self and peer assessment

Self and peer assessment are important aspects of assessment for learning practice (see *Assessment for learning*). Assessing their own work or that of others can help pupils develop their understanding of learning objectives and success criteria. Research has shown that pupils make more progress when they are actively involved in their own learning and assessment.

Developing self and peer assessment

The development of effective self and peer assessment takes considerable time and effort. However, once fully embedded into teaching and learning, they can be particularly effective in motivating pupils to move forward in their learning, thereby facilitating teaching. Teachers who have reached this stage are generally enthusiastic about the beneficial effects on pupils and teachers (see *What do teachers say about self and peer assessment?* overleaf). It is recommended that peer assessment should be introduced first, only moving on to self assessment when both teachers and pupils are fully comfortable with the former.

Peer assessment

The starting point for introducing peer assessment is for teachers and learning support assistants to model the process (i.e. acting as a role model, and explaining and demonstrating how it should be done). For example, showing how to give constructive feedback (detailed comments, objective focus, etc.) both verbally and through marking. A good way of doing this is to use examples of work from anonymous pupils (e.g. from a previous year or another school), modelling the type of constructive feedback that might be given or providing a list of questions that pupils might ask. This allows pupils to become accustomed to the process before they are asked to evaluate and comment on the work of their classmates. Pupils need to be supported in giving effective feedback, helping them to understand the different types of feedback that can be given and how each type can help others to improve their work. Whole-class marking can also be useful as it allows for discussion and sharing of ideas in a secure environment.

Peer assessment rules

Make the rules for giving feedback explicit and ensure that pupils understand and follow these rules when working in groups or with response partners.

- Respect the work of others.
- Identify successful features.
- Think about the learning objective and the success criteria when suggesting improvements.
- Word suggestions positively.

Moving from peer assessment to self assessment

Having assessed the work of others, pupils will find it easier to identify weaknesses in their own work and to see how they can make improvements. They should be encouraged to reflect on their own development and progress, comparing their current work with that produced previously and with their own personal targets.

Showing examples of work that do and do not meet the success criteria can help pupils to understand more fully what is required and to reflect on the things they need to do in order to improve. Looking at the work of others can also help pupils to understand the different approaches they could have taken and to appreciate that there are different ways of achieving success.

Pupils generally enjoy supporting one another in their work but both self and peer assessment need to be managed carefully. Following any self-assessment activity pupils should be given sufficient time and opportunity to make improvements. A potential danger of pupils comparing their work with others is that some pupils may be excessively or insufficiently challenged and become demotivated. It is therefore important that pupils understand that everyone's learning journey may be different. It is also important that pupils can admit to areas of weakness without risk to their self-esteem. There are lots of ways for pupils of different ages to indicate their confidence or familiarity with a particular concept or topic and to articulate where they are in relation to learning objectives and success criteria (see *Resources and useful weblinks*).

What do teachers say about self and peer assessment?

- Developing self and peer assessment skills is a valuable investment for the long-term future of our pupils.

- Pupils tend to be more critical of the work of their peers than teachers would be. But our pupils, even low-ability pupils, find it very motivating because they have a larger audience for their work.

- The allocation of response partners should reflect the nature of the task. Where pupils are evaluating each other's work we tend to ask them to work with someone working at the same level.

- Self assessment makes it easier for pupils to contribute to target-setting.

- Verbal peer assessment works better than written feedback. With younger pupils evaluation is often given in the form of, 'What I liked…' whereas older pupils link it more explicitly to success criteria.

- For pupils with special educational needs, the giving and receiving of feedback should be consistent with their normal means of communication. Learning support assistants can provide support in the role of buddy/critical friend.

- The attitude of pupils has changed – before they would queue by my desk as soon as they had finished a piece of work, and now they talk to one another or look over their work to see how they can make improvements.

A supportive culture

Self and peer assessment require a classroom culture or ethos where errors are valued as learning opportunities and admitting to not understanding something is acceptable. Pupils act as critical friends, critiquing the work of others in a way that both supports and challenges them and facilitates their future success. In order for such a culture to thrive teachers must be able to show that they too can make mistakes. As with self and peer assessment among pupils, the development of such a culture can take time and effort.

As self and peer assessment become embedded, their use will be evident in pupils' written work (for example where pupils have made comments on the work of others) and when pupils are observed interacting with their peers in the classroom (giving oral feedback, working with partners, etc.).

Teachers' experiences of self and peer assessment can be shared at staff meetings, and teachers may gain further insights by observing their peers or visiting schools where it is being successfully practised. Although this leaflet is concerned with pupil self and peer assessment, many of the same principles could equally apply when teachers are observing and evaluating their own teaching and that of colleagues.