

## Report summary

# The impact of the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative

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## Executive summary

In 2007, the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) launched a pilot project called 'Making Good Progress'. This took place across 10 local authorities in England and involved around 500 schools. Several complementary initiatives made up the full 'Making Good Progress' pilot. The project included single-level tests, a pupil progression premium, one-to-one tuition, a strong focus on assessment for learning and the development of the 'Assessing pupils' progress' materials. These offered schools a set of criteria, guidance and exemplars for making judgements about pupils' progress in relation to National Curriculum levels. Essentially, they were designed to support the accuracy of teachers' assessment and inform lesson planning.

The focus of this survey was to evaluate the impact of the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative on improving outcomes for pupils in terms of their achievement and attainment. The survey also examined the extent to which assessment was used effectively to support learning and to ensure that the curriculum met pupils' needs.

During 2010, inspectors visited 14 secondary schools and 25 primary schools in 11 different local authorities. With the exception of two secondary schools, all of the schools visited participated in the 'Making Good Progress' pilot. Inspectors held discussions with senior school leaders, staff, pupils and local authority officers. In addition, they observed lessons and analysed a range of documentation relating to assessment.

In all of the schools visited, the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative was one of a number of strategies designed to raise pupils' attainment and it was not possible to disaggregate its impact entirely. However, it did help to strengthen assessment practice in the schools. Its impact was greatest when it formed part of a strongly led, whole-school vision of teaching, learning and assessment that promoted high expectations and a shared drive towards consistency. In this context, where the different elements of assessment were connected in a coherent policy for raising pupils' achievement, the use of materials developed through this initiative made an

important contribution to pupils' rising achievement in English and mathematics where this approach was most embedded.

The implementation of this initiative increased teachers' accountability and the accuracy and consistency of assessment practice. Teachers also developed their understanding of progression in learning and their subject knowledge. Nevertheless, the use of the 'Assessing pupils' progress' materials did not always improve teachers' evaluation of pupils' progress in lessons because this depended on other key teaching skills and the quality of these varied.

Engagement with this approach to assessment heightened teachers' awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' learning. Inspectors found that this had a positive impact on lesson planning and the curriculum because it led teachers to adapt the provision so that it met the needs of groups of pupils and individuals. Teachers, particularly in the primary schools visited, also used the information successfully to refine how they grouped pupils to maximise their learning.

The guidelines produced for implementing the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative helped teachers to clarify success criteria in lessons, and, as a result, pupils were more able to evaluate their progress and identify how they could improve their work. Teachers' expectations were raised because they focused on pupils' next steps in learning as well as their attainment of age-related National Curriculum levels.

The initiative provided a common language for teachers to discuss, and reach agreement about, pupils' progress. This maintained the continuity of pupils' learning at points of transition within schools, but when pupils moved from one phase of education to another this dialogue often broke down. Where local authorities were proactive in setting up arrangements for cross-phase moderation of assessment, collaboration between schools was sustained and successful in supporting pupils' progress and sharing effective assessment practice.

## Key findings

- The introduction of the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative had helped to strengthen assessment practice in all of the schools visited. However, impact was greatest when it formed part of a strongly led, clear, whole-school vision of teaching, learning and assessment that promoted high expectations and developed consistency. Where this was the case, the initiative was an important factor in pupils' rising achievement, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Common benefits of the initiative seen were improvements in teachers' subject knowledge, in their understanding of progression in learning and in the accuracy of their assessment of pupils' attainment and progress. The extent of the improvement in assessing pupils' attainment and progress was, however, linked to the quality of other aspects of teaching, particularly in skills such as identifying and explaining objectives, questioning pupils and giving them precise feedback; the application of these skills varied in quality.

- Through the use of 'Assessing pupils' progress' assessment criteria, schools were able to construct a detailed picture of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' learning. Where this information was used well, lessons were better matched to pupils' needs, they participated fully and resources were targeted carefully to tackle gaps in pupils' learning. Teachers, especially in the primary schools visited, also used the information to refine how pupils were grouped to maximise their learning.
- The 'Assessing pupils' progress' materials provided teachers with a common language to discuss and agree pupils' progress. This improved the consistency of assessment practice, increased teachers' accountability for pupils' progress and helped to mitigate any loss of momentum in pupils' learning at transition points. However, when pupils moved from one phase of education to another, 13 of the 25 primary schools and eight of the 14 secondary schools visited did not take advantage of these benefits.
- Where teachers working in different phases of education had opportunities to meet and reach agreement about the standard of pupils' work, this was highly beneficial. Teachers trusted the accuracy of their assessments, developed a thorough understanding of progression and shared effective assessment practice.
- The implementation of assessment techniques based on this initiative had a positive impact on the curriculum in 19 of the primary schools visited and nine of the secondary schools. In these schools, teachers adapted provision in the light of information obtained through this approach to assessment so that it built on pupils' prior learning and included a better range of opportunities to develop and assess learning.
- Teachers' engagement with the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative helped to raise expectations because they focused on pupils' next steps in learning as well as their attainment of age-related National Curriculum levels.
- The use of materials made available through the 'Assessing pupils' progress' initiative improved the clarity of success criteria and the consistency with which they were shared with pupils in lessons. This helped pupils to evaluate their progress and identify how they could improve.

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