

How to get the culture right

Experts Christine Cannon and Jacquie Carpenter help a head teacher keen to make Assessment for Learning second nature within her school



Q As head teacher of a primary school I am keen to introduce a culture of Assessment for Learning throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. However, I'd like some advice on the first steps. How do I set this up? What success criteria should I put in place? I should also welcome some advice on the support I need to put in place for my staff and for the students. How realistic is it to expect them to "learn how to learn"? I am aware of initiatives such as quality marking and peer review, but unsure of how to build them into an assessment strategy.

A **Chris Cannon replies:** The key element of Assessment for Learning is for teachers to share clear learning objectives and success criteria with pupils.

To be most effective, learning intentions need to be in child "speak" and the success criteria are best created with the pupils by modelling activities. Teachers need time to try out, discuss and embed these activities into their practice. Once success criteria are set, then quality marking and planning time for pupils to make improvements can be undertaken. This often involves a review of the school's marking and assessment policy, which needs to be shared with parents.

Developing the use of "talking partners" (when teachers pair children to facilitate discussion and build confidence) early in the process is most successful. It not only provides opportunities for pupils to talk about their learning but also creates the right atmosphere for peer reviews to succeed.

I suggest drawing up an action plan of training and review sessions including realistic timescales, and encouraging teachers to experiment with the strategies so they become part of your school culture.

A **Jacquie Carpenter replies:** Assessment for Learning is key to transforming teaching and learning within a school. It must be introduced systematically to ensure a firm assessment foundation. To make this happen, you need to take several steps:

- Check the "conditions for learning" by revisiting your school aims and values as a whole staff to ensure they are shared by all.
- Walk round the school and use a grid (such as a school environment checklist for effective learning, which I have based on the Primary National Strategy) to identify how the aims and values are expressed within the school.
- Ensure all staff are aware of the level of attainment of each individual learner and how individual learning can be taken forward by using formative and summative forms of assessment. Barriers to learning, such as depressed language skills or difficulty with a particular concept must be identified and the appropriate intervention strategy decided.
- Identify the correct intervention strategy, which will depend on: the level the learner is working at; the identified gap in the learning (this may have been identified through gap analysis of NCT papers or optional tests); and the layer of curricular target.
- Mapping provision grids (which some counties use or are available through the Intensive Support Programme) are useful to track movement of pupils and as a means of identifying target pupils. Target pupils are those learners who are not making progress through levels or even regressing, and may require specific intervention and targets to move them forward to an age appropriate level. The grids can be used for the three core subject areas as a means of assessing progress over time.
- Use layered high-value curricular targets (which identify the success criteria, gauge the level of achievement in reaching them

and the actions to take), identified within the Framework for Teaching, to track age-related progress and accelerating progress. Staff can hold individual development plans identifying the target and the children that should, must and could obtain it. Half-termly dialogue with year groups/staff can take teaching and learning forward by ensuring the reasons for targeted children not succeeding are discussed and the timescales agreed.

- Monitor and evaluate lessons for correct structure and content. A clear monitoring schedule should be in place led by the subject co-ordinator and supported by senior managers to ensure effective teaching and learning is in place.
- Monitor and evaluate books regularly for quality target marking. The subject co-ordinator will monitor books on a termly basis to ensure that marking takes the learner forward and that work linked to curricular targets will be marked to those targets.
- Structure a programme of professional development meetings to discuss quality marking, model lesson structure, and success criteria (feedback, dialogue) to ensure that AfL has an impact at your school and is taking learning and teaching forward.

Meet the experts



Chris Cannon is a teacher adviser for Lancashire Learning Excellence. She delivers CPD courses and consultancy services on Assessment for Learning, and design and technology.



Jacqueline Carpenter is the head teacher of Orchards Church of England, an associate member of the institute and has a special interest in learning to learn.

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