Assessment for learning 8 schools project report

department for
education and skills

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Acknowledgements

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Preface

Definition

The Assessment for learning 8 schools project was an action research project (July 2005 – October 2006) which sought to identify what helps pupils develop as motivated and effective learners and how AfL can be successfully developed whole school (through professional dialogue and collaborative working with teachers, school leaders and LAs). The project yielded evidence that assessment for learning improves pupil progress over the short and medium term and impacts on standards in the longer term.

Assessment for learning (AfL) has been defined as:

'The process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.'

Assessment Reform Group, 2002

Principles

AfL is founded upon the following ten principles.

AfL:

- is part of effective planning;
- focuses on how pupils learn;
- is central to classroom practice;
- is a key professional skill;
- is sensitive and constructive;
- fosters motivation;
- promotes understanding of goals and criteria;
- helps learners know how to improve;
- develops the capacity for self (and peer) assessment;
- recognises all educational achievement.

Assessment Reform Group, 2002

In practice

To make good AfL practice explicit and to help teachers recognise how this relates to good teaching and learning, it is useful to focus upon the seven 'key characteristics of AfL'.

AfL:

- is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part;
- involves sharing learning goals with pupils;
- aims to help pupils to know and to recognise the standards they are aiming for;
- involves pupils in self (and peer) assessment;
- provides feedback which leads to pupils recognising their next steps and how to take them;
- promotes confidence that every pupil can improve;
- involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data [information].

Assessment for learning: beyond the black box, Assessment Reform Group, 1999

1. Introduction

The 'AfL 8 schools project' was an action research project which sought to identify what helps pupils to develop as motivated and effective learners, through professional dialogue and collaborative working with teachers, school leaders and local authorities (LAs).

The context of the 'AfL 8 schools project'

Those working to develop AfL in schools can provide many examples of how it has transformed teachers' practice, accelerated learning and made a significant impact on standards. Sometimes we see the impact on standards within minutes in a lesson and this improvement in performance is secured within a handful of lessons. This is why it is so popular among teachers, headteachers and advisers; it makes sense and they have seen it work.

The report summarises the main findings and provides 13 key messages arising from the research.

It focuses on the **impact of developing AfL on pupil learning and standards and on the leadership and management of change** linked to:

1. teachers developing effective AfL in the classroom;

2. leaders developing AfL whole school.

The project findings indicate that fundamental to developing AfL in the classroom is **developing the independent learner** and, fundamental to developing the leadership and management of whole school change is **developing distributed leadership**. The intended audience is teachers, leaders in schools, those who advise and support schools and national policy makers.

Despite the apparent potential of AfL, Ofsted continues to report poor formative assessment practice nationally. Even in schools noted for AfL development it is often only having a measurable impact within a small number of departments and has not provided a vehicle for whole school improvement.

In summary, on the micro scale, in individual teacher's lessons or in successful departments, impact is evident both short and longer term – but on the macro scale, across a school or LA, it remains weak and elusive.

Underpinning hypotheses

Given the context, the project was designed to provide strong evidence of impact on standards and to gain greater insight into how AfL can be successfully developed as a whole school approach.

The project was underpinned by three hypotheses:

1. AfL will have more significant and widespread impact if more schools commit to a strongly led, well managed and systematic approach to developing AfL. The focus needs to be on the identified learning needs of the pupils in the school and requires all teachers to work collaboratively to develop specific areas of AfL. The key is: developing pupils as independent learners.

2. Schools need to be clear about the relationship between whole school developments and school improvement. School improvement is not just about doing certain things better. It is about improving how you go about doing things better, such as developing collaborative ways of working, towards an agreed vision which drive continuous improvement. The key is: using AfL as a vehicle for school improvement.

3. The impact of AfL will be more obvious to everyone when there is better understanding of what AfL looks like in the classroom and how its impact on learning is evidenced. The impact on learning is multi-faceted: there is the impact on pace of learning (and hence standards) and there is also the impact on how effectively pupils learn (their attitude towards learning and their learning skills). The key is: recognising AfL strategies in good teaching and recognising the impact on learning.

Objectives of the project

At the start of the project we established a set of research objectives:

1. **Objective:** To strengthen and deepen a shared understanding of what AfL is and what it looks like.

2. **Objective:** To demonstrate the impact of AfL in the short, medium and longer term on the quality of teaching, the pace of learning, and on standards.

3. **Objective:** To demonstrate the impact of AfL on pupils' motivation and independent learning skills.

4. **Objective:** To explore the effectiveness of a common theme whole school approach to developing AfL and learn how schools can further develop this approach.

5. **Objective:** To help sharpen understanding of the nature and role of AfL in the wider context, making effective use of valid and reliable summative assessment information.

6. **Objective:** To learn how to overcome the obstacles to whole school development of AfL, identify best practice strategies and solutions.

7. **Objective:** To identify how the whole school development of AfL can contribute to school improvement and advise schools.

Nature and purpose of this report

The report summarises the main findings and key messages from the 'AfL 8 schools project'. The intended audience is teachers, leaders in schools, those who advise and support schools and national policy-makers.

The thrust of the report is on the impact of developing AfL on pupil learning and standards and on the leadership and management of change linked to:

1. **teachers developing effective AfL in the classroom;**

2. **leaders developing AfL as a whole school initiative.**

The report, however, goes beyond summarising and giving examples of the main findings and key messages from the project. It contains advice and guidance on how to successfully develop AfL to improve teaching, develop independent learning, raise standards and support school improvement.

Evidence of the impact of adopting AfL whole school on teaching, learning and on standards and also on the leadership and management of change in schools is provided in the report. Unsurprisingly, the research raises new questions which cannot be answered within the scope of this report and this opens up a number of lines of further enquiry.

Sometimes developing classroom practice has not had impact or practice has remained patchy, but schools in the project have come to a better understanding of what actions to take or what lines of enquiry to pursue to help determine appropriate action. Everyone involved in the project has learned a great deal, both from what went well and why and from what did not and why.

The project findings

The project findings are based on the eight schools' own findings as explained and evidenced in their case studies, which summarise what they have learned. Each school's case study is provided in full on the CD-ROM and while these are written to an agreed structure the final presentation naturally varies a little. They remain as they were submitted by each project school for publication: their own account in their words. The project schools are candid about their experiences, what worked and what could have been done better and they are prepared to share this with other schools.

The experiences and reflections of the three Regional Advisers (RAs) working with the schools are taken into account in the writing of the key messages and in editing the summary of the findings (Section 5) but ultimately the teachers and leaders in the schools have conducted the research.

This summary report endeavours to capture and distil out what we have learned together but is not a substitute for what the schools themselves have to say.

Voices

In undertaking the research we recognised that to develop practice at every level you need to engage people at every level and listen to what they say. The following are examples of feedback from participants:

Pupil voice

'Teachers give you small steps, like a ladder, you only have to do little things but know you will get there if you do' – *'it's not just about knowing you have to go to a house, it's knowing how to get to the house'* – *'yes, like climbing a mountain, teachers need to explain that if you try to take the short route you will be in big trouble but if you take the right long route you will get there'* – *'some teachers write… what we need to do to improve. It's much more helpful than just ticks or grades.'*

Teacher voice

'What makes the biggest difference to the higher-attaining classes is dialogue: not just teacher-pupil dialogue, but pupil-pupil dialogue and pupil-led dialogue. The teacher giving the learning objective and the outcome but the pupils deciding where they're going to take that. Pupils see that it is independent learning and see themselves as independent learners, and they see that they're getting something out of it so it's really motivating.'

School senior leader voice

'If I had to pick one thing it would be the way the pupils, of all abilities, talk about their learning … they're actually better than some staff. They have a really good idea about what lessons should involve. When pupils start by saying 'I feel more motivated in my learning when…' you know you've made a difference. They are now much more critical of us as providers of their education. It's essential to invest in the pupil voice as part of personalising learning.'

LA voice

'When we began the project, the school was receiving support to help it to exit special measures. Using AfL as a vehicle for whole school improvement contributed to the school exiting well within the allocated timescale. The very positive Ofsted inspection before Easter supports our evidence of the improvements made to the quality of learning and teaching. The school now has the internal capacity to sustain its own self improvement.'

'The project has helped all involved within the school to improve their understanding of both the relationship and distinction between assessment of learning and assessment for learning.'

'The project has promoted a shared understanding of the language and practice of AfL. This has improved consistency (of practice) across the school by ensuring a common focus and commitment.'

Secondary National Strategy – RA voice

'I have learned more about developing AfL in the classroom to impact on standards and learned more about leading and managing whole school change during this project than I have from anything else I can think of… in discussions; pupils, teachers and school leaders immediately relate to the issues and can see the sense of what we have learned to help resolve these.'

2. Key messages

The key messages relate to two areas:

- **teaching and learning;**
- **the leadership and management of whole school change.**

The project findings indicate that fundamental to developing AfL in the classroom is **developing the independent learner** and, fundamental to developing the leadership and management of change is **developing distributed leadership**. It is important to be mindful of this when considering the key messages.

There are four key messages for teaching and learning and nine for the leadership and management of whole school change.

The four key messages for teaching and learning are further unpacked as they are each a synthesis of a number of important messages.

Teaching and learning: key messages

Independent learning: Pupils need to move from being passive recipients of what they are being taught, to develop as independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning and are empowered to make progress for themselves. The best AfL leads to lessons in which the pupils and teacher work together to take the learning forward.

Key message 1

Fundamental to AfL is that pupils have a clear understanding of what they are trying to learn (learning objectives), how they can recognise achievement (learning outcomes), what 'good' looks like (success criteria) and why they are learning this in the first place (that is, the big picture, sometimes linked to personal curricular targets).

Explanation:

- This key message is fundamental because all other aspects of AfL rely on it.

- Learning objectives in lessons are important because they help secure progress towards the medium and longer term objectives; they support planning and help focus the teaching on what pupils need to learn; they help pupils see the point of individual lessons.

- Learning outcomes are important because they focus on pupil achievement and help teachers design lessons which enable pupils to do well. As important as clear learning objectives are, it is the clarity of learning outcomes which most help pupils make good progress in a lesson.

- Success criteria are the refinement of the learning outcomes: they provide the detail needed to help pupils understand how to evaluate the quality of their work and improve it (see Key message 2).

- Objective led lessons operate on a range of different levels from the basic surface response to policy ('the objectives are on the board') to teachers continually developing and refining their understanding of progression in the subject and helping pupils use success criteria as independent learners.

Key message 2

Pupils' progress is accelerated when they are clear about the success criteria for the intended outcomes and are able to judge the quality of their work and know how to improve it. This requires teachers having a good understanding of progression in the key concepts and skills in their subject.

Explanation:

- This key message builds upon Key message 1.

- When teachers are clear about the success criteria for the intended learning outcome(s) in a lesson they are able to support whole class and individual pupil progress through questioning, dialogue and written feedback.

- Through the effective use of success criteria there is a multiplier effect as pupils become individual hubs of learning within a lesson, each pupil driving their own learning and supporting others' learning.

Key message 3

Learning happens in pupils' heads as they assess their level of understanding or quality of their work and recognise how to improve it. This is the essence of AfL.

Explanation:

- AfL takes place in lessons and at the point of learning, that's to say at a point of interaction between teacher and pupil, or between pupils or during a moment of personal reflection. AfL is not, in itself, a collection of teaching strategies.

- AfL can seem deceptively simple. On the one hand many of its tools and classroom strategies are simple and easy to implement. There are undoubtedly some quick and longer term gains to be made from the immediate use of approaches such as 'think-pair-share' or providing written staged success criteria for pupils to refer to during peer assessment. However, teachers who most successfully develop and refine their AfL practice never lose sight of the fact that AfL is something happening in pupils' minds and all their planning and interactions with pupils aim to facilitate this.

Key message 4

Classroom dialogue (whole class, group or paired discussion) is at the heart of good AfL as it enables pupils to develop their thinking and to learn from each other. Teachers need to develop pupils' dispositions, skills and confidence to engage in reciprocal talk within a positive climate for learning.

Explanation:

- Vibrant, structured and focused dialogue provides pupils with the opportunity to dig deep into their own understanding and identify what they need to learn, support the learning of others, work collaboratively and enjoy learning as an active participant.

- Dialogue is underdeveloped in many lessons and so AfL simply isn't happening no matter what strategies the teacher uses.

- Dialogue is sometimes avoided by teachers (and pupils) because it can result in 'loss of control' (disengagement and disruption). Typically, this is because pupils do not have the skills, protocols or habits of discussion or because discussion is insufficiently focussed.

The leadership and management of whole school change: Key messages

Distributed leadership: Strong proactive senior and middle leadership is critical to developing AfL whole school but this is a precursor to distributed leadership within a collaborative learning community. Leadership is neither 'top down' nor 'bottom up'. With distributed leadership comes shared ownership of, and contribution to, a continually evolving vision of where the school is going and how to get there. The distributed leadership goes right down to pupils taking the lead in their learning, going full circle to developing independent learners.

Key message 5

Effective whole school change must be informed by a thorough and on-going analysis of the overarching learning needs of the pupils. This is about diagnosing common obstacles to learning in lessons and teachers working collaboratively within and across departments to address these. Pupils' learning needs change over time as schools help their pupils develop as learners.

Key message 6

To establish AfL whole school both 'top down' and 'bottom up' change processes must prevail as they fulfil different purposes. 'Top down' approaches can convey a clear message about expectations and focus for improvement but this alone does not win the 'hearts and minds' of all teachers or build internal capacity.

Key message 7

AfL practice is most successfully developed where teachers work collaboratively within and across departments, share their practice and learn from what they and their peers do well. Change is most effective when there is a sustained professional dialogue between teaching staff and between staff and their pupils. In planning change, consideration needs to be given to establishing mechanisms for encouraging and facilitating this dialogue.

Key message 8

Senior and middle leaders need to maintain an unrelenting focus on, and support for, the intended change. This includes addressing the issue of competing priorities and the contradictory practices which may stem from these.

Key message 9

A secure and shared understanding of what effective AfL practice 'looks like' is essential for teachers to be able to reflect and develop their practice and for leaders to be able to help them do this. Isolated pockets of good practice can be developed by individual teachers but, for AfL to have significant impact, development needs to be whole school. Everyone, especially senior and middle leaders, must continue to develop a more insightful understanding of AfL.

Key message 10

Senior and middle leaders need to reflect critically on their ways of working; they should flex and change through learning from others to take intelligent informed risks. Effective leaders are able to both continue to refine and sharpen their current approaches to whole school change and introduce new ones where things are not working.

Key message 11

The whole school development of any pedagogical approaches, and associated teaching strategies, requires systematic and systemic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of this on:

- The quality of teaching and learning;
- Standards;
- The leadership and management of change.

Key message 12

Monitoring and evaluation needs to be a distributed process involving all teachers and subject teams. It should be enquiry-based and inform continuing professional development (CPD) (e.g. ongoing action research in lessons and coaching). CPD is a journey not a series of isolated events.

Key message 13

Pupils can provide rich and penetrating evidence and insight into what works well in lessons and what doesn't. Engaging pupils in school self evaluation also helps them develop as reflective learners and practitioners in much the same way as it does teachers.

3. Project methodology

Three Secondary National Strategy RAs worked closely with LA Strategy support teams in eight LAs across the regions. In each LA one secondary school was identified as the focus for the case study.

The purpose was not to provide artificial or intensive consultancy support to the eight schools, but to learn from their approaches to developing practice and to provide advice and support where helpful so that the outcome would provide 'do-able' guidance and advice for other schools. The selected schools did, however, receive some additional support from LA personnel to assist in their collection of evidence in order to compile their case study for the research.

The eight LAs selected were known to have a strong commitment to AfL with good Secondary National Strategy leadership and an effective consultancy team.

The school selection criteria provided to LAs were that the school needed to:

- have a strong commitment to the common theme whole school approach to developing AfL with pro-active support from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT);
- have a critical mass of teachers who wish to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms;
- have the capacity to lead and manage improvement;
- have the capacity to produce the case study for the project;
- ideally have already launched the whole school development of an aspect of AfL and now be focusing on developing AfL in classrooms;
- have a proven track record in being open to LA Strategy support;
- understand (or will be open to the premise) that AfL cannot be embedded in classroom practice through training events alone and are therefore open to other appropriate approaches to CPD, for example coaching, networking, collaborative planning within and across departments.

In reality, not all the schools selected met all of these criteria.

The eight schools selected were from a range of contexts:

- high and low attaining;
- low, average and high contextual value added (CVA) scores;
- improving, declining, steady and varying standards;
- urban, suburban and rural;
- one in special measures and another recently emerged from special measures.

The project focused on Year 9 to make the project manageable (for example, triangulating evidence of impact of AfL on identified pupils from different sources). It also meant that the end of Key Stage 3 assessment results could be used alongside other measures of standards to help evidence impact.

The 'support' approach is described and exemplified in **Appendix 1** 'Model for working with schools'.

The project started in July 2005 with a meeting in each school between the headteacher, School Strategy Manager, AfL lead consultant and RA (and in some cases an additional LA representative) to share the objectives of the project, methodology for working with the school and so on.

- Each school drew up an operational plan to address the key areas for attention relating to: a whole school approach to developing AfL; the involvement of the SLT; capacity building strategies; school self evaluation and support from the LA.

- In September 2005 RAs and LA personnel provided a brief input to all staff in each of the eight schools to explain the nature and purpose of the project and respective roles within it.

- Once underway, a wide range of evidence was systematically collected (through SLT and departmental reviews, lesson observations, work scrutinies, pupil interviews).

- Each half term, the RA visited each school for a day to help gather and collate evidence and discuss progress (typically alongside the LA AfL lead consultant). The precise nature of these visits varied as the agenda was agreed following discussion with each school.

- At the end of each review day a meeting was held with the school strategy manager (and often with other members of the SLT) to evaluate impact on classroom practice, on standards and on leading and managing change. Obstacles to progress were discussed and potential 'next steps' including CPD needs were identified.

- In between each review day schools continued to collect and collate a range of evidence of the impact of AfL, evaluate progress and support CPD, sometimes with the support of the LA.

- At the end of the project, schools were asked to produce their own case study to contribute to the findings and evidence that had been collected.

Summary of the 'AfL 8 schools project' approach

The 'AfL 8 schools project' approach:

- is a whole school approach to identifying and addressing the learning needs of pupils (and associated CPD needs of teachers) to raise standards;

- is driven by a systematic and systemic self evaluation of:

  – pupil standards, pace of learning, learning skills, motivation, attitudes and behaviour;

  – the quality of teaching (an action research approach to improvement through lesson observation and professional dialogue with reflective practitioners);

  – the appropriateness and effectiveness of the leadership and management of change in the school;

- uses regular self evaluation (and triangulation of evidence) to inform the CPD of teachers and the leadership and management of change;

- is based on a school having a shared vision of where they want to be and a clear focus for next steps towards this vision (although a vision can evolve during the process);

- promotes collaborative working (including coaching) and distributed leadership;

- is internally driven but externally supported (by critical friend(s) – working in partnership but providing challenge and wider expertise and experience);

- is an iterative action research approach to school improvement and raising standards.

In short, it is about the personalisation of continuing change and school improvement processes and any external support for this, according to the starting point and evolving needs of an individual school. It draws on AfL:

- where are we now? (how do we know?);

- where do we want to get to?;

- what are our next steps?

The respective roles and responsibilities of those involved in the project is summarised in **Appendix 2** 'Roles and responsibilties'.

4. The eight schools

School A

We are a relatively small mixed comprehensive school with 654 students on roll and are designated as a school 'in challenging circumstances'. We are on an urban fringe in an area of both social and economic deprivation – 39.6% of the intake receives free school meals. Our intake is predominantly white English and only 2.5% of our students come from other ethnic backgrounds. Student attainment on entry is below the national average (close to well below) – 34.5% of the students are on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register and 3.3% have statements. Our unauthorised absence figure is higher than the national average but we have a stable school population. Care and 'tough love' is central to our work with our children. One of our greatest challenges is to encourage our students to be aspirational and to believe that it is possible for them to achieve academic success and go on to further education. We are beginning to see the first generation of a member of the family going on to university.

We went through the painful but cathartic process of being in special measures and emerged from these in March 2004 with a determination to sustain the vastly improved quality of teaching and learning. Both teachers and students have regained their pride in the school. There is a strong team ethos among the staff and a willingness to share ideas and be receptive to change. We have a high retention rate of staff and most of the current senior management team has been together since 2001. In March 2006, part way through the project, Ofsted judged us as a 'good and improving school' and we received a grade 2 for teaching and learning.

School B

We are a mixed 11–16 comprehensive foundation school with more than 1000 pupils on roll, specialising in technology and languages. Our school serves a mainly rural area. Prior attainment is slightly above the national average for maintained mainstream schools. In 2006, 15% of our pupils were identified as having SEN, 25 of those having statements. There are slightly more boys than girls in the school and 7% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school achieves results above the national average; CVA indicates very good attainment, especially at Key Stage 3. Staffing is very stable, with many experienced teachers who have spent the majority of their careers at the college.

Since our headteacher's appointment in 2002, the focus of leadership, judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted in February 2006, has been on creating a climate for learning, initially by establishing high expectations of behaviour and aspiration, then by re-energising teaching and learning. AfL was identified in 2004–05 as a key area for school improvement, which would raise attainment and improve the level of pupil engagement and participation in the learning process. However, it became clear that the focus had to remain on AfL in 2006 and beyond if we were to embed the initiative across the whole school, in all classrooms. Taking part in the project and working closely with the LA consultant gave us the renewed drive and energy to start addressing the variability in AfL practice.

School C

Our school is a large comprehensive school specialising in technology and languages, with 1350 students on roll. We are located in the suburbs of a shire city and we draw our pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds. Percentages of students with SEN is broadly in line with the national average but students who receive free school meals and with English as an additional language (EAL) are all below the national averages.

Historically students' attainment on entry has been below national expectations. More recently this picture has changed with the prior attainment of new cohorts rising. Furthermore due to a variety of other recent whole school initiatives, there has been a marked improvement in students' attitudes to learning: there are fewer serious behaviour incidents; attendance has risen; and relationships between staff and students have strengthened. Though standards and achievement have not been a particular cause for concern the SLT is committed to the pursuit of continuous improvement. However, previous learning and teaching priorities had not achieved the intended, sustained impact upon standards and achievement. In 2004 the composition of the SLT was revised to strengthen the strategic leadership of teaching and learning. Our AfL development work has played a major part in developing a 'supported and challenging' climate among colleagues, and has allowed the school to collectively pursue excellence in teaching and learning.

School D

We are an 11–16 oversubscribed mixed comprehensive school situated on the outskirts of an inner city area. There are 1200 pupils on roll, 6.1% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 7.1% are on the SEN register. Most pupils join the school from areas of relatively low levels of economic and social deprivation and the population is almost entirely white British.

With teaching and learning as our core focus, we are aware that our culture has been one of generally good practice with some areas of inconsistency. We are determined to break down the barrier of inconsistency and to make the sharing of good practice the accepted norm. New developments are readily taken on board and introduced through consensus rather than imposition. A number of the school's standing committees are given the opportunity to discuss and review these initiatives prior to their introduction; we therefore aim to foster an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual support which keeps our aspirations for pupils high.

Attainment on entry is above the national average and KS2 to KS3 CVA was well above the median in 2005. The percentage of pupils gaining 5 A*-C at GCSE has increased by 10% in the past five years to a current rate of 68%. The rate of increase over the past three years has slowed.

AfL had been a whole school priority for 2004–05 but whole school impact had not been evident. The school had committed to implementing AfL 2005–06 as there was a determination that it would not be just a ticked 'one-year initiative' but would really impact on every teachers' work and on pupils' achievement.

School E

We are an 11–18 Church of England voluntary-aided mixed comprehensive serving a wide rural community, formed in 1992 from the amalgamation of three small schools. We are housed in new buildings on the outskirts of a small town and we also draw our intake from outlying villages. We are a dyslexia centre and, in 2004, we became our LA's first Business and Enterprise College. Being on the boundary of two counties, we have grown over our 15 years from 750 students to the present 1450.

Our vision is to be 'a centre of excellence in the heart of our community' and we were described as 'caring' and 'enthusiastically inclusive' by the last Ofsted report. We place great emphasis on the needs of the child with a strong ethos of shared responsibility between staff and pupils. Our pupils are articulate and characterised by a desire to do well but also to support their peers.

On entry to the school, the attainment of our pupils is marginally above average but at GCSE our students achieve well above national expectations. Attainment has been good across all key stages, although in response to the previous Ofsted report, teaching and learning priorities have recently focused upon improving the experience and attainment of pupils in Key Stage 3.

Since the launch of AfL as our whole school teaching and learning priority we have created a positive learning community by establishing an active teaching and learning group alongside pupil voice groups across all key stages.

In the last year we have looked to embed our use of objective led lessons and formative written feedback so that pupils are more involved in their learning.

School F

We have 681 pupils aged 11–16 on roll and are situated in a semi-urban area: we have recently become a Sport with Mathematics College. There is a high level of social deprivation locally: 24% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The majority of our pupils are from a white British background, with a significant minority of pupils from Gypsy, Roma and traveller families.

Attainment of pupils on entry is in line with national average at Key Stage 2. Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 conversion is still not as high as we would wish, despite the percentage of pupils obtaining five A*-C at GCSE rising from 20% to 55% (37% including English and mathematics) in the last five years. Although the school does not have many major behaviour issues, low level disruption does hinder learning and so we have benefited from the DfES behaviour improvement project (BIP).

During the course of the 'AfL 8 schools project', three new members were appointed to the SLT: this contributed significantly to the process of embedding a focus on teaching and learning.

The vision of the school is: 'We believe that every child matters. A child only has one school life and, together, we must make it count.'

Our school is a community with learning at its heart. We want our pupils to become lifelong learners. We also believe in the importance of providing broader educational opportunities and in fostering a sense of equality, tolerance, courtesy and the value of hard work.

Prior to being involved in the project AfL had been an identified priority within the school for a number of years and was being developed by a small group of interested teachers, supported by an LA advisory teacher. However, there was no whole school focus, nor direction from the SLT, on any particular elements of AfL and because there was no overall strategic leadership the impact of AfL was, at best, 'patchy'.

School G

We are an oversubscribed, mixed 11–18 comprehensive foundation school on the outskirts of a large conurbation with 1122 pupils on roll. Since 2003 our school has been a specialist Mathematics and Computing College. The school serves a relatively affluent local community with 26 pupils (2.3%) eligible for free school meals. Prior attainment is well above the national average and variations year on year are slight. 8% of our pupils have been identified as 'Gifted and talented'. There are 9% of pupils identified as having SEN with 3% having statements. Headline examination results are respectable at all levels, but the CVA is variable. Our school has a relatively stable staff though recruitment is often difficult. Staff attitude towards, and engagement with, change is usually very positive.

Pupils' attitudes to school are generally positive and participation in the many activities available to them is high. We had done a lot of work within the Secondary National Strategy to develop teaching and learning and this had been successful in improving the quality of lessons across the school. However, our pupils remained in large part, passive learners and we saw the need to develop their independence as a way to raise their attainment. To this end we began to develop AfL strategies as a whole school focus from September 2004. In February 2005 Ofsted recognised this as an area for development and we put our action plan in place and began its implementation with support from the LA. We were keen to take part in the project because it gave us the opportunity to assess the possible impact of AfL on pupil progress at an early stage in our development.

School H

We are an 11–18 mixed comprehensive of 1134 students. Our college is the only state secondary school in a small seaside resort with a population of 25 000 and we are on two sites approximately half a mile apart. One site houses Years 7–9 and suffers from some overcrowding and the other accommodates Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. We are typical of many secondary schools in the LA with a very small number of students from ethnic groups.

Our college went into special measures following an Ofsted inspection in January 2004. The following 20 months saw a change in the headteacher five times before the current principal arrived in October 2005. We determined in the summer term of 2004 that AfL would be the most effective whole college strategy in improving teaching and learning. Our college was removed from special measures following a successful HMI visit in December 2005 (during the project). We are applying for Specialist status with a joint physical education/science bid which was submitted in October 2006.

Attainment at Key Stage 3 is very close to national average in core and foundation subjects. Attainment of five or more A*-Cs at GCSE has varied between 51% and 59% over the last six years with the higher figure achieved in 2006 being indicative of a general upward trend.

We adopted AfL as a whole school initiative in 2004 but leadership capacity issues meant that it did not develop as we might have hoped. We seized the opportunity to become involved in the project and saw it as a means to strengthen teaching and learning across the school.

5. The findings: learning from what worked... and what didn't

This section is organised under the headings of:

- **impact on teaching and learning;**
- **impact on standards;**
- **impact on leadership and management of change.**

5.1 Impact on teaching and learning

The schools in the project identified, both prior to and during the project, a number of issues in relation to the quality of teaching and learning.

The learning issues are about **developing pupils as independent learners** (whether working individually, in pairs, groups or within an interactive whole class session). Project teachers identified these characteristics of pupils who are independent learners:

- **Pupils who are clear about what they are trying to learn in lessons (and why), how they can demonstrate success and evaluate 'quality'.**
- **Pupils who are gaining skills and confidence in whole class dialogue and in group and paired discussion.**
- **Pupils who are developing a language for learning so that they are increasingly able to articulate and discuss how they learn and what helps their learning.**
- **Pupils who can respond to feedback and improve their work during lessons.**

Associated teaching issues focus on teacher behaviours which encourage and enable **pupils to develop as independent learners. These teaching issues have very much informed the project report's key messages and include:**

- **Teachers having a shared understanding of AfL and how it impacts on learning and on standards.**
- **Teachers having a good understanding of the progression in the key concepts and skills in the subject they are teaching** – this involves building upon National Curriculum (NC) level descriptions and subject frameworks (which help with planning) to develop finer success criteria which can provide a scaffold for learning for pupils.
- **Teachers moving from 'planning for teaching' (activity driven) to 'planning for learning' (outcome driven) for all pupils of all abilities** – this involves distinguishing between 'pace of teaching' and 'pace of learning' in lessons and also teachers gaining confidence to take risks (with support).
- **Teachers providing opportunities for pupils to learn through thoughtfully facilitated and supported questioning and dialogue (whole class, group or paired discussion)** – this includes encouraging and supporting regular and structured peer and self assessment.
- **Teachers providing better feedback (especially written feedback – an identified weakness) which identifies pupils' next steps and providing opportunities in lessons to respond to feedback.**

Developing pupils as independent learners

As the project progressed, the importance of developing pupils as independent learners

became apparent, although few schools had mentioned it as an issue at the outset. It became increasingly clear that pupils need to move from being passive recipients of what they are being taught, to develop as independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning and are empowered to make progress for themselves.

The development of independent learning is complex and stems from the interplay between a number of teaching approaches including:

- An approach using objective led lessons, which goes beyond just focussing on the teaching to also supporting the learning, for example, ensuring pupils are clear on the success criteria and are thus able to take responsibility for improving their work.

- Teachers scaffolding what is to be learned, such as modelling a successful outcome and allowing paired construction before encouraging an individual, independent response.

- Teachers, and pupils, valuing the role of talk as a route to more independent learning. This includes the role of dialogue as part of 'exploratory talk' supporting thinking together and peer assessment.

The initial audit of AfL completed at the start of the project in all schools identified more issues relating to teaching than learning. All eight schools decided to maintain a focus on the development of objective led lessons with seven of the eight schools also working on additional aspects of AfL which included peer and self assessment, and formative written and oral feedback.

However, it quickly emerged, through pupil interviews and lesson reviews (lesson observations followed by discussions with teachers), that nearly all the schools had:

- over-estimated the security of objective led lessons across the whole school, believing that the pockets of good practice were representative of the whole;

- not recognised the need for objective led lessons as the basis for developing other aspects of AfL, for example written feedback and peer assessment.

This caused schools to focus even more strongly on objective led learning and the importance of clear learning outcomes as the main driving force for improving learning in lessons. As a result, attention shifted more towards the learning issues and the teaching response.

'Initial pupil interviews and questionnaires showed that the use of objective led lessons was inconsistent and this was more prevalent than first thought.'

When the schools came to analyse how well pupils understood what they were learning in individual lessons and, even more importantly, understood what 'good' looks like (the intended outcomes and associated success criteria), they realised that often objectives were focusing the teaching but not driving the learning. The sharing of learning objectives in lessons, successful in terms of 'happening' in all lessons, was often a surface response to implementing an agreed whole school policy. The AfL principles and purpose underpinning the approach were not always understood or 'believed in' by teachers and, where this was the case, did not inform the teaching and learning throughout the lesson (sometimes the 'routine' had a negative impact on engagement).

The 'teaching and learning review tables' (see **Appendix 6a** 'AFL teaching and learning review tables') were invaluable in enabling senior leaders and teachers to understand the link between AfL teaching approaches and developing more independent learning. They were 'traffic lighted', to help teachers reflect on how they may develop their practice. This was very different from an inspectorial approach to lesson observation with an expert observer and teacher recipient, because they were used to support action research into what is helping pupils learn.

The importance of developing pupils as independent learners is supported by the learning issues identified in the project.

Pupils who are clear about what they are trying to learn in lessons (and why), how they can demonstrate success and evaluate 'quality'.

'If we don't know what we are expected to learn, how do we know if we've got there?'

'When I revise I go straight to the learning objectives and know where to look to revise rather than having to go through loads and loads of pages.'

'They put learning objectives on the board and explain them – I understand more so I can do it. It makes you learn more. I learn what to do before I start… I feel more in control.'

This issue linked directly to three aspects of teaching:

- the clarity of the learning objectives for the lesson and the degree to which these are explicitly shared with the pupils;
- the clarity of the learning outcome(s) and associated success criteria and whether these are understood by the pupils;
- the clarity of progression in the subject and a sense of the big picture (sometimes linked to personal curricular targets).

To encourage teachers to actively reflect on the issue of pupil progress and independence, it was suggested that in each lesson they question, *'If I were to ask every pupil "What would a good outcome look like for this lesson?" could they tell me?'.* This was asked of a sample of pupils during lesson observations to inform the review with the teacher afterwards. The following pupil responses show the informative nature of this question where teachers were using clear success criteria well:

'That we use the correct terminology from the law of science in our answers … and we use word equations.' (science lesson)

'By trying to hypothesise and explaining in more detail by making links between historical factors.' (history lesson)

'I'll be able to use past negatives… to say a phrase in the past tense.' (the pupil then demonstrated they could do this accurately – MFL lesson)

Several schools tackled teachers' expectations for all pupils in each lesson by increasing the emphasis on learning outcomes and their success criteria, rather than just learning objectives. This caused teachers to reconsider the lesson design. For example, having identified what they wanted pupils to learn, they considered what a quality outcome would look like and what to do to help all pupils to achieve a high standard.

Once teachers had begun to explicitly identify the success criteria for the intended outcome, as part of their planning, it became much easier for them to scaffold the learning for the lesson, for example by modelling a quality outcome at the start of the lesson.

Where this was successful it impacted on the quality of the teacher feedback, particularly with more focused and challenging questioning. Teachers quickly began to recognise the impact of using learning objectives and success criteria to promote more independent learning.

Where teachers were clear about the intended learning outcome(s) and the success criteria (even if they did not share these with pupils) the impact on the structure of lessons, particularly the use of interim plenaries, on the quality and challenge of teacher questioning and on the

> *'Sharing clear learning objectives supported the progress they [the pupil]) made. We differentiate the learning objectives and this provides students with challenges that make sure they push themselves even further. This also encourages them to make their own challenges.*
>
> *As a result of this, plus other work we've done on AfL (notably peer and self assessment) the higher ability students are now very confident. They use opportunities to contribute orally in lessons. They will often take a warm up, coach others and act as referee.'*
>
> **(PE teacher)**

clarity of their feedback was very positive. Where teachers explicitly explored the success criteria for the intended learning outcomes early on in the lesson there was a significant impact on:

- the proportion of the class that made measurable progress by the end of the lesson;

- the pace of the learning and quality of the pupil outcomes;

- the ability of the pupils to progress more independently;

- the quality and focus of the whole class and group dialogue;

- the engagement and motivation of pupils.

Where, following whole school training, teachers had not understood the importance of, and rationale underpinning, planning and teaching to clear learning objectives and outcomes, it proved difficult to shift their beliefs and practice. As professionals, they were committed to supporting whole school policy but their surface behaviour response, for example, putting objectives up and mentioning them from time to time during the lesson, was not impacting on pupils' understanding or progress. Where senior leaders applied further pressure regarding the use of objectives and outcomes this had limited impact because teachers did more of the same but weren't able to develop what they were doing.

> *The AfL strategies have 'given pupils a window on the teachers' world and what we are aiming for and why. For example, when I ask pupils to write a formal letter to an MP it would be inconceivable not to share with the pupils what the features of the formal letter need to be'.*
> **(English teacher)**

An approach which helped develop teachers' understanding and practice involved the use of the 'objective led lessons teaching and learning review' tables (see **Appendix 6a** 'AFL teaching and learning review tables') alongside a review or coaching conversation following a lesson observation. This allowed the coach (or observer) to help the teacher to reflect on the degree to which the use of objectives and outcomes enabled pupils to understand what they were learning, and to progress towards the intended outcome. By reflecting on pupils responses to the questions:

- *'What are you learning in today's lesson?'* and

- *'What would a really good outcome for today's lesson look like? What will you need to do?'*

the teacher could begin to identify how successful their teaching had been. This approach was only really effective where the coach had a sufficiently good understanding of objective led learning to provide appropriate support and challenge during the review conversation.

Another important factor which strongly influenced whether pupils understood the features of a quality outcome was teachers' understanding of standards and progression in their subject. Sometimes their lack of this, particularly where teaching outside their subject specialism, resulted in poorly focused objectives with low level challenge.

> *'To help in moving my practice on I've used the (reviewing teaching and learning) progression sheets. They really are extremely useful in picking out clearly the actions and outcomes that you want to see if you are improving your use of objectives and feedback… They make you think about your practice, although perhaps the pupils section should be the top rather than the second part you end up looking at – it's the most important part really.'*
> **(music teacher)**

The most effective teachers had a very clear understanding of the progression in the key concepts and skills in the subject they are teaching. They used this to unpick the progression sufficiently well to share criteria which helped pupils understand this progression for themselves and, equally, develop strategies which pupils can apply to help understand these concepts and acquire these skills.

A good understanding of the National Curriculum level descriptions (and, where available, teaching objectives in subject frameworks) helped teachers plan for progression. However, for some teachers, producing 'pupil friendly' level descriptors became an obstacle to developing AfL because these were thought to provide appropriate success criteria for pupils in lessons but were, in reality, too broad to help them identify 'next steps'. Level descriptors are intended to describe progress over the longer term. Pupils also need more finely graded success criteria specifically related to the lesson objectives, which will help them evaluate the quality of their work and improve it.

> *'I don't bang on about the levels half as much as I used to at the start of lessons. In the past the level numbers provided a starting point for pupils but that isn't as useful as it could be. I think it switched pupils off. By getting them to meet the objectives in each lesson (that link together) pupils can then see that as a result of all this action they get to a level. I think pupils feel they can achieve because they can meet the objectives whereas the level criteria scared some kids off.'*

Another factor that inhibited pupils' ability to make progress within individual lessons and their engagement with learning, was their lack of understanding of the bigger picture and where the learning was going in the longer term. Pupils were rarely able to identify the value of learning specific skills or concepts within (or across) a subject, particularly in the foundation subjects. The most frequent pupil response, during lesson observations, to the question, *'What is the long term purpose of what you are learning today?'* was, *'To get a good level in the SATs/tests'.*

Sometimes blame is placed upon the volume of National Curriculum content i.e. having to cover 'so much stuff' (although everything is not meant to be covered by all pupils). However, the real issue is how the content is packaged and presented within a concepts and skills framework to help them make links and assimilate the content (e.g. in science, history and geography). This is about helping pupils put the jigsaw together rather than just keep giving them the pieces with a view that they have repeatedly been given everything they need to know. Reflections on this reinforced the point that effective teaching is only happening when pupils are learning. Sometimes when pupils are not learning there is still the surface behaviour of good teaching, for example, teachers are 'doing the right sort of things' (such as providing a handout which clearly articulates success criteria or giving pupils an opportunity for paired discussion). However, the teachers are not alert to the effectiveness of these strategies (for example, to pupil responses in the lesson) and they are not informing their interactions with the pupils to help them learn.

The rush to cover the curriculum within lessons can create an illusion of good teaching and sometimes intense pupil activity but can actually mean a slow pace of learning or no learning.

In some lessons, the pupils' sense of the big picture and their progression within this was inhibited by pupils not being clear about longer term learning objectives and outcomes. During the project some schools began to review their reporting and target setting processes because they recognised that it was not sufficiently focused on personal curricular targets which individual pupils could understand and act upon.

Where pupils did have curricular targets and teachers discussed their progress towards them, pupils were very aware of how much this helped them improve their work.

> During a post lesson review with a teacher the question was raised:
>
> *'Is the teacher working much harder than she needs to in her ambition to cover the NC for science?'* Both the teacher and a pupil (via pupil interviews) recognised that sometimes the teaching outpaces the learning. The observation confirmed that pupils sometimes miss some of the teaching because the teacher talks quickly and provides rich elaboration in the whole class interactive episodes or there is a lot of text on the interactive whiteboard. It might be helpful to explore identifying and sharing expected learning outcomes with the pupils and to experiment with restricting teacher feedback to these.

Pupils who are gaining skills and confidence in whole class dialogue and in group and paired discussion

'We like it when teachers give us the chance to work in groups, have more discussion and even lead parts of the lesson. This means we are more involved and remember more things.'

A key factor inhibiting learning and progress within a significant number of lessons was the lack of pupil talk. Even where peer assessment tasks had been planned into lessons, pupils were often asked to swap books and to mark in silence. The essential purpose of learning through talk was not recognised by the teachers and was not valued by the pupils. Reviews with teachers indicated their concern about poor behaviour being triggered by opportunities for dialogue, particularly in lower attaining groups. Teachers could not identify ways of introducing opportunities for dialogue where pupils lacked the protocols and skills for reciprocal talk.

Where paired and group talk was facilitated and well managed, pupils made more progress in lessons because they constructed more meaning for themselves and extended their thinking. Typically their responses to teachers' questions were more extended and demonstrated higher levels of thinking (for example, analysis, synthesis and evaluation). Another impact was that their progress was more independent because they were less reliant on teacher support and they were more engaged with their own learning and that of others.

Learning through talk was successfully developed using a range of strategies which included:

- Introducing learning objectives which focused on the use of learning through talk during the lesson and success criteria which identified the features of effective dialogue.

- Providing specific success criteria linked to learning outcomes to focus the talk, for example, *'When you are discussing it's important to take turns… to build on what the other person has said… to show you are listening by your body language…'* and so on.

- Teachers modelling dialogue with pupils to make explicit the features of effective talk (such as *'That was a good response because it built on what your partner had been saying.'*).

- Developing pupils' language of learning so that they could articulate and discuss what they were finding difficult and support each other's learning.

- Opportunities for brief 'think-pair-share' – building up the amount of time allowed for this (this approach was particularly successful, even with lower attainers or pupils with poor behaviour).

- Using group work strategies to manage and structure the build up of learning through talk, for example, jigsawing, envoys.

'I think specific targets are good because they point out where your flaws are in your work and what exactly needs to be improved. But sometimes they [teachers] get you to think for yourself which raises more awareness of how you've done something incorrect and what you can do to improve it as well.'

'… the pupils consistently mentioned that they found peer discussion useful in deepening their understanding. However, lesson observations and scrutiny of teacher planning showed that although some teachers were building in opportunities for peer assessment, pupils were not receiving the necessary support to provide effective feedback to each other. They obviously needed scaffolding to support their discussion or comments.'

One colleague has noted that before they made use of AfL practices, pupils had found it difficult to describe and analyse barriers to their learning themselves or talk about gaps in their knowledge. They are now able to articulate this better.

- The use of thinking skills strategies, such as card sorting, to encourage focused dialogue about different kinds of thinking, such as classification and mysteries. By moving the cards around and talking this through the pupils expose their own thinking or understanding to others.

- Developing whole class discussion from 'ping-pong' (teacher question followed by pupil response to teacher) to orchestrated whole class 'basketball' dialogue (pupils responding to each other in a whole class discussion with the teacher chipping in occasionally to help maintain, focus and develop the discussion as and where necessary).

> *'Pupils' use of language is now more closely related to the given success criteria. As the pupils have become exposed to more peer and self assessment the level of discussion in peer and self assessment activities has become more sophisticated.'*

In schools where there was no tradition or culture of 'learning through talk' senior leaders recognised the need to develop this. For example, in School A, discipline problems (both before and while in special measures) had shaken teachers' confidence in allowing pupils to talk in groups but successful approaches based on whole class interactive teaching had evolved. However, lesson observations demonstrated that whole class interactive teaching on its own was inhibiting more independent learning and sometimes capped pupil understanding. Some departments were able to build upon the confidence and skills gained by teachers and pupils through the successfully developing whole class dialogue to move to more group and paired discussion.

> *'Staff have developed their questioning techniques, particularly using 'open ended' questions as 'building blocks' to scaffold pupil learning. Through this they have witnessed an improvement in pupils' thinking skills and their ability to construct more complex verbal argument. Thinking time was crucial to this process aided by a no hands-up expectation.'*

> *'What makes the difference to the higher-attaining classes is dialogue: not just teacher-pupil dialogue, but pupil-pupil dialogue and pupil-led dialogue… Pupils see that it is independent learning… and they see that they're getting something out of it… Pupils are now more actively engaged in their own learning and accept the responsibility of being involved in their own learning. AfL has definitely raised standards in English by creating more independent thinkers.'*

(head of English)

> *'We had some difficulty at first with peer assessment in pair-share mode as pupils could be overly critical of each other's work… think-pair-share questioning has really taken off and enhanced pupil dialogue… and has resulted in longer, more focused and/or more extended answers from pupils. Pupils are getting more confident in talking constructively in pairs and groups.'*

(history department)

Pupils who are developing a language for learning are increasingly able to articulate and discuss how they learn and what helps their learning

This is a different issue. It is about pupils reflecting on how they develop as learners and are able to understand the strategies teachers are using in lessons and gain most benefit from the activities in which they are engaged. This issue cropped up many times in discussions with schools during the project but, surprisingly, is not explicitly stated in many of the case studies.

The 'pupil voice' interviews were originally set up to help provide insight into what was helpful and what was not. This targeted sample group of pupils, interviewed as a group in each school, each half term, became increasingly articulate during the course of the project about what hindered or helped their learning. Individual pupils changed their attitudes towards teaching strategies, for example peer assessment, after listening to their peers explain why they found them useful. Discussions were invariably very honest and constructive but became notably deeper and more reflective as the project progressed. The pupils valued being listened to and found the discussions useful.

Realising that the interview sessions themselves were helping the targeted group of pupils become more reflective and motivated learners was an unexpected outcome (although obvious in hindsight). See **Appendix 2.9aD** 'Pupil Case Study'.

In School H (the school which was in special measures at the start of the project) pupils commented on their learning in an interview towards the end of the project in September as they started Year 10.

Notes from pupil interview – School H

When asked 'What motivates and engages you in lessons?' responses included:

- *'There is a mixture of ways they teach*' [another pupil chips in] '*different elements in a lesson – not just the same thing all the time*' [another pupil] *'variety of things but structured and planned – they come together to make up the lesson.'*

- *'Questions or activities which make you really think, not just churning something out (for example) starters which make you think, they often don't have anything to do with the subject but they get your brain going and then you get into the lesson.'*

- *'Direct interaction, teachers talking to you – just five minutes one-to-one with a teacher made all the difference, I knew what I needed to do to improve.'*

When asked 'What helps you learn and make good progress?' responses included:

- *'Having targets and knowing how to get them.'*

- *'Teachers give you small steps, like a ladder, you only have to do little things but know you will get there if you do… It's not just about knowing you have to go to a house, it's knowing how to get to the house.'*

- *'Teachers explain why you are learning what you are – I can stick with something if I know how it leads up to something.'*

- *'Some teachers write out at length what we need to do to improve, it's much more helpful than just ticks or grades.'* What about other feedback, what the teacher says to you? *'Well that's even better because you get that straight away.'*

- *'Discussion in groups or pairs is really helpful, it helps you think.'*

- *'Peer assessment can be helpful but it is often done for the sake of it rather than learning from it.'*

There is much more explicit evidence from the project of teachers developing as reflective practitioners and much less about the learners doing so. This evidence creates the challenge of: How this can be addressed? How would it be possible to provide structured and focused situations for all pupils to benefit in the way the small sample groups in the project did?

One of the schools has begun to address this area by combining the development of objective led learning, peer assessment and the teaching of thinking skills. By establishing teaching trios (using the National Strategies 'Leading in learning' model) teachers are working collaboratively to plan, observe and review lessons which focus on developing pupils' classification skills and their metacognition (talking about how they think and learn). This has begun to nurture learning through talk with a strong focus on developing the 'language for learning'.

'Following the analysis of the first pupil questionnaires… we found that there were anomalies between pupil responses and lesson observation evidence… we decided that the issue was one of inconsistent use and accuracy of terminology related to peer assessment, for example teachers were saying "talk with your friend about…" which in the pupil's mind equated to having an informal chat to their friend. If the teacher had specifically identified the task as peer assessment, then the students would have better understood what they were expected to do and what was involved and would see it as a strategy which could be employed in all subject areas.

This led us to recognise the importance of consistent use of the terminology in all lessons so that teachers and students had a common understanding of what was involved. This transferability of the use of terminology, and thereby skills, became the focus for the next stage of CPD.

To ensure our students had the language necessary to actively engage in feedback with their peers about their learning, for example when giving feedback to one of their peers about a task, they were able to use appropriate language in relating to the success criteria, as opposed to giving a purely emotive response. We took the step of organising training for departments to help them to prepare a series of statements which would be displayed on 'learning walls' in the classrooms. These were to support effective feedback, for example "You would have met the success criteria more effectively if you had…".'

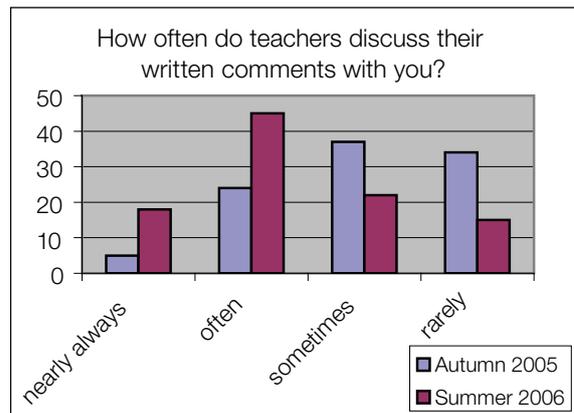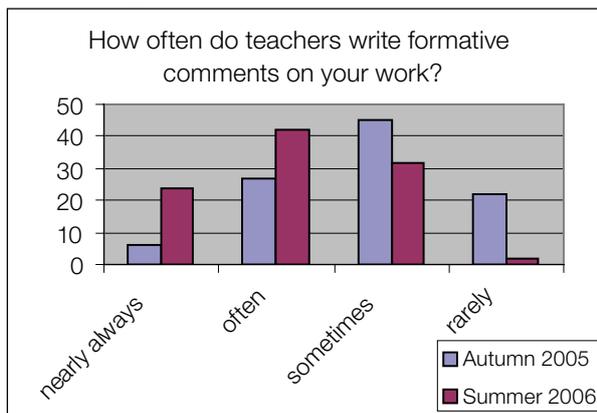## Pupils who can respond to feedback and improve their work during lessons

There is a wealth of evidence on the importance of constructive, informative and subject specific oral and written feedback and how much this is valued by pupils. The importance of improving the quality of written feedback in particular is widely recognised and something many schools are finding hard to crack.

'Written feedback was seen as being very useful to pupils but was not taking place with regularity in the school, though oral feedback was perceived as being more of a feature of lessons. There was little expectation that pupils would discuss their comments with teachers or act upon them.'

In the schools focusing on the development of 'written feedback' there were two significant factors inhibiting the impact of teachers' written feedback on pupil progress:

- Teachers lost sight of the overarching principles of AfL: to help pupils take their next steps in learning by building on their current position. This tended to occur because teachers did not hold the objectives, outcomes and success criteria for the work in their minds as they marked the work. Consequently their comments tended not to indicate potential 'next steps' for pupils.

- Having provided written feedback, teachers neglected to provide time for pupils to respond to it and to improve their work.

However, some of the schools did shift their practice significantly over six months as feedback from the questionnaires for School B indicates:

How often do teachers write formative comments on your work?

How often do teachers discuss their written comments with you?

Schools introduced a range of strategies to make the written feedback process more formative and to ensure pupils were better able to progress as a result, including:

- Two stars and a wish;

- 'Now' and 'Next time' tasks;

- Traffic lighting pupil work to indicate how secure the learning outcomes are in relation to the success criteria provided.

> *'Our written feedback uses "now" tasks for pupils. We give a positive statement with an expected action or "now" task. When we started to do this we didn't always check back on the pupil responses but we've tried to tighten this up. We had been teaching too much and not concentrating on the quality of learning. We now set aside time for pupils to respond to feedback. … At the end of each half term – we give a "next time" task – often we detail this as annotation on the pupils' work. "Now" tasks are all about giving an immediate action for improvement, while a "next time" task might relate to something that needs developing over a number of weeks.'*
>
> **(head of geography)**

5.2 Impact on standards

Schools in the project found the impact of AfL on standards the most difficult aspect to find evidence of. By 'impact on standards' we are referring here to impact on the progress pupils made in lessons, impact on progress over a half term or term and impact on end of Key Stage 3 results.

The schools encountered different types of difficulty as follows:

1. Recognising impact in lessons

When observing lessons, senior leaders, teachers and consultants were more easily able to recognise improvements in teaching and learning behaviours than the progress the pupils had made. This was often due to lack of clear success criteria or their being used to help teachers and pupils judge the quality of outcomes and evaluate progress.

2. Identifying progress through work scrutiny

When scrutinising pupils' work, senior leaders and teachers were more easily able to review the quality of written feedback (teacher behaviour) than the improvement in standards and rate of progress towards curricular targets made by the pupils as a result of the teaching.

3. Being able to relate improvement in performance directly to developing AfL practice

Whether in lessons or over time it was difficult to attribute improvements in pupil performance to the quality of AfL. This was itself for different reasons:

a) because the AfL itself was not recognised, for example, senior leaders and/or teachers did not have a sufficiently developed understanding of AfL;

b) because other aspects of good teaching were relevant;

c) because pupils sometimes made improved progress in lessons where AfL practice was not strong. Possible reasons for this were that the whole school development of AfL was causing more teachers to focus on developing their teaching with other aspects of their teaching improving as a result, and pupils transferring learning skills gained in lessons where AfL practice was strong into those where it wasn't.

4. Analysing pupil progress

Most schools needed significant support from the LA to undertake the level of analysis of pupil

level data required to link pupil experience with achievement and some analysis has been subsequently undertaken by the National Strategy Advisers. This has significant implications if we are to fully recognise the impact that AfL is having across schools nationally.

Analysis of trends over time in results was also difficult because of peculiar dips in the otherwise upward trends of national results, for example in particular the fall in the national result for English at Key Stage 3 in 2006. It is necessary to examine a wide range of data analyses to draw any inferences, so teacher assessment, relative attainment and CVA data are all referred to in this section.

Progress in lessons (short term)

Because of the tendency for teachers and their observers to focus on teacher behaviours, (where they did consider pupils they tended to focus primarily on pupil behaviour, engagement and motivation rather than on progress) they were encouraged during the project to consider, within lessons, the degree to which AfL approaches were impacting on:

- the amount of progress pupils actually made (that is how far what they knew, understood or their skills improved);

- the proportion of the class who made demonstrable progress.

For example (taken from actual lesson review documents):

- In an English lesson most pupils were able 'To write a bold opening paragraph for effect about 9/11' where their initial attempts were improved upon significantly during the lesson.

- In another English lesson only four or five pupils out of a class of 28 were observed to have made progress against the objective 'To be able to identify the relationship between the main characters and to begin to explore their language'.

This helped everyone to be clearer about specific aspects of teaching and learning which optimised the chances of most pupils making progress. It also enabled them to identify where teachers were able to accelerate pupils' progress within a lesson.

Although progress during individual lessons resulted from a complex set of factors, evidence suggested that it was most significant when:

- Objectives were limited in number and focused.

- The success criteria for the intended outcome(s) were shared and understood by all pupils towards the beginning of the lesson.

- There was high quality whole class interactive teaching involving effective teacher questioning and quality dialogue.

- Pupils were given opportunities to improve their work either against success criteria or in response to feedback (teacher and/or peer).

- Underpinning the above factors, teachers had a clear understanding of progression (and what 'good' looked like) in the subject.

> *'One mathematics teacher in particular devoted time to sharing "process success criteria". This helps students to get away from the idea that in mathematics things are "right or wrong". Process success criteria used by students as a checklist throughout the process helps them to see, step by step, what will lead to a successful end product.' (School C)*

> *'Using success criteria gives pupils a scaffold and when you give them the opportunity to respond to feedback you can really see the difference in their rates of progress.' (School F)*

The fundamental importance of having clear success criteria to support, planning, teaching and learning became increasingly apparent as the project progressed. Many teachers and senior leaders had not initially recognised this as being part of objective led lessons.

Several schools were able to link evidence of short term progress that resulted from the introduction of AfL approaches to impact over the longer term in particular subject areas. For example in School E the effective use of written feedback in two departments is considered to have contributed to:

- improved end of Key Stage 3 progress in science where 64% of pupils reached level 6+ in science exceeding the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) D target by 8%;

- improved end of Key Stage 3 attainment in geography with 99% of pupils achieving level 5+.

Progress over the medium term

Evidence of the impact of AfL on standards over the medium term was most effectively collected where teachers had set up small scale action research in their own classrooms, often with the support of a LA Strategy consultant. This enabled them to focus on the differences that a specific set of strategies and approaches had on pupil learning and progress.

The longest term piece of analysis of impact was carried out by the MFL department in School E, from October 2004 to July 2006. They wanted to build on the successful development of the Secondary Strategy MFL Framework in Year 7 to sustain improved pupil enthusiasm, confidence and motivation.

Their main focus of developmental work was to improve pupils' use of the target language in sharing learning objectives and outcomes and in doing so, embed the main principles of objective led lessons in the pupils' and teacher's thinking.

0bjective led lessons had become embedded in departmental practice and the approaches used were evidenced to be impacting on pupil progress in the short, medium and long term.

By the end of Year 9 72.4% of pupils in the target group had attained level 6 or above. From this class of 29 pupils, six had reached level 7 or above. Between the start of Year 8 and the end of Year 9 all pupils had made progress of at least a level and for the majority of the class progress of two levels had been achieved. In addition to this impact on standards, 62% of these pupils opted to continue with MFL in Year 10, a proportion significantly above the departmental norm.

The joint head of English in School E also provides very compelling evidence of the continuing impact of AfL on both the progress of one Year 7 pupil in the subject and in the skills of AfL. His case study, with accompanying appendices showing the pupil's work over the course of two terms, explains how he developed AfL with the class and illustrates how, as a result, the pupil is becoming more analytical and self reflective so her personal targets become increasingly insightful and focused. As this happens her English skills are seen to develop at an impressive rate.

Two teachers from School C were able to identify the impact of the introduction of success criteria on pupils' standards of attainment over the course of a term:

- The English department carried out a comparison of one pupil's work firstly where the class had analysed a model answer (using clear success criteria to support peer assessment) and then later where AfL approaches had not been made explicit and were not directed. The teacher comments that where AfL was used the pupil's *'vocabulary and conscious crafting of narrative is apparent'*. She identifies that '*the use of models and success criteria… helped the student use greater variety of punctuation which is more ambitious and conscious. He was able to imply irony and sarcasm more than he had previously.'* She also noted that peer assessment '*helped, particularly with the pupil's vocabulary and use of irony.'*

- The history department compared the extended writing of two Year 10 pupils to analyse the impact of explicitly sharing success criteria. Both pupils achieved lower levels of attainment than the teachers thought them capable of when the success criteria were not formally established prior to carrying out the task. For another piece of work where the success criteria were shared, the teacher found that the pupils were more likely to look through the written comments in their books to pick up key things to improve. As a result, both pupils produced work at a standard in line with teacher expectations.

School B provides a useful document in their case study (see **Appendix 1.5B** '9 pupils KS3 data core') which triangulates observed practice with pupil feedback and progress in mathematics as tracked through periodic summative assessment:

'…A term later pupil interviews and lesson observation identified that objective led learning had begun to have an impact. This is indicated from a snapshot of the triangulation of evidence collected on the focus group of 12 Year 9 pupils. The document (see **Appendix 1.5B** *'9 pupils KS3 data core') demonstrates the link between changing teacher practice and the impact on pupil learning.'*

Impact on end of Key Stage 3 results

In terms of the impact of AfL on the end of Key Stage 3 results the eight schools fall into four categories:

- One school felt confident to attribute overall improvement in results to AfL.

- Five schools were able to evidence the impact of the quality of AfL practice in specific subjects on progress and results in those subjects.

- Four schools could evidence the impact of the quality of AfL practice on groups of pupils taught by specific teachers.

- One school found the evidence of impact on standards to be inconclusive e.g. could not be attributed to AfL rather than other good practice or could not correlate good AfL with stronger progress.

The table on page 33 shows selected raw attainment scores, progress data (contextual value added scores) and trends for the eight schools.

- Four of the schools are significantly above the national average for their 2006 CVA scores.

- Two of the eight schools have an upward trend in their Key Stage 3 CVA scores. This means that these schools are enabling their pupils to make better progress, year on year, across English, mathematics and science.

- In the previous year, 2005, six of the eight schools showed an upward trend after their initial phase of developing AfL.

- For 2006, five of the schools show a variable trend of Key Stage 3 CVA scores across three years.

- School A has shifted from making significantly less progress (-1) to significantly more progress (+1) in their overall Key Stage 2 to 3 CVA score. From a starting point of the 93rd percentile rank nationally in 2004, they progressed in the two years following to the 38th in 2005 and finally to the 9th in 2006.

- Eighteen of the twenty-four core subject results (En, Ma, Sc) for 2006 show an improvement in their level 5+ Key Stage 3 results from their 2004 level i.e. since introducing AfL. Of these eleven have improved by 10% points or more.

- Twenty of the twenty-four core subject results (En, Ma, Sc) for 2006 show an improvement in their level 6+ Key Stage 3 results from their 2004 level. Of these, seventeen have improved by 10% points or more.

- All of the eight schools show an upward trend in % of pupils achieving A*-C grades at KS4 over the past three years.

It has not been possible for the schools to attribute these improvements solely to the introduction of AfL. It should also be noted that these figures do not take into account the improvements in foundation subjects which were, according to the evidence from some schools, more significant than in the core subjects.

Integrated dataset for the 8 schools

Key stage 3 Results: Levels 5 and Levels 6 | **CVA Key Stage 2 to 3** | **Key stage 4 Results**

School	No. pupils at end of KS3 2006	KS3 % Level 5+ 2004 to 2006 — English 2004	English 2005	English 2006	Mathematics 2004	Mathematics 2005	Mathematics 2006	Science 2004	Science 2005	Science 2006	KS3 % Level 6+ 2004 to 2006 — English 2004	English 2005	English 2006	Mathematics 2004	Mathematics 2005	Mathematics 2006	Science 2004	Science 2005	Science 2006	CVA overall school score 2005	Percentile rank	Relative attainment (sig) 2005	CVA significance 2004	CVA significance 2005	CVA significance 2006	trend (sig)	% 5+ A*-C 2004	% 5+ A*-C 2005	% 5+ A*-C 2006
School A	163	29	57	56	47	57	56	25	49	52	8	18	12	25	40	40	8	18	23	101.1	9	1	-1	1	1	U	24	36	37
School B	214	80	84	87	77	83	85	73	86	86	55	42	58	61	65	71	50	53	63	101.1	10	1	1	1	1	U	64	63	70
School C	267	82	71	81	77	73	76	70	74	76	50	30	39	55	52	66	42	41	50	101	10	1	1	1	1	V	49	60	67
School D	242	90	91	72	85	88	88	82	85	78	44	58	15	66	70	67	46	56	53	98.7	94	0	-1	1	-1	V	65	74	68
School E	229	76	78	77	76	87	87	75	87	84	33	46	32	56	69	72	42	57	54	100.3	35	1	1	1	0	V	61	70	63
School F	155	67	74	80	68	68	77	60	66	70	25	25	37	45	49	55	28	28	37	99.5	75	0	-1	0	-1	V	44	49	55
School G	181	91	96	82	91	92	90	87	89	89	73	55	40	74	71	75	54	52	62	99.3	97	-1	1	0	-1	V	63	63	73
School H	197	73	75	75	78	76	83	70	63	78	30	35	38	50	51	58	31	37	37	99.5	74	0	-1	-1	-1	D	53	51	57

The significance column identifies schools where pupils are making significantly more progress (+1), less progress (-1) or are progressing as expected (0)

The significance trend column shows whether the progress is up (U), down (D) or variable (V)

The relative attainment (sig) column shows if the school's relative attainment is significantly above (+1), below (-1) or in line (0) with the national average

School A was the only school that saw improvements across all core subjects at the end of Key Stage 3, in both 2005 and 2006, and also felt confident to identify AfL as a significant contributing factor, so this is worthy of detailed analysis. The school emerged from special measures in March 2004 and had identified 'objective led lessons' and 'peer and self assessment' as key areas for development in their two year post-Ofsted action plan.

Although the school still has below the national average relative attainment its school Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 CVA scores indicate significantly improved levels of pupil progress between 2004 and 2006.

This pattern of improvement is true of all three core subjects which shifted from being significantly below national average CVA in 2004 to being significantly above in 2006.

Contextual Value Added Key Stage 2 to 3 against Relative Attainment at Key Stage 3 Overall

2006

2005

2004
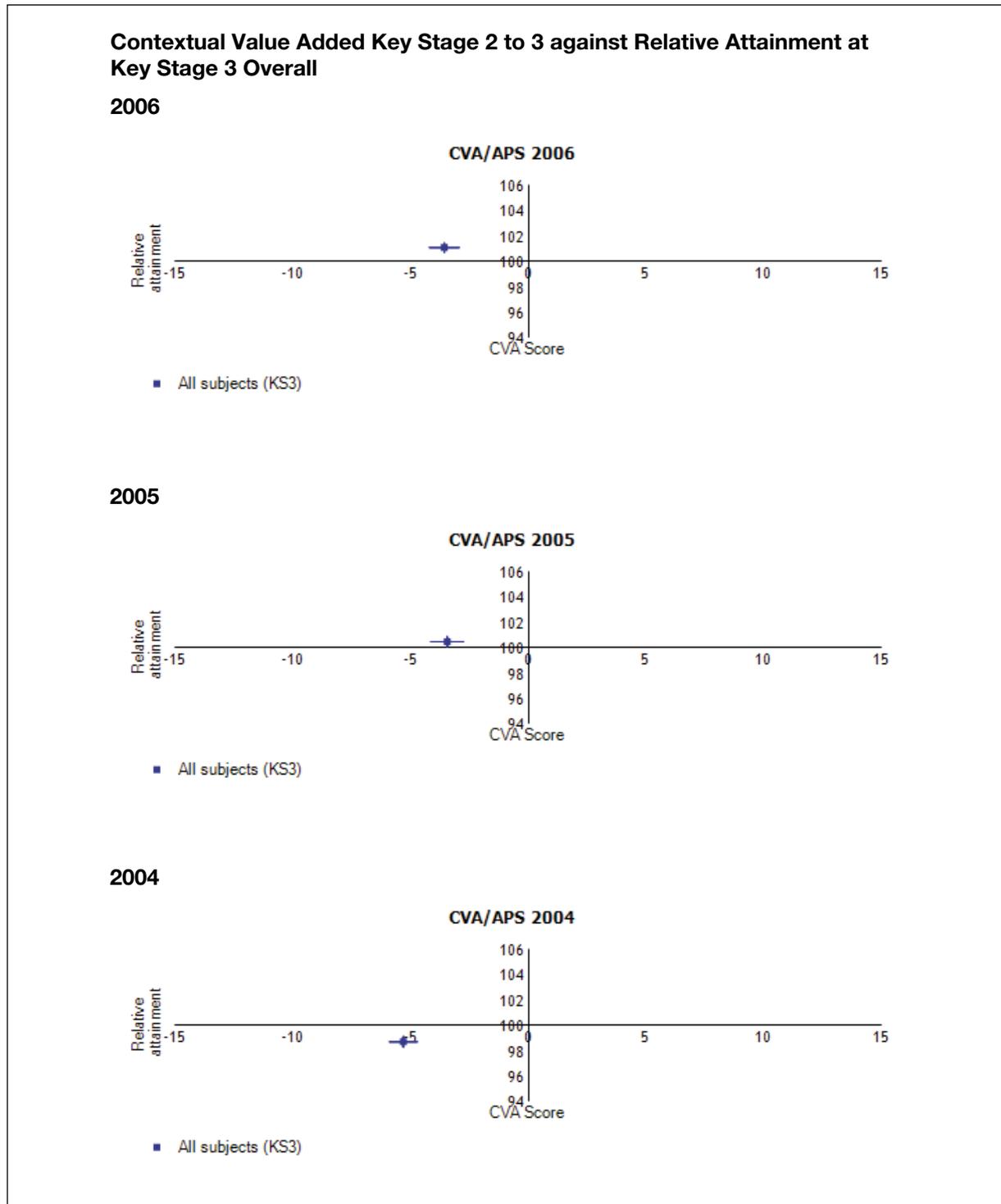
The extract below is from the school/LA's analysis of its Key Stage 3 2006 results:

The impact of effective teaching and learning was also evidenced in the Key Stage 3 results in 2006 and may be illustrated by the summary of the attainment and progress of the 2006 Year 9 cohort. The data analysis and the school's pupil tracking systems may show the impact of AfL as an important part of 'quality first teaching' and that the school is truly inclusive.

Progress

The CVA (Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3) for the case study cohort (Year 9 in 2006) at the school shows that their progress overall was statistically significantly above the national average. Statistical significance shows that this is an event which is unlikely to have occurred by chance (for example, that the school had done something which was impacting on standards of pupils' progress).

Using the FFT data for the last three years (2004 to 2006):

- *The progress made by the pupils has improved from being significantly lower than that of similar pupils in similar schools in 2004 to being significantly higher in 2006.*

- *The trends for all pupils at the threshold measures (level 5+ and level 6+) and the mean NC level (an overall measure) indicate a higher rate of improvement relative to all schools, except level 5+ in mathematics where it is broadly the same. For the mean NC level for all core subjects combined and in each of English and mathematics, pupils made significantly better progress than expected as they also did at level 6+ in mathematics.*

- *The progress for each of the sub-groups of pupils in relation to the mean NC level for all core subjects is significantly higher than expected when compared to similar pupils in similar schools except for those boys and girls of average prior ability (at the end of Key Stage 2). For those two sub-groups, progress is improving at a higher rate relative to schools nationally.*

School Report		Significant Differences and Trends											

School A : KS2->3 : 2004 - 2006

		AllCore			English			Mathematics			Science		
		CS5	MNG	CS6	EN5	EN6	ENG	MA6	MA5	MAG	SC5	SC6	SCG
All Pupils	460	⇑	⇑⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑⇑
Girls	217	⇑	⇑		⇑		⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑
Girls - Lower	114		⇑		⇑⇑		⇑⇑						
Girls - Middle	78	⇑	⇑			⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	
Girls - Upper	25		⇑								⇓		⇑
Boys	243	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑⇑
Boys - Lower	136	⇑	⇑			⇑	⇑			⇑	⇑		⇑
Boys - Middle	73	⇑	⇑		⇑		⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑
Boys - Upper	34		⇑	⇑			⇑						⇑
FSM - No	240	⇑⇓	⇑		⇑		⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑
FSM - Yes	220	⇑	⇑⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑⇑
SEN - N	341	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑
SEN - A	43		⇑		⇑	⇓	⇑	⇑			⇑		
SEN - P	67		⇑	⇓		⇓	⇑⇑						⇑
SEN - S	9												
White	458	⇑	⇑⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑⇑
Black Caribbean	1												
Looked After - No	458	⇑	⇑⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑		⇑	⇑	⇑	⇑⇑
Looked After - Yes	2												

- *56% of the 2006 cohort made significantly better progress in English than their peers in similar schools and 36% of the cohort exceeded their FFT estimated level by half a level or more.*

- *82% made significantly better progress in mathematics than their peers in similar schools and 39% exceeded their FFT estimated level by half a level or more.*

- *70% made significantly better progress in science than their peers in similar schools and 37% exceeded their FFT estimated level by half a level or more.*

Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 contextual value added: performance of groups within school

Year		All pupils	Girls	Boys	Girls <Level 4	Girls at Level 4	Girls >Level 4	Boys <Level 4	Boys at Level 4	Boys >Level 4	Non-FSM	FSM	Non-SEN	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus Stat	First Language: English	First Language: Other	Not In Care	In Care
2006	Cohort for CVA	151	73	78	39	30	4	41	28	9	87	64	99	19	33	151	0	150	1
	School score	101.1	101.0	101.1	100.8	101.0	100.1	100.8	101.3	100.3	100.8	101.4	100.9	101.4	101.1	101.1	-	101.1	100.0
	95% confidence interval	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.4	0.7	0.8	1.2	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.9	0.8	0.4	-	0.4	1.6
	Significance	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig+	Sig+		Sig+	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+	-	Sig+	
2005	Cohort for CVA	149	71	78	27	35	9	42	31	5	78	71	113	10	26	147	2	149	-
	School score	100.5	100.4	100.5	100.1	100.5	100.7	99.9	101.2	100.2	100.4	100.5	100.7	99.9	99.7	100.5	99.7	100.5	-
	95% confidence interval	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.8	1.2	0.7	0.8	1.4	0.5	0.6	0.5	1.2	0.9	0.4	1.6	0.4	-
	Significance	Sig+							Sig+				Sig+			Sig+		Sig+	-
2004	Cohort for CVA	138	64	74	31	26	7	34	34	6	70	68	115	11	-	137	1	-	-
	School score	98.7	98.6	98.9	98.7	98.5	99.9	99.4	98.3	100.5	98.9	98.6	98.7	98.6	-	98.7	100.4	-	-
	95% confidence interval	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.9	1.3	0.8	0.8	1.4	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.2	-	0.4	1.7	-	-
	Significance	Sig-	Sig-	Sig-	Sig-	Sig-			Sig-		Sig-	Sig-	Sig-	Sig-		Sig-	-	-	-

The comments regarding the impact of AfL on 'quality first teaching' are important. By focussing on the day-to-day teaching of all pupils (in addition to specific intervention programmes) the school has brought about significant improvements in progress for all pupils in English, mathematics and science between 2004 and 2006. Furthermore, the focus on 'quality first teaching' reduces the number of pupils needing targeted intervention programmes. This improvement can be linked directly to the quality of the leadership in the school, described by Ofsted in March 2006 as *'good with some outstanding aspects… The headteacher provides inspirational leadership'* particularly to the 'distributed leadership' in the development of AfL brought about since the school left special measures. This is explored further in the 'Leadership and management' section which begins on page 41.

Other schools did not experience a blanket improvement across all core subjects at Key Stage 3 but could find evidence of the impact of the quality of AfL practice in specific subjects and specific teachers on pupil attainment and progress in those subjects.

School B provides a good example of this:

'Pupil interviews conducted with the sample group of 12 pupils demonstrate how objective led learning and feedback was having a growing impact on pupil learning and standards.' (See **Appendix 1.10B** *'AfL pupil interview questions feedback' which provides an evidence base for this).*

'We analysed the data of this group of pupils and discovered that 90% of pupils improved their Key Stage 3 FFT target and 38% of pupils achieved more than half a level above their FFT target. While it is difficult to attribute all the success of this group to AfL strategies, the evidence from pupils indicates that the AfL strategies had a significant impact on their learning, motivation and achievement.' (See **Appendix 1.11B** *'Maths evidence of standards').*

School E, where overall CVA has been consistently above the national average over the last three years, provides a further example:

'By the end of the year (2005 was the first year of AfL development) progress was visible in all core subjects. In the 2005 end of Key Stage 3 SATs pupil attainment in Year 9 had increased at level 5 and level 6 in English, mathematics and science. See in the following table.'

Key Stage 3 Results	L5+				L6+			
	2004	2005	2006	FFT D	2004	2005	2006	FFT D
English	76%	79%	76%	-11%	33%	46%	32%	-20%
mathematics	76%	87%	86%	-1%	55%	69%	?2%	+2%
science	74%	88%	83%	-3%	42%	57%	64%	+8%

Although not entirely attributable to the development of AfL these improvements in performance were not a complete surprise, when responses from pupil interviews of Year 9 pupils were taken into account. For example, both mathematics and science had been identified by pupils as making good use of learning objectives. Our scrutiny of work in the summer term 2005 also indicated that staff in these core subjects provided formative feedback to pupils.

'By 2006, also emerging were areas where AfL was not showing as great an impact as in other subjects. Our results at Key Stage 3 proved encouraging in science and mathematics, two areas where there had been a strong commitment to developing AfL. The performance by pupils at level 6+ exceeded FFT D targets putting them among the top 25% of departments nationally.

However in spite of the progress made this year… improvements in 2004–05 appear greater than in 2005–06… we are still well aware of patchy practice existing in some departments and a reluctance on the part of some staff to fully engage with the process.'

Again the role of effective senior leadership in bringing about whole school improvements in standards were recognised as being fundamental by the school when they evaluated the impact of AfL across two years. Following the improvements in 2005 the SLT had assumed that departments would continue to develop AfL with a less assertive steer from the top but this was not the case in all areas.

Other schools where AfL had not impacted consistently across all departments and teachers were able to evidence the impact of the quality of AfL practice on groups of pupils taught by specific teachers.

In one school for example, there was a sharp contrast drawn between two groups of pupils taught by teachers with markedly different 'AfL practice':
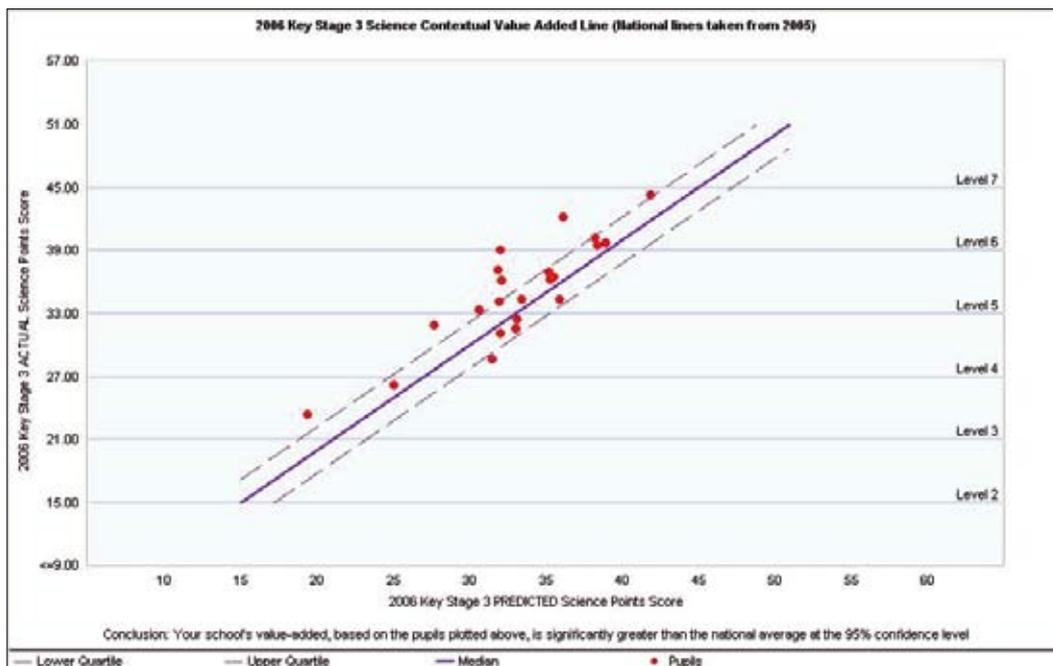
Progress of the school group taught by teacher with more developed AfL practice
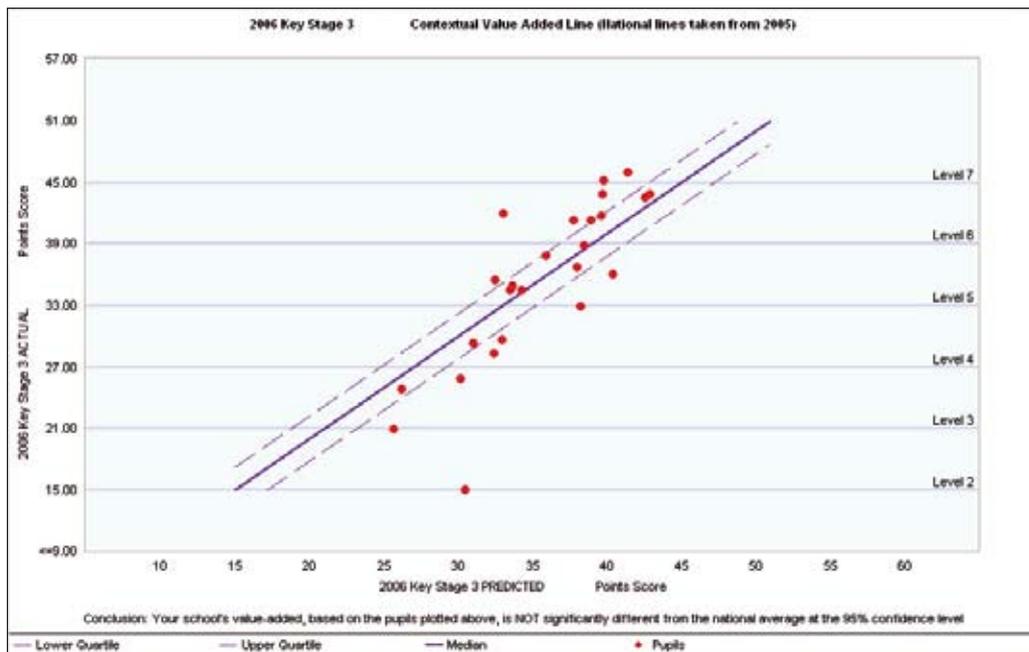
Progress of the school group taught by teacher with less developed AfL practice

> '…analysis of correlation between AfL practice and impact on pupils' standards revealed that less developed practice corresponded with a less favourable picture in terms of pupils' progress.'

This realisation has led to a determination in the school to focus on ways to extend good practice more consistently across the school:

> 'We need to ensure continued collaboration and discussion within departments and across the school and that this impacts on practice… and the next steps are to ensure that there is consistency by agreeing departmental policies.
>
> Reflecting on the current position the head of MFL has written that the members of the department are "singing from the same hymn sheet" in terms of practice – but (we) haven't got the right hymn sheet yet.'

In School C, where overall CVA was consistently above the national average over the last three years, they were also able to evidence the impact of the quality of AfL practice in specific subjects for specific teachers. The following is an extract from their analysis of Key Stage 3 core results:

> 'Good practice in AfL… had a positive and measurable impact on the standards that students attained in last year's Key Stage 3 tests.
>
> As part of the results analysis undertaken across school the NC levels achieved in the tests are subtracted from the FFT target to leave a residual. These residuals are then averaged out across teaching classes, genders, ethnic groups and MidYIS bands to provide an analysis of performance.
>
> When one looks at the residual analysis within English, it becomes apparent that there is a positive correlation between the residuals achieved by the classes where the teacher would be recognised as having good individual practice and the residual achieved across the department as a whole. On average students attained +.3 of a level above their FFT target across the department as a whole in the 2006 tests, but the average residual across the classes where AfL practice would be recognised as strong amounted to +.54 of a NC level. Students therefore attained a NC level that was on average a fifth of a NC level above the average for the department.
>
> Within mathematics the average residual for the department amounted to +.52 which compares to an average residual of +.87 in those classes where AfL practice would be recognised as strong. Again the pattern that emerges is that students in classes where the teacher has strong AfL practice achieve a third of a NC level more than the department average.'

School F: KS2→3 : 2004 - 2006

		AllCore			English			Mathematics			Science		
		CS5	MNG	CS6	ENG	EN6	EN5	MAG	MA6	MA5	SC5	SCG	SC6
All Pupils	436		⇑		⇑		⇑					⇓	
Girls	224				⇑	⇑	⇑						
Girls - Lower	70		⇑	⇓	⇑	⇓	⇑						⇓
Girls - Middle	90				⇑	⇑				▮			
Girls - Upper	64	▮			▮							▮	
Boys	212		⇑		⇑		▮						
Boys - Lower	81	▮			⇑								
Boys - Middle	70									▮		⇓	
Boys - Upper	61	⇓	▮		⇑		▮		⇓	⇓			
FSM - No	324	⇑	⇑⇓		⇑		⇑	⇑				⇓	
FSM - Yes	112				⇑							⇓	
SEN - N	357		⇑		⇑		⇑	⇑				⇓	
SEN - A	50					⇑				▮			
SEN - P	17		⇑		⇑				⇓				
SEN - S	12		⇑⇓		⇑⇓			▮					
White	436		⇑		⇑		⇑					⇓	
Looked After - No	436		⇑		⇑		⇑					⇓	

Some schools were not able to explicitly link what the data analysis yielded with progress in embedding AfL in the teaching. For example, School F does show variable CVA (levels of pupil progress have improved across the core subjects) over the last three years but the school felt that it could not directly attribute this to AfL as it could not isolate its contribution from other factors (good teachers typically have a range of other skills and qualities in addition to their AfL skills). However their case study does provide evidence of, for example, the impact of AfL in English and includes a strong view expressed by the head of department:

> *'AfL definitely works – pupils know what they are doing, know what they have to do because of success criteria.'*

It is also of note that the department was aligning their development of AfL with work on securing teacher understanding of progression across Key Stage 3 by using the *Assessing Pupils' Progress in English at Key Stage 3 (*DfES/QCA 2006) to develop success criteria to match the assessment focuses of key assessment pieces.

An analysis of the FFT FX data for Key Stage 3 shows an upward trend in English across most sub-groups and possibly evidence of improvements to 'wave 1' teaching for all pupils. However, the school did not present this evidence or draw these links in their case study. Possible reasons for this are explored in the 'Leadership and management' section of this report.

In foundation subjects it was difficult to correlate impact on standards with changes in classroom practice because teacher assessment is sometimes considered less reliable for foundation subjects than for core subjects. However, several of the schools believe that improvements in the foundation subjects could be linked to effective AfL practice in some departments. For example, in School E:

> *'Overall, by the end of the second year of development of AfL we have seen some of the best progress made by pupils in the subjects that have most fully embraced some of the key principles and practice that we have promoted. Performance in teacher assessments in geography, music and MFL at level 5+ are much higher when compared to performance in the LA, against national figures and against other foundation subjects in the school.'*

Subject	% L5+ school (2006)	% L5+ LA (2006)	% L5+ national (2005)
Geography	98.7	82.8	70
MFL	74.8	57.7	52
Music	89.4	79.4	69

'Pupil interviews and lesson reviews have served to highlight the connection in these subjects between high performance and the use of formative assessment strategies.'

Other schools reported similar evidence, for example School F where the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessment results showed an improvement in attainment at level 5+:

'… in history and geography, two subjects in which there was strong evidence of good practice in AfL, teacher assessments have shown an improvement in achievement of level 5+ within the school, which for history is well above the national (figures in brackets) rise over the equivalent period of time.'

Level 5+ TA	2004	2005	2006	Overall
Geography school	70 (69)	71 (70)	75 (75)	+6 (+6)
History school	70 (68)	77 (70)	84 (71)	+14 (+6)

It is difficult to attribute such a significant rise in performance to any single change in teaching approach, but the history department's analysis does include:

'Using success criteria gives pupils a scaffold and when you give them the opportunity to respond to feedback you can really see the difference.'

Finally, although the focus of the project was Key Stage 3, in particular Year 9, some of the schools did see improvements at Key Stage 4 that they felt they could attribute to their AfL development work. For example, in School C:

'At Key Stage 4, this summer's results saw a large increase in the number of students who attained 5 A*-C's. Although it is difficult to attribute this solely to the developmental work undertaken on AfL, what is clear through various monitoring activities is that the school priority of developing AfL created a debate and a better understanding of the key components of effective teaching. The SLT believe that this debate allowed colleagues to become more reflective in their approach to teaching and as a result were able to deliver lessons which were more suited to the particular requirements of students.'

	2004	2005	2006
5 A*-C	49%	60%	67%

5.3 Impact on leadership and management of change

The senior leaders in each of the schools were committed to developing AfL whole school to secure consistent high quality teaching and learning across all subjects and raise standards. Understandably different schools were at different starting points in terms of their history of developing AfL, their models and style of leadership, their internal management structures, their capacity to manage whole school change and the culture regarding whole school change processes.

The extract from School C's case study below is typical of many schools' starting point when trying to bring about leadership and manage whole school change:

> *The strategic planning for the implementation of AfL was initially informed by an honest evaluation of similar experiences in the recent past. While there had been a commitment to whole school improvement in learning and teaching from the headteacher and SLT, we had experienced limited success at securing whole school change. This detailed end of year evaluation of the AfL work (2004-05) presented some of the perceived 'barriers to change':*
>
> a) *there was significant inconsistency in the commitment and quality of implementation of agreed whole school messages on learning and teaching both across teams and within teams;*
>
> b) *whole school learning and teaching initiatives lost momentum because of other competing priorities;*
>
> c) *the responsibility for change in whole school approaches to learning and teaching was delegated to a member of the SLT and it was therefore largely dependent upon his drive and energy;*
>
> d) *there was no real collective commitment from the staff to change classroom practice.*
>
> *While we would not claim to have resolved all these management of change issues, we believe that one of the most important benefits from the project has been that it has deepened our understanding of the change process and fundamentally altered the way we manage whole school priorities.*

Distributed leadership

Just as developing the independent learner became increasingly recognised as fundamental to developing AfL in the classroom, developing distributed leadership became recognised as central to successfully developing the leadership and management of whole school change.

All the case studies evidence points to the fact that strong proactive senior and middle leadership is critical to developing AfL whole school. However, the case studies also evidence that this is a precursor to developing distributed leadership within a collaborative learning community and the sections which follow look at aspects of this.

School improvement research has suggested that leadership is neither 'top down' nor 'bottom up'. With distributed leadership comes shared ownership of, and contribution to, a continually evolving vision of where the school is going and how to get there. The school case studies support this view.

Getting everyone fully on board and driving improvements was recognised by all the schools as one of their greatest challenges. This involved more than winning the 'in principle' hearts and minds, it was about ensuring that everyone had ownership, took responsibility and made their full contribution. This meant all senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, pupils and parents and carers proactively playing their part. The first step for most schools was to gain the full proactive support of middle leaders and/or key leading practitioners.

One project school provides a very candid account of the challenge:

'Pupil interviews, lesson observations, work scrutiny and a staff questionnaire highlighted the fact that things were not moving as quickly as anticipated except in departments which already had good practice. It became obvious that the systems were not in place to enable whole school improvement… Monitoring was focused on the progress being made with Year 11 towards meeting GCSE targets… AfL was seen as an "add on" rather than the driving force for school improvement… The assumption had been made that all staff had a clear understanding of what AfL is and how to implement it due to the fact that it had been considered a school priority for two years. This was not the case, and therefore became a major issue, along with other issues such as resistance from some middle leaders who had the belief that AfL does not work in certain subjects, with pupils of certain ages and abilities…'

The challenge described is due to a number of factors including:

1. lack of understanding of AfL and belief in its impact;

2. lack of sharing and networking of effective practice within and across subjects;

3. competition with other priorities;

4. contradictory policy and practices within the school;

5. lack of focused, coordinated and supported CPD.

This school responded as follows:

'The project leader re-introduced the Effective Learning Group (ELG), as well as the teaching and learning toolkit… a teaching and learning noticeboard in the staffroom… the introduction of teaching and learning meetings once a half term and the showcasing of good practice. These were introduced to try and address the issue of a lack of understanding by some teachers, middle leaders and SLT members…

The issues relating to the leadership of AfL were addressed by making sure AfL was on all agendas, particularly middle leaders' and SLT meetings… middle leaders and SLT members were asked to use the AfL progression review sheets when observing teachers and in line management discussions. Subject leaders were asked to allow their ELG member time within meetings to disseminate the work carried out by the group.'

It was clear across all the participating schools that teachers need to be supported to develop their practice as professionals in partnership if they are to take responsibility. The participating schools used a range of strategies, some predominantly 'top down' and others primarily 'bottom up'. Several schools used 'lead practitioners' as a means of developing distributed leadership through a combination of 'top down' and 'bottom up'. Teaching and learning groups were also identified as having a key role to play in stimulating distributed leadership.

One school recognised that while the 'bottom up' thrust, brought about by the teaching and learning group, had initially played an important role in bringing about whole school change it did not provide the necessary reach and rigour to influence all departments and all teachers.

'For that to happen additional processes needed to be brought into play including:

- *Focusing line management meetings on department's attempts to embed AfL priorities.*

- *Publishing a half termly bulletin celebrating aspects of impact in the school promoting the AfL priorities, reiterating key AfL principles and offering practical next steps.*

- *Using team meetings to re-focus staff on AfL priorities.*

- *Using the planned (SLT) subject review of the mathematics department to recommend practical next steps in response to the formative lesson observations.*

- *Coaching staff whose AfL practice was particularly weak.'*

The importance of distributed leadership is summarised well by the series of quotes below from one school:

'We identify middle leadership as crucial, training subject leaders to be leaders… Improvement in teaching across the school has led to a greater spread of competence – we need tighter department leadership to get all teachers working in that way. There's been collaboration across departments, too.' (headteacher)

'With leadership of a project like this, getting consistency is difficult. Ownership is an issue; the teachers believing it… to move past the trendy initiative idea into appreciation that it's concrete in the classroom… embedding it into practice.' (assistant principal)

'Leadership has been brilliant, fantastic; we're not expected to do it all in one year… The deputy head has encouraged us, he's very supportive, realistic, he's been great. I really appreciated that it hasn't been a quick fix, a flash in the pan like so many initiatives; it is really important, it has changed our teaching and our pupils' experience of learning. It's important to get it right and keep revisiting and reviewing, and he's done that. He's stuck with it. It's been a very positive experience. I haven't heard of anyone being against it, except what you always get at the very beginning.' (subject leader)

'Definitely we've felt as a staff it has been a priority – it's something we've constantly come back to on training days… I think now we're at a stage where everybody knows what they are supposed to do, or most people do, in terms of objective led lessons, but not everybody has internalised it as their way of teaching, which is difficult to do if it's a complete change, but everybody will talk about objectives and they know that that's what they are being asked to do. I'm not sure we are at the stage where everyone believes in it. They are starting to, and the fact that the SLT keep coming back to it means that people are realising this is important, this isn't going away, this is a big thing and people are adapting to it. Now we have AfL objectives in our performance management. You don't hear groans about AfL around the school like you do about other things…' (NQT)

An aspect of whole school development which was identified as an issue with all the schools was that of how to win the 'hearts and minds' of all teachers regarding the AfL so they would wish to lead on developing it for themselves. As one school identified *'Real change cannot be imposed; it is dependent upon winning the hearts, minds and belief of all staff and involves both challenge and support.'* Several schools identified that to truly establish AfL whole school both 'top down' and 'bottom up' must prevail.

The evidence from the project suggests that distributed leadership was achieved through a combination of processes including:

- sharing the vision;
- developing and deepening understanding of and expertise in AfL;
- collaboration within and across departments and hierarchies;
- mutual support;
- reflection on practice, supported by coaching conversations.

The project exposed a correlation between 'distributed leadership' and recognition of impact of developing AfL on learning and standards (short term pupil progress and end of key stage results). In order to make the causal links between specific changes to teaching in individual classes and impact each teacher must be able to:

- understand precisely what aspect of AfL they have implemented and how they have improved pupils, learning;
- use AfL alongside an accurate understanding of progression in the subject they are teaching.

Unless they are able to do both of these they are unable to relate short term incremental improvements in pupil progress to the longer term gains shown in end of Key Stage results and consequently the impact of AfL on standards is unrecognised.

In the schools where more distributed leadership was achieved, teachers were far more confident and unequivocal in attributing improvements in standards to the use of AfL. For example:

'I can show you the correlation between groups where AfL was explicit and higher attainment. What makes the difference to the higher-attaining classes is dialogue: not just teacher-pupil dialogue, but pupil-pupil dialogue and pupil-led dialogue… Pupils actively engaged in their own learning and accept the responsibility of being involved in their own learning… AfL provides something for every pupil… every single pupil makes the progress they're able to make because they know what their personal starting point is and how to make the next steps… AfL has definitely raised standards in (this) English (department) by creating independent thinkers.'

The sections which follow look at interrelated and overlapping aspects of developing distributed leadership namely:

- **Sharing and evolving a vision:** initial drive, sharing a vision and long term commitment to developing practice.

- **Focusing, as a whole school, on the identified learning needs of the pupils.**

- **Developing a learning community** through collaborative and mutually supportive ways of working to build up a learning community of reflective practitioners.

- **Deepening a shared understanding of AfL** and how it creates independent learners.

- **Planning, systematic self evaluation and CPD opportunities for teachers:** maintaining momentum by focusing on what matters.

Sharing and evolving a vision

The schools' visions of what could be achieved evolved with their developing understanding of the pupils and how AfL was helping tackle these. It also evolved through greater distributed leadership with more staff taking ownership, contributing to self evaluation and providing direction.

At the outset of the project, some of the schools' senior leaders identified the need to get all staff on board and recognised that key to this was securing the commitment and support of middle leaders and leading practitioners.

'Our first step was to encourage subject leaders to share the vision of what we were trying to do – both in terms of AfL in the classroom and the nature of distributed leadership. There had to be ownership at all levels if AfL was going to succeed… This involved discussions at line management meetings, subject leader meetings and on training days. We also made the leadership of AfL a key aspect of performance management, to put it at the heart of the work being done by all leaders.'

'The AfL operational plan was shared at all levels of leadership within the school to ensure all key individuals need what was expected during the course of the project.'

In School E there was an understanding from the outset that if they were to establish a shared vision for AfL they would need to engage staff in developing a preliminary understanding of what AfL could bring to their pupils:

'To start the process we wanted staff to 'play in the sand pit' by trialling various AfL strategies, this created enthusiasm… To this end different departments identified approaches they intended to trial which were reviewed through the teaching and learning group. This created and sustained momentum.'

In some of the schools the importance of revisiting the evolving vision with staff was also recognised as an essential part of the process.

> *'It is important that the ongoing vision for the learning and teaching journey is regularly shared with staff and opportunities for professional development (linked to this) are created… The headteacher frequently reminds us that we should teach students in our school as we would wish our own children to be taught. The high quality of his leadership was commented on in the Ofsted 2006 report.'*

This understanding of the importance of vision was more typical of the schools that already had experience and success in bringing about whole school improvements to teaching and learning.

In schools where the initial whole school training event went on to have an impact across the school it was made clear from the outset that the event itself was just a starting point, and that teachers' CPD would be continuing and prioritised. In these cases the event typically initiated departmental action planning. As School A observed:

> *'This is a journey, not an event. It involves keeping your focus (on your evolving vision) and using the evidence to inform CPD and future developments.'*

In some of the schools this realisation was arrived at during the project:

> *'As the project progressed, we came to understand that any whole school change can be a "messy business" and is rarely straightforward. We saw the importance of the need to become more flexible in our approach to change management. As understanding of AfL and pupils' learning needs increased and development progressed the vision evolved.'*

Focussing on the identified learning needs of pupils in the school

There was a tendency, at the start of the project, in most of the schools, for the focus of AfL developments to be on teacher behaviours, rather than on the learning needs of pupils. This was true even in the schools where the school 'vision' recognised the importance of learning and 'pupil voice'.

On engaging with the project each school undertook a probing self evaluation exercise to help establish the degree to which their whole development of AfL was impacting on teaching, learning and standards. This proved invaluable; ongoing systematic and systemic self evaluation became a key feature of the project and steered the focus of AfL development and the CPD opportunities (rather than 'support') for teachers.

A range of self evaluation strategies were used:

1. A pupil questionnaire for Year 9 (see **Appendix 3** 'AfL pupil questionnaire');

2. Interviews with a selected group of Year 9 pupils across the ability range (see **Appendix 4** 'AfL pupil interview questions');

3. Termly scrutiny of the same Year 9 pupils' work across all subjects (see **Appendix 5** 'AfL work sampling');

4. Teaching and learning reviews focused on AfL practice in lessons (especially sharing objectives and outcomes with pupils) with post-lesson discussions with the teachers (see **Appendix 6a** 'AfL review tables');

5. Departmental reviews of developing practice using the relevant AfL focus progression tables (see **Appendix 7** 'AfL progression tables');

6. SLT reviews of the whole school AfL development using the 'whole school progression table' (see **Appendix 8** 'WSI progression table');

7. Review discussions with SLT, middle leaders and teachers;

8. Teacher learning logs.

The use of these to support and promote a more systematic and systemic whole school approach to evaluating improvements in teaching, learning and standards is discussed in the section below entitled **'Planning, systematic self evaluation and CPD opportunities for teachers'.**

The self evaluation tools were used at the start of the project to help establish a base line regarding the quality of leadership, teaching, learning and standards and particularly to ensure that each school had a clear and true understanding of the overarching strengths and learning needs of its pupils.

The initial self evaluations caused the schools to adjust their 'action plans' for the development of AfL. In nearly all schools there was a strong re-focusing on sharing learning objectives and outcomes with pupils as practice was not as advanced or as consistent across the school as previously thought and it was recognised that this underpinned the development of other aspects of AfL.

> *'Objectives were being used on an irregular basis, and pupils were not aware of what impact they could make on their learning. Personal target setting and discussion about progress was limited. The role of the plenary or revisiting the objective was also only partially developed… More than half of the pupils questioned in the autumn term of Year 9 indicated that they were unclear about the learning objective in their lessons. This was supported by lesson observation that indicated teacher misconception between the objective and the task/activity pupils were undertaking. However, it was also clear through pupil interviews that some subject areas were making good progress in developing objective led learning and this was having a positive impact upon learning and their motivation.'*

Developing a learning community through collaborative working

Creating a learning community and developing distributed leadership are intimately linked.

The eight schools each identified that, key to developing AfL whole school, is collaborative working and understanding that CPD is an ongoing process and that teachers' best develop their practice on the job with appropriate support.

All the participating schools either recognised from the outset, or came to understand, the importance of collaborative working, within and across departments. Peer support for CPD is a natural dimension of distributed leadership.

> *'The development of AfL is a journey not an event. CPD has to be seen as an ongoing process and not as isolated events. The types of CPD activities used have to be specific to the issue being addressed and the audience being targeted. It is crucial that these activities generate and promote cross-departmental, in-department and cross-hierarchical opportunities for dialogue.'*

> *'It is essential to establish and develop a learning community across the school, as both teachers and students need to see themselves as constantly learning, and that it is important for opportunities to be created to share and discuss that learning. It became increasingly clear that AfL would only have the impact we wanted if the school operated as a Learning community, where teachers saw AfL as a learning experience rather than an "initiative". Indeed, we deliberately avoided using the word "initiative" in training events and communications, as a reminder to ourselves that AfL is part of our ongoing, collaborative learning and teaching journey.'*

The eight schools used a range of different approaches to develop a learning community, often in combination. These included:

- coaching, usually supported by the relevant teaching and learning review sheet;

- collaborative planning, teaching and /or lesson observations across departments;
- networking effective practice through teaching and learning forums;
- classroom based research.

They came to recognise that some approaches, whilst highly effective for building a learning culture and impetus for change, did not draw all teachers into the learning community unless they were carefully managed by the senior leadership team.

Key to the above is that change is most effective when there is a sustained professional dialogue between teaching staff and between staff and their pupils. Planning change needs to take into account facilitating dialogue.

> *'Embedding aspects of AfL is extremely challenging. Effective monitoring and review across subjects can push things forward but shared dialogue among teachers is also needed if there is going to be a change in practice.'*

One school commented on how they developed this over time and its impact on the school as a learning community:

> *'…we promoted sustained, meaningful and productive dialogue between our staff about learning and teaching – the sort of talk that promotes understanding, changes attitudes and beliefs and informs risk-taking in classrooms. We realised that the impact of whole school training sessions was limited and that we required a more creative use of staff development time… [this] resulted in higher levels of trust among colleagues – a feeling that it's OK to admit that you don't fully understand.'*

Another school used a combination of networking, via their teaching and learning forum, and collaborative planning and teaching to extend learning to all its staff:

> *'The success of the teaching and learning group was such that we now began to work to extend that to all of our teachers. Whole school training events were used to provide a focus for the development of AfL via trios*… (Every member of the SLT was also a member of a trio.) They shared good practice and acted as critical friends… Teacher interviews conducted towards the end of this pilot have underlined the value that teachers place on working collaboratively.'*

*(*The approach to trios promoted in the Secondary National Strategy's 'Leading in Learning' materials was used.)*

Several other schools used coaching to support AfL CPD. This was well received by teachers who felt that this bespoke approach really helped them move their practice on:

> *'I did a trial model of coaching with two experienced colleagues: one teaching, one observing as coach, and one observing the coaching role. Time consuming but valuable, we used the video camera. It was interesting to see myself on camera… Coaching needs to be embraced a bit more by staff… it's always been a small number of staff who have volunteered… Coaching is vital for teachers because they get to know what AfL feels like: where you are at, what you need to do to improve. If we expect pupils to set targets and so on, we should do the same.'*

Teachers across the schools reported that they learned as much about developing their own practice from being a coach as from being coached. However, there were considerable variations in teachers' ability and confidence in being self-reflective practitioners across the project schools, particularly in schools where collaborative working was relatively new.

Deepening a shared understand of AfL

It became increasingly clear that everyone in a school needs to continue to develop and deepen a shared understanding of AfL through discussion and reflection.

This links directly to 'distributed leadership' discussed above. One school explains the challenge this presented when they launched AfL in 2004:

'With hindsight we recognise that this choice (to develop AfL) was not "strategically" thought through: AfL was bolted on to the improvement agenda that the school had at that time. In order to sharpen the focus, a teacher education day was used to ask colleagues to evaluate their practice, using the strategy audit materials. This, however, raised more questions than it answered, as the outcomes conflicted with the evidence from the school's self evaluation processes. There was a marked inconsistency in colleagues and team's perception of their AfL practice and the SLTs. Clearly, the effectiveness of the audit depends on the security of understanding of effective AfL practice. Unsurprisingly, at this stage of our development, this was not secure among the majority of colleagues.'

Similarly another school reported the apparently 'negative impact' of AfL at the end of their first year of development:

'… a number of subjects reported 'negative' progress (if there can be such a thing!)… that their deeper understanding of formative assessment led them to recognise that their initial evaluation had been over-inflated. This highlighted the nature of developing AfL as a journey, where for reflective practitioners the more you understand about it the more you recognise and respond to the challenge its development represents. This recognition in some parts of the school of the complexity of the process should have been shared with all staff.'

This means the issues and foci change as understanding of AfL deepens. This impacts on action planning in response to the continuing evaluation of impact using improved understanding.

The section on 'Distributed leadership' above also identifies the need for SLT and middle leadership teams to act collectively in supporting and challenging staff to effect change in classroom practice. Their capacity to do so is dependent upon their own (as leaders) understanding of pedagogy. As one school puts it:

'Early in the process our link meetings and lesson observations had limited impact largely because the SLT as a whole did not have a secure enough understanding of AfL to be able to make secure judgements and to support colleagues in identifying appropriate action to move that practice forward. A critical moment in our development was the acknowledgement by the SLT that they needed to [develop] their own understanding of AfL.'

Several of the schools also identified that, as teachers began to use the language of AfL more readily and opportunities to share best practice became more frequent, a more trusting and collaborative whole school dialogue for learning, developed. One teacher commented:

'AfL has been a godsend, it has allowed me to develop into a reflective practitioner, in a non threatening way. I now feel confident at analysing the next steps that I need to take with my own AfL development. It's like having success criteria for teachers.'

SLTs and teachers recognised that they were growing a learning community and that there was more regular and increasingly enthusiastic dialogue about teaching and learning both within and outside of meetings. To some extent this growing dialogue was orchestrated, for example through:

- staff meetings;
- designated time in department meetings;
- focus of whole school training days;
- teaching and learning groups;
- performance management discussions;
- programmes of lesson observations;
- coaching/collaborative planning.

'Dialogue about teaching and learning has become common practice in the school through the establishment of a teaching and learning group; a coaching programme; opportunities for CPD; and a consistent message from senior leaders that sustainable change will take time and that we are committed to this initiative. AfL will not be a one year wonder replaced by yet another initiative. This has led to willingness on the part of leaders, teachers and pupils to engage and think about how we move forward with AfL and in so doing, transforming the process by which teachers and pupils learn.'

'A critical moment in our development was the acknowledgement by the SLT that they needed to delegate scheduled leadership and management time to the development of their own understanding of AfL. The SLT stated during a review meeting that "a lively, open, ongoing debate about the nature of AfL has both challenged and supported our understanding".'

The critical point is that formal and informal discussions about teaching and learning at every level within the schools became normal everyday occurrences in meetings, lesson reviews, staffrooms and corridors.

One school commented that **'One important consequence of this is that a greater shared understanding of the concepts and terminology of AfL enables teachers to provide more effective feedback after lesson observations.'** This links directly to the fundamental importance of 'distributed leadership'.

Schools in the project valued this growing dialogue. Teachers were getting under the skin of AfL and understanding why different strategies help pupils learn and how they might develop them in their lessons so that they were able to develop as independent learners themselves.

Planning, systematic self evaluation and CPD opportunities for teachers

It is clear from the project that change needs to be planned and systematic. In schools where this was the case the evidence of the impact of AfL could be well documented.

In a small number of schools the planning and leadership has not yet brought about the impact across the school that they had wished for. Their case studies, however, are clear about the lessons learned from this and the implications for their next steps.

One school had seen considerable impact at all levels, including on pupil standards, at the end of the first year of implementing AfL. However, at the end of the second year (during which they participated in the 'AfL 8 schools project') they recognised that:

'… in spite of the progress made this year we feel that improvements in 2004-05 appear greater than in 2005-06. By the end of this year we had hoped to reach "critical mass" with our development of AfL. Instead, we are still well aware of patchy practice existing in some departments and a reluctance on the part of some staff to fully engage with the process.'

Their case study documents the complexity of the issues which lead to the reduction in impact but these can be distilled out as:

- a restructuring of SLT responsibilities whereby the senior leader who had initially led on the whole school development of AfL was no longer in charge of CPD;

- an increased emphasis on monitoring impact at the expense of providing opportunities for collaborative CPD;

- a lost focus on the overarching principles of AfL in an attempt to build the range of AfL strategies used by staff (a focus on teaching rather than learning).

In their conclusions about leading whole school change the school recognised that:

'Maintaining momentum is hard in a school system where, until recently, successive initiatives have "been and gone within a year or two", for AfL to transform schools we need to look at developments across a longer, more sustained time period… Monitoring and review needs to be a formative process linked to CPD and this was one of the hard lessons we learned across the year.'

At the outset of the project the participating schools did not have self evaluation tools or systems in place that were sufficiently systemic or focused to address the AfL objectives for the project. It was therefore necessary to develop a range of self evaluation tools which would enable schools to collect the evidence of the impact of AfL on leadership, teaching, learning and standards, at all levels within their school system. These are referenced in the sub-section above 'Focusing on the identified learning needs of pupils in the school'.

These tools provided evidence from the key players in the school, for example, whole school evidence; subject evidence; individual pupil evidence. It was crucial for this evidence to be analysed and triangulated to identify key issues which helped the schools evaluate the impact of developments in teaching and learning and target their response:

'Systematically reviewing the progress of AfL has made the biggest difference at both classroom and whole school level. Using the pupil voice and the teaching and learning review tables identified where we were with AfL and, most importantly, what we needed to do to make it better. This helped middle leaders and individual teachers improve their practice in the classroom. The whole school progression grids made a difference at a whole school level as they highlighted what was necessary to move our practice into the establishing and enhancing stages. They have given us the next steps.'

Several schools reported on how the AfL evaluation toolkit provided by the project enabled them to identify specific CPD needs:

'Our use of (qualitative) data became more sophisticated from our work in the AfL 8 schools project. The frequency of using pupil voice and lesson observation facilitated an element of 'drilling down' to expose specific issues that needed addressing by staff as a whole but also in indicating those subject areas where further support might be needed.'

For the majority of the schools the use of 'pupil voice' was one of the biggest changes to the monitoring and evaluation systems in the school. Listening to pupils caused the schools to recognise the importance of all teachers in the school working together to tackle the specific learning needs of their pupils.

'Another significant implication for leading school improvement has been the value of pupil voice. It is inconceivable that we would not make pupil interviews an integral part of any other initiative that we would undertake.'

'The feedback from student questionnaires gave a valuable insight as to whether our work was heading in the right direction and the students were very honest and open in their views.'

'If I had to pick one thing (which made the biggest difference) it would be the way the pupils, of all abilities, talk about their learning… they're actually better than some staff. They have a really good idea about what lessons should involve. When pupils start by saying "I feel more motivated in my learning when…" you know you've made a difference. They are now much more critical of us as providers of their education. It's essential to invest in the pupil voice as part of personalising learning.'

Deputy headteacher

The target group of pupils in schools became increasingly articulate. They developed as reflective thinkers and came to understand why teachers were using the strategies they were and how, as learners, they could exploit these better. They also changed their views after listening to each other: one boy who was very anti peer assessment became a strong advocate (although he denied having changed his mind!).

As well as recognising the value of the 'pupil voice' some schools also commented on the importance of capturing 'teacher voice'. Individual teachers and subject teams who were encouraged and enabled to support the evaluation of their developing AfL practice had ownership and commitment.

This was useful because it exposed teachers' misconceptions about AfL or revealed reasons why they weren't implementing AfL in line with whole school policy and expectation. This enabled senior leaders to then identify appropriate ways to support these teachers in implementing AfL. The project's model for working with schools (six review days across the year) lent itself to short term review and response cycles. The CPD activities which were agreed at the end of each review day were designed to make a difference before the next review. The 'cocktail' of CPD activities needed to make the difference in each individual school was different.

In one school, at the start of the project, there was limited whole school momentum for improvement and initial evidence identified that objective led lessons were not well embedded. It was recognised that a 'top down' push on CPD was necessary. Later in the process a more 'bottom up' approach to CPD involving classroom research and collaborative planning was introduced but the SLT also continued to use the 'top down' approach where helpful.

Several of the schools which were more experienced in planning for a range of CPD approaches recognised the essential nature of coaching as a means of impacting on all teachers… and therefore all learners:

> *'One development that has built the capacity of our staff to provide in-house CPD has been the use of the LA consultant to train seven members of the teaching and learning group as coaches. These staff worked with nominated staff in the spring and summer term 2006. Following positive feedback from staff we now plan to use coaches in a more targeted way, acting upon the information gleaned during the departmental review process, as the school seeks to narrow the gaps in the standards of teaching and learning within the school.'*

Schools were also working with other schools to share and help develop their own practice:

> *'Although the school makes maximum use of its own expertise, it is not inward looking. One of the reasons for becoming involved in the project was to share with the other schools and to learn from them too.'*

The progression tables* were identified by all the schools as being significant in bringing about change. One school identified that a mathematics teacher 'moved' from the 'focusing' to the 'establishing' level in six months by simply using the 'Objective led lessons' sheet as an aide memoire. They were particularly effective because:

- they provided a common focus for all staff in a school, for example, for developing peer and self assessment;
- they could be used summatively to support assessment of the school's, or a department's current position;
- they could be used formatively to enable teachers' reflection on how they can move forward – as individuals or teams. In this context they were particularly effective when used alongside coaching conversations (before and after a lesson observation);
- they provided useful prompts for lesson planning;
- they provided prompts for school and departmental improvement planning, particularly in focusing the language of pupil outcomes;
- they enabled monitoring and CPD processes to happen concurrently, both informing school self evaluation and facilitating 'next steps'.

* Progression tables for each AfL training unit are provided in the 'subject development materials' (on the CD-ROM provided to all secondary schools and on the Strategies website). 6. Concluding remarks

6. Concluding remarks

All of the schools valued their involvement in the project as part of their continuing commitment to developing assessment for learning, improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning across their school, and to further developing the leadership and management of change. Similarly, the LAs also valued their involvement in the project which has helped them reflect upon and further develop their support for schools.

Each of the eight case studies makes clear the importance of a whole school collaborative approach to developing practice to better meet the learning needs of all pupils of all abilities in all subjects. Subject leaders and teachers need to work with colleagues within their department and with colleagues in other departments. School leaders, consultants and advisers need to provide opportunities to facilitate this. A collaborative approach empowers teachers as professional reflective practitioners and helps pupils develop as responsible motivated learners as they receive consistent and coordinated support.

The project has been able to provide evidence of the impact of AfL on standards. However, this has very much depended on the depth of understanding of AfL of school leaders and teachers so that: (a) they are able to make the connections between good practice and impact on pupil achievement; and, (b) have systems in place to track progress (e.g. through lesson observation and work scrutiny) and record the impact on individuals and groups in different subjects and lessons. The schools with the most developed distributed leadership were more confident to associate the raising of standards with developing AfL practice (and were more able to provide detailed supporting evidence).

The report pursues the two themes of developing the independent learner and developing distributed leadership. During the project, these two themes emerged as fundamental to successfully developing AfL whole school. The term 'independent learner' as understood and defined within this report is hand in hand with the term 'autonomous learner' as understood and defined within the Teaching and Learning Research Programme's publication *Improving Learning How to Learn: Classrooms, Schools and Networks* * (there is encouraging synergy between the findings of the recent 'learning how to learn' research and the 'AfL 8 schools project'). Distributed leadership is about everyone playing their part in developing a vision and working together to realise it. The project findings reflect the importance of developing a whole school learning community where self-evaluation at every level (including pupils) informs CPD and is part of an action research approach to developing practice.

The report helps focus in on a number of critical issues associated with developing AfL as a whole school and provides examples of successful practical approaches to address these. However, the project has also raised many more questions due to the complex dynamics of developing teaching and learning, and school leadership and management. In other words, the project may have formally ended but the research continues in schools and LAs who have come to understand the '8 schools project approach' to developing practice.

The summary report's 13 key messages are interrelated and need to be viewed holistically. It would be futile to try to act upon any one of the key messages in isolation. What is needed is a planned response to the key messages to systematically and systemically develop practice.

We hope that schools, LAs and national policy makers find this report useful. It is intended to help professionals learn from each other and find their own way forward.

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* James, M., McCormick, R., Black, P., Carmichael, P., Drummond, M-J., Fox, A., Honour L., MacBeath, J., Marshall, B., Pedder, D., Procter, R., Swaffield, S., Swann, J., and Wiliam, D. (2007, in press) *Improving Learning How to Learn: Classrooms, Schools and Networks* (London: Routledge)

7. The CD-ROM

The CD-ROM is organised as described in the following sitemap. From the homepage there is access to the 8 schools overarching report (this booklet) and its appendices. The next layer gives the 8 schools overview, with links to their individual reports (case studies) and supporting evidence in the form of appendices. There is also a layer containing the AfL evidence collection tools, with a range of linked documents.
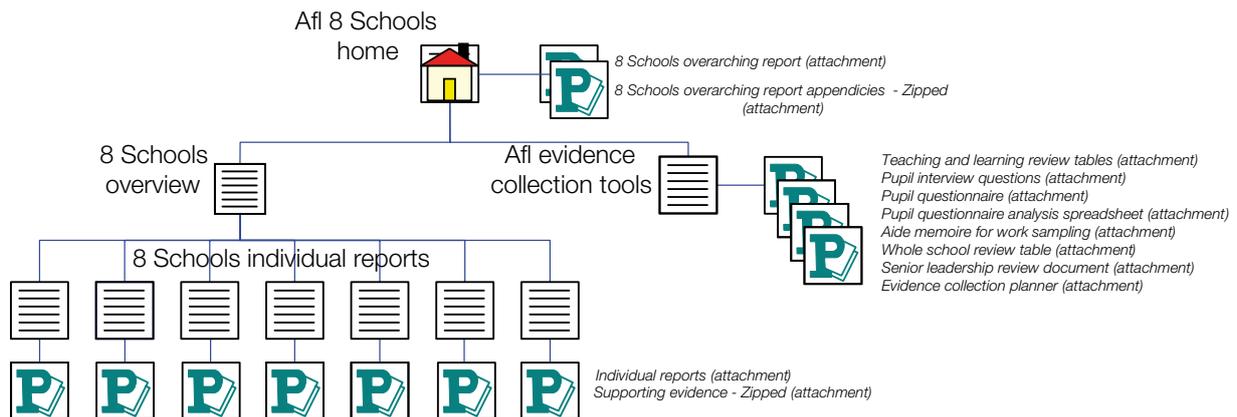
Specifications

PC minimum specification

CPU: Pentium II or greater

RAM: 64 MB

HD with 200 MB of free space

CD-ROM drive

Sound card (16 bit) with speakers or headphones

Video card with 64 MB of RAM (video RAM or VRAM) and DirectX 9.0b

Keyboard & mouse (Microsoft compatible)

Operating system: Windows 98SE or later

Mac minimum specification

CPU: Mac G3 processor 233 Mhz

RAM: 64 MB

HD with 100 MB of free space

CD-ROM drive

Sound card (16 bit) with speakers or headphones

SVGA graphics card (16 bit colour)

Keyboard & mouse

Operating system: Mac OS X or later

Software

Recommended - Windows Media Player v10 and above or Real Player.

Microsoft Internet Explorer 6 or Netscape 7.1.

Autostart

The disc will autorun on all computers except those on which autorun has been disabled. If this is the case for you then PC users should double click on My Computer, open whichever drive letter corresponds to the CD-ROM drive on your computer and double click on the file named **index**. Mac users should open the CD-ROM from the desktop icon and run Start.

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