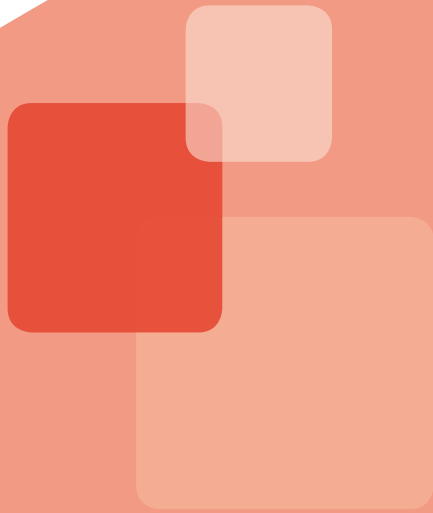


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STEPS

Strategic Targets for Educational
Progress and Success at Key Stage 3

Case Studies 2017

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DARRICK WOOD SCHOOL

AN ACADEMY AND TEACHING SCHOOL

“Colleagues are really relishing the advantages that such a focused approach can afford”

Darrick Wood School in Kent is the ‘birthplace’ of what is now STEPS. Following the end of Key Stage 3 Attainment Levels in September 2014, Darrick Wood sought to develop its own new assessment and progress monitoring, tracking and reporting programme for Years 7-9.

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 admitted. “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 KS3. 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 KS3. ‘Expected’ progress is the equivalent to movement of one whole step in each year of KS3.

Martin explained: “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 training gives every pupil an entry point into each strand. Through ongoing formative assessment the pupils’ progression can then be measured over the course of KS3. 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 2016, Martin said 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,” Martin said.

“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. 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 afford and, as they have learnt the system, have really come to value its structure,” Martin revealed. “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.” For pupils, Martin said: “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, schools are able to purchase STEPS for their school. “What schools are looking for is confidence that any new system will not disappear overnight,” Martin said. “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 only normal, but once that time investment has been made the return is huge. Finally, it is completely flexible and adaptable, so schools can attune STEPS for their purposes.”

STEPS utilises the frameworks and assessment focuses already created by subject leaders since the introduction of Assessing Pupils’ Progress (APP) and the National Strategies. It is compatible with SIMS and uses FFT Aspire and Cognitive Abilities Tests/MidYIS data to help triangulate baseline data for each pupil.

Case study developed in January 2017.

Acle Academy

Care, Challenge and Enrichment



“The STEPS baseline assessments have been an important addition”

Acle Academy, part of the Norfolk-based Wensum Trust of five schools specialising in early years to sixth form, has used STEPS as part of its overall solution to Key Stage 3 assessment following the end of well-established levels.

Jimmy Day, Acting Assistant Headteacher and Data Manager, recalled the key challenges in moving to a post-levels solution. “Firstly, we had to get teachers to move on from the security of levels,” he said. “Then it has been about finding consistency between departments and developing a way of measuring progress that helps with the Progress 8 measure at the end of Year 11. Despite the abolishment of levels, staff, governors, parents and students all seem to want to know what ‘level’ they are working at.”

The academy sought to overcome these challenges by sharing best practice, attending conferences and data workshops but, most importantly says Jimmy, “using our initiative” in the development of a new system for tracking assessment and

pupil progress in Years 7-9. “Two aspects of our system are particularly worthy of focus at this stage,” he said. “The use of mastery statements – we had a lot of issues with buy-in from staff to begin with but seem to be getting there now. The other is assessing against learning objectives – this is working to some degree but it currently takes a lot of time.”

Jimmy was first introduced to STEPS last summer but “as we got wind of it too late and were already setting a system up” the academy has not used it in its entirety. “However, we really liked the baseline assessments,” he said. “We have implemented these into our own system and now have effective baseline assessments for all subjects in years 7-9. This has given us a great starting point from which to work from.”

Acle Academy has now set its sights on further developing, monitoring and evaluating its system. “We would like to make things quicker and more streamlined – that’s our priority,” Jimmy said. “We are happy with the progress we have made to date, and the STEPS baseline assessments have been an important addition.”

Case study developed in January 2017.



“Staff, students and parents have found it easy to use and it has already helped to raise standards at Key Stage 3”

Erith School in the London Borough of Bexley adapted the principles of an initial version of what is now STEPS to guide its own response to the end of well-established Key Stage 3 Attainment 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 gone on to 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 explained. “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 said. “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, along with help from Heather Viligiardi, the Director of Student Progress, launched the new assessment model in Years 7 and 8 in September 2015. From September 2016 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 revealed. “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. 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,” Ben said. “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 added.

Case study developed in January 2017.



“The value of STEPS has undoubtedly been its flexibility and adaptability”

Ridgewood School in Doncaster has adopted STEPS to drive its own system for assessment and tracking pupil progress in Years 7-9.

Leadership Coach Bethanie Goodliff explained that the “strategic platform” provided by STEPS was invaluable as the school got to grips with life after levels: “Firstly, we’ve used the STEPS baseline assessments for Years 7, 8 and 9 since September 2016. In some cases heads of department have adapted these assessments for their own purposes and the value of STEPS in this case has undoubtedly been its flexibility and adaptability. We have used these tests alongside CAT and Key Stage 2 scaled scores to allow pupils to demonstrate their full range of ability and this is working well.”

Bethanie said that work around introducing STEPS in Key Stage 3 classrooms was also well underway. “As senior leaders we are recommending STEPS as a framework rather than something that must be followed in its entirety,” she revealed. “Teachers are now using it in that way, and finding that it can be flexible unlike a GCSE specification. They are using STEPS to support their planning in lessons without necessarily seeing that it is about, for instance, delivery of a particular strand. Parents are aware that we are using STEPS to set targets for Years 7, 8 and 9 – they understand this is all linked to progress against the baseline assessments with, for example, half a step of progress between assessment points usually demonstrating that the

student has a motivated attitude to learning. Students have also proved extremely flexible and adaptable in their thinking.”

Following the end of Key Stage 3 attainment levels, Bethanie admitted that there had been a “huge degree of uncertainty on what to do next”. She added: “Until STEPS came along we continued to run with levels. 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. STEPS brings clarity across all subjects and a common language for staff to use. However, the baseline assessments are key. Previously we had useful information from primaries in English, Maths and Science but with creative 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 was very difficult and we often amended our baseline targets after initial teacher assessment. Consequently we didn’t have an effective way of giving all pupils a chance to be measured when they came in. We have that now with STEPS.”

The objective for Ridgewood School now is to “ensure that assessment is meaningful and accurate”. Bethanie said. “We will continue to use STEPS and make sure that parents understand the system. This is important because there are so many changes going on right now, including GCSE 9-1. And we will aim to be consistent in our teaching. We will introduce more training, especially around how STEPS can be used in classroom scenarios. Overall, as a basis for Key Stage 3 assessment, we are really pleased with it. We’ve realised that it is much more flexible than we thought. What is also useful is the co-planning sessions we have introduced, with departmental leaders planning schemes of work using STEPS. We will continue to learn and adapt as we go forward.”

Case study developed in January 2017.



“We recognised there was an opportunity to do something really exciting to transform Key Stage 3”

The King John School in Benfleet, Essex, has been using STEPS to assist with its overall strategic response to 'life after levels' at Key Stage 3.

The school's new methods for assessment and tracking pupil progress in Years 7 and 8 have been in operation since September 2016, and Assistant Headteacher Nic Spearman said the “flexibility” of STEPS had helped to inform their new system. “We bought the STEPS box last summer and have used this to assist in forming our own learning ladders which are at the heart of our system,” she explained. “Some subjects are using the STEPS baseline tests and others have taken the core principles and amended them for their own purposes. For PE, drama and languages, it's really helped with our ideas around strands. For geography, it's been useful for performance. The flexibility has been great.”

Nic said the launch of the school's overall system for assessment and progress monitoring, tracking and reporting at Key Stage 3 at the start of the 2016-17 academic year had been the culmination of two years work: “We spent the first six months reviewing our curriculum as we recognised there was an opportunity to do something really exciting to transform Key Stage 3. We wanted to make sure that we met each subject's needs at Key Stage 3, whilst also catering for the complexity between Key Stage 2 and 4. Through the Benfleet Teaching School Alliance we 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 wanted our Key Stage 3 system to be challenging yet inspire creativity, and improve depth of learning. We ran pilot schemes in different departments and they opened our pupils' eyes to being able to do a lot more than they thought.”

Since the system was rolled out in September 2016, initial feedback has been encouraging. “A mirrored 9-1 at Key Stage 3 is the right thing for our pupils and will enable children with all abilities to demonstrate progress,” Nic said. “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 grade, which can be very de-motivating. Parental feedback has been very positive. The consensus is that parents know where their child is and what they need to do to progress, that the Key Stage 3 grade talks to the GCSE, and that they can identify where their child will be at the end through the expected attainment pathways.”

Nic and colleagues have been able to discuss what is working with other primary and secondary schools through the Benfleet Teaching School Alliance. “We've set up a Key Stage 3 working group where we are able to share best practice, interesting developments, and generally challenge each other,” she revealed. “From our own perspective we've already run assessment points for Year 7 and Year 8 and we will continue to pursue opportunities to develop our system. However, looking ahead, we first need to let the system settle, identify any tweaks, and not change it or be too reactive. We have been given a real pedagogical opportunity to develop a curriculum and assessment programme which seeks depth of knowledge and skill development to best suit our learners. We wanted autonomy in our curriculum and assessments but you need to balance free reign and consistency in approach to create a purposeful curriculum structure.”

Case study developed in January 2017.



“An ‘outstanding relationship’ with Scholastic made the addition of STEPS even easier to accommodate”

Trinity Catholic College in Middlesbrough has used the baseline assessments provided by STEPS to fill a significant gap in the creation of an alternative assessment system to evaluate and monitor academic progress for Years 7-9.

The College was formed in September 2009 following an amalgamation of two of the area’s long-established schools; Newlands FCJ Specialist Maths and Computing School and St David’s Roman Catholic Technology College. In November 2015 it converted to an academy with 10 Catholic primary partner schools to form St Hilda’s Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Nick Mitchinson, the College’s Assistant Head for Data, Assessment and Reporting, has led the organisation’s overall response to ‘life after levels’.

“I received a STEPS leaflet last summer and was immediately drawn to the system’s baseline testing linked to Key Stage 4 grades,” Nick said. “This benchmark, which we didn’t have previously, comes to us through these baseline tests that can be linked to Key Stage 2 and CAT scores. Around 85% of our pupils come from other primary schools within our MAT so the STEPS baseline provides consistency across the piece. It links perfectly to the flight paths we use which are extending, secure, developing and foundation. Ideally pupils can now move up the flight path, but they certainly don’t move down.”

Prior to the additional introduction of STEPS, the College had already made good progress in developing its own system. “Our work on assessing progress at Key Stage 3 started out prior to the formal removal of levels,” Nick recalled. “We looked at expected and above expected progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, while still using Key Stage 3 levels as a guide for ‘stepping stones’, but always had in mind flight paths for children on GCSEs.

Key Stage 3 levels had become too granular – it was simpler for pupils and parents to say if a child was secure or insecure rather than at a 5A or 5B – but we needed a more holistic measure of progress. We have Key Stage 3 levels in the background, so staff can use these as a guide, but we don’t report these to pupils or parents. The flight paths provide different objectives, which the pupils fully understand.”

Nick explained that the STEPS baseline tests have “now given us a clear direction on what groups of pupils are expected to learn”. He added: “We are happy and content with where we are – the system is working for us. We are able to demonstrate progress for the pupils, which is absolutely key. The baselines mean we are doing the same thing for pupils in all subjects so we are able to accurately track their progress.”

An “outstanding relationship” with Scholastic made the addition of STEPS even easier to accommodate, Nick said. “We use Scholastic to buy books for our library and I’ve always found them to be very friendly and open. STEPS as a classroom resource is a hugely welcome innovation. For me, the most important part of STEPS is the curriculum tests. They show what primary school pupils have been learning and we can therefore demonstrate progress against that, rather than the granular examples of Key Stage 3 levels.”

Case study developed in January 2017.