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Qualifications  
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Development  
Agency



2010  
Guidance for  
senior leaders

## Assessing pupils' progress: learners at the heart of assessment

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**Qualifications and Curriculum  
Development Agency**

53–55 Butts Road  
Earlsdon Park, Coventry  
CV1 3BH

Telephone 0300 303 3010  
Enquiry line 0300 303 3011  
Textphone 0300 303 3012  
Fax 0300 303 3014  
info@qcda.gov.uk  
www.qcda.gov.uk

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# Contents

- 4 Where are we now?
- 6 Guiding your thinking
- 8 Moving on whole school assessment
- 10 Impacting on pupils' learning
- 12 Impacting on pupils' progress
- 15 What next?

# Where are we now?

Assessment is at the heart of an effective curriculum and is a fundamental part of good teaching and learning. It enables learners to recognise achievement and make progress, and teachers to shape and adapt their teaching to individual needs and aspirations.

Assessing pupils' progress (APP) is a national approach to assessment that puts the learner at the heart of the assessment process. APP not only provides a link to national standards, but also builds a more well-rounded individual profile of learners' achievements that highlights their strengths and areas for improvement. In 2008, we published *Assessing pupils' progress: assessment at the heart of learning* (QCA/08/3867). It described the APP process, the thinking behind it and the benefits, as well as outlining how APP would develop in the future.





This booklet for senior leaders pulls together a range of recent practice and evidence to help you implement APP successfully into your school – there is no one way to do it!

Here we pose questions to help guide your thinking on school assessment policy and focus on learners being at the heart of curriculum, learning and assessment. The challenge for you as school leaders is to maximise the progress made by the pupils in your care.

The APP approach is being adopted by schools throughout England. Schools tell us that using APP:

- reduces reliance on specific assessment tasks and tests at key transitions
- provides a common language for discussing assessment
- recognises evidence from the full range of what pupils know and can do
- provides a clear sense of whether pupils are able to use the knowledge, skills and understanding they have developed in different contexts

- is consistent with the assessment of pupils working at P scales
- raises pupils' expectations by clarifying their achievements and next steps in learning
- informs teachers' discussions about learning with pupils and parents/carers.

It is clear from schools engaged in implementing APP that not all the benefits are obvious at first and sometimes there are teething problems. One benefit stands out sharply – it helps the teacher and pupil identify and celebrate overall progress in a subject or aspect of learning, rather than just assessing learning of the most recently taught topic.

**This structured approach to teacher assessment sets clear criteria by which a pupil can be assessed, so that the teacher is secure in assigning a pupil a level on a scale of progress.**

*Report of the Expert Group on Assessment, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009*

# Guiding your thinking

In working through this booklet, think about the next steps for your school in light of your experience and that of others.

Consider these four key principles for assessment:

- ▶ the learner is at the heart of assessment
- ▶ assessment needs to provide a view of the whole learner
- ▶ assessment is integral to teaching and learning
- ▶ assessment includes reliable judgements about how learners are doing in relation, where appropriate, to national standards and expectations.



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## ▶ The big question

What will you take from the experiences of others to help improve your own school's assessment policy and practice?

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## What is the evidence?

« The introduction of APP allowed the school to drive through a focus on all pupils making progress, including those pupils who were underachieving...

We now know that pupils have made progress before they reach the end of the key stage. In English more than double the number of pupils have been making the average of two levels of progress within the key stage than before the introduction of APP.

The [APP] process helps teachers identify gaps in learning and creates a dialogue with the pupils and their parents. »

Secondary headteacher

« It [APP] has triggered a full assessment review in our school. »

Key stage 2 pilot teacher feedback,  
*Evaluation of the assessing pupils' progress in key stage 2 pilot project, 2006–2008*,  
QCA, 2008

« We are good at moderation activities – all our schools are moderating in school and most are involved in same- and cross-phase moderation. We plan to extend this so more schools are involved in inter-school moderation in the future. »

School pilot leader, secondary school,  
*Evaluation of the Making Good Progress pilot*, DCSF, 2010

As part of a school development programme, APP can:

- use what teachers know about their pupils to improve their learning
- help learners understand their own learning and where to go next
- give parents/carers better information about their children's progress.

Joint statement on APP by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), the National Union of Teachers (NUT), DCSF and QCA, 2009

# Moving on whole school assessment

Schools involved in APP have told us that it has moved on their whole school assessment policies and brought about a major and positive change in their school. For any school leader, assessment policy is a key consideration in the school development plan. It is for your leadership team to decide what works best at your school.

## What is the evidence?

Most teachers found the review of evidence to derive an assessment outcome relatively easy, once they had assimilated the advice on the APP flowcharts about making a judgement across assessment focuses.

*Evaluation of the assessing pupils' progress in year 1 pilot project, 2007–2008, QCA, 2008*

« Our school almost exclusively used tests for summative assessment before using APP. The senior leadership team was responsible for analysing the data from tests which resulted in little engagement from or responsibility taken by individual teachers for pupil performance.

Changing a school's assessment policy is never going to be easy and getting the agreement of staff and taking them 'on the journey' are essential to developing and successfully implementing APP in a school. »

Deputy headteacher, primary school

In another primary school in the local authority, teachers had started to share APP informed targets with parents/carers. The school also conducted a parent/carer workshop to share best practice about how parents/carers can support their children in their learning.

*Case study, Evaluation of the Making Good Progress pilot, DCSF, 2010*

« Meeting time has been dedicated to [assessment learning] AfL or APP; although moderating APP judgements has taken time, it's essential to support the introduction of APP. We are continuing to focus on what other opportunities there are to support teachers. »

Headteacher, junior school





## Talking points

- ▶ When do you stand back and reflect on your assessment practice and discuss changes with your colleagues?
- ▶ How will you secure APP across your school and manage the changes you want to see?
- ▶ When APP is working well, what would you expect to see and hear:
  - from pupils?
  - in a learning context?
  - in a curriculum meeting?
  - in moderation meetings?
  - in your leadership meetings?
  - in parent–teacher communications?
- ▶ How will you evaluate the impact of APP in your school?

### Deanesfield Primary School's experience

APP has made a fundamental change in how teachers think and behave at Deanesfield Primary School in South Ruislip.

The school operated a dual system at first with some teachers adopting APP and other teachers continuing to use optional and other tests. Unfortunately this caused some confusion. Teachers saw optional tests as a safety net and used test scores to 'check' teacher judgements made using APP.

All testing, apart from statutory end of key stage tests, has now stopped. Teachers have ownership of the timetable, curriculum, and how they organise learning for their pupils. Teachers use planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time for assessment activity and two staff meetings a term are devoted to moderation sessions.

Teachers now take responsibility and are accountable for the outcomes of their teaching, and a wider range of evidence of pupil achievement has been considered using APP. A cross-curricular approach has been taken to identifying evidence of learning, particularly in English and science.

# Impacting on pupils' learning

APP pilot schools have told us that teachers approach teaching differently as they start to become more familiar with APP. Many found APP made them focus on making their planning more targeted on the needs of their pupils. APP has helped them address one of Ofsted's commonest findings over a number of years – that assessment does not sufficiently inform teaching and learning.

After working with APP, teachers became aware:

- ▶ that parts of their curriculum provided restricted learning opportunities for pupils to demonstrate independently what they could do
- ▶ of the need to plan more open questioning to allow pupils to show more evidence of what they really knew and could do
- ▶ that periodic standing back to assess a range of work helps to inform the teacher's medium- and long-term planning.

## What is the evidence?

APP is a straightforward approach to making secure judgements about the standard of pupils' work and what they need to do next. It:

- ▶ supports systematic assessment
- ▶ supports a broad curriculum
- ▶ has been shown to improve learners' progress.

Joint statement on APP by ASCL, ATL, NAHT, NASUWT, NUT, DCSF and QCA, 2009

« I've had to interrogate my own judgements more closely and I've begun to see the different patterns of strengths and weaknesses and I'm learning more about my pupils. »

English teacher, *Monitoring pupils' progress in English at key stage 3, final report on the 2003–2005 pilot*, QCA, 2006

The most immediately obvious impact of APP was in teachers' understanding that two pupils can both be working at the same level and yet have very different profiles across the assessment focuses and therefore very different needs for progression.

*Evaluation of the assessing pupils' progress in key stage 2 pilot project, 2006–2008*, QCA, 2008



## Talking points

- How far is assessment for learning an everyday part of pupils' learning experiences?
- How will your AfL practice support periodic assessment through APP?
- What impact do you see on your school's curriculum as a result of introducing APP?
- How will you monitor the impact of APP on the curriculum?

### St George's New Town Junior School's experience

Professional development and making time to support teachers are crucial to the successful introduction of APP, according to St George's New Town Junior School in Colchester.

Headteacher and APP pilot lead Carl Messer says identifying time where teachers could focus on APP was essential and the school uses some PPA time for teachers to focus on APP.

To address possible workload pressures on teachers, the school has taken a staggered approach to APP, starting with small groups of pupils in writing and reading before moving onto mathematics. In September 2009 APP was introduced for all pupils.

Teachers' confidence in assessment judgements is growing; they are starting to see how APP feeds into the whole process of assessment, as it informs teaching, improves learning and focuses their questioning.

Assessment for learning is a daily activity and APP heightens teachers' awareness; it can only have a positive impact on teaching and pupils' learning. The school is teaching in response to what APP periodic assessments are telling us, which in turn is leading to more personalised targets for each child.

Mr Messer says the implementation of APP was enhanced by the school being able to work alongside the local authority assessment adviser.

Having an external link adds an element of challenge, questioning and opening up a dialogue to ensure teachers are making the right professional judgements.

# Impacting on pupils' progress

APP has the potential to give learners a greater insight into their own learning and identifies where pupils require further input. There is an emphasis on progression as APP gives teachers, learners and their parents/carers a common language for discussing pupils' learning and next steps.

Day-to-day assessment enables teachers to provide pupils with immediate feedback, relevant next steps, suitable support and personalised targets. It also helps them to adjust their short-term planning in line with their pupils' needs. Periodic assessment helps the teacher and pupil gain an overview of progress in a subject or aspect of learning and a clear sense of whether pupils are able to use the knowledge, skills and understanding they have developed in different contexts.

Many teachers in the pilots said APP impacted on pupils' learning and progress in a number of ways. Pupils became better at sharing ideas and showed how they could work as part of a team. They were also more confident problem solvers as they became more aware of their own progress and were better able to take opportunities to make decisions or access open-ended tasks.

## What is the evidence?

« APP has been really useful for target setting and reporting, and has enabled me to plan effectively for individual or whole groups of students. »

*Teacher survey, Evaluation of the Making Good Progress pilot, DCSF, 2010*

« APP has made me responsible for my own learning and, with my teacher's help, I have found out how to improve my work and believe it has improved my levels too... APP has helped me in improving my levels from a low six to a mid-seven since the beginning of the year. »

Year 9 pupil

It is therefore our view that, done well, APP represents a significant contribution to the professional development of teachers, which could have a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning, and upon the approach to assessment in general.

*Report of the Expert Group on Assessment, DCSF, 2009*



## Talking points

- ▶ How do you involve pupils actively in their own assessment?
- ▶ If you are starting to use APP, how can it help develop your assessment practice to provide pupils with more personalised learning opportunities?
- ▶ If you have already implemented APP in your school, what impact on pupil performance have you seen?

### Haydon School's experience

There is nothing more persuasive than pupil voice and one pupil at Haydon School in Hillingdon is more than happy to tell everyone about his positive experiences of APP.

Haydon School changed its schemes of work in English to embed APP and the school has produced folders for pupils that contain achievements, progress and targets linked to APP. An 'APP lesson' has been introduced at the start of each half term when pupils are given back their work to review and reflect on their progress.

« In our APP lesson at the start of the half term we reflect on what we have already done. We highlight what we can already do well and use a colour to highlight what our targets are. We then look at other people's work so we can see how they have completed the task. By doing this, I can see that my work has really improved and I understand what was missing from my first piece of work. »

Year 9 pupil

Leigh Beauchamp, Head of English at Haydon School says APP has had a big impact on pupils. They are more engaged and their behaviour has improved.

« Through APP, pupils can see they are achieving their targets, which gives them an incentive to learn. »



## Top tips from Brunswick Park Primary School

Brunswick Park Primary School in London has a few tips for other schools considering introducing APP into their school and their top piece of advice is to implement APP in a way that works for you.

That is followed closely by:

- ▶ understand that APP will show gaps in pupils' learning, which can be addressed as part of ongoing teaching and learning
- ▶ moderation is important, but remember that evidence produced will reflect the teaching and learning that has taken place
- ▶ be confident that pupils will progress by using the APP approach in your teaching.

Assessment Manager Tim Ives says APP came along just at the right time for his school and has generated a lot more discussion between teachers.

« APP fitted beautifully into what we were doing anyway and where we were going as a school. »

From September 2009, teachers will work in threes to open up even further the professional dialogue needed. »

Mr Ives says one of the big impacts of APP for teachers was rediscovering what they used to do but had stopped because of the pressures of the curriculum.

« APP and teaching and learning reminded us to let pupils do most of the talking. »

One thing is clear at this school – ways of teaching have changed for the better, teachers are listening more to the pupils and pupils are more engaged in their learning. »

### What is the evidence?

« Don't give up – once you are used to the process the benefits for pedagogy and practice are clear. »

Key stage 2 teacher, *Getting to grips with Assessing Pupils' Progress*, DCSF, 2009

# What next?

Each school will be at a different point in adopting APP.  
Here is a list of next steps for you to take forward.

## Guiding your thinking

Consider what assessment in the future should be like and how you want it to work in your school.

Plan what you need to do to get your staff, pupils and parents/carers to meet this aspiration.

## Moving on whole school assessment

Review the aims of your whole school assessment policy, what you want to achieve for the school and your pupils and how you will measure success. (See *Developing whole school assessment*, QCA/09/4110)

Take a look at the range of APP materials on The National Strategies website at <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/app> and plan the integration of any new materials (for example, primary science and speaking and listening for key stages 1, 2 and 3, published in the spring of 2010).

How will you evaluate the impact APP is having on improvements in the quality of dialogue with parents/carers?

## Impacting on pupils' learning and progress

Consider how you will evaluate the impact APP is having on:

- ▶ teachers' curriculum planning and pedagogy
- ▶ pupils becoming more independent and taking more responsibility for their learning and their progress.

## Need more information?

National Strategies website

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/app>

*Evaluation of the Making Good Progress pilot*, (DCSF-RR184)

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk>

*Assessing pupils' progress: assessment at the heart of learning*, (QCA/08/3867)

[www.qcda.gov.uk/orderline](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/orderline)

SecEd supplement: *Assessing pupils' progress*

[www.sec-ed.co.uk/downloads/assessing\\_pupils.pdf](http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/downloads/assessing_pupils.pdf)

Teachers TV APP material

[www.teachers.tv](http://www.teachers.tv)

*The Assessment for Learning Strategy*,

(DCSF-00341-2008)

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>

*Getting to grips with assessing pupils' progress*, (DCSF-00129-2009BKT-EN)

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>

National Curriculum website

[www.qcda.gov.uk/curriculum](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/curriculum)

QCDA website

[www.qcda.gov.uk/assessment](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/assessment)



## About this publication

### Who is it for?

Teachers, headteachers and governors.

### What is it about?

How the assessing pupils' progress (APP) approach is being adopted by schools throughout England and the positive impact it is having.

### What is it for?

To help school leaders introduce APP successfully into their schools.

### Related publications

*Assessing pupils' progress: assessment at the heart of learning*  
(QCA/08/3867)

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#### **Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency**

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Coventry, CV1 3BH

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Fax 0300 303 3014

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