



King's Cross Academy

# **King's Cross Academy Assessment for Learning (AfL) Policy**

## Introduction

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### What is Assessment for Learning (AfL)?

- The shift in emphasis from Assessment *of* Learning to Assessment *for* Learning signifies an increasing recognition that assessment, especially self or peer-assessment, can itself be a powerful vehicle for learning. Assessment should be seen as *part* of the learning rather than something that follows the learning.
- Assessment for Learning grew out of research by Paul Black and Dylan William at King's College summarised in 'Inside the Black Box', 1998.
- Their work studied the effectiveness of assessment practices in classrooms, including marking and verbal feedback as well as how teachers lead dialogue with children.
- The research identified four key areas where learning could be enhanced through improved classroom practice: **questioning, feedback, sharing success criteria and self-assessment**.
- Further research led the King's College team to refine their views of good practice in assessment; in particular, the team gave greater emphasis to 'marking' of written work and the formative use of summative tests i.e. using tests in a meaningful way to enhance learning ('Assessment for Learning', 2003).
- Assessment for Learning practice also owes much to the work of Shirley Clarke (e.g. Formative Assessment in Action, 2005; Enriching Feedback in the Primary Classroom, 2003) who has particularly emphasised the need for children to know exactly what to do in order to close gaps in their learning. She has also been foremost in advocating that learners not only know the current learning objective but also how to judge whether it has been achieved (success criteria).
- A further strand of research relevant to Assessment for Learning is the work of Chris Watkins who has explored how learners can investigate and talk about their own learning (e.g. Classrooms as Learning Communities, 2005; Effective Learning in Classrooms, 2007).

### What are the key principles underlying Assessment for Learning at King's Cross Academy?

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- it promotes *further* learning rather than reporting on *previous* learning (in other words, AfL is formative and diagnostic rather than summative);
- it should use a wide range of methods to encourage learners to express what they are thinking and then to *act* on this reflection;
- it should focus on the learning and what needs to be done to improve rather than on levelling or scores;
- it must ensure that learners have specific advice about *how* to improve;

- it must motivate learners to improve or to deal with gaps in their learning – unless assessment leads to constructive action to improve learning then it is pointless;
- it is not a package or programme – it is a way of thinking about how learners make sense of their own progress in learning enabling them to improve;
- teachers will need to adapt AfL to their individual classrooms – we would not expect AfL to look the same in every class, though the underlying principles must be consistent.

## What are the key elements of AfL in practice?

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- **Questioning:** eliciting learners' understanding and enabling them to extend their own learning through carefully pitched questions;
- **Feedback:** reflecting on how well learning has gone and identifying specific next steps in learning;
- **Sharing success criteria:** being clear about how the learner can judge their own success in learning (at KCA we use the terminology 'Competent, Accomplished and Exceptional' to judge success);
- **Self and peer-assessment:** learners evaluate their own progress against the success criteria;
- **Formative use of summative tests:** analysis of tests and quizzes on a question-by-question basis is used to identify gaps and to pinpoint misconceptions in learning.

## What techniques are used for each key element?

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**Questioning:** the purpose of teacher questioning is **shifted from the search for a pre-determined answer** (e.g. what word am I thinking of?..) Instead, questioning is used to explore ideas, to stimulate thinking, to elicit learner understanding, to challenge misconceptions and to promote shared learning. In order for teacher questioning to achieve these aims such techniques as the following are indispensable:

- **Wait time (thinking time):** teachers should give a few seconds longer before expecting answers – this has been shown to be very powerful. Learners have a little more time to rehearse their answer and are more likely to venture their ideas.
- **Productive questioning:** teachers should think through possible lines of questioning beforehand to make sure that questions are stimulating and worthwhile. Rephrasing closed questions in terms such as 'what do you think about...?' invite lengthier and more thoughtful contributions. Asking follow-up questions relating to what has been said like 'do you agree with Jack's point and why?' help to create a sense of shared exploration and reflection.
- **Learning Questions:** at King's Cross Academy, we structure learning around Learning Questions rather than learning objectives. A question is more inviting and implies that we do not necessarily know the

whole story beforehand. Learning Questions can still be very specific e.g. 'How can we use commas in a list?'

- **'Think-pair-share' (talking partners):** instead of teachers asking a question and then expecting immediate responses, it is often helpful for learners to think about and discuss the topic with a partner before sharing their ideas. This ensures that every learner is involved in considering the question at hand and that ideas can be stimulated and extended before making them public.
- **'Hands-down':** teachers make it clear to learners that they should *not* put up their hands to answer questions. This means that at any time any learner can be called on to make a contribution. If all learners feel they could be called upon then it is impossible to 'coast' or let others do all the thinking. The emotional climate of the classroom is important in order that learners feel able to share their confusions or ask for help in thinking through their responses openly. Misconceptions can be explored openly and lead to learning for the whole group if learners feel comfortable and supported by each other as well as the teacher.

**Feedback:** this includes 'marking' of written work by the teacher, self or peers as well as verbal comments. Feedback is most effective when the following strategies are employed:

- **Developmental comments:** rather than merely commenting generally e.g. 'well done!' or 'an interesting piece', teachers identify the next step needed in learning and write a specific piece of advice needed to achieve this e.g. 'James, you need to practise partitioning to help you add 2-digit numbers mentally.'
- **'Closing the gap' comments:** the teacher and/or learner identify a gap in learning and specify the steps needed to fill it e.g. 'to make my spelling more accurate, I need to use the five key spelling strategies more in my writing.'
- **Comment against the success criteria:** the comment refers directly to the success criteria identified at the start of the learning e.g. 'you managed to make a vehicle that travels in a straight line but now need to make it stable.'
- **Peer feedback:** learners assess each other, giving constructive comments and suggestions focusing on what to do next to improve the learning. This depends upon building a positive ethos within the classroom. Peer feedback can also be organised as a game e.g. cards such as 'add an adjective', 'join the sentences together' can be played by a peer and then acted on by the writer. This game can even be scored in pairs: one point for playing a card, a second point for acting on it to improve the writing.
- **Annotated writing:** writing can be annotated by the writer themselves, by peers or by the teacher. This is best when it happens during the writing process. A class or group can stop writing and swap pieces to annotate. Codes can be developed to make this more efficient and fun e.g. PLW = 'premier league word', !! = 'very dramatic'. Sections of writing that meet the success criteria can be highlighted plus those that need more working.
- **Conferencing:** one-to-one sessions between a learner and adult are very powerful e.g. looking in depth at a piece of writing: the adult can scribe and read back what has been written, asking questions to clarify thinking and scaffold improvement.
- **Time for improvement:** feedback is only useful if there is **time to apply it**. Feedback needs to be *during* learning rather than *following* it.

**Sharing success criteria:** this is where the specific features of successful learning are outlined clearly by the teacher or in discussion with the learners. Some useful approaches are:

- **Emergent success criteria:** rather than specifying the success criteria before the learning, the success criteria can emerge from an initial engagement with the learning e.g. learners make a rough attempt at a design for a balloon-powered buggy then come together and discuss what the features of an effective design will be.
- **Quantitative success criteria:** these could specify numerical goals e.g. 'you need to make sure your report has at least three complex sentences,' or 'you need to complete each mental maths problem in less than 30 seconds.'
- **Qualitative success criteria:** these can relate to agreed standards of quality e.g. 'the poem must include strong images and premier league words.'
- **Audience-focused success criteria:** success criteria can relate specifically to the desired response from an audience, real or imagined e.g. 'a year 4 child must be able to follow your instructions for your board game.'
- **Returning to success criteria during and after the learning:** it is important to keep the success criteria in the learners' minds during the learning. It can also be productive to revisit them after the learning not only to evaluate how far they were met but also to ask whether they were the right success criteria. During the learning, new ideas may have emerged and more refined success criteria could be agreed for next time (success criteria should always be on display, either on the IWB or manual whiteboard).

**Self and peer-assessment:** this is very powerful in enabling learners to understand their own learning needs better and to take responsibility for their own learning. With younger children, such assessment can be very simple (traffic light symbols, thumbs up etc) but it is important to introduce the idea of thinking about your own learning as early as possible. Peer assessment has been shown to allow greater acceptance of difficult messages than teacher-assessment. Peer assessment also develops the language and constructive mentality that is needed for effective self-assessment.

- **Ongoing self and peer-assessment:** in most lessons, learners should have opportunities to assess their learning against the success criteria. This can be informal and quick e.g. 'show with your fingers a score out of five for how well you think you managed to use the 5 key spelling strategies.' Talk partners are quick and effective for ongoing peer-assessment.
- **Self-assessment and curricular targets:** learners should assess themselves against key targets. These are derived from school priorities e.g. mental maths, sentence structure. Teachers should help learners to see where they need to aim within the curricular target and how to get there.
- **Group assessment:** for group tasks, assessment can be carried out as a group. Success criteria can refer to group learning outcomes e.g. 'every member of the group must have made a contribution to the design of the boat.' This is very effective in developing a sense of shared purpose and in promoting peer-support with a learning-focus.
- **Individual learning plans:** these are useful particularly in Year 5 and 6 for learners to reflect on different aspects of their learning and then plan next steps.

**Formative use of Summative Tests:** this means that the testing regime is used creatively to enhance learning on an ongoing basis rather than being seen as one-off assessments that happen at the end of the learning.

- **Analysis of tests and quizzes question-by-question:** we look at tests from Year 2 to Year 6 in terms of which questions were answered well, poorly or not at all. Questions are also grouped into categories e.g. 'explanation questions'. This data allows us to identify specific learning issues for different year groups as well as whole school issues. These issues can then inform curricular targets as well as learning and teaching priorities for the year.
- **Follow-up to tests and quizzes:** teachers can work through completed tests with learners, identifying what caused difficulty, strategies that were used and how they might approach similar questions differently next time. Sometimes, it is valuable for the learners to repeat the same test having explored strategies. This is highly motivating as learners see their score rise dramatically. Alternatively, similar questions can be set to see how far learners are able to transfer the strategies discussed to new problems.
- **Peer marking of tests / quizzes:** this forces learners to engage with tests from the angle of the test-setter. They have to understand the marking criteria from the inside. It helps to demystify tests and empower learners if they can experience tests from a markers' position.
- **Learners devising their own test questions / quizzes:** this forces learners to engage more deeply with the subject matter to be tested. They have to understand the assessment process itself from within and will better understand how test questions are framed and what is being asked for.
- **Collaborative approaches to test preparation:** techniques such as 'jigsawing' (one member of each group teaches another group) and 'snowballing' (a pair of learners share ideas with a four then an eight and so on) enliven the mastering of content for tests.

## How does AfL fit with other forms of assessment and monitoring of progress at King's Cross Academy?

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- **Summative assessment:** AfL can be made to support summative assessment (i.e. end-of-year tests or tests/quizzes at the end of a learning project) in the ways described above. However, there is still a tension between good practice in formative assessment and high stakes testing regimes. As Black notes: '...the pressures exerted by current external testing and assessment requirements are not fully consistent with good formative practices...Frequent summative testing dulled the message about the means to improve, replacing it with information about successes or failures.' (Black et al, 2003).

At King's Cross Academy, we need to make every effort to make summative assessment as valuable as possible in terms of learning by ensuring that as we prepare learners for tests, we are retaining our emphasis on high quality learning, on learners taking responsibility and on the active engagement of learners in the testing process. Black again: 'Active involvement of students in the test process can help them to see that they can be beneficiaries rather than victims of testing, because tests can help them improve their learning...' (Black et al, 2003).

- **Baseline assessment:** the Foundation Stage baseline assessment carried out in Reception classes provides a baseline across the early learning goals. These can be used in Year 1 to identify gaps in learning as well as informing individual learning targets. They also allow the Academy to measure the 'value added' from Reception to year 2 and from Reception to year 6. AfL practices likewise support

focused target-setting for individuals, emphasising the learner's own understanding of what they are trying to achieve.

- **Pupil Progress Review meetings:** these termly meetings are valuable opportunities for teachers to explore children's progress in learning with the Phase Leader / SLT. Although there is a focus on current attainment, the emphasis is on progress the child has made and the strategies that each child needs to work on next and any teaching techniques, or targeted support, that may assist them.
- **Pupil discussion briefings:** these briefings run once every week (as part of the briefing update meetings) where senior leaders / teachers can discuss particular individuals who are not making expected progress with the rest of the school's professional community. It's an opportunity for past and present teachers to scrutinise progress and to talk about particular barrier/s to learning an individual is experiencing. It's also an opportunity to brainstorm possible strategies to overcome those barriers.

### How will AfL be monitored and evaluated?

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- Termly observations / developmental monitoring cycles monitor and evaluate AfL practice in every class.
- The Subject Leaders, Phase Leaders and SLT monitor assessment practice through observations, sampling of written and other products and discussions with teachers and children.
- Phase Leaders ensure consistent and effective assessment practice within their Phase, monitoring assessment practice through 'agreement trials / moderation' and reviews of teacher comments in books.
- Termly Pupil Progress Reviews give the Phase Leader and SLT an overview of assessment practice across the school as well as the impact in terms of progress in learning.
- The Senior Leadership Team evaluates progress in developing AfL termly.

### Document Control

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