



The Coopers' Company & Coborn School

Assessment for Learning Policy

(Amended February 2011)

“In times of change learners will inherit the earth, while the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

Eric Hoffer

Assessment *for* Learning is very different from Assessment *of* Learning. The latter tends to be summative and is *carried out periodically*, e.g. at the end of a unit, year or key stage. This kind of assessment is used to judge how well a student is performing. Conclusions are typically reported in terms of grades, marks or levels. Along with information acquired through other means, these help to inform the school's TRIPS process, which, because the grades and levels used are set alongside national standards, students and teachers are able to evaluate performance against others and the school is able to track progress over time.

Assessment *for* Learning (AfL) on the other hand is formative and *takes place all the time* in the classroom. It means using evidence and feedback to identify where students are in their learning, what they need to do next and how best to achieve this. In practice, this means obtaining clear evidence about how to improve individual attainment, understanding between teachers and students on what they need to improve and agreement on the steps needed to promote sound learning and progress.

AfL values quality of learning rather than quantity and presentation. It raises self-esteem by concentrating on advice for improvement whilst avoiding the demoralising effects of comparing students repeatedly and negatively with more successful students. That is not to say all comparisons are necessarily negative, but care should be taken. Further, AfL leads teachers to work with a more complete picture of the students' learning needs and therefore, with carefully considered feedback, it helps students to learn more effectively.

Background to this policy

This document refers to Assessment *for* Learning (AfL) and is not a whole school policy on assessment, recording and reporting. It focuses on formative rather than summative assessment. It sets out the principles for personalised learning and is firmly embedded in the belief that AfL is an exceptionally powerful ‘tool’ that has been *proven* to improve learning outcomes.

This policy has been written from the premise that teachers make the most difference to students’ learning and, what is more, they make this difference by becoming excellent practitioners of AfL.

If AfL is to work effectively in our school it will need widespread engagement across all faculties and with all colleagues and with the proactive support of all line managers at both middle and senior levels. Successful implementation of this policy will require a supportive culture in which colleagues support, coach and learn in collaboration with each other, and students are well trained in the relevant strategies which, in time, they will experience across the curriculum.

An important vehicle for the development of such a collaborative approach to teaching is the Teacher Learning Community (TLC)

By sharing best practice TLCs help promote continuous improvement and encourage on-going professional development. This should be the central format for all meetings at faculty and department level and should be based upon the generic agenda.¹

This AfL policy is a framework for effective learning, providing opportunities for an extensive variety of teaching and learning techniques. Some indication of the range of techniques available is to be found in the booklet accompanying this policy.

An integral part of AfL is Learning to Learn (L2L)²

It must be made explicit to students what they need to do to be successful in their learning. Effective learners are **ready** (motivated and curious), **resourceful** (flexible and keen to collaborate), **resilient** (able to cope well under stress, tenacious, persistent), **reflective** (contemplative, absorbed, introspective) as well as able to **remember** (retain, recall, practise, apply learning).

L2L could include:

- ✚ Discussion with students about learning.
- ✚ Using reading and thinking time to promote understanding of tasks and activities.
- ✚ Scaffolding (writing frames, sentence starters) to assist answering questions.

¹ See separate document

² There is a separate policy document on L2L: ‘learning skills – learning to learn handbook’ which can be found on the ‘O’ drive > ‘teaching and learning’ > ‘learning skills’.

- ✚ Modelling (sharing students' work, working through examples) to encourage best practice.
- ✚ Developing learning and study skills (revision techniques, note-taking, summarising).
- ✚ Collaboration (student to student, student to teacher and teacher to students).
- ✚ Regular and frequent action target setting on how to improve.
- ✚ Regular and frequent reviews of progress toward agreed targets.

General Expectations

- ✚ When planning a unit of work the full range of AfL strategies should be incorporated across the unit if not within individual lessons.
- ✚ The major assessed pieces of work should be accompanied by written (and also perhaps oral) formative feedback.
- ✚ It will be for Subject Leaders (in conjunction with Directors of Faculty) to decide on the precise application of AfL strategies, since the level of questioning, examples of self and peer assessment and types of learning styles will vary from subject to subject as well as between different units of work within a single subject.

The key elements of AfL in our school should:

- ✚ Have a strong emphasis upon **learning intentions** and **success criteria** which are shared with the students so that they understand precisely what they are doing, why they are doing it and what they are expected to gain from it. It is not sufficient merely to inform students what they will be doing or even how they will learn; the emphasis should be on what they should have learnt by the end of the lesson. There may be occasions when it is desirable to avoid stating the lesson's intentions at the very start but students should be given the opportunity to discover or be told what they are at an appropriate stage of the lesson.
- ✚ Incorporate **varied learning styles** (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) to suit different learners in order to stimulate motivation and develop understanding and longer lasting retention³.
- ✚ Encourage active involvement of all students by engineering effective **questioning** and discussion that elicits evidence of learning; more the how to get an answer than the specific solution.
- ✚ Make use of enhanced oral and written **feedback** between teacher and students to establish what has been done well and what needs to be done next to move learning forward, bearing in mind that comments that focus on the work rather than the person are more constructive for both learning and motivation. Feedback should be concise, accessible to students and personal (by using the student's first name). It should be constructive and should encourage students to take ownership of their learning.
- ✚ Make regular use of well thought out **self assessment** that activates students as owners of their own learning, as well as carefully planned **peer assessment** that activates students as instructional resources for one another and which therefore promotes effective **collaborative learning**.
- ✚ Regularly provide opportunities for individual students to **reflect** and talk about their learning and progress in order for them to recognise how they can improve.

³ You could get your students to do the VAK 'test' – there's a copy on the 'O' drive in the AfL folder

- ✚ Use strategies at the end of lessons to test **learning outcomes** in order to establish the focus of the next lesson. In these ways teachers will be acutely aware of their pupils' capabilities and of their prior learning and understanding and will be able to plan very effectively to build on these.
- ✚ Make regular use of **tick and target** as a more effective assessment device than an array of marks; leave summative assessment **of** learning for a few key assignments that will help teachers to adjust their teaching and their students' learning for improved learning outcomes as well as inform the TRIPS process.⁴ This presupposes that Subject Leaders plan summative assessments ahead of each TRIPS data deadline.
- ✚ Involve teachers systematically and effectively **checking pupils' understanding** throughout lessons, anticipating where they may need to intervene and doing so with striking impact on the quality of learning.
- ✚ Involve **recognition of achievement**. This may entail merits, letters or postcards home, notes to form tutor and/or Head of Year, displaying pupils' work and references made to outstanding work and/or effort in assemblies.

From this, it is assumed one hour lessons will:

- ✚ Set out clearly the lesson's intentions in a language that is accessible to the students. This should be more than stating what will be done; it is more about what would have been learnt by the end of the lesson.
- ✚ Engage students in a variety of active learning tasks that encompass a range of learning styles.
- ✚ Involve well planned questioning that, far more than testing knowledge, elicits understanding and asks individuals to think, reflect and question their own assumptions.
- ✚ Provide the time for learners to read, understand and take note of any formative feedback from work returned to them, so that they gain an awareness of how to move their learning forward.
- ✚ Make use of a well thought out plenary activity that tests outcomes in relation to the learning intentions set out at the start of the lesson.

And additionally, from time to time lessons will ...

- ✚ Involve some kind of peer or self assessment that asks learners to make judgements set against clearly laid out assessment criteria.

Such lessons are likely to help pupils ...

- ✚ Acquire knowledge, develop understanding and learn and practise skills exceptionally well.
- ✚ Demonstrate excellent concentration even in extended periods without direction from an adult.
- ✚ Develop resilience when tackling challenging activities.
- ✚ Succeed in grasping opportunities to extend and improve their learning, perhaps even in exceptional ways.
- ✚ Progress at least well if not in exemplary ways.

⁴ The Humanities faculty has taken this notion a step further and now across Geography, History and RE at Key Stage 3 uses a 'no-marks' marking policy. A copy of this is on the 'O' drive in the AfL folder.