



# **Pupil Attitudes to Self and School**

## **Report 2016**





## INTRODUCTION

Educators rightly pay a lot of attention to how children are taught, what they are taught and the quality of teaching they receive. Far less heed is paid to the attitudes of students themselves. What do we know about what they think of school or their teachers? How well prepared do they think they are to learn? How confident are they and how well do they respond to increased curriculum demands?

This report tries to answer those questions. The study, which was based on data from more than 31,000 students in England and Wales, not only tries to assess what students really think of schools and learning but also when their opinions change. As you will see, there is a significant increase in most – though not all – negative feelings after Year 7.

Educators have always known that many students have a difficult time making the transition from primary to secondary school. A wealth of research shows that academic performance often declines, sometimes markedly in the case of disadvantaged pupils, when they change schools. What is surprising from our study, however, is how long those negative feelings persist – well into Year 8 and beyond.

Obviously, this has significant implications for teachers. According to researchers, up to 30 per cent of attainment is influenced by attitude, which of course also has significant implications for student wellbeing, behaviour and later career success. And, if the barriers to learning are attitudinal rather than curricular, then the interventions required will be different. Moreover, if those attitudes persist far longer than originally thought, then those interventions are not just imperative in Year 7 but in Years 8 and 9 too.

Fortunately, negative student attitudes to learning can be changed if teachers identify the problem and adopt appropriate remedies. Elsewhere in this report, teachers and academics outline what they might be and who might benefit. Attitudinal research may be a relatively neglected area of study compared to others. But as more and more schools realise how important young people's feelings about learning are, we have good reasons to hope that this neglect won't continue.

GREG WATSON, Chief Executive of GL Assessment





# REPORT FINDINGS

Student engagement and attitudes to learning **play a vital role** in academic performance and children's wellbeing.

**Several studies, including the OECD's PISA in Focus<sup>1</sup>, have found that "students can only achieve at the highest levels when they believe that they are in control of their success". Even those students "with less raw potential, but with greater stamina, perseverance and capacity for hard work are more likely to succeed than those who are talented but have little capacity to set ambitious goals," the study concludes.**

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that a disadvantaged child is likely to do well at school if he or she finds schools worthwhile and has "a greater belief in his/her ability at school and believes that events result primarily from his/her own behaviour and action".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, their report also found that "policies aimed at improving attitudes and behaviours among teenagers could have some beneficial effects in preventing children from poor backgrounds falling yet further behind during the secondary school years."

Young peoples' attitudes to learning and school therefore matter enormously. Yet educators have not, with some notable exceptions, given them the weight they deserve or identified when attitudes start to change. This study, one of the largest of its kind, seeks to identify when student attitudes start to alter, what implications that has for their education and what interventions can be implemented if necessary.

## Main findings

The study, which was based on data from more than 31,000 children across England and Wales, found a decline in positive attitudes to schools, teachers and attendance from Year 7 onwards. The reasons why children find transition difficult, of course, can range from the lack of new friends to the hormonal.

Year 6 in England and Wales is of course the last year of primary school for most children and Year 7 the first of secondary school. Educators have long known that the transition between phases has a negative effect overall on student attainment, markedly so in the case of disadvantaged children. Indeed, Ofsted's 2015 report, 'Key Stage 3: the wasted years?', said that one of the major contributory factors for a stalled performance in secondary schools "was that, too often, transition from primary to secondary school was poorly handled."

Yet crucially, our study finds that the decrease in positive attitudes is just as great if not greater between Year 7 and Year 8 as it is between Years 6 and 7. The implications are clear: 'transition' lasts a lot longer than one or two terms in Year 7.

While a whole host of factors come into play at this point in a child's development – hormones, friendships, growing up, taking control – the transition to secondary school marks a significant change for students and it is at this point that we begin to see a notable decline in their attitudes. The effects for some children last well into Year 8 and into Year 9.

Whether young peoples' changing attitudes are a cause or consequence of the problems associated with transition are beyond the scope of this report.

But as the trend in attitudes is clear, it would be reasonable to conclude that transition plays a significant part on student performance, behaviour and wellbeing. If a student is not achieving as expected, could other factors be limiting their potential? Could it be a question of confidence and attitudes to teaching and learning?

We need to understand what happens to a child's self-esteem, confidence and work ethic when they change schools and go through adolescence. We need to know how they view their own learning skills and how they view their teachers. And schools need to know what can be done to address problems in these areas when they are identified.

## The factors behind the attitudes

Young peoples' attitudes to school and to their own capabilities as learners have been broken down into a number of distinct factors:

- Feelings about school
- Attitude to teachers
- Attitude to attendance
- Confidence with challenging tasks
- Self-regard as a learner
- Response to curriculum demands
- General work ethic
- How prepared for learning they feel they are
- How positive they feel about their specific capabilities as a learner





The biggest decreases in children's positive attitudes are towards schools, teachers and attendance. The scores from children who feel good about school declines from **94%** in Year 3 to **84%** in Year 9. Positive attitudes towards teachers fall from **93%** to **84%**, while positive attitudes to attendance decline from **90%** in Year 3 to **82%** in Year 9. The biggest declines in all of these factors occur after Year 7 not before.

The underlying questions behind the data can be illuminating. For instance, the proportion of children who think the rules in school are fair declines from **94%** in Year 3 to **86%** in Year 9. The proportion who say they are bored at school increases from **19%** per cent in Year 3 to **32%** in Year 9. Between Years 3 and 9 there is a 10 percentage point drop in the number of children who say they like their teacher. The fall isn't precipitous, but that equates to around 70,000 students in each year group who have a much more negative perception of teachers.

Attendance, too, becomes more of an issue for children the older they become. The proportion of students who say they would rather be somewhere else than in school rises from a quarter (**25%**) to a third (**33%**) between Years 3 and 9.

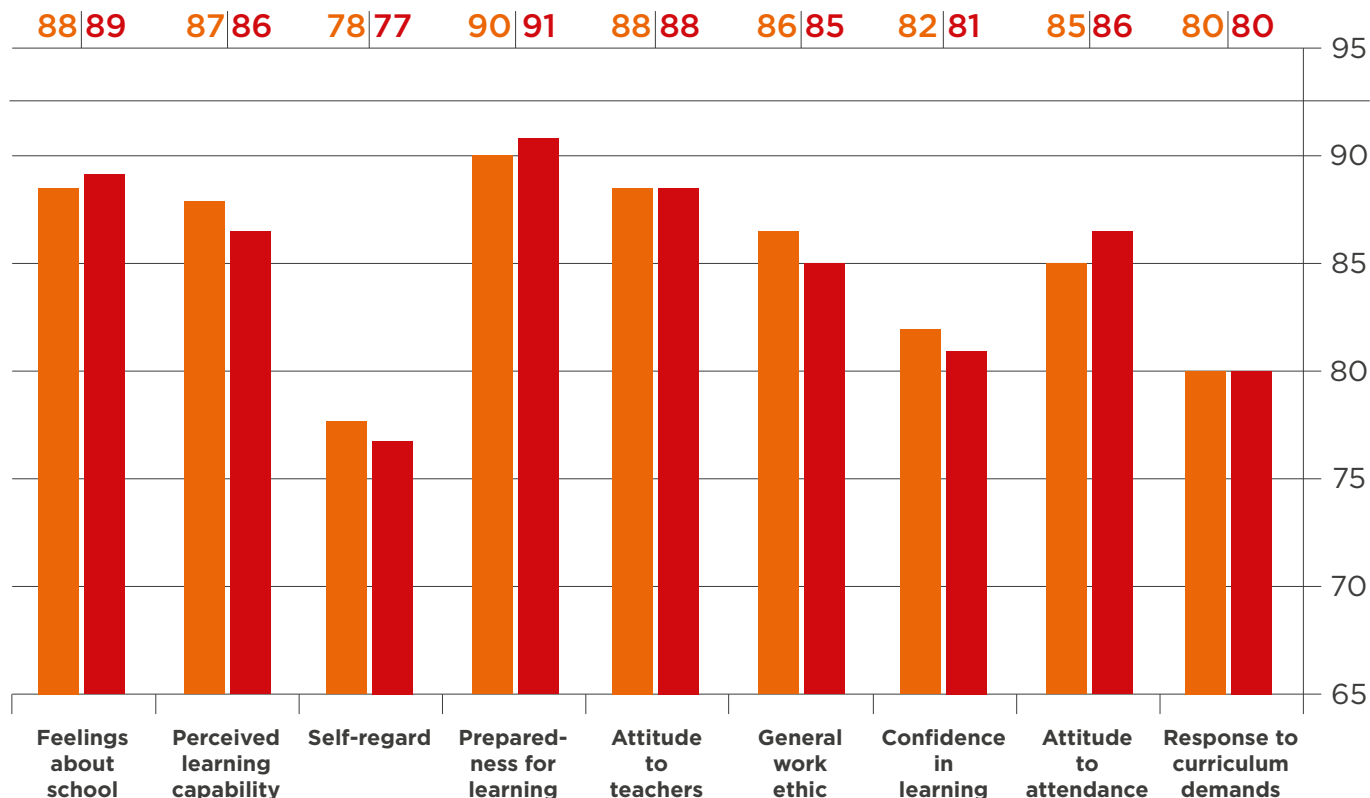
The scores for children who **feel good about school** declines 10%, between Years 3 and 9.



**94% (Year 3) - 84% (Year 9)**

Around 70,000 students in each year group have a much more **negative perception of teachers.**

## Factors by gender - The average scores by gender across Years 3 – 9



**Average percentage score:**



Males



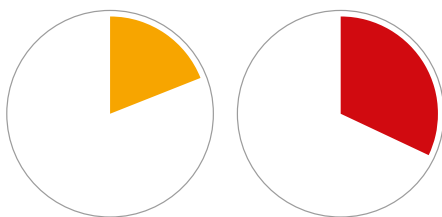
Females





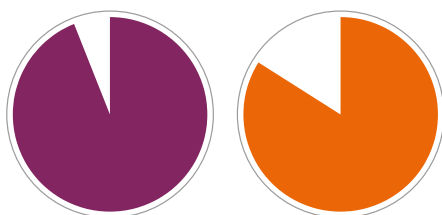
**Positive attitudes to attendance** declines 8% from Year 3 to Year 9.

Students who say they are **bored at school** increases 13%, between Years 3 and 9.



**19% (Year 3) - 32% (Year 9)**

The proportion of children who think the **rules in school are fair** declines 8%, between Years 3 and 9.



**94% (Year 3) - 86% (Year 9)**

One positive attitudinal indicator actually increases over time. Contrary to received wisdom, **students tend to respond well to increased curriculum demands.**

The proportion of students who say the **work they have to do in class is too easy** declines 29%, between Years 3 and 9.



**43% (Year 3) - 14% (Year 9)**





When it comes to how prepared children feel they are for learning and their own capabilities, there is also in a decrease in positive attitudes, though it is less marked than their feelings towards teachers and schools. The scores for preparedness for learning declines from **93%** in Year 3 to **87%** in Year 9. Perceived learning capability drops from **89%-85%** over the same period, while children's confidence with challenging tasks decreases from **86%-78%** between Years 3 and 9.

Once again, responses to the underlying questions are instructive. The proportion of children who think that problem solving is fun declines from **89%-81%** between Year 3 and Year 9. The percentage of children who think they are clever falls from **94%-90%**.

By contrast, some attitudinal factors are remarkably stable over time. Self-regard as a learner, for instance, is **76%** in Year 3 and remains at **76%** in Year 9. General work ethic is **85%** in Year 3 and only falls slightly to **84%** in Year 9.

One positive attitudinal indicator actually increases over time. Contrary to received wisdom, students tend to respond well to increased curriculum demands.

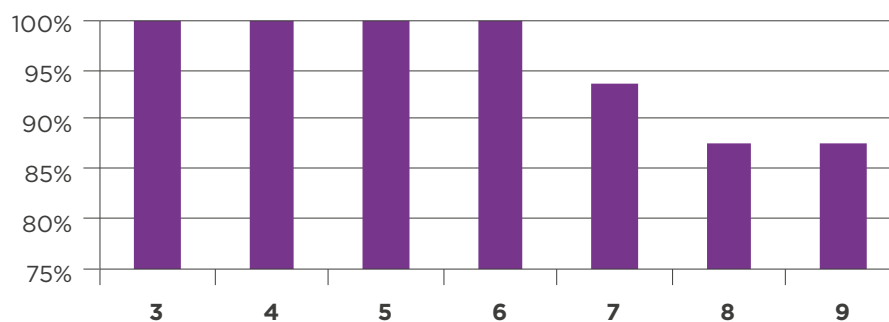
The proportion who rate it positively rises from **76%** in Year 3 to **79%** in Year 9. That is less surprising when we look at some of the underlying questions behind that indicator. In answer to the question, 'Do you get anxious when you have to do new work?' the percentage of children saying they do halved between Years 3 and 9, from **35%-18%**. While the proportion saying the work they have to do in class is too easy declines from **43%** in Year 3 to **14%** in Year 9.

## What the data did not show

The survey is also notable for what it did not find. The data suggest, for instance, that there is no noticeable gender variation in attitudes to learning and schools. Nor is there any perceived difference among regions.

At a macro level the survey suggests that pupil attitudes to learning are pretty identical, regardless of gender or region. That suggests that there are no inherent attitudinal reasons why, say, boys shouldn't perform as well as girls overall academically. Which interventions may be appropriate for specific issues are explored elsewhere in this report.

## Attitude to teachers Percentage of maximum score



Year Group: ■

This study is based on data from 31,873 children from Year 3 to Year 9 across England and Wales, compiled during the period May 2015 – March 2016. There were on average around 2,500 students in each of the primary years 3 to 6 and around 7,000 students in each of the secondary years 7 to 9. The data was extrapolated from GL Assessment's *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS)* attitudinal survey.

*PASS* is an all-age attitudinal survey that provides a measurement of a pupil's attitudes towards themselves as learners and their attitudes towards school, suitable for pupils aged 4 to 18+. *PASS* data has been standardised against a highly representative national sample of more than 600,000 respondents.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Results: Ready to Learn: Students' Engagement, Drive and Self-Beliefs (Volume III), PISA, OECD Publishing

<sup>2</sup> Alissa Goodman and Paul Gregg (2010), Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour? Joseph Rowntree Foundation



# FOCUS ON TRANSITION AND LISTEN TO THE PUPIL VOICE

Moving from one school to another is a stressful experience, whether you are a teacher or a pupil.

**Sir John Dunford**, Chair of Whole Education

**It can be particularly stressful at the age of 11. There is the anxiety of moving to a much larger school; of having to find your own way round without getting lost; of being in classes where you will know few, if any, of the other children; of the presence of lots of much older children, some of whom may be bullies; of having more than ten teachers instead of one; of the demands of increased homework – and all this at an age when the complexities of personal development can weigh heavily.**

So it is particularly important for primary and secondary schools to listen to the voice of their pupils during this transition stage of their education. What are the pupils themselves thinking about their progress, their school and themselves, and how does this compare with what other children of the same age are thinking?

Transition can be a major barrier to learning for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are more emotionally vulnerable or have mental health issues. Many schools have made transition a priority area for spending the pupil premium, so that children who do not have as much support from home are given the additional support that they need at this critical time.

Schools are increasingly using surveys of parents and pupils to obtain feedback on the performance of the school from the consumer viewpoint, not only to provide information to Ofsted inspectors but, more importantly, to inform the process of school self-review as part of the school's improvement strategy. The advantage to a school in using an established product, such as *PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School)*, is that it enables the school not only to gain valuable feedback from its own pupils, but also to have the feedback standardised against a representative national sample of more than 600,000 respondents.

Whole Education is a network of schools that are finding different ways of providing every learner with a fully rounded education, developing not only knowledge but also skills and personal qualities in a planned way. It is a high priority for all Whole Education schools that learning is an active process in which the learner and teacher work in partnership, with learning to learn and feedback as integral parts of the educational process.

A group of primary and secondary schools in the Whole Education network has this year been looking at several ways in which they can better understand and hold themselves to account on providing a 'whole education', and the *PASS* survey has proved a valuable tool. Whole Education network schools have recognised the difficulty of the hurdle at the transition points in schooling and are using *PASS* in a pilot project across the primary/secondary transfer to determine how attitudes to school and to learning change between the ages of 10 and 13. Interestingly, many schools are finding that there is a bigger dip in positive attitudes between Years 7 and 8 than there is between Years 6 and 7, suggesting that policies to improve the transition experience need to last longer than simply easing the move from one school to another.

Attitudes are a good predictor of engagement and, if a pupil is engaged and positive about themselves and their learning, they are more likely to be successful.

*Sir John Dunford is Chair of Whole Education and was the National Pupil Premium Champion from 2013 to 2015. He is a former Secondary Head and General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders.*





# HOW CAN TEACHERS ENSURE CONTINUITY OF LEARNING BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL?

**Suzanne O'Farrell**, Curriculum and Assessment Specialist, ASCL

**As we begin to understand more about how secondary schools are starting to build on what has been learned following the introduction of the new primary curriculum, it makes sense to redefine 'academic transition' as 'continuity of learning'. Continuity of learning is ensuring that pupils' learning builds sequentially on what has been learned previously so that there are no unnecessary jumps and gaps in pupils' learning or repetition.**



So what approach should schools and teachers take to ensure continuity of learning for the maximum benefit of their pupils? Really knowing where pupils are in their learning when they join secondary school is the key to successful academic transition.

1. The first thing to do is to find time to talk to primary colleagues and really understand the impact of the new curriculum in terms of what pupils have covered. Once you have that information, it is a lot easier to adjust the Year 7 curriculum to accommodate.
2. Next, prioritise the students as individuals rather than as a number on some spurious new scale; a number tells us something but not everything they can do.
3. Share assessment that is useful and meaningful, for example sharing with colleagues what pupils can do confidently and competently on their own and in other contexts rather than relying on a number or a label generated from narrow assessments.
4. Assessment is broader than just data; discuss with primary colleagues what information would be useful, why you need it and what you are going to do with it.
5. One significant difference between primary and secondary is the approach to curriculum; in primary this tends to be reasonably broad right through reception to the end of Year 6 whereas in secondary, the curriculum is less connected and eventually narrows as pupils make their options as early as half way through Year 8 in some cases. Adjusting from a generalist approach to a specialist approach is one of the challenges pupils have to adjust to and make sense of. Some schools are managing this by having specialist teachers from secondary deliver discreet lessons in primary (particularly modern foreign languages and science), others are using teachers of Year 7 to deliver a number of subjects – e.g. humanities and science options.

6. Build on strategies that pupils have developed in primary schools to help them learn, be resilient and independent. For example observing pupils in a primary setting gives secondary teachers an insight into their 'stuck strategies' – the processes they have been trained to go through before asking for help.

7. Ensure pupils of all abilities are challenged so they do not repeat work and respond well to the increased gradient of work in the secondary setting.

8. Share pedagogies that have been successful with particular groups of pupils, for instance lower ability pupils.

But how and when do we know if transition has been successful? At the end of the first term, at the end of Year 7 or even at the end of Year 8? Do we sometimes take it for granted that pupils will sustain their initial enthusiasm for all things 'secondary'?

Attitudinal surveys as well as research from Ofsted into Key Stage 3 show that there is a dip in the upper years of Key Stage 3. Could we be doing more in schools to develop and sustain pupils' confidence, self-esteem and positive attitudes to school life throughout this period?

A number of schools are reversing this dip by ensuring the first two or three years of secondary school have a very high profile and investment which they say pays off in later years. One successful school in London has abandoned the concept of Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 and regards the years in Year 7 and 8 as foundation years from which pupils have to graduate at the end of Year 8 after compiling a portfolio of evidence and completing an extended task. Pupils graduate at a number of different levels and the greatest achievement is to 'graduate with distinction!' Year 9 then becomes an 'acceleration' year to inject new challenge, followed by 'examination' years. In this way, momentum is sustained throughout each phase through new expectations and priorities.

The focus on creating a challenging culture in these early years making them the bedrock of the entire secondary experience is proving successful in many schools.

The growing development of an increasingly collaborative culture between secondary and primary schools where colleagues understand each other's barriers and understand the whole journey is leading to an acceptance of a shared responsibility for transition – one in which secondary schools are primary responsive and primary schools are secondary attuned!



# CHANGES IN PUPIL ATTITUDE FROM YEAR 7 TO YEAR 8

## - what to look for and how to help

By **Poppy Ionides**, Educational Psychologist



The findings of this report back up a view that has been voiced anecdotally in schools for years: from the first to second year of secondary education there is a significant drop in positive attitudes towards school. This includes decreases in areas such as children's beliefs about their ability to learn and motivation to persevere when presented with a challenge at school. Attitude towards learning is linked with wellbeing, academic performance and life opportunities so what can be done if a child's positivity towards school and learning plunges?

Reducing attitudinal slips requires you to notice and respond to each child's unique combination of academic factors, curricular factors, social and emotional factors, and role models.

### Academic factors

As children settle into secondary school, academic expectations increase. If you have a hunch that academic worries or difficulties could be influencing your child's attitude towards school then you could ask them to rate how they feel about each subject with a number from 1-10. Discussion can shed light on causes of low/high ratings. For instance, are ratings influenced by:

- **Difficulty understanding the teacher's instructions**
- **Behaviour of other children in the class**
- **Amount of reading/writing in each subject**
- **Time pressure in class**
- **Finding the subject hard/easy**
- **Fear of making mistakes**
- **Relationship with the teacher**

These findings could feed into a meeting with school – perhaps with your child's tutor, head of year, special educational needs coordinator or another key adult – so that areas of concern can be addressed with a combination of assessment, intervention and teaching strategies.

### Curricular factors

As children sail away from the novelty of Year 7, the extrinsic motivators of GCSEs not yet in sight, it makes sense that scholastic focus might lapse. For some children, however, deeper curricular factors than this come into play.

Much of the curriculum and assessment in schools is built around language, literacy and logical-mathematical skills.

For those whose strengths lie in other areas – maybe practical skills, creativity, social skills, physical endurance – the assessment emphasis in secondary schools can be unintentionally disempowering. This can be reduced by finding ways in which school can:

- **Recognise and develop your child's strengths**
- **Adapt teaching to take into account your child's strengths and interests**
- **Explicitly show links between learning in school and your child's aspirations**
- **Challenge the notion of particular skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy) having a greater value than others**

### Social and emotional factors

Relationships with peers take an increasingly central role in children's lives as they move through secondary school but children also remain strongly influenced by their connections with school staff and family members.

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- **Does your child have a quantity and quality of relationships with peers and staff to meet their social needs in school?** If not, school and home can support children to develop positive peer and teacher interactions (e.g. setting up opportunities to meet with friends outside of school; a Circle of Friends intervention at school; identifying and building on those teacher relationships which are positive).
- **Do you know what is going on in your child's digital world?** If not, encourage your child to talk to you about this so that you can work with school to give support around issues such as cyber bullying.
- **Are physical and hormonal changes contributing to tiredness and emotional volatility which will influence your child's attitude towards school?** If so, communication between home and school will enable accommodations to be made for this.

### Home and community role models

Be aware of the spoken and unspoken messages that your child may pick up at home about the importance or otherwise of skills, qualifications and aspirations. Telling a child to work hard and show self-restraint will have greater success if they have role models who exemplify those values.





## CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS: WHAT REALLY WORKS?

**Nicola Lambros**, Head of Secondary,  
The International School @ ParkCity, Kuala Lumpur

**An extensive range of research over the past few decades has overwhelmingly found that student self-belief is a strong predictor of academic and career achievement as well as the likelihood of depression, dropping out of school or truanting. This is because students who have a strong belief in their capabilities adopt higher aspirations, set more challenging goals and have more motivation, focus and perseverance, particularly when faced with obstacles.**

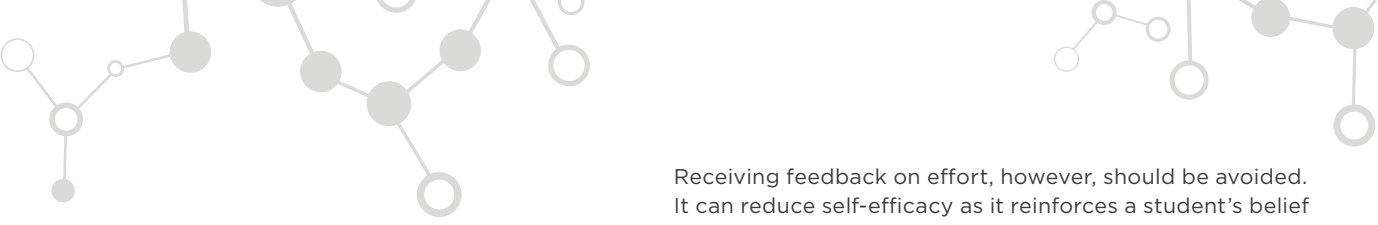
To enhance achievement, therefore, schools must build strong self-belief or self-efficacy in every student. Self-efficacy can be defined as 'personal judgements of one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action to attain designated goals' (Zimmerman, 2000).

Crucially, it is a student's perception of their capabilities rather than their actual performance that is important. If schools hope to 'close the gap' in student attainment then identifying, challenging, and altering low self-efficacy should be enshrined in every school's ethos.

It's a question of celebrating excellent attitudes to learning rather than grades. Schools should praise students for their increased motivation and progress, highlight success outside the classroom achieved through perseverance and espouse failure as a powerful learning experience.

How, though, can teachers intervene to make this happen? Essentially, **what matters is how things are taught.** Academic underachievers, for instance, typically have fewer opportunities that allow them to succeed. So teachers must create environments that allow them to experience success on a regular basis. To do this students must be given opportunities and choice to set themselves personal short-term goals they feel are attainable. Providing students with examples of what children with similar abilities have achieved will enable them to realise that goals are achievable. Goals set by parents or teachers are pointless if a child feels that they are not capable of achieving them, even if in reality they have the ability. As students achieve their goals their self-efficacy increases, boosting in turn their commitment, motivation and **use of self-regulatory strategies** so more challenging goals can be set.





## Providing students with examples of what children with similar abilities have achieved **will enable them to realise that goals are achievable.**

Positive feedback, too, is essential. Research has found that underachievers are more likely to receive negative feedback that focuses on shortfalls and highlights personal deficiencies, reducing self-efficacy. Focussing on the positive is therefore essential.

As students work towards their goals regular individual feedback should provide information to specify what is being done well, how much progress has been made and what could be done to improve further. Students who receive positive feedback on progress in a skill they find challenging develop higher skills and **an improved self-efficacy.**

Receiving feedback on effort, however, should be avoided. It can reduce self-efficacy as it reinforces a student's belief that academic mastery requires a great deal of hard work and suggests they do not have the academic capabilities required. Anxiety undermines self-efficacy and academic performance. Students with low self-efficacy interpret anxiety as a sign of incompetence, which lowers their self-efficacy.

Hence, a well planned support system should be in place and made readily available for all students. Tools for managing stressful situations should be integrated into classroom instruction and should play a key role in PSHCE programmes.

There must also be a clear focus on developing effective independent learning skills and a **'Growth Mindset'** in every student. However, teaching **independent learning** strategies out of context has been found to be a fruitless endeavour; students are not able to transfer the skills.

Explicitly teaching learning strategies and skills in class and supporting students in their independent learning through effective mentoring and coaching **to foster a 'Growth Mindset'** is required. Students can then practise and master these skills independently in and out of class, **thereby improving their metacognitive monitoring, study strategy selection and self-regulatory skills to increase academic success, self-efficacy and the likelihood of remaining in education.**

*In January 2017 Nicola will be moving to Kings College, Madrid to take up the position of Deputy Head, whole school.*







## HOW TO...HELP RISK AVERSE CHILDREN SUCCEED

**Anne Eardley**, Vice Principal of Crosshall Junior School in Cambridgeshire, shares her thoughts on how to get those reluctant students to throw caution to the wind.

**Risk aversion is common among young people. A child can sit through five lessons, engage with the tasks at hand, behave well, and then go home. This may sound like a perfect scenario, but this process does not produce well-rounded citizens, able to cope successfully with the challenges of life.**

At Crosshall Junior School, we have developed a curriculum that offers a wide range of challenging activities through a programme called Future Me. It is open to all students and acknowledges home and school successes, but also failures. Children need to experience and cope with authentic risk in order to thrive.

Positive relationships between students and staff, open communication and the *PASS* (*Pupil Attitudes to Self and School*) attitudinal survey help us identify which students are risk-averse. Once we know who they are, there are things we can do as teachers to give them more confidence.

### Here are some tips for helping risk-averse children to succeed:

#### Celebrate effort

Make your school a place where making mistakes and “having a go” are celebrated, rather than just attainment. For example, a child running a cake sale might not raise the money required, but by being able to take pride in what they have achieved and identify areas for improvement, the experience can inspire future success.

#### Clarity is key

Deal sensitively with students who want to check your instructions, tasks or expectations. They are asking because they need to. Log their names and be pre-emptive when delivering challenging activities. Reluctant students are often the ones who might be embarrassed to ask for clarity, so making your instructions crystal clear can make them feel more confident.

#### What's the worst that could happen?

When emotions get the better of reason, explore this with parents as well as with the student.

Catastrophising can be useful if you are exploring the worst that may happen along with strategies to cope with that eventuality. This can often help the student to realise that the worst-case scenario is not all that bad after all.

#### Step by step

Give students an experience that is similar to one they fear, but in a less threatening context. Although a student might dread the idea of presenting to the whole class, they may feel able to present to a smaller group. Celebrate individual success and then step it up.

#### Lead by example

Encourage staff to model risk-taking behaviour. For example, students are often more likely to have a go at an activity which involves some element of performance if a teacher is willing to model it themselves. If you want your students to work outside of their comfort zone, you should probably be willing to step outside of yours.

*First published in the TES.*



# ASHLAWN SCHOOL, WARWICKSHIRE



**Ashlawn School is a bilateral secondary school in Rugby. It currently has 1,750 11-18 year olds on roll. To tackle the problems some students face at transition Ashlawn has adopted a very proactive approach.**

**Paul Foxton, Assistant Headteacher, explains:** “We know that the three big things that worry Year 7 students are getting lost, the amount of homework they will receive, and the more demanding timetable. As soon as we know which students will be joining us, we speak to their primary schools to gather a range of academic and non-academic information about them.”

“Regardless of how many students we get or how many feeder schools we have, we go out to meet with them and their class teacher. It’s important to give them a face they will recognise on their first day. We try to alleviate their concerns in advance. If a child is particularly anxious or has additional needs, we invite them into school before they start,” Paul says.

## Gaining a holistic view of students

When it comes to assessment, Ashlawn has adopted a holistic approach with pastoral care at its heart. “You can have the best teaching in place but if you don’t have the pastoral side right, it won’t mean a thing,” Paul says.

Last year, Ashlawn decided to introduce *PASS* towards the end of Year 7 as a way of highlighting any attitudinal issues before the start

of Year 8. “The premise was early intervention. We wanted to go from being more reactive to being proactive, and pick up any potential issues as early as possible.”

By comparing *PASS* data with attainment data, the school has discovered some useful trends. “The data showed that high attaining students had quite a mixed profile. The boys didn’t engage with school quite as well as the girls, and some boys were overly confident in their abilities.”

## Building confidence

Building confidence is a key area of focus, and Ashlawn uses *PASS* as a way to gain an insight into what might be causing confidence issues. “In the first few years of secondary school, a lot of different things can knock students’ confidence. They might have been the top of the class in primary school and performing in the middle of the class now, and that can hit some students very hard.”

A lack of confidence can manifest itself in different ways, too. “Some students play up while others go quiet,” says Paul. “When you’re teaching a class of 30, you focus on the extremes and you can sometimes miss the quiet students. *PASS* can give everyone a really good idea of what’s really going on. Our teachers are discovering how powerful *PASS* data is.”

Ashlawn has developed a very comprehensive mentoring programme to support students during transition and beyond. As soon as students start, they are asked to list what they like

doing, what their hobbies are, and what their likes and dislikes are. They also complete a reflection exercise each week, rating how they are feeling about all of their subjects on a 1 – 4 scale. These simple tasks are a good conversation starter.

Ashlawn has also developed a mentoring system with students in the sixth form. “The first stage is teaching sixth formers how to be an effective mentor by buddying with their own classmates so they learn some basic techniques,” Paul explains. “When they then partner with Year 7 students, they encourage them to talk to them about anything they’re worried about. Once the younger children start to open up to their buddies, they become more prepared to speak to their teachers.”

Good parental engagement is also essential. After all, secondary school is a big shift for parents as well as students, Paul says. “To help parents support their children at home, we’ve started to think about their skills levels and identify common gaps – for example, in maths. We’ve started running maths lessons for parents because the methods we’re teaching now are so different to the ones they learnt when they were at school.”

However, Paul believes that one of the biggest lessons is preparing students for the fact they will get things wrong. “We need to build grit and determination. We talk about how everyone needs to make mistakes to learn more effectively, and we encourage staff to share personal examples to enable students to connect to these experiences. It brings a human element to it.”



# WAKEFIELD CITY ACADEMY, WAKEFIELD



**Wakefield City Academy is a secondary school for students aged 11 to 16. Last year, it used *PASS* for the first time with Years 7-10 to identify students with additional barriers to learning early on in their school life, allowing teachers to effectively manage and support these students.**

In common with most schools, Wakefield sees a drop in students' feelings about school from Year 7 to Year 9. The school is very aware of these attitudinal fluctuations and has introduced a number of interventions to engage students at key milestones and limit the dip as much as possible.

One of their most successful interventions has been a peer-mentoring programme. Students with a higher self-regard score are paired with peers with lower scores, while off-site team-building days help to cement relationships between students. The programme has made a difference – Wakefield's most recent *PASS* results show that this has significantly improved students' self-esteem and positivity towards their studies and school.

Some attitudes have remained stable throughout Key Stage 3 and others have been a welcome surprise. In particular, students' perceived learning capability, general work ethic and their response to curriculum demands have remained stable.

**Dan Styles, Assistant Head, explains:**

"We operate mini options in Year 9 and we think that this makes students feel more in control about what they are studying, which makes a big difference. Their confidence increases and their attitudes towards teachers improve, too."

## The impact of GCSEs

Running *PASS* with Year 10 was an effective way of gaining valuable feedback on the design of the school's curriculum. It also allowed teachers to see students who were struggling with the transition to GCSE early on and to foresee any issues before they reached Year 11.

"One group that caused us some concern was high-achieving students who appeared outgoing and confident but actually had some underlying anxieties. This was especially prominent in some of the most able female students," says Dan. "The results have allowed their academic mentors to support them in areas of self-worth and dealing with stress."

*PASS* also enabled the school to identify students who were and are at significant risk of truanting. "By cross-referencing the results with our Education Welfare Officer, we were also able to praise those with *PASS* results that showed them being a risk but who were knuckling down and attending well above the target level of 95%."

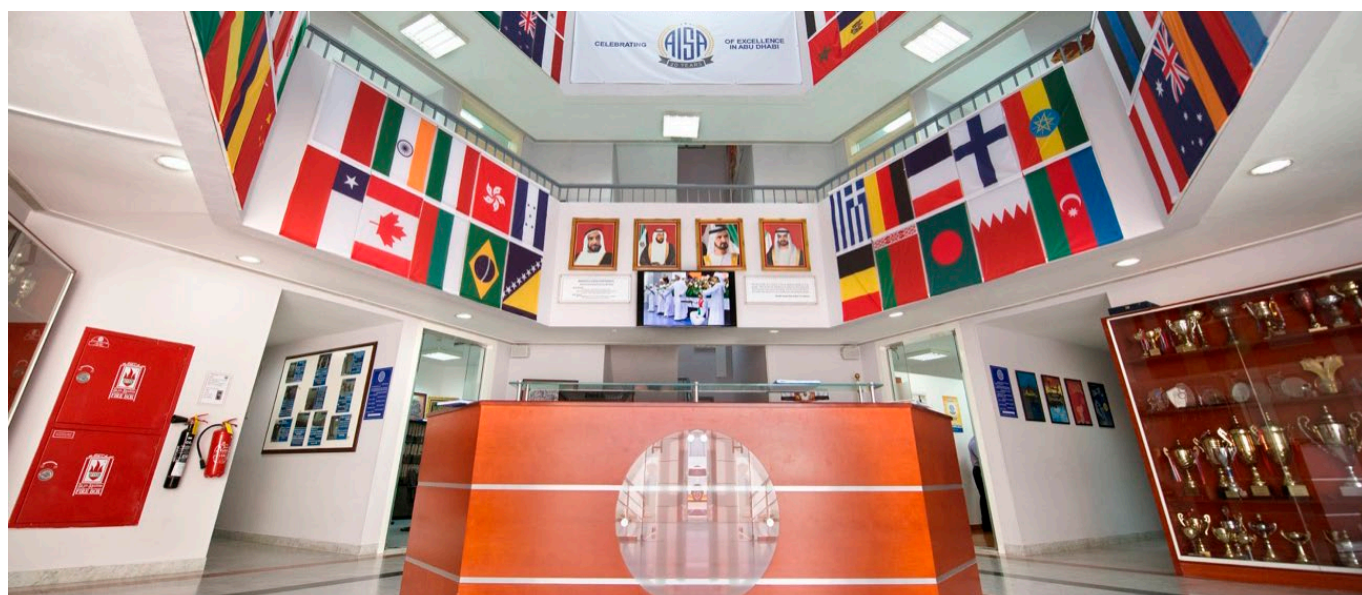
## The end result

"This was our first time running *PASS* and it provided us with some excellent insights into our students' opinions about school," Dan says. "We had a feeling that our students were generally positive towards our school and that was backed up by the results. It was pleasing to see that they valued the effort their teachers were making."

"But we learned some interesting lessons, too. Sometimes students who on the surface appear the most secure, resolute and resilient can be masking concerns that could affect their potential to achieve."



# AISA, ABU DHABI



**The American International School (AISA) in Abu Dhabi has a student body of 1400 students, aged 4 to 18, from more than 75 different countries. Approximately 80% of children speak English as an additional language.**

**Stephany Herzog, Learning Support Co-ordinator, explains:** “Our school embraces difference, our students are incredibly diverse and have an ability range that includes educational difficulties as well as very high achievers. It’s important to us that we meet every child’s needs, but attainment data alone does not give the full picture. For example, if achievements are low, why are they low? Is it to do with a child’s grasp of English? Are there emotional issues? Do they like school?”

“To nurture success, we wanted to find a better way to identify individual strengths, weaknesses and attitudes. After thorough research, we were excited to discover GL Education’s *Cognitive Abilities Test* and the *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School* survey.”

The *Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT4)* supports schools in understanding students’ developed abilities and likely academic potential, through verbal, non-verbal, quantitative and spatial ability tasks.

“Our principal was on-board very quickly. She saw the same thing I did;

that more information was needed on our students. For example, was this boy gifted and talented overall, or just at maths? Was that girl struggling everywhere or did she have a bias towards a spatial thinking style and we were talking her ear off?”

“We both liked the fact that *CAT4* is computer based, streamlined and simple to implement. Teachers don’t need to score anything and it’s instantaneous to run different reports.

“In fact, the only hesitation we had was that it is developed in Britain and therefore might not work with our attainment assessment for an American curriculum.

“We decided that the reports *CAT4* produces were so comprehensive and user-friendly, it was worth the risk. In practice, it has not been an issue. There is some terminology that is different, but it’s still straightforward to compare our attainment data with the standardised age scores from *CAT4*.”

Last September, the school used the attitudinal survey *PASS* for the first time, a trusted psychometric measurement that can help inform teaching strategies and monitor well-being.

“We wanted the missing piece of the puzzle – attitude,” Stephany said. “Were children enjoying school and feeling happy, or feeling bored and insecure in their ability to learn? *PASS*

uncovers this information for us so we can fully understand more than just academic barriers to learning.

“We were delighted to find that students really like coming here and feel supported. They feel as though they belong, which re-confirms that we are moving in the right direction with their education.”

Now, AISA is committed to making these assessments part of the school plan.

“We have inspections by ADEC every year and we need hard data that evidences our work. We are now able to say, we think this is happening and our assessments show us the same picture.

“Ultimately, we want all our pupils to do well and feel successful, whether their strength is musical, sports, social skills or academic. We can see who is working to their potential, who is coasting, who needs to be stretched, even who is over-performing and perhaps needs the pressure taking off.

“Those with educational difficulties can be further supported, and we can make sure high achievers who don’t often hit barriers in their learning are taught resilience and critical thinking for when they do. We’re in a position to ask the right questions, look at the whole child and personalise their time at our school.”



# IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS TO LEARNING



**Sarah Haythornthwaite**,  
GL Assessment's Sales and  
Marketing Director, explains  
how the company's **Pupil  
Attitudes to Self and School (PASS)**  
survey fits in with their 'whole pupil'  
approach to education.

GL Assessment has worked in partnership with schools for over 35 years to develop a range of assessments that support better outcomes for pupils. Our portfolio helps to reveal pupils' potential, track their progress, and identify any barriers and learning difficulties they might have. Pupils' motivations, anxieties, school-based relationships and future learning behaviours are an essential part of the picture.

Our attitudes are formed by and affect how we feel, what we do and how we think. In school, a pupil's attitudes to learning can influence their whole experience of education and have significant effects on their overall levels of attainment, engagement and wellbeing.

*PASS* is a particularly valuable assessment tool for pupils aged 4 to 18. It often provides that 'missing link' when a pupil's attainment scores do not match up with ability data. It helps teachers quickly understand the reasons behind this outcome, revealing the often hidden reasons behind low attainment, challenging behaviour and low attendance. In many instances, *PASS* helps to identify issues before they even manifest themselves, giving teachers the opportunity for early intervention.

As this paper has demonstrated, the correct use of assessment data can allow schools to quickly gain an insight into pupils' mindsets that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. *PASS* can help identify and understand attitudinal barriers to learning, inform teaching and learning strategies, help improve overall achievement, and provide important information for pastoral support.

By helping to raise standards of attainment and pupil wellbeing *PASS* can dramatically improve learning outcomes for individual students, groups of pupils and the whole school.

For further information please visit [gl-assessment.co.uk/pass](https://gl-assessment.co.uk/pass). To contact your local area consultant to organise a school visit or a free quote please visit [gl-assessment.co.uk/consultants](https://gl-assessment.co.uk/consultants) or to discuss your specific requirements, call 0330 123 5375.

