

LIFE AFTER LEVELS

A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO LIFE AFTER LEVELS

Mortimer

A hand-drawn sign on a white background. It features a vibrant rainbow with multiple concentric bands of color (yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, green). The name 'Mortimer' is written in a black, cursive-style font across the middle of the rainbow. To the left of the sign, there is a black arrow pointing upwards and to the right.

ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

A large, solid black arrow pointing downwards and to the right, positioned on the left side of the bottom dark grey banner.

ASSESSMENT WITHOUT LEVELS

Following the announcement, by the Department for Education, of the removal of levels for the attainment and progress of children (2013), and as part of our curriculum development, the current system of 'levels' at KS3 used to report student's attainment and progress has been removed and will not be replaced.

We have moved away from an assessment system that runs throughout the school and across year groups where students are encouraged to accelerate through the levels to a model where students are assessed against a key set of expectations (*a list of the key objectives that students need to know*) which identify whether they are on track to meet expectations at the end of the year in all subjects. Students are not accelerated through levels, instead they develop a deeper understanding and an ability to apply this understanding, allowing students to learn in greater depth and apply their learning to a wide variety of situations.

Underpinning the new curriculum is a different understanding of what constitutes progress. The expectation now is that all learners fully understand the key facts and concepts before moving on. Under the old curriculum the temptation was to move pupils on to higher levels in order to show progress. However, students may not all have fully understood what they had learnt in previous levels with the result that learning was not fully secure. So, the expectation now is that pupils learn fewer things, but in greater depth.

WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

In May 2014 Durrington High School were awarded an 'Assessment Innovation Fund' by the DFE, to develop a method of 'assessing without levels' in KS3. We have adapted its model and believe that we have devised an approach to assessment that is effective in assessing the progress made by our students within our context and curriculum. It is one that works for our students with the sole aim of supporting their achievement. It is an assessment system that:

- Is based on developing the key knowledge and skills required for success in KS4
- Is based on high expectations and challenge for all. Going "beyond" the traditional programme of study, to provide real stretch and challenge
- Is based heavily on formative feedback and allows all students to succeed – and so develops a growth mindset
- Uses regular high quality formative feedback that means something and gives all students the chance to develop a secure understanding of the key ideas.
- Incorporates high quality end of topic summative assessments which help students develop the skills needed to tackle GCSE examination questions.
- Informs future teaching and learning, including intervention needs, as results from assessments reliably identifies what students have/have not understood
- Allows for simple, meaningful reporting to parents and carers
- Has consistent principles, to be used across subjects, but the flexibility to be suitable for all subjects.
- Allows all students to experience success – by focusing on the progress they make from their starting point, rather than a pre-determined end point i.e. a 'target level'

IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

I. BASELINE THRESHOLDS

We use the average KS2 fine levels from reading and mathematics to place students into 4 attainment band 'THRESHOLDS'.

| THRESHOLD | EXCELLENCE | SECURE | INTERMEDIATE | FOUNDATION |
|------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| GCSE GRADE | A+ | B+ | C+ | D+ |
| NEW GCSE GRADE | 7/8/9 | 6 | 5 | 4 |
| YEAR 11 | 7/8/9 A**-A | 6 B | 5 C | 4 D |
| YEAR 10 | 6 B | 5 C | 4 D | 3 E |
| YEAR 9 | 5 C | 4 D | 3 E | 2 F |
| YEAR 8 | 4 D | 3 E | 2 F | 1+ G+ |
| YEAR 7 | 3 E | 2 F | 1+ G | 1 G |
| KS2 FINE LEVEL Y8 & Y9 | >5.20 | 5.19 – 4.50 | 4.49 – 3.70 | 3.69 – 3.00 |
| KS2 SCALED SCORE Y7 | 120 - 107 | 106 - 100 | 99 - 91 | 90-80 |

The assessment thresholds are different from levels:

- Assessment is based on *progress* made – so celebrates effort of all students, with different starting points.
- Our teachers set the standard of excellence expected – this reinforces our high standards.
- Students are not given feedback such as ‘you’re a 4.2’ – but focused on formative feedback that makes students think about how to develop their understanding.

2. SUBJECT AREAS IDENTIFY THE CORE KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

The model is based on working backwards from GCSE with each subject area identifying the core *knowledge* and *skills* that students will need to master in order to be successful at GCSE. This is based on the knowledge and skills that subject staff know to be key to success in Y11 and enables the development of the five-year **assessment threshold rubrics** based on the revised GCSE specifications, and also link to the National Curriculum programme of study. Once we know where we want the students to go in our subjects, in terms of achieving excellence by the end of Y11, we can then plan backwards with the curriculum for Y7-11.

3. SUBJECT AREAS OUTLINE THE STANDARD EXPECTED FOR EACH THRESHOLD

Based on this, subject specialist teachers come up what does the 'Excellence Threshold' look like in each subject. They then scaffold progress towards 'Excellence' through the thresholds, from a baseline threshold. Staff use the thresholds to plan for progression and focus assessment and feedback on the key knowledge and skills.

For each unit of work subject teachers will need to discuss, decide and agree what standards are expected from each threshold in terms of the core knowledge and skills. This allows us to set the high standards we expect from our students. It also allows us to be selective about the key knowledge and skills that we think are important and so need to be assessed – so we don't just assess everything. This approach ensures that KS3 students are only assessed on essential understanding and skills, directed towards success at GCSE, **and** enables a judgement to be made about whether a student remains on track to meet expectations, is slipping behind or exceeding expectations. This provides the basis for interventions and target revisions, as appropriate, and prepare our students for the challenges that lie ahead at GCSE.

4. ENSURING PROGRESSION

When subjects are planning their assessment threshold rubrics for each unit of work, it is important that there is progression through the years. So, for example, if a student has a baseline threshold of 'intermediate' and if they make expected progress through KS3, they should achieve a minimum of a grade C by the end of Y11. This means that the 'intermediate' thresholds in Y7, 8 and 9 should show increasing levels of demand in terms of expectation, to allow them to maintain this trajectory. Ideally, what we would like of course, is for them to rise through the thresholds towards 'excellence'.

The chart on the right from maths explains this well:

| | YEAR 7 | YEAR 8 | YEAR 9 |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| | | | EXCELLENCE Factorise quadratics |
| | | EXCELLENCE Expand quadratics | SECURE Expand quadratics |
| EXCELLENCE Factorising linear | SECURE Factorising linear | DEVELOPING Factorising linear | |
| SECURE Expanding linear | DEVELOPING Expanding linear | FOUNDATION Expanding linear | |
| DEVELOPING Simplifying | FOUNDATION Simplifying | | |
| FOUNDATION Use letters to express unknowns | | | |

5. TRACKING PROGRESS

In terms of tracking progress we monitor how students are **currently** performing, relative to their baseline threshold. This is reported to parents in the following way:

| Pathways | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|
| English | | | Maths | | |
| Pathway | Target-tracking | Effort | Pathway | Target-tracking | Effort |
| Secure | Expected | E1 | Secure | Above Expected | E1 |
| All Other Subjects' Pathway: Secure | | | | | |
| Qualification | Target-tracking | | Effort | | |
| Science | Above Expected | | E1 | | |
| Geography | Expected | | E1 | | |
| History | Expected | | E1 | | |
| Spanish | Below Expected | | E1 | | |
| Computing | Expected | | E1 | | |
| Art | Expected | | E2 | | |
| Technology | Expected | | E1 | | |
| Religious Education | Above Expected | | E1 | | |
| Physical Education | Expected | | E1 | | |

Advantages to this:

- Rather than focusing on a pre-determined 'target level', we are focusing on the progress they are making from their starting point i.e. what they achieved at Key Stage 2.
- Allows underachieving students to be identified and interventions planned.
- Allows performance of classes/ subjects to be monitored - % of students making above expected, expected, less than expected progress.
- Ensures students of all abilities can be praised for the effort and progress they are making – in the same way.
- Supports long term goals – and monitoring progress towards them.

This allows us to look at how students are progressing across their subjects and we can see:

- The students who are making most progress across all subjects, by looking at their progress total – irrespective of their starting points.
- Individual students who are not making as much progress – either in individual subjects or across the board. This allows targeted interventions to be put in place.
- The progress being made across individual subject areas, in comparison to others.

6. KS3 SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Summative assessments are used to assess how well students are doing during calendared assessment windows. Based on their performance on these tests, an assessment can be made on the progress they are making, relative to their baseline threshold.

Summative assessments will:

- Demonstrate the extent of a student's success in meeting the key set of expectations for the current and previous units of work (Cumulative testing).
- Provide a summary judgement about what has been learned by each student at a specific point in time
- Show what students can achieve without support
- Inform any subsequent intervention activities
- Be used to measure progress relative to their baseline threshold.

Summative assessments will take a variety of forms, depending on the nature of each subject. For example, in maths and science they are most likely to be tests. In history and English extended writing will be prominent. While in design and technology, assessments will be based around design and make processes. In drama and PE, teachers will often rate the performance of students against set criteria.

One important element of this system is all the assessments be modeled on cumulative testing in the same style as the GCSE assessment in the relevant subject, and should assess the knowledge and skills from the most recent unit of work and all previous units.

Students will have to revise for these assessments, thus preparing them earlier for the demands of the two-year linear assessments in Year 11. It is envisaged that this approach will improve retention and recall, as curriculum design will be interleaved to incorporate regular revisiting of the key knowledge and skills.

Summative assessments will be graded which indicates how well the students have understood that particular unit of work and previous units. Whatever the nature of the assessment, the outcomes will generate a percentage score which will be mapped against each threshold. Subject areas need to ensure moderation and standardisation is carried out on summative assessments.