

Assessment Case Study – The Approach to Assessment at Turnfurlong Infant School, Aylesbury

Background

The introduction of a new National Curriculum and changed approach to reporting attainment by levels have given the school a new momentum to develop its existing practice. Much of the new National Curriculum appears unduly prescriptive and assessment has moved from an approach based on Bloom's Taxonomy which gave emphasis to criterion referencing and flexibility to the curriculum, to a norm referenced approach where the emphasis is comparing the attainment of one child with another against detailed knowledge. This does not fit easily with the ethos of the school which has a focus on developing individual children, most of whom have traditionally attained well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Whilst the school has always complied with the National Curriculum it has used guidance selectively and, over time, has been heavily influenced by thinking about early years research on learning and the development and progression of outcomes (skills, attitudes and knowledge).



Most important is a strong belief that the curriculum and assessment must be developed together with constant evaluation of teaching. If it does not have an impact on learning then it is changed. Achieving a balance between formative and summative assessment means that there is consistency and understanding across the staff team about what is meant by progress and the trajectory of learning of each child.

Curriculum

The school has a strong tradition of designing and developing the curriculum around an annual initiative agreed by all the staff (The Celts 2015, Strings and Things 2014) which leads and refreshes the learning each year, and provides coherence across the school. The initiatives provide a context for learning in which subject leaders are trusted to shape attitudes, knowledge and skills (competencies) to the agreed standard in the National Curriculum. The annual initiative leads the core subjects and is used to refresh all other subjects and inspire children by developing their interest. It has had a significant impact, improving speaking and listening skills for SEND children, and pre-teaching programmes are provided for EAL children to improve their level of engagement. Year Leaders play a key role in designing the curriculum to embrace the agreed subject competencies, and they rotate which brings continual refreshment of ideas, and secures an understanding about expectations across the school.

Curriculum design builds from the needs of the children to avoid 'teaching to the level' and each year group focuses on providing an engaging curriculum

with the confidence that if the learning is sufficiently rich then the children will reach the expected standard. The standards in writing are aligned with those in reading and, by increasing the number of steps, this helps staff to support learning so that the standards attained in writing and reading aim to be equivalent. Year groups describe the expected minimum threshold for entry, which informs how children are prepared as they progress from one year to the next. This has improved transition and led to a high level of efficiency and continuity in learning from reception to the end of year 2.

Assessment

The school is cautious about the level of expectation described in APP and published assessment schemes, and has a healthy scepticism about the reliability of national tests. The thinking in 'Development Matters' has been influential in the approach to assessment. The standards for the core subjects are pasted on the inside cover of each exercise book and staff use assessment to identify the next steps for learners. This provides a story for the child and staff about progress and guides the nature of intervention. For guided reading and maths, attainment is recorded on a concept ladder, which informs the child about what has to be achieved to progress to the next stage of learning. This has proved especially important for those children who attain high standards.

The result is that formative and summative assessment are joined up, with limited reference to national levels until the end of each year when they are reported within a context of what each child knows, can do and understands. This underpins the school approach to individual learning, and regular discussion takes place across the staff team about expectations. This has resulted in all staff becoming expert at moderating and levelling through work scrutiny leading to a common understanding about what is expected at the end of year 2.

The formative data emerging from the moderation process is recorded on tablet computers for analysis to identify common gaps and trends, such as patterns in spelling or handwriting, in real time. What drives improvement is how the analysis of formative data informs the nature of intervention and the grouping of children (for example in word and sentence level learning). Where children 'get stuck' they return to previous achievement, consolidate learning, and then build from there. Addressing misconceptions involves a child led conversation and this illustrates that addressing misconceptions may take time. Finding this when there is top down pressure about allocating time for subjects can be unhelpful.

The challenge now is to describe the entry baseline and, as always, the school is seeking to create its own path to meet the needs of the children.

"This is what we think is right for our children and this may not be right for other schools. We must have the courage of own convictions and must not just do things because we have been told to do them".

Jan Tyson (Headteacher)