



THE
KING JOHN
SCHOOL



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The King John School

part of Zenith Multi-Academy Trust

The King John School in Benfleet, Essex – and part of Zenith Multi-Academy Trust – 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.”

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