

Association of Assessment  
Inspectors and Advisers



**Secondary Assessment Practice:**

## **Self Evaluation and Development Materials**



**The Association for those with a professional interest in  
the assessment, recording and reporting of achievement**

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## Acknowledgements

'Secondary Assessment Practice: Evaluation and Development Materials' builds upon and develops earlier AAIA publications. In particular, the checklists are based upon the AAIA document 'Teacher Assessment in Action' (first published 1996 and updated 1998).

Many AAIA members contributed to these earlier publications and to this booklet. Specific contributions to this booklet have been made by Tony Cobb and Martin Clark who undertook the bulk of the work in writing it. Thanks also to Sue Swaffield for feedback, proof reading and many useful suggestions for improvements to the booklet.

**May 2002**



## Introduction

### Audience and purpose

This booklet is designed to assist the evaluation, review and development of assessment practice in schools, with the intention of promoting student achievement. It aims to encourage practice which supports learning and teaching, and addresses the various processes associated with assessment, recording and reporting. The principles and general statements contained in the booklet are applicable to schools of all types, but the specific examples refer to secondary schools.

The booklet is written for AAIA members as the main audience, anticipating that they will use the materials in their work with schools. Although the intention is that the booklet will be mediated by AAIA members, others, including teachers and headteachers working independently, could use this material.

### Content

The main body of the booklet is divided into sections, which cover aspects of assessment, recording and reporting. These sections are:

1. Fundamental principles
2. Planning learning
3. Assessment for learning
4. Feedback and marking
5. Assessment of learning
6. Recording and evidence
7. Reporting to parents and carers
8. Transfer and transition
9. Management and monitoring
10. Using assessment information to monitor progress
11. Evaluation as part of school improvement

It is not necessary to work through all of the sections in the order provided and a consultant / adviser might concentrate on one particular section in his / her work with a school. However, it should be borne in mind that an understanding of certain practices covered in other sections might be a prerequisite for any section taken alone. For example, the quality of feedback and marking may have been identified as an area for development, but this cannot be effective unless learning intentions are clearly identified in planning and shared with students in every lesson. So the planning section may also need to be addressed.

However, since each section is designed to stand alone, when the document is taken as a whole there is some duplication between the sections. This is kept to a minimum but also reflects the way assessment is integral to teaching and learning.

Section 1 is of a different nature from the others as it considers fundamental principles of assessment. These should underpin the practices focused upon in all other sections and could be thought of as being the bedrock of practice. It is therefore suggested that it

is essential for everyone to discuss and agree some fundamental ground rules first, since all other sections have to be considered in the light of these. Such debate should promote consistency and coherence in practice.

Whilst all sections develop aspects of assessment, recording and reporting, students' learning is most directly affected by what goes on in the classroom everyday. Sections 2, 3 and 4, 'Planning learning', 'Assessment for learning' and 'Feedback and marking' could therefore be considered as key to improving classroom practice. The checklist statements discussed and agreed in these sections could form the basis of a school's Teaching and Learning policy.

Each section consists of three elements:

1. A commentary or vignette written from the viewpoint of someone linked to a school, such as a classroom teacher, assessment co-ordinator, head teacher, parent governor or LEA adviser, which illustrates the values, practice and the development processes in place. These commentaries reflect important points of principle and practice, and are intended to be illustrative not exhaustive. They were written by the authors with real schools and people in mind. Elements of practice from a number of schools have been used, they are there to initiate discussion.
2. A checklist, which consists of statements about practice, designed to be used as a self-evaluation tool. Two types of judgements are required: perceptions of the level of the importance of this aspect and a judgement against current practice. This is to help to identify those areas that are felt to be successful, and those that would benefit from refinement or development.
3. A selection of quotations - from students, parents, teachers and a wide variety of documents are included - to illustrate, clarify, provoke, stimulate and inspire discussion and debate, and should not be taken as models of good practice.

Wherever possible each A4 page of the booklet is self-contained so that it can be used as an in-service training resource and for supporting school self-evaluation. The booklet is available on the AAIA web site, where it is hoped that members will add additional strategies and their own experiences. The AAIA site is also complemented by additional materials, which are frequently revised and updated.

<http://www.aaia.org.uk>

## How to use these materials

This booklet began as a self-evaluation tool. Its aim was *“to help members work with schools by matching current policy and practice against the checklist statements provided”*. Using these checklists, an audit of current strengths and potential areas for development can be undertaken. This audit should then inform school improvement planning as well as support the completion of the self-reporting forms required by Ofsted inspectors, many local authorities and governing bodies. However, experience has shown that making judgements, using the statements, is not always a straightforward matter. When the material was trialed in schools, some of the teachers judged their practice as very good when the reality was rather different.

In discussion with one group of teachers after completing the exercises, it became obvious that their understanding of many recent assessment initiatives was limited. They did not involve students in their learning, but had evaluated their own practice for the statement, *“assessment practice advances the learning process”* as a 4 (i.e. that practice mirrors the statement). Their evidence was that they used end of Key Stage 2 and 3 test results to group students. However, in this school, practice did not include involvement of students in setting their own targets, evaluating lessons, feedback marking, or many other processes that move learning forward, all issues that the leadership team had wanted to initiate.

Whilst every effort has been made to make the statements as clear and unambiguous as possible, it does not allow for different starting points. To help with clarification each section is introduced with a vignette, which places the values and attitudes related to the statements within a context. The vignette exemplifies some assessment practice that is then reflected upon in the audit. It is suggested that it is read in order to provide a starting point for discussion. The vignettes have not been written in order for teachers or AAIA members to accept verbatim but for comparison against one’s own practice, views and beliefs. The process then proceeds and judgements can be made against checklist statements.

In order to develop practice further two sorts of judgement are required:

1. The importance that is attached to each statement by the teachers
2. The extent to which current practice in the school matches these statements

A four-point scale is provided for these judgements. On the left is the scale for indicating the importance / relevance of the statements.

- 4 = essential
- 3 = very important
- 2 = quite important
- 1 = of limited importance

On the right is the scale for judging how closely the statements match to current practice:

- 4 = the practice mirrors the statement
- 3 = the practice has room for minor improvements
- 2 = the practice has elements that require development
- 1 = the practice requires re-thinking

A final resource in each section is a series of quotations that are provided to provoke further discussion. These quotes could be used formally, for example, “I agree / I disagree” with the quote, or by ranking each in order of importance, or alternatively they can be used as an informal starting point for more discussion. These three elements of vignettes, checklists and quotations form the basis for thorough review, evaluation and possibly then further development of assessment practice. The materials in the booklet can be used in a number of ways. An outline example of an INSET activity that was carried out with teachers is shown below. This activity formed part of a session on planning.

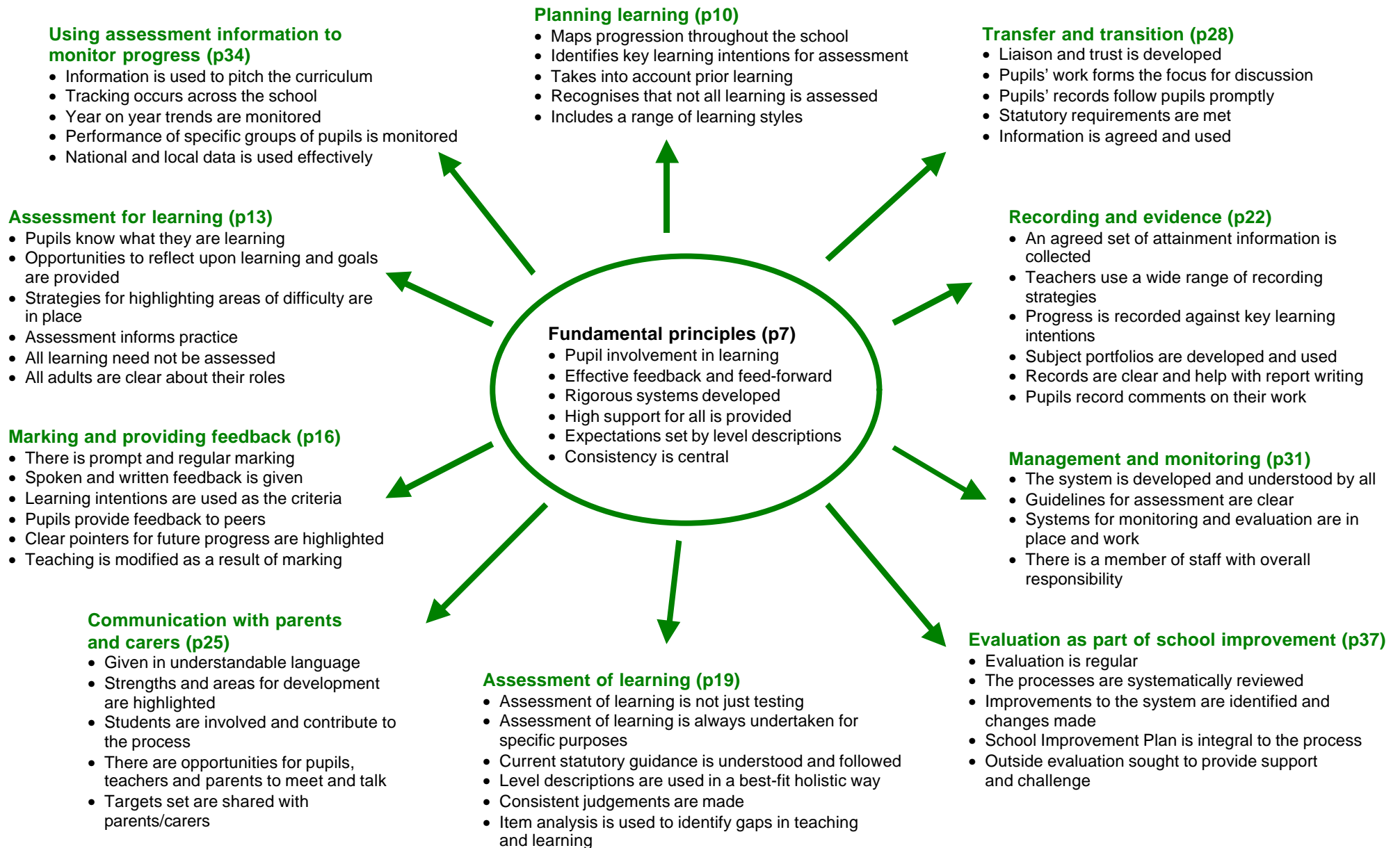
### Planning learning – an Inset activity

Group activity for 40 members of staff.

**School:** Urban 11-16 High School.

**Resources:** Planning section photocopied and three coloured pens per table

Timing	Activity focus	Participant response	Groups
3 minutes	Introduction to session. Clarification of aims and reassurance that no one answer was expected	Personal questions and issues to be addressed	In small groups(3-4)
10 minutes	Participants read vignette and highlight in green what they already do, highlight in orange things they do not do but would like to as they make sense and highlight in red things that they do not do and would not like to	Discussion of vignette. The focus is on reading what is written ensuring the participants unpack their ideas sentence by sentence.	In their small group
5 minutes	Groups move on to the checklist. Making judgements against their practice and against their priorities	Although this session is still in groups, it is easy to spot where there is total agreement in the group and also areas that need to be drawn out for further discussion	Still in small groups
10 minutes	Whole group discussion on vignette and statements	What had they highlighted in orange/red? Was there any consistency between groups? Are the coloured sections the same for each group? (as they are highlighted it makes visual evaluation by the course leader easier)	Whole group discussion with scribe to take key points for action/debate further
5 minutes	Quotations are read	Rank them in order of importance to your group(1-6)	Small group
3- 5 minutes	Plenary	Which statements are most important? Why? What effect will this have on the students? Key points for future action	Whole group with scribe



## Fundamental principles

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Soon after my appointment as Head, I wanted to talk to all my colleagues about assessment and its use in school. There was plenty of it going on. Colleagues were marking regularly. Our assessment co-ordinator was analysing school, local and national data, feeding back reams of information to subject areas. Individual student target setting was in full swing. However, my classroom observations, looking at agendas for subject meetings and monitoring student work made me question the effectiveness of all this very hard, almost slavish attention. How far was this assessment activity influencing lesson planning, and improving students' progress and continuity of learning?

At our leadership team weekend, we devoted significant time to reviewing some assessment principles, and current practice. Most of us had met 'assessment for learning' principles, and 'Inside the Black Box' and subsequent thinking. A flip chart was used to record our concerns about our school's current practice. Too much time was spent by teachers on marking, often "working much harder than the kids". Too much marking was still focused on completion and presentation, rather than pointing up ways to improve. Prior attainment at KS2 was in teacher mark books, but there was little evidence that this data influenced lesson planning and the pitch of tasks set. Many colleagues felt "overwhelmed" by the photocopied sheaf of student data in their pigeon holes in September. As data moved from pigeon hole to desk drawer for "when I've got time", the immediate learning needs of the average and most able students, based on their good prior attainment, may well have been over-looked by teachers. Nevertheless teachers felt strongly that 'assessment affects student motivation'. This next flipchart comment unlocked a lengthy discussion. 'Do long term numerical targets, based on levels, motivate students?' For how many years is level 5 the declared target for an average student at KS3? Do students feel that they are being helped to 'manage' their own learning and development needs? Are they being encouraged to support each other's learning?

Important issues for future action became clearer. We agreed that we needed to improve our understanding of:

- the kinds of assessment and target setting processes which motivate and develop students in all years, but particularly in Years 7,8 and 10;
- the common, minimum, and manageable data to be handled regularly and understood by students, teachers and parents;
- the use to be made of a range of known prior attainment, and of teaching and learning styles, which recognise the individuality of our students, moving between and within schools;
- the techniques involved in identifying under-achievement and the potential of high achievers;
- the national benchmarking and value added data from sources such as the Autumn Package,
- the ways in which all students can be helped to support their own learning and that of their peers, developing skills of self-assessment, paired or group review, and personal motivation.

These were big areas for the school to tackle, but essential for informing short, mid and long-term planning and effective classroom practice. Achieving greater student responsibility for their own learning seemed to be the long term priority, but both teachers and students would need to develop an understanding of new ways of working. We felt that we had set at least a two-year staff development agenda.

## Fundamental principles

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Assessment offers all students an opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment practice helps students to understand what they can do and identify where they need to develop further and how this can be done	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The key learning outcomes for each subject have been identified so that assessments can be made against these	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment of progress relates to all aspects of the curriculum	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Sharing of learning intentions and success criteria is routine practice	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment practice in the school enhances the learning process	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessments made by the teachers inform planning and allow learning to be matched to the needs of the students	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment of students' learning is reported to parents in a way which identifies achievements and what the student needs to do to improve	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are involved in assessing their own work and that of their peers	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students and teachers work together identifying targets for learning and ways of achieving these	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment records including data on each student are updated regularly and passed to the next teachers to aid future planning	1 2 3 4

### **Importance**

- 4 = essential  
 3 = very important  
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### **Current Practice**

- 4 = our practice mirrors the statement  
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## Fundamental principles

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“Any assessment is only as good as the action that arises from it”. *James, 1998*

“Good day-to-day assessment helps students raise standards of their work, correcting mistakes, reinforcing knowledge, building concepts and developing skills”.  
*Good teaching and effective departments, Ofsted, 2002*

“Promoting children’s learning is a principal aim of schools. Assessment lies at the heart of this process. It can provide a framework in which the educational objectives can be set and students’ progress charted and expressed. It can yield a basis for planning the next step in response to children’s needs– it should be an integral part of the educational process, continually providing “feedback” and “feed forward”. It therefore needs to be incorporated systematically into teaching strategies and practices at all levels”. *TGAT, 1988*

“Overall, the purpose of assessment is to improve standards, not merely to measure them. Although the quality of formative assessment has improved perceptibly, it continues to be a weakness in many schools”. *OFSTED, 1998.*

“In a review of research on assessment and classroom learning—the outcome was a clear and incontrovertible message: that initiatives designed to enhance effectiveness of the way assessment is used in the classroom to promote learning can raise student achievement”  
*Black and Wiliam, 1998a*

“If all pupils in a class are working at an appropriate level and the work is pitched correctly the assessment must be good” *Ofsted Inspector*

“Assessment is to be seen as a moment of learning, and children have to be active in their own assessment and to picture their own learning in the light of an understanding of what it means to get better”. *Black & Wiliam, 1998b*

“Clues to the effectiveness of formative assessment are how well teachers listen and respond to students, encourage and, where appropriate, praise them, recognise and handle misconceptions, build on their responses and steer them towards clearer understanding. Effective teachers encourage students to judge the success of their own work and set targets for improvement. They will take full account of the targets set out in individual education plans for students with special educational needs”. *OFSTED Handbook, 2000*

“A school is effective if it promotes progress for all of its students beyond what would be expected given consideration of initial attainment and background factors”. *NAHT, 2000.*

“If you want a plant to grow it is no good just measuring it, you need to give it the things that will make it grow. Children are the same, measuring them is not enough! They need to be given learning that makes them grow”. *Anon*

“Learners not only need to learn but also need to know what they know” *Jensen, 1996*

“The relationship between effective formative assessment and the improvement of standards has yet to be fully recognised, understood and capitalised upon by schools generally”  
*Suffolk LEA, 2000*

## Planning Learning

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As subject leader, the head asked me to explore ways in which our assessment practice could feed more effectively into curriculum planning for which I am responsible. We both feel strongly that assessment is inextricably linked to planning. Student performance data feeds a familiar cycle: 'Where are we now? Where do we want to be? What does assessment tell us about our strengths and weaknesses in getting from A to B?' We do a lot of analysis within subject areas, but not so much 'whole school', apart from the important leadership team study of PANDA and Autumn Package commentaries on national tests and exam performance.

I enjoy looking at how similar schools are managing. One school produces an A4 sheet summarising the strengths and weakness of the incoming Year 7 students – as a group. This is impressive because the data comes from 27 feeder schools, although 8 would be seen as core providers. My school expects teaching, driven by its faculty organisation, to take account of an intake which is shown to have a higher proportion of more able students than previous entries. The school improvement plan targets and activities will include measures to cater for an unexplained, under-achievement in mathematics at KS2. Year tutors are alerted to the need to monitor discreetly the students who come from two feeder schools, still in special measures, with acute staffing difficulties. I need to look at what some schools are doing in summer school programmes to compensate for just this problem. My impression is that our school puts too much emphasis on the 'fresh start' opportunity offered in Year 7, with an emphasis on consolidation rather than moving forward. This is worrying when national surveys show that up to a year can be lost in subject progress made at the start of KS3.

The national KS3 strategy has had the effect of focussing attention here on the need to look again at teaching and learning strategies for the curriculum in all years. We need to worry less about how teachers teach, and look more actively at how students learn. Our schemes of work need to include suggestions for a wider range of teaching and learning styles suited to students' varied preferences. For my MA, I am thinking of looking at whether particular learning styles suit specific subjects.

I visited a school using the Accelerated Learning Programme as a framework to help effective learning. Long term, our department wants a consistent approach to defining learning outcomes for the 'big picture' and for individual lessons, understood and anticipated by teachers and students at the start of every lesson or module of work. Over time, with a variety of teachers and techniques, the school is now striving to provide all students with a range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic classroom learning experiences. With learning outcomes clearly explained, we set daily expectations against which students know they will be assessed and understand how this learning will help them in the future. Subject meetings spend significant periods of planned time in reviewing the effectiveness of their schemes of work. "What works? What needs working on?". Regularly, time is spent securing level agreement between subject staff, discussing examples of student work - "Does this work show characteristics of being a good / satisfactory / weak Level 5? .... Why do we think this is?". Some of the same examples, marked to show strengths and weaknesses, are then displayed for students to see. "This work shows good / satisfactory work at Level 5 because.....", and the reasons are given briefly.

Assessment has helped us plan to meet each cohort's needs more accurately, helped students and teachers to know expectations at every level, and developed a more consistent quality of teaching and learning.

## Planning learning

Importance		Current practice
	<b>Long term planning</b>	
1 2 3 4	Involves the whole staff and reflects our school's aims	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Reflects the whole-school curriculum framework taking into consideration programmes of study, schemes of work, the wider 14 to 19 curriculum and time available	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Maps progression throughout the school in terms of level of demand with reference to the programmes of study and level descriptions	1 2 3 4
	<b>Medium term planning</b>	
1 2 3 4	Identifies key learning intentions for assessment	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Identifies progression and curriculum targets for groups of students	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Takes into consideration a range of teaching techniques and assessment approaches which reflect students' different learning styles	1 2 3 4
	<b>Short term planning</b>	
1 2 3 4	Contains clear specific learning intentions for assessment and success criteria to illustrate expectations for students	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Takes into account the prior knowledge, skill and understanding that the students bring to the learning situation	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Takes into account a range of learning styles	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Recognises that all learning does not need to be assessed	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Recognises that unanticipated learning occurs	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Identifies what will be assessed for students or groups, how and when this will be done, and who will do it	1 2 3 4

### **Importance**

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### **Current Practice**

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## Planning learning

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“What really makes a difference to children’s progress is the day to day work of being absolutely certain where children are now and where they need to go next and how quickly on an individual level” *NAHT, 2000*

“Assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning. A teacher’s planning should provide opportunities for both learner and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It also has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills. Planning should include strategies to ensure that learners understand the goals they are pursuing and the criteria that will be applied when assessing their work. How learners will receive feedback, how they will take part in assessing their learning and how they will be helped to make further progress should also be planned”. *Assessment Reform Group, 2002*

“Some teachers provided information about syllabus content and assessment criteria but many GCSE and A-level students were not aware of the criteria their work was to be assessed on. It was important for the language of the criteria to be understood”.  
*LEARN Project, 2000*

“A further necessary step in effective planning of both teaching and assessment is to take time to consider the big picture, to establish what will be the curriculum experience of the child as she or he moves through the school from one class to the next. When the teachers look together at the big picture, they regain the sense that each teacher is making a contribution to the overall learning of the child”. *Sutton, 1995*

“When we evaluate the learning that our students have done, we are also evaluating, whether we want to or not, the teaching we have done. Evaluation of teaching, therefore can not, nor should be conceived as unimportant in the evaluation of learning”  
*Coll and Martin ,1993*

“Most of what’s learned in your class is not in your lesson plan - in other words, there is a documented, enormous and profound difference between presenting and learning”.  
*Jensen, 1996*

“Asking the right question has been called the essence of good teaching as it can act as the bridge between teaching and learning. A good question can stimulate pupils to move on to a more advanced stage in their thinking and provide the ‘scaffold’ for new learning”  
*Suffolk LEA, 2001*

“ Consistently good teaching is almost always underpinned by an agreed curriculum for each subject, carried forward in a scheme of work that establishes what is expected of every teacher. The degree of specificity may vary between school and subject. .... The most effective departments do not have necessarily any more detailed or thoroughly documented schemes of work than other departments – indeed the volume is sometimes less. However, there is a concentration on what knowledge, skills and understanding should be covered with each class ....” *Good teaching and effective departments, Ofsted, 2002*

“The main part of the lesson is introduced by the teacher telling pupils what they are going to learn rather than what they are going to do”.  
*KS3 Strategy – Managing the second year, DfES, 2002*

## Assessment for Learning

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I am a teacher governor at a school which values assessment as more than just recording and reporting information about an individual's attainments. We share a view that students should know what they are learning and why. It is now the norm to find lessons beginning with the learning intentions clearly set out. These may be written, often on the board or the top work sheets, or verbal or both. We also try to give 'the big picture' at the start of a series of related lessons, showing students what they will learn and how it will help them in everyday life or to learn something else.

Part of my role has also involved doing some curriculum mapping, particularly at Key Stage 3. Where do my subjects' content and skills overlap with other curriculum areas – and where do learning intentions in other subjects relate to what I am trying to do? It's hard work at first, but one benefit surprised and brought some subject teachers together quite quickly. We noticed that student and teacher workload, and the 'tension' involved in learning something new, felt reduced. As teachers, we built on common areas of learning, such as research and report writing skills in history, science and English. It's still bitty, and identifying these areas is 'small bite' stuff, built up over time. But more and more, students can see relationships between subjects and the learning intentions that lie behind expectations and assessment of them. Teachers are working to support each other. Students have a sense of combined purpose, and better understanding of their learning goals.

We are also trying to respond to the wish to involve students more in the assessment of their own learning. More of us are creating situations in which students talk about their work, and discuss what they have learned. If young people are to feel confident in expressing their views, a very positive and supportive environment is needed. They too want to feel valued both by the teacher and their peers. We have sought their views on why they think a piece of their work is good, and whether our comments on their work have been useful in helping them to improve. What kinds of marking have been most useful to them? We have had to watch teacher workload, but these discussions make student self and peer evaluation possible, easing some of the burden of endless marking.

Peer assessment is now common in many classrooms. Students swap work in pairs and ask each other simple questions such as "What do you think you have done well?... Why did you do this, in this kind of way? .... Teach me how you did...." Small groups of students now tease out their understanding of what the assessment criteria, given to them for the next task, will actually look like in their work. "What do we have to do / to show? ... and where are sources of help?" These small groups are also identifying collective areas of weakness in their own progress which helps my lesson planning. These key issues feature in a short plenary that follows their discussion.

I am trying to encourage them to respond to my comments on their work. Did they understand my comment – or not? The students' way of indicating to me that they have failed to understand my comment is to put a question mark in a circle.

By using these techniques students are now able to articulate their own learning targets in words which reflect their next development steps quite specifically. Increasingly they are recognising that learning is sometimes more effectively done with others, and by drawing upon resources beyond the classroom.

## Assessment for learning

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Students know what they are learning, what they have achieved and how they can improve	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are provided with regular opportunities to reflect and talk about their learning, progress and goals	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are provided with time to read and act upon comments on marked work	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Teachers use a range of assessment methods confidently and appropriately	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The organisation of learning enables planned assessments to occur and unexpected achievements to be recognised and valued	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Strategies are in place which encourage students to recognise where they need help and to seek advice	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessments are used to inform planning for individuals, groups and the class	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Shared ways forward are agreed between students and teachers and focus on how students will achieve their goals	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Other adults working in the classroom are clear about their role in assessment and communicate significant information about students	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment judgements are informed by a range of learning outcomes including course work, projects and performances	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	It is recognised that all learning need not be assessed	1 2 3 4

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### **Current Practice**

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## Assessment for learning

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“Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”.

*Assessment for Learning – 10 principles Assessment Reform Group, 2002*

“It’s a lot easier to decide whether my students have learned something if I know what it is I want them to learn in the first place” ..... “It’s a lot easier for my students to learn something if they know what it is I want them to learn”.

*Teacher comment supplied by AAIA member, 2001*

“Sound assessment practice was linked with children learning more effectively. This was because their teachers used assessment information to set work which better matched children’s capabilities”. *HMCI report, 1992.*

**“Pre-conditions for successful independent learning:** The learner believes that he / she is capable of learning; she knows enough about herself to set learning targets within her extended grasp; he is willing to make the effort and commitment; she is aware of different ways of tackling a learning task, and able to make good decisions depending on the circumstance; he has access to useful resources and knows how to use them; she is not afraid of failure and knows how to learn from it”. *Sutton, 1995*

“Feedback and reflection become intertwined, enabling the learner to review their learning in it’s context and related to previous experiences and understandings – a ‘meta’ view which can lead to meta-learning”. *Askew, 2000*

“Every teacher who wants to practise formative assessment must reconstruct the teaching contracts so as to counteract the habits acquired by their students”. *Perrenoud, 1991*

“We had to give in course work for a certain week. There was a deadline. So the teacher suggested we could come in to help each other. We gave each other ideas, suggestions and stuff, asked for opinions, ‘Is it good?’, ‘Is it alright?’. It was after school so everyone felt more free like. The teacher didn’t say anything to us if we walked about the classroom and normally when you are in school you have to stay in your seat”. *Year 11 male student in Askew, 2000*

“Current thinking about learning acknowledges that learners must ultimately be responsible for their learning since no one else can do it for them. Thus assessment for learning must involve students, so as to provide them with information about how well they are doing and guide their subsequent efforts”. *Assessment Reform Group, 2000*

“...the term ‘assessment’ refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs”. *Black and Wiliam, 1998*

“We assess each other’s. We go through, mark and make suggestions how they could improve. You get other people’s opinions as well as the teacher’s and not just your own”.

*A level student LEARN Project, 1999*

## Marking and providing feedback

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“SWN.....Strengths, Weaknesses, Next”. I run the staff development programme for our cluster of schools and picked up this simple formula from a teacher. It hit me as an answer to a personal prayer. Suddenly Sundays came back – I could meet the family! My school assessment policy seems to expect me to give NC levels, grades for effort, and comment on set pieces of work through the term. I spend disproportionate amounts of time marking students’ work, questioning the value of what I am doing. I am sure students’ only look at the grades, and I know some research supports this. I am guilty of arranging twilight sessions about whether or not to give grades...or marks ...or levels....or comments, or combinations of these. Our school has gone for the latter, but I’m beginning to feel that our students don’t really look at the comments. We will need to re-evaluate this approach soon, as I’m not sure that it’s working.

SWN seems to have been born out of this kind of frustration. At the start of the lesson the student is told clearly about the learning intentions of the work set and he or she writes them down. Marking is in the form of teacher comment, identifying the work’s strengths, weaknesses and next steps in the student’s own learning in relation to the original learning intentions of the exercise. There is no mark or grade on most occasions, but the teacher does award a National Curriculum Level assessment periodically, in line with the school policy. The aim is to give students a regular and realistic feel for their own progress towards the inevitable national measures, and peer comparisons. SWN, against stated learning intentions, seems easily understood by students, and by parents. Some parents are quick to criticise marking that ignores what they see as basic errors. Here, at least, there are criteria, and a sense of forward development for their child, answering the question “What do I have to do to improve?” And, SWN, with bullet pointed comments, suggests a greater degree of individual attention and valuing of student work, motivating for progress. A student feels that the teacher too is ‘paying attention’.

A cluster group working party is also looking at ways in which students can be involved in assessing their own or their classmates’ work. There is a collective will to encourage students to be more aware of their own learning skills and progress. We felt strongly that target setting alone has a mechanistic feel. “Any fool can set a target”. What matters to a student is how to achieve it. In Year 7, we are experimenting with a practice, already met by some of them in their primary schools, using a simple graphic system to note key learning points. As teachers, we confirm, with an asterisk in the margin or with a ‘sticky’, that they have met the learning intentions of a task, defined when it was introduced. This helps us when summarising good points at the end of marking. Similarly, areas for development are shown by using #. The student is also encouraged to indicate for herself where uncertainty exists. A wiggly line down the margin, particularly on homework, expresses “ I tried ....but I am not sure I am right ..... I had help with this bit”. We pick up any commonly shared concerns in the next lesson.

Peer assessment is also a very effective catalyst to learning. Our PHSE programme includes modules on teamwork, and how to give positive criticism to others. Our Art, Drama and PE staff are constantly reminding us that, for years, much of their own assessment is based upon a review by the class of the performance of an individual in front of them. If given the marking criteria in their language, we find that the students can be effective and fair critics of each other. We also have plenty of examples in our classrooms of student work at different levels or grades at GCSE, to which they can refer. By handling the criteria and examples, they seem to internalise so much more about what is expected in their own work, and more willing to talk about difficulties, and to strive more naturally to improve.

## Marking and providing feedback

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Prompt and regular marking occurs in all classes and all subjects	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The marking process includes both verbal and written feedback	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Marking focuses on the learning intentions and the criteria for success	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Time is provided for students to respond to marked work	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are provided with opportunities to assess their own and others' work	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Marking strategies help the students understand what they have achieved and what they need to do next	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The outcomes of marking, along with other information, are used to adjust future teaching plans	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The policy for marking is evaluated and reviewed regularly, making sure new members of staff understand it, so that practice can continue to reflect the school ethos	1 2 3 4

### **Importance**

- 4 = essential  
 3 = very important  
 2 = quite important  
 1 = of limited importance

### **Current Practice**

- 4 = our practice mirrors the statement  
 3 = our practice has room for minor improvements  
 2 = our practice has elements that require development  
 1 = our practice requires re-thinking

## Marking and providing feedback

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“Praise should be specific - it should identify the specific behaviour being praised and the reason why, so that the student knows what aspect of their work is being singled out for praise”. *Askew and William, 1995*

“There should be ways of sharing, with the pupils, the educational aims and the criteria for judging achievement of these aims”. *ASE, 2000*

“Key issues for schools—they need to improve the quality of routine assessing and marking, providing better feedback to students on their progress and attainment”. *Subjects and Standards, OFSTED, 1994-95.*

“When we are working towards a big piece of work the teacher marks it along the way so we can improve it before the final piece” *middle school student, Suffolk LEA, 2001*

“Marking has the potential to be the most powerful, manageable and useful diagnostic record of achievement. It is a manageable way of tracking National Curriculum learning intentions for written work for individual children on a day-to-day basis along with notes made on the short-term plan to feed into further planning. It is also a very effective medium for providing feedback to children about their progress”. *Clarke, 1998*

“Marking Policies in a significant minority of schools have important weaknesses. For example, some policies overemphasise the need for a positive response to students’ work – Whatever the quality and detail of marking policies, there are few schools in which marking practice is consistent, even within departments”.  
*Secondary Education 1993-7 A review of Secondary Education - Schools in England*

“If I got a C, as long as I knew what it meant that would be OK” *Y8 student, Suffolk LEA, 2001*

“Marking is usually contentious but often fails to offer guidance on how work can be improved. In a significant minority of cases, marking reinforces under-achievement and under-expectation by being too generous or unfocused. Information about student performance received by the teacher is insufficiently used to inform subsequent work”.  
*General Report on Schools, OFSTED, 1996*

“Most of my teachers say I could improve on my presentation. It’s not very helpful because they’ve said it so many times”. *(Y9) LEARN project, 1999*

“Overall, two-thirds of the sample described themselves as feeling anxious or worried about showing their work to their teacher. Many pupils were unclear about what was required of them and this uncertainty produced additional tension”. *Pollard & Triggs, 2000*

“Our biological brain thrives on feedback for growth in learning, intelligence and survival”.  
*Jensen, 1996*

“Students of all ages used feedback to improve performance. Constructive criticism was helpful where it told students how to improve work. Simple comments, ticks and ‘good work’, signified approval but didn’t help students ‘bridge the gap’ between present performance and future goals”. *LEARN project, 2000*

## Assessment of Learning

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I have been teaching for three years and recently represented our faculty in a whole school review of our procedures for assessing pupils. We had 57 varieties of data. Historic practice, colleagues with fresh ideas, and our well-intentioned desire to observe best practice – all of it - combined to drown us. There was a sea of inconsistencies and mixed understandings of assessment marks, grades and levels, by colleagues, pupils and parents. Nor were we sure how all this information was being used to inform and improve pupil learning. Ofsted questioned how we knew that individual pupils were progressing. Years 9 and 11 were all right, but they focused hard on colleagues teaching Year 8.

We are aware of the government's thinking on the need for schools to adopt a common basic data set. We all felt that our in-house, 15 column, pupil tracking form was over-loaded. Some colleagues were not bothering to enter some data in the columns, or departments had substituted their own records. Too much of our data did not relate to the types used in the Autumn Package or PANDA. We could not compare ourselves easily with other schools. Our first task was to identify the essential types of data that all staff need to track the pupil's learning progress, regardless of subject. Our objectives are fourfold:

1. We want baseline data, recorded when pupils enter the school, indicating their prior attainment and our starting point with them. Key Stage 2 information from the primary schools is the most robust and informative.
2. We would like to predict their attainment year by year, and at Key Stage end, tweaking the prediction a little into a challenging target. "**Prediction + challenge = target**" is ingrained in our thinking now. When setting targets at KS4 now, each pupil's average KS3 points score is worked out. Using the Autumn Package's KS4 'Median Line with quartile boundaries' each pupil adopts 2 targets – one is close to the recorded mean for that KS3 points score, **the prediction**, and **the challenge** is based on the upper quartile attainment for that same points score in each national curriculum subject.
3. We aimed to have some way of easily tracking each pupil's progress, and amending the target up or down as we go. The information needs to be common and simply expressed, recognised and understood by pupils, teachers and parents, and easily put alongside similar national and LEA data. It also needs to be accessible daily – teacher mark book and pupil diary?
4. We had to decide on the periods for monitoring a pupil's progress – assessments twice a term, once a term, ....what?

Training days are essential opportunities to ensure that most of us understand and use progress charts from the Autumn Package and the conversion of CATs scores to GCSE predictions. In our school, we have found that CAT scores tend to under-estimate final attainment, but we continue to keep comparative records. English and Maths teachers like to add all three CAT scores to help diagnostic analysis and can indicate a pupil's preferred style of learning. Everyone then uses this information to target the levels or grades that the pupils will aim to achieve at the end of the year and the Key Stage

We are trying to review KS3 assessments twice a term, reviewing targets for the end of Years 8 and 9 and amending up and down as necessary. We all wanted a firm focus on end of year attainment targets for each pupil, and twice termly checks at least, as a step in trying to limit the nationally recognised dip in performance mid-Key Stage 3. We check once a term in KS4. This activity drives teacher expectation about where pupils in their teaching group should be in twelve months time. Actual performance at the end of Years 7, 8, 9, and 10 is recorded, evaluated and reviewed. For the moment, we have not included issues of gender, ethnicity and date of birth, all variables affecting performance. Our assessment officer does record these on his computer programme.

## Assessment of learning

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Assessment of learning is based on more than just tests and exams	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment of learning is always undertaken for a specific purpose	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The current requirements and guidance for statutory assessment are understood and followed	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	A holistic and 'best-fit' approach is used when working with the level descriptions in Key Stage 3	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	In making judgements against level descriptions a range of assessment information is used	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Consistent judgements are reached through activities and moderation exercises that promote shared understanding of standards	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Tests and examination papers are analysed to identify gaps in teaching and learning	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The outcomes of assessment of learning activities provide feedback and 'feed-forward' for students	1 2 3 4

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## Assessment of learning

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“There is no evidence that increasing the amount of testing will enhance learning. Instead the focus needs to be on helping teachers use assessment, as part of teaching and learning, in ways that will raise children’s achievement”. *Assessment Reform Group, 1999*

“To do the right thing is not enough; to be competent one must also know what one is doing and why it is right”. *Von Glaserfeld, 1987*

“Learners have brains of unlimited potential. It is a disgrace to treat the learner’s brain as a wheelbarrow”. *Jensen, 1996*

“Summative assessment will demonstrate how well pupils have performed and whether teaching practices are effective or not, which, in turn, will lead to critical reflection on the teaching and learning policies adopted”. *Brighouse and Woods, 1999*

“Successive governments have created a situation where policy is based on assumptions that are not merely unsupported by evidence, but just plain wrong. Rising test scores demonstrate little more than teachers’ increasing abilities to teach to the tests, and to the power of high stakes tests to distort the curriculum”. *William, 2001*

“A clear distinction should be made between assessment of learning for the purposes of grading and reporting, which has its own well-established procedures, and assessment for learning which calls for different priorities, new procedures and new commitment”. *Assessment Reform Group, 1999*

“Sometimes if she just puts B at the bottom and doesn’t put corrections – you think, well, what have I got to do to put it right?” *Y10 student, LEARN Project, 2000*

“The children seemed only too aware that whilst ‘trying’ was worthy, ‘achieving’ was actually the required outcome”. *Pollard & Triggs, 2000*

“What can the benefit be of hours of test revision for my child? He does not want to go to school. That is all he has done this week, repeat papers and revision. I rang QCA and they said it was not good practice to do so much cramming but they could not do any thing about it”. *Parent of Year 9 child, 2001*

“Meaningful assessment is more than just one more way to test. It’s a comprehensive approach to the whole process. It’s very delicate because you never want learners to learn just for the test, but you do want them to know that they are accountable”. *Jensen, 1996*

“In some cases individual teachers had devised their own tests and tasks to determine what their pupils knew, understood or were able to do prior to embarking on a new piece of work”. *Suffolk LEA, 2000*

“Many of the most effective departments make good use of data to set targets for students’ performance in external tests and examinations”. *Good teaching and effective departments, Ofsted, 2002*

## Recording and evidence

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I'm a member of the leadership team, with a brief to monitor and support pupil learning and improved attainment. Our head asked me to look specifically at classroom record keeping twelve months ago, worried that it was not meaningful nor used in day-to-day planning for teaching and learning. She felt then that too many of us kept records that no one else read, and which quickly become little more than historical records or diaries of assessed work. I feel strongly that recording and developing learning should be complementary activities. In a variety of ways now, there is 'live' record-keeping used daily by pupils.

The pupil's workbook or folder has become more much important as a key school record. In it, teacher comment and the pupil's self-assessment add a context to the finished task. The whole staff looked together at our own expectations and practice in these two areas. As teachers, when we record observations on work, we agreed that ideally written comments should:

- be positive in tone, and personalised with the pupil's name;
- relate closely to the stated learning intentions for the task when it was set;
- ensure that any grade, score, level or code used is fully understood by the pupil;
- help pupils to know what they have to do next to make progress.

In addition, each teacher mark book has common records, to which specific subject information and data can be added, when necessary. Every teacher has a record of each pupil's:

- prior attainment, e.g. average points score at previous key stage / Cognitive Ability Test;
- N.C. level attained in the subject at the start of the year, differentiated a, b or c;
- predicted level of attainment for each of the following year ends, and at the next Key Stage,
- actual level of attainment reached, differentiated a, b ,c;
- agreed target level or GCSE grade, reviewed and amended in the light of information above.

We talked to some pupils about what would help them in self or peer assessment of their work. They said that they liked:

- a chance to talk about their work with teachers and with each other;
- looking at other pupils' work which was a good example of their current level;
- subjects which gave them help in understanding how the work was going to be assessed – in words they could understand;
- clear advice on how to improve their own work;
- guidance on how to improve skills, such as personal organisation, independent learning.

We are encouraging pupils to write their own comments at the end of tasks, noting parts of the current work which they find difficult, and aspects of improvement they think they need to work on. I believe other schools are developing personal target setting, with the targets written at the start of the next piece of work. 'Post-its' are used for pupil comments on the work of peers - initially too many colleagues worried about the results when pupils wrote in each other's books. So far, it's all working unbelievably well. Pupil involvement is seen as both positive and perceptive, bringing a gradual reduction in teacher workload – can't be bad. Pupils' own comments, particularly on work not understood, have focused lesson planning. Worries about lost books, central to record keeping now, have almost disappeared because work books and folders have become a more valued pupil property. 'Recording and developing learning' are becoming complementary activities for pupils as well as teachers. One next step for us is to see that this evidence base travels with the pupil from year to year, teacher to teacher.

## Recording and evidence

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Information from ongoing assessment records, together with records of summative assessment, contributes to the agreed attainment information used to track progress	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	There is a whole-school agreed set of attainment information, which is recorded	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The agreed attainment information is updated at least once a year and used to track progress	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Beyond agreed whole school records, teachers decide what to record	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Each teacher uses a range of recording strategies for additional records	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Progress against key learning intentions is observed, noted and where significant, is recorded	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Progress against key learning intentions feeds forward into future planning	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are involved in recording comments on their work	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Samples of assessed work are kept to exemplify agreed standards and to model success	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Records which are passed on are useful, clear and easy to interpret	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Records enable reports to be written easily	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Whole school records provide the information required for the National Transfer Form	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Information from previous teachers is used to plan work in a new class	1 2 3 4

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## Recording and evidence

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"In retaining evidence and keeping records, schools should be guided by what is useful and manageable in planning future work". *QCA, 2000*

"Record-keeping systems should be determined by the information they are designed to accommodate, not the other way round". *Sutton, 1995*

"Repetition should be avoided. Teachers often find themselves writing the same thing in various formats. Unless this is useful in itself, strategies should be sought for reducing the repetition". *Clarke, 1998*

"It is important not to confuse procedures that are designed to satisfy the administrative requirements of National Curriculum assessment with procedures and processes that endeavour to make sense of the idea that assessment promotes children's learning. In theory, it is possible that the two are not mutually exclusive but often in practice, more time is given to secretarial record keeping tasks". *Mitchell and Koshy, 1993*

"Faced with the dilemma of record-keeping, it's helpful to go all the way back to first principles, consider the purpose and audience of records, and how we can make them both effective and efficient..... It (the recording system) should have:

- One section which is structured to accommodate information in either codes or words about specific outcomes for each child;
- Another section which is less structured and allows the teacher to make the quickest possible note of significant specific observations about individual children". *Sutton, 1995*

"Teachers can review the rate of progress by looking at work in students' folders or exercise books and by the marks in their record books. One way to improve manageability would be to make a note only of those students who achieve significantly above or below the expected outcomes for the task". *Keeping Track, QCA, 1999*

"Check how well subject and assessment co-ordinators work together with class teachers so that consistent records are produced and made use of throughout the school to guide planning". *Ofsted Inspection Handbook*

"Data is inert until someone handles it and makes it powerful". *IBM in Pringle and Cobb, 1999*

"Where practice is good, assessment information, including subject records and reviews of pupils' progress is regularly updated. The role of the form tutor is clearly identified and senior managers ensure that tutors have the time and support to do the job. Staff monitor pupils' progress closely; targets for improvement are identified and those pupils who need it are given structured guidance about improving their work".

*Annual report of Her Majesty Chief Inspector of Schools, 2002*

## Communicating with parents and carers

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My children attend the local comprehensive school. I have been a parent governor for two years and was asked to join a working party on Assessment with two other parents/carers. I was worried at first. I understand the basic stuff about targets at GCSE and percentages of A-C grades, but 'regression lines' and 'value added at Key Stage 3' leave me cold. However, I felt I could really push for far more information about how an adult can help a child to improve, and to understand better how my own children are doing. I do believe strongly that teachers and parents can do a lot together to help, even with teenagers! I've got a thing about these rushed interviews with subject staff on parents' evenings – they are one-way traffic. The marking in books mystifies me too. I understand the levels, but I am not sure what teachers are looking for sometimes, and too many errors are overlooked, I think.

When we met, we were all asked to share what we wanted out of these meetings. I said my bit, and saw 'improving home-school support for student learning' in the objectives. That was me! First, we wanted to have more information about what parents and students thought about the school's ways of reporting on how the students are doing. Questions were listed on a flip chart. Was the school's information clear and understandable for most parents? Did it show what the student had to do next? Was it possible for all students to respond to what they are asked to do – use a computer, work at home and so on? Did our children feel they could seek help, or suggest ways in which their learning could be helped? The Deputy Head contacted two schools which had already done surveys with lots of parents, and places like Keele University. We constructed two questionnaires, sending one to all parents, and the second one was for all students in Years 8 and 10 – we had to cope with manageable numbers and we thought that these two years might like a bit of recognition. Four students helped us to compile their questions. Three class teachers were also on the working group so we felt we had a representative view from them. I came to year assemblies when the questionnaire was introduced.

We worked on the replies, talked amongst ourselves, and we had a very interesting evening when a year tutor told us about different learning styles. I feel better about my son needing music on while he is working, and one of our daughter's passion for doing all her revision notes in diagrams and pictures. We are planning a repeat evening for all parents. Both surveys praised teachers whose marking did two things. First, the class wrote down 'the learning intentions' for the piece of set work (I'm getting the jargon). Some teachers give the marking scheme. Students said they then knew what was expected. I could help as a parent too. Secondly, many more teachers were writing short helpful comments – the good and not-so-good things and brief advice on how to improve, usually on just one of the learning intentions. Kids and parents can cope with this – and some kids commented that they liked the personal interest shown in their work. I can see what they mean. There is a third bit which we got from another school. In future, we are going to try to have parent and carers consultation during the day. The student will be there and lead the discussion. Form tutors will give class help and time to preparing how to do this. My children will bring their books and talk briefly about what they can do well, and what they need to improve on. Their form tutor will have the reports from subject teachers, and we can share what we know. It's good that the older ones are given responsibility for speaking up for their efforts and progress. Parent / carer, child and teacher need to be together once a year if our views are to be seen to matter at all. And the child is talking about his / her future – not us acting as a substitute for our children.

## Communicating with parents and carers

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Efforts are made to ensure that parents and carers understand the information given to them about their child's attainment and progress	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Statutory reports outline strengths in all aspects of school life and indicate areas that need to be developed	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are actively involved and contribute to the reporting process	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	There are opportunities for teachers, students and parents to talk together	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Involvement of parents and carers is actively encouraged so that they understand how next steps in learning can be supported	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students are involved in setting their own targets which are shared with parents / carers and reviewed together	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Every effort is made to ensure that parents and carers understand pupils' achievements in relation to national and individual expectations	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Written reports are part of a process which enables appropriate discussion and action to take place	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Parents are helped to understand that a teacher's assessments and test levels are equally important and provide different and complementary information	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Every effort is made to ensure that pupils and parents / carers understand that ongoing feedback and marking relates to learning intentions and therefore should be focussed and selective	1 2 3 4

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## Communicating with parents and carers

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"Sometimes the annual reports for individual students are insufficiently detailed or do not contain the statutorily required information. The most frequent omission is advice on what students need to do next in order to improve".

*Annual report of Her Majesty Chief Inspector of Schools, 2001*

"Overall the report must tell you what your child has learnt, the things they are good at and where they might need extra help. The report might also give you some practical ideas about things you can do to help your child in the future". <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/parentsgateway>

"An effective partnership includes the sharing of information about children, their learning and how they feel about school". *Ofsted Inspection Handbook*

"Fiona has the same glacial beauty as an iceberg, but unlike the iceberg she has absolutely nothing below the surface". *from Roald Dahl's "Matilda"*

"Many parents' evenings are still quite reminiscent of prison visiting arrangements, with parents queuing up for five minutes across a table with each subject teacher. Often this takes place in a noisy hall with conversations going on all around". *James, 1998*

In good schools: "Information to parents and carers through written reports is excellent, making clear what pupils need to do to improve and how parents can help".  
*Ofsted Inspection Handbook*

"There remains a body of parents who dislike computer-generated reports. The school will need to explain that the reports do encompass the more personal and individualised comments that these parents assume are contained only in manual reports".  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/cuttingburdens>

"One in five parents (and carers) are concerned about how their child is getting on and how closely the school is working with them".  
*Annual report of Her Majesty Chief Inspector of Schools, 2002*

"It says here that my progress is satisfactory – what does that mean?" *Year 8 pupil*

"Reports to parents are generally much more detailed and informative than they were a decade ago". *James, 1998*

"Reports should:

- include descriptive assessment
- refer to supportive evidence
- use positive statements
- place achievements in context
- discriminate between attainment and achievement
- report against given criteria
- avoid speculation and jargon
- identify targets for future learning
- target the audience: pupil, parent and teacher"

*AAIA handbook, 2002*

## Transfer and transition

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I am an experienced science teacher. Two years ago the Head asked me to become the Academic Manager for Year 7. We were to support and monitor student progress by combining traditional pastoral and academic responsibilities. He gave me the DfES report on transition and transfer issues. For the first time, the school was starting its new academic year in June, as Year 11 completed GCSE exams. Not a popular move for Year 11 and 13 teachers, but it gave me and the 'new' Year 7 tutors some time to prepare properly for our incoming Year 7 in September. We take students from 6 main feeder schools, and a small number spread among approximately 15 others in September. Our school has meetings with the main feeder schools at head teacher level. Summer school work was already planned for low achievers in literacy and numeracy, and our P.E. and Art Departments had developed shared activities.

I joined the Head at meetings with the feeder schools. We discussed priorities for action. Firstly, our school wanted KS2 assessments ahead of the September start, recognising that 'official channels' would not supply this until well into the Autumn Term. Primary colleagues 'huffed', asking if it was going to be put to good use – previous history suggested that a lot of information, which we had asked them for had, not reached our class teachers. The DfES report and my Head's interest in teaching and learning influenced the discussion positively. We recognised past ills, nevertheless, we all felt that we had done a lot together to reduce fear of transfer in the minds of students and parents. Data was needed to recognise individual prior attainment, and the attainment strengths and weaknesses of the year group as a whole. We argued that each cohort was different in character. We were concerned about the Report's comments on the de-motivation of average and above-average students, if their prior attainment was not taken into account immediately by new teachers. We also wished to establish clear baselines from which we could measure 'value added' throughout KS3. We felt we got the deserved comment, "some of your teachers are quick to say that they mistrust our assessments – they re-test in September and some set work at a lower level, 'to consolidate' upon what they claim hasn't been done".

This brought our second proposal into play. We knew of another family of schools who had done joint curriculum planning in ICT for Key Stage 2 and 3 together. We admitted to knowing little of the teaching and learning approaches of the KS2 literacy and numeracy strategies. The national KS3 strategy was still new. Some curriculum links existed already. Developing these, could we use working groups of teachers to look first at the classroom implications of national strategies at KS2 and KS3? Experienced primary colleagues might well be leading this initially – "could be useful 'politically' ". Our teachers did want to sit in on lessons at the primary schools, to join discussions on levelling pieces of student work, and particularly to look at varied approaches to teaching and learning at KS2 – in the students' interests. "What was our new Year 7's common experience so far?" "But we use the last half of the summer term for trips.... not easy to fit all this in," replied the Primary Heads. We all came to recognise the good intent and potential of the ideas. We began to understand what our Year 7's had been doing in Key Stage 2. Thankfully the joint work we did contributed hugely to a growth in trust and confidence generally – and to the development of my own leadership skills!

We started modestly with teacher groups looking at teaching, learning and assessment in English and Maths, based on shared discussion, classroom visits and student work review. Year 7 colleagues produced two succinct summaries of findings and led an Inset day for our school in July. The SEN Co-ordinator and I, worked with our colleagues to help in the collection of KS2 attainment information – it was now so much easier because of the greater, planned staff contact.

## Transfer and transition

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	Curriculum liaison and trust are well established with partner schools and settings	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students' work is used as a focus for discussions on progression and approaches to learning as students transfer	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	There are opportunities for teachers to observe learning in partner schools and settings	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	There is agreement within and across schools about what information should be passed on	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Information transferred identifies students' strengths and areas for development	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The information which is transferred to the next school covers the statutory requirements	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	When students move schools there are procedures in place to ensure that the right information gets to the right people in good time	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	When new students arrive the information that comes with them is always used to pitch the curriculum appropriately	1 2 3 4

### **Importance**

- 4 = essential  
 3 = very important  
 2 = quite important  
 1 = of limited importance

### **Current Practice**

- 4 = our practice mirrors the statement  
 3 = our practice has room for minor improvements  
 2 = our practice has elements that require development  
 1 = our practice requires re-thinking

## Transfer and transition

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“We need young people who can sustain:

- an enthusiasm for learning
- confidence in themselves as learners
- a sense of achievement and purpose”. *DfEE Research Brief No 131*

“One big question: why are some teachers so dismissive of children’s previous learning?”  
*Sutton, 1995*

“Schools need to develop structures which allow students to ask about things they don’t understand particularly their concerns about classroom learning and the expectations of their new teachers”. *DfEE Research Brief No 131*

“Many of the anxieties felt during the transfer process relate to parents (and carers) as well as to pupils”. *Nicholls G and Gardner J, 1999*

“Some of us do not understand as much as we need to about the child’s next or previous learning environment. We can, and we do, attempt to overcome this barrier by talking to each other and passing information in various forms between us, but still there may be a gap. The children, and their parents, may actually be more aware of this gap than we are ourselves”.  
*Sutton, 1995*

“A second area is students’ transfer from primary to secondary schools. In general, students make too little progress in Key Stage 3. They often start their secondary education enthusiastically, but may become disheartened if their basic skills are not firmly enough in place to make sense of all the subjects’ demands or if insufficient account is taken of what they already know and can do. Motivation and behaviour tend to fall away in Years 8 and 9, and end-of-key-stage performance at times shows too little gain in knowledge and understanding”. *Annual report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools, 2001*

“In the future we plan to develop this work and to make further improvements including:

- Ensuring better use of the second half of the last summer term at primary school, by providing training in the use of transition and encouraging secondary schools to receive some or all of their new students for two or three weeks in advance of the summer break.
- More extensive provision of summer schools so that ultimately there would be summer school provision at every secondary school.
- Teaching frameworks and materials that cross the divide. These are already available in English and mathematics: the frameworks which have been such a crucial part of the primary strategies have now been extended to cross the transition and include Years 7, 8 and 9. Meanwhile nationally produced Schemes of Work, which have proved immensely popular with teachers, are available in every National Curriculum subject for ages 7-11 and 11-14.
- Joint training for primary and secondary teachers”.

*Schools’ Green Paper, 2001*. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/buildingonsuccess/index.shtml#a8>

“One vital element of good transition collaboration is the timely transfer of relevant information from the feeder primary schools to their partner secondary schools. Agreement on the scheduling of the transfer information is crucial. A degree of compromise and understanding will often be required”. *Nicholls G and Gardner J, 1999*

## Management and Monitoring

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“We are successful because we practise what we are not good at”. These words, attributed to the New Zealand ‘All Blacks’ rugby captain during a period of world domination in the sport, have stuck in my mind. He claimed that too often we spent time embellishing what we are already good at doing. To be truly successful, teams need to identify their areas of weakness and work at these, however difficult.

As assessment co-ordinator for four years now, I see value in this observation. I asked a group of my colleagues to tell me of their least favourite teaching module coming up in the next few weeks. “Chaucer ..... sheep farming .....chemical equations ....” and so on. We agreed that, in our least favourite teaching tasks, we were almost going through the motions to satisfy the scheme of work. Learning outcomes were woollier than the sheep themselves. Two other significant points were made. First, did we always know the areas where we thought we taught effectively and where students made progress in their learning? Secondly, did we know which colleagues really did know how to teach an understanding of a chemical equation effectively? We are now spending much more time as subject teams, analysing the learning outcomes of module tests and activities, making ourselves identify “what we are (not) good at”, chiefly as a department but also perhaps as a school. We are paying far closer attention to GCSE subject reports, KS3 national analysis and to LEA adviser comment. We have tried to nominate a colleague for each subject whose job is to relate our findings, with national and local observations. We know that time for such research is limited and barely scientific. However, by focusing as a team on areas which we have found to have weaker learning outcomes for students – or where we have admitted to personal lack of confidence – we are getting a more even, consistent quality into our subject teaching.

A further aspect of monitoring has now become important. With the leadership team, I am spending more time monitoring the use made of subject meetings. When do we discuss “what we are not good at” – hopefully after recognising what we are good at? The agendas for subject meetings had become too heavily influenced by matters imposed by us, the leadership team, or by the personal preferences of the subject leader. We now monitor to ensure that most subject meetings focus on students’ learning outcomes and evaluating the effectiveness of our schemes of work. We have to deal with administration and general communications in other ways. We share what is going well in our teaching, the areas for improvement, and the strategies for helping us to effect that improvement as a team or individually. The minutes of the meeting must now conclude with a team mini action plan. No it wasn’t wholly popular to start with – but some reasonable critics recognised that the approach was no more than we expected from students in their learning. Was it Michael Fullan who wrote that “learning is stressful”?

I was keen to see assessment figure more prominently in classroom observation, which my school sees at the heart of its monitoring policy. Here, we have spent a lot of time, probably correctly, looking at teaching skills. Performance Management issues have reinforced this recently. Those same issues also underline the need to look at progression in students’ learning. Knowing the baseline ability of a class, its potential attainment, and whether or not this compares well with similar students elsewhere, are important pieces of information for the classroom observer, engaged in any form of monitoring. I wonder sometimes if this gets lost in the preparatory stage of negotiating a classroom visit. As a school, each classroom observation is now set in a context of class, baseline and potential attainment within school, and compared with external measures and expectations.

## Management and monitoring

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	The policy for assessment, recording and reporting is developed together and is understood by all	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	There are agreed written guidelines for implementing our policy, which are communicated to the staff	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Subject meetings are used effectively to focus on improving learning	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Procedures are in place to monitor and evaluate what is happening in all aspects of assessment, recording and reporting	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Subject leaders monitor the planning and delivery of their subjects. For example through scrutiny of short-term plans, lesson observations and students' work	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	There is a member of staff with overall responsibility for assessment, recording and reporting who co-ordinates the overall assessments made	1 2 3 4

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## Management and monitoring

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“Essentially it is the schools themselves that have it within their control to make substantial impact upon levels of achievement. Schools do not improve simply because of new legislation and because of LEA policy. They do not improve simply because an inspector or an advisory teacher comes to call”. *MacGilchrist, 1996*

“Despite differences between schools, the reasons they require special measures are similar, and similar to those for previous years, including some or all of the following:

- poor leadership and management, including that provided by subject co-ordinators and the governing body;
- low standards and unsatisfactory achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- a high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, often linked to weaknesses in planning, poor use of assessment, teachers’ limited subject knowledge and low expectations of what students are capable of achieving”.

*Annual report of Her Majesty Chief Inspector of Schools, 2001.*

“Monitoring will only be considered worthwhile by teachers if they can see positive effects and follow up for the children and/or the school or in their personal development”. *Clarke, 2001*

“To be effective, targets for school improvement, statutory or otherwise, need to be **SMART** targets. This means they should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **R**ealistic and **A**chievable, and set against an appropriate **T**imescale”. *Supporting the target setting process, DfEE, 1998*

“Monitoring in schools is a key issue for ensuring consistency, continuity and that rhetoric matches the reality. However, monitoring has associated time management problems and, if set up inappropriately, can determine practice rather than monitor it. ....Getting teaching and learning right should be the first priority and then how to monitor it the next”. *Clarke, 2001*

"Judge how well the school monitors the results of different ethnic groups by ability or by gender. Check how well this information is recorded and analysed to help the school take action to improve achievement. If there is no evidence of monitoring the achievement of different groups of pupils, it raises questions about how effective the school is in meeting the needs of all the pupils". *Ofsted Inspection Handbook*

“An objective appraisal of the potential advantages and disadvantages of any proposed exercise of monitoring, evaluation and review may reveal that it is important, urgent, easy to carry out or expensive of staff time”. *National College for School Leadership, 2002*

“Structured discussion among teachers from different subject departments in a secondary school can provide a very useful starting point for improved communication across the school about the fundamental concerns of teaching and learning”. *Sutton, 1994*

## Using assessment information to monitor progress

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For me as head teacher, the Autumn Package is one of the most significant tools produced by government agencies in recent years. Apart from its own data and benchmarking, I use some of its working principles and practices in monitoring the progress of students in our school. As a leadership team, we have also sought to involve all our colleagues in understanding and applying the kinds of simple measurement that are most helpful in assessing student progress. The 'some questions to consider' sections in the Package have provided agendas for in-house training on assessment, and frankly have given me a checklist ahead of meetings with governors, local advisers and the recent Ofsted inspection.

I do not think we were very good at knowing how much progress has been made by students in their time at our school. Long before 'performance tables' appeared nationally, we were looking at GCSE results year on year, and more recently comparing our annual KS3 results. We were improving slowly. But we had not got to grips with knowing what our potential attainment should look like; whether progress was made evenly throughout the 5 years students are with us; and spotting the troughs when individuals or particular kinds of students made little progress. We are competing for students with a number of local schools, and we began to worry that we were not giving sufficient attention to variation in quality of intakes each year, and planning to take account of general strengths and weaknesses in attainment.

The Value Added information and progress charts in the Autumn Package were our starting points. Quickly, we recognised the need to help all colleagues to understand, use and interpret three kinds of information, if student progress was to be assessed with any accuracy.

1. In September of Year 7 we needed to record each students' prior attainment as a baseline. We had to know the students' starting point.
2. Everyone had to understand what 'an average points score' meant, how to use progress charts, and forecast potential attainment for teaching groups.
3. We needed to learn how to construct our own value added progress lines, following the principles in the Autumn Package, and compare these with national evidence. None of this is rocket science really – and comparatively what might be expected of a doctor interpreting a scan. The assessment co-ordinator and a part-time secretary supported colleagues with the practicalities.

When everyone felt more confident in these three areas, we felt we were in business. Every mark book contains a 'home produced' progress chart for each class, recording prior and expected attainment within a Key Stage for each teaching group. Annual expectations for the group's progress can then be set in agreement with the class teacher. The Head of Subject uses the value added progress line to track progress in core subjects, against national benchmarking; or, more significantly and developed over time, against our own previous records of our students performance in tests or teacher assessments in non-core subjects. As a leadership team, we have to work to ensure that KS2 prior attainment data is known by us in September – we do get most of it from key feeders with less nagging now. We also have to support non-core subjects as they slowly build a databank of assessment information, adding whatever is available additionally from the LEA.

What we have achieved is a school focus on prospective progress, with the opportunity for support, rather than too much retrospective, end of year analysis of attainment, too late to effect improvement.

## Using assessment information to monitor progress

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	When new students arrive the information that comes with them is always used to pitch the curriculum appropriately	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	An agreed set of attainment information about each student is used to track the individual's progress	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Attainment information is used to inform curriculum planning and to identify key learning intentions	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Year on year trends are monitored	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Attainment is analysed for each cohort and is used to set appropriate targets	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Progress towards targets is checked regularly for year groups and the implications for individual students are noted	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The performance of specific groups of students is monitored: e.g. gender, ethnic groups, EAL, SEN, looked after and talented and gifted students	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Information about student progress in different teaching groups and subjects is used to inform the performance management process	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	National and local data are used to provide a realistic comparison with other schools	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Benchmark information is used to identify other similar schools in order to learn from their experience	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Analysis of information informs decisions about what to include in the Key Stage 3 Audit, subject action plans and school improvement plans	1 2 3 4

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## Using assessment information to monitor progress

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“Procedures for monitoring and supporting students’ academic progress are satisfactory in about four in five schools having full inspections. The results from national tests and optional tests provide schools with the information they need to calculate the progress made by students year by year. It is now possible to set realistic, yet challenging, targets for individuals, groups of students, year cohorts and the school as a whole. Some headteachers have developed effective target-setting or other systems for monitoring progress but these are strengths in less than half of the schools”.

*Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools, 2001*

“The quality and use of assessment remain the weakest aspect of teaching. Many schools are generating a great deal of assessment data, at considerable cost in terms of time, but are not using it to set work based on the students’ prior attainment or to set appropriate targets for different groups of students”.

*Annual report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools, 2001*

“As children begin to reflect on what they would like to be able to do, what they think they are good at and what kind of help they have needed, this gives you the basis for considering in a practical way how each child’s work in class might be improved and the support needed to bring this about. These considerations are formalised in the setting and writing down of agreed targets”. *Johnson, Hill and Tunstall, 1992*

“Key to identifying ‘how well are we doing?’ is having in place appropriate standards against which groups of students’ achievements can be measured, and sensible criteria for the groups of students to which those standards apply. –The second step in the school improvement cycle is to consider how well the school is doing, shown by its students’ achievements, in the wider context of the performances achieved by other similar schools....”. *Supporting the target setting process, DfEE, 1998*

“Teachers should expect to be involved in helping the school to set challenging and realistic targets. Of course, teachers will be following the progress of their students on a day to day basis, and ordinarily the teachers concerned will once a year prepare and discuss forecasts of students’ likely performance and, once a year, contribute to school reviewing of progress towards targets”. *DFEE circular 2/98*

“The test of successful education is not the amount of knowledge that a student takes away from a school but his appetite to know and his capacity to learn. If the school sends out children with the desire for knowledge and some idea about how to acquire and use it, it will have done its work. Too many leave school with the appetite killed and the mind loaded with undigested lumps of information”. *Cited in Abbott, 1999*

“In a single class of two pupils it is possible for one to score 100% on a test and the other 0%. The class average would therefore be a comfortably mid-tables and reassuring 50%. However this figure is almost totally meaningless and provides no information about the individuals whose efforts produced it”. *Hedger and Jesson, 1999*

“The use of assessment to define problems in pupils’ work that need to be addressed remained a weakness in most schools”. *Ofsted, 2002*

## Evaluation as part of school improvement

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I am an LEA school improvement adviser working with a group of schools. One in particular which has been working very hard on developing assessment practice, prompted by an unfavourable Ofsted report. The head teacher had recognised assessment as a key issue. Senior managers have the knowledge and individuals are quite skilled, but subject leaders have yet to come on board. Oceans of data swirl round, waiting to be channelled into improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Some subject areas in the school put time and effort into analysis and development, but it tends to be by fits and starts. For this school, assessment is now much more integrated into daily life and is a regular part of school improvement work.

I think a really significant development was the programmed time invested by the whole staff in discussing and agreeing clear purposes and principles for assessment, recording and reporting. They had a chance to share their own practice – and to look at one or two key national research projects, such as the thinking behind “Inside the Black Box” and the AAIA web site material ([www.aaia.org.uk](http://www.aaia.org.uk)). We were able to draw upon some good, departmental initiatives. What mattered was that a consistency of simple practice emerged. Data analysis, national statistics and measurable outcomes are still not popular areas for classroom teachers. The school worked hard on convincing as many as possible of the value of diagnosing students’ learning needs, and of the practical application of this knowledge to lesson planning. A clearer focus on what needs to be improved concentrates the mind – and may prevent time and energy being used wastefully.

Purposes and principles are included in an assessment policy now, to be reviewed, with all other school policies, on a rotational basis every three years. That doesn’t mean practice stands still in between times: practice does change but in line with the agreed purposes and principles. The assessment co-ordinator has to draw up an assessment development plan, in the same way as her colleague heads of subject. Targets include developing consistent classroom practice in setting learning intentions at the start of lessons; explaining their purpose and anticipated outcomes in context of the student’s learning; and the provision of examples of work at different levels as illustrations for students. An additional piece of evaluation takes place at the end of each teaching module, when teachers annotate medium term plans for future use. This is very helpful if the teachers have devised a particularly effective way of assessing a key objective, or aid to improving student learning.

The quality of questions used by teachers to illuminate students understanding is the latest target for this school. It has been less easy to review and evaluate. The school booked me in to observe volunteers, focussing on their questions for assessment. The subsequent feedback sessions were found to be very useful by two teachers who had initially felt less confident with the whole process. Questioning is now a focus for the routine peer observations of teaching. Feedback includes a summary of observations against the success criteria in the assessment development plan.

With all these developments, the school has focused upon what is actually happening, the effect on teaching and very importantly the impact on learning. Obviously the assessment of learning through tasks, tests and teacher judgements is one source of information. Now the school is just beginning to take student views into account. A small group of governors and teachers drew up a questionnaire for Year 12 students, asking about their learning experiences particularly at KS4. It asked about learning habits, preferred learning styles and the most helpful forms of assessment. The results were shared with all staff and students.

## Evaluation as part of school improvement

Importance		Current practice
1 2 3 4	All staff are involved in the review and evaluation process	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Students' views on how assessment can help their learning are sought and used to improve teaching practice	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Assessment recording and reporting practices and policy are systematically reviewed and evaluated, in terms of the impact upon both teaching and students' learning	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Decisions are made about how the practice of assessment, recording and reporting can be improved and targets for development are identified and agreed	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The records of students' progress are reviewed regularly to ensure information held is used effectively and when necessary adjustments are made	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The review and evaluation of assessment practice and policy informs school improvement planning	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	The school improvement plan is the vehicle for describing how the strategies for further developing assessment recording and reporting practice will be implemented	1 2 3 4

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## Evaluation as part of school improvement

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“A strong feature of the best departments is thorough and systematic self-evaluation”.  
*Good teaching and effective departments, Ofsted, 2002*

“Observation and feedback is like holding up a mirror to enable colleagues to see themselves in action”. *Hughes, 1991*

“Each subject leader needs to take account of his or her own contribution to overall performance and of general trends within the school. If their department is doing well but most others are not, future recruitment to the school and ability to pay mortgages might be adversely affected!” *Hedger and Jesson, 1999*

“Most schools, through the process of the school development plan, are now involved in the review of their activity in a way that their predecessors were not. The danger is that half the staff are not involved and therefore do not own or reinforce the outcomes”.  
*Brighouse and Woods, 1999*

“ ‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’  
‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.  
‘I don’t much care where-’ said Alice.  
‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat.  
‘-so long as I get SOMEWHERE,’ Alice added as an explanation.  
‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ said the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough’ “  
*The Annotated Alice, Lewis Carroll, 1965*

“Evaluation is not an exact science ....many influences can combine to advance or frustrate plans. ....Nevertheless, some principles are well established. They include the importance of being clear about the aim, how to achieve it and how staff and group members will know whether it has been achieved. It is also important to be open about successes and failures, since the latter are often more valuable to those who wish to learn for the future. A failure concealed may be endlessly replicated, with a great waste of time and money: while one documented clearly can lead to real breakthrough in development and understanding. It is also vital that evaluation information is gathered in forms which are accessible to a variety of audiences who will expect different things”.  
*DFES A guide to Evaluating Projects.*

“The child wants to know:

- Am I making appropriate progress?
- Is there anything I need to do to improve my progress?
- Are my individual needs being catered for?
- Is my work planned so that it is just right for me - not too easy or too difficult, despite the needs of the curriculum and statutory tests?
- Do I get an appropriate balance of subjects?” *Clarke, 2001*

“The most effective departments find time for teachers to observe each other’s lessons and use this well for different evaluative purposes”.  
*Good teaching and effective departments, Ofsted, 2002*

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