

Why Raising Achievement Matters

“The first step in the argument is to consider why we need to raise achievement. It is not because of Ofsted, league tables or what is sometimes called ‘the standards agenda’. It is because raising achievement matters, for both individuals and society. For the individual, the higher achievement means increased lifetime salary, improved health and longer life. For society it results in increased tax revenue, lower health care costs and reduced criminal justice costs.”

(Dylan Williams, 2007)

Assessment Policy

“Overall the purpose of assessment is to improve standards, not merely to measure them.”

(Ofsted, 1998)

“The quality of assessment has a significant impact on attitudes to learning and on attainment in schools by stimulating and challenging pupils to work hard and by encouraging teachers to focus on how to improve the learning of individual pupils.”

(Ofsted, March 2003, “Good assessment in secondary schools”)

Aims of the policy

- To provide clear guidelines on the school’s approach to assessment.
- To establish a coherent approach to assessment across all departments.
- To provide a system which is clear to students, staff and parents.

Introduction

Assessment is a term which encompasses a wide range of activities, formal and informal, summative and formative. Summative assessment (external and internal exams) has traditionally tended to dominate teaching and assessment and has a place in providing a summary of achievement. However, research evidence indicates that formative assessment has a greater impact on motivation and attainment. The following guidance is an attempt to:

- minimise the need for summative assessment;
- provide an assessment structure which students recognise and understand;
- provide a policy which is realistic and attainable for teachers in terms of workload.

Formal Assessment

As stated previously, teachers are constantly monitoring student understanding and progress through questioning, discussion and observation. What follows is an attempt to quantify formal assessment.

- Students' books or work should be assessed every 6-8 lessons or 2-3 weeks, depending upon the frequency of lessons and/or the structure of the subject's modules. Research and feedback from students indicates that they lose interest in their written work, and its quality, if teachers do not collect and assess it.
- Exceptional effort and attainment should be rewarded using the school's reward system.
- Comments should be made on class work and written homework as appropriate, identifying
 - i. what the student has done well;
 - ii. highlighting what needs to improve;
 - iii. explaining how to improve in the future.
- Departments may produce end of unit/end of module tests and record marks for these centrally (summative assessment). This type of test is useful to inform teachers of progress and understanding. However, research suggests that students do not learn from tests which take place at the end of the process.
- NC levels and GCSE grades should be recorded each half-term or at the end of a module of work, as appropriate, to enable teachers to log progress and check against forecast data. Students may be given their levels/grades if departments feel this is helpful. As part of the teaching and learning process, descriptors for NC levels and GCSE grades should be discussed and examples analysed together so that students are aware of what is required to achieve different levels or grades and what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers are responsible for recording marks or comments for students' work regularly, either electronically or on paper, in accordance with the department assessment policy (even though these might not be written on the students' work) to ensure that written evidence is available to inform discussion with parents.
- A forecast level or grade is what the pupil is expected to achieve at the end of the key stage, based upon a current assessment of their work and progress, with the expectation that they will maintain this standard for the duration of the key stage.

"The setting of a target alone does not raise standards. Teachers working with individual pupils do that. They manage it through a combination of optimism, persistence and praise, and cajoling where necessary. They create good-humoured and inspiring learning environments. They challenge pupils and use a variety of teaching and learning approaches. They treat pupils as individuals and keep parents centrally involved. Their assessments are regular, frequent, informative and supportive; they remind pupils what it is they need to know and what they need to do."

(The Numbers Game: Using Assessment Data in Secondary Schools
by Keith Hedger & David Jesson)