

## Assessment for Learning Checklist

This section contains general guidance, in the form of a checklist, to support teachers and schools implementing assessment for learning.

Assessment for learning is effective when pupils:

- show changes in their attitudes to learning and in their motivation, self-esteem, independence, initiative and confidence
- show changes in their responses to questions, in contributions to plenary sessions, and in explanations and descriptions
- improve their attainment
- ask relevant questions
- are actively involved in formative assessment processes, eg setting targets, peer or self-assessment, recognising progress in their written work, skills, knowledge and understanding.
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To effectively use assessment for learning teachers need to:

- **know their pupils well, know why pupils make mistakes, and be able to make judgements about next steps or interventions**
- **share learning intentions with pupils and use them to mark work or give feedback or rewards**
- **build in review time for themselves and their pupils**
- **encourage pupils to take responsibility for their learning by providing opportunities for pupils to describe their response to learning intentions or targets, the strategies they use and the judgements they make in relation to their progress**
- **give pupils examples of a variety of skills, attitudes, standards and qualities to aim for**
- **analyse pupils' performance in tests and use the information for future learning plans**
- **feel confident and secure in classroom practice.**

In addition, teachers need to produce plans with:

- **emphasis on learning intentions and on sharing them with pupils and other adults in the classroom**
- **assessment criteria for feedback and marking, peer and self-assessment**
- **differentiated classroom groups**
- **built-in review time and flexibility**
- **notes of pupils who need additional or consolidation work**
- **time for guided group sessions for explicit formative assessment opportunities**
- **adjustments highlighted or crossed out: what did or did not work and why.**

To effectively use assessment for learning schools need an ethos that:

- **values attitudes to learning and promotes trusting relationships**
- **encourages and builds self-esteem**
- **believes that all pupils can improve and measures individuals against their own previous attainment instead of against other pupils**
- **uses value-added data**
- **provides support, guidance and appropriate training for teachers**
- **manages change well and includes maintenance systems**
- **encourages review and self-evaluation at individual, subject and school level.**

**<http://www.qca.org.uk/295.html>**

# **Characteristics of Assessment for Learning**

Assessment for learning involves using assessment in the classroom to raise pupils' achievement. It is based on the idea that pupils will improve most if they understand the aim of their learning, where they are in relation to this aim and how they can achieve the aim (or close the gap in their knowledge).

Effective assessment for learning happens all the time in the classroom. It involves:

- **sharing learning goals with pupils**
- **helping pupils know and recognise the standards to aim for**
- **providing feedback that helps pupils to identify how to improve**
- **believing that every pupil can improve in comparison with previous achievements**
- **both the teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on pupils' performance and progress**
- **pupils learning self-assessment techniques to discover areas they need to improve**
- **recognising that both motivation and self-esteem, crucial for effective learning and progress, can be increased by effective assessment techniques.**

Research has shown that being part of the review process raises standards and empowers pupils to take action to improve their performance. We have produced an [Afl checklist](#) that you can use to identify effective assessment for learning in your own classroom or school.

Assessment for learning (formative assessment) is different from assessment of learning (summative assessment), which involves judging pupils' performance against national standards (level descriptions). Teachers often make these judgements at the end of a unit of work, year or key stage. Test results also describe pupils' performance in terms of levels. However, an important aspect of assessment for learning is the formative use of summative data.

## **Key characteristics of assessment for learning are:**

- **using effective questioning techniques**
- **using marking and feedback strategies**
- **sharing learning goals**
- **peer and self-assessment.**

## **Using effective questioning techniques**

High-level questioning can be used as a tool for assessment for learning. Teachers can:

- use questions to find out what pupils know, understand and can do
- analyse pupils' responses and their questions in order to find out what they know, understand and can do
- use questions to find out what pupils' specific misconceptions are in order to target teaching more effectively
- use pupils' questions to assess understanding.

Some questions are better than others at providing teachers with assessment opportunities. Changing the way a question is phrased can make a significant difference to:

- the thought processes pupils need to go through
- the language demands made on pupils
- the extent to which pupils reveal their understanding
- the number of questions needed to make an assessment of pupils' current understanding.

For example, a teacher wants to find out if pupils know the properties of prime numbers. The teacher asks, 'Is 7 a prime number?' A pupil responds, 'Err...yes, I think so' or 'No, it's not.'

This question has not enabled the teacher to make an effective assessment of whether the pupil knows the properties of prime numbers. Changing the question to 'Why is 7 an example of a prime number?' does several things.

- It helps the pupils recall their knowledge of the properties of prime numbers and the properties of 7 and compare them.
- The answer to the question is 'Because prime numbers have exactly two factors and 7 has exactly two factors.' This response requires a higher degree of articulation than 'Err...yes, I think so.'

- It requires pupils to explain their understanding of prime numbers and to use this to justify their reasoning.
- It provides an opportunity to make an assessment without necessarily asking supplementary questions. The question 'Is 7 a prime number?' requires further questions before the teacher can assess the pupil's understanding.

The question 'Why is 7 an example of a prime number?' is an example of the general question 'Why is x an example of y?' This is one type of question that is effective in providing assessment opportunities. Other types of questions that are also effective in providing assessment opportunities are:

- how can we be sure that...?
- what is the same and what is different about...?
- is it ever/always true/false that...?
- how do you...?
- how would you explain...?
- what does that tell us about...?
- what is wrong with...?
- why is...true?

### **Using marking and feedback strategies**

Teachers recognise that feedback is an essential element in helping pupils improve. When using assessment for learning strategies, teachers need to move away from giving work marks out of 10 with comments that may not be related to the learning intention of the task (eg 'try harder' or 'join up your writing') and move towards giving feedback to help the pupil improve in the specific activity. This will help to close the learning gap and move pupils forward in their understanding.

It is important to establish trust between the teacher and the pupil before giving feedback.

Pupils benefit from opportunities for formal feedback through group and plenary sessions. Where this works well, there is a shift from teachers telling pupils what they have done wrong to pupils seeing for themselves what they need to do to improve and discussing it with the teacher. Giving feedback involves making time to talk to pupils and teaching them to be reflective about the learning objectives and about their work and responses.

## **Characteristics of effective feedback**

Feedback is more effective if it focuses on the learning intention of the task and is given regularly while still relevant.

- Feedback is most effective when it confirms that pupils are on the right track and when it stimulates correction or improvement of a piece of work.
- Suggestions for improvement should act as 'scaffolding', ie pupils should be given as much help as they need to use their knowledge. They should not be given the complete solutions as soon as they get stuck and should learn to think things through for themselves.
- Pupils should be helped to find alternative solutions if simply repeating an explanation continues to lead to failure.
- Feedback on progress over a number of attempts is more effective than feedback on one attempt treated in isolation.
- The quality of dialogue in feedback is important and most research indicates that oral feedback is more effective than written feedback.
- Pupils need to have the skills to ask for help and the ethos of the school should encourage them to do so.

A culture of success should be promoted in which every pupil can make achievements by building on their previous performance rather than being compared with others. This is based on informing pupils about the strengths and weaknesses demonstrated in their work and giving feedback about what their next steps should be.

## **Sharing learning goals**

Most schemes of work emphasise the need to clearly identify the learning objectives for a lesson. Teachers should ensure that pupils recognise the difference between the task and its learning intention (separating what they have to do from what they will learn).

Assessment criteria or learning outcomes are often defined in formal language that pupils may not understand. To involve pupils fully in their learning teachers should:

- explain clearly the reasons for the lesson or activity in terms of the learning objectives
- share the specific assessment criteria with pupils
- help pupils to understand what they have done well and what they need to develop.

Looking at a range of other pupils' responses to the task set can help pupils understand how to use the assessment criteria to assess their own learning.

## **Peer and self-assessment**

Research has shown that pupils will achieve more if they are fully engaged in their own learning process. This means that if pupils know what they need to learn and why, and then actively assess their understanding, gaps in their own knowledge and areas they need to work on, they will achieve more than if they sit passively in a classroom working through exercises with no real comprehension either of the learning intention of the exercise or of why it might be important.

### **Peer assessment**

Peer assessment can be effective because pupils can clarify their own ideas and understanding of both the learning intention and the assessment criteria while marking other pupils' work.

Peer assessment must be managed carefully. It is not for the purpose of ranking because if pupils compare themselves with others rather than their own previous attainment, those performing better than their peers will not be challenged and those performing worse will be demotivated.

## **Self-assessment**

Self-assessment is an important tool for teachers. Once pupils understand how to assess their current knowledge and the gaps in it, they will have a clearer idea of how they can help themselves progress.

Teachers and pupils can set targets relating to specific goals rather than to national curriculum levels. The pupils will then be able to guide their own learning, with the teacher providing help where necessary or appropriate. In addition, pupils will need to:

- reflect on their own work
- be supported to admit problems without risk to self-esteem
- be given time to work problems out.

Asking pupils to look at examples of other pupils' work that does and does not meet the assessment criteria can help them to understand what was required from a task and to assess the next steps they might need to take. Looking at different responses can also help pupils understand the different approaches they could have taken to the task. It is often helpful if the work is from pupils they do not know.