



Office for Standards  
in Education

# Good assessment in secondary schools

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## Introduction

### Purpose of the report

1. This report is about the ways in which schools can use assessment to improve learning and achievement. It draws evidence from lessons and schools' systems for academic monitoring to illustrate some of the most effective strategies used to guide, challenge and support pupils.

### Assessment in secondary schools

2. A consistent message of Ofsted reports over several years has been the indifferent quality of assessment compared with other aspects of teaching in secondary schools. The Annual Report 2000/01 shows the quality and use of ongoing assessment to be good or better in only 37% of schools inspected. By contrast, teachers' general professional knowledge and understanding are good in 90% of the schools, with teachers' planning of a similar quality in 74%.
3. One problem is that marking to inform pupils of their progress is inconsistent, with teachers often giving insufficient guidance to pupils about how to improve their work and providing few opportunities for pupils to reflect on comments. Another problem is that reports to parents are sometimes weakened by bland writing that fails to describe strengths and weaknesses clearly enough or by a lack of information that shows how pupils are achieving in relation to national standards. Their usefulness can also be affected by varied formats that make comparisons between subjects difficult.
4. Responses to pre-inspection questionnaires in 2000/01 show that the parents of secondary school pupils are very satisfied with the education their children receive: over 90% say their children like school and are making good progress and that the schools expect their children to work hard and do their best. However, fewer parents think that they are kept well informed about how their child is getting on. This aspect, along with the extent of homework, receives the lowest rating.
5. The need to strengthen assessment procedures is reflected in evidence about the assessment skills of trainees at the end of their initial teacher training (ITT) courses. Across 166 inspections of ITT providers in 2000/01, inspectors judged trainees' skills in monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability to be significantly weaker than their subject knowledge or their planning, teaching and classroom management skills. Although the assessment training provided by higher education institutions is generally good, a major shortcoming of many trainees' school experiences is the lack of emphasis on finding out what pupils already know, understand and can do, and then using the outcomes to influence how and what they teach. School mentors rarely comment on assessment issues after observing lessons or during training sessions. Trainees' marking of pupils' work is usually conscientious, but most schools are at the early stages of using the data they have on pupils' prior attainment and tend not to share the full possibilities with their trainees.

### Recent developments

6. A focus in many schools on what is commonly termed 'assessment for learning' has been prompted in part by initiatives such as the literacy and numeracy strategies. Assessment for learning has been defined as 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide

where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there'.<sup>1</sup> Attention to assessment for learning has been reinvigorated by the findings of recent research involving teachers seeking to improve aspects of their practice.<sup>2</sup>

7. In February 2000 the Secretary of State for Education asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for advice on developing the assessment system beyond 2002. In its response, the QCA concluded that: 'assessment – defined in its broadest terms – can make a significantly enhanced contribution to raising standards in schools if the focus is placed on the professional skills of teachers'. The benefits to be gained from this include:
  - 1 improved focus on the quality of teaching and learning
  - 1 greater clarity of objectives and expectations in the classroom
  - 1 clearer understanding of national standards
  - 1 greater consistency and rigour in the assessment process
  - 1 improved understanding among pupils of how they can learn most effectively
  - 1 better appreciation among parents of how they may support their children's learning.
8. The QCA recommended that, in concert with colleagues in what was then the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and with other organisations, it prepare a long-term programme of activities that would support the government's initiatives to raise standards in Key Stages 1–3 by focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

### **Coverage of the report**

9. Part I of this report describes the main components of some good assessment systems and explains how they work. To gather evidence, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited schools whose assessment procedures were judged to be very good or excellent in their most recent Ofsted inspection. The schools were comprehensive and served a range of communities, from inner city to rural. Some had sixth forms and a few were much larger than the average.
10. Inspectors studied the schools' assessment systems, using criteria to guide them. As well as looking at pupils' work and records and visiting lessons, they interviewed staff such as assessment co-ordinators, heads of year and form tutors, as well as a sample of pupils and their parents. They were not expecting the schools' systems to exemplify all the criteria, rather to note how different schools combined a number of important elements. They examined the use of data, target-setting, the ways the schools monitor and support pupils' progress, and the management of assessment, and tried to understand the nature of the 'wiring' behind the systems. They looked for systems that were economic, in which elements connected neatly and which were successful in involving pupils and communicating with parents. The connection between the elements of the system was a key feature. If assessment is to help pupils to do their best, the various elements of a good system – data analysis, pupil planners, subject

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<sup>1</sup> *Assessment for Learning: 10 principles*, Assessment Reform Group, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly influential has been the work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. See, for example, *Inside the black box: raising standards through classroom assessment*, King's College London School of Education, 1998.

targets, progress reports, the roles of class teachers and tutors, marking, additional support, parental consultation – must successfully interrelate.

11. A major difficulty for schools is finding the time to attend to and provide for assessment of the learning of individual pupils as well as fulfilling statutory obligations. The tension between what schools are required to do as a minimum and what they wish to do to meet the needs of their pupils is sometimes not easily reconciled. Reporting requirements are a case in point. Some schools visited as part of this exercise had taken decisions to report to parents at more frequent intervals than is statutorily required, while other schools visited had good approaches based on provision closer to minimum requirements. The report illustrates how procedures can be both efficient in their use of time and effective in meeting pupils' and parents' needs. Of particular importance is that teachers receive the information they need to do the job well, and have the time and opportunity to exploit it.
12. Part 2 of the report illustrates good assessment practice in subjects. It is based on the findings of HMI visits in 2001/02 to schools whose assessment in particular subjects was judged by their latest Ofsted inspection to be good or better. This part of the report concentrates on assessment in the classroom and on the processes of formal assessment, especially in relation to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) coursework. As with those visited for the purposes of Part 1, the schools were comprehensive and served a range of communities.

## Main findings

- Good assessment practice in the schools visited derives from scrupulous attention to pupils' progress and draws teachers together in working systematically on achievement. It has been key to improvement in these schools.
- The quality of assessment has had a significant impact on attitudes to learning and on attainment in the schools by stimulating and challenging pupils to work hard and by encouraging teachers to focus on how to improve the learning of individual pupils.
- Good use of data is a basic feature of the schools' practice. In particular:
  - 1 Key Stage 2 data are gathered as early as possible and analysed carefully, supplemented by other test data when available, for cross-referencing
  - 1 pupils with special needs are identified through individual consultation in Year 6 to enable smooth transfer from their primary school
  - 1 the data provide a baseline to monitor and review individual pupils' progress – especially to identify signs of underachievement or unusual potential – and to set targets for the pupils and subject departments.
- In relation to teaching, marking and setting targets, pupils are helped to improve their work by:
  - 1 clarity in the aims and outcomes of lessons
  - 1 teaching methods that involve them actively and emphasise analysis, discussion, experimentation and thinking ideas through
  - 1 written or oral comments on their work that provide both clear evaluation of the content and structure and sensible advice that leaves them with manageable action points
  - 1 use of National Curriculum level descriptions and GCSE grade criteria to show what needs to be done to make progress
  - 1 target-setting that focuses on specific, relevant and achievable goals.
- Pupils' progress is improved by thoroughgoing monitoring and support, based on informed dialogue among subject and pastoral staff about pupils' academic progress and their attitudes, behaviour and personal development.
- Pupils of all ages appreciate teachers showing them how to move on to the next stage of achievement and value discussion about their progress with their tutor.
- The schools visited take the involvement of parents very seriously and communicate with them very well. The parents value well-written, personalised school reports, and they also appreciate regular, informal consultation over and above that provided at conventional parents' evenings. Well-kept diaries or journals, carefully monitored, are a valuable means of communication between pupils, parents and teachers.

- Good management of assessment in these schools:
  - 1 depends on strong direction by senior managers who share a clear vision for what they wish to achieve with all staff
  - 1 provides high-quality documentation to establish the expectations and define the procedures
  - 1 connects the elements of the school system – including data analysis, target-setting and review, assessment in the classroom, marking and reporting to parents – in a productive and economic fashion
  - 1 uses efficient and accessible information systems and administrative support to reduce the burden on teachers
  - 1 involves senior managers monitoring practice thoroughly, supported by middle managers whose oversight of systems is attentive to detail
  - 1 provides continuing professional development that addresses both difficulties and important new ideas in assessment practice.

## Part I: Good school assessment systems

### Introduction

13. In setting out to report on good assessment, inspectors considered schools' work under the following headings:
- 1 using data
  - 1 teaching, marking and setting targets
  - 1 monitoring and supporting progress
  - 1 involving pupils
  - 1 communicating with parents
  - 1 managing assessment
  - 1 connecting the elements of assessment.
14. The visits took into account the extent to which the schools fulfilled statutory requirements in assessment and reporting, including preparation for end of Key Stage 3 assessments and GCSE and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) examinations. Part 2 of this report covers formal assessment in more detail.

### Using data

#### **Features of good practice**

- ◇ *Key Stage 2 data are gathered as early as possible and analysed carefully (including analysis by gender, ethnicity and mobility), supplemented by other test data (such as in English, mathematics or verbal reasoning), when available, for cross-referencing*
- ◇ *pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or those learning English as an additional language (EAL) are identified through individual consultation to enable smooth transfer from their primary school*
- ◇ *data are used as a baseline to monitor and review individual pupils' progress, especially to identify signs of underachievement or unusual potential, and to help set targets for the pupils and subject departments*
- ◇ *an effective management information system allows individual departments and teachers to access information independently and in a way tailored to their needs, and also allows new data to be easily entered and processed when required*
- ◇ *subject teachers and tutors use data and other assessment information to review the performance and expectations of pupils, maintaining a productive dialogue with the pupils about their progress*
- ◇ *test results and teacher assessments are analysed to illuminate aspects of pupils' performance and the extent to which progress is consistent with earlier data*
- ◇ *analysis of the performance of class groups is used to identify weaker aspects of teaching, which are then addressed through performance management and professional development.*

15. The Ofsted publication, *Changing schools* (2002), evaluated arrangements for pupils transferring schools at the age of 11. The report describes great variation in the range and quality of information received by secondary schools and points to the amount of additional testing carried out by many secondary schools in Year 7.
16. Almost all of the schools visited in this survey make use of cognitive ability tests (CATs) or other tests to provide an assessment of the pupils' capabilities on intake, in addition to Key Stage 2 data. Occasionally, a school arranges for tests to be taken in Year 6 before prospective pupils transfer. All of the schools use a range of additional specialised assessments to diagnose the learning difficulties of pupils with SEN. Often, specialist secondary staff undertake visits to partner primary schools to pick up information about pupils with special needs as early as possible.
17. The schools use the data they receive from primary schools or produce themselves, first and foremost to place pupils into appropriate teaching groups. As Part 2 of the report confirms, effective subject departments making good use of the data consider the teaching approaches and curriculum content they use for different teaching groups and work out appropriate Key Stage 3 targets for themselves and the pupils. A few of the schools visited discuss the data with both the pupils and their parents, and explain their expectations concerning the National Curriculum levels they predict the pupils should attain at the end of Year 9. Most schools, however, prefer to leave this kind of discussion until later and to focus pupils' minds on short-term curricular targets in the first instance.

*When pupils join **Sacred Heart High School** at age 11, a range of assessment information is considered, including Key Stage 2 test and teacher assessment data, and the outcomes of standardised tests in mathematics, reading and non-verbal reasoning. These are used to provide a baseline for individual pupils and benchmarks for the school. The data are made available across the school and are used to help review the pupils' progress. At the end of Year 7, pupils take further tests in English and mathematics. In later years, information derived from optional QCA tests and statutory tests at the end of Year 9 updates the baseline information.*

*The school's local education authority (LEA), Hammersmith and Fulham, makes an excellent contribution to the school's awareness of the value it adds to pupils' attainment by analysing data at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. For example at the end of Key Stage 3, in addition to the standard information, analysis is provided by gender, teaching group, stage of fluency in English for pupils with English as an additional language, stage of the SEN Code of Practice, ethnicity and mobility. Statistical differences between contextual groups are highlighted, as are trends in all the data since 1995. The analysis provided by the LEA demonstrates the value added between Key Stages 2 and 3, based on the average test level results of matched groups of pupils. The trend in the progress made by pupils is based on all the test results from 1998. A similar analysis is done from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. School-by-school analysis enables Sacred Heart to see how the performance of its pupils compares with pupils across the borough. The school can see, for example, how well its Black Caribbean, white, or refugee pupils are performing compared with those in other schools.*

18. It is important to get the management and handling of data right. Members of staff with different roles need different data sets and to be able to obtain the most up-to-date information easily.

***Dixons City Technology College** has developed an effective software package that meets its needs. As pupils progress through a year, subject progress levels are*

updated by teachers and the figures are entered by school administrative staff. Departments check the data before particular data sets are printed out. School staff receive what they need. For example, the Key Stage 3 co-ordinator requires full year group lists by alphabetical order and class, as well as summary data; she then uses the data to compare performance against that of previous years as well as against targets for the current year. Form tutors use the data in pupil interviews. All staff assiduously check the progress of pupils for whom they have responsibility against the targets set for them.

19. Careful analysis of data, appropriate target-setting and detailed record-keeping are basic to good provision for pupils with SEN. For SEN co-ordinators, the art lies in translating targets for pupils into practical advice for subject teachers.

A Year 10 pupil with a statement at **Dixons City Technology College** has a specific reading and spelling difficulty but is nonetheless academically capable. Careful diagnosis of the pupil's needs led to advice to teachers that included the following:

- provide access to a word processor with spell-checking facility and voice-operated software
- ensure he understands texts before being asked to work on them
- provide regular opportunities for discussion about coursework, homework and personal research and in order to verify that he understands work done in class
- ensure that the pupil is given opportunities to show what he can do that do not involve use of high-level writing skills
- set targets for examination grades commensurate with his high ability.

20. Data are used in the schools to challenge departments to consider in detail the effectiveness of their teaching and other matters, such as grouping arrangements and examination entry policy.

At **Sacred Heart High School**, heads of department analyse their department's work according to a standard format. Full subject data are provided by senior management for comment by the head of department following discussion. Searching responses are required. The data include:

- subject A\*–G, A\*–C, A\*/A percentage figures achieved, as well as targets aimed for, for the past five years
- percentages of pupils at all GCSE grades for the past five years
- a teacher/class set chart indicating, for the current year, the numbers and percentages of pupils achieving each grade in each set
- a comparison between the percentages of pupils expecting particular targets and those actually achieving them ('In achieving the outcomes above, what worked well and what was less successful?')
- a chart setting out the value added (numbers and percentages gaining 1, 2, 3 levels/making no progress/going down the level scale) from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. The questions to departments include: 'What value has the department added to pupils' attainments and achievements in terms of progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4? What issues/concerns/future challenges does this raise for you as head of department and for the department as a whole?'

The further three questions heads of department are required to address are:

- 'In comparison with other departments and school performance as a whole, how well is the department performing in relation to: (a) performance at A\*–G,

(b) performance at A\*–C, (c) numbers and percentages achieving A\*/A, and (d) number of non-entries? Please identify and comment on any issues comparison with other departments and the school as a whole raises for you.

- What do you intend to do this year to improve: (a) performance at A\*–G, (b) performance at A\*–C, (c) numbers and percentages achieving A\*/A, (d) non-entries?
- Any other comments on results and future strategies for improvement?

At **The Heathland School**, data are interrogated by teachers with responsibilities such as for gifted and talented pupils or the work of learning mentors. Subject teachers are asked to nominate pupils who may show signs of a particular aptitude or need that has not been highlighted either by standardised data or by data from National Curriculum assessments. The lead learning mentor, in taking an overview of all mentoring activity, is able to cite instances of pupils with high standardised scores – for example in non-verbal reasoning – but whose National Curriculum attainment does not reflect this.

21. The solution to problems such as this may be earlier mentoring, but the critical thing is to identify the pupils in the first place, for they do not stand out in the way that some SEN, gifted and talented, or GCSE C/D borderline pupils do.

## Teaching, marking and setting targets

### **Features of good practice**

- ◇ teaching expects high achievement and supports it by clarity of aims and outcomes, by methods that involve pupils actively and give them some responsibility for how they learn, by a strong emphasis on analysis and discussion, and by opportunities to experiment and try ideas out
- ◇ when work is returned, pupils are given written or spoken comments that combine clear evaluation with sensible advice and manageable action points
- ◇ the quality and consistency of marking are monitored within departments and by senior managers
- ◇ effective use is made of National Curriculum level descriptions to demonstrate to pupils what they need to do to progress in their learning and attain higher standards, and pupils preparing for GCSE are trained to assess samples of work against grade criteria
- ◇ target-setting focuses on specific and achievable goals relevant to important aspects of knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject.

22. The home of assessment is the classroom. The teaching seen in the schools visited commonly illustrated the way in which good assessment skills help pupils to learn effectively. In successful lessons, confident, knowledgeable teachers typically interacted very well with pupils, managing and controlling activities so that all the pupils took part. The lessons offered, among other features:
- 1 a welcome to the pupils, who were personally valued and knew that they would be expected and helped to do their best
  - 1 clarity of aims and expected outcomes, discussed at the outset
  - 1 a range of methods that give pupils some responsibility for organising how

they learn, and that involve them in a variety of ways – through presentations, displays, using the whiteboard, simulations, role play, quizzes, modelling, the use of memory and recall techniques, and through reflecting on the value of what has been achieved

- 1 a collaborative approach to learning, with a strong emphasis on analysis and discussion
  - 1 opportunities for divergent thinking in an atmosphere that ensures pupils do not feel bad if they make a mistake.
23. Part 2 of the report illustrates these features by reference to the teaching of different subjects. In the following examples of teaching in mathematics and physical education the teachers were able to build on pupils' existing knowledge to move them towards higher standards.

*In a mathematics lesson at **Pittville School** the teacher worked with a Year 8 mixed-ability group on mental multiplication and division. The lesson made excellent use of direct questioning to test the 28 pupils' recall of earlier learning. During this the teacher gained a very clear picture of the pupils' knowledge and understanding. She went on to use graded examples to illustrate new techniques for multiplying by powers of 10, again with a high level of pupil participation. The teacher's manner throughout was lively and expressive. She listened carefully to the pupils' answers and brought into the spoken exchanges contributions from everyone. She showed great skill in taking pupils forward from what they already understood well. The pupils used individual whiteboards to work through practice questions, enabling the teacher to actually see how well the pupils understood the mathematical processes involved. The pupils had re-capped earlier learning, had been introduced to new ideas and in the end were able to consolidate their new learning through practice. The more advanced pupils in the group were given extension questions at appropriate times. The pace of the lesson was lively throughout, with both teacher and the pupils on their toes.*

*At **The Heathland School** a physical education class for Year 9 boys from a range of ethnic backgrounds made excellent progress in evaluating each other's performance in dance under the direction of a knowledgeable teacher who had planned the lesson carefully, linking it to the science of the body's movement, and exercise. The object of the lesson was to improve each other's performance skills through peer assessment. Demonstration by both the teacher and some of the boys of aspects of good performance to look out for preceded the boys' dividing into pairs in order to evaluate each others' execution of a Brazilian dance sequence, the 'capoiera', which they had worked on in earlier lessons. The teacher's vigorous, practical and, at times, commanding approach encouraged the boys to offer positive comment. The boys were able to make useful evaluations and the teacher was able to extend their analysis in a plenary session in which ideas about what had been learnt were shared.*

24. Good marking provides maximum help for pupils at the point of learning, especially where the teachers set targets and share and discuss National Curriculum level or GCSE criteria as a way of illustrating expected standards. Pupils learn how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Pupils are helped most where the quality of the written or spoken comment on their work gives a clear evaluation and sensible advice that leaves them with action points they are able to work on. It is also helpful if there is continuity in comments from one piece of work to the next.

25. Approaches to marking in different subjects are described in Part 2. A key issue for teachers is balancing coverage of all the work of their groups with in-depth response. In one school, a teacher was particularly deliberate in discussing returned work with different individuals over a half-term, so that coverage of the group was systematic. In another example, a design and technology teacher provided a comprehensive written evaluation of pupils' work at a crucial design stage in GCSE coursework, having provided mainly oral comment at earlier stages. The written evaluation set important targets for the next stage of the work.

26. Targets can mean different things. A school or subject department, for example, will have targets to meet in terms of a percentage of pupils expected to attain grade C or better at GCSE – and a good many more. A pupil might say, at Key Stage 3: 'My target is to get a level 6 for science in my Year 9 SATs'. At Key Stage 4 pupils would almost certainly be aware of a target minimum grade for each subject that they expected to attain in GCSE or GNVQ. At Key Stage 3, however, the intended achievement for a pupil is much more likely to be expressed in terms of a 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related) target, perhaps based on a particular National Curriculum level description.

*At **Pittville School** for each module of the English course in Key Stage 3 pupils keep a log in which they record the skills they will be addressing, the levels or marks achieved, as well as their targets for improvement. The targets are very specific, and relate to the need to practise particular skills, such as incorporating more verbs into a poem for better effect, or learning how to use a particular punctuation device. The log enables the pupils to assess their progress over time.*

27. In several of the schools visited, a few subject departments attain a remarkable consistency in their standards of marking, and there is systematic monitoring of pupils' books and work by heads of departments and heads of year across the whole school.

*At **Trinity School** the head of Year 7 interviews all the pupils in the year group over a six-week period and looks through their work with them in around six subject areas. She writes brief comments on the work of each pupil which are passed on to the form tutor. If there are issues to do with poor-quality marking these are passed on to heads of subject and the deputy headteacher.*

28. In some practical subjects, advice often cannot easily be written down, so most support for learning results from teacher/pupil interaction in a lesson and can apply to the whole class. A physical education lesson illustrated this well.

*A teacher at **Pittville School** was coaching the boys in the tactics and rules of rugby. He used natural pauses in the play to discuss and coach. Pupils received feedback on their play and on how to develop their skills further. The teacher very effectively encouraged the pupils to evaluate their own standard of performance. Throughout, the pupils were aware of playing strengths and skills levels. They knew what they had to do to improve.*

29. At the same school, Key Stage 3 assessment criteria in history are shared and discussed with the pupils. The department is experimenting with 'traffic lighting', where the pupils review the historical skills they have been addressing in a lesson and colour a grid – red, amber, green – to indicate how well they feel they are applying these. This is helpful to teachers because it encourages them to think more precisely how to pitch subsequent lessons, and which skills to review. It is not an easy exercise for all of the pupils, however. The difficulties are described by the head of department:

*'Feeding back to pupils what they need to do to get to the next level has been hard and not always successful. The words 'causation', 'chronology' and 'assessment' do not easily connect with pupils' sense of their own work and development. However, we are teaching pupils what the levels mean and this leads to better history as a result.'*

30. Target minimum grades are commonly used to challenge pupils in Key Stage 4. The targets are normally based on expectations of achievement at GCSE that stem in part from evidence from Key Stage 3 test data, YELLIS data and teachers' own awareness of the pupil's knowledge and understanding.<sup>3</sup> The best target-setting assists day-to-day learning.

*At **Dixons City Technology College**, very clear guidance is provided on target-setting in the school assessment policy which is reflected in departmental policies and the policy for pupils with SEN – called here the 'Individual Need' policy. A thorough analysis of all data on pupils is made: end of Year 9 national assessment information, CATs scores and the first term in Key Stage 4 progress grades, by group, ethnicity, gender and individual need.*

*By December of Year 10, targets in all subjects have been negotiated between the pupil, subject teacher and form tutor at a pupil review interview. The YELLIS predicted grades are used as a baseline but in reality, for most pupils, these represent an average of a grade below what the college believes to be achievable targets. For this reason, the majority of target grades are raised one level. In 2001, 80% of pupils achieved their target grades.*

*Targets for coursework (end-of-module assessments or other written assignments) are also negotiated, written in planners, checked by parents and tutors, and used to inform each new piece of work. Pupils take any feedback very seriously, know why targets have been set and strive very hard to achieve them, irrespective of ability. Learning mentors and learning support assistants help pupils with weaker organisational skills to keep track of their targets and provide additional strategies to enable pupils to achieve, thus promoting independence.*

*Teachers and tutors regularly refer to individual targets as they go round the class commenting on pupils' work. This is done in 'T&G' (tutor and guidance/personal, social and health education) lessons – three half-hour sessions each week – and subject lessons, or by written feedback in class or homework. The approach is effective because it assesses the pupils' grasp of both targets and written comments on their work and is a continuous activity.*

*At **Sacred Heart High School**, individual education plans are written not just for pupils with SEN, but any pupil experiencing significant difficulty. Any pupil can have the number of negotiated targets reduced for this reason or the form tutor, sometimes assisted by a learning support assistant, may negotiate a cross-curricular target shared between subjects. This makes the understanding of targets more effective for such pupils.*

*'The subjects that gave me the most targets were science and geography. I had to think about the areas I was doing bad in. I am happy with all my targets as they are targets I can work on.'*

*'Targets are the best part of the school...I can't wait for the next ones.'*

***Charlton School** has adopted a similar approach based on explicitness about progression in learning. The criteria for success – at three sub-levels both for National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, and in pupil-friendly language – are*

<sup>3</sup> Year 11 information System: a pupil performance monitoring system devised and administered by the Curriculum, Evaluation and Monitoring Centre of the University of Durham. ALIS is the companion A-level system.

provided in classrooms as well as in exercise books and pupil planners. This gives pupils and teachers a common language for discussing attainment and what needs to be done to take it to the next stage. There is a genuine attempt to involve the pupils in the process.

The benefits of the approach at its best were seen in the work of a Year 10 boy in English and history. 'David', who was expected to achieve at least five A\*–C grades, had a stronger interest in science and maths than in these two subjects. His English teacher had established with him a neat set of five targets for improving writing focused mainly on 'building an argument' and 'making good use of evidence', along with some associated technical matters (notably 'joining sentences up').

David was able to point to the relevance of these targets to achieving the next level (expressed as a C/B GCSE grade) and to articulate the progress he had made since the beginning of the year. The marking of his English work was highly constructive in this respect; and recent work based on analysing the Bentley trial case showed that progress was good. He was also able to point to the overlap with targets for history and was consciously looking to apply techniques learned in English to that subject, with evident success. In both subjects, level descriptors were included in books or folders and had been annotated by David or his teachers. The English teacher in David's case approached the improvement of reading and writing in this all-boy group 'like a trade, teaching boys about the skills needed to complete a job and to appreciate the quality of workmanship in what they read'.

31. Pupils preparing for GCSE commonly take part in exercises where they assess samples of work against the relevant criteria, thereby improving their awareness of what they need to do to attain higher standards. When the criteria are rigorously explored in assessing the work of others this helps pupils to appreciate the standards of their own work, thus putting into practice a form of self-assessment.
32. At **The Chase School and Technology College**, a Year 10 English lesson demonstrated well the explicit sharing of English coursework criteria in an exercise where the pupils did some marking.

The teacher had selected a number of extracts from written assignments on *Romeo and Juliet* completed by the class. Following a reminder of aspects that examiners consider when assessing such pieces – such as language, dramatic structure, staging dramatic devices and audience response – and of the examination board criteria for grade C and grade A performance against those criteria, the class was invited, using coloured pens, to highlight the parts of the extracts which met the respective criteria. Working in pairs, the class faced a considerable intellectual challenge here, but pupils were able to get to grips with the relative qualities of the various extracts, some of which answered the question more effectively than others. They deepened their appreciation that the use of examples and specific detail to support a well-reasoned argument scores points, potentially, against several of the criteria. This activity worked for the class at three levels simultaneously: it deepened the pupils' appreciation of the play's language and dramatic qualities; they learned how their understanding of the play would be assessed, and they learned – by implication – more about how to write better assignments in future.

33. Carefully focused, analytical work that is directly related to developing in pupils an understanding of examination criteria can often have a wider relevance than the particular subject or topic under consideration.

Two Year 11 pupils at **Withernsea High School and Technology College** enjoyed a history lesson that reviewed recent examination scripts. The lesson

concentrated on how marks had been awarded in the light of the mark scheme. The teacher, with the aid of an overhead projector, asked pupils to apply the mark scheme to exemplar answers. Using mini-whiteboards, pupils held up the marks they gave for each answer, following general and paired discussion about application of the marking criteria. The teacher ensured there was a representative range of examples. The pupils were asked to consider how their own work could be enhanced by what they were doing.

Time was taken to explore the application of each level in the mark scheme and the pupils rapidly gained in confidence and understanding. The work moved them forward in their thinking about specific learning targets that would improve their own examination performance. In discussing what they had gained from this lesson, the two pupils were clear about what they needed to do to improve their own work in history but also felt that the ideas had relevance for their work in English. They were able to link what they had learned to the requirement to interpret two short story writers' choice of language in describing characters and story settings. They recognised that they needed to improve their skills in the quick scanning of a text, but that the history work would help them make selections of texts for comparison and interpretation, and sharpened their awareness of the demands of particular questions.

34. **Denbigh School** has, over a number of years, established an approach to target-setting that has led to a significant improvement in attainment. While the attainment of pupils on entry is average, achievements in the three years leading up to the school's most recent inspection were in the top range of schools nationally. As the school's inspection report states, 'the school makes excellent use of assessment to ensure pupils do not underachieve and to set very challenging targets for pupils and departments'.

Data in **Denbigh School** are built up systematically and professionally on each pupil, beginning with the baseline evidence gained from contributory schools. As well as the usual range of data, information from the school's electronic registration system is also included. This provides a meticulous record of attendance, behaviour and whether or not homework was done and handed in on time. Managers and teachers use only the data relevant to them. On entry to the school in Year 8 pupils are given three targets for each subject:

- an 'accountability target' (to achieve, say, a level 6 in English at the end of Year 9) is derived from cognitive ability test and Key Stage 2 test information
- a 'professional target' (perhaps to achieve also level 6 in English) is set by the teacher based on the accountability target but also bearing in mind factors such as the way the pupil is working in terms of level of commitment
- a 'pupil target' (perhaps to achieve a level 7 in English at Key Stage 3) is set by the pupil and parents together.

At a parents evening, the basis of CATs data is explained and the data themselves shared with parents who, with their child, are invited to set a target at home for each subject. The parent/pupil target-setting is formalised, with completed data required to be returned to school by mid-November along with a four-point action plan designed to show how the pupil proposes to achieve the stated target levels. All of this is managed by means of a handy explanatory booklet that pupils and parents take home from the evening.

This consultation event sets the tone for the way in which the school approaches target setting at the later stages of schooling: Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At each stage the parents are invited to play their part. The headteacher is very willing to challenge YELLIS and ALIS predictions if there is evidence that they are not in line with the school's own analyses. The school sees its role as providing high-quality

teaching combined with careful and regular monitoring of pupils' progress – a complex matter in a school of 1,400 pupils.

Heads of department understand what is expected of them in terms of pupils' attainment in their subject, and they are given good support in enabling them to deliver results to the standard expected. The careful study of results year on year, including 'subject residual' analysis, has been potent in focusing the attention of all staff on the need to raise attainment. Individual teachers receive detailed data on the performance of the pupils they have taught in relation to the targets set for them. They are thus accountable for their work, but say they appreciate knowing where they stand, and like a system that requires them to take care over the education of each pupil they teach. Where a pupil's attainment is at variance with expectations, the reasons for this are explored professionally.

The system works well for the majority of pupils. Importantly, it is supported by administrative staff who deal with teachers' correspondence effectively. The school also deploys half the time of an extra administrative officer to collate the additional data from the school's electronic registration system, such as attendance. A professional assistant is employed to gather and sort the data; she understands the educational issues and the needs of staff for particular kinds of information, and is capable of producing relevant analyses and information in response to specific requests.

## Monitoring and supporting progress

### Features of good practice

- ◇ successful systems vary in their detail, but depend upon the availability of reliable data, on regular checks and routines carried out consistently, and on academic and pastoral staff working co-operatively and diligently to share and use information effectively
- ◇ target-setting is part of a wider school system for checking the progress of pupils and ensuring they have the support they need
- ◇ pupils' progress is regularly and systematically monitored, with all assessments carefully scrutinised, and tutors having a key role in discussing overall progress with the pupils in their groups
- ◇ effective monitoring of sixth-form students' progress covers both the standards they are achieving and a wider range of criteria about organisation and learning.

35. By raising expectations, achievement targets can be a useful way of encouraging pupils to do their best. However, unless target-setting operates as part of a wider system for challenging, supporting and checking on the progress of pupils, it is unlikely to have much impact.
36. Systems in the schools visited vary in detail, but they depend upon the availability of good data, on carrying out regular checks and routines consistently, and on key staff working co-operatively. They crucially depend on staff being alert to the possibility of the unanticipated – perhaps a pupil experiencing a hidden problem, or an item of data that seems inconsistent with teachers' evidence. The principles and practices of good monitoring and support are illustrated well by four schools.

### Denbigh School

*At Denbigh School careful monitoring helps the pupils to achieve well. Heads of year and heads of department share information effectively, but the role of the*

form tutor is central. Heads of year support and monitor the work of tutors, helped by an additional teacher attached to each year group who makes space for essential dialogue between the tutor and pupil.

In Year 10, tutors have 20 minutes each day with their tutor groups plus an hour each week for personal, social and health education (PSHE). At the start of each term, one PSHE lesson is devoted to 'setting and review', when pupils identify their short-term (usually general) targets for the next half term. They write a short action plan describing what they will aim to do to meet their targets, using a 'target and review' proforma which, once completed, is looked at again each week in a specific tutor session, when the pupils review their own performance. This proforma has superseded the conventional diary in Key Stage 4.

The heads of year and tutors handle all reports, including, importantly, the half-termly subject progress reports. At the end of each term, 'achievement' data (attendance, homework, and effort) are augmented by an additional set of tutor grades for 'organisation', 'contribution to form group' and 'behaviour'. In addition, there is further subject attainment information, normally expressed as a 'working at' level or grade. Heads of year intervene where pupils give particular cause for concern – usually about three or four in a tutor group. An intervention might result in inviting parents in to discuss the situation or might warrant one or another level of being 'on report'. 'Praise lists' are also produced, and these are displayed both in school as well as at parents' evenings.

Tutors themselves have the authority to contact parents directly should they feel it necessary. As well as having all necessary data at their fingertips, tutors also receive information direct from subject leaders or subject teachers about other matters related to a pupil's academic performance.

The subject side of the partnership is illustrated by the modern foreign languages department which, like all departments in the school, monitors pupils' performance closely and involves parents as and when needed. Trouble is taken to personalise all correspondence, and this is made manageable by excellent school administrative support. Communication with tutors includes concerns as well as praise, and is regular and consistent. The co-leader of the department estimates that she spends about two hours per week following up issues and receives excellent support from tutors and heads of year in doing so.

### **Sacred Heart School**

'Setting targets will not, on its own, raise standards of achievement. This will depend on the timely and skilful intervention by teachers and other professionals, and the support of parents.'

The school uses a system called 'individual pupil monitoring' (IPM), which operates at Key Stages 3 and 4, and involves setting individual pupil targets for each subject, using prior attainment data (referred to earlier in the section on using data). The pupils also have short-term subject targets. Pupils' progress in learning is monitored and reported on by subject teachers at approximately nine-week intervals – three cycles a year. Three categories are used: blank (work is appropriate to expectation); minus (working below potential and below a reasonable level of performance); star (working to a level beyond expectation). These assessments are collected and stored on a database.

IPM issues are a standing item in departmental meetings, but specific concerns about the progress of individual pupils are also discussed between the senior line manager and head of department. School guidance on departmental reviews of IPM assessments requires teachers to:

- consider carefully why any pupil might have been awarded a ‘minus’
- consider less ‘visible’ pupils whose attainment appears to show progress but, when related to baseline information, shows little real sign of this
- consider, where pupils have underachieved, whether targets have been reviewed, and what needs to be done in terms of adjusting teaching and/or support strategies (teachers are referred to the school’s policy for teaching and learning).

Departmental IPM decisions and action recommendations are copied to the senior line managers. Heads of department use IPM information to monitor teaching and learning in the department and heads of year use the information to monitor the all-round progress of individual pupils. Heads of year and tutors spot symptoms of difficulty or problems and take early action, especially where there may be underachievement. Tutors work with heads of year, for example if parents are to be contacted and routine monitoring is required.

Two suspended timetable days, in October and March, are used for IPM and academic review. They provide an opportunity for the tutor and pupil to discuss individual progress. For the formal review, pupils are required to complete in advance a *pro forma* covering a set range of questions.

The role of the form tutor is central to the effectiveness of the system. Colour-coded slips are inserted in the home/school diary that parents must sign. If three pink slips are issued parents are automatically brought into school. Conversely, gold slips reward achievements that are above target. This system importantly applies to performance that is other than the academic, and this strengthens the school’s aim to link the pupils’ academic and personal growth. The monitoring process ensures that an individual competes to do better than her previous best.

The school aims, for each pupil, to raise attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 by at least 1.5 levels above that expected, and at the end of Key Stage 4 by at least two grades above that expected. In 2000, after GCSE results had been adjusted for prior attainment at Key Stage 3, the school added more value than any other school in the LEA.

### **Dixons City Technology College**

In Dixons, form tutors also play a vital role in monitoring pupils’ performance. On a practical level, tutors, subject teachers, heads of year and heads of department work together, but the tutor co-ordinates a number of activities that ensure that the linkages work in the best interests of the pupil. A Year 8 tutor, for example, is responsible for the following:

- form tutor/pupil interviews – which occur twice per year in Key Stage 3 and three times in Key Stage 4 – in order to discuss progress and targets
- a form tutor ‘surgery’ on Tuesdays after school, at which parents regularly drop in to discuss progress and concerns
- progress grades/causes for concern, which are discussed at a weekly form tutors’ meeting (for SEN pupils there is a weekly meeting between the head of the Individual Needs department and heads of year)
- monitoring the progress of pupils who are put on daily or weekly ‘report’ at various levels of seriousness
- monitoring pupil planners which are used for pupil/teacher/parent comments and include a section for current targets

- logging of pupils' merits and certificates
- monitoring attendance of individuals
- organising 'celebration' assemblies once each term, where awards are made
- a system of peer mediation, whereby pupils in Years 9 and 10 offer lunchtime counselling for Year 7 and 8 pupils
- Year 12 'student managers', who are attached to class groups, a role the students take seriously and for which they have to compete.

### **The Chase School and Technology College**

*In all the schools visited, sixth-form students are invariably carefully monitored. At The Chase School and Technology College the system promotes good dialogue between student and tutor. There are progress checks at four key points over the two years of the course. Initially, the school uses GCSE and school data in setting targets for students in each subject.*

*A progress check requires the students to make an initial assessment of their own progress, after which the subject teachers assess progress from their point of view. The factors they consider include: the students' meeting of deadlines; the standard of their current work; grades for the last four pieces of marked work; understanding and knowledge of course content; rate of development of examination skills; coursework record; contributions in class; willingness to ask for help when necessary; background reading; and level of organisation.*

*The two assessments are discussed between student and tutor, and an action plan devised which goes to the parents for signing. A consultation evening then follows. At the end of each school year a full report is provided for parents. The students are well supported by a good study skills booklet that not only offers information on key dates, deadlines and essay writing but also explains in clear language what the students' responsibilities are, and how their progress through the sixth form is assessed and reported.*

## **Involving pupils**

### **Features of good practice**

- ◇ *pupils use a diary or planner systematically to help keep themselves organised and diaries are carefully monitored so that they form an important link between pupil, subject teachers, tutor and parents*
- ◇ *pupils are given high-quality feedback by subject teachers on their work and are encouraged to respond to it*
- ◇ *pupils have regular opportunities to discuss their academic progress and personal development with their tutor and such dialogue helps them to succeed beyond their expectations.*

37. Very largely, pupils in the schools visited rely upon their diary or planner as the organiser of their school lives. In these schools use of a diary or planner is taken seriously and is generally maintained with rigour.
38. At **Denbigh School** diaries are checked carefully by tutors and parents, and the school has high expectations that this will be done regularly and well. The pupils' targets are in their planners, so that they always have them, whether working in class or speaking with a tutor.

39. At **The Heathland School** the diaries are colour-coded by term, with the pupils using three diaries in a year. As in many of the schools, they provide an effective four-way link between the pupil, the parents, the tutor and subject teachers. Tutor work of a consistently high standard has a positive impact on the attitudes and personal organisation of pupils and they appreciate its benefits.

*In a Year 9 tutor group the pupils read quietly whilst the tutor circulated, scrutinising diaries for completeness: parental signatures, homework well recorded, any subject merits or criticism recorded by teachers (the former totted up and recorded for further reference, the latter in case any sanction or additional target was needed). The tutor knew her group very well – their attainment scores, their potential, and the nature of any individual education plans (11 pupils had these). The 30-minute session concluded with a pupil leading a well-considered ‘thought for the day’. Similar tutor sessions in Year 10 and Year 11 demonstrated how important the tutor’s role was in monitoring the welfare and general achievements of the pupils.*

40. At **Sacred Heart School**, diaries that include pupils’ grades and targets are invariably to hand in lessons. Teachers refer to these as need be in discussions with pupils and the pupils refer to them themselves, saying the diaries help them manage their targets.

- ‘My tutor has the power to help me progress by providing me with good ideas, and he knows my targets. He won’t let me drown or let me stop from recovering...he knows me and I know him.’
- ‘If IPM was not here we would not know our weaknesses or be challenged enough.’

41. Pupils with SEN have their individual education plan incorporated within their IPM with fewer targets but set with equal rigour. This ensures the pupils are fully included in the school-wide system. One pupil with a statement of SEN in Year 9 said, quite simply: ‘I feel like the other girls’.

42. High-quality written and oral feedback is crucial in making the pupils feel positive about their learning – and about their schools. At **Dixons City Technology College**, the pupils are well aware that they are in a high-achieving school and, when their marked work is returned to them, they look for constructive criticism. One pupil just arrived at the school in Year 12 said she thought she could have done much better at GCSE if she had had this level of support at her previous school:

- ‘It was scary at first...But both pupils and teachers helped me to adjust to the new expectations...I quickly realised how much I could do.’

and another pupil who started in Year 9 said:

- ‘I transferred here from middle school – nobody had told me what to do to improve my work. Now I know exactly how to improve my grades. I know the criteria for particular marks in an assignment, and it’s my fault if I don’t do the work.’

43. Pupils and teachers share the setting of targets and time is set aside when a pupil needs help. Staff go to great lengths to make themselves available. The pupils’ personal development is highly valued, and they are encouraged to see themselves as learners who, with effort and good organisation, can succeed beyond their expectations.

44. To suggest that all this works for all of the pupils in the schools visited would be misleading, although some of the schools get close to it. Even very good schools have problems motivating their most disaffected pupils. Indeed, there may sometimes be a demotivating effect on lower-attaining pupils where expected grades or levels are shared publicly and regularly, no matter how sensitively. What makes the difference in the schools where this is a relatively uncommon problem is the attention to detail in the arrangements for pupil guidance. Occasionally, pupils do not get the one-to-one discussion they need, but this is rare.
45. A very common message from the discussions with pupils was that they like to know how they are doing and where they stand. They like teachers who expect a good deal and stand no nonsense but also offer reliable guidance in a reassuring and, where appropriate, confidential way. Where the school handles assessment sensitively, thoroughly and honestly, the pupils are overwhelmingly in favour of the approach and usually respond very well.

## Communicating with parents

### *Features of good practice*

- ◇ *a strong partnership with parents, based on frequent, regular, personalised and pertinent communication, helps the pupils to achieve their best*
- ◇ *the schools provide regular opportunities for informal parental consultation*
- ◇ *schools' reports to parents are clear, consistent and comprehensive, with interim reports valued for their economy and directness.*

46. The schools in this survey see the involvement of parents as vital in enabling the pupils to achieve as much as possible. They communicate with them frequently by newsletter and in other ways and place much value in the role conscientious parents play in, for example, checking homework diaries and supporting their child in attending out-of-hours classes. It was clear that, when the partnership with the parents is strong, this can have a great influence on achievement. For their part, the parents in the survey schools almost always gave high praise to the schools for the work they do.
47. Schools find the process of providing consistently high-quality written reports to parents demanding. Although some weaknesses were evident even in the reports of some of the schools visited, these were far outweighed by their general strengths. Interim reports – usually in the form of grade profiles without specific subject commentary – are valued greatly by the parents. One school issues these every six weeks, although the norm is to provide one around mid-year. Some schools prepare one in each of the autumn and spring terms followed by a full report at the end of the academic year.

***Kettlethorpe High School** demonstrates a manageable and successful approach to reporting to parents. Two useful reports (the first a grade profile) are issued per year. The timing of these is important – for example in Year 11 the profile is sent out before mock examinations, with the full report afterwards. Reports are well written, with marks and grades used consistently across subjects, and carefully glossed for the parents. Parental satisfaction with the system is very high, since the straightforward and consistent approach throws into sharp relief anything problematic.*

48. The parents interviewed appreciated clear, concise reports linked to informative, well-planned consultation evenings. Especially important for many parents were additional opportunities to discuss issues as the need arises. Parents felt that informal discussion of this kind was of great value, whether instigated by themselves or by the school.

*At Dixons City Technology College parents of pupils in Key Stage 4 are introduced to the school's marking system at a parents' evening. They receive a progress report each term showing the pupil's target grade in each subject alongside the actual grades based on assessed pieces of work. A high value is placed on 'tutor surgeries' where tutors make themselves available weekly, after school, to discuss any problems. The parents are obliged to sign pupil planners every week and there is a parent/teacher comment box on these for other less urgent information to be exchanged effectively. Annual reports are direct and to the point, and include useful targets for improvement such as:*

- *mathematics: 'She could improve her anticipated grade to A\* if she practises sketching graphs from equations'.*
- *science: 'He must extend his background knowledge by using secondary sources of information to enhance his notes'.*

*Before being sent home, annual reports are given to the pupils to check that comments and grades are thought to be fair. On one occasion a pupil felt a subject comment had not reflected her achievement well enough and, after discussion, the teacher adjusted it. The system attempts to be honest, fair and responsive. Annual reviews of pupils with SEN fit into this process well. Because the reporting process includes target-setting, those with individual education plans are not singled out as different.*

## Managing assessment

### Features of good practice

- ◇ *senior managers have a strong understanding of key aspects of assessment, from the use of data to effective classroom practice, and they monitor these rigorously*
- ◇ *school documentation on assessment is comprehensive and well designed to help staff with practical assessment tasks*
- ◇ *departmental assessment policies are consistently modelled on the school policy*
- ◇ *there is access to good information technology systems and administrative support for assessment*
- ◇ *time is spent on staff training and other professional development to ensure procedures are developed intelligently and applied consistently across the school*
- ◇ *classrooms are welcoming and supportive to pupils, and styles of learning are varied and provide for productive exchange and discussion.*

49. In schools where assessment is well managed, the senior management has a strong understanding of the range of key aspects: the use of data; target-setting; and the link between assessment and high-quality teaching. At best, they ensure, through monitoring, that good assessment practice steers the direction of lessons and learning.
50. Since good use of assessment is an essential teaching skill, some of the schools visited see it as especially important in supporting effective performance

management, at both subject department and individual teacher level, as described earlier in this report. Teachers reported highly professional handling of this by senior managers.

51. Most schools designate someone to take the lead on assessment, usually a senior member of staff. The first responsibility of this person is to ensure that school policy and working documentation about assessment are well designed to help teaching staff. Documentation is best when it is concise, practical and fit for purpose. It sets out the key principles and makes clear standard procedures, as well as offering explicit guidance to staff on matters such as marking and the ground to be covered when a tutor interviews a pupil on a review day, for example. Good policies provide guidance to departments on constructing their own, subject-specific policies to ensure consistency across the school.

*The **Sacred Heart High School** assessment policy states that effective assessment will involve all pupils in order to:*

- *‘identify specific achievement and allow for its recognition and reward*
- *diagnose specific strengths and difficulties/weaknesses providing information on what a pupil knows, understands and can do*
- *increase pupil motivation*
- *be helpful to teachers and to pupils in setting learning targets*
- *help to predict future performance*
- *help to evaluate curriculum, teaching and learning styles.’*

52. Good assessment takes time. In the school visited, the most pressing concern was often finding the time for consultations between staff, pupils and parents. Access to an efficient management information system is crucial. Several schools among those visited lamented the fact that their systems were not powerful or flexible enough to enable teachers easily to obtain data when they need it. This reduces teachers’ efficiency, makes their assessment of pupils’ needs more difficult and impairs the quality of their professional dialogue with colleagues, pupils and parents. Teachers worked very hard to minimise any such impact.

53. Schools reported that, once set up, an efficient system saves time and unnecessary bureaucracy, especially when good-quality administrative support is made available, such as a clerical assistant for collating data or for SEN record-keeping. Where a capable assistant is employed to ensure that teaching staff receive accurate, up-to-the-minute data on the pupils they teach, this represents money well spent. Some of the schools visited had gone further in this respect than others.

*The staff at **Dixons City Technology College** are trained in the effective use of information technology. The school has set up its own ‘Maximising Achievement Database’, which provides fast access to information about individual, class and year group performance. Its advantages in monitoring and support are that it:*

- *is very easy to set up by an administrator*
- *enables fast data entry*
- *gives customised print-outs at a range of levels and for a range of need: class teacher, head of department, head of year, form tutor, parent and pupil*
- *can work in tandem with the school’s administration system*

- provides information on pupils who are underperforming or achieving well, background information on individual pupils, progress grade lists by class for subject teachers and form tutors, prints letters to parents informing them of progress grades, and provides the basis for accurate annual reports.

*Class and form tutors use the information to plan their work. They report a high degree of satisfaction with a system that meets their needs and saves them valuable time. They particularly like the speed in which information can be obtained regularly. Middle managers also speak highly of the system, saying that it enables them to monitor progress very quickly and alerts them to potential difficulties with weaker teaching.*

*The school believes that time and energy spent on assessment as part and parcel of teaching and learning will, in the long run, save time. All staff interviewed believed they were more effective and efficient because assessment had such a role in the school.*

54. All the schools see assessment as driving the work of improving the curriculum, teaching and learning. They see it as central to action to improve attitudes to learning and attainment – including the action they take in relation to pupils with SEN and others at risk of low achievement. In this respect, assessment is a key to inclusive practice.

*A key to the effective linking of assessment with teaching and learning at Dixons is the full inclusion of pupils in decisions taken about how they work and how they are supported to do well. The pupils discuss their targets, record them, and then have the responsibility for checking with staff how well they are doing. In addition, the school works hard at getting its classrooms to serve the pupils' needs well. There is a very good awareness of the kind of teaching that supports good assessment for learning.*

## Connecting the elements of assessment

### Features of good practice

- ◇ *an overriding emphasis on improving classroom practice, spearheaded and monitored by the senior and middle management*
- ◇ *a well-documented system of assessment and support*
- ◇ *an information system that provides the data staff need*
- ◇ *a framework of support grounded in good use of data by teachers and middle managers, and complemented by secure understanding of the standards of pupils' work in class*
- ◇ *encouragement and help to pupils to set sensible targets to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills*
- ◇ *teaching that is carefully planned to meet clear learning objectives for a class and to provide opportunities for pupils to go beyond expectations*
- ◇ *assessment of pupils' progress as they learn that focuses on the quality of outcomes rather than exclusively on matters of organisation and presentation in pupils' work*
- ◇ *a well-managed tutorial system that requires tutors to monitor the performance of the pupils in their tutor groups and allows them time to do this well*
- ◇ *heads of department, year heads, individual teachers and tutors who are accountable to senior managers for the progress of the pupils in their charge*

- ◇ *lines of communication between subject departments and year heads/tutors and parents that are open, easy and well used*
- ◇ *good administrative support for routine recording, distribution of information and secretarial functions.*

55. The schools visited have assessment regimes that are very successful overall, although they have particular strengths in different areas. They have succeeded in connecting the elements of their assessment system and linked them carefully with the roles of staff, so that the system serves the purposes of learning and achievement well. In the most effective schools, the system has a neat and economic circuitry that enables staff to know how well the pupils are doing at all times and in all subjects – and to be able to locate and attend to a problem when something goes wrong. The schools' approaches have been carefully constructed over time, incrementally, and the systems now in place are well managed and maintained. They do their job.
56. In **Trinity School**, for example, there is clear evidence that the approach taken is effective in helping to promote good standards of achievement.

*The Trinity School is fully committed to supporting pupils' academic and personal development. This is outlined in the policy, which states:*

*'In support of the ethos of Trinity whereby the maintenance and self-esteem of each pupil are paramount, any method of pupil assessment must be such that in design and implementation it respects and upholds each individual pupil's self-worth.'*

### **Monitoring and supporting pupils**

*This principle is backed with a well co-ordinated and manageable set of procedures that are broken down by key stages. The monitoring works at all levels. All teachers in positions of responsibility produce a weekly report for the head teacher. This ensures that there is a focus on pupils' achievements and progress. There is no fixed format for this report, a feature which is regarded positively by staff, in that it enables them to be free-ranging in their comments and analyses, even though these are primarily about attainment. For example, a weekly report in science comments on the most recent GCSE modular grades and how the results compared with the overall end-of-key-stage target for A\*–C grades, which was set at 90% for 2002. It outlines a series of strategies for providing a range of additional support for those pupils at risk of not achieving their target grades.*

*The school has an extensive and co-ordinated range of additional activities to support pupils. These include lunchtime and after-school homework clubs and revision sessions for targeted pupils who are on the borderline of GCSE grades C/D. An example is a project that runs from around the start of Year 11. Initially it covers coursework support in all subjects, and the sessions run for six weeks. These are extended further to cover structured and systematic revision sessions lasting for five weeks. The project is explained to the parents and their support is sought.*

*The emphasis on the individual is a striking feature. Heads of year and tutors monitor pupils' journals rigorously and systematically. For example, the head of Year 11 collects the journals every nine weeks and uses a pro forma to check how well they are being used, and reports the findings to the headteacher. The tutor has a weekly lesson during which the journals are examined. The combination of subject and pastoral monitoring together with the active involvement of the senior management team ensures that no pupil slips through the net.*

## **The role of target-setting**

*The well-written documentation on target-setting includes clear pointers to staff on practicalities. It focuses on the procedures needed within departments to set targets and to monitor performance against them:*

*'Target-setting should help students answer the following questions: Where am I now? Where do I want to be? What can I do to improve? How can other people help me?'*

*The principle of support is applicable to all pupils. The Year 9 mentoring programme is directed at pupils who are working at level 4 in two or more of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The aim is to provide the target group with learning support in preparation for their Key Stage 3 tests. The support is achieved through the setting of weekly targets. Each pupil meets with a teacher mentor for 12 weeks for an hour after school for a tutorial session that is divided into two sections: tuition in study skills and putting the skills into practice. During the programme, the mentor rings parents twice to discuss progress and any areas needing further attention. The second phone call is made a month before the national tests take place.*

*The targets set are recorded on a card for the pupils to keep in the inside cover of their journals. The mentor signs these off as achieved. There are also opportunities for the pupils to complete extra targets at home that can be signed off by the parents. The mentor keeps a record of the meetings held and the targets set. When a number of targets are achieved the pupils receive praise and are rewarded with a certificate.*

*School 'pastors' operate at Key Stage 3 to support the tutors. They cater mainly for those pupils who are experiencing difficulties with personal organisation. They see their allocated pupils individually and briefly during the morning tutor time and systematically go through their journals to ensure that homework and other important items are recorded.*

## **Links with parents**

*The school has an open-door policy and parents are welcomed at any time if they want to visit the school. The parents are very positive about the quality of communication that has been established between them and the school. They are supportive of the ethos of the school and are happy to be a part of it. They describe the partnership with the school as very strong.*

*The journal is seen as a very effective means of two-way communication between parents and teachers. The system works consistently well. Teachers are meticulous in checking the journals and respond quickly to any parental comments. Telephone contact augments this communication: teachers will routinely contact parents if there are concerns. Equally, when parents telephone the school they receive a very quick response.*

## Part 2: Good assessment in subjects

### Introduction

57. This section of the report draws on evidence from subject-focused inspections undertaken by HMI in 2001/02. HMI visited schools and observed lessons in departments where the quality of assessment was judged, in their most recent Ofsted inspection, to be good or better.
58. As Part I of this report makes clear, departments' assessment is likely to be effective when it is driven by policy and practices established clearly for the whole school and when each department's work connects closely to that of others. No individual subject department is an island, although it may demonstrate excellence in one or two aspects of assessment. The snapshots of good assessment in subjects that follow are, therefore, framed within larger pictures of effective whole-school practice.
59. The section considers key aspects of assessment, from those concerned with judging and promoting pupils' progress on a day-to-day basis to the more formal measuring of attainment, including the marking of GCSE coursework. Each aspect is illustrated with reference to two or three subjects.

### Using data

60. A major difference between the core and other foundation subjects is the amount of subject-specific data on pupils' performance available in Year 7. In English especially, but also in mathematics and science, the amount of data available on entry, or from assessments carried out early in the school, can be considerable. Sensibly used, the data can provide baselines against which future progress can be measured. Effective systems for tracking pupils' progress from such baselines were evident in a number of subjects.

*In one science department, the regression charts from the Autumn Package provided by the DfES are used to generate expected Key Stage 3 levels from individual Key Stage 2 test raw scores. The difference between each pupil's Key Stage 2 level in science and the Key Stage 3 target is then divided into three equal increments. For example: level 4.3 at Key Stage 2; target 5.5 at Key Stage 3. Expected progress is 1.2 or 0.4 levels a year. Topic test scores are then converted to levels and a spreadsheet used to compare actual and target progress. The software automatically highlights pupils whose performance falls significantly below their target.*

61. In this and other successful departments, the information derived from such tracking procedures is used to trigger support for individuals. However, the nature of the intervention and its effectiveness are dependent on the ability of the teacher to translate numerical data into subject-specific and task-specific activities. In themselves, the data are of limited value.
62. Without the data from national tests, departments in the non-core foundation subjects have to build an accurate picture quickly through their own testing and other forms of assessment when pupils join the school. For instance, in geography, in one school, pupils undertake on entry a skills-based assessment to provide baseline information. Within a few weeks all Year 7 pupils have a geography skills baseline, used as an indicator against which to measure progress.

63. However, even in the core subjects, with the advantages of national and other test results, effective departments recognise that data provide only one form of evidence upon which to judge pupils' capabilities and rates of progress. For secure judgements to be made, this information needs to be set against that acquired through day-to-day assessment and other classroom-based interactions.

*In a Year 7 mathematics lesson the teacher was able to assess for herself levels of mathematical knowledge developed in primary school, through a paired activity. In the first lesson of a new module on multiplication and division of decimals by single-digit and two-digit whole numbers, the teacher provided a resource sheet of eight multiplication and division calculations containing errors. All the calculations involved whole numbers. The teacher asked the pupils to use the knowledge they had developed in this topic in primary school and to work in pairs to identify their errors.*

64. The recording of assessment information, economically and usefully, is an issue for all subject departments, especially where there are increasing demands on non-contact time. However, the increasing use of information technology is helping some departments to develop manageable systems and several instances of good practice were observed. In GCSE geography, in one school, a colour spreadsheet is used for easy identification of progress by individual pupils. All pupils are given a target sheet before the start of coursework. They record this grade on the record sheet and continue to record marks given by the teacher on a weekly basis. If they are ahead of the target, this is highlighted in green. If they are behind, this is highlighted in red. Pupils must be at or ahead of their target grade to make progress to the next stage. This simple system has been effective in raising the expectations of both teachers and pupils.

### Teaching, marking and setting targets

65. In most subjects, good day-to-day assessment practice centres on the use in teaching of a combination of observation, questioning, discussion and marking of pupils' work. Through these activities, skilful and knowledgeable subject teachers find out what pupils know, understand and can do and then decide what needs to be done to improve learning.
66. While observation is central to most kinds of informal assessment, it has a particular force in some subjects, such as physical education or drama, where physical actions are a central part of performance, both in the teacher's assessment of the pupil and the pupil's own self-assessment.

*In a Year 8 physical education lesson, where the teacher wanted to develop pupils' bowling action in the game of rounders, she observed that some girls were making insufficient use of leg movement to develop a change of speed. She combined a demonstration of the correct action with careful questioning, focusing particularly on weight transfer. Pupils then tried to put what they had seen into action, but with varying levels of success; the teacher then modified the distances between bowler and receiver, in order to improve the technique further.*

67. In this example, involving close observation on the part of both pupils and teacher, questioning was important. In the most effective practice observed, the teachers demonstrated high levels of skill in this aspect of teaching.

*Over the 60 minutes of an art lesson, the teacher gave detailed attention to each pupil. Occasionally, where the pupil declared the work to be finished, she pinned the painting on the wall and they looked at it together – in one case from the other side of the room – checking to see whether it had indeed reached a*

conclusive point or if more could be done. 'Have you got the foreground right?' 'Those colours are a bit strong – is that what you want?' 'Perhaps you could have another look at your source material.' Gradually, the teacher was able to judge that the pupil had far from 'finished' but needed specific advice to take him further – and he realised this himself. Through such exchanges it was easy to see how the department has created an ambience similar to that of art school: from the beginning of Year 7, pupils are encouraged to talk seriously about their work and this quickly affects positively their attitude to the subject.

68. Such dialogue helps the teacher to build detailed pictures of the pupils as learners and thus to intervene appropriately. The example also indicates that it is important for a climate to be developed in which pupils feel they can be honest about their own work and where, as observed in another subject department, assessment is not seen as punitive.
69. While the dialogue described above was built on one-to-one questioning of an open style, questioning of the whole class can also provide useful insights into, for instance, pupils' understanding of terminology, as in the example which follows.

*In a drama session taught in the school hall, Year 11 pupils were questioned on their understanding of various theatrical terms. For instance, 'Why, when an actor walks from the front to the back of a stage, do we say he is walking 'up stage'?' When a pupil offered an answer, the teacher asked the others in the group whether they thought he or she was correct, or, in some cases, requested further information from them. 'So, if, as you say, the stage was sloping, or raked, what would have been the purpose of this?'*

70. Informal assessment can provide a quick and efficient way of giving pupils feedback on what they have done, holding them to account, but also letting them know that their work is valued. Short, well-focused assessment-related tasks, especially at the beginnings of lessons, were observed to be successful in a number of subject contexts, including, in this instance, religious education.

*While completing a simple task at the beginning of the religious education lesson, Year 8 pupils were asked to make their homework available to the teacher as he circulated. They then received brief, helpful comments on the quality of their response, sometimes with reference to a failure to finish or follow instructions.*

71. The use of informal assessment methods, including games and quizzes, can galvanise the interest of pupils. In successful science departments – though this approach is equally applicable to other subjects – the use of games and quizzes to check learning is popular with pupils, who respond with enthusiasm. Some like the competitive element; others appreciate being able to communicate their uncertainty about new ideas without exposing this to the rest of the class through a more formal approach. A successful example of such a game was observed in a chemistry lesson.

*This was the first lesson on a new science topic: chemical change. It started with a game of 'chemical bingo' that got the lesson off to a brisk start and enabled the teacher to check pupils' recall of ideas from the previous chemistry topic. Later in the lesson 'chemical anagrams' were used to ascertain pupils' understanding of the new terms just introduced.*

72. Complementing assessment made by the teacher are pupil self-assessment and peer assessment.

*A 35-minute mathematics lesson began smartly with the whole class brainstorming all the statistical terms they had in their jotters, with a description offered for each.*

*In turn, three pupils demonstrated their methods for calculating the mean, mode and range for grouped data, responding confidently to questions raised by members of the class. Pupils were then asked to work with their 'marking partner' to mark each other's work. The peer marker was asked to consider the following questions: 'Are all the necessary terms included? Do the definitions make sense? Does the explanation of how to calculate the mean, mode and range make sense? Is it complete? Are examples used well to help the explanation? What advice would you give to your partner to improve the draft?' During the last few minutes the teacher used questions directed at individuals to draw out the main issues and omissions before giving the pupils three or four minutes to note any alterations they wished to make to their draft.*

73. Such peer and self-assessment practices reflect a commitment to helping pupils become independent learners, able to identify for themselves the skills, knowledge and understanding to move forward.

*In a Year 7 geography lesson the teacher discussed a decision-making exercise from the previous lesson concerning the location of a leisure centre. He provided several alternative answers. Pupils were asked to rank these answers in terms of quality against the marking criteria. As a result, pupils were clearly able to see the difference between simple descriptions and attempts to explain and analyse the information. Pupils were then asked to compare their own answers with the examples and decide which one of their answers had fitted best. The pupils were clearly inspired to analyse their own work, comparing it with a better answer and highlighting how their own could be improved.*

74. In this and other successful instances of self-assessment, pupils had a clear sense of what they had to achieve and, importantly, the criteria against which their success was to be judged. Often, these assessment criteria were spelled out in wall displays or in photocopied sheets in pupils' workbooks.

*In one art and design department, Year 11 pupils criticised each other's paintings constructively, invoking GCSE assessment criteria pinned to the whiteboard. The teacher had created an ethos in which pupils could be honest with each other without feeling 'got at'. Each pupil, in turn, placed an example of ongoing work on an easel, together with preparatory visual research, which was then subjected to peer and teacher scrutiny. The language used by pupils was suitably evaluative and informed by a sound knowledge of particular artists – for example: 'You have generalised the face too much, even though it's based on a study of Modigliani's style'. No one took offence: disagreement, such as it was, centred mostly on interpretations of the criteria.*

75. While emphasising the need for shared criteria, the example also highlights the need for an evaluative language, partly drawn from the assessment criteria but also from the terminology of the subject.

76. Good marking makes clear the assessment criteria the teacher is using. It provides detailed and personalised evaluations and points for future development. Often, grades are given for effort and attainment, but it is usually in the detail of the comment that marking is particularly helpful to pupils. In one history department, for example, comments on GCSE scripts, which indicated how pupils might improve, included:

- 'An excellent answer – as far as it goes – but it does not mention sources. If it did this, it would be level 4 against the examiners' mark scheme, but without the sources it can only be level 2.'
- '4A: good. You have shown how to link points. This will get you higher grades in the exam if you can explain yourself in this way.'

77. In a design and technology department, a more discursive commentary, based on both oral and written feedback, was recorded in the pupils' log sheets. One example of written comment, relating to the design and fixing of a desk leg, provided a clear analysis of strengths and weaknesses and targets for the future:

*'Your analysis of a wide range of existing solutions on tables in the school means you have a very good basis to make your design decisions using conventional solutions. Your sketching shows good ability to record shape and form with perceptive analytical notes identifying crucial features. I particularly like the comparisons you make between cast aluminium and fabricated steel. You have captured the ways in which choice of material, manufacturing and shape interact. Before the next coursework – check the date – I suggest you broaden the range of solutions you consider: can the leg/frame joint be achieved without a bracket, or without using metal? Broaden your horizon by looking at frame construction in architecture. Finally, although you are getting better, you still need to practise fast design-sketches that are more 'thinking with a pencil' than attempting to be works of art.'*

78. This lengthy commentary raises the question of manageability, especially for teachers who take a large number of groups, as is the case for many teachers of music and religious education, for instance. The problem of manageability is being tackled successfully in some schools through systems for staggering marking or for sampling – for example, by marking only three classes' work each week, or that of 5–6 pupils in each group in one week, or marking in depth selected items only.
79. While setting targets to focus improvement can be a part of written and oral feedback, they can also be agreed formally at programmed review points throughout the year. Increasingly this is part of a whole-school programme in which tutors work with subject teachers. In some of the most effective target-setting in subjects, especially that relating to attitudinal change, this link with tutors was particularly strong, helping to reinforce the importance of targets and ensure that they led to appropriate action.
80. The following are characteristics common to the effective setting of targets in all subjects. The targets are:
- 1 specific to the subject and relate to important aspects of knowledge, understanding and skills in that subject
  - 1 derived from teachers' assessments and not only pupil-devised
  - 1 limited in number and of manageable proportions (for example, the spelling of key words, or the reading of a particular book)
  - 1 relatively short-term, capable of being monitored and subject to regular amendment
  - 1 stored so that they are accessible to the pupils as they undertake the next task (for example, in a planner or draft book), not locked in a filing cabinet
  - 1 drawn from, or relate to, the teaching objectives of a unit of work or the assessment criteria for the current task, and so are immediately relevant and can be referred to in marking and feedback.

## Formal assessment

81. Most subjects conduct end-of-unit and end-of-year assessments, which contribute to the assessment information on pupils acquired initially in Year 7. As with day-to-day assessment, these assessments are most effective when there is a shared understanding of what is to be assessed and by what criteria.

*In one music department, at the beginning of each unit of work, Year 8 pupils are given written details of the topic, the activities, the resources and what they are expected to do and learn. The musical focus is made clear, for example to work in pairs and compose a piece of music using computer software. The task sheet contains the criteria on which both the ideas, the use of software and the structure and content of the final piece of music will be assessed.*

82. Pupils need to know that formal assessment is purposeful and helpful. In modern foreign languages, for instance, pupils in one school were made well aware of how they were doing in speaking during routine oral work and periodic mini-tests in speaking, which they had to redo until they got a satisfactory mark. This 'kept them on their toes', they said.
83. Essential to end-of-key-stage assessments is a shared and robust departmental understanding of National Curriculum levels. One feature of effective practice is the development of portfolios of work categorised by level – produced digitally in some art and design departments. These usually contain best-fit assessments of examples of pupils' work against particular levels. In one history department, a portfolio included an essay on how Britain changed from 1750 to 1900 accompanied by an informative commentary:

*'This piece shows evidence of a student who can describe in detail and make links between the main facts (a feature of level 5). The student has also found and clearly organised a lot of relevant and accurate information. The student has shown a coherent understanding and knowledge of history offering evidence of level 6. This is reinforced in this task by her understanding of the relationship of cause and consequence.'*

84. Being clear about what level descriptions mean is not only important for teachers. Pupils also need to know. The ability to turn level descriptions into language that pupils can understand (and, in the process, helping teachers to do the same) was a feature of good practice in several subjects.

*One modern foreign languages department had made particularly good use of sharing assessment criteria with pupils in Key Stage 3. This involves 'Aim High' sheets, which set out for each skill the National Curriculum level descriptions presented in pupil-friendly language. Pupils use these to monitor their own progress and to identify what they need to do to reach the next level in a particular skill. Pupils find this motivating and, along with other strategies, it has resulted in pupils' performance rising significantly in recent years.*

85. Being specific with pupils about what they need to do to reach the next level is essential. However, as the best practice in all subjects demonstrated, it is important that this process is not too narrowly defined, but set within an approach to developing the breadth and depth of pupils' understanding and skills in the subject.

## GCSE coursework

86. Pupils are best prepared for GCSE coursework when they know how they are to be assessed – against what criteria – and have the opportunity to develop the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertake the required work.

*In geography in one school, pupils undertake a 'mock' study based on tourism in the area. As they complete this exercise before their real coursework assignment, the pupils are familiarised with the fieldwork assessment criteria. They are able to analyse their outcomes and to identify strengths and weaknesses in their methodology. This is a valuable formative exercise and coursework standards have improved as a result.*

87. Such preparatory work is given additional weight where it is informed by exemplars provided by an examining board, as noted in some of the best practice in religious education.
88. How, when and where to give emphases to different coursework skills to ensure that pupils develop the necessary level of competence are questions that require appropriate teaching strategies and course design. In effective departments, the acquisition of relevant coursework skills begins systematically in Key Stage 3.
89. In successful music departments, for instance, solo and ensemble performance and individual compositions became a stronger feature towards the end of Key Stage 3 than at the start, where whole-class practical activities or group compositions were used more frequently. In such schools there was a good progression of skills through the two key stages.
90. Sometimes adjustments have to be made in the light of pupils' performance, as in some successful English departments where teachers judged that too much emphasis had been placed on coursework skills, at the expense of those required for timed examinations. Several of the successful schools surveyed for English had analysed their results carefully to identify where pupils were most and least successful, and linked this to the emphases given in the scheme of work or teaching approach. Some had increased the attention paid to timed writing or note-taking on examination texts, while spending less class time on coursework, for example.
91. Where in some schools the approach to coursework in certain subjects had appeared to disadvantage boys, effective departments had found ways of enabling both sexes to succeed.

*One design and technology department had worked hard to ensure that pupils understood the nature of designing and the importance of genuine design thinking rather than the neat but specious design sometimes encountered. Pupils made rapid progress and boys' attainment was much closer to that of girls than is usually found.*

*Similarly, in one successful business studies department, the systematic attention given to boys' and other groups' achievements was informed by data analysis. In this department, the performance of different groups of pupils was analysed. Where evidence from examinations indicated that boys were under-performing in coursework, better monitoring and shorter deadlines were introduced. Performance improved as a result of these measures.*

## Standardisation

92. In all subjects, ensuring that staff have a common understanding of assessment criteria and standards is by no means easy, especially in departments with part-time teachers or discontinuities in staffing. Standardisation is as much an issue at Key Stage 3, where pupils' progress is related to National Curriculum level descriptions, as it is at Key Stage 4. Successful practice was evident, however, in a number of subjects. In science, for instance, coursework assessment in Key Stage 4 is usually standardised by a combination of departmental discussion and marking by two people. In about half of the departments visited, this is linked to a portfolio of previously standardised work. Teachers have honed these procedures in familiar contexts so that they are confident of the reliability of their judgements.
93. More generally, secure standardisation was dependent on the scrutiny of exemplars from examining boards, attendance by teachers at marking workshops provided by the boards or LEA subject advisers, and teachers' own experience as external moderators. One teacher described his period as an external moderator as 'an opportunity to understand exactly what was required by the board and from visits to other schools how – and how not – to achieve it'.
94. In good subject departments, teachers are aware of the ground rules relating to the supervision of coursework and are agreed on a proper level of intervention. In a design and technology department, for instance, the teacher monitored the coursework to ensure progress was being made. His interventions were noted in the course log sheet, ensuring transparency and accountability.

## Evaluation and development

*In an information technology department, coursework was the department's key development focus for the year. This was because the analysis of last year's Year 11 results showed that coursework was the main weakness for those pupils gaining GCSE grades D and E. The head of department maintains individual pupils' targets on the walls of the computer room, along with deadlines. He also maintains detailed information about what has to be done by each pupil to improve coursework – and this is shared by pupils themselves.*

95. As is clear from this example – and in many of the others used in this report – effective departments also use information from coursework to evaluate their practice. They analyse all the assessment information they have and make changes to the curriculum, teaching styles and learning materials accordingly. Good use of assessment information to review the work of subject departments was exemplified in some of the best history departments. In these, there is thorough evaluation of assignments and the teaching of them to establish what does and does not work. This gives feedback on teaching, and can result in raising the tempo for some pupils and providing more support for others. It can cause teachers to adapt their approaches, for example, by changing the balance in the teaching of knowledge, understanding and skills.

## Conclusions and recommendations

96. In summarising findings on the quality of assessment, Ofsted's review of secondary education in 1998 commented: 'Overall, the purpose of assessment is to improve standards, not merely to measure them.'<sup>4</sup> Inspections of secondary schools continue to indicate that many schools need to work on features of assessment to ensure that it helps pupils to learn better.
97. As practice in the schools covered in this report demonstrates, positive development occurs when senior and middle managers share a clear view about what they want to achieve and then set about adjusting school systems in a coherent way over a period of time. The schools' systems differed in design and sometimes considerably in their detail, but there was a large measure of consistency in the principles underpinning them.
98. The list of issues that follows reflects weaknesses in assessment practice in secondary schools generally. Attention to them needs to be adapted to local circumstances, but without any weakening of the important principles they embody.

### Issues for attention

- To ensure that data inform assessment, schools should:
  - 1 consider whether more searching use can be made of Key Stage 2 data, including the profiles of raw scores, thus reducing the volume of assessment at the start of secondary school
  - 1 use data fully to identify pupils who may be gifted and talented or those who, while not having special educational needs, may benefit from specific additional support
  - 1 seek opportunities to refine the skills of staff in understanding and using data.
- To improve practice in teaching, marking and setting targets:
  - 1 professional development in schools should focus on exemplifying productive approaches to the day-to-day use of assessment in teaching
  - 1 marking should ensure that action points are clear and require pupils themselves to take responsibility for solving a problem
  - 1 heads of department and senior managers should monitor the quality of marking closely in order to reduce variation in its standard
  - 1 in encouraging pupils to work for higher standards in tests and examinations, schools should focus on improving pupils breadth and depth of subject understanding and skills, rather than concentrating too narrowly on the finer requirements of the next higher level or grade.

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<sup>4</sup> *Secondary education 1993–97: a review of secondary schools in England*, The Stationery Office, 1998.

- To improve the way pupils' progress is monitored and supported, schools should:
  - <sup>1</sup> give tutors appropriate time and training so that they can properly monitor pupils' academic progress and liaise with other staff
  - <sup>1</sup> ensure that pupils themselves are involved as much as possible in assessment discussions and decisions and have the chance for regular confidential discussion with a member of staff or external mentor about their progress.
- To improve communication with parents, schools should:
  - <sup>1</sup> offer regular, informal opportunities for parents to speak with tutors and other key staff as needed
  - <sup>1</sup> work further on improving the clarity and consistency of reports to parents.
- To improve the management of assessment and make good use of teachers' time, schools should:
  - <sup>1</sup> invest, in consultation with one another and their LEAs where appropriate, in setting up management information systems that provide efficient handling of assessment data
  - <sup>1</sup> look to employ administrative staff more fully to assist with assessment procedures.

## **Annex: Schools visited**

Ofsted is grateful to the schools visited in connection with both parts of this report for their willingness to share their good practice.

The schools visited in connection with Part I of the report were:

- The Cardinal Wiseman Roman Catholic School, Ealing LEA
- Charlton School, Telford and Wrekin LEA
- The Chase School and Technology College, Worcestershire LEA
- Denbigh School, Milton Keynes LEA
- Dixons City Technology College, Bradford LEA
- The Heathland School, Hounslow LEA
- Kettlethorpe High School, Wakefield LEA
- Northallerton College, North Yorkshire LEA
- Pittville School, Gloucestershire LEA
- Sacred Heart High School, Hammersmith and Fulham LEA
- Trinity Catholic High School, Redbridge LEA
- Withernsea High School and Technology College, East Riding of Yorkshire LEA

