

Case Study

Developing a personalised approach to learning at The Regent Primary School, Abuja



The Regent Primary School in Abuja, Nigeria, prides itself on its high standards and on its personalised approach to teaching and learning. It recently became the first school in Abuja and only the fourth in the whole of Nigeria to be accredited against BSO (British School Overseas).

A structured approach to assessment, combined with teacher observations, ensures that each student is stretched to reach their full potential but also that interventions are rapidly put in place when needed.

Akif Naqvi, the school's Deputy Headmaster and Head of Assessments, explains: "We use a combination of GL Education's *Cognitive Abilities Test® (CAT4)*, *Progress Test Series® (PT Series)* and the *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School® (PASS)* survey. We begin with *CAT4* tests when the students arrive at the school and then ensure that the right level of progress is being achieved with the *PT Series*, which we use as the end of year assessment."

Using the data to identify personalised measures of progress

Used together the *CAT4* and *PT Series* assessments results allow staff to compare cognitive ability data against attainment data. They can see which students are at, above or below the level they should be. The system will identify, for example, a student who is achieving below what he or she is capable of, as well as those attaining at higher than expected levels.

"We found that not only are the results available immediately, because of the nature of the tests, but there was no teacher marking, so no possibility of errors of judgement," Akif says. "It saved teachers' workload in the marking and moderation of the tests. We could see straight away which students needed additional help, and those who had performed particularly well. This freed up teachers' time to analyse the data to improve teaching and learning."

Teachers who wrote their end-of-year reports arrived at similar conclusions

to the test results. "The tests largely endorsed what our teachers had observed and knew about students. We share results with our teachers immediately so we can discuss areas where improvements might be needed," Akif said. "The assessments offer an invaluable validation of teacher judgement."

Using the data to decide student grouping and differentiation

We use the data to inform student grouping, set learning targets and revisit curriculum maps. Based on their assessment outcomes, we write the IEPs for students who have struggled and those who have performed way above their age expectations.

For those who we have found to struggle or who are not making the progress as expected, the school's Learning Support Department carries out diagnostic tests for learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, with a view to implementing one to one or other interventions. "We need to find out if these students have a specific support need," Akif added. "We don't want to consider them as having a support need if they have simply fallen behind and need to catch up. For those who have performed well above their age expectations, apart from supporting learning through an IEP within the class, we offer the opportunity to join Brain Academy, a lunchtime club for gifted and talented students."

The data also enables teachers to ensure a smooth transition from one year to the next. It means the teacher receiving them in the new academic year will know how they have performed and be familiar with their strengths and areas for development.



Differentiation and stretching gifted & talented students

Akif says: “The children bring their lunch with them to the club. They know that according to GL Education’s assessments they’ve done really well but we tell them that this is not a time for boasting. Like Spiderman, with great powers come great responsibilities and you must help others.”

The students participate in verbal and non-verbal reasoning tasks, general knowledge quizzes, brainteasers and learning how to manage money. They are also given special assignments to do at home which are age-appropriate and differentiated. For example, in science, they might look at the importance of looking after their teeth and what foods are damaging to good dental health. The challenge might be to ask them to consider how they could test their idea of what rots teeth. These projects help the students in learning to learn.

“It is a real morale booster for these children,” Akif says. “It means other students work harder because they want to be part of the Brain Academy too, so it acts as an incentive. During carpet time, the Brain Academy learners will be doing activities that stretch and challenge.”

Crucially, these gifted and talented students may also be asked to help teach their classmates, under the supervision and direction of the class teacher. They usually work in pairs or small groups with students of the different abilities, acting as a ‘spokesperson’ or ‘expert’ in that group.

“Previously the gifted and talented group of students might have been overlooked because they got on with tasks in lesson and didn’t need much teacher intervention,” Akif adds. “Now their abilities are being served in the same way as we would give interventions to students at the other end of the spectrum.”

“Students have no problem being taught by their peers. They are getting additional input with the Brain Academy child suggesting different ways they might solve a problem. The children understand that it is good to help others and if a classmate says

something good about the Brain Academy child, then that child will get a sticker from me.”

One of the reasons this method works so well, Akif says, is because the school has been moving away from rote-learning, which was the traditional approach in Nigeria.

“Rote-learning might be good for some things, such as learning time-tables, but it’s not appropriate for teaching everything. We are a British school and follow the New National Curriculum for England way of doing things,” Akif says. “Many of our staff members have been on immersion trips to UK schools. In addition to the knowledge gained, it was a real validation to our staff that the UK schools have incorporated some of our assessment practices into their own assessment practice, too.”

“Apart from their Nigerian teaching qualification, a vast number of teachers also have a UK PGCEi. Our teachers are well versed in analysing the valuable data from GL Education, which also helps them for differentiation in the classroom.”

Supporting student wellbeing

The Regent School uses the *PASS* survey to discover more about their students’ attitudes towards learning, and themselves. The short survey helps the school to identify students who are unhappy or at risk of disengaging.

For example scores in the *PASS* factor ‘Response to Curriculum Demands’ helped teachers to identify one student who clearly was unhappy about some aspects of school. On further investigation they discovered that although he was technically very literate he didn’t enjoy reading. “The teacher was surprised at this, because he was a good reader,” Akif says. “This was addressed by giving the child reading materials more suited to his interests, such as football and cricket, which was what he loved doing.”

Engaging with stakeholders

“Education is highly valued and hugely important to Nigerians and there is a great emphasis on getting the best possible education,” he says. “Coming to the school does cost and

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they might have to make sacrifices elsewhere such as foregoing holidays. Previously things were very old-fashioned here in Nigeria and we would separate children during examinations using wooden partitions. It was very formal in that way.

“We have tried to change the mindset to get parents away from thinking about the scores their children get in these tests and more into understanding how assessment works and how it helps us to teach.

“There have been some concerns among parents about the lack of involvement of teachers in assessment and children being assessed online so we invited them to attend workshops to explain how it all works.”

“We are starting to find that other schools are taking notice of the work we are doing in relation to assessment,” Akif says. “In Abuja, there is little collaboration between schools but we are trying to change that.”

Since last September 30 Heads have linked together via social media, which has allowed Akif to spread the word about the work being done at The Regent School.

“They have asked me about what works so I have told them about how we are implementing these assessments,” he says. “We held a workshop and 15 Heads turned up from around the region.

“There is a feeling that if Regent is doing something then it must be good. I am very open about what we do here and believe we should be helping improve educational prospects across the country.”

The *Cognitive Abilities Test: Fourth Edition (CAT4)*, *Progress Test Series (PT Series)* and *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS)* are registered trademarks of the GL Education Group.

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