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Off to a flying start – assessment in Reception Year: West Hove Infant School

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Brief description

Effective assessment in Reception Year is vitally important if children are to enjoy and embrace learning. The approach needs to be highly individualised and integral to an appropriate balance between structured play and formal teaching. This case study outlines how West Hove Infant School establishes baseline and ongoing assessment sensitively and rigorously to ensure that every child not only gets off to a flying start but sets out on a path of life-long learning.

Overview – the school's message

'We believe that every child matters and every moment counts. We begin with, and build upon, what an individual child can do. We pride ourselves on our small-school mentality where we know every child extremely well. Our extensive and accurate assessments and careful pupil progress tracking make it impossible for any child to slip through the net. We have high expectations of all children and teachers are held to account for their children's well-being and progress.'

We view the environment as the children's third teacher. We work hard to ensure that classrooms are vibrant, stimulating and engaging. They reflect current learning and are organised so that every child can access their own resources and become autonomous in their journey as life-long learners.'



Wendy Harkness, headteacher

The good practice in detail

Early identification and intervention

Information gathering begins before the children start school through liaison with pre-school settings, parents and carers and any outside agencies. Local authority Early Years Foundation Stage transfer records provide useful baseline data. Great care and consideration are given to synthesising this information and, in one-to-one consultation with parents and carers, a clear picture of every child's aptitudes, interests, knowledge and understanding is developed. Consequently, teachers and teaching assistants are highly responsive to children's individual needs from the outset.

Children begin in a very small group of six to eight, which allows staff to establish relationships quickly. During these early weeks, teachers carry out a speech and language assessment. Children identified as needing additional support begin the 'School Start' programme which offers a range of early language development solutions. By half-term, teachers have an accurate baseline for all children. This information is used to inform planning and set pupils' progress targets for linking sounds and letters, reading, writing and calculation.

Assessment captures what the children demonstrate in their independent learning and adult-led tasks indoors and outdoors. What the children say and do is recorded using sticky notes, class lists, photographs and children's work. Each class has an observation book specifically for outside learning. Staff undertake at least one 'long observation' of each child each term. Planning for teaching and assessment is meticulous. For example, higher order questions and prompts are tailored to individual children. Teachers and teaching assistants are involved in observing and assessing the children. Bilingual assistants also support teaching and learning and, where appropriate, make assessments in a child's home language. Teaching assistants receive regular training to enable them to extend and support children's learning.

Staff monitor and assess children's progress in reading and writing using continuous assessment records. These chart progress against key descriptors to highlight what a child can do and what they need to do next; thus enabling teachers to have a clear understanding of a child's level of attainment which, in turn, informs planning. Children's phonic knowledge and high frequency word recognition are checked regularly and each child completes a piece of unaided writing in a profile that builds through Key Stages 1 and 2.

The data collected enable teachers to track progress and identify those children who are underachieving. This information also provides year group, subject and senior leaders with an overview of pupils' attainment.

Classroom practice and the learning cycle

High-quality teaching is coupled with effective and targeted deployment of support staff. The principles and practice of assessment for learning and accelerated learning are at the heart of pedagogy. Teachers plan and deliver highly effective learning experiences which closely match the needs of children. To achieve this, they have developed an age appropriate 'learning cycle'. This model includes:

- child-friendly learning intentions

- a model of the expected outcome
- differentiation
- brain breaks
- peer- and self-assessment
- group mini-plenaries.

When a new topic is introduced, learning intentions are always explained in the context of a 'big picture' which places them in a continuum of past and future learning. In addition, children are encouraged to relate their learning to real-life contexts. Questionnaires are sent to parents and carers to ask for children's interests so that these can be incorporated into planning. This gives children an opportunity to say what they already know and what they would like to find out and includes parents and carers in their children's learning. Learning walls using this information are developed as the journey of the topic unfolds. These displays are a work in progress and a visual record of how learning and assessment are individualised. Above all else, the school identifies a reflective and flexible approach to building step by step on children's previous learning as key to success.

Partnership with parents and carers

The school works in close partnership with parents and carers to ensure that they are fully involved in their child's learning. Information is provided about what children are learning in school and how parents and carers can help their child at home. Parents and carers receive a half-termly topic overview and communal display boards highlight learning for that week. Further information is available through the school's learning platform. Curriculum workshops and information leaflets are uploaded to the platform so that parents and carers can access them at their convenience. For example, the objectives of a 'Reading and Writing Together' presentation outlines what and how children will be taught, including the role of phonics in



teaching reading and gives parents and carers ideas about how they can support the school's work and their children's learning.

Continuous dialogue between home and school is also facilitated by an open-door policy and home/school communication diaries. Assessment underpins the celebration of children's achievements and the sharing of their successes with peers and parents and carers. More formally, pupils' progress is shared with parents and carers during consultations and children's next

steps in learning are clarified. The school is pro-active in ensuring attendance at these important consultations.

Key roles: the assessment and special educational needs coordinators, and foundation stage leader

Formal evaluation of children's progress takes place each term. The assessment and special educational needs coordinators ensure that action plans are reviewed for any children not on track to achieve their target with the aim of accelerating progress. Further support is provided for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and expectations are raised for children who are making better than expected progress. The coordinator advises teachers, coordinates provision and monitors progress using assessment information. This

work begins before the children start school through liaison with external agencies to facilitate a smooth transition. Comprehensive provision mapping details interventions and identifies those children receiving additional support.

The foundation stage leader carries out termly lesson observations and conducts performance management reviews for the teachers and support staff in the team. To ensure consistency, year group meetings focus on assessment, moderation, planning and professional development. A further detailed end-of-year analysis of outcomes in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is undertaken against all pupil groupings. This ensures that implications for teaching and learning are addressed to close gaps in attainment.

'No room for complacency'

The headteacher is clear that there is no room for complacency and that only the highest expectations are acceptable. Thoroughness is a word that is often used by senior leaders. It is a thoroughness that has a keen eye for the detail of children's development, a strong commitment to parental engagement and deep understanding of what supports independence in learning – all of which underpin the effectiveness of assessment practice in Reception Year.

The school's background

West Hove Infant School is a larger-than-average, urban school with seven forms of entry across two sites. Pupils come from diverse backgrounds, including approximately 25% from minority ethnic groups many of whom start school at an early stage of learning English. It also has an attached Children's Centre.



Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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