

## Deidre Harrison

DEIRDRE HARRISON (LEFT) AND MARY WILKINS



### Five top tips for working with a CEA

1. Make sure that the senior management team and the staff are all on board with the idea of working with a chartered educational assessor. Don't bring one in if you don't want one.
2. Sit down and discuss with the CEA the rationale and philosophy of what you want to achieve so that everyone is clear about their role.
3. The CEA must get to know the staff well and understand the school, and the staff must trust the CEA – so arrange opportunities for them to meet regularly.
4. Work out with the senior management team what the objectives are and what you want to achieve. If it is Assessing Pupils' Progress, think about how you are going to implement it.
5. Make sure the staff are motivated and excited about working with the CEA, and that they understand the benefits of this to their work and the progress that can be made with pupils.



# Choosing the charter route

Interview **Dorothy Lepkowska** Photographs **Jim Varney**

## Deidre Harrison works closely with a former colleague, now training as a chartered educational assessor, to get the measure of pupils' progress

My name is Deidre Harrison and I am the assistant head and assessment manager at Farnborough primary, a one-form entry, 200-pupil school, in the London Borough of Bromley. I have been here for the past 24 years, having previously taught in schools in Bexley, Kent and the Middle East. I was acting head for

two terms last year when the headteacher took maternity leave. We entered an exciting new phase at Farnborough recently when we began working on our assessment methods with Mary Wilkins, who is working towards the new Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors' chartered educational assessor (CEA) qualification. Mary and I were colleagues at Farnborough for many years before her retirement three years ago. She

used to teach Year 6 and I taught Year 5, so we worked on many projects and have huge respect for each other. Our work with Mary is a big focus for the school at the moment. I arrive at about 7.30am, when I take time to get organised before the working day begins at 8am. Today, the senior management team has a short meeting to discuss pupil monitoring and targets. We want to check that teachers had submitted all relevant proof and evidence to accompany pupils' levels as part of the Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) programme, and that the levels given matched up with the standard of work the children had completed.

The children arrive by 8.40am and we have an assembly where we celebrate children's work and get them in the right frame of mind to begin lessons. Two of our Year 2 girls have just achieved level 1 in ballet, so they performed the dance they did for their exam to the rest of the school. We believe it is important that all achievements are recognised and celebrated because it raises children's self-esteem and confidence.

At 9.15am the first lesson begins. I no longer have a class of my own but I see supporting colleagues as an important part of my work. Today I am covering for the Year 5 teacher, who is our head of ICT and is working on those skills with other classes. I taught this age group and I have to admit that it is my favourite because the children are at an age when they are becoming more independent and are developing a wonderful sense of humour. You can banter with them and they are fun to be around.

I am taking them for a maths lesson and we are studying probability, as part of the numeracy strategy. I ask the children to roll dice and note which numbers they land

on. We are working on the premise that the more times you do this, the more accurate your readings will be. We played a game where I covered up the number 6 on one die and divided the children into two groups. The object of the game was to see which group reached 50 the quickest. Of course, it wasn't fair because one group could not add the number 6 to its score.

During the lesson, I observed the children and made notes on a pro forma document we produce at Farnborough about how they worked. The pro forma is a sheet of A4 paper that includes boxes where we can write notes about pupils' strengths and weaknesses. We don't really have time to go into the minutiae of each lesson but we can note enough down to make sure that any problems are picked up.

I noticed that one pupil was struggling with the concept of probability so I wrote his name, as well as the names of those who grasped it easily. At the end of the lesson I left the note on the teacher's desk so she can see it and use the information to plan any future activities.

If I have particular concerns over a pupil, I might arrange a more formal meeting with the teacher. We may need to find out if there is a reason why a child might be underperforming; for example, there might be problems at home. But in this instance, it is only a case of making sure the child understands the concept next time it comes up so I will mention it when I next see her in the staff room or in the corridor. In a small school like this it is easy to find colleagues.

At 10.15am it is playtime. I was due to speak to the newly qualified teacher about a lesson observation I did with her the previous day, but I have been asked instead to speak to a couple of boys who took

their playground game too seriously and got rough with each other. They are Year 4 pupils and at a start of the next lesson at 10.30am, I spoke to the whole of their class about the importance of playing fairly.

At 11am, I have a meeting with Mary about the school's introduction of the APP initiative. She is helping us to examine our existing arrangements and monitor and review any changes we might need to make. So far, she has suggested, among other things, that for ease of reference, we colour-code every year group in the main folder where we keep our school's APP records. This enables teachers to see, at a glance, that blue markings mean Year 4 and purple is for Year 6.

We also photocopy all work that was included in the APP process and keep it in that folder so we can compare standards

of the same or comparable work year on year. At the start of the year, we assessed three children in each class – one each from the top, average and below-average ability ranges – to set benchmarks of the standards and progress in each class.

Initially we analysed their writing skills – we expect to do a similar exercise with reading during the summer term – and each teacher looked at eight pieces of work by each child that were appropriate to their age group. So the junior pupils, for example, looked at aspects such as punctuation, the appropriate use of words, use of paragraphs, spelling, the use of verbs and adjectives, tenses and sentence formation. This term, we included a further three children in each class of similar abilities to the exercise, and we will build up the numbers of children assessed in this way to all pupils over time.

It was on Mary's advice that we decided to use just a few students to start with. She believed that this was the simplest but most effective way to start developing APP. By the end of this term, Mary will have spent a total of two days speaking with every member of staff individually, and going through their assessments, looking at the results and discussing with teachers how they can use this information in their planning.

Our meeting today was to look at the accuracy of the assessments so far, and generally we were impressed. We were particularly pleased that we agreed on the

### CV

**Name** Deidre Harrison  
**Lives** Orpington, Kent  
**Job** Assistant head and assessment manager at Farnborough primary school, Bromley  
**Reason for becoming a teacher/ assessor** Working with children gives me a complete buzz and if I had my life all again, I would teach again. I have a passion for the use of formative assessment. It is very exciting for education.

## A day in the life



“Our meeting today was to look at the accuracy of assessments so far, and generally we were very impressed”



different levels awarded to the group of pupils who have been assessed so far. If we can carry out teacher assessment in a similar vein in the future, where we have uniformity of marking, perhaps eventually we will be able to get rid of end of Key Stage tests. We did feel, however, that one teacher had not gathered enough evidence to have marked a piece of work at a particular level so we decided to ask her to look at this pupil again and to gather more information and proof.

We considered how teachers should try to fit APP in their everyday work: it is a time-consuming process and you have to allow people time to get used to that way of doing things. We also spoke about the need to remind teachers that the next piece of assessment on pupils has to be done by the end of half term. It is easy for teachers to be distracted by everything else that goes on in their classrooms so we try to keep them on track by setting deadlines.

After our meeting, at 11.45am, I finally catch up with the NQT to give her feedback on her lessons. She is a reception teacher and has a teaching assistant in the class doing work with pupils, so she can pop out for a few minutes. She is taking everything in her stride and is aware that she needs to keep notes and records and gather proof of what the pupils are doing and saying. There are a couple of pupils in her class who have English as a second language, so we discussed ways she could support them.

At 12.10pm, our lunchtime begins, and the NQT and I go to see our Year 4 teacher, who is a linguist and has taken a course in English as an additional language, to ask her advice about how the reception pupils can be better supported. It is so useful to have teachers on the staff with this sort of experience and, because we are a small

school, it is easy for colleagues to seek advice and support from each other.

We have a staggered lunchtime because we have a small playground, and want all children to be able to have a chance to run around. I always pop into the dining hall at some point as it is a good time to catch up with children who might have had a wobbly morning – like the two boys in Year 4. At about 12.50pm I go into the staffroom in case any of the teachers want to speak to me. It is important to have that regular link with colleagues, even if it is just to allow them to unload about the morning they have had.

By 1.20pm everyone is back in lessons and today I'm taking Year 1 for the whole afternoon, while their teacher takes her preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) time. In the first hour we do music and dance. I am using music that includes mechanical sounds so they are imitating machine movements. Again I use the A4 pro forma and make notes for their classroom teacher about what we did during the lesson and how the children reacted.

Some children have done exceptional work today and have been really engaged with the activities so I note down their names, as well as those who seem to need more support. Again, I will leave this on the teacher's desk for her to read later and plan any future lessons accordingly. If I had any particular concerns about a child I would speak to her immediately.

Once afternoon break is over at 2.30pm, the children have story-time or assembly.

Today we are having an assembly because a few children in Key Stage 1 have their birthdays this week and we like to celebrate that. Afterwards, we go back to class for a brief “show-and-tell” session. We don't assess this but it is a chance for children to stand up and tell their classmates about what is happening in their lives. Today, one of the boys has brought in a postcard and figure of a kiwi bird that his grandfather brought back from holiday in New Zealand. It was his chance to have “his moment”.

After the children have left at 3.30pm the staff have a quick meeting about general housekeeping issues, such as health and safety, and at 3.45pm we go into a training session. We are looking at achievement in maths and the new national framework, and two of our teachers brief us on what they learned at a recent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority training session.

At 5pm, I have an hour in my office, planning the next day's activities and organising what I need to do. It is a good time to reflect on the day's events. I usually leave about 6pm.