



# Chapter 5

## Assessing Progress and Attainment

**Curriculum Guide for Special Schools**

Prepared by the Curriculum Development Council  
Published for use in schools by the Education Bureau  
HKSARG  
2024



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### Chapter 5

## Assessing Progress and Attainment

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# Assessing Progress and Attainment

## 5.1 Assessment for a Range of Purposes

Assessment in special schools can be used for a range of purposes. For example, assessment can be used to identify any special educational needs that a student may have. This **identification** of difficulties will lead to provision of appropriate support for students, e.g. some students will be recommended for separate teaching, or other forms of specialist provision within special schools.

Assessment can be used to make a more detailed and focused **diagnosis** of a student's difficulties. In this process, a student's difficulties in learning are scrutinised and classified so that appropriate remedial help and guidance can be provided. This diagnostic function may result, for example, in the recognition of a student's specific learning difficulties or attention control problems and these diagnoses may lead to the determination of specialist interventions.

Assessment can be used to provide a summary of what a student has learned, for example, at the end of a school year or at a point of transition such as between the primary and secondary phases of education. This **summative** function is usually associated with the recording of the overall achievement of a student in a systematic way and the preparation of reports about the progress that a student has made in his/her learning up to a specific point in time. For students who are following an ordinary curriculum in special schools, external formal tests or public examinations may be used as part of summative assessment.

Assessment can be used to inform future planning of learning and teaching, for example, helping teachers and students decide on future objectives for learning or revisions to planned learning opportunities. In **formative** assessment, which serves two major purposes, namely "Assessment for Learning" and "Assessment as Learning"<sup>25</sup>, the positive achievements of a student are recognised and discussed and the appropriate next learning steps are planned. This formative function can operate at a number of levels, from the everyday adjustment of learning and teaching strategies that experienced teachers carry out continually to more formal review and revision of curriculum plans or schemes of work for a subject.

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<sup>25</sup> For more details regarding "Assessment for Learning" and "Assessment as Learning", please refer to Booklet 4 of the SECG (2017) and Chapter 5 of the PECG (2024).

Assessment can also be used as part of the curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation cycle. This **evaluative** function enables aspects of the work of a class, a subject team, a school or other educational services to be monitored in order to inform review or reporting. At a school level, assessment information can be used to drive the review, revision and improvement of plans for learning and teaching in terms of objectives, content, learning activities and pedagogy.

This chapter of the guide focuses chiefly on the functions of assessment that relate to the curriculum, i.e. **summative, formative and evaluative** functions. This chapter does not set out to provide advice on the identification of special educational needs or on the diagnosis of specific difficulties in learning. This chapter will focus significantly on the assessment of students' progress and attainment in relation to the subjects of the central curriculum. However, much of the guidance provided here will also apply to assessment of other learning aspects in special schools, including the assessment of students' progress in relation to generic skills, towards individual targets for learning, and with regard to important aspects of the school-based curriculum.



### For reflection and action

- As a teacher, how do you know that your students are learning? How do you record students' attainments and other outcomes of learning?

## 5.2 A Spectrum of Forms of Assessment

Under the principle of “one curriculum framework for all”, special schools teach the subjects under different Key Learning Areas of the central curriculum. Besides, special schools can offer a number of related but different learning elements in the school-based curriculum. In some special schools, for example, the curriculum might focus significantly on the teaching of generic skills such as communication skills or information technology skills. In many special schools, the curriculum might also focus significantly on developing practical capabilities, such as self-care skills and skills for independent living. This chapter will explore different forms of assessment and how students' attainments and progresses can be recognised.

### Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs)

In order to support the assessment of progress and attainments in relation to certain subjects of the central curriculum for students with intellectual disability, the *Learning Progression Frameworks for Students with Intellectual Disabilities* have been developed and made available to special schools. The LPFs cover a range of attainments from the earliest levels of subject awareness through to outcomes that may be similar to attainments seen among students in ordinary schools. The LPFs will therefore provide relevant reference points in a wider range of specialist settings where students are studying these subjects of the central curriculum and making progress that is below typical age-related expectations.



By making reference to the supplementary guides of the subjects of the central curriculum for students with intellectual disability, the LPFs describe the critical attainments or “milestones” of learning for students with reference to the related subjects. They provide an important reference for making judgements about the outcomes that students have achieved over time and also offer information that can help teachers improve curriculum planning as well as learning and teaching in future.

### School-based Assessments

The LPFs only covers the key learning outcomes of certain subjects and do not provide a full picture of students’ learning outcomes across the whole curriculum, teachers therefore need to identify attainments that are not listed in the LPFs by other means. School staff should use the LPFs together with school-based assessments and, where appropriate, students’ individualised education programmes (IEPs) in order to extend their understanding of students’ wider learning attainments and progress. Staff will need to rely on school-based assessment to reveal students’ learning achievements in areas that are not represented in the LPFs, including other subjects, generic skills and areas of learning that supplement the subjects of the central curriculum. This might include the development of student learning portfolios designed to demonstrate students’ whole-person development and achievements.

### Assessments Across a Wide Spectrum

Teachers in special schools should be used to carrying out assessments across a wide spectrum of possibilities. As noted in Section 5.1, assessment in special schools has a **formative function** (assessment to inform future learning, i.e. “assessment for learning” and “assessment as learning”) as well as a **summative function** (assessment to establish the current level of attainment, i.e. “assessment of learning”). These forms of assessment can be used effectively in relation to students’ learning progress in the curriculum because they can be linked to externally determined frameworks for measuring progress, whether these comprise agreed criteria (such as those given in the LPFs – **criterion-referenced assessment**) or agreed standards of expected attainment (such as the measures of progress or norms established in relation to standard tests or public examinations – **norm-referenced assessment**).

Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments are not the only options available in special schools. Assessment of progress in relation to individual targets or priorities for learning can also be ipsative or self-referential. **Ipsative assessment**<sup>26</sup> simply compares

<sup>26</sup> Refer to Tina Isaacs et al., *Key Concepts in Educational Assessment*. (London: Sage Books, 2013), pp.80-82.

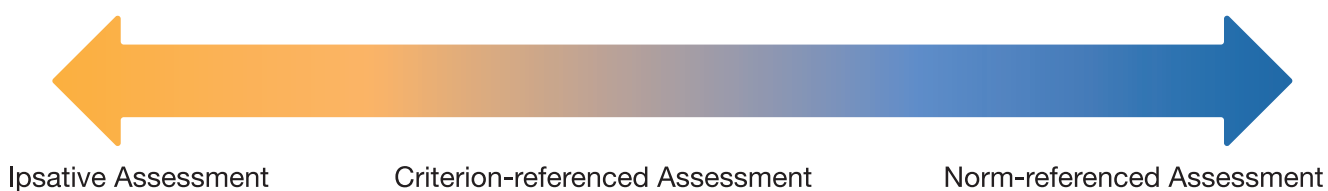
current performance with an individual student's previous attainments. Where individual programmes of learning are used, for example, in the form of individualised education programme (IEP), ipsative assessment of a student's "personal best" effort to date is likely to be most appropriate. This form of assessment mainly concerns the distance travelled on a personal learning journey by the individual student since the previous assessment; externally determined criteria and the attainments of other students are not relevant.

Individualised education programmes (IEPs) and ipsative assessments generally focus on a small collection of short term targets or priorities for learning designed to meet the specific needs of an individual student. These plans and assessments are highly personalised and may concern, for example, targets set in relation to generic skills and other essential skills (as introduced in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 "Setting Objectives for Learning") that are additional to and different from the objectives for learning that apply to groups or cohorts of students following a shared curriculum.

In contrast, at the further end of the assessment spectrum, some students in special schools follow a curriculum that is essentially the same as their age peers in ordinary schools. In order to help provide these students with equivalence of opportunity in their lives beyond school, it is appropriate that they sit for the same standardised tests and examinations as students in ordinary schools do. Teachers are encouraged to follow the procedures set out for entering students for public examinations, but also to make full and sympathetic use of the examination accommodations and special arrangements that are available for students with special educational needs, including the use, for example, of extra time or specialist equipment and resources.

The spectrum of assessments in special schools is summarised in Figure 5.1 below. Most assessment activities in special schools will lie between the positions of personalised or ipsative assessment and norm-referenced and standardised assessment. The remainder of this chapter looks at the assessment practices and principles that are most likely to be of use in special schools, continuing with the theme of overcoming barriers to assessment.

Figure 5.1 A Wide Spectrum of Assessments in Special Schools





### For reflection and action

- How does curriculum planning in your school help you align modes of assessment with objectives for learning?

## 5.3 How Can Barriers to Assessment be Overcome?

Students in special schools may experience different levels of difficulty in their learning. However, the approach of school staff in making assessments of any kind should remain positive. Teachers should be looking for evidence of what students “can do” rather than trying to identify what they have not yet learned. The process of “testing” students to the point of failure will put up further barriers to their learning. Therefore, it should be reiterated that the key task for teachers is to promote progress as well as to identify and reward success.

In addition to their difficulties in learning, many students in special schools experience other impairments that present barriers to the demonstration of particular forms of attainment. These impairments may be sensory, physical, emotional or social. Examples in the context of Chinese Language include:

- difficulties in visually decoding text (“reading”) for students with a visual impairment
- difficulties in hearing spoken words (“listening”) for students with a hearing impairment
- difficulties in the mechanics of making marks (“writing”) for students with impaired eye-hand co-ordination
- difficulties in articulating sounds (“speaking”) for students with physical disabilities or speech and language impairment

Students’ impairments do not necessarily present barriers to the demonstration of attainment nor to teachers’ judgements. As in tests or examinations, **students should be allowed to use assistive technologies, alternative and augmentative systems, and/or reasonable support and assistance where appropriate in order to enable them to demonstrate their attainments.**

In the light of their impairments, teachers may **exempt individual students from demonstrating attainment in relation to certain learning outcomes while still recognising the progress they have made.**

In order to overcome barriers to learning, teachers should be confident in **offering students learning activities that are different from, but equivalent to, those set out in the central curriculum and in assessment materials**. These different but equivalent activities can help promote student engagement and learning effectiveness when they are accessible to students and when they capitalise on students' interests and preferences. Teachers can use the outcomes of these different but equivalent activities as evidence of learning when making assessments.

Barriers to learning can also sometimes be overcome by **providing prompting or support**. Most attainments represented in the central curriculum require students to accomplish tasks without direct help or support, although the materials may not explicitly state that the task should be accomplished independently. However, prompted or supported learning may provide a useful transition for many students between work they find too challenging and independent attainment. Further, some learning outcomes in the central curriculum may involve students working with instructions or guidance from teachers or the support or combined efforts of peers. For example, some activities in the curriculum for Chinese Language involve writing that is “guided” by a more experienced partner while some activities in other subjects require students to work collaboratively. In the case of learning outcomes like these, teachers can make assessments on the basis of work done with the forms of prompting or support specified or that are equivalent to those set out in the documents relating to the central curriculum. Teachers may talk to their colleagues about the levels and forms of support that are acceptable when measuring progress in relation to specific outcomes or discuss these issues with colleagues from other schools.

As they work towards other more challenging learning outcomes, students may still require support in order to make responses, to participate in activities or to complete tasks. In these instances, staff should offer support and at the same time work towards enabling students to demonstrate these attainments without assistance. School staff need to be keenly aware of the distinctions between constructive prompting (which could be described as providing the minimum support that facilitates learning and the demonstration of attainment) and unnecessary interference (which is in the form of “helping” that creates a barrier to learning, discourages independent activity and invalidates attainment).

At the earliest levels of response and attainment (for example, for students with severe intellectual disability), access to any form of learning activity may require guided participation. These students may move through stages in a continuum of awareness, support and prompting until they can be said to be actively participating. Making judgements about assessing students on this continuum of possibilities, and deciding when to start fading levels of prompting, will depend on the teacher's or the activity partner's sense of when students are moving from resistance, through co-operation, towards initiation of activity or response. As in other areas of learning, it will be important to continue to provide prompting in order to maintain the positive stimulus of guided participation, as well as be ready to reduce levels of prompting as soon as there is a sense of the student beginning to make independent responses.



Students with more significant difficulties in learning may need long periods of time to generate responses, but any signs of initiation should be rewarded immediately with positive feedback and praise. Working in these ways requires sensitivity and subtle judgements and the goal for staff should always be to build autonomy, choice and self-determination for students. In terms of assessment, teachers may need support, for example, through discussion at assessment and moderation meetings, in making interpretations of reflex reactions versus active or co-active exploration.

Whatever the form of prompting used, teachers should note down the levels and forms of support required to enable students to attain. Future teaching can then be planned in such a way as to promote greater independence for students, and teachers can be ready to recognise progress when students learn to complete tasks with less prompting or less significant forms of support. Reductions in the levels of prompting or support needed by students in making their responses (at whatever level) will be likely to provide evidence that these students are moving towards the attainment of new or more secure learning outcomes.



### For reflection and action

- How does your school ensure that students are not denied attainments simply because they give their responses using different modes of expression?
- What strategies do you use to enable students to demonstrate their learning? How do you record the support measures and resources that are used to facilitate learning outcomes?

## 5.4 What Forms of Evidence Should Teachers Recognise?

Assessments and judgements about attainment, in relation to the subjects of the central curriculum, should be supported by evidence, and that evidence can take a number of different forms. Teachers normally want to be sure that they have observed evidence of learning on more than one occasion. Teachers can therefore gather evidence from different sources, for example:

- annotated samples of a student's work (whether these are digital, on paper or presented as artefacts)

- photographs, video or audio recordings of students responding in particular ways
- staff records or notes based on observations of student behaviour in learning activities online, in the classroom or during daily activities outside the classroom
- students' self reports and/or peer reviews
- anecdotal accounts from outside school recording practical performances or responses

It is important to note that records can be multimodal, and record keeping and assessment can often be carried out most effectively in the context of ordinary day-to-day learning activities – in formative assessment, and in relation to the central curriculum. Generally, there is no need to separate teaching and assessment, or to set up separate assessment tasks or tests/examinations, especially when standard tests or assessment activities are inaccessible due to students' learning difficulties.

There is therefore a key role for teacher observation and judgement when keeping records relating to the attainments of students in special schools. Further, record keeping and assessment can be greatly enhanced by the involvement in these processes of other members of staff, family members and the students themselves. This means that teachers may make their own records of observations or they may collect the descriptions, comments/commentaries or “witness statements” from other people who have observed certain responses. These contributors may include:

- other teachers
- teacher assistants
- speech therapists
- physiotherapists
- occupational therapists
- parents
- siblings
- classmates and peers
- other relevant individuals

Evidence should also be derived from everyday learning and teaching activities, such as project work, a classroom quiz or a practical activity. In fact, the context in which learning occurs can have a significant impact on student performance and behaviour. Lack of experience, limited learning opportunity, low expectations and inappropriately differentiated teaching can all present barriers to learning and prevent students from realising their potential. Besides, students will be unlikely to learn and to demonstrate their attainments when they are under the pressure of an unfamiliar or formal setting working with an adult who is not known to them. Equally, a student who is able to repeat responses in a familiar setting with a trusted member of staff may be reluctant to offer similar responses in different

situations with unfamiliar people. For many students in special schools, the ability to transfer or generalise learning into new contexts represents, in itself, significant attainment.

For more accurate and comprehensive judgments of students' attainment, teachers should therefore take full account of responses that occur outside subject lessons and outside the classroom. Some learning outcomes require students to apply their learning in new settings, so reports of student responses and behaviours at home, in the community, in Applied Learning courses and in other learning experiences and activities will often be particularly relevant. Arguably, settings outside the classroom will offer the best opportunities to make judgements about the application of communication skills, literacy skills or numeracy skills.

Collecting learning evidence should be manageable and avoid duplication and bureaucracy. When making teacher assessments, there is **no need to**:

- collect numerous forms of repetitious evidence to support each judgement – staff observation records, comments and witness statements can stand alone as evidence
- collect evidence from every lesson or illustrate every increment of progress – staff should focus on collecting clear evidence and making brief, telling annotations in relation to significant attainments or landmarks in students' learning
- set up separate assessment tasks/activities, use tests or set up arbitrary rules, criteria or conditions when making assessments – teachers can use observation records and materials collected during learning activities as an evidence base

However, it is inappropriate and unreliable to award a level to a student on the basis of observing a single learning event. Evidence of learning builds up over time and in a range of contexts and teachers should use their professional judgement to decide, on the basis of significant evidence gathered during a series of learning opportunities and in different settings, when a student has made secure progress to a new level. Very often, teachers may compare evidence of learning in relation to learning outcomes across a cluster of levels for their students.

Whatever the nature of the evidence gathered by teachers, it should be supported with annotations giving contextual information. Dates on pieces of work can reveal trends and rates of progress, but good annotation involves more than merely dating work. Examples of relevant contextual information include:

- the date and time of the response and the learning outcome to which it is relevant

- the setting in which the response occurred, for example, online, in a subject lesson, in the community and at home
- the people who were with the student at the time, for example, a therapist or teacher assistant or a group of peers, and the resources being used
- whether the response is “new” (the first time a response has occurred) or “emerging” (a response that is happening more often but that is not reliable) or “established” (a response that a student usually offers in a certain set of circumstances)
- the levels of guidance, support or prompting required to enable the student to make the response (for example, a model to copy, verbal reminders or physical prompts)
- whether assistive technologies and alternative or augmentative systems (reasonable assistance) are used
- any adaptations or amendments teachers have made (for example, by recording unusual or individual examples of performance) in order to enable their students to demonstrate their progress

Providing staff with annotation sheets of learning evidence in an agreed format will make the annotation process more efficient and useful. Some approaches involve various members of staff simply writing their comments onto samples of work. Where students are working at earlier levels, staff may append a dated set of notes onto a photograph of a student responding in a new and significant way.

Teachers should discuss their assessment decisions with colleagues within their school, showing their evidence and annotations to other members of staff so that the latter can either confirm their judgements or guide them towards more accurate judgements using their own experience. Later, teachers may be invited to discuss their assessments with colleagues from other schools by sharing their records including evidence and annotations and justifying their reasons for recognising attainment at a given level. Annotation of evidence plays a crucial role in facilitating dialogue about assessment.



### For reflection and action

- Think about all the different ways in which assessments happen in your school. How do these different practices enable all students to demonstrate their learning and attainments?
- What information should be included when designing annotation sheets for your school? What annotations would help you in the process of assessing students' learning performance and progress? Discuss and agree on these matters with colleagues.

## 5.5 Who Can Contribute Towards Assessment?

While teachers are responsible for making assessment judgements, many people can contribute to the collection of evidence that supports these judgements. Indeed, dialogue is crucial to the process of making judgements about attainments for students in special schools and teachers should avoid making assessment judgements in isolation.

Teachers in special schools are used to working in a variety of forms of partnership. Staff can use these existing partnerships to inform conversations about learning and assessment. Contributions from the whole classroom team, including teachers, therapists, teacher assistants and other professionals, are valuable. Staff often share their thoughts about the emerging attainments they see in students' everyday work. Sometimes these discussions will highlight the need to collect a particular piece of work as evidence or to make a note of a particular response in a student's record.

Classroom support staff, including teacher assistants and volunteers, can often offer valuable insights into the responses made by students on a day-to-day basis. Teachers should encourage these colleagues to share their thoughts about the emerging attainments they see in students' everyday work and their perceptions about any aspects of the learning and teaching context that might be hindering/slowing progress rather than facilitating it. Shared reflections, collaborative processes of review and record-keeping practices that welcome contributions from all the members of the classroom team can help teachers secure accurate and valid assessment judgements.

Dialogue with other professionals can often confirm the significance, in terms of attainment, of students' responses as observed over time and in a range of contexts. Teachers can improve the quality of their assessments when they work closely with therapists, psychologists or sensory support staff to review and reflect upon students' learning or to evaluate the meaning of the responses that students make.

An exchange of views with staff from residential or respite settings or who work with students on community links can often inform assessment judgements in similar ways. Discussion with parents, carers and family members about learning at home can also enhance the effectiveness of the assessment processes. Discussing progress with people who know the student in a wide range of settings can help inform assessment and resolve uncertainties over assessment judgements by providing evidence of the application of learning in contexts beyond the classroom.

Discussion with students can also enrich the assessment process and its meaning. Experience



in the special schools demonstrates that all students can be meaningfully involved in such discussions in some way. The feedback they give, using their preferred method of communication, as they review and think about their own performances or the attainments of their peers can yield valuable evidence of progress. In turn, involving students in self or peer assessment can help them become more aware of their own learning.

Discussing their own progress or the responses of their fellow students with teachers can help students appreciate what is expected of them. Listening to and observing students can reveal what they found easy, the factors that cause difficulties or barriers to learning, and the extent to which they need to consolidate or generalise skills. It can also show if students are approaching attainments at a higher level.



### For reflection and action

- How can space and time be made available in your school to enable teachers to collaborate with one another and with teacher assistants, therapists and other professionals to complete shared assessment?
- What strategies do you use, as a teacher, to help you understand the perceptions and points of view of your students?

## 5.6 Assessing Different Aspects of Student Progress

Teachers should make their assessment judgements using a “best-fit” approach. There is no need to “atomise” the criteria given in external rubrics or in school-based assessment materials, checking students’ learning against each element, or to “quantify” attainment, ensuring that students display some fixed proportion of the behaviours within a description of learning performance. The “best fit” approach means that students do not have to achieve all the elements of a description of performance at a given level in order to attain that level. Many students will give responses that characterise learning at clusters of levels above or below those of their main attainments.

It follows that students will often display uneven or “spikey” profiles in their learning across different aspects of the curriculum (including subjects and strands within subjects). There are no expectations of “typical” rates of progress within a subject or of learning that is consistently within a level across subjects or across strands. Students will often therefore have profiles of learning that include attainment of learning outcomes across a range of levels, across subjects, and across strands within subjects.

Staff will often be able to identify both linear and lateral progress when assessing outcomes for students in special schools. Broadly this means:

- linear progress through ever higher levels of attainment
- lateral progress across a range of learning experiences at a similar level

**Linear progress** can be identified when students display new behaviours, make fresh responses or gain new skills and understanding. Linear progress can be assessed, over time, when students attain at incrementally higher levels (when a student progresses, over two or three years, from earlier levels to higher levels of learning, for example). Linear progress in relation to the subjects of the central curriculum can be thought of as representing new learning within a subject area.

For many students with difficulties in learning, progress within or across levels of attainment can be as important as progress to higher levels. **Lateral progress** can be identified when students use related skills at similar levels in different contexts or show consistent responses or forms of understanding in different subjects. This is sometimes referred to as generalising learning. Lateral progress can be assessed between the subjects of the central curriculum (when a student indicates “big” and “small” objects consistently in Mathematics lessons and in Visual Arts lessons, for example) or within subjects (when a student responds consistently to loud and soft sounds played on different instruments in Music lessons, for example). Lateral progress in terms of generic skills can also be assessed when students demonstrate the skills and understandings they have gained in one area of learning in other contexts.

It is important for staff in special schools to provide, in their planning, students with opportunities to apply emerging skills in a wide range of contexts. It will be useful to record how students give different or similar responses in different situations. This may enable teachers to assess the extent to which students generalise their learning in different settings and contexts. In this way, students can be encouraged to develop more even profiles of attainment across the curriculum as they consolidate, strengthen, refine and apply their learning in new settings. Staff can then acknowledge the lateral progress students make when they extend their range of learning experiences, make equivalent responses in a range of subject settings or use pre-existing skills in new contexts.

To show students’ learning progress, looking for evidence of learning across the subjects will therefore be important. A smooth profile of attainment at similar levels in different subjects may be a significant indication of lateral progress. At the same time, strong linear progress through levels of learning in one particular subject area may indicate an aptitude or a preference for a particular subject or area of learning that may become relevant as the student gains new attainments. In short, staff should be alert to both kinds of progress.



### For reflection and action

- In what ways are your students encouraged to apply and consolidate their learning across the curriculum?
- How is assessment information shared between staff members (for example, teachers of different subjects) in your school?

## 5.7 How Can the Outcomes of Assessment be Used?

### Assessment for Learning and Assessment as Learning

The key purpose of formative assessment is to inform learning and teaching and promote further learning. Gathering and annotating a broad range of items of evidence of learning will help teachers identify the strengths, abilities, needs and interests of individual students and the conditions that facilitate further progress and attainment.

Teachers may also exchange information about students' attainments and the progress they have made with their colleagues. Teachers should share the outcomes of their assessments:

- as reference with staff who teach their students different subjects
- to help another teacher set work at an appropriate level for a student they have taught
- at points of transition (for example, when students move to a new year group or a new key stage, or leave school)

Moreover, teachers can use assessment information to review progress with students. Students will benefit from being involved in self-assessment and self-review. Teachers should discuss progress and attainment with students where appropriate because:

- involving students in self-review helps them reflect upon the processes of learning and therefore helps them become better learners
- inviting students to review their learning encourages them to repeat and consolidate important skills, responses or behaviours
- involving students in the development of their own learning portfolios/profiles can motivate them to learn, and
- reviewing learning with students can give staff insights into the stability of recently acquired learning and how the students interpret it or connect it to other aspects of their prior knowledge

The assessment judgements arrived at by teachers can provide a focus for dialogue with students about the progress they are making. Talking with students about their work can help teachers refine their thoughts about the progress students have made and provide fresh insights into learning and attainment.

Knowing how to recognise attainment can also help students move their learning forward. Of course, teachers will need to recognise and celebrate aspects of progress, both in relation to the subjects and in terms of students' wider experiences and achievements. Students also wish to review their most recent achievements in areas where they regard learning as being highly relevant and important, for example, in relation to ipsative assessment and their personal targets.



### For reflection and action

- How is information about student attainment shared between staff in your school?
- How do you inform students about the criteria used to assess their learning and how are they involved in the assessment process?

As well as using assessment data to inform individual learning, school staff can also make broader use of assessment data to enhance learning and teaching and to drive school improvement, which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

## Using Aggregated Data to Enhance Learning and Teaching

The development of digital approaches to the management of data (including assessment data) is being actively pursued in many special schools. This kind of development has great potential to impact upon school improvement in future. For example, some school leaders may make use of data drawn from assessments made using the LPFs in their schools in order to inform learning and teaching and wider planning. These initiatives have demonstrated that data can play a useful part in school improvement and this section will explore those possibilities.

Previous material in this chapter has confirmed that gathering evidence of student attainment can drive the ongoing and formative assessment of student learning together with the reporting of learning outcomes and summative accounts of student progress. Moreover,

assessment plays a major role in the ongoing cycle of curriculum planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review, and the management and analysis of assessment data can inform curriculum plans at a number of levels, for example:

- improvements in learning and teaching on micro, meso and macro levels
- the review of the curriculum itself, including long, medium and short term planning
- the evaluation and review of the effectiveness of school provision

Using attainment data in these ways can help curriculum leaders, subject panel heads and teachers raise their expectations in relation to future student learning. For example, implementing the LPFs can encourage teachers to increase the challenge in their planned activities and help them promote students' further learning at higher levels.

### **Using Aggregated Data for Improvement in Learning and Teaching on Micro Level**

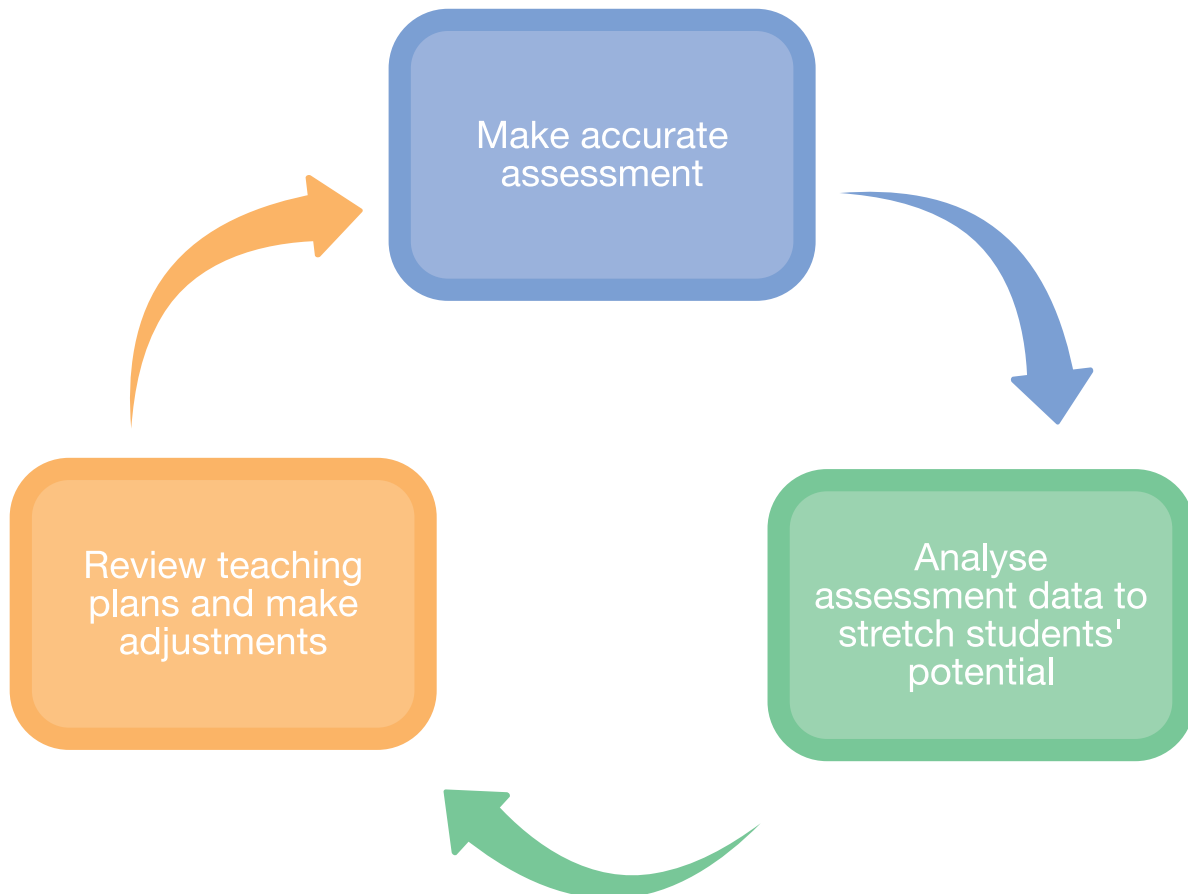
Making accurate assessments can, in some instances, result in teachers raising their expectations of students. Planned lessons and activities sometimes do not challenge students enough and do not allow them to demonstrate higher-level attainments. Teachers may then have diminished horizons for students. Balanced and equitable assessments can help teachers identify and rectify lowered expectations, inadequate challenges and under-achievement.

Looking at assessments and attainment data can help teachers plan lessons that provide greater challenge in the activities offered to students (for example, by reducing teacher instruction and increasing levels of independent activity and learning). Therefore, assessment can, through review and formative processes, help teachers raise attainment as well as inform learning and teaching.

Working in this way enables individual teachers to review and refine their own teaching plans, for example, for lessons scheduled to take place in the days and weeks ahead, making adjustments in the light of what they know students have learned in previous lessons. The major roles and process of using assessment data in improving learning and teaching on micro level is summarised in Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2 Using Assessment Data to Improve Learning and Teaching — **Micro Level**



### Using Aggregated Data for Improvement in Learning and Teaching on Meso Level

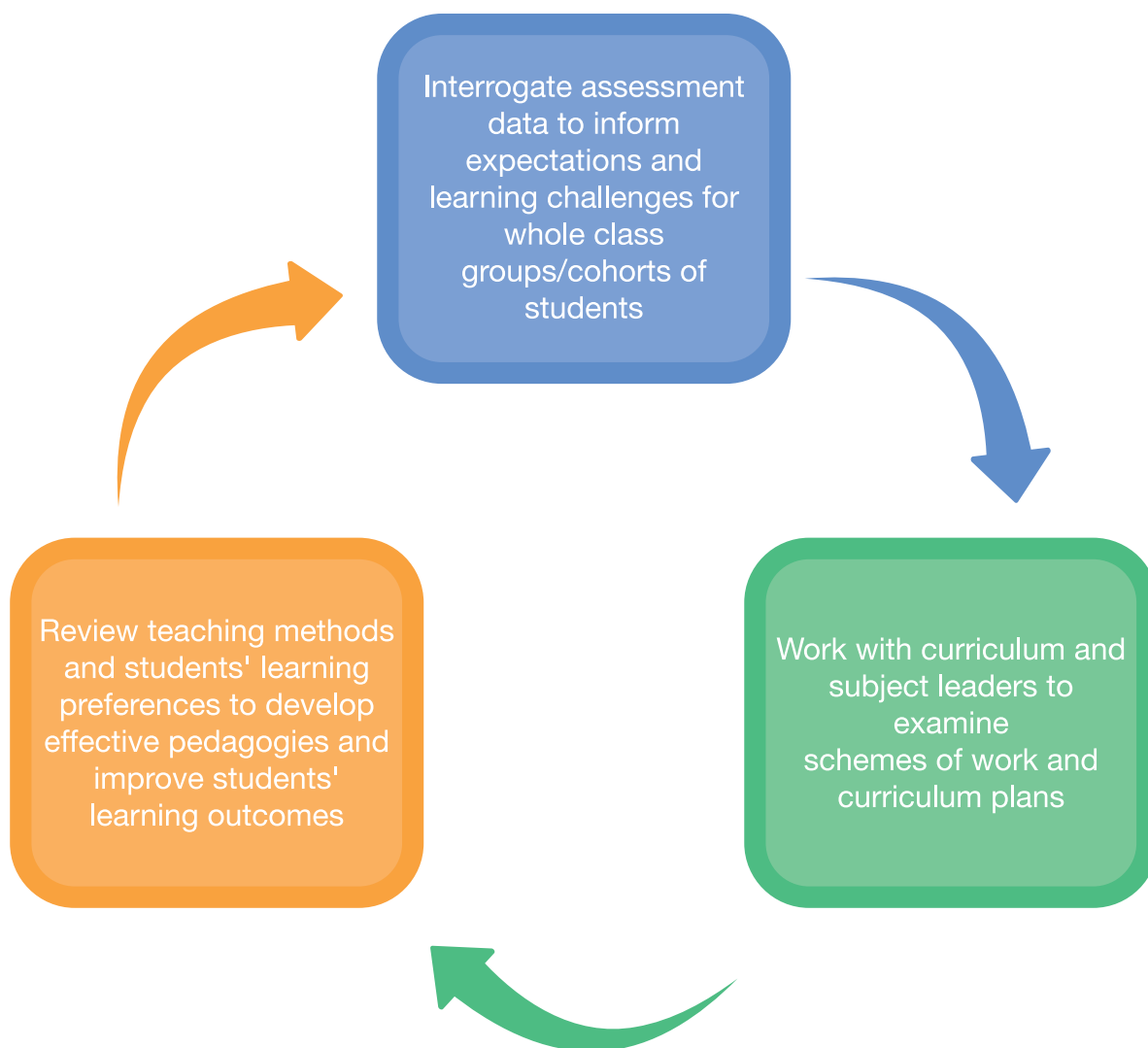
Moving beyond the micro level of learning, making intelligent use of attainment data can help teachers plan lessons that more consistently involve greater challenge in the activities offered to individual students as well as groups of students.

At the meso level, interrogating aggregated attainment data can inform broader questions about expectations and learning challenges for whole class groups or cohorts of students. To address these questions, it will be appropriate for class or subject teachers to work closely with subject panel heads and curriculum co-ordinators to examine schemes of work and curriculum plans for students in particular year groups or key stages with a view to tailoring the degree of challenge in a module or unit of work to the needs of groups of students. Curriculum and subject leaders can therefore work with subject teachers to use assessment information in the broader review of schemes of work and long term plans for subject teaching.

Part of this process of review has, in many schools, led to revision and improvement of approaches to learning and teaching. Assessment information helps teachers realise that teaching methods and learning preferences can have a significant influence on attainment and, in many schools, the development of enhanced and innovative pedagogies has led to improved learning outcomes for students.

Figure 5.3 shows the major roles and process of using assessment data in improving learning and teaching on meso level.

Figure 5.3 Using Assessment Data to Improve Learning and Teaching — **Meso Level**



## Using Aggregated Data to Drive School Improvement

Attainment data can also inform wider discussions about balance in the whole curriculum at a whole school level.

### Using Aggregated Data for Improvement in Learning and Teaching on Macro Level

At the macro level, senior staff in special schools will be able to use aggregated whole school attainment data to work with curriculum co-ordinators and subject leaders in order to drive forward wider school improvements by subjecting aspects of the curriculum to review, revision and enhancement. At this level, it may be possible to see patterns in the data such as relationships between attainment and gender, or specific impairments, or the social or cultural backgrounds of students. Schools will wish to ensure that there are equal opportunities for students from any background to demonstrate their learning. In this way, frameworks for assessment like the LPFs may not only be used to measure attainment but, by encouraging school staff to review their plans for teaching, may actively help teachers raise attainments across the whole school.

Developing this aspect of the use of the LPFs will be of direct relevance and interest to school leaders and other stakeholders (including professionals from outside school). Curriculum leaders and subject panel heads clearly also have major roles to play in these kinds of initiatives. However, **becoming involved in these processes of curriculum review and the systematic evaluation of learning and teaching will benefit all teachers**, enabling them, for example, to build a reliable view of progression in their subject and to see how their teaching contributes to logical sequences of learning for students.

The assessment process can therefore encourage teachers to collaborate, for example:

- when discussing student attainments with colleagues (including fellow teachers and other professionals) within the classroom
- through processes of curriculum review and subject planning in subject panels and curriculum teams in their schools
- in association with moderation meetings/activities between schools, when student attainments are reviewed, scrutinised and discussed in collaboration with colleagues from other schools and in relation to processes of curriculum planning

Key staff and other stakeholders in special schools should therefore explore how data on student attainment and other forms of data can play a powerful role in facilitating wider

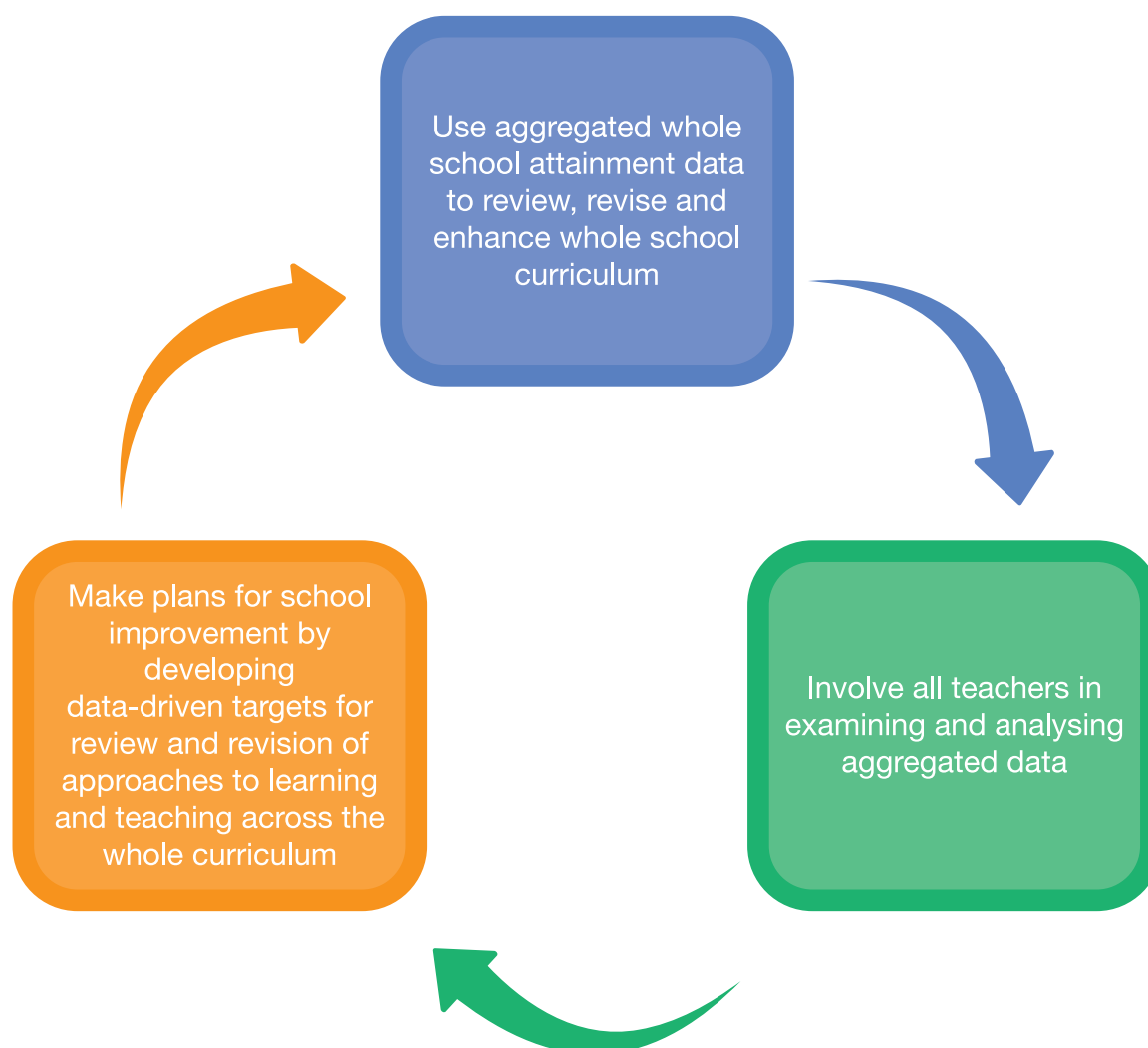
processes in school development and school improvement. The digital management of data might then contribute to a number of outcomes, for example:

- Reports of the attainments of individual students may be passed to the students and their families in order to support them in gaining access to post-school provision (including services related to employment);
- Schools may make use of their own school data, in aggregated form and without identifying any particular students, in order to identify areas in which learning and teaching or other aspects of student well-being need to be improved and thus to inform planning for school development;
- Schools may agree to share anonymised data in order to build up a broader picture, over time, of the attainments of students in special schools, for example, across the schools managed by one sponsoring body or across schools catering for specific categories of student need; and
- Ultimately, without identifying any particular students or schools, it may become possible to make an aggregated and anonymised extract of territory-wide attainment data available to senior leaders in the special schools in Hong Kong on an annual basis in order to support informed school improvement planning.

The LPFs and other agreed frameworks for assessment therefore provide an opportunity to aggregate data about attainments in the special schools in Hong Kong on a territory-wide basis and to make use of such data for school improvement purposes. However, it is critical to ensure through rigorous review and moderation among schools that there is full confidence in data generated through teacher assessment. It is also important to note that data should not be used in order to make invidious and invalid comparisons between schools. Most importantly, where schools are able to use their own data sets to drive internal processes of school improvement in relation to a wider picture of attainment, the outcomes are very positive.

Figure 5.4 summarises the major roles and process of using assessment data in improving learning and teaching (driving improvement in school curriculum) on macro level.

Figure 5.4 Using Assessment Data to Improve Learning and Teaching  
(Driving Improvement in School Curriculum) — **Macro Level**



This chapter has confirmed that recognising progress and attainment through processes of assessment can bring positive results in a wide range of contexts in special schools, benefiting students, parents, teachers and other professionals, curriculum leaders and school managers and wider school communities. Used wisely, as a key element in cycles of planning, implementation and evaluation, assessment can inform continuous processes of improvement in all these dimensions. As well as having the potential to support reporting, therefore, information about student attainment and other forms of relevant data can be used to drive the evaluation of learning and teaching and processes of curriculum review. There is also potential for senior staff in special schools to use those data in order to inform plans and agendas for school improvement. In order to accelerate these possibilities, it is



important that assessment and the management and use of attainment data are located appropriately for school staff within the broader picture of curriculum development, and the improvement of learning and teaching, in special schools. Chapter 6 “Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum”, provides further discussion of the roles of assessment within cycles of monitoring, evaluation and review.



### **For reflection and action**

- How is assessment information used in your school in order to drive forward improvements in learning?
- How are data managed in your school and how are aggregated data used in order to inform school improvement?