

EDUQ&As:

STEPS

MARTIN SMITH, ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER AT DARRICK WOOD SCHOOL IN ORPINGTON, DESCRIBES A POWERFUL NEW ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESSION SOLUTION FOR KS3

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TS Why did you think a new assessment and progress system was needed for KS3?

MS Since September 2014, assessing without levels has become a reality and schools have had to find new methods of assessment and tracking progress. Levels were always a very broad model of *best fit* which presented many challenges for schools, parents and students (with some students being more concerned about what level they were rather than the substance of what they know, can do and understand). The STEPS system allows for meaningful reporting of both attainment and progress in all subjects studied at Key Stage 3. The programme of study for each National Curriculum subject is divided into Strands and progressive Steps with a parity in the level of complexity. This *bottom up* approach to building the system ensures that the curriculum requirements are met while progressing students towards GCSE readiness by the end of Key Stage 3.

Who was involved in its development?

The team at Darrick Wood liked the opportunity that developing an in-house system would present, but we were only too acutely aware that it was a gargantuan task; the hours of work from a huge number of people to take the initial ideas to the next level were clear for most to see. A steering group in the school was established containing a broad cross-section of staff with experienced representatives of each subject area studied at KS3, as well as members of the Senior Leadership Team.

How does it work?

The cornerstone of the system is a simple STEPS Grid for each subject and a progressive set of attainment targets that break the curriculum into manageable chunks. At the beginning of the first term in Year 7, all students undertake baseline testing in the form of a written test or practical assessment, depending on the subject in question. This subject-specific testing gives every student an entry point into each Strand. Through ongoing formative assessment the students' progression can then be measured over the course of KS3.

What are the particular benefits of STEPS for students?

Students are introduced to the STEPS system at the beginning of Year 7 and constant exposure to the 'big picture' is achieved simply by promoting

the use of the STEPS Grids throughout the school – and more widely to parents. Once students become used to and feel at ease with STEPS, most will be able to identify their own targets in each Strand. The class teacher's role, through formative marking, is to suggest appropriate strategies and work with the pupil to find the ways to meet the next challenge. Parents feel empowered, gain in confidence and become highly supportive of the process within the school largely because the system is very logical and makes sense; having their own handbook of STEPS Grids has also proved to be very reassuring!

And for teachers?

Teachers relish the advantages that such a focused approach affords and really value its structure. Many teachers have commented upon a newfound focus to parental meetings and the guidance and support it gives them during the

report-writing process. Subject Leaders are able 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. The level of detail helps to raise an early warning to individual pupils, as well as teaching groups who are seemingly making unusual rates of progress.

What else do schools need to know?

There is so much to say about STEPS that I can't fit in here; from how it works with SIMs, to how it uses FFT Aspire and CATS/MidYiS data to help triangulate baseline setting for each pupil. The best thing is to take a look at www.scholastic.co.uk/steps or email consultants@scholastic.co.uk and a Scholastic representative can visit you in school to discuss your requirements. Starter Kits are available for £550.

