



Lady Lumley's School

Newsletter

10th December 2014

Special Edition



Special Key Stage 3 Assessment Edition

Why the change in the assessment system?

In June 2013, the DfE announced “As part of our reforms to the national curriculum, the current system of ‘levels’ used to report children’s attainment and progress will be removed. It will not be replaced.” This policy decision followed recommendations from the national curriculum Expert Panel (DfE: 2011) chaired by Tim Oates. The rationale was explained as “We believe this system is complicated and difficult to understand, especially for parents. It also encourages teachers to focus on a pupil’s current level, rather than consider more broadly what the pupil can actually do. Prescribing a single detailed approach to assessment does not fit with the curriculum freedoms we are giving schools”

This gave schools the ‘green light’ to do what they should have done years before (and some did) which was to stop using levels for tasks for which they were never designed. When levels were first proposed by TGAT (the Task Group on Assessment and Testing) in 1988 (at the same time as the introduction of the National Curriculum) they were intended to be summative assessments at the end of each Key Stage. One of the members of the original Task Group and an extremely well-respected and influential educational expert, Professor Dylan William, has always made it clear that national curriculum levels are only accurate to within one full level (i.e. a child with a Level 4 could be operating at anywhere between Level 3 and Level 5). Despite this, nearly every school, under the driving force of a performative view of Ofsted inspections and the misguided work on Assessment for Learning (where formative assessment was diluted by being shackled to numeric values) adopted a system of sub-levels and used these to ‘report progress’.

Sub-levels were never a part of National Curriculum levels and the supposed fine-tuning of a child’s attainment was an exercise (which we all believed in – staff, students and parents) where a great deal of data was generated which created a self-sustaining myth of accuracy.

There is huge value in recording a child’s current attainment and attitude to learning in school. There is a need for students, staff and parents to know where a child is and how much he/she has learnt over a period of time. There is a need for the school, as an organisation, to be able to see how each student is doing across a range of subjects, and there is a need to see how one subject is performing against others. But the old system only appeared to do this, and this is true in the vast majority of schools in this country. This is why the DfE has removed levels.

Schools are now free to choose how they record progress. Schools always were, but few schools were brave enough to be different from the norm. Those which were are now celebrated by the Government as innovators and we are asked to look at their practices. At least at Lady Lumley’s we embraced the opportunities as soon as they were made explicit. Some schools clung to National Curriculum levels and are only now looking at more effective ways to record and report.

Here, we have approached assessment, recording and reporting in an holistic fashion. The progress checks are only one way of parents and carers receiving information. We have maintained, and will continue to do so, full written reports once a year. We have also emphasised the importance of marking and the impact of marking in the students' books. This is on-going assessment and reporting on a week-by-week basis and should form a three-way dialogue between students, parents and teachers. The use of green and purple pens clearly shows the formative comments made by the teachers and the students' responses to these comments. The students' progress should be visible in their written work.

Within school, we monitor students' work within and across subjects. We monitor lessons and expect every lesson to be good or outstanding, as teaching will only be judged as high quality if it engenders high quality learning, and high quality learning will produce positive outcomes for every student.

As a school, we strongly believe the key indicator for any student (and their parents or carers) is how much progress they are making. Teachers are asked to make a professional judgment on each student they teach – is he/she making as much progress as they should be? This is reported home in the termly progress checks. Subject leaders and senior leaders moderate this from lesson observations and work scrutiny, as well as other internal assessments.

We feel this gives a more credible and useful indicator than National Curriculum levels, but it is a change and staff, students and parents may take time to get used to this change.

We want every student working outside his/her comfort zone (in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development), challenged yet supported. If we get this right, most students will be making expected progress most of the time. And if that's the case, their final examination results will be very impressive indeed.

Why no progress report for Art, Music and Drama?

The subjects of art, music and drama are valued highly in the school as they provide an important dimension to the breadth of study and chances of expression for our students; as well as being recognised as free-standing academic qualifications in later years. When we took the decision to change the way we reported on student's progress, we also looked into the opportunities offered to make reporting of progress as relevant as possible to these creative subjects. In consultation with the subject leaders for art, music and drama we discussed the possibilities for students to demonstrate progress in a less formulaic way and more genuinely reflect the journey travelled by each student. I removed the necessity for reporting attitude to learning and progress grades from these three subjects for the whole of key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9) for a trial period and tasked the subject leaders to create a more appropriate reporting method. This is currently being devised.

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Parent Forum

If you would like to share your views and have an opportunity to hear about teaching and learning updates, please come along to our next Parent Forum meeting on Tuesday 3rd February at 6:30 p.m. Please contact Brian Davis on bdavis@ladylumleys.net for further information.