School Improvement Case Study:

Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust Primary Schools

The impact of NTS Assessments and Boost Insights data on teaching and learning in Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust Primary Schools

Like many growing multi-academy trusts, Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust wanted a consistent assessment approach across its schools, while still allowing teachers to use their professional judgement. The Trust also wanted assessment information that could support moderation, inform teaching and provide meaningful insights at both school and Trust level.

We interviewed senior leaders of the Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust to find out how the teams at this multi-academy trust use NTS Assessments (National Test-style Standardised assessments in Reading and Maths) and the associated reporting platform, Boost Insights. Jen Devaney, Senior School Improvement Lead for Primary, was joined by Sian Cook, Associate Principal of Wallbrook Primary School, and in a separate interview, we also met with Josh Parkes, Assistant Principal at Shireland Technology Primary.

Jen leads on areas including data and assessment across the Trust's seven primary schools and was part of the team who made the decision to switch their primary tests to NTS Assessments three years ago, starting with reading and maths and later adding the optional GPS assessments (called New GaPS). NTS is now used across all seven primary schools.



Using NTS Assessments across the Trust

Shireland leaders particularly valued the fact that NTS Assessments are paper-based and closely mirror the national tests in the style of questions, building up to full national test-style papers at the upper end of primary school. They said this helps pupils become familiar with test structures, timings, conditions and presentation from an early age. The school leaders believe using NTS Assessments helps learners develop appropriate test technique while providing teachers with meaningful diagnostic information.

Assessment results are entered into Boost Insights and synchronised with Arbor. The Trust uses both Arbor and Boost reporting and Jen provides training for schools on using the reports and analysis tools, whilst school leaders such as Josh and Sian provide training within their schools as required.

A wider assessment strategy

For schools within the Trust, reliable assessment information is particularly important given the varied contexts they serve. Josh Parkes explained that Shireland Technology Primary serves a community with high pupil mobility and significant proportions of pupils eligible for pupil premium and EAL support. In this context, standardised assessment information and detailed gap analysis provide valuable evidence to support school self-evaluation, identify strengths and areas for development, and inform improvement planning, while enabling leaders to track pupil achievement and progress over time.

Across the Shireland trust, NTS assessments form an important part of a wider assessment strategy. Josh told us,

"The reason we value NTS is that it forms one part of a wider assessment system. Teachers use their professional judgement from what they see every day in class and combine that with NTS outcomes to arrive at secure judgements."

SHIRELAND COLLEGIATE ACADEMY TRUST

New Edition NTS Assessments Mathematics

NTS Assessments Reading

Learners complete NTS Assessments each term and the teachers combine the outcomes with classroom evidence, book scrutiny and their professional judgement to inform assessment outcomes. The Boost Insights reports support moderation conversations, giving leaders confidence when validating teacher judgements and discussing attainment, progress and greater depth decisions. "Sometimes you get teachers being overcautious and maybe not putting a learner at greater depth, for example, but I can see they've got a standardised score of 112, so it strikes those conversations. It informs our pupil progress and the moderation conversation: 'Well, they have got this on the assessment. So why have you formed this judgment?' So it's given our teachers confidence in their judgments, that they have something to back up what they're seeing in class and in the books as well."

Driving school improvement

The schools require their teachers to enter the NTS question-level marks into Boost Insights each term because they value the detail of the Question-level Analysis Reports in helping improve teaching and learning: "It's the gap analysis that we get. It's how it drives school improvement for us at a school level and it informs planning, teaching, attainment and pupil progress". [Sian].

The data supports pupil progress meetings and helps identify misconceptions, curriculum gaps and pupils requiring additional support. "Teachers value the diagnostic information and gap analysis because it allows them to personalise teaching..." [Josh]

For pupils working significantly below age-related expectations, NTS Assessments from a different year group assessments are sometimes used, and the resulting analysis informs subsequent planning of targeted teaching.

When discussing the strengths of NTS assessments, all three leaders emphasised the value of both standardised scores and detailed gap analyses in supporting planning and pupil progress reviews. Josh highlighted the importance of the NTS standardised score and explained that the Group Report from Boost Insights is the report used most frequently during pupil progress discussions.



Driving growth at Trust-level

Jen, Sian and Josh highlighted the importance of the strong correlations between NTS outcomes and statutory assessment outcomes. Predictive validity and benchmarking data are of significant interest from both school and Trust perspectives and Jen was interested in the correlation research that is regularly performed analysing NTS schools' data with their Key Stage 2 statutory assessment performance: "That's really interesting to me in my role… that's something I like to look at internally within our MAT, how closely they correlate."

"We use the NTS data at a Trust level as well to inform our target setting." Jen analyses cohort performance from previous assessment cycles and uses this as a starting point for discussions with each of the school leaders including Sian and Josh. The data helps establish performance targets while allowing leaders to factor in contextual information such as SEND, mobility and other cohort characteristics. "As we're growing as a Trust, I'm getting more interested in MAT averages and comparing those to national and local averages, but then also being able to drill down and see which schools are high performing."

Conclusion

These senior leaders all agreed that they would recommend NTS Assessments and Boost Insights, with Josh summing up that:

"NTS Assessments and the reports available in Boost Insights provide what we need at senior leader, teacher and governor level. The value comes from the standardisation, diagnostics and analytics. NTS provides assurance around teacher assessment judgements and turns test scores into actionable pupil-level conversations."

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Learn more about how NTS assessments and Boost Insights can support your school

We talked to Josh Parkes, Assistant Principal at Shireland Technology Primary, to discover how the school uses NTS Assessments and Boost Insights to inform teacher judgements, personalise learning, and support pupil progress.



As part of my role as Assistant Principal, I lead on assessment, data and maths across Shireland Technology Primary School, so I'm interested in assessment as a whole but particularly NTS Maths, which I use most extensively. Our school is part of the Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust.

Our assessment processes are determined at Trust level and we all agreed to use NTS Assessments in the same way alongside our wider teacher assessment model. I work closely with our Trust's Senior School Improvement Lead to implement assessment practices in our school.

Shireland Technology Primary was a free school that opened with just Reception and Year 1 initally, this year being the first time we have had a full Year 6 cohort with two classes and we are very proud to have been graded Outstanding by Ofsted.

Our challenges around assessment and data are that we do not yet have long-term data trends, especially for the upper primary year groups. Pupil mobility is also high and we have high levels of pupil premium and EAL, so the data and gap analyses that the NTS Assessments provide are therefore important to us as measures to consider alongside our professional teacher judgements.

We have assessment weeks at the end of autumn, spring and summer terms and NTS Assessments provide important benchmarks at these points. The reason we value NTS is that it forms one part of our wider assessment system: teachers use their professional judgement from what they see every day in class and combine that with NTS outcomes to arrive at secure judgements. NTS informs judgements rather than dictating them.

Personalising teaching with Boost Insights

Technology is a really big part of what we do - we're always keen to utilise technology for teaching and learning, but also for things like assessment - which is why using the Boost Insights reports of our NTS results appeals to us.

The reports available in Boost Insights provide what we need at senior leader, teacher and governor level. The main measure we use for our pupil progress meetings is the NTS standardised score, and the report we use most heavily from Boost Insights is the Group Report, particularly the breakdown of pupils 'working towards', 'at expected standard' and 'at greater depth'. We use this to compare with teacher assessments and to investigate any significant differences.

Teachers use the Learner Progress Reports and Question-level Analysis Reports to inform planning and we sometimes pull up Individual Learner Reports in pupil progress discussions if we're talking about the progress of individual learners. Teachers value the diagnostic information and gap analysis because it allows them to personalise teaching, so they find it worth the time entering the question-level scores. Our NTS data then goes into Arbor, too, so the direct syncing from Boost Insights is really helpful.

Preparing pupils for statutory testing

One of the reasons we moved away from our previous assessment was because it was all online and we chose NTS because it mirrors the style of the national assessments and because the paper-based approach is important to us to prepare pupils for statutory testing.

I'd say the assessments align very closely with our curriculum. Occasionally, there may be one or two questions that are taught later in our curriculum sequence because, although we follow a curriculum that is based on the White Rose sequencing, some blocks have been reordered or split to support revisiting prior learning.

At the moment we are conscious of workload at our school so we have limited ourselves primarily to maths and reading assessments, but I know some schools in the Trust also use the New GaPS assessments for grammar, punctuation and spelling, that sit alongside NTS Maths and Reading.

Conclusion

"I would recommend NTS Assessments and Boost Insights. The value comes from the standardisation, diagnostics and analytics. It provides assurance around teacher assessment judgements and turns test scores into actionable pupil-level conversations and planning. It works very well for us."