

Life after levels – what next?

Effective assessment and
approaches to tracking pupil
progress at Key Stage 3

*A summary report from interviews with
multi-academy trust and school leaders*

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pupil progress at Key Stage 3*

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Foreword

Welcome to 'Life after levels – what next?', our research and insight report into how schools are delivering effective assessment and tracking pupil progress at Key Stage 3 following the end of attainment levels.

In this report, which is based on in-depth interviews with multi-academy trust and school leaders and supporting quantitative research by Scholastic, we investigate how the teaching profession has responded to the challenge of developing its own methods for measuring attainment and progress in Years 7–9, the crucial pre-GCSE years.

We draw attention to the issues that schools have faced, and in many cases are still facing, in the transition from levels. We also highlight the response from a representative group of multi-academy trusts and schools, and provide guidance on where schools need support in delivering on this agenda going forward.

The key findings of this report are that:

- Schools are generally united in their view that what levels had become was not fit for purpose and change was needed.
- There has been little guidance for schools in identifying alternatives to levels and on what they report to pupils, parents and regulators.
- There is currently no definitive approach that schools are taking in response – some have developed their own systems, many are continuing with levels under other names, whilst others are still unsure of their plan.
- The lack of a standard system within schools and between schools is expected to create problems around national benchmarking and for pupils and teachers moving between schools operating different systems.
- The issues of effective entry baseline assessment into Year 7 and lack of clarity around new GCSE grades are cited as major related issues for secondary schools.

The reality is that whatever the ultimate answer to 'life after levels' is, including our own solution at Scholastic, we will not have a true picture about whether any of these are truly successful until pupils have gone through the new system and completed their GCSEs. However, through this report, our objective is to shine light on where the teaching profession is now and where we need to go next to help deliver the best possible outcome for pupils.



Catherine Bell

Co-Group Managing Director
Scholastic UK

Acknowledgements

Report sponsors Scholastic UK would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who were interviewed for this report in July 2016:

Suzanne O'Farrell

Curriculum and Assessment Specialist | Association of School and College Leaders

John Henrys

Executive Principal | Brooke Weston Trust

Mark Woods

Chief Executive | Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust

Stephen Munday

Chief Executive | Cam Academy Trust

Martin Smith

Assistant Headteacher | Darrick Wood School, Orpington

Ben Morgan

Assistant Headteacher | Erith School, Bexley

Sarah-Jayne Whyand

Assistant Headteacher – Data and Assessment | King Edward VI School, Bury St Edmunds

Nic Spearman

Assistant Headteacher | King John School, Benfleet

Neil Maslen

Area Advisor | Plymouth CAST

Bethanie Goodliff

Leadership Coach | Ridgewood School, Doncaster

Dawn Morton

Executive Headteacher | The Duke's Middle School and Lindisfarne Middle School, Alnwick

Steve Colledge

Former Secondary Director | The White Horse Federation

(a) The image below shows the parts of a plant.
Write in the boxes the correct name for each part.

One has been done for you.



(b) The table below describes what function these parts perform.
Write the correct number of each part of the plant in the table.

Number	What the part does
4	makes food
	produces pollen
	receives pollen
	attracts insects

Scholastic

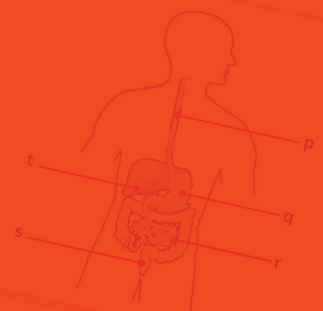
starch

fat

protein

sugar

The diagram shows part of the human digestive system.



What is the name of the small intestine?

What is the name of the large intestine?

The Issue

“Over-complicated, vague and unambiguous” – these were words used by the Department for Education (DfE) to describe assessment levels when announcing its decision to remove these from September 2014. However, following the end of well-established attainment levels at Key Stage 3, secondary schools have been required to develop their own methods for effectively measuring attainment and progress in Years 7–9.

So what was actually wrong with levels? “Levels effectively became a control tool – and that’s not what they were meant for,” says John Henrys, Executive Principal at Brooke Weston Trust. “In some subjects the difference between A/B/C was marginal and open for interpretation. In the worst-case scenario levels were used to illustrate pupil progress that wasn’t there.”

Mark Woods, Chief Executive of Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, agrees that change was needed: “Levels were simply not designed to do the job they ended up doing, and there was too much variation in the criteria for what constituted a ‘best fit’ grade. They didn’t work very well in terms of formative assessment and were limited in terms of scope for summative assessment. Saying that, teachers all knew and got used to the weaknesses in the system and made them work for the children. It’s what we continue to do with the A Level or GCSE grades that students leave education with.”

Nic Spearman, Assistant Headteacher at King John School, Benfleet adds: “National Curriculum levels enabled consistency across schools and as a result there was more confidence in a system we knew. Levels were all pupils knew, we had the security and we felt them to be reliable. However, it got to the stage where schools neglected the criteria aspect of levels and instead were looking at progress as moving pupils up a sub-level every half-term rather than providing valuable feedback.”

School leaders interviewed for this report were generally united in their view that what levels had become was no longer fit for purpose. However, Stephen Munday, Chief Executive of Cam Academy Trust, says the aftermath has left schools with a number of common headaches: “The obvious challenge, and opportunity, is how can we measure progress through Key Stage 3 with proper integrity? We had all got used to levels, even those who disliked them, and it was a nationally agreed measure. Now we have to ensure that, with little guidance on the issue, what we report to parents, pupils and the regulator is appropriate and supports progress. The assessment commission report laid out some key broad principles to follow, but it’s been up to schools to work out how to implement them going forward. Equally, you can’t demonstrate progress without a clear framework. It’s really highlighted the need to sort out the whole principle of assessment.”

“Levels effectively became a control tool – and that’s not what they were meant for... In the worst-case scenario levels were used to illustrate pupil progress that wasn’t there.”

John Henrys

Executive Principal
Brooke Weston Trust

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4	makes food u
	produces pol
	receives polle
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Stephen Munday

Chief Executive
Cam Academy Trust

Finding a consistent and comparable system was highlighted by many interviewees as the most significant issue. “The main challenge we were faced with was comparing like for like, and across all subjects,” explains Bethanie Goodliff, Leadership Coach at Ridgewood School. “We also lost something which says clearly to parents where their child is and where they are aiming for. We have clarity, to some extent, with Levels 9-1 at GCSE - but at Key Stage 3 we’ve had to find something that is meaningful.”

Dawn Morton, Executive Headteacher at The Duke’s Middle School and Lindisfarne Middle School, says her key challenge has to be “to find a consistent system to track progress across a wide variety of subjects and to build confidence in the system: staff initially, pupils, parents and governors”. Like Munday, and many others interviewed for this report, Morton also says there has been little guidance on how best to respond to the situation: “The changes were thrust upon us with very limited direction. Our local authority did not support or direct schools to work together in partnerships and therefore we have a situation where our feeder schools use a weird and wonderful array of systems that all work for them individually, but cannot be used to provide an effective entry baseline.”

The issue of entry baseline is also pinpointed by Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust. “When we were first told that Key Stage 3 attainment levels were ending we recognised that a rainbow would appear in terms of the information we would receive from primary feeders,” admits Woods. “We have moved now into a position of not at all understanding the data that is coming through from primary schools. This has been accompanied by a complete lack of faith in the tests used this summer. At least with levels we had some understanding of where we were, and had standard tests and a sense of moderation in English, maths and science. Now all that work has been undone, we are unclear about what to do. To measure progress, we need to know where we are starting from and where we are going to. This allows us to set milestones at various points in the journey. How can you say that a pupil is doing better than expected if we don’t know what expected is? You need something to pin it too - we don’t have that.”



(a) The image below shows the parts of a plant. Write in the boxes the correct name for each part.

One has been done for you.

“The main challenge we were faced with was comparing like for like, and across all subjects. We also lost something which says clearly to parents where their child is and where they are aiming for.”

Bethanie Goodliff

(b) The table below describes what function the number of each part of the Leadership Coach at Ridgewood School

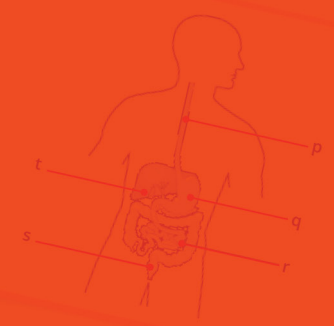
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Dawn Morton

*Executive Headteacher
The Duke’s Middle School
and Lindisfarne Middle
School Trust*

The diagram shows part of the human digestive system.



What is the name of the part marked p?

What is the name of the part marked q?

There is also a cultural issue to overcome in schools, according to Neil Maslen, Area Advisor at Plymouth CAST. “The biggest challenge is that secondary schools have become so used to and comfortable with levels,” he says. “Most teachers have only known levels. Initially there was some uncertainty, and no-one was there to help us, but that moved on to feeling quite liberated and being comfortable in developing our own system. People have been hung up on linear progress and now we get to choose our own terminology. However, the language of assessment is problematic. We have two secondary schools, one of which has 41 potential feeder primaries, and there is no uniform language. There is a lag in the language that primaries use compared to secondaries.”

King Edward VI School has also been keen to embrace the opportunity around developing its own approach to Key Stage 3 assessment. “We had mixed emotions following the end of levels, both within departments and between departments,” says Sarah-Jayne Whyand, Assistant Headteacher - Data and Assessment at the school. “On the one hand, nobody likes change and we all like to be told what to do. On the other hand, whilst we understood the levels we didn’t use them in their fullest sense. It has brought an opportunity to broaden yet re-focus our approach. Developing our preferred model has been a very long and slow process but it has given us an opportunity to come up with an approach that works for the whole school, at a subject level and for individual teachers.”

John Henrys at Brooke Weston Trust suggests that the ‘preferred model’ in schools should not necessarily involve dismissing the principles behind levels. “Rather than the discussion being about ‘life after levels’, what we are really talking about is life where there is an opportunity to do things differently but not throw everything out of the window and start from scratch,” he says. “In that sense, I think the issue has been misbadged. What is more accurate is looking at flight paths and the track from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4, and therefore what the points on that journey look like. We need to track, and for there to be measurement, but some of the principles of levels are still appropriate.”

And Steve Colledge, former Secondary Director at The White Horse Federation, believes the general direction of travel for the profession is understood: “Michael Gove made it very clear at the time - it’s up to the system to decide the way forward post-levels. Teaching has become too much about box-filling a number. Teachers must have knowledge of the child. Before the world of levels teachers understood the class in front of them. It has become a habit to set a module of work, teach it and test it. There needs to be more concentration on whether the child is learning the best way they can.”

(a) The image below shows the parts of a plant.
Write in the boxes the correct name for each part.

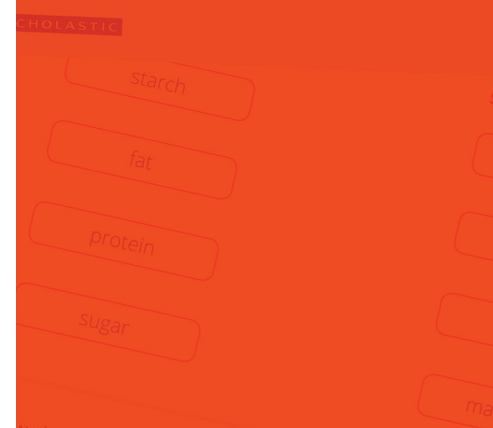
One has been done for you.



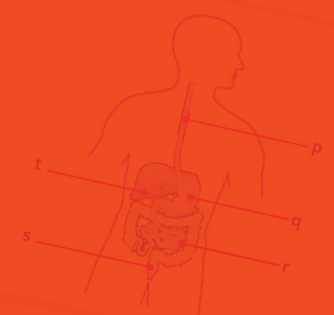
(b) “It has become a habit to set a module of work, teach it and test it. There needs to be more concentration on whether the child is learning the best way they can.”

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Former Secondary Director
The White Horse Federation



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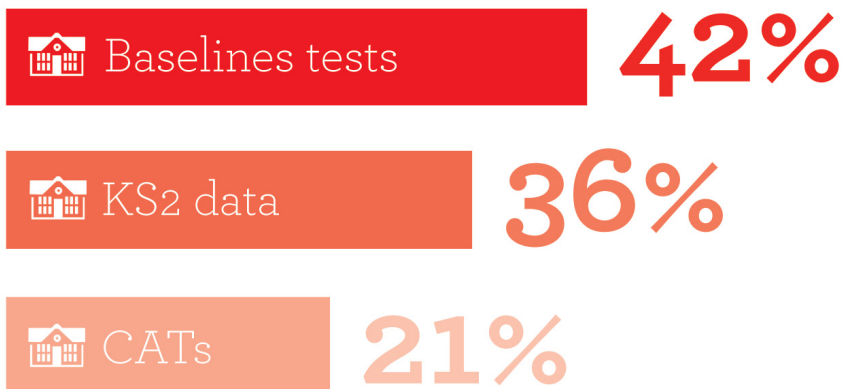
... all intestine?
... each?

The Response

“Schools have really been left in the lurch in terms of identifying alternatives to Key Stage 3 attainment levels,” says Suzanne O’Farrell, Curriculum and Assessment Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). “Schools have found it a challenge, at a time of considerable change in the system, to move away from levels and still be able to track pupil progress effectively. The response has been varied. Some have done little, some have attempted to recreate levels but in other names, and some have taken a really enlightened approach and are focusing on tracking curriculum understanding but not necessarily translating this into a number. The key is linking assessment and progress to the curriculum – assessment needs to shape teacher planning.”

Steve Colledge, former Secondary Director at The White Horse Federation, points out that in his experience schools had largely put the end of Key Stage 3 attainment levels on the ‘back burner’ – and only now are we seeing action. “For those who entered the teaching profession from 1988 this change is almost as traumatic as Britain leaving the EU,” he says. “They have not had the opportunity to assess without putting grades in a box. Two years ago we thought that at least three models would be released, but nothing happened and schools have stood by waiting for clarity. There has been a flurry of activity since Christmas on how assessment works and the guidance on more formative than summative assessment. And since Easter we’ve had lots of last-minute work on the curriculum and information being released for certain subjects. A different mindset is needed – and now we are seeing different approaches. Some schools are doing 9-1 GCSE grades for Years 7-11 and others are doing flight paths – though this is nothing new as we’ve always had targets.”

How will secondary schools measure the baseline levels of the new Year 7 cohort in September 2016?



*Results based on a March 2016 survey of 122 secondary schools where respondents included Headteachers, Deputy Heads, subject heads and classroom teachers.

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Schools Unsure of 'Life After Levels' Response

Research undertaken by Scholastic found that, as recently as March 2016, nearly half of schools were still unsure about their plan for tracking progress in Key Stage 3. Scholastic's survey of 122 secondary schools revealed that 49% of respondents (comprising of Headteachers, Deputy Heads, subject heads and classroom teachers) did not have a plan for the 2016-17 academic year for tracking progress in Years 7-9. Whilst half of all schools said they would prefer the same assessment system across the whole school in every subject, interviewees also cited a lack of consistency on approach within schools, between schools and across geographical regions. At the time of the survey, 42% of schools who responded said they were opting for their own baseline tests for measuring the Year 7 cohort. However, there was also a reliance on Key Stage 2 data (36%) and CATs - Cognitive Abilities Tests (21%). In the main, schools were found to be using a mixture of the new Key Stage 2 data and information from primary schools together with their own tests and classroom assessments.

"We resisted it (the move away from levels) for as long as we could," admits Mark Woods, Chief Executive of Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust. "We had established a working common understanding of levels and had some standardisation. In dealing with 'what next' we have introduced systems that build on the principles of levels - we now operate a two-year Key Stage 3 and focus on nailing English, maths and science progress. However, the issue is how you can ever demonstrate good progress in subjects where there is no common baseline coming in. We've had to take difficult decisions in subjects like art, where there is no baseline, and we don't have the intellectual capital or data to make a comparison. Many secondaries use early assessment in the first two weeks of term, or even on 'move up days' because there is little else to baseline to provide comparisons we can trust or understand. We've bought in comparative data tests to provide a consistent baseline, and to provide a clear measure of progress by the end of each year in Key Stage 3 to ratify teacher assessments of progress. It also provides the security of having a national data set to compare our students' work to."



"We resisted it (the move away from levels) for as long as we could ... We had established a working common understanding of levels and had some standardisation"

Mark Woods

Chief Executive
Cambridge Meridian
Academies Trust

What approaches have schools taken?

Brooke Weston Trust

“A big challenge is that we have been unclear on what GCSEs look like at the other end, so it is practically hard to map Key Stage 2 through to the end of Key Stage 4. We started looking at flight paths, all using a data and analytics tool behind them, and have been following this since the start of the year. What we’ve achieved, I think, is clarity and simplicity. If we are dealing with simple data people will understand it, and the more effective our response will be. Within the flight paths system we can move between parallel lines. So if our data capture shows a pupil is performing well we can move them up a flight path. If they fall below the requirements then we can intervene. We have used the language of levels where appropriate, and written new language where we need to. The system is working for our own performance analysis. For parents, we have discovered they don’t want the complex data. They just want to know if their son or daughter is on track, what their attitude to learning is like, and ultimately how they are behaving. So we have simplified what we report back from data capture points and now show where pupils are on the flight path in Key Stage 3 – if they are on track, and a comment on their attitude and behaviour.”

John Henrys, Executive Principal

King Edward VI School

“What we have come up with is an approach that we feel is workable. It is largely numerical in background, though it is not presented to pupils and parents in that way. Essentially we will measure students in five ways: basic, developing, secure, advanced and excelling. This is perhaps more subjective than levels but it will clearly show the path to progression. In development there has been ongoing conversation between subject leaders about the issue of whether all subjects are progressive. The perspective of some is that not all subjects are about going up a ladder, and actually that many are about breadth and depth. So a challenge for us is about representing the views of all subject leaders yet highlighting the need to demonstrate expected progress to GCSE and A Level whilst also enriching the curriculum. We came up with the first model in April 2015 and it took 13 months to get to our final version for implementation this September. There is still work to be done but it will provide consistency across departments, which we have never had. It will also provide consistency in the language used in class. This same language will go back to parents in their children’s workbooks and report on what they need to do keep improving.”

Sarah-Jayne Whyand, Assistant Headteacher – Data and Assessment

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*Assistant Headteacher
– Data Assessment
King Edward VI School*

Plymouth CAST

“We work differently to a typical MAT in that we allow our secondary schools to make their own decisions at a local level rather than operate them centrally – our two secondaries are also at very different stages and we recognise they are best placed to take the most appropriate action for their own community around assessment. This year both schools have developed different systems in response. One has a model leading from GCSE down, not Year 7 up, which is logical. The other has bought in ideas from different organisations. In terms of hard impact, it’s too early to say. However, we recognise that the so-called ‘forgotten years’ at Key Stage 3 are critical and we are monitoring things carefully. Whatever system we are using, though, a key success factor is whether children understand how they are progressing. It must be able to measure progress for the child as well as the school. Now we have diagnostic tools to identify gaps in an individual child’s progress and respond accordingly. We also believe our system will enable us to identify issues more quickly in groups, for example if children are underachieving or not hitting expected.”

Neil Maslen, Area Advisor

King John School

“In September we will launch our new system in response. This is the culmination of two years’ work where we have reviewed our curriculum, worked with primary colleagues to create a high-level transition programme, and developed a best-practice grading system which mirrors the 9-1 Key Stage 4 grading system. We’ve run pilot schemes in different departments and opened our pupils’ eyes to being able to do a lot more than they thought. For higher ability pupils it will challenge them further and in more depth. For lower ability pupils it will help them to move away from sitting on the same level, which can be very de-motivating. We will have improved baseline tests – which account for the challenge in the new Key Stage 2 curriculum – alongside CAT scores and the Key Stage 2 scaled scores to give us a detailed view of each learner on entry. There are elements of caution around the new scaled scores and what a ‘100 pupil’ looks like, so we are conscious of the need to look at other measures. Then we want to develop our shared language of learning. The process will evolve – it’s work in progress – and whilst we are optimistic that we will see real impact in the months and years following the launch we are also realistic that until we see these learners complete their GCSEs we will not have the wealth of data that we currently do with the levels that we are used to. We need a full picture which realistically can only be seen once learners have progressed through the whole Key Stage 3 and 4 learning journey.”

Nic Spearman, Assistant Headteacher

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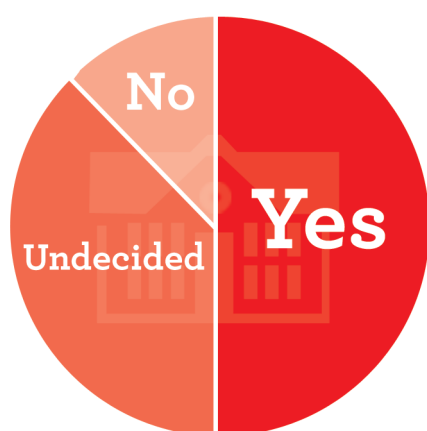
“We are also realistic that until we see these learners complete their GCSEs we will not have the wealth of data that we currently do with the levels that we are used to.”

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Cam Academy Trust has developed an overarching Trust strategy which schools use and report on in their own way. “However, from what I’ve seen every Trust has developed their own system,” says Chief Executive Stephen Munday. “There is no clear answer at present, but that is bound to be the case when you lose a well-established national system and bring in new assessment. If there is fairly standard practice there will be a more standard system. But the blunt truth is there is no agreed system. What this suggests is that Ofsted may be wise to do some reporting on this across the sector.”

Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust’s Mark Woods agrees with Munday: “There is surely a major national piece of work that should be done around why this system changed without investment in its replacement. I feel frustrated about where we are now – it’s been an unnecessary distraction – with thousands of schools and staff all working on the same issue.



50%
of secondary schools say that they would prefer the same assessment system across the whole school in every subject

*Results based on a March 2016 survey of 122 secondary schools where respondents included Headteachers, Deputy Heads, subject heads and classroom teachers.

Parents are confused, but they were confused before. From their perspective they just want to know how their child is doing versus their classmates; are they making progress and fulfilling their potential? More importantly they want to know that their child is happy, and there is clarity on what they need to do to do better.”

Dawn Morton, Executive Headteacher at The Duke’s Middle School and Lindisfarne Middle School, also has concerns: “We have introduced a system using the 9–1 GCSE gradings for English and maths. This has proved fairly effective for most pupils; however, it’s not as effective for the least able pupils. For all other subjects we’ve designed our own bespoke system. This was very time-consuming for staff and meant a great deal of CPD time was needed to help departments to develop the criteria and moderate against the new criteria. The key problem is pupils moving between schools mid-key stage as so many different systems are used. Another problem relates to the amount of time needed to develop staff confidence. Finally, will Ofsted have confidence in the system you are using? Who knows, but it adds another level of uncertainty to the Ofsted process.”

“The key problem is pupils moving between schools mid-key stage as so many different systems are used. Another problem relates to the amount of time needed to develop staff confidence.”

Dawn Morton

*Executive Headteacher
The Duke’s Middle School
and Lindisfarne Middle
School*

ACSL's Suzanne O'Farrell adds: "Ofsted have clarified what they want to discuss in terms of assessment. They will want to know how assessment is being used to support pupils' progress and how assessment is aligned to the curriculum. Inspectors will look at whether schools have identified the key milestones and big ideas in each subject, how they know the extent to which pupils have grasped these big ideas, and ultimately what interventions and challenge they are implementing to support pupils. We are encouraging schools to ensure they identify the key ideas or threshold concepts when assessing so they can be sure whether students understand and have grasped these throughout Key Stage 3."

Former Secondary Director Steve Colledge maintains that the unprecedented change in the education system is not helping schools' develop the 'ultimate solution'. "The National Curriculum was brought in to look at students' understanding of the scheme of work rather than what is tested - and at the moment we don't know what that scheme of work at GCSE looks like," he explains. "In the past schools have had a bit more money and a bit more time to implement big changes. This is the first time we've had such change throughout all key stages at the same time. Schools are simply overloaded. There is not the time to think about it and we're seeing quick fixes and solutions. We would be much better prepared if schools had been given three or four years to run the changes in, at least we could have worked on the schemes of work for a useful length of time. I can't think of any situation before where we've had such massive change in advance of testing. It would have been far better to delay the introduction of the new GCSE or A Level (one or the other) to give everyone more time."



49%
of secondary schools
say they do not have a
plan for tracking
Key Stage 3 progress
for September 2016[†]

[†]Results based on a March 2016 survey of 122 secondary schools where respondents included Headteachers, Deputy Heads, subject heads and classroom teachers.

(a) The image below shows the parts of a plant. Write in the boxes the correct name for each part.

One has been done for you
"Ofsted ... will want to know how assessment is being used to support pupils' progress and how assessment is aligned to the curriculum."

Suzanne O'Farrell
Curriculum and Assessment Specialist
Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)

(b) The image below shows a cell. Write in the boxes the correct number of each part of the cell to perform the function these parts perform.

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BIOLASTIC

starch

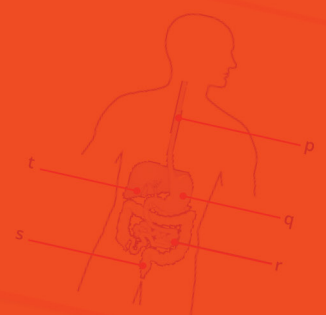
fat

protein

sugar

mar

shows part of the human digestive system.



all intestine?
each?

The Future

At the top of schools' 'wish list' is a scheme to support effective assessment and approaches to tracking pupil progress at Key Stage 3, moving towards standardisation to enable benchmarking and greater confidence in baseline assessment into Year 7.

"In the interest of fairness, it is only right that all schools have standard baseline tests in each subject to support the transition between primary and secondary," says Bethanie Goodliff, Leadership Coach at Ridgewood School. "You can't use English, maths and science tests to judge what a pupil is capable of in all other subjects. With subjects like art and music we didn't know where pupils were when they walked through the door. We're fortunate in that we have a whole week of primary transition here but modelling in creative subjects has been very difficult and we often amended our baseline and targets after initial teacher assessment. So we need an effective way of giving all pupils a chance to be measured when they come in."

"There are still gaps, and secondary schools generally are massively inconsistent in benchmarking new pupils in Year 7," acknowledges Sarah-Jayne Whyand, Assistant Headteacher - Data and Assessment at King Edward VI School. "It is also about what we are being asked to measure. Standard baseline tests in each subject to support the transition between primary and secondary phase would still be useful. However, for us there are two phases with our system. We are working with our middle school to decipher where pupils are and where we envisage them to be. Next year we will extend this to primary schools and eventually everyone will be talking the same language."

"We also have concern about interpreting the data coming up from Year 6 - what does this tell us?" asks Neil Maslen, Area Advisor at Plymouth CAST. "Most secondary schools, including our own, will need to run their own baseline tests." John Henrys, Executive Principal at Brooke Weston Trust, agrees: "For the last four years we have undertaken baseline testing for Year 7s, and we will continue to do that for the next 12-18 months at least. Not because we don't trust the data coming from primary schools, it just gives us something consistent to deal with. It also seems to me that most schools are using the 9-1 scale, and working back from the top end, but there is no uniform approach. For us, we are always keen to benchmark against other schools outside the Trust, but if everybody is doing their own thing it's hard to get an accurate reading."

"My own concern is around standardisation," admits Nic Spearman, Assistant Headteacher at King John School. "If every school does something differently how can they be compared at Key Stage 3?"

"In the interest of fairness, it is only right that all schools have standard baseline tests in each subject to support the transition between primary and secondary."

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Leadership Coach
Ridgewood School

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Executive Principal
Brooke Weston Trust

Maslen concurs: “It’s about having a consistent approach in Years 7-9. What does progress mean for the child? What do they understand? How do they get there? There also needs to be consideration to teacher induction – most schools are using different systems, and new arrivals coming to Plymouth CAST will have to get to grips with ours.” Goodliff adds that it is “also hard to measure someone coming in from another school which might be using a different system”.

The longer term situation, as ever, is unclear. “The other fear is are we genuinely doing the right thing?” says Spearman. “We’ve had no form of directive and if a new standard system is introduced then all our hard work is wasted. That could happen, of course, with a new government. Autonomy is good, but without a clear national directive on how we should be measuring attainment and progress, there is always going to be a doubt that where we are now is where we will be in a few years’ time.”

Maslen also says there is anxiety around “what might happen”: “Will Ofsted have their own preferred system? Schools must justify the systems they are using and the benefits for pupils. We’ve been disappointed by the lack of guidance and the DfE has seriously underestimated the problems this whole transition has caused.”

Stephen Munday, Chief Executive at Cam Academy Trust, summarises where the sector is in July 2016: “Everything has changed. All key stages and the national assessment level system have completely changed. Key Stage 2 SATs were clear but now they are in the bin. The new SATs scaled score system has thrown up questions on what these results mean and what that tells us about pupils coming into Year 7. There is no prior benchmark and this will take time to unpick. We are going to see more uncertainty. How can we get a handle on expectations on progress when we have got something new? For the last 15 years we have undertaken CATs in Year 7 and we might need to use them. We know where pupils have got to and are pleased to have that at least. We’re not sure what the new SATs say, but we have a more reliable way of benchmarking for now.”

For Mark Woods, Chief Executive of Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, there is a much bigger conversation to be had. “The DfE or Ofsted now need to look at what we have created, what Key Stage 3 curriculum looks like and recreate a system that makes sense. They could commission a group of MATs or teaching schools, but we need to understand what is needed between Year 6 and 11 and a sense of what good practice looks like. I do, unfortunately, think that the re-introduction of Year 9 tests is on the horizon because Ofsted/DFE will want to see hard accountability data – as opposed to something we actually find useful as educators. We want to identify and address shortfalls in student learning. We are encouraged to obsess over student outcomes in quite narrow, often poorly devised tests.

One has been done for you
 “Autonomy is good, but without a clear national directive on how we should be measuring attainment and progress, there is always going to be a doubt that where we are now is where we will be in a few years’ time.”

(b) The table below describes what function the _____ of each part of the _____ perform.

Nic Spearman

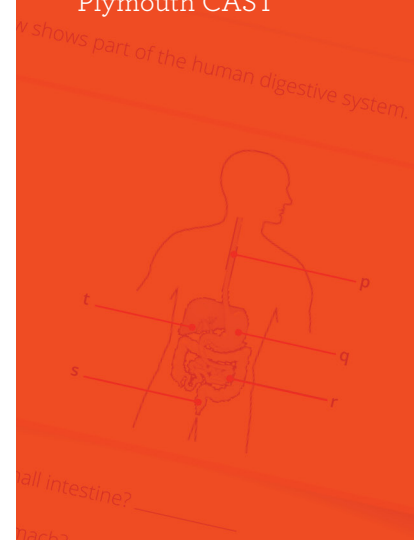
Assistant Headteacher
 King John School

Number	What the p
4	makes food u
	produces pol
	receives polle
	attracts insect

“There also needs to be consideration to teacher induction – most schools are using different systems, and new arrivals coming to Plymouth CAST will have to get to grips with ours.”

Neil Maslen

Area Advisor
 Plymouth CAST



It is no way to develop an education system. There is lots of work to be done going forward and we can only hope for greater clarity, and soon.”

Despite these questions, former Secondary Director at The White Horse Federation, Steve Colledge, says there are some certainties. “Years 7-11 all did levels. The CAT tests haven’t changed. With the CAT scores teachers will know what a high, middle and lower ability student looks like. But how they will do in exams we don’t know.” However, Colledge is also seeking clarity as we enter a period when schools will again be challenged to ‘do more with less’. “There will be big financial cuts in schools at a time when new work and resources are required for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5,” he says. “Schools won’t be able to afford to send out staff for training and they will increasingly seek collaboration with others for free. Results will be volatile, and in some cases pointless. It is generally accepted that schools can’t demonstrate year-on-year improvement using the new forms of assessment. Hopefully we will see sharing and understanding of the English and maths GCSEs so that Year 10 is taught better, and we will have appropriate preparation for other subjects.”



“There is lots of work to be done going forward and we can only hope for greater clarity, and soon.”

Mark Woods

Chief Executive
Cambridge Meridian
Academies Trust

(b) The table below describes what function these perform. Write the correct number of each part of the perform.

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	attracts insect

CHOLASTIC

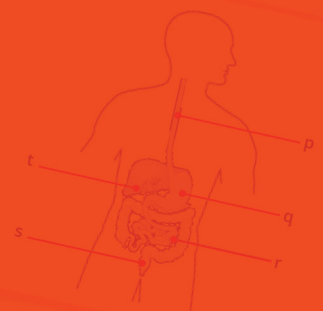
starch

fat

protein

sugar

y shows part of the human digestive system.



all intestine?

each?

The Last Word

Martin Smith

Assistant Headteacher
Darrick Wood School

The end of well-established Key Stage 3 Attainment Levels in September 2014 was greeted with huge reticence from schools and created a real sense of panic amongst teachers – teachers were left feeling extremely insecure about being told to go away and develop their own assessment methods without guidance.

The reality is that ‘life after levels’ has been a good thing because of what was fundamentally wrong with levels in the first place. They were not designed to be an assessment system. They were equipped to respond to government on ‘whole levels’ – a description of attainment at the end of each programme of study – but were too broad and wide for application within schools, even with the later introduction of sub-levels.

The system itself was not fit for purpose. When levels were the norm they were viewed as thresholds and teaching became focused on the next threshold, instead of ensuring pupils were secure in their subject knowledge, skills and understanding. The worst-case scenario was that the depth and breadth of understanding was forsaken as levels were used as the ‘best fit’ model. This meant that a student could have serious gaps in their knowledge and understanding, but still be placed within a given level. Teachers, pupils and their parents were not always clear where the strengths lay and where the gaps were. As a result, measuring how much progress was being made in Key Stage 3 and predicting outcomes in GCSEs became somewhat patchy and erratic.

So, in effect, schools were left with three options on the table: stick with levels for as long as possible, prepare to purchase an ‘off the shelf’ system that was being built by a third party, or devise an entirely new system from scratch.

Initially, the government launched a competition encouraging schools to develop and share innovative new assessment methods for other schools to use. Eight winners were chosen by an independent panel on behalf of the DfE in May 2014. However, there was little information and evidence coming out at a time when most schools were seeking answers to develop their own plans.

By this time, in any case, we were already well on the way to creating our own system at Darrick Wood School. Driven by our forward-thinking local authority in Bromley we formed an initial working party with other schools in the area to exchange ideas and come up with a workable solution.

(a) The image below shows the parts of a plant.
Write in the boxes the correct name for each part.

One has been done for you.



(b) The table below describes what function these parts perform.
Write the correct number of each part of the plant in the table.

Number	What the part does
4	makes food
	produces pollen
	receives pollen
	attracts insects

CLASSIFICATION

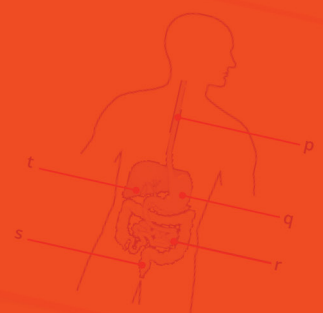
starch

fat

protein

sugar

The diagram shows part of the human digestive system.



What is the name of the part of the digestive system that is labeled 'p'?

What is the name of the part of the digestive system that is labeled 'q'?

From our side, that solution went on to take the form of STEPS – Strategic Targets for Educational Progress and Success.

STEPS is an assessment and progress monitoring, tracking and reporting programme for secondary schools. It uses the frameworks and assessment focuses already created by subject leaders since the introduction of Assessing Pupils' Progress and the National Strategies, adopting positive elements from a range of systems to create a comprehensive, proven solution to life after levels. Crucially it is compatible with SIMS and uses FFT Aspire and Cognitive Abilities Tests/MidYIS data to help triangulate baseline data for each student.

The cornerstone of STEPS is a simple grid and a progressive set of attainment targets that present challenge at all levels of ability throughout Key Stage 3. The grids are broken down into subject 'Strands' and then 'Steps'. This level of detail means pupils can make fine levels of progress and teachers can create incremental, personalised targets based on assessment throughout Key Stage 3. It also provides crucial baseline assessment tests; purposeful, valid data; clear targets for pupils, and consistent reporting.

There is definitely still work to be done as a sector. It varies greatly how effective secondary schools are, right now, in benchmarking new pupils in Year 7 and measuring progress in Years 7-9. Some had an idea on what they want to do and have developed their systems but, in my view, many have not thought enough about the progression side. Teachers, being teachers, are trying to make it work. There isn't a week goes by when I don't get calls about assessment without levels – there are lots of good ideas out there, but nothing proven, and arguably nothing tried and tested like we have with STEPS.

Martin Smith is Assistant Headteacher at Darrick Wood School and designer and developer of STEPS

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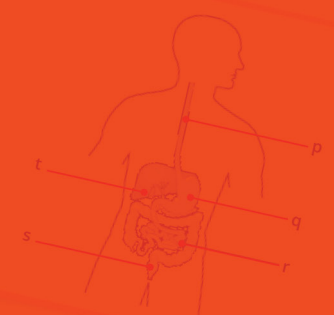
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SCIENCE

- starch
- fat
- protein
- sugar
- ma

... shows part of the human digestive system.



... all intestine? ... each?

The STEPS Approach

Darrick Wood School

Darrick Wood School in Orpington, Kent is the 'birthplace' of what is now STEPS (Strategic Targets for Educational Progress and Success in Key Stage 3), published by Scholastic. Darrick Wood sought to develop its own new assessment and progress monitoring, tracking and reporting programme for Years 7-9 following the end of levels in September 2014.

The project was led by Assistant Headteacher Martin Smith, in conjunction with a team of specialists at Darrick Wood, which holds both Teaching School status and the World Class School Quality Mark. "When we started this work there was a mixture of excitement and concern amongst those of us involved," Martin admits. "Excitement because it presented a genuine opportunity to devise an entirely new system from scratch, one that fulfils the objectives and ethos of our school, but concern because we were going into the unknown in terms of creating additional workload on top of everything else we do as teachers. Then the excitement really took over and now I believe we have a system that works not just for our school but is flexible enough to be adapted to all schools."

The cornerstone of STEPS is a simple grid for each subject and a progressive set of attainment targets that present challenge at all levels of ability throughout Key Stage 3. The grids are broken down into a template of nine 'steps' across four, five or six different subject strands. This level of detail means pupils can make fine levels of progress and teachers can create incremental, personalised targets based on assessment in Key Stage 3. 'Expected' progress is the equivalent to movement of one whole step in each year of Key Stage 3.

Martin explains: "At the beginning of the first term in Year 7, all pupils undertake initial baseline testing in the form of a written test or practical assessment, depending on the subject in question. This subject-specific testing gives every pupil an entry point into each strand. Through ongoing formative assessment the pupils' progression can then be measured over the course of Key Stage 3. Constant exposure to the 'big picture' is achieved by promoting the use of STEPS in class and more widely to parents."

An initial pilot began in September 2015 for Year 7 pupils and, at a presentation to parents in January, Martin says the positive feedback was overwhelming: "STEPS provides a very simple overview of where a pupil is at and what they need to do to improve. Parents have loved the simplicity of a quick check via the 'Step Point' score but also the level of detail that is there if they want to see it.

"STEPS provides a very simple overview of where a pupil is at and what they need to do to improve. Parents have loved the simplicity of a quick check via the 'Step Point' score but also the level of detail that is there if they want to see it."

Martin Smith

Assistant Headteacher
Darrick Wood School

They have realised the potential of having several ready-made targets and have appreciated the level of detail in each ‘Step Grid’ that the breakdown of a whole key stage provides them.”

Teachers, too, have seen significant benefits already. “Colleagues are really relishing the advantages that such a focused approach can bring and, as they have learnt the system, have really come to value its structure,” Martin reveals. “Many have commented on the new-found focus to parental meetings and the guidance and support it gives them during the report writing process. Subject leaders have started to analyse the results from each data collection window to identify strands of their subject which the pupils are finding more difficult and/or which teachers are finding more difficult to deliver.”

It has also increased support for pupils, Martin says: “The level of detail has helped to raise an early warning to individual pupils, as well as teaching groups who are seemingly making unusual rates of progress. It has allowed them to put in place support for pupils and/or groups and in some cases additional training for teachers.”

Now, with backing from Scholastic, other schools are able to purchase STEPS themselves. “What schools are looking for is confidence that any new system will not disappear overnight,” Martin says. “As teachers, we don’t want to be changing systems again in five years’ time – we are looking for security, and STEPS provides that. We have shown that our system is effective – it measures progress and assessment simultaneously, and creates easily understandable data and a structure for teaching. It also ultimately saves time. There is initial work to be done in getting to grips with the system, that is normal, but once that time investment has been made the return is huge. Finally, it is completely flexible and adaptable, so schools can adapt STEPS for their own purposes.”

“As teachers, we don’t want to be changing systems again in five years’ time – we are looking for security, and STEPS provides that. We have shown that our system is effective – it measures progress and assessment simultaneously.”

Martin Smith

*Assistant Headteacher
Darrick Wood School*

- starch
- fat
- protein
- sugar

... shows part of the human digestive system.



... all intestine?
... each?

The STEPS Approach

Erith School

Erith School in the London Borough of Bexley adapted the principles of an initial version of what is now STEPS (Strategic Targets for Educational Progress and Success in Key Stage 3) to guide its own response to the end of levels.

Ben Morgan, Assistant Headteacher at Erith School, was tasked with creating an alternative assessment system to evaluate and monitor academic progress for Years 7-9. In September 2014 Ben began to seek out best practice in other schools and was introduced to Darrick Wood School which has now gone on to fully develop the STEPS model with Scholastic.

“In the minefield created by removing levels at Key Stage 3 schools were very much left to their own devices in terms of deciding what assessment models to use,” Ben explains. “I looked at many options and found the system being developed by Darrick Wood to be the most appropriate to our needs. I really liked it a lot. Not only did it give us a better model to pursue ourselves, I could see immediately that it would reduce teacher workload. The flexibility of Darrick Wood’s system ensured that we were able to tweak it to meet our school’s needs. We have gone on to produce similar grids for each subject, in a system that internally we call ‘Steps2Success’. We’ve gone from a much prescribed approach under levels to one that is more open-ended, which is what we wanted.”

As part of its own innovation, Erith School has developed a new assessment vision to support preparations for Key Stage 4. It includes enabling commitments to embed the skills required for Key Stage 3 success, clarity for pupils and parents, a focus on guidance, evidencing progress, and overall positivity in the language used. “Whether you use levels, grades or steps it is the same ladder we are trying to climb,” Ben says. “The difference is in moving the discussion from ‘How good are you at maths? 4B’ and ‘What would make you better? 4A’ to deeper knowledge and appreciation of the skills required to improve. In all subjects, students now know their strengths and areas for development and more importantly they know what it is they need to do to make further progress.”

Ben, supported by Director of Student Progress, Heather Viligiardi, launched the new assessment model in Years 7 and 8 in September 2015. From September Erith School will introduce a five-year flight path to support progress into Key Stage 4. “Staff, students and parents have found it easy to use and it has already helped to raise standards at Key Stage 3,” Ben reveals. “We’ve been able to get the breadth of each subject across to parents, carers and other stakeholders – it has provided substance that they are able to access.

- (a) The image below shows the parts of a plant. Write in the boxes the correct name for each part.
- One has been done for you.
- (b) The table below describes what function these parts perform. Write the correct number of each part of the plant in the boxes.

Number	What the part does
4	makes food
	produces pollen
	receives pollen
	attracts insects

“The difference is in moving the discussion from ‘How good are you at maths? 4B’ and ‘What would make you better? 4A’ to deeper knowledge and appreciation of the skills required to improve.”

Ben Morgan

Assistant Headteacher
Erith School

Middle leaders are taking ownership of the reformed GCSE specifications and what we have to do to be successful at Key Stage 4. It will bring a much smoother transition. We will monitor and evidence progress, of course, and expect that further tweaking will be needed. But now teachers are very clear that by putting in a set of numbers at the start, middle and end of the year the whole thing is bigger than one assessment.”

For Ben, there is a confidence and reassurance that the school is heading in the right direction. “We’ve had visitors from other schools who have come in to look at our work in this area, and also our work around Progress 8 at Key Stage 4,” he says. “We are an improving school and our results at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 were noted by Ofsted in a recent visit. There is more work to do, of course, and we need to keep an eye on Key Stage 2 data as well as baseline data to inform the path for development. It’s a case of leaving no stone unturned. We are talking about our new system to Year 6 parents to make sure that even before pupils come into the school there is an understanding of our approach.”

However, Ben is continually looking for best practice in other schools to inform his own model. “It’s really good to see that development of Darrick Wood’s model with Scholastic – it’s a welcome innovation – and I am certainly keen to see what we can learn from it,” he adds.

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“It’s a case of leaving no stone unturned. We are talking about our new system to Year 6 parents to make sure that even before pupils come into the school there is an understanding of our approach.”

(b) The table below describes the function of each part of the human digestive system. Write the correct number of each part in the boxes.

Ben Morgan

Assistant Headteacher
Erith School

Number	What the part does
1	receives pollen
2	produces pollen
3	attracts insects
4	makes food

Scholastic

starch

fat

protein

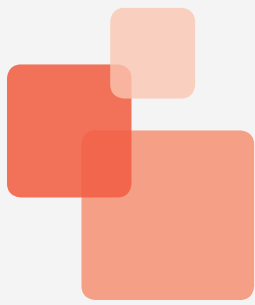
sugar

Diagram shows part of the human digestive system.



What is the name of the small intestine?

What is the name of the large intestine?



STEPS

Strategic Targets for Educational Progress and Success at Key Stage 3

Find out about more about STEPS, watch videos and read case studies at www.scholastic.co.uk/steps





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Download this report: www.scholastic.co.uk/ks3

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Scholastic

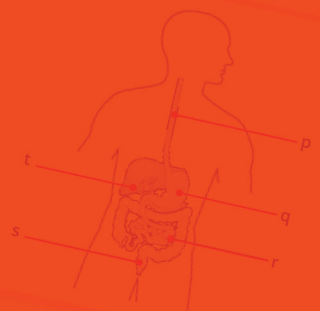
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