

Continuous Assessment Year 7 to 9



Information and Guidance for Parents and Students

Please find enclosed the new version of the 'Progress Report' for students in Years 7 to 9 which we have developed in response to the government abolishing National Curriculum Levels two years ago.

Why have we changed our approach to assessment and reporting in Year 7 to 9?

In 2014 the DfE announced that National Curriculum Levels, which have been in existence in 1988, would be abolished from September 2016 and from that date schools must no longer use them to assess learning and progress or report to parents. This followed a comprehensive review of the positive and negative impact of using numerical National Curriculum Levels to assess and report on children in primary and secondary schools, led by Cambridge University. The report concluded there was strong evidence the continued use of National Curriculum Levels was educationally counter-productive and therefore schools must stop using them.

The DfE required all schools to devise their own approach to assessing learning and progress and reporting to parents, ensuring they did not directly replace what had come to be perceived as a flawed number-based system of assessment with another system with the same flaws.

You can learn more about this by searching for 'Tim Oates assessment' on YouTube. Tim Oates, a Cambridge education professor, led the Expert Panel commissioned by the DfE which recommended the abolition of Levels.

The situation at Highcliffe School

At the same time as the DfE announced this change we at Highcliffe School were contemplating the feedback we regularly receive from staff, students and parents, which reinforced the point made by the DfE report that for the old National Curriculum Levels:

- Students and parents frequently say 'but I don't know what e.g. Level 6b actually means'
- Parents frequently say 'if I actually knew what my child was learning about and what standard to aim for, I'd be able to support my child more effectively but all I get is a number'
- Teachers frequently say 'but the Levels don't always make sense anymore because the National Curriculum has changed repeatedly' and 'they give a false impression because a student in my subject might be Level 4c in one thing but Level 5b in another, so which Level do I give them?'

This feedback closely mirrored the findings of the Expert Panel about the problems with Levels.

What process have we been through since 2014/15?

Consequently, for the last 18 to 20 months, teaching and support staff at Highcliffe have been devising a wholly new approach to assessment and reporting in years 7 to 9 (the traditional Key Stage 3 years which relied on Levels), linked carefully to the way teachers plan lessons and mark work, which we call *Continuous Assessment*.

Teaching staff have written bespoke assessment criteria *for every unit of work* studied in every subject in Years 7 to 9, carefully mapped to introduce GCSE-related knowledge, understanding and skills early on in learning, and offering opportunities for the most motivated students to also go beyond the prescribed criteria, when they are ready to do so, to begin preparing them to succeed at A Level. Units vary in length between 4 to 5 weeks to entire terms of around 12 weeks.

Instead of students and parents receiving only a National Curriculum Level, which explains very little, students and parents in Years 7 to 9 from now on can *log on to MyHighcliffe at any time and see the topics and the assessment criteria being followed from week to week*; and more importantly read an actual description of what the student is learning and what they can and can't yet do; and what topics are to come in future. This is why we have called it *Continuous Assessment*.

What do these criteria look like?

To help make sense of the detailed assessment criteria our staff have divided them into four 'Thresholds', ranging from Foundation where a student is acquiring the basic knowledge and skills to build upon, all the way up to 'Excellence' where the student is beginning to master some of the most complex and challenging concepts and skills in the topic or subject.

This means that students and parents should no longer ever need to ask 'but what does that Level actually mean?', or that parents should no longer feel 'but if I actually knew what my child was learning about and what standard they should aim for, I'd be able to support them more effectively'. You can see the units of work already completed and the standard they were done at, the units currently being studied but not yet completed, and the units yet to come; and through the Data Drop a guideline as to whether the student is on track for their expected 'flight path'.

Why is this better than assessing and reporting with National Curriculum Levels?

This adds up to *a substantial increase in the total amount of information shared by the school with parents and students* compared to our past arrangements for reporting home through Progress Checks and Profiles; and we hope it is seen this way by parents and students.

Students and parents can actually see what topics are being studied currently in school, and what standard of knowledge, understanding and skills the students should be aspiring to acquire. This has never been possible before, when all that was used was a Level. The underlying principle is one known as 'formative assessment'. Research over the last 20 years relentlessly proves it is the most effective type of assessment/marking and far more effective than just awarding a Grade or Level. It is effective because it makes the success criteria *public knowledge*, not hidden knowledge which only the teacher possesses and which cannot be described in a single number or letter e.g. 6b. It means students know what they should be aiming to learn, and so do parents – parents knowing is vital to the ability of parents to support their child with learning at home.

You can learn more about formative assessment by searching for 'Dylan Willem effective assessment' on YouTube.

Live updates available to view online plus a termly 'Data Drop'

From 15th December 2016 the Continuous Assessment System will be available to view by students and parents at any time online through MyHighcliffe. Over time, you will find you teachers recording your child's learning and progress through a unit, which will automatically be updated online.

In other words, students and parents will have *continuous* access to teachers' assessment of their learning and progress.

However, students and parents must be realistic about how frequently these will be updated. *It will not be every day or even every week*. Some units are shorter, while others are longer, and subjects have different amounts of lessons so it may take several weeks or even months for learning and progress to occur and be recorded. For Example, Ethics and Personal Development has only one lesson a fortnight

so naturally therefore units take longer to complete than subjects which have 3 or 4 lessons a week like Science. Some subjects deliver topics in a carousel– for example PE, Science and Art, Design and Technology – so students aren't all learning and making progress on the same topic at the same time.

Although the focus of our reporting from now on in Years 7 to 9 is through live updates accessible at any time via MyHighcliffe, we are also retaining a system of sending information home and sustaining the frequency of this 'data drop' at once-per-term. This 'data drop' is merely a summary overview: it is not a substitute for the far more detailed version accessible through MyHighcliffe. Parents are welcome to use the 'data drop' as a reminder to access the far more detailed version accessible online.

Is a student making progress in line with their prior attainment at Key Stage 2?

Parents and students will want to know whether, over time, good progress is being made from the student's starting point at the end of Key Stage 2, as shown by their KS2 SATs results.

Under the old system of reporting National Curriculum Levels parents and students will have got used to seeing Levels go down as well as up in Profiles or Progress Checks, or stay the same for a while: in other words students being more successful in some topics than others or needing to spend time consolidating their learning at a certain standard before moving on to more demanding work. This is perfectly normal as students rarely find everything 'easy', and some topics are simply harder than others.

We have created a broad '*flight path*' for every student giving a rough idea of what two Thresholds the student should be trying to achieve in each subject, based on their prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. Based on their KS2 prior attainment the majority of students should be normally aiming to hit the 'Secure' criteria by the end of a unit, while others should be aiming for 'Excellence' or 'Developing'. Students are able to see the criteria for each Threshold in each topic in advance via their MyHighcliffe, and teachers are using them to plan lessons and mark and feedback on work. *Naturally, students will not always achieve the Threshold they are aiming for in every unit of study and this should not automatically be a cause for concern.*

What to do if you become concerned about progress over time

If you are concerned about your child's progress in a subject *over the course of several units*, you should

- In the first instance discuss with your son or daughter, using their record of Commendations and Demerits in MyHighcliffe, to what extent they are demonstrating the attitudes, skills and commitment required to make progress in school, as described in the Attitude to Learning Criteria. It may be that your child would benefit from putting more effort into their learning at home, or joining in and paying more attention in class, or responding more thoroughly to the feedback their teachers are giving them. You can get a sense of your child's learning behaviours and attitude towards learning through their Commendation and Demerit records in MyHighcliffe.
- If you continue to be concerned about a particular subject or subjects, the next stage is to make contact with the teacher, to initiate a discussion. Phoning the school is the best way to start this dialogue.
- If you are concerned about their progress in a range of subjects over time, you should make contact with your child's Head of Achievement, if we have not already contacted you.

The contribution students are responsible for making to their learning and progress

Particular importance is being placed on students accepting responsibility for responding to and acting on their teachers' advice on how to improve their work, in order to maximise their chance of staying on their 'flight path' – not least through the increased use of the Breakthrough in Learning Commendations and the Lack of Effort Demerit, to focus students in on feedback and marking. A particular focus is also on all students working hard in class and at home, actively joining in lessons, using MyHelp or emailing their teachers when they need help, being organised and bringing the right books and equipment each day, avoiding causing disruption to learning by persistently talking, arguing back at the teacher or otherwise misbehaving in lessons. All of these responsibilities are can be rewarded and encouraged by specific Commendations.

A *Breakthrough in Learning Commendation* is usually awarded when a teacher sees that a student has responded really well to a piece of advice, corrected a piece of work or substantially improved it after feedback; a *Lack of effort Demerit* may be awarded where a teacher forms the opinion that a student has ignored feedback advice, or a request to make improvements or correct a piece of work, or hasn't applied themselves wholeheartedly to a piece of work. These Demerits do not lead to a punishment, but if accumulated over time will lead to the school seeking to work with parents to find a way forward which helps the student respond to feedback, as they flag up that a student may struggling or coasting in class. *Commendations for Using Your Initiative* can be awarded where a student is unsure about how to respond to a piece of feedback and asks the teacher for further clarification to help them respond, or uses MyHelp.

You can see how frequently your child is being Commended or Demerited in each term's data drop or every time you log on to MyHighcliffe.

How teachers use the assessment criteria

Teachers plan their units of work and individual lessons to ensure they have a clear focus on working towards achieving the assessment criteria for each unit. They know the flight path of each student and differentiate the lessons accordingly.

Teachers use the Rewards and Learning Behaviour polices to draw students' attention to the attitudes and behaviours required for success.

The Rewards Policy and Behaviour Policy are available to view in the Policies section of the school website.

The school has also implemented a new marking policy since September to further improve the clarity and consistency of advice and feedback students receive. In your child's exercise books and folders, you should see the increasingly consistent use of *WWW (What Went Well)*, *EBI (Even Better If)* and *CTG (Close the Gap)* in teachers' marking, plus use of the '*Purple Pen of Progress*' where students draw attention to improvements to their work or their response to feedback by doing it in their purple pen. The Purple Pen system is being used in Year 7 to 9.

The Assessment and Marking Policy is available to view in the Policies section of the school website.