Assessment for Learning
what you need to know...

It’s cropping up everywhere. Assessment for learning (AfL) is what we should all be doing and doing loudly if we want to be acclaimed. The irony is that its basis is what good teachers have always done: using day-to-day assessment to inform future planning, checking children’s understanding during lessons and adapting tasks accordingly. Add to this the responsibility of children as learners and the need for them to self-evaluate, and we have a newly packaged approach to the way many teachers taught before SATs led the assessment array. In this issue ‘Headliners’ picks out the different strands of AfL – and wonders why so much common sense should have got lost in the first place.

The following information is based on Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching in the primary years.

There are two main purposes of assessment:

- Assessment of learning (summative – at the end of the process)
- Assessment for learning (formative – ongoing during the process)

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 Reform Group, 2002a)

Conditions for learning
Curricular boards have become a common sight in many primary classrooms. It is intended that they are used as a learning tool and might include:

- learning objectives
- key questions to be used in lesson starters and plenaries
- key questions and prompts available to support children’s talking and thinking about learning
- statements and questions to highlight key learning points
- key literacy and numeracy and learning to learn targets
- visual prompts and resources to support key curricular target focuses

In addition the classroom should have:

- positive affirmations displayed and referred to regularly
- positive attitudes and behaviours reinforced consistently
- successes celebrated

Using curricular targets
Most schools are using and are familiar with the curricular target. Through a process of results’ analysis, areas of weakness are identified and targets ‘layered’ according to children’s ability. The following are key actions in their implementation:

- Set whole-school curricular targets.
- Assign year-group curricular targets.
- Differentiate the year-group targets into targets for different groups or individuals.
- Amend planning and teaching to prioritise curricular targets.
Provide focused teaching to support children’s learning.
Identify the group or individuals whose progress is to be assessed.
Collect and provide evidence of achievement against the curricular target from day-to-day assessment.
Evaluate the impact on learners through work scrutiny, discussions with children and outcomes of children’s self-evaluation.
Leadership team monitors the achievement of targets.
Leadership team feeds back key findings from whole-school analysis of progress.
Use data to identify which children are not making expected progress.
Discuss with class teachers the progress of the children in their class.
Ensure that inclusive principles are addressed so that all children receive appropriate additional support, intervention and opportunities.
Establish monitoring and evaluation systems to review the impact of intervention programmes on children’s progress.

Planning
The emphasis in short-term planning should be on:

- the objectives – shared with the children
- success criteria – linked to the objective and shared with the children

This focus places the emphasis on learning rather than activities, as shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, Year</th>
<th>Learning objective</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Success criteria – steps to success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Yr 2</td>
<td>To be able to write instructions</td>
<td>Making jelly</td>
<td>Use imperatives. Make sure the instructions are in the correct order. Use bullet points, numbers or first, second to support layout.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Day-to-day assessment strategies
Classroom practice should include:

- Questioning:
  - asking questions to assess children’s starting points
  - asking a range of questions from literal to higher-order to develop understanding
  - using thinking time and talk partners to ensure all children are engaged in answering questions
- Observing:
  - watching children and listening to their discussions to assess their learning
  - making planned observations of particular children to support their learning in the lesson
- Discussing:
  - holding brief impromptu discussions with children
  - holding discussions with children to assess understanding
  - holding informed discussions to follow up earlier assessment and diagnosis
- Analysing:
  - marking and assessing written work with children
  - discussing with children their responses to the tasks
- Checking children’s understanding:
  - recall tests to assess knowledge immediately
  - brief review checks
- Engaging children in reviewing progress:
  - developing supported self- and peer-assessment
  - developing independent self and peer-assessment – children identify their own achievements
  - sustained feedback with individuals or groups

Feedback on learning/marking
This should include:

- Sharing learning objectives and success criteria
- Sharing unit coverage – concept and mind-mapping
- Providing effective oral and written feedback to children on their learning – talking about learning
- Marking against the learning objective, e.g. showing success, indicating improvement, giving an improvement suggestion, making the improvement
- Developing peer- and self-assessment

Formative use of summative assessment
This should include:

- School-level data:
  - looking for trends and differences between the performance of different groups
- Pupil-level data:
  - tracking children’s progress
  - evidence of impact of specific school interventions
  - relative progress made by children in different groups
- Question-level analysis:
  - analysis of optional tests in Years 3, 4 and 5