

# Unlocking progress

Helping children achieve their potential



department for  
children, schools and families

**The National Strategies**

# The importance of progression

## Why is so much emphasis being placed upon personalised learning and pupil progress?

**Peter Dudley, National Director Primary at the National Strategies explains.**



Maybe it's because progress is about how students learn as well as just what they learn: in other words, a focus on progress is critical to ensuring a child achieves their potential. In order to get this right you need to know exactly where a child is and what approach or intervention will benefit them most in their next steps.

What's more, achieving your potential in the 21st century will require more than being able to recall facts for a test. Good progress every year creates space for rich learning every year. Today's children are likely to have multiple careers in which they will need to embrace generations of new technology with ever-increasing swiftness – and they'll need a rich, broad and enjoyable education that actively engages them in learning in order to do that.

And that means not only must they make good progress, but also increasingly know how to make good progress: to understand their own learning. It also means we, as teachers, need to do everything in our power to ensure they do not fall by the wayside.

I believe teachers hold two keys to help children do this – and an ever-increasing body of evidence concurs. The first key is Assessment for Learning (AfL) as a pedagogic approach. A recent AfL position paper suggests that for teachers and learners AfL is:

'the process of identifying aspects of learning as it is developing, using whatever informal and formal processes best help that identification, primarily so that learning itself can be enhanced'<sup>1</sup>

Second is the key to understanding what progression in that learning looks like over time – and seeing it in the same way as other professionals. Progression in key aspects of learning is brought

to life for all through Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) - one of the most powerful tools available to support teacher assessment.

Together, both AfL and APP can help ensure that a child gets the learning opportunities, the challenge and the feedback they most need at critical moments to help them to move on. They help teachers gauge the right teaching approach or intervention to guarantee that happens – and there is a growing network of Lead Assessment schools to help you.

So, I hope this supplement will give you an insight into just some of the ways that can happen in practice – and will inspire you to find out more, from our website, from local Lead Assessment schools, from our regional advisers or from the research itself.

<sup>1</sup> *Position Paper on Assessment for Learning from the Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning, Dunedin, New Zealand, March 2009.*

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# Putting personalisation and progression at the heart of your teaching

## How can you ensure every pupil in your class makes good progress?

There are no instant answers. But schools across England are proving that personalised, tailored teaching is an achievable reality – provided you know where pupils are in their learning, where they need to get to, and how they are going to get there.

The National Strategies has plenty of evidence that good progress occurs where schools: use the Frameworks to ensure that progression is built into planning; secure consistently good teaching and learning; combine day-to-day Assessment for Learning (AfL) with periodic assessment; and design effective personalised intervention for pupils who have fallen behind.

All pupils are entitled to quality first teaching which is lively, engaging and involves a carefully planned blend of approaches that direct children's learning. AfL is at the heart of good teaching. It raises achievement by ensuring pupils are fully involved in managing their own learning and that teachers have the assessment information they need to take learning forward. AfL is all about developing learners who have



the understanding and skills to assess where they are in their learning, where they need to get to and how they can get there. It is about giving you the information you need to plan responses, interventions and lessons which will help them progress, tailoring your teaching to support their needs.

Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) is a structured tool for termly in-school assessment, developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), and supported by the National Strategies. APP enables teachers to use their

professional judgement and the information they already gather on pupils to accurately assess the progress of their learners. It also supports good whole school tracking so that rapid action can be taken to support those pupils whose progress slows or stalls.

AfL is a pedagogic approach and happens all the time. A good knowledge of AfL helps you change the way you ask a question, push the way a discussion is going, or group pupils for particular purposes: because you know each pupil's strengths and weaknesses

within key aspects of a subject, and what they need to do to improve. You can design interventions that fit into your lesson plans and pupils become skilled in self-assessment and managing their own learning. AfL is very powerful, enabling you to unlock progress for all pupils.

AfL in combination with APP makes it easier for teachers to personalise learning within a normal classroom setting. The benefits of this combination are not just classroom based. APP gives teachers access to accurate information on how and what their class is learning, but it also gives senior leaders the information they need to look at progress across year groups and key stages so that they can design appropriate provision and evaluate its impact.

Many schools have a whole-school intervention mapping process, where data is used to inform intervention. APP allows these schools to be even more scientific in their choice of intervention as teachers further develop their ability to highlight exactly where pupils need support. It also gives parents the opportunity to have an informed dialogue about their child's progress with teachers and perhaps, most importantly, it ensures that pupils have the kinds of conversations about their learning that mean they have a clear idea of where they are in their learning, what they should be aiming for – and how they can get there.



There is another reason to focus on pupils' progress. Narrowing the achievement gap in our schools has a very clear moral purpose: it enables all learners to improve their life chances. The entitlement to quality first teaching, the information that AfL and APP both provide on the progress of individuals and groups of pupils; and focused intervention to support progress where it is needed, also go a long way to ensuring that those whose progress and attainment is affected by disadvantage, or by barriers to learning, can get the additional support they need, when they can benefit most from it.

**'AfL is very powerful, enabling you to unlock progress for all pupils.'**

So, if you want to understand what AfL looks like in the classroom and how one headteacher has led assessment and planning for intervention, read *Leading by example* on page 5. To get an insight into how families of schools are using APP to improve transfer and transition, turn to page 8. To read case studies of schools who are deepening and developing AfL with APP, through the Lead Assessment school model, go to page 10. And for a comprehensive look at all the resources produced by the National Strategies, turn to page 7.

## Leading by example

### Headteacher Donna McNicholl has taken St Mary's Catholic School in Lancashire from satisfactory to outstanding in two years. So what's her secret?

Miss McNicholl says it's all down to Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP). "I came from a very successful school where AfL and thorough assessment were key to making sure every child achieved – I knew it could work," she says.

Walk into any one of St Mary's five classes today and you'll see AfL in action. "It's all about good questioning, waiting for children to answer, investigating common misconceptions," she says. "So a teacher will make a mistake on purpose and then the class will discuss it. Or children will explain an issue to each other – and I will jump in and ask something specific."

If much of that sounds familiar, don't be surprised. Nigel Minns, a National Strategies Senior Adviser explains. "AfL is really effective teaching and learning – sharing learning outcomes with pupils, use of dialogue in the classroom and peer talk. So many teachers use these techniques as an instinctive part of pedagogy," he says. "But APP is different. It's a teacher tool – a termly assessment of students' progress, created by comparing knowledge gathered on a day-to-day basis and nationally agreed levels."



So what does that mean in practice? "It means sitting down, no more than once a term, and reviewing all the key evidence – not everything you've done, and not special tasks or tests, just the key pieces of work, notes you've made, sticky notes, guided records. You then make a judgement against the nationally agreed levels as to where you think a child is," Mr Minns says.

"The advantages are that you have control – you select the work and decide what is critical and what isn't – and you can then make decisions about the next steps children should be taking, so you're using it to move them on."

The key word there, of course, is 'level'. For APP to work effectively, teachers need to have a really good sense of what each level looks like – and that takes time, as Miss McNicholl explains.

"We spent useful time moderating work as a staff to understand what was needed to move a child on to the next sub-level," she says. "We used PPA time and our weekly staff meeting. And for the first year, I spent 50 per cent of my time teaching, so that I could model AfL with APP."

Mr Minns says the St Mary's experience is fairly typical – but that once you have embedded the levels, APP becomes much easier. "At the start of the pilots,

teachers said ‘It’s hard work, but worth it,’ he says. ‘After about a year, teachers stopped saying it was hard work – it had just become day-to-day practice. But the key breakthrough comes when schools stop doing other things – tests, end-of-unit assessments, writing weeks – because they realise that APP delivers much more valuable and accurate information.’

Tests are based on a snapshot rather than the broader picture given by teacher assessments through APP.

Miss McNicholl agrees. ‘We’ve all seen children do surprisingly well or badly at an end-of-term test,’ she says. ‘APP gives you solid information that means your target setting is spot on. There are no surprises.’

Another advantage is that while you may not review evidence every day, daily assessment enables you to intervene quickly and precisely. ‘All children get intervention of some kind,’ Miss McNicholl says. ‘They might be withdrawn for extra support, but often it’s as simple as identifying a particular child’s misconception in a question, or an extra ten minutes, one-to-one, at lunchtime.’

But doesn’t using day-to-day information to create a termly review result in huge amounts of paper? According to Donna McNicholl, it’s all about being creative. ‘We have copious amounts of evidence to justify a child’s level, but it’s rarely loads of paperwork and it’s definitely not about box ticking.’



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Nigel Minns agrees that recording doesn’t have to be all-consuming. ‘It’s all about how far down the road the school is with APP,’ he says. ‘A common midpoint, for example, is that you keep a sheet for a particular group, and annotate it to show the performance of individual children – but the most sophisticated is where APP is really well embedded and all the teachers know the criteria. In one school I visited, they didn’t need to look at a sheet or write it down – they knew where the gaps were.’

Nevertheless, Miss McNicholl says to really push the achievement of every child, AfL with APP has to be accompanied by effective performance

management. ‘We have a tracker for every child,’ she says. ‘Each term staff have a meeting with a senior member of staff and we look at how every child has progressed – have they had intervention, has it worked, if not what do we need to do, and that works into staff performance management. It means we are really focused on each child.’

And despite all the hard work, Donna McNicholl says the effort has been worth it. ‘I’ve seen our children blossom and it’s because of our tracking,’ she says. ‘We are never complacent and we want every single child to reach their full potential – not just one group or this child who’s lagging behind – every child.’

## Support to help you succeed

### The National Strategies has produced a range of support materials for school senior leaders, SIPs and teachers.

They provide advice on leading and managing the whole school development of AfL with APP including self evaluation materials and examples of how other schools have developed AfL with APP in different contexts.

In addition to the resources you’ll find on these pages, our web area [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) has primary and secondary areas devoted to assessment: there you can find all the materials we have produced over the last five years in relation to AfL, APP,

pupil tracking and target setting. You will find, for example, the full suite of APP materials for reading, writing, speaking and listening, maths, science and secondary ICT, including the assessment criteria, standards files and the APP handbook.

## Resources

### Personalised Learning:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/personalisedlearning](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/personalisedlearning)

### Primary assessment area:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/primary/assessment](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/primary/assessment)

### Secondary assessment area:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/secondary/assessment](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/secondary/assessment)

### Transfer and transition:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/transferandtransition](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/transferandtransition)

### Narrowing the Gaps:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/ntg](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/ntg)

### Guidance for School Improvement Partners: Supporting and challenging improvement in AfL with APP:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/sipsguidance](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/sipsguidance)

### The Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategy:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/aflstrategy](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/aflstrategy)

### AfL with APP: Developing collaborative school-based approaches:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/aflandapp](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/aflandapp)

### One-to-One Tuition: A guide for School Improvement Partners:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/onetooone](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/sup4/onetooone)

# Transfer and Transitions

## Primary and secondary schools that work in partnership with the Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) approach demonstrate how it helps pupils to continue to make progress when they move to a new class or to a new school.

This is because APP ensures that primary and secondary teachers use exactly the same criteria and tools to make their judgements against levels. And as a consequence, they are able to reach a shared understanding of what a child is capable of – of their strengths and weaknesses in key aspects of a subject, which is great information for the receiving teacher or school.

For Laurie Kwissa, a National Strategies Regional Adviser, it's all about trajectory. "If APP is used collaboratively and consistently it gives teachers access to the professional knowledge and data of the teacher who has come before," she says. "And that means you know the child's trajectory: you know what progress looks like and you know about them as learners."

Mrs. Kwissa's colleague, Trevor Folley, also a National Strategies Regional Adviser, says there is another important pitfall of transition that APP can help avoid. "You can spend the whole of primary building up a child's ownership of learning, so that by the time they get to Year 6 they will go to a drawer and take out the resources they need to continue their

learning," he says. "Then, when they get to secondary, research shows that they often struggle because they lack confidence and no longer feel they have an influence over their learning." Cross-phase use of APP can help pupils continue to build the confidence and capacity to take responsibility for their own progress by allowing prior learning to be valued and skills to be built upon.

But to achieve these benefits, using APP successfully has to be about more than simply handing over a piece of paper. It relies on an ongoing dialogue between pupils, parents, teachers and their schools. In Leicestershire, Shepshed High School has strong partnerships with all four of its feeder first schools, as Laurie Kwissa explains. "The schools have allocated time for primary and secondary teachers to look at their APP evidence together – they go through the range of evidence, they level together, and then they set targets for each child," she says. "In October, the primary teachers visit their old pupils in their new classrooms at Shepshed to look at progress, see how pupils are interacting, and chat to them and their teachers about

standards and expectations. Crucially, this is communicated with parents and pupils to increase engagement in learning further and to support ongoing progress."

This kind of collaboration can have a huge impact on learning, as Trevor Folley has discovered. "I hear a lot about seamless transition," he says, "but we must ensure that with continuity comes progression. A key value of APP is that it can inform appropriately high expectations."

But however much schools value collaboration, communication between teachers separated by school and phase can still be challenging. According to Matt Nixon, Gloucestershire County Council's APP maths consultant, this is where local authorities (LAs) can really add value. "When we started the pilot, quality cross-phase collaboration between schools was still rare, although they met on network and training days," he says. "With the best will in the world, time is always at a premium, and so we as an LA emphasised how working together would benefit children to make it happen. We've now asked primaries to nominate a secondary school for cross-phase working in the future."

The stronger the links between schools the greater the chance of success, as Trevor Folley explains. "Work to strengthen transition is notoriously fragile. Partly because of the inherent complexity that comes with cross-phase collaboration and partly because it is often led by enthusiasts who may change roles. Formal structures and systems provide a scaffold to support the partnership when it comes under pressure from competing priorities.

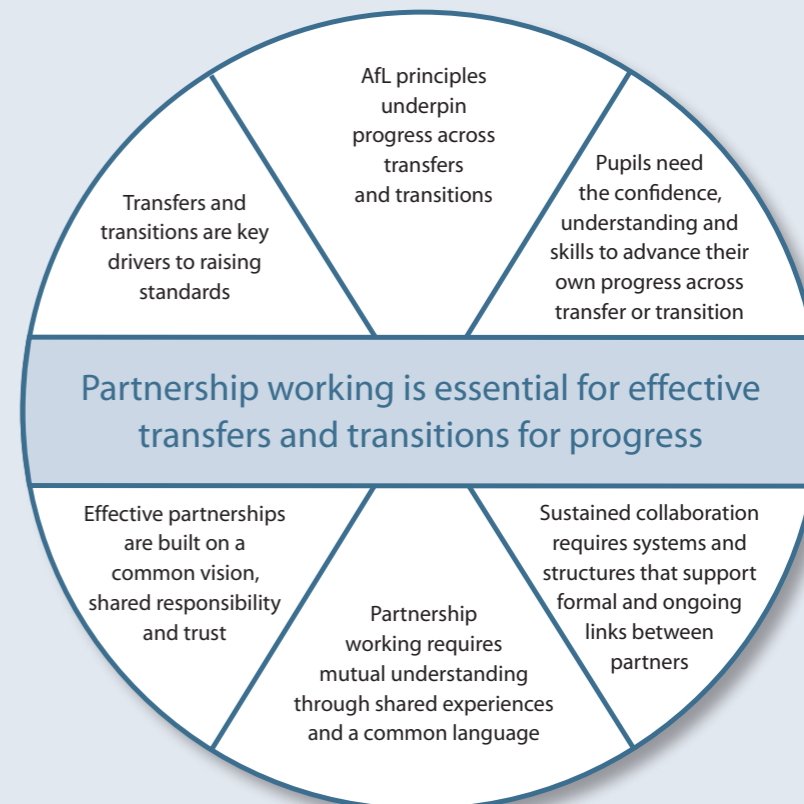
Indeed, in Gloucester, the LA hasn't stopped at creating links – they host regular network days, have allocated funding and support and created resources. They have also produced a template e-Profile for schools to use to record students' progress and the Levellopedia – the levelling handbook. Indeed, with 95 per cent of schools involved in the project, it seems unlikely the project could have gone so far – or so fast – without Gloucestershire's firm support.

And once collaboration is in place, APP can go a long way to building trust and a common language between practitioners, as Laurie Kwissa explains. "APP is a consistent tool that transcends phases and stages – we have never had that before, it's the missing link that experience tells us will improve and strengthen professional dialogue and trust," she says.

Trevor Folley emphasises that partnerships built on mutual trust are essential. "There can be no sense of hierarchy between schools as all are responsible for the progress of the pupils before and after transfer. This means

### Key messages for effective transfers and transitions

The National Strategies 'Strengthening transfers and transitions' project clearly identified seven key principles that underpin effective transfers and transitions for progress.



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practitioners understanding their place in a child's continuing education and being clear how their role complements the roles of others. Where primary schools use APP to provide meaningful information; where that information is trusted and used purposefully to plan for every

child; and where professional dialogue is responsive and ongoing, it benefits all children. The move to secondary school becomes the next opportunity in an exciting and rewarding learning journey."

## Sharing good practice

If you need inspiration take a look at two schools using the Lead Assessment school model.

### Primary case study: Orston Primary and Fairfield Primary, Notts.

Now in its second year, the three-year national DCSF Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategy has provided funding for collaborative models. In Nottinghamshire, a model of primary Lead Assessment schools is already having a significant impact on practice and the progress of pupils across the LA.

Headteachers Sarah Moore and David Howatson are very clear about one thing: the Lead Assessment school model is all about partnership. "It's not about me saying I'm the expert," explains Mrs Moore, headteacher at lead school, Orston Primary. "We do some great things, they do some great things, and it's brilliant to be able to share our experiences."

So how did the collaboration come about? "We make good progress in maths and science," David Howatson, headteacher of Fairfield Primary, says, "but our improvement in writing had stalled. So when our school improvement advisor suggested we meet with Sarah it seemed a great opportunity."

Over the last term, Orston and Fairfield have been working together at three levels: as headteachers, subject leaders and teachers, Mrs Moore says.

"It's all about the leadership team sharing good practice, and teachers sharing good practice," she says, "and then talking about effective monitoring and evaluation systems."

Tracking progress, supported by accurate periodic assessment using APP, has been the key for this partnership, as Mr Howatson explains. "We had started looking at visual maps of pupils' progress, but Sarah has fine-tuned it to make it very specific," he says. "So for example, before we might have looked at how a large group might make progress; now it's about saying individual pupils can get to this level. We're being far more aspirational."

To ensure that monitoring and self-evaluation are as robust as possible, the literacy curriculum leaders from both schools are working together. "They are going to identify the strengths,

look at what needs attention, and then, most importantly, work out what needs doing," says Mrs Moore. "Monitoring is really about the 'so what?' bit – what are we going to do about the issues we find?"

Being able to advise on potential pitfalls has also been useful. "We have had joint staff meetings which we've turned into workshops, and given everyone as much time as they needed," Mrs Moore says. "Our experience means we've been able to say 'we found this really tricky' or 'you might find this helpful' and they know we've really been there. APP is not an add-on, it's always in the back of your mind."

Has it been hard to accept help from another school? "It could have been awkward learning from another school," Mr Howatson agrees. "The biggest issue is definitely the personalities of the schools – my staff are very open, and want the best for the children, and so do Sarah and her staff. In fact, we're working exceptionally well together!"

**'Our experience means we've been able to say 'we found this really tricky' or 'you might find this helpful' and they know we've really been there.'**

## Secondary case study: Tewkesbury School and Severn Vale School, Gloucs.

Christian Walsh, maths teacher at Tewkesbury School and the lead professional, and Richard Johnson, assistant head at Severn Vale School, have only just started working together, but they are already excited about the possibilities.

"We've done quite a bit about Assessment for Learning (AfL) within the school as a whole. As I think in most schools, we have outstanding examples of AfL – we have Advanced Skills Teachers recognised for AfL – but we don't have consistency and one of the key challenges is to try and improve this. AfL is the basis for good teaching and that's what we are trying to do," says Mr Johnson. "APP has been valuable in really getting people to think about what it is you want pupils to learn."

Mr Johnson is planning to use the Lead Assessment school model to address a specific issue quickly and develop approaches to support future sustainable development. "We have had very high performance in maths for a number of years, and then last year we went from outstanding to good and we wanted to address that and very quickly," he explains.

"This Lead Assessment school support model seems to be a model of development where, if you can show it works, then you can grow it – it has a life beyond the support we are getting and can be rolled out further."

So what will Christian Walsh be doing? "Every two weeks, Christian sits with a member of staff for an hour before the lesson – going through in fine detail what areas they are going to work on, and that's the opportunity to refine it. They then deliver the lesson – might be team teaching, might be observing – then there is an opportunity afterwards to dissect it – what have we learnt, what worked what didn't." Mr Johnson explains. "What it has done has made us look at the maths department for next year, and because we like this model, next year we are creating a CPD period for the maths department – so that these discussions take place on an ongoing basis."

And progress so far seems to have been swift, as Mr Walsh explains. "This week there was an eye-opening moment when we interviewed students at the end of the lesson," he says. "The student said that he preferred the lesson because it had been more challenging, and was therefore more interesting. It was a real penny-dropping moment, because up to that point we were working on the basis that he was disengaged because he was struggling."

Indeed, Mr Walsh says that there are just as many professional benefits on his side as there are for Severn Vale. "I think it is helping us all," he says. "This week, I saw a technique work that I've never tried myself and it's something I'll take back. The aim is that it has an impact on

teaching and learning in all our classrooms."

So what are Richard Johnson's tips for other schools considering working with a Lead Assessment school? "First I'd say do it – it's definitely not a sign of weakness, but something we can all benefit from. Secondly, use your data to really identify what you want to target. And thirdly, make sure your staff know that this is not about criticism but an opportunity for professional development."

**'This Lead Assessment school support model seems to be a model of development where, if you can show it works, then you can grow it – it has a life beyond the support we are getting and can be rolled out further.'**

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