

# Getting to Grips with *Assessing Pupils' Progress*







## Foreword

***The Assessment for Learning Strategy launched in May 2008, sets out how national partners – the Department for Children, Schools and Families, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, National Strategies and the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors – will work together to develop assessment for learning during the period 2008-2011. £50 million is provided to schools in each year of the strategy to help consolidate and systematise AfL practices.***

One of the key objectives of the three year strategy is to link classroom assessment reliably to National Curriculum levels in order to track the progress of individual pupils and intervene accordingly. We know that schools which have robust tracking systems in place achieve the best rates of progress and are well placed to help pupils when they fall off trajectory. So whilst APP is not compulsory, we do know that it really works – and that's why so many schools are embracing it. These schools know where their pupils are, where they need to be, and how to get there. They have taken steps to personalise the learning of their pupils and are realising the benefits.

*Assessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) is a straightforward approach to making secure judgements about the standard of pupils' work and what they need

to do next. It has been nationally developed and standardised so that you can have confidence in the judgements made of your pupils. It strengthens existing practice, and there is a lot of support available if you need it.

Taking on a new programme or practice is always daunting, but this one can be absorbed over time, first using the criteria to support judgements, then developing practice in the use of evidence, moderation and subsequent intervention. Don't be put off by the size of the Standards Files; they contain guidance and exemplars if you wish to refer to them, but the basic paperwork is not extensive.

APP is all about knowing enough to make rational judgements about where to target resources and when to offer pupils assistance.

The bottom line is that when you make a judgement, you use national criteria, and keep a note of the judgements made over time so that you can see how pupils progress. That's it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Hackman". The script is cursive and fluid.

**Sue Hackman**  
**Chief Adviser on School Standards**

# Introduction

## APP – the benefits

APP is a structured approach to in-school assessment which:

- enables teachers to make judgements about their pupils' attainment, keyed into national standards
- develops and refines teachers' understanding of progression in their subject
- provides diagnostic information about the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils and groups of pupils
- enables teachers to track pupils' progress over time
- informs curriculum planning
- facilitates the setting of meaningful curricular targets that can be shared with pupils and parents
- promotes teaching that's matched to pupils' needs
- supports the transfer of meaningful information at key transitional points, e.g. from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3
- **is not a 'bolt-on' to existing arrangements. APP is all you need.**

## APP – the materials

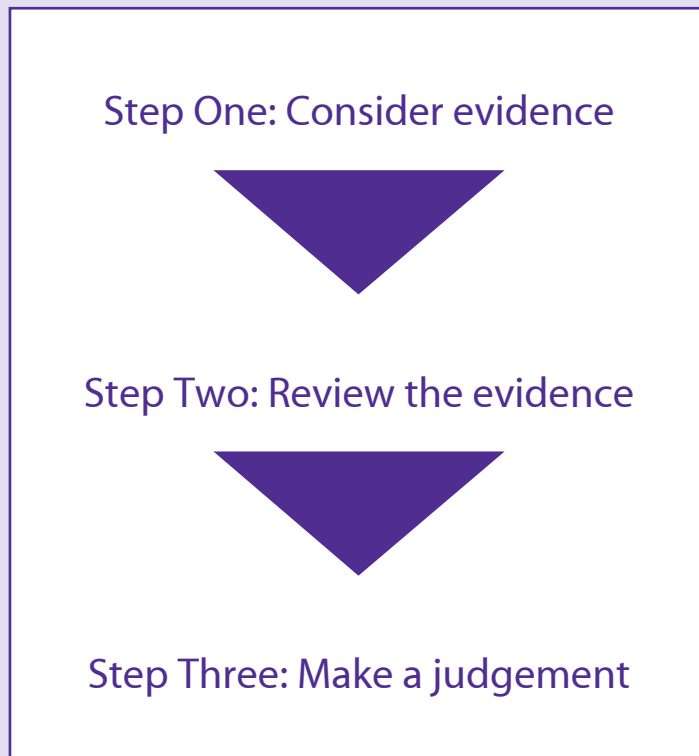
The **Assessment Guidelines** are the criteria for each level and the key document of APP. These sheets help you to assess pupils' work in relation to national standards and provide a simple recording format for the assessment criteria in each of the assessment focuses in the subject at each level.

APP is well backed-up with extensive materials which can be used for reference as and when required. The **APP Handbook** is designed to aid teachers in using the materials and implementing the approach. The **Standards Files** are collections of assessed evidence of pupils' performance, exemplifying attainment at different levels, to give a feel for each level, and show how to aggregate performance in different aspects of a subject.

These resources are currently available to support APP in English (reading and writing) and mathematics at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and in science and ICT at Key Stage 3 only. Materials are being developed for science at Key Stage 2.

# The basic approach

The basic approach is straightforward



The next pages take each step in turn...



*"...we are optimistic about the application of APP. The main attraction is that it makes sense. Far from adding another 'layer' of assessment, it helps to rationalise the current system and focuses planning, teaching and assessment upon particular Assessment Focuses."*

**Head of English**

# Step One: Consider evidence

Your APP assessments are more likely to be accurate and useful if you have a range of appropriate evidence from each pupil to review – this might be written or oral evidence. Your pupils are likely to have undertaken a variety of activities since their last APP assessment so you need to decide which pieces will be most relevant.

## Key points:

- APP is used to periodically review your pupils' work so you will wish to gather evidence on a termly basis, or whatever fits in with your current school assessment arrangements.
- Use the work that's already in pupils' exercise books or portfolios and make use of any 'sticky notes' on which you've captured some of their spoken contributions in class. You can also take account of what you or others have seen pupils do in the course of their work. You don't need to gather weighty collections or portfolios of pupils' work.
- You won't need to look back at all of the work a pupil has done since their last APP assessment – just the pieces that you know will provide significant evidence.
- A manageable range of evidence will facilitate the process of 'scaling up' to involve all pupils in the APP approach.

## What helps?

- Identifying assessment opportunities in the scheme of work in order to ensure that a broad range of evidence is likely to be available, including work where pupils have demonstrated a significant degree of independence.
- Discussing with colleagues the range of evidence in a small selection of the Standards Files.



# Step Two: Review the evidence

By assessing your pupils' work against the assessment criteria you will be able to establish a profile of learning for each of your pupils. This also enables you to track their progress over time.

## Key points:

- You are reviewing rather than assessing the work for the first time. Since you already have marked and responded to your pupils' work, the opportunity to step back at regular intervals enables you to take a broader view of your pupils' achievements over the whole subject and over a period of time.
- Teachers who have been using APP for more than a year report that the process very quickly becomes easier and less time-consuming as they become familiar with the assessment criteria.

## What helps?

- Using a separate Assessment Guidelines sheet for each pupil will help you to track individuals' progress over time.
- Highlighting the criteria pupils have met across a range of evidence provides a visual picture of their strengths as well as gaps in their learning. It's also a useful basis for a conversation with pupils and their parents or carers.
- Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in order to agree what constitutes 'success' for the various assessment criteria can provide a rich source of professional development.

*"APP has been a very steep learning curve for me, especially as it's my first year of teaching. It has really benefited my assessment and added to my own teaching and assessment strategies."*  
**Key Stage 1 teacher**

	AF2	AF3	AF4
	Understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference text.	Deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts.	Identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and presentational features at text level.
<b>Level 4</b>	Across a range of texts: • some relevant points identified • comments supported by generally relevant textual reference or quotation, e.g. reference is made to appropriate section of text but is unselective and lacks focus	Across a range of texts: • comments make inferences based on evidence from different points in the text, e.g. interpreting a character's motive from their actions at different points • inferences often correct, but comments are not always rooted securely in the text or repeat narrative or content	Across a range of texts: • some structural choices identified with simple comment, e.g. 'he describes the accident first and then goes back to tell you why the child was in the road' • some basic features of organisation at text level identified, e.g. 'the writer uses bullet points for the main reasons'
	✓	✓	□

## Step Three: Make a judgement

The assessment guidelines enable you to make reliable judgements about your pupils' attainment in different aspects (or assessment-foci) of your subject. You can then arrive at an overall subject level judgement, before fine-tuning it to 'high', 'secure' or 'low'.

### Key points:

- Some schools choose to report 'high', 'secure', 'low' as a, b, c to fit in with their existing reporting arrangements.
- Don't be tempted to make a judgement based on insufficient evidence. If sufficient evidence is unavailable, it may be that the scheme of work needs to be adjusted in order to provide a fuller evidence base across the range of Assessment Focuses in the future.
- Specific sub-level assessment criteria don't exist and have never existed. Whilst helpful guidance in arriving at level-related judgements is available, a good degree of professional judgement is also needed.

### What helps?

- Spending some time reviewing the annotated evidence in the Standards Files will help to ensure that your interpretation of the assessment criteria is consistent with that of other colleagues.
- On-going opportunities to share and discuss samples of your pupils' assessed work will help to ensure consistency within your department as well as providing rich discussions about your pupils' progress.

*"Pupils have taken ownership of their own learning, they know where they are, where they need to go and can find out how to get there."*

**Key Stage 2 teacher**





# Using APP to benefit pupils

APP is about pupils – identifying what they're good at and where they need more support. One of the greatest values of APP is the way it can help you to learn more about your pupils' strengths and weaknesses in different aspects of your subject.

Over time, APP judgements also tell you how a pupil is progressing and alert you if they fall off trajectory. This is the basis for intervention planning to help pupils to progress.

For example:

- If your APP assessment guidelines reveal similar gaps in learning for most of your class, APP will help you to adjust your planning to focus on areas of underperformance.
- If similar gaps in learning are shared by only a few pupils, you might plan some guided learning sessions to address the particular needs of those pupils.
- APP assessment information can also be used to identify pupils who may benefit from other interventions.
- APP also supports the setting of meaningful curricular targets based on analysis of pupils' real strengths and areas for improvement.

## Key points:

- Curricular targets, informed by APP, can be shared with pupils and parents to support discussions about where pupils are in their learning and what they need to do to progress.
- Once you've identified gaps in pupils' learning, you should use the Framework objectives and Programmes of Study to plan for relevant teaching and learning opportunities.



## Making it manageable

One of the great advantages of APP is that it uses national criteria that have been rigorously trialled by teachers in pilot schools. Pilot schools trialled APP approaches in addition to their current assessment systems, and applied the method to just a handful of pupils. Now that we are moving towards full adoption, we encourage schools to apply APP to all their pupils to avoid running two assessment systems. This will ease the workload and avoid confusion. Schools have found, in any case, that it is easiest to embrace APP fully and to disengage the old system. APP fits better with new emphases on progression, personalisation and forward planning.

Teachers who use APP say that it looks daunting at first but they are surprised at how quickly they are able to familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria. They also say that the best way to do this is through use – by diving in and having a go. They soon internalise the criteria and the process begins to take less time.

Of course there's an initial workload, as there is with anything new, but this can be significantly reduced by:

- Trusting your APP judgements and not trying to do APP in addition to other internal tests or assessment criteria
- Diving in and having a go – practice promotes familiarity
- Starting with a few pupils or just one class if you wish, but planning to scale up quickly
- Making use of the support materials as you need them
- Seeing APP as a whole school approach to teacher assessment

It's not an easy option. What is? But time and practice help. Support from other teachers who've already had a go also helps. It's worth the effort.

*"Don't give up – once you are used to the process the benefits for pedagogy and practice are clear."*

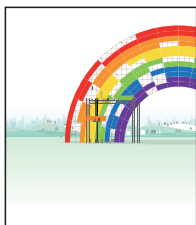
**Key Stage 2 teacher**

## Further information

For further information, guidance and support, you may wish to visit the National Strategies website at [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies)

Here you will find an APP focus area which sets out what APP entails. It provides links to the relevant phase and subject-specific APP sections where you can find resources and materials to download, and more support and guidance.





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