Testbourne Community School

Responsive teaching

A rationale for, and explanation of, changes you and your child may experience in lessons and assessment.

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TESTBOURNE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Call: 01256 892061
www.testbourne.hants.sch.uk

Contents

1. **Summary** ..... page 2
2. **The problem** ..... page 4
3. **Suggested reading** ..... page 5
4. **Background and research evidence** ..... page 6
5. **The effect on lessons and your children**..... page 7

If you have less interest in the background and theory, page 6 onwards explains what to expect in terms of your children's lessons.

If you would like to know more about the theory and the INSET delivered to staff, please start by reading the suggested reading books but let us know if you require further details.

Summary

TCS are trialling new strategies for assessment of students, based on evidence from research. The aim is to make us more efficient in assessing what children are thinking and what they have learnt. This should allow us to be more effective in helping children learn and make progress.

Although you may see less traditional marking in books, you will see lots of evidence that your child is making progress. This evidence will demonstrate that your child is being assessed, receiving feedback and developing their knowledge and understanding as a result. Although staff may not be doing traditional marking in the way we have been used to in the past, they are working just as hard devising assessment strategies that can be re-used, that will help our current students and those to come. They will be spending the same amount of time that they were spending on traditional marking, but will be using it more effectively using the strategies explained in this booklet, so that they are better at assessing the progress students are making, identifying knowledge and understanding and revealing misconceptions. This will mean students can gain more expertise in their subjects and thus be more successful learners. Traditional marking does not allow for this highly diagnostic approach. The research quoted in this booklet makes it clear that the traditional approaches make little impact on progress.

At first, there will be some uncertainty from staff, students and parents about this radical form of assessment. We have all been trained to hang on to traditional marking as a security blanket that convinces us that teachers are working as they should be. An element of trust is required at this stage whilst we trial strategies. When you look at books or talk to your child, you should be able to see key indicators that they are learning effectively. To help, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is their work well-presented and complete? Is the same standard being maintained throughout the term? *If the answer is no, this* may *be worth discussing with the class teacher.*
2. Are they making the same mistakes repeatedly as the term goes on? *If the answer is yes, a discussion with your child who should be able to explain their learning, and a discussion with their class teacher* may *be necessary.*
3. Can your child talk about what they have learnt, how they have overcome mistakes and how well they understand concept? *If the answer is no, a conversation with the teacher* may *be necessary.*

Soon we will be asking subject leaders to formulate specific assessment for learning and marking policies for their subjects. These will ensure there is common understanding of strategies used to promote learning in individual subject areas. Each subject is very different so it must be the subject experts who make these decisions.

As always, we continue to evaluate the effectiveness of our practice to determine if the approaches supported by research are right for our school.

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's progress in a subject, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please direct your inquiry to the class teacher in the first instance, followed by the subject leader if required. If your concerns are broader, please do not hesitate to contact your child's tutor for advice.

Please be confident that all of our work is grounded in giving the best education for your children to allow them to become skilled and confident learners, not just young people who can pass exams. We are committed to approaches that prepare our students for their futures.

If you are interested in reading some of the research that the approaches are based on, I have included the details of two excellent books, each one itself referencing several educational research pieces from noted academics in the field.

The remainder of this booklet is not essential reading but we have included it for those who wish to know more about what we are doing.

Mr J Beck, Headteacher

The problem

Our students are well supported in their learning by parents, teachers and their peers. They are generally taught well, respond well to feedback and make excellent progress irrespective of their background (see provisional DfE data for 2017-18). The issue with all of these statements is that they apply to the cohort as a whole and not to individuals. Our aim is to get as close as possible to the ideal that everyone should make excellent progress.

Teaching methodology tends to be based on old concepts. It does not always recognise what we now know about how the brain works, how children learn best and how we can help children make the best progress possible. Quite often, teaching methodology is founded in what we think is right, rather than what we have evidence for. We sometimes use methods that were considered good 30 years ago but are actually shown to be quite ineffective; we would never apply the same standards to other areas of life. We would expect medicine to move on, technology to move on (think of technology in 1988!), design to move on and so on. Teaching needs to do the same, responding to the most recent findings that are founded in evidence from research.

At TCS we are dedicated to evolving our approaches and basing our decision making on research findings. This is because we believe this is the only way we can ensure we do the best for our students. We want to address some serious barriers that the modern teacher faces:

- How we plan lessons when we want students to learn so much and have so little time?
- How we can show students what success looks like?
- How we can tell what students have learned **in the lesson?**
- How we can tell **what students are thinking?**
- How we can help **every student** improve?
-

For me, the last bullet point is the key one. We want every student to be able to improve. There are some fundamental beliefs we must challenge if we are to address these points. Some of these around planning and some around marking, assessment and feedback.

On the INSET day on 28th September, I delivered an INSET session to staff to challenge their perceptions, engage them in discussion about teaching methodologies and encourage them to be active researchers by trialling strategies in their classrooms. This document summarises the main principles so you can understand what is happening with your children's education and recognise it in their work with teachers. I have also referenced some books in case you are interested in deeper reading on what is a very interesting topic. These books, and the papers they refer to, helped shape our thinking.

At present, we are engaged in the initial trials of the strategies mentioned later in this document. Soon, we will be able to decide how well these work for our students and implement fully or partially across the school.

Suggested reading

If you are interested in finding out more, then please read:

- *Responsive Teaching* by Harry Fletcher-Wood
- *Making Good Progress? The future of Assessment for Learning* by Daisy Christodoulou

Background and research evidence

Research evidence shows that:

- Assessment, when used incorrectly, can hinder learning. Focusing on 'the test' instead of the learning.
- There is an emphasis on skills rather than knowledge even though deep knowledge is required to become an expert in any subject. We might consider chess players highly strategic but evidence shows the strategic skills of a chess player are not transferable. They are excellent and expert chess players because they have a lot of knowledge in that field.
- Learning means committing things to memory AND organising and connecting what we know AND automating smaller tasks so we can get on with bigger ones.
- Assessment is more than just a range of techniques. The principles of assessment are extremely important. We can have all the strategies in the world but we must, at the heart of it all, be able to tell what every student knows and understands and what it is they are thinking during a lesson.
- We need to have awareness of cognitive science. For example, all of us have limits to what we can work on at once – our cognitive load.
- Learning concerns creating organised structures of knowledge in our long-term memory. Knowledge has to be held in working memory (conscious memory) before it gets to long-term memory.
- Working memory is small capacity and what students are thinking about at any one time (the cognitive load) is fundamental to learning.
- Sharing a model of success is a valuable part of learning as long as students engage in the model.
- Instantaneous feedback is the most valuable kind and has the biggest effect on learning.

The effect on lessons and your children

This section describes what your children may experience as part of our work.

Sharing Success

Why: There is compelling evidence from the research quoted that using strategies to share success helps children to understand what is required of them and ultimately helps their understanding.

What: Teachers may use:

- Models (examples of excellent practice) from professionals – e.g. scientific/historic writers; artists; authors; poets; professional sports people.
- Examples of work of differing quality form students or created to highlight common misconceptions and ideas.
- Engagement with models so students can learn what success looks like in their own words. For example students might engage in:
    - Comparing models to spot the difference, highlight strengths and weaknesses and so on.
    - Identifying success criteria from a strong piece of work.
    - Comparing possible choices for completion or substitution to improve work.
    - Examining improvements that others have made.
    - Live modelling – looking at work that has been completed in class to give it a supportive critique under the guidance of the teacher.
    - Practising articulating what success looks like.

Key point: Not all of these strategies would be in use in every lesson or in every subject.

Teachers assessing what students have learned

Why: We need to catch errors early so we know if ***all*** students really got something and if they are ***all*** ready to move on. The longer we leave the feedback, the less effective it is. Consider learning to juggle: you will be able to learn more effectively if someone is instantaneously correcting what you are doing wrong. Feedback in the form of half a side of writing, 25 lessons after your initial attempt, is going to be very hard to act on. You will most likely barely be able to remember what your first attempt was like!

We need to be aware here that marking in its usual form does not help us with this. It is not instantaneous and the lag between misconception and correction gets in the way of learning. The issue with marking is that students produce far more work per hour than would be feasible to assess in a meaningful way. A class of 30 produces 30 hours of work per hour. To mark it effectively would be approximately 10 minutes per hour of one students' work – 5 hours per class, depending on subject. And that's just one class in

one period in a day. An average class teacher teaches 45 periods every fortnight. This means we need a far more strategic and meaningful method for ascertaining whether or not children have learned what we intended them to. Additionally, in experiments conducted by Kluger and DiNisi, feedback was found to be sometimes positive and sometimes neutral in its effects. More astonishingly was that feedback had a **negative** effect in up to 38% of cases. We are committed to ensuring that no children get left behind so the thought that over a third might be prevented from making progress through feedback means that we wish to address our strategies.

What: Teachers are investigating some specific strategies that allow them to assess work more efficiently so more time can be spent on helping children to make progress. Strategies include:

- Exit tickets: a form of short diagnostic questioning that specifically addresses the potential misconceptions from the lesson. These are completed at the end of the lesson and handed in as the children are leaving (hence, exit tickets). They are then processed out of lesson and followed up in the next lesson with re-teaching strategies where required and strategies to deepen learning for those who have gained the required understanding.
- Targeted marking: check for misconceptions in a sample of books and then focus on these next lesson.
- Standardised feedback: e.g. teachers create a sheet with common targets for frequent tasks for students to refer to.
- Error highlighting: teachers provide a model, highlight errors only and the student uses the model to help them learn from the errors.
- Feedback in the lesson: teachers may stop if they encounter three students with the same issue. Research shows that repeating the teaching in a different context for those who were not having trouble with the concept has a profoundly positive effect on learning and memory.
- Reading all work and noting all issues that arise but NOT marking the books *per se.*

Key points: You may see less traditional marking in your child's books but you should be reassured that more efficient assessment is being carried out. If you want to check your child is making progress, the following indicators may help:

- High quality, well-presented work that does not deteriorate over time.
- Evidence that they are acting on feedback and not making the same mistakes.
- Evidence from conversations with your children that they are learning and feel like they are making progress.

If your child's work does not meet the above criteria, there may be cause for concern so you should contact the subject teacher in the first place.

This is the hardest area to adjust to as we have all been conditioned to expect traditional marking either through our own experiences of school or through misinterpretation of what effective assessment is.

Finding out what students are thinking

Why: To ensure we really help students make progress we need to know what they are thinking during a lesson. Without knowing what they are thinking, we cannot identify misconceptions quickly so that they can be corrected. Once misconceptions are embedded, they are very difficult to undo!

What: Teachers are exploring strategies to ensure that they track what **everyone** is thinking in a lesson even though it is not possible to talk to every individual in a lesson. Teachers are also focusing on specifically checking knowledge and understanding and not relying on confidence checks to asses understanding. Research shows that asking students how well they understand something is highly unreliable whereas testing students' knowledge, in a way that ensures all participate, is more reliable and allows us to ascertain students' train of thought. The main strategy that teachers are using is 'hinge questions.' An example of how we might use hinge questions in lessons is:

1. Devise a multiple choice hinge question to test potential misconceptions and depth of understanding. (This is a difficult skill and will take time to develop).
2. Each answer only highlights one misconception or line of reasoning.
3. Answers are completed in 60 seconds at a *hinge point* in the lesson.
4. Students put their answer, quietly and confidentially, on a mini white board.
5. Students hold up answers on the count of three, facing the teacher so no-one else can see.
6. Teacher quickly assesses the misconceptions and knowledge, re-teaches and/or deepens understanding and gains an assessment of every ***individual's*** understanding on the matter.

Staff have received training and we have demonstrated that cleverly constructed hinge questions can test complex ideas.

In addition, we have agreed as a staff to do 'hands down' questioning. This is because research shows that teachers have an unconscious bias to the most able third of the class and that the third of the class who are struggling with a concept are often not chosen to answer. Our method avoids children being influenced by the answers of others. If we ask one child at a time, all we can reasonably conclude is whether or not the first child understands the concept or not. It would not tell teachers whether or not other students have understood the concept. The 'hands down' strategy is for use in conjunction with hinge questions or other strategies that allow ***all*** children to answer the question.

Key point: staff will be engaging in strategies within lessons or sequences of lessons that test the knowledge and/or conceptual understanding of ***all*** students rather than a select few

Feedback and helping *every* student to improve

Why: However we choose to assess students, feedback is essential if they are going to overcome misconceptions, gain new knowledge or deepen their understanding.

Carefully considered and structured feedback is at the centre of children making progress.

What: We need to understand that errors have three main causes:

1. Procedural issues – e.g. decimal place in the wrong place. These require minimal feedback to promote the most effective learning.
2. Lack of understanding in the form of missing chunks of conceptual or procedural knowledge but without a persistent misconception. We would try re-teaching methods to overcome these.
3. Misconception – we try significant investment of time as we have to engineer undoing the misconception before we can re-teach the correct concept.

Staff have received some training in this area and are applying the principles that effective feedback must be:

- Understood
- Acted upon
- Learned from

Key point: Teachers will aim to efficiently understand the errors that children have made and help them to overcome them.