

How online tests are used to monitor progress at Handcross Park School



case study

Handcross Park Independent Prep School in West Sussex has a deserved reputation for providing high standards of childcare for 2 – 13 year olds. The school prides itself on achieving excellence in all areas and assessment is a key aspect of informing teaching and learning across the whole school.

In the Autumn term of 2007, Handcross Park decided to adopt a suite of online reasoning, literacy and numeracy assessments from GL Assessment in order to provide an efficient method of assessing pupils and collating results. Neil Cheesman, Deputy Head Teacher, noticed the difference immediately.

“We instantly saw a huge reduction in the time it took to analyse results. Online assessment provides results within minutes and saves a great deal of time previously taken up by marking written assessments.”

However, not only was the school new to digital assessment; it was also using GL Assessment’s tests for the first time. “Our previous tests didn’t cater for pupils that were out-of-range and we wanted a means of assessing pupils of all abilities. Another problem was that the data was in an unfriendly format and we had to spend hours going through the reports and making them easily accessible for staff.”

Handcross Park chose to adopt the digital version of GL Assessment’s *Cognitive Abilities Test* (CAT) to assess pupils’ reasoning abilities. CAT measures the three principal areas of reasoning – verbal, non-verbal and quantitative – and is the most widely used test of reasoning abilities in the UK.

To measure specific strengths and needs in English, the school selected the *Suffolk Reading Scale* (SRS) and *Progress in English* (PIE). For Maths, they adopted *Progress in Maths* (PIM), a standardised series of tests

designed to provide rich diagnostic information about pupils’ mathematical abilities.

Used together, Handcross Park found that the test data provided a useful, objective means of assessing pupils progress which supported ongoing classroom assessment.

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Introducing online assessment

When the school introduced GL Assessment’s online testing platform, Testwise, Neil Cheesman found little need for staff training. “Having established that all we needed was a reliable internet connection, we required virtually no training with the new assessments. We are reasonably computer literate and just had to log in and start.”

“The support in setting-up the online system has been very efficient, together with the ongoing support, which has been superb. The results have always been available within minutes of the assessments being completed,” he says.

“The electronic assessments are for Years 3 – 8 and while it can be a busy time for me in organising the process, we save so much staff time as we are not wasting valuable hours marking papers.”

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Instant reporting

Once a test has been completed by a pupil, test scores and detailed diagnostic reports are delivered instantly, enabling teachers at Handcross Park to evaluate pupils' needs immediately.

At the beginning of the academic year, Handcross Park uses the PIE, PIM and SRS tests to provide a comparison of Standardised Age Scores within the class, year group and nationally.

"We use these to inform target setting, teaching and learning for the year ahead. Teachers particularly like the option of producing a question-by-question analysis as it allows them to review individual and group progress, and then embark on specific target setting," Neil explains.

A 'Value Added Tracking Chart' is also used to view year-on-year progress of individual pupils, classes and year groups. The school finds this very useful in monitoring the progress of

individual pupils, together with displaying an overall picture of the year group's ability levels in Maths and English. This is also used as a comparison across classes within year groups to evaluate teaching at the school.

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In the summer term, the school uses CAT data to inform teaching and learning based on comparisons within each class and year group. It is

also used to obtain a useful guideline for Key Stages 2-3 and GCSE predictors, and to ascertain a comparison of boys and girls. For example, the data can enable teachers to see if girls are out performing boys in numeracy, or whether a particular group of children are struggling with a specific area in English.

"All of these tests arm our teachers with knowledge about our pupils' levels of understanding across the curriculum, enabling them to take into account specific areas of learning during lessons," Neil explains.

"We can tailor lessons accordingly and take into account specific areas of learning during lessons, so that each pupil will gain the maximum benefit. The whole process is working extremely well and the online element ensures that our time is given to supporting pupils rather than given to unnecessary paperwork."

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The image shows two screenshots of digital assessment questions. The top screenshot is from 'Progress in English 11 Digital' and shows a reading comprehension question. The text reads: 'The great bird stretched out its wings to greet the sun and feel the life-giving warmth on its feathers. The farmer was quiet.' Below this is an illustration of a man and a woman in a field with a large bird. The question asks: 'All was silent. Nothing moved. What atmosphere does the author hope to create with these two very short sentences?' with radio button options for 'mystery' and 'fear'. The bottom screenshot is from 'Progress in Maths 9 Digital' and shows a word problem. The text reads: 'One bus can carry 59 people when it is full. 465 people hire some buses to go on a trip.' Below this is an illustration of several buses and people. The question asks: 'How many buses do they need?' and instructs the user to 'Click then type your answer in the box below.' The interface includes navigation buttons like 'BACK', 'NEXT', and 'instructions help'.

Benefits:

- Offers the quality, rigour and reliable information that you expect from GL Assessment tests.
- Removes the burden of test administration as all practice, instructions and timings are computer administered
- Instant scoring gives you results at the touch of a button
- Flexible digital format enables you to analyse results with ease and integrate them with other school information
- Fast feedback is motivating for pupils and saves you hours of marking time
- Full continuity of data for schools moving from paper to digital assessments

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