

Principles of Assessment and Reporting in NSW Public Schools



Background

Underpinning the development of the following principles of assessment is the model of pedagogy presented in the *Quality teaching in NSW public schools: An assessment practice guide* (NSW Department of Education and Training June 2006). The model incorporates three dimensions of assessment practice that are linked to improved student learning outcomes: Intellectual Quality, Quality Learning Environment and Significance. The discussion paper and further support materials are available at:

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/>

This document sets out the principles that underpin the assessment of student learning in NSW government schools, and the reporting of that learning to parents. It incorporates the NSW Institute of Teachers professional competence standards of Element 3, among others, in the areas of assessment and reporting to parents. The standards are available at:

<http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au>

Preamble

Assessment is the process of collecting evidence of student learning in order to draw an inference about an individual's (or a group's) current level of attainment.

Student Reporting is the process of communicating information to a range of stakeholders about student learning—including a student's level of attainment and the progress they have made.

The fundamental purpose of assessment and reporting is to improve student learning. This is true at the system, school and classroom level. It is Department of Education and Training policy that assessment and reporting of student learning be undertaken formally and informally for all learners, including students with disabilities. Policy advice *Curriculum planning, programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12* is available at:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/policy.htm>

Manageable assessment and reporting may require a whole school, rather than individual teacher approach.



Assessment principles



1. Assessment should be relevant.

Assessment needs to provide information about students' knowledge, skills and understandings of the learning outcomes specified in the NSW syllabus documents. That is, it needs to be directly linked to the syllabus standards. Syllabus standards are defined at:

https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/curric_plan/policystandards161006.pdf

2. Assessment should be appropriate.

Assessment needs to provide information about the particular kind of learning in which we are interested. This means that we need to use a variety of assessment methods because not all methods are capable of providing information about all kinds of learning. For example, some kinds of learning are best assessed by observing students; some by having students complete projects or make products and others by having students complete paper and pen tasks.

Conclusions about student achievement in an area of learning are valid only when the assessment method we use is appropriate and measures what it is supposed to measure.

3. Assessment should be fair.

Assessment needs to provide opportunities for every student to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. Assessment must be based on a belief that all learners are on a path of development and that every learner is capable of making progress. Students bring a diversity of cultural knowledge, experience, language proficiency and background, and ability to the classroom. They should not be advantaged or disadvantaged by life experiences, abilities, or gender differences that are not relevant to the knowledge, skills and understandings that the assessment is intended to address. Students have the right to know what is assessed, how it is assessed and the worth of the assessment.

Assessment will be fair or *equitable* only if it is free from bias or favouritism.

4. Assessment should be accurate.

Assessment needs to provide evidence that accurately reflects an individual student's knowledge, skills and understandings. That is, assessments need to be *reliable* or dependable in that they consistently measure a student's knowledge, skills and understandings. (This means that we need to use a variety of assessment strategies to give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning in a range of contexts and to make sure that the inferences we draw about a student's level of attainment

Assessment principles



are not influenced by the choice of a specific assessment task). Assessment also needs to be *objective* so that if a second person assesses a student's work, they will come to the same conclusion as the first person.

Assessment will be fair to all students if it is based on reliable, accurate and defensible measures.

5. Assessment should provide useful information.

The focus of assessment is to establish where students are in their learning. This information can be used for both *summative* purposes (the assessment of learning), such as the awarding of a grade, or *formative* purposes to feed directly into the teaching and learning cycle (assessment for learning). Assessment information that is useful for formative purposes needs to focus in part on the depth of a student's understanding, not just on the accumulation of knowledge. That is, it needs to focus on a student's conceptual understandings. Assessment tasks which focus on Intellectual Quality, including deep knowledge and understanding and higher order thinking, and which provide elements of Quality Learning Environment such as explicit criteria and high expectations, assist in informing ongoing teaching and learning.

Assessment of this kind identifies strengths and weaknesses, and provides detailed diagnostic information about how students are thinking. The collection of evidence of this kind may require opportunities for students to explain in their own words or pictures their understandings of the material they are learning.

6. Assessment should be integrated into the teaching and learning cycle.

Assessment needs to be an ongoing, integral part of the teaching and learning cycle. It must allow teachers and students themselves to monitor learning. From the teacher perspective, it provides the evidence to guide the next steps in teaching and learning. From the student perspective, it provides the opportunity to reflect on and review progress, and can provide the motivation and direction for further learning.

7. Assessment should draw on a wide range of evidence.

Assessment needs to draw on a wide range of evidence. A complete picture of student achievement in an area of learning depends on evidence that is sampled from the full range of knowledge, skills and understandings that make up the area of learning. An assessment program that consistently addresses only some outcomes will provide incomplete feedback to the teacher and student, and can potentially distort teaching and learning.

8. Assessment should be manageable.

Assessment needs to be efficient, manageable and convenient. It needs to be incorporated easily into usual classroom activities and it needs to be capable of providing information that justifies the time spent.



Reporting principles



1. Student Reports should meet specified requirements.

Reports need to meet specified Department guidelines; including A-E reporting, learning area reporting, reporting against state wide syllabus standards, written comments and requirements for ESL students and students for whom accommodation and or learning adjustments have been made. Further information on specific policy requirements can be accessed at:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/policy.htm>

2. Student Reports should be easy to understand.

Reports need to be written in plain English. Teachers, like other professionals, have a specialised language for communicating among themselves about what children are learning and about the difficulties children are experiencing. Reports to parents need to use plain, everyday language.

3. Student Reports should show what a student is now able to do.

Reports need to summarise where a student is up to in his or her learning—the skills and understandings that are demonstrated now. Some schools may use marks, grades or numerical levels, but these are not sufficient. Reports need to contain objective information about what has been taught and about students' current levels of knowledge, skills and understandings, including areas for further development. Written comments may be particularly useful for this purpose. A portfolio of examples of a student's work for discussion at a parent-teacher interview, or samples of the child's work on a confidential web page, are two strategies for providing supportive evidence.





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4. Student Reports should show students' progress.

Reports should show progress and allow progress to be monitored over time. In any given year level, children are at very different stages in their learning. Reports need to give an accurate picture of where each student is up to in his or her learning in a way that allows parents to monitor learning. Reports need to focus on learning and progress, rather than make judgements of the child.

5. Student Reports should show what is expected of students.

Reports need to indicate the achievements expected of students at a particular year level. For example, a report for a Year 3 student could indicate how the student is performing in relation to other students in the same year level.

6. Student Reports should include social as well as academic information.

Reports need to provide information about how students are progressing socially as well as academically. Schools not only develop children's understandings of subject matter; they also develop personal skills such as working independently, dealing with frustration, and completing tasks with concentration. Schools teach children to respect the contributions of others, to learn from others, to cooperate in joint activities, and to live and work together, sometimes putting the needs of other children ahead of their own. Reports need to provide information about all aspects of development, not just academic development.

7. Student Reports should be constructive.

Reports need to provide information in a constructive manner with reference to actions likely to support further learning. Reports will not only show parents what their child is able to do and what progress they are making over time, but will also suggest practical ways in which parents might support their child's further learning. Ideally, reports will form the basis for discussion between teachers, students and parents.

8. Student Reports should be time efficient and manageable to prepare.

Reports need to draw on the formal and informal evidence that has been collected routinely and recorded systematically as part of teachers' ongoing classroom assessment practice.

Further support

Extensive support material to facilitate school planning in Assessment and Reporting is available at the Time to Teach website at: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/index.htm> and at Curriculum support at: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/>

Contact

Further information can be accessed by contacting Kerry Long, Manager School Based Assessment and Reporting Unit, Curriculum Directorate on 9886 7765 or email Kerry at: kerry.long@det.nsw.edu.au

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NSW Department of Education and Training
Curriculum K-12 Directorate
3a Smalls Rd
RYDE NSW 2112
Australia

www.det.nsw.edu.au

