



CASE STUDY REPORT

Raising attainment by establishing whole-school Assessment for Learning (AfL)

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This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to raise teachers' awareness of how feedback and objective-led learning helps pupils to improve and make progress, and to improve independent learning skills and raise pupils' attainment.

Aims: The main aim is to improve pupils' independent learning skills and raise their attainment by implementing Assessment for Learning (AfL) in teaching.

Methods: The participants in this case study are head of school improvement, headteacher, middle leader, national strategies consultant, senior leadership team, SIP, subject leader, teacher, and pupils. Methods used included whole-school CPD, coaching, use of outside speakers, targeted work of consultants, AfL materials, and use of pupil voice.

Findings: The main findings are that effective implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) has had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership. It has improved independent learning skills, raised pupils' attainment, and increased focus on learning objectives and feedback.

Implications: The findings suggest that effective implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) can improve independent learning skills, raise pupils' attainment, and increase motivation. It also highlights the importance of leadership and management vision in leading change.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Secondary education

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

There was underachievement possibly due to pupils' lack of awareness of how to improve their learning, to be addressed by effective implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) in teaching. There was a need to raise teachers' awareness of how feedback and objective-led learning helps pupils to improve and make progress.

Watch the Teachers TV video of this case study:

Who might find this case study useful?

- Head of school improvement
- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- All aspects
- All subjects

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

By implementing AfL we hoped to improve independent learning skills and raise pupils' attainment. We intended to impact on all curriculum areas, with lead practitioners in English, history and MFL departments

What were your success criteria?

Teaching focuses on learning objectives and outcomes linked to standards; feedback relates directly to learning objectives. Pupils, when supported, are able to recognise and improve their achievement against predetermined criteria and some are able to contribute to determining criteria. Feedback is characterised by specific, positive, formative remarks linked to outcomes for learning; pupils are able to respond to feedback, identify what they have done well in their work and how to improve further. Pupils are aware of their targets and how these link to progression in learning.

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- CVA data
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data
- Test results

Describe the CPD approaches you used

Also Involvement of pupil voice.

Whole-school CPD was used to identify the priority of AfL and the plan of action, to share the vision and implementation of processes. Time was identified for the development of department practice linked to the whole-school priority of AfL, this was monitored by the senior leadership team. other strategies were:

- effective use of T&L group to act as a discussion forum and best practice research base;
- introduction of coaching process with identified coaches;
- by 2006 the use of specialist coaches in AfL;
- use of outside speakers (research base Mary James) to invigorate and bring a wider perspective while maintaining key messages;
- targeted work of consultant to support development of practice, e.g. working with subject leader, developing action research practice, work with teaching assistants, involvement of pupil voice, strategic support to the Strategy Manager who effectively maintained and led a high-profile focus, support for review of practice.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

AfL whole-school training materials folder; Study guides on AfL and coaching and AfL and teaching assistants; Coaching materials from Subject leader development programme and CUREE; Pedagogy and practice module. School action plan. Monitoring and evidence collection proformas.

8 School Project materials: progression grids, work sampling aide-memoires, pupil questionnaires and pupil interview sheets. Subject development materials for AfL.

Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Middle leader
- Senior management
- Subject leader

How were you supported?

We were part of the Secondary Strategy 8 School AfL Project.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

There has been impact of objective-led learning on pupils' knowledge and understanding of the context of the lesson; impact of oral feedback, particularly one-to-one feedback, on pupils' ability to understand and act upon their next steps in learning; impact of written feedback versus grade indicates overwhelming positive response for feedback that is motivational and informative.

Data of raised attainment yet to be processed. There are indications of raised attainment in terms of levels, but this awaits further analysis of CVA data.

Pupil interviews provide anecdotal evidence of impact on pupils' learning, including motivation. Acting on this evidence greater emphasis was given to objective-led lessons and pupils have now indicated they are unclear of the purpose of the lesson in significantly fewer lessons. Pupils have become more independent learners and more

able to discuss how their learning could improve.

The use of pupil voice and in-depth interview has influenced pupils' perception of being part of school development and developing confidence in their own skills of independent learning.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

'In my own classes, the pupils feel confident, reassured, safe, aware of what they need to do. They like signposting in lessons. Lessons are much more explicit; pupils really value their understanding of what and why they are learning. Pupils record their learning objectives in their books - it helps them recall, review and reinforcement. They can scan through. With formative feedback and target setting, the children write their target in the back of their books - they become better at thinking about their own learning. (Assistant Head and English teacher)'

'When I revise I go straight to the learning objectives and know where to look to revise rather than having to go through loads and loads of pages.' (Y9 pupil)

'In science, yeah, lots of feedback - verbal feedback and written feedback telling you what you have done well and how you can improve it.' (Y9 pupil)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- CVA data
- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Pupil consultation data

What has been the impact on teaching?

Marking and feedback is developing. Teachers were quick to realise they needed more focus on learning objectives and outcomes once they started giving detailed written feedback. This was a good place to start, as it revealed shortcomings to the teachers themselves, which they were then able to address effectively. The work sample indicates significant improvement in the quality of feedback.

Focus on learning objectives has improved lesson planning; the use of learning objectives is embedded.

The quality of questioning and target-setting between teachers and pupils has improved.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

'Learning Objectives create the expectation of pupils to understand. Teachers need to be obvious and upfront about the purpose of the lesson, stop learning being a mystery, especially for middle and lower ability children. Learning objectives are embedded in our department now. We make them accessible to children.' (Head of Science)

Written feedback: 'We use comments for milestone pieces, but writing comments all the time is time-consuming. We give oral feedback as a class. We had to train ourselves with formative comments, to be positive and constructive. It's so easy to leap into what needs improving. We do 3 good points and a suggestion for improvement. It's easier for newer teachers, because they have no old habits to unlearn.' (Head of MFL)

'AfL has been a driving force in improving teaching and learning. It is good for teachers in terms of planning... it has to have made a difference.'

'We have more data, and by focusing on AfL and using baseline data for aspirational targets, you know where they are going and what they are capable of.'(Asst Head)

'In English the teacher is walking around all the time checking how you are doing and telling you how you can improve your work e.g. to get a level 6 you need to...!' (Y9 pupil)

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Teachers readily describe the changes to their teaching and how it has improved learning.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The role of leadership (senior leadership team, middle managers, etc.) and management vision is essential; direction and strategic processes are critical for successful impact. Middle leaders now have a greater role in school improvement planning and increased awareness of the need to collaborate within and across departments.

The importance of middle leadership in leading change has also led to renewed focus upon CPD for subject leaders, and the development of their strategic role.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Teachers' perceptions.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The effectiveness of Assessment for Learning approaches, and AfL being a priority for school development, permeating all the levels in the school organisation.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- AfL whole-school training materials folder: study guides on AfL and coaching, and AfL and teaching assistants; coaching materials from the National Strategy's Sustaining Improvement materials and CUREE; Pedagogy and practice module; School action plan; Monitoring and evidence collection forms.
- 8 School Project materials: progression grids, work sampling aide-memoires, pupil questionnaires and pupil interview sheets. Subject development materials for AfL.
- Sawston Village College AfL Operational Plan (see What page).
- AfL research publications, such as Black & William's 'Inside the Black Box'.

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- Whole-school session with Professor Mary James gave a theoretical framework and *raison d'être* for what we were doing.
- Whole-staff meeting sharing best practice in written feedback in exercise books.
- Continued focus in line management and leadership group meetings and department meetings.
- Teaching and learning group journal used to review practice and spread the word.

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Start with a whole school session as above. For teachers, giving detailed written feedback is a good place to start, as it reveals the need for clear learning objectives.
- Essential elements: school priority, long-term approach. effective Assessment for Learning approaches.
- school priority, long-term approach.
- effective Assessment for Learning approaches.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

The school will be embedding this process to influence most to all teachers, maintaining the vision amid other priorities and ensuring that leadership at all levels continues to monitor and evaluate the process. We are creating a three-year plan with a shared picture of excellence.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Sawston AfL Operational Plan 2005-6

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About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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