Oxford Primary Writing Assessment Handbook

Contact: ow.ly/TZdkn
Reviewed by: Louise Sage

VERDICT: Fits the bill

If your school is looking for a comprehensive and realistic assessment system then this could be the one for you!

One of the most important questions in primary schools across the UK at the moment is: ‘How are we going to assess, track and monitor the progress of writing?’

Leadership teams are working tirelessly to find a consistent and robust assessment system to support the teaching of writing according to the standards and expectations set out in the new National Curriculum. With the Government giving us freedom to choose an assessment system and Ofsted looking at how schools use, monitor and apply their assessment policy it is paramount that schools develop a rigorous and consistent approach to the assessment of writing. Could the Oxford Primary Writing Assessment Handbook be the answer?

Working alongside the Oxford Primary Reading Assessment, the handbook aims to ensure children develop their full potential as writers by acquiring a wide range of skills and, most importantly, a life-long enthusiasm for writing. I, for one, am extremely glad the latter is given importance as with the growing emphasis on Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling in the New National Curriculum, it is refreshing to know that experts in the field are still promoting the love of writing.

The Oxford Writing Criterion Scale is a comprehensive set of criteria created by the expert Ros Wilson, designed to inform teacher assessment of writing. The criteria help to record and track pupil progress and attainment, whilst identifying next step targets. Just like with the Oxford Primary Reading Assessment, the tick sheets can be used to inform a best-fit judgement linked to the new standards. For each standard there is a list of essential skills laid out to ensure children don’t progress without mastering some of the basics from the previous year group, but you may wish to check these against your school’s own priorities in case they don’t entirely match – as it’s obviously important that children don’t move up to the next age expectations before they are completely secure in all aspects of writing.

From start to finish

“Writing is like ballet.” This is a quote from page six of the handbook, and a beautiful simile used to describe the journey of becoming a writer: “Only when all the steps have been learnt, sequences have been rehearsed and re-rehearsed, techniques have been honed and the performer has brought them together in a wonderful interpretation can the abilities of the writer (dancer) be truly judged.” Reading this, from the point of view of a passionate and enthusiastic English Lead, it is wonderful and inspiring to find an approach that understands and values the difficulties of writing and how we, as teachers, need to give children interesting and engaging stimuli knowing what the outcomes of a successful piece of writing are in order to be able to judge whether they have deployed learning to maximum effect.

The handbook states that focusing on four main areas: the purpose of writing; type of text that would achieve that purpose; audience of the writing; and the stimulus for writing can influence how successful a piece of writing is. It also highlights the importance of good basic skills across spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. The emphasis for secure writing is on whether a child can consistently produce independent writing for a range of purposes and audiences.

Part of this handbook which could prove to be invaluable is the exemplification material for each year group. Moderation of writing is key to ensure consistency and progression across Key Stages; however, we now lack examples of writing that show the new standards and expectations. Using the marked exemplifications in school to practise using the criteria and gaining a common understanding of standards and then using the unmarked samples could be extremely effective for a school starting out on this complicated journey.