	
Numeracy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grasp of place value (decimals, %, fractions)• Strategies for working out• Accuracy• Problem solving and logic• Presentation and interpretation of data• Work on shapes	
Consistency <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework/classwork• Performance in different lessons• Trends over time	
Teacher input <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extent of marking• Usefulness of marking• Consistency of marking• Pupil response to marking	
Other	

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