

You Can... Choose the best assessment tool to fit your class

In today's media-rich classrooms, filled with interactive whiteboards, laptops, palm readers, media players and other tools, it seems natural to use the opportunities that IT programs have to offer for assessment. The range of tools appearing on the market include digital formal assessments, tools to track standards and online resources that can support moderation, which are particularly useful with subjects such as PE for which you might not have many examples. Added to this are learning platforms that will also include an assessment section that parents can access. The issue facing modern teachers is how to efficiently get the most out of the many resources that are available.

Thinking points

- In the last five years, schools have begun to utilise IT to streamline assessment procedures. With the growing range of resources available, it is easy to be seduced by what the programs can do rather than what you are looking for. There is little doubt that IT saves time and can manipulate data quickly. With the growing number of laptops in classrooms it is likely that we will see an end to paper-based assessments in the not-so-distant future. That said, it is important to keep at the forefront what it is you are assessing and why, not what the program wants you to assess.
- Formal test-based assessments have been available as programs for several years. They have the advantage of marking and evaluating the work on your behalf. The role of the teacher, in this case, moves from 'administrative-marker' to 'professional-assessor', freeing your time to scrutinise the results.

Tips, ideas and activities

Don't be intimidated by some of the larger programs. If you are looking for one aspect, such as highlighting if a child is on track, then learn how to use that function and build from it. It is likely that programs in the future will become easier to access as publishers become familiar with what teachers want.

- Schools will have access to RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation), an online government assessment tool. This program provides data created from the Key Stage 1 and 2 tests. Its aim is to enable schools to share a common assessment programme that allows the user to observe value-added trends and contextual information about the school and targets, and also provides an opportunity to edit and manage individual pupil data. It has much potential but has had a few teething problems.
- There is a range of tracking programmes available on the open market:
 - Target Tracker (www.targettracker.org) does as the name suggests and tracks children's standards as they progress from year to year. This can be managed either termly or half-termly. Once an individual's data has been inputted, the program will make any calculations on your behalf, including progression within the class, groups or cohort. The programme is based on Excel and will perform any of the standard sorting functions that you would expect with an Excel document.
 - TargSATS (www.targsats.com) is a similar program, also based on Excel, which will create any number of charts and tables once it has been populated with data. Like Target Tracker, it can produce next-steps targets and will highlight its termly data to reflect schools that are using the Intensive Support Programme (ISP) codes.