Making Great Progress -
Schools with outstanding rates of progression in Key Stage 2

Making Good Progress Series

department for education and skills
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Every child deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Our school system must be one that focuses on raising attainment for every child, regardless of background. This report celebrates those schools that have secured success for all their pupils, ensuring that each child makes the best possible progress.

We have come far since 1997. The quality of teaching, transformed through the literacy and numeracy strategies, has led to big improvements in primary results. In 2006, nearly 100,000 additional pupils achieved the expected national standard at Key Stage 2 (Level 4) in English and an additional 83,000 pupils in mathematics. However we still have more to do. We need to make sure that everyone succeeds and no one’s potential is left unfulfilled.

Following the publication of the Making Good Progress consultation in January 2007 – which opened the debate about options to develop even better ways to measure, assess, report and stimulate progress in our schools – we investigated schools that were making great progress for all their children. This report is a celebration of their achievements; it reflects the key characteristics of these schools and is intended to be a practical resource to support other schools in strengthening their work around pupil progression.

Our priority now is to ensure that no child gets left behind; we must create a reality where every school and every pupil is making great progress.

Alan Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
1 Introduction

1.1 A group of expert advisers visited schools with outstanding rates of progression in Key Stage 2, to find out what lies at the heart of such spectacular improvements for children.

1.2 Twenty schools were visited and they were chosen because over the last three years, more than 90% of their pupils who were at national expectations (Level 2) in Key Stage 1 progressed to national expectations (Level 4) at Key Stage 2.

1.3 The schools were located across the country and had mixed intakes; some schools had high levels of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) populations.

1.4 In the twenty schools, officials met with the Headteacher and a member of the school’s Senior Leadership Team usually responsible for assessment. They discussed six broad areas: school culture, leadership, assessment and monitoring, policies and resources, curriculum, and teaching and learning. The schools visited all shared common characteristics in each of these areas, and a strong picture emerged of what leads to success in securing progression.

1.5 We all know the familiar features of successful schools. This report aims to draw out the connection between those features and great rates of progression for all pupils, to provide a practical resource for headteachers, senior leaders and teachers.
Chapter 2:
An achievement culture 6
All the schools had:

A moral imperative that all children will succeed

2.1 They assumed that every child had it in them to succeed. They did not accept background, race or gender as an excuse for underachievement. There was a positive ‘can do’ attitude. They made a strong presumption of success. They never said ‘the kids we get here’ or grumbled about the intake. The children thrived in this atmosphere and aimed high. They saw themselves as learners and expected to succeed because the staff did.

Waycroft Primary School, Bristol – Building an achievement culture

Following a ‘leadership’ tour to schools in Denver, USA, the head of Waycroft Primary School, Simon Rowe started introducing Waycroft children to positive ‘you can do it’ statements. These statements feature in assemblies and in posters prominently exhibited around the school.

A shared vision of their collective purpose and ethos

2.2 The word ‘vision’ is not used glibly; these schools had a pressing sense of mission which united the staff and set the tone. The head and senior staff lived and projected the vision. Since pupil success lay at the heart of the vision, staff felt obliged and inspired to make it happen.

Precise knowledge of how each child is doing and what each child needs

2.3 A high value was placed on intelligence about the child’s performance, aptitudes, strengths and learning needs. The single most effective thing all the schools were doing was to track the progress of their pupils regularly, vigorously and individually.
In spite of differences in philosophy, style and organisation, this finding was the strongest in the survey. Tracking leads to success.

A learning environment free from distractions

2.4 Learning and achieving is the goal, and everything about the school speaks to this goal. Displays support learning; time is efficiently used; learning routines are consistent; subtle messages in the environment remind children to give their best and to aim high; no opportunity is lost to turn time and resources to account. There is focus and a climate of busy application. The school gets on with the job of learning.

Lyndon Green Junior School, Birmingham – Consistency and order in the classroom

Lyndon Green Junior School’s philosophy is that consistent, orderly and planned transition and continuity throughout Key Stage 2 underpins the most effective and efficient learning journey for each child. The more predictable this progression is, the better it can be resourced, monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. The less change each child has to accommodate the less likelihood for a dip in progress.

The senior management team at Lyndon Green ensures that the environments in the school are consistent, orderly and tidy. Classrooms have a similar layout, with a common display dimension for literacy and numeracy, curriculum themes, ICT access, teaching technologies, storage and resourcing. Displays reflect the learned curriculum and a source of information in addition to celebration of achievements.

Learning that is openly admired and celebrated

2.5 This is less about formal awards than moment-by-moment feedback and appreciation. Effort and attainment are expected and remarked on. Success is rewarded with attention rather than ‘bribes’. The climate inhibits anti-intellectualism and bullying of ‘boffins’. The school is a place where learning is actively promoted.
Chapter 3: Leadership
3 Leadership

All the schools had a group of senior leaders made effective by:

Heads who see themselves as the Head Teacher

3.1 Leading teaching, learning and achievement is their prime job: they organise everything else around this key priority. They know how to improve teaching in order to increase attainment and achievement.

Senior leaders being close to the learning

3.2 These leaders allocate a lot of time to being in the classroom with teachers and pupils. They exercise control over the details of learning including the presentation of children’s work, marking, record keeping and the progress made collectively by the whole class and by individual pupils in it.
Heads and/or senior teachers being in post for a long time and retaining their energy and enthusiasm

3.3 The energy and enthusiasm of these people remain undiminished over the years; indeed, they appear to increase as these colleagues continually seek new challenges in the school. Their enthusiasm is infectious and they are great motivators. They all have a deep sense of duty towards the local community. Continuity of leadership helps to secure the continued progress of generations of children.

An absolute and sustained focus on improving standards

3.4 These senior leaders are unswerving in their focus on improving standards. Regardless of the starting point of the children, they ensure that all pupils make significant progress. There is no coasting or underachievement. Both lower and higher attaining pupils are challenged and supported and progress at a significant rate. Being on the SEN register is not an excuse to make poor progress.

Establishing systems to allow time to think and act strategically and innovatively

3.5 The importance of thinking strategically and innovatively is paramount in these schools. Systems are in place and staff are organised in such a way that leaders are proactive rather than reactive in leading the school. Procedures and processes are constantly honed in the quest for more time to focus on pupil progress and achievement.

Developing a confident and assured style of leadership

3.6 Actions are decisive. Leaders do not shy away from making decisions, which are based on a clear and firm vision of where the school is going. There is an openness to try out different practices, informed in a variety of ways from outside the school, including by research. However, if the practice does not result in improved outcomes for pupils, it is swiftly suspended.

Passion for order and thoroughness

3.7 A prevailing feature of these schools is the head’s insistence, persistence and consistency about certain non-negotiables. These often differ from school to school and can appear, on the surface at least, to be quite small things, such as tidiness of books or coats. They arise from the head’s own personal values which are, however, adopted over time by the school as a whole. They are pursued with a zeal that could be construed as a fussiness, which, however, often has a profound impact on the smooth running of the school and its focus on achievement.
Organising a team around functions rather than status

3.8 Unashamedly, these heads exploit the skills and interests of all the staff regardless of where they fit into the hierarchy. Over time, senior leaders assume multi-layered roles, for example, a deputy head who also takes on the role of inclusion manager as well as being a member of the Y3/4 team in addition to taking on responsibility for a subject, say history. Adopting all these different roles enables senior leaders to exercise influence across the school and to keep the focus firmly on pupil progress.

The forging of strong, professional relationships

3.9 Although formal meetings are scheduled regularly, a greater emphasis is placed on the quality of professional relationships. Heads have considerable contact with staff. For some this means organising time to be in classrooms, for others the accent is on working with staff during their planning time. This way of working assures consistency of approach throughout the school and has a significant impact on individual pupil progress.

Doing jobs that need to be done

3.10 These leadership teams do not allow a perceived lack of a capacity to get in the way: they get on and do what needs to be done, without complaint. They have their own checklist of non-negotiables that must be in place to assure the progress of each child.
4 Assessment and monitoring

In all the schools:

Pupil tracking is rigorous and vigorous

4.1 *Every* school in the survey had in place tracking systems which were thorough, regular, individualised and well-maintained. Periodically, they scrutinised evidence: folders of work, end-of-unit assignments, one-to-one sessions with pupils. Tracking was usually reported at half-termly intervals, against criteria, and more often than not using sub-levels. There was nothing inert about the data generated. The information was detailed enough to use in forward planning, to set targets and plan lessons. Some schools shared the judgements with parents, a move that proved very popular. In other words, the schools had mechanisms for watching and driving pupil progress.

Tracking pupil progress at King David Junior School, Manchester
The senior team take a high-profile hands-on approach to assessment

4.2 In every school, the role of assessment co-ordinator was located in the senior leadership team, and was much more than an administrative or organisational job. The records were more than numbers in a mark book. They really were tracking pupils rather than marks. Many of the senior staff we spoke to had marked scripts across the year to secure a good sense of the pattern of performance. They routinely inspected pupils books, did sample surveys by subject, theme or year. They kept tabs on pupils who had fallen off trajectory. The work was close-to-the-ground and ‘hands-on’.

They look for evidence and gaps in evidence of achievement

4.3 Although assessments were recorded, these schools did not have a tickbox mentality. They searched for evidence for judgements. They found this is pupils’ books, or by setting more summative assignments to see if children could use the skills they set out to teach. Sometimes they used formal tests such as QCA optional tests applied in controlled conditions. In the process of close searching, they found features of the pupils’ work which were strong, and defined those which needed more work. The assessments were therefore both well-informed and useful.

Numbers translate into action

4.4 The schools use national curriculum levels, but they have a grip on what each level represents. They have a strong sense of the small steps between one level and another; they understand progress. They also have targets, but the targets are translated into children. They know where the pupils are who have shown early promise; they know who has untapped potential; they know the data but they have identified the percentages as actual children. Real children and real progress matters to them, so they have targets and tests in perspective. They are not afraid of data; they use it.
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5 Policies and resources

In all these schools:

Adults are considered the most important resource

5.1 We had expected these areas to be significant in these schools’ ability to make good progress. In fact, we found that this was not the case apart from one universally important area: staff. In some schools up to 87% of the budget is allocated to human resources. But deployment of these adults is carefully targeted to maximise pupil achievement, for example, teaching assistants are assigned to work with groups of pupils with whom they could add value, and not automatically the least able group. Policies that really count are those that arose from shared values and become part of the day to day work of teachers. Policies for assessment teaching and learning and behaviour were cited as the most valuable.

South Farnham Community Junior School, Surrey – Emphasis on staff development

‘When staff teams feel valued and understood they have no need to divert their energy into any area other than the success of their pupils.’ Andrew Carter OBE – Headteacher, South Farnham Community Junior School

South Farnham considers the development of a strong staff team as central to their successful school. South Farnham aims to know their staff as well as they know their pupils. This knowledge of teachers’ strengths and areas for development enables the staff to know exactly what they should be working on, either collectively or individually.
Chapter 6:
Curriculum
6 Curriculum

In these schools:

Planning for progression is secure throughout the school

6.1 All these schools had clearly established long term plans in place for curriculum progression. In English and mathematics these are based on the Primary National Strategy frameworks. Medium term planning is a rich mixture that includes: commercial schemes; QCA schemes of work and home developed materials. This rich mix is constantly refreshed, mostly by teachers attending courses or identifying useful resources to purchase. It is typical that subject coordinators supervise this process. Continuity between year groups is highly efficient in most of these schools. They ensure that at least one member of the year group remains in place the following school year so that continuity and consistency is assured. Where this is not possible senior leaders become the guarantors of this continuity by inducting new teachers to the team and its expectations. A strong emphasis is placed on using summative assessment at the end of the school year to inform planning for the following year. This is a really important part of the schools’ processes for planning progression. Many allocate a day per year group at the end of the summer term to carry out this vital task.

Systems are in place so that time is not wasted on reinventing wheels

6.2 Because the long and medium term plans are in place, teachers can confidently plan across the year group to create a consistent approach. Many of these schools store lessons on their intra-net so that other teachers can use them as a starting point for when that topic is taught next. The underlying principle for planning is to amend and adapt existing plans to match the needs of children and not to start from scratch. In this way these schools are able to maximise their time and energy on thinking about what they might need to do in their teaching to ensure all children can make progress in their learning. In most of the schools this short term planning involves senior leaders in one form or another. This contributes to a strong quality assurance procedure. In one school the headteacher makes herself available every afternoon to work with teaching teams in their PPA time to plan lessons.

The whole school takes responsibility for the standards achieved in Year 6

6.3 These schools are good at plotting the necessary trajectory to get children to make sustained progress from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2. Once this has been done, these schools go further and work out what needs to be done in each intervening year group. This does two things: first, it provides a measure for tracking and second, it informs the necessary curriculum planning to ensure the cohort is kept on course.
The emphasis is on application of skills

6.4 A common belief shared by all these schools is that skills are learned for a purpose and not out of context. In most schools this belief extends to all areas of the curriculum and is certainly an acknowledged area of development for all. These schools have spent a great deal of time analysing the hierarchy of skills that children need to make greater progress throughout the school. Skills are methodically built up, practiced and refined so that more challenging and complex work can be attempted.

Concepts are important, though standard practices are taught too

6.5 These schools place a great emphasis on children understanding the key concepts attached to each subject. They do not, however, shy away from teaching vital standard practices, for example, punctuation and grammar and mathematical algorithms. But the point here is that they make sure that children understand why these procedures are efficient and are fit for purpose.

Improvement targets are shared and layered through the years.

6.6 Most of the schools carry out a rigorous self evaluation that identifies areas of the curriculum they think are not addressing as well as others. Responsibility for improvement is shared by all staff. Each year contributes to the effort. Personal targets set for all pupils are specific and challenging. They are also high-value. They are set, and they are followed up. This approach contributes to the development of team work, shared accountability for standards and often leads to a deep sense of pride of what the school is achieving.
Chapter 7: Teaching and learning
7 Teaching and learning

In these schools:

**It is expected that teachers have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the curriculum**

7.1 To this end, on-going professional development of staff is considered vital and is clearly linked to performance management objectives. Professional development opportunities are carefully selected and related to the school’s overall vision of effective teaching. In some cases, support is provided in-house. There is an explicit focus on subject knowledge as well as on pedagogy. A strong feature in these schools is a positive climate which allows teachers to appraise honestly the areas in which they need – and want – to improve.

**Lessons are pacy, orchestrated and well-signposted**

7.2 Lessons are well planned, nearly always collaboratively across the year-group, and based on clear and precise learning objectives shared with the class. Children’s interest is retained by explicitly explaining to them the lesson format and why they will be doing certain things; as a result, they have a good overview of what will happen and what the purpose of the activity is. Evident in the lesson planning is a focus on honing the craft of questioning to identify pupils’ understanding and the next steps in their learning. This accrued knowledge builds up a composite picture allowing accurate formative assessment.

A pupil at St Joseph’s RC Junior School, Stockport, using the school’s interactive whiteboard
Children are encouraged to spell out how they learn

7.3 Thinking aloud and explaining your working out are important facets of the lessons. One word answers from children are discouraged: only complete sentences will do. Although a mixture of teaching methods is employed, interactive, whole-group teaching predominates.

Much is expected of pupils in terms of their learning

7.4 Children are taught how to learn. Learning is active; pupils retain a deep interest and behave accordingly. Considerable emphasis is placed on oral participation and teachers stress the positive. If a child fails to make the required progress, it is never deemed to be his/her fault, rather teachers look to themselves and to their teaching.

The conclusion of the lesson is planned for and worked towards

7.5 There is a sense of momentum during the lesson based on the learning objective. The conclusion of a lesson is planned for and worked towards. The intention is very clear and is seen as a step on the way to achieving greater understanding of the topic or theme in hand.
The good teacher is highly valued

7.6 All adults who contribute to the achievement and progress of children are perceived as the school's greatest asset. Good staff are retained in a variety of ways, often by focusing on their individual skills, interests and ambitions. For some, this means internal promotion, for others this means additional time to develop a particular area of expertise.

Teachers adopt the school’s values and vision

7.7 In all these schools, teachers and teaching assistants buy in to the shared values of the school, particularly the notion that all children can achieve. This is an important feature in the initial recruitment of teachers. Greater emphasis is placed on this attribute than on a particular style of teaching.