

An Asset in KS3 and beyond

Asset is being used to meet the assessment needs of different sets of pupils at Dorothy Stringer High School, a specialist sports college, in Brighton. The school's Head of Languages, Rachel Revéréault, described what is going on in KS3 and beyond.

"We wanted to externally assess all pupils at the end of KS3, especially as languages are no longer compulsory," she explained. "We put one cohort of Year 9 pupils through for the first time last academic year. Pupils in set 3 did Preliminary French and set 4 did Breakthrough French. Asset is a way of offering all pupils the chance to leave the school with a qualification in a foreign language. Our set 1 and 2 classes already do the fast track GCSE course, so we wanted something for the set 3 and 4 classes and we liked the look of the Asset qualifications."

Rachel continued: "At present, we only assess KS3 pupils in this way in French. We could not fund our pupils taking external exams in a second language as well. Maybe we will look at doing internal assessments with them in the future."

Asked how the school decides which tests pupils will take, Rachel replied:

"It can be difficult to decide which skills and stages to enter pupils for as the staff in the department are still getting to know the Asset qualifications. In theory, our set 4 pupils do Breakthrough, set 3 do Preliminary and sets 1 and 2 will do Intermediate as from 2011, but ultimately the teacher decides whether pupils should be entered for those levels and some pupils may not be entered for all skills. However, we were pleased with our first results for Breakthrough and Preliminary, as 81.5% of the exams that were sat were passed. We had 45.5 % of pupils who were entered gaining a qualification in all 4 skills, 73.7% gaining 3 skills, 85.1% gaining 2 skills and 95.5% gaining 1 skill.

How does the school prepare its pupils for Asset style tests? "We adapted the schemes of work to include speaking preparation. We also adapted our termly tests and wrote them in the same style as the Asset exams. We are still looking at other ways that we can adapt our schemes of work and teaching in order to better prepare our pupils."

The school opts to enter pupils for tests in the June window, giving its KS3 pupils plenty of time to reach the standard required. The results met the school's expectations, with pupils 'pleased that they had passed'. Even some of those who failed were interested to know how near to passing they were.

The school's use of Asset is expanding. As well as introducing Breakthrough and Preliminary tests for KS3 pupils for the first time in 2009, Rachel plans to bring in different Asset assessments for the top sets next year. "From next academic year, our set 1 and 2 classes - about a third of the year group - will no longer do GCSE, but will do Intermediate Asset French at the end of KS3," she confirmed.

Alongside the expansion of Asset within KS3, the school finds the qualification an increasingly useful motivational tool in KS4. "We already run a course for post GCSE fast-track French pupils who wish to continue and they are entered for the Advanced Asset exam at the end of KS4 (Year 11)."

"From 2011 however, pupils sitting Level 2 exams in KS4 will do Intermediate Asset, as opposed to the new GCSE. Not only do we prefer the exam, we felt that this would mean that our pupils will be able to advance up the Languages Ladder. Having done Preliminary or Intermediate in KS3, they can then do Intermediate or Advanced in KS4. We will also be introducing Asset Intermediate for Spanish and German, instead of the new GCSE in KS4."

At Dorothy Stringer, approximately 20 to 25% of the year carry on to take a Level 2 or 3 qualification in languages in KS4. Funding for Asset tests is currently not an issue as the school's SMT believe that it is worthwhile attempting to get every pupil to end KS3 with external language qualifications.

"The school has funded the early entries for French GCSE at the end of KS3 for a number of years now and the money that would have been used for that will now be used to pay for Intermediate Asset entries instead. The funding for the Intermediate and Advanced exams in KS4 would otherwise have been used to pay for entries to other GCSE options so there is no extra cost to the school."