



## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

*(The following information has been compiled using the DEC policy statement and 'Curriculum Planning, Programming, Assessing & Reporting to parents K - 12 website <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/>)*

### Reporting to Parents Department Policy Requirements (Oct 2006)

- Schools will provide parents/caregivers, throughout the school year, with formal and informal opportunities to receive information about and discuss their child's learning
- Schools will provide parents/carers with a written report at least twice a year
- Schools will provide information on how a child's achievement compares with the child's peer group at the school, on request from the child's parents/carers
- The written report will:
  - use plain language
  - provide information on what a student has learnt as a result of the school's teaching programs in each of the key learning areas (KLAs)
  - compare the student's achievements against statewide syllabus standards using a five point scale defined in mandatory standards/procedures
  - include teacher comments that identify areas of student strength and further development
  - provide information about the student's social development and commitment to learning

### The Teaching Learning Cycle

Report writing is an integral part of the 'teaching learning' cycle.





## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

### The Five Point Achievement Scale – the A – E grades

Schools will use the following achievement scale to report to parents for students in Years 1 – 10. The achievement of students is to be assessed in relation to syllabus standards.

**A or Outstanding** The student has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the content and can readily apply this knowledge. In addition, the student has achieved a very high level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills to new situations.

**B or High** The student has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the content and a high level of competence in the processes and skills. In addition, the student is able to apply this knowledge and these skills to most situations.

**C or Sound** The student has a sound knowledge and understanding of the main areas of content and has achieved an adequate level of competence in the processes and skills.

**D or Basic** The student has a basic knowledge and understanding of the content and has achieved a limited level of competence in the processes and skills

**E or Limited** The student has an elementary knowledge and understanding in few areas of the content and has achieved very limited competence in some of the processes and skills

### Allocating the A – E Grades

The NSW syllabuses state *what* students at each stage are expected to learn. The A – E grade scale describes *how well* students achieve. The process of grading student achievement should be based on syllabus standards within each year/stage group. The allocation of grades and word descriptions is a holistic judgement on a range of assessment information up to that ‘point in time’. The professional judgement of teachers continues to be central to this process. That judgement can be based on both formative and summative assessment activities rather than a single piece of work. This evidence of learning extends the process of *assessment for learning* into their *assessment of learning*.

#### ➤ Consistency in Reporting

Each subject has course band descriptors that provide a useful tool to report consistent information about student achievement. These describe observable and measurable features of student achievement at the end of a stage. For example: Stage 5 Australian History

Grade E	Grade D	Grade C	Grade B	Grade A
<i>A student performing at this grade typically:</i>	<i>A student performing at this grade typically:</i>	<i>A student performing at this grade typically:</i>	<i>A student performing at this grade typically:</i>	<i>A student performing at this grade typically:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates <b>elementary knowledge</b> and understanding of some significant events in 20th century Australian history and, with teacher support, <b>describes</b> some impacts of these events on Australian life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates <b>basic knowledge</b> and understanding of some significant developments in 20th century Australian history and <b>explains</b> their impact on Australian life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates <b>sound knowledge</b> and understanding of significant developments in 20th century Australian history and makes a <b>simple evaluation</b> of their impact on Australian life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates <b>thorough knowledge</b> and understanding of significant developments in 20th century Australian history and <b>evaluates</b> their impact on Australian life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates <b>extensive knowledge</b> and understanding of significant developments in 20th century Australian history and <b>evaluates</b> their impact on Australian life.</li> </ul>



## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

### Providing Effective Feedback

Feedback on its own does little to assist students to improve their level of performance. As well as indicating what they did and did not do, effective feedback includes evaluation and further guidance.

Effective feedback:

- ✓ Describes what happened – the player had the ball, looked around to see who was in a good position to receive it and then disposed of it, but on occasions failed to do so accurately.
- ✓ Provides an evaluation – the player was clearly aware, made very good use of her knowledge about where players were positioned, selected an appropriate player to pass the ball to, but disposal was not always accurate.
- ✓ Provides guidance about how performance could be improved in the future – drills to focus on improving ball disposal.

### Report comments: useful tips

#### 1. Use plain language

It is important for teachers to use jargon-free language when writing reports for parents. The words selected should be easily understood by the school community, rather than professional terminology.

Example using plain language

Leigh demonstrates attentive listening skills within the classroom. She listens while others present news and asks relevant questions. Leigh is developing a growing understanding of reading skills and strategies. She participates in the shared and guided reading of a variety of different books. Leigh uses her knowledge of grammar and sounds to assist her reading. She can write simple stories using full stops and capital letters. Next year she will begin to write longer descriptions of people, places and animals. Leigh can draw a set of pictures to show a sequence for a procedure. Leigh needs to further develop her handwriting skills, especially the formation of letters.

Example using professional terminology

Leigh demonstrates attentive listening skills within the classroom. She listens while others present news and asks relevant questions. Leigh is developing a growing understanding of reading skills and strategies. She participates in the shared and guided reading of visual and written texts. Leigh uses her knowledge of grammatical structure and phonological awareness to assist her reading. She can write simple stories using full stops and capital letters. Next year she will begin to write longer descriptions of people, places and animals. Leigh can create a sequence of visual images to illustrate a procedure. Leigh needs to further develop her handwriting skills, especially the formation of letters.

Highlight or underline the examples of professional terminology.





## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

### 2. Editing

During self-editing procedures, reports should be read aloud, which makes it easier to check on spelling, grammar and punctuation.

- **Spelling**

- **commonly misspelt words include:**

- practice (noun) and practise (verb)

e.g. Michael needs to **practise** his handwriting.

Elizabeth needs **practice** with number combinations to 20.

effect (noun) and affect (verb)

commitment;

definitely;

initiate, initiative;

trial, trialling, trialled;

target, targeting, targeted;

focus, focusing, focused.

- **Grammar**

- **subject/verb agreement:**

This occurs when the writer selects the correct verb for the noun or noun group to which it is referring.

e.g. *Reading and writing **are** important* (as opposed to *Reading and writing **is** important*).

e.g. *He **writes** stories. They **write** stories*

- **noun/pronoun reference:**

There is no hard and fast rule for how many times you should use a pronoun before you repeat the child's name. It is recommended that you use a pronoun no more than three times before using the child's name again.

E.g. **Jai** can count to 70 and order, read and write numbers up to 30. **He** needs to continue working on his addition facts. **He** still requires practice in solving number problems. **Jai** can make halves, but still needs help when working with quarters.

- **tense:**

Ensure that the **same tense** has been used throughout the comments for each KLA.

- **redundancies:**

Try to avoid redundancies.

e.g. *a class group*

*final completion*

*a number of examples*

- **Punctuation**

Use punctuation for pause and effect and to make the statement clear:

- **Capital letters** at the beginning of sentences, proper nouns. ( N.B. Schools should decide whether they want to capitalise the key learning areas. English needs to be, but other KLAs may have lower case e.g. mathematics, creative arts.)

- **Full stops** at the end of sentences;

- **Commas** should be used between clauses that have different subjects and are linked by conjunctions such as *but, for, nor*.

- e.g. *Juan can count to 50 by ones, but needs to practise counting by twos.*

- **Hyphens.** Do not hyphenate *cooperate, cooperative, coordinate*.



## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

### L White

### 3. Word Choice

Report comments should be written in a positive and informative manner.

#### Words that promote positive view of the student

- thorough
- caring
- shows commitment
- improved tremendously
- has a good grasp of

#### Words and Phrases to use to convey that a child needs help

- could profit by
- requires
- finds it difficult at times to
- needs reinforcement in
- has trouble with

When teachers write comments on report cards, they need to be cognizant of the fact that each child has a different rate of social and academic development. Therefore, comments should not portray a child's ability as fixed and permanent (Shafer, 1997). Such comments do not offer any reason to believe that the child will be successful if he/she attempts to improve.

#### Words to Avoid or Use with Caution

Also, teachers must be sensitive to the fact that their students will read their comments. If negative comments are made, teachers must be aware that those comments may be counterproductive. In addition to the previously mentioned positive comments, Shafer (1997) compiled a list of words and phrases that should be avoided or used with caution.

- unable
- can't
- won't
- always
- never

### 4. Time considerations

When writing report comments teachers should consider the following:

- The school timeline for the development and issuing of reports to parents
- Start early to avoid last minute pressures/stress
- Liaison with relevant teachers, e.g. student advisers, support staff
- Self-editing to minimize corrections by head teachers

Planning is the key to effective report writing. Report writing needs to be linked to assessment practices and consideration given to how you record marks/grades and descriptions of student work and learning. A mark on its own may not tell you how the student can improve.



## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

### Comment Starters

Comment starters are available on the following website:

[http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/report/s\\_teachers/comment\\_start.htm](http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/report/s_teachers/comment_start.htm)

### Exemplars

<b>KLA</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Comment Starters</b>
<b>English</b>	Speak, listen, read, write, view and represent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ uses a range of processes for responding to and composing texts</li><li>▪ responds to and composes texts in different technologies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ shows skills in writing, speaking and representing</li><li>▪ composes texts for a range of purposes, audiences and contexts</li><li>▪ plans, drafts and edits texts before publishing</li><li>▪ checks the accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation</li><li>▪ uses technology in composing texts</li></ul>
<b>Maths</b>		Perimeter and area MS5.1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ uses formulae to find the area of rhombuses, trapeziums and kites</li><li>▪ finds the area and perimeter of simple composite figures consisting of two shapes including quadrants and semicircles</li></ul>
<b>PDHPE</b>	Movement skill and performance	Students will move with confidence and competence, and contribute to the satisfying and skilled performance of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• perform movement skills competently in a range of situations e.g. games, gymnastics, dance, aquatics</li><li>• transfer movement skills from one game context to another</li><li>• participate enthusiastically and safely in movement activities</li><li>• use feedback to improve their skills</li></ul>
<b>Science</b>	<b>Knowledge and understanding</b> Can recall some physical phenomena and their impact on humans and the living and non-living environments	<b>Planning/conducting investigations</b> With guidance can design a simple investigation	<b>Problem solving/Critical-thinking</b> Can state a problem to be investigated



## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

### Suggested Activity

Use the template to record report comments which match your syllabus outcomes and learning objectives. You could pool your ideas with other faculty members to create a bank of useful comments which link syllabus outcomes to assessment and to student achievement.

Objectives	Outcomes	Comment Starters







## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

L White

### Word/phrase bank

#### Behaviour/attitude

- meticulous; attention to detail
- capable, competent
- conscientious
- diligent, hardworking
- motivated
- mature/responsible attitude to learning
- innovative, talented
- articulates/expresses/conveys her ideas clearly and succinctly/
- cooperative, friendly, pleasant, personable
- makes insightful observations
- contributes confidently to class discussions
- makes valuable contributions to group work
- works well with her peers
- interested, enthusiastic
- uses class time efficiently
- is able to work independently
- closer attention to teacher explanation will improve her understanding of ...
- asks questions to clarify her understanding
- it has been necessary to isolate ... three times
- ... needs to complete all class work to improve her ability to ...
- Listens attentively in class and follows directions
- Performed well in all aspects of the work
- Her interest in the subject is evident in her ...
- Focused, concentrates
- Her strengths lie in her ability to ...
- Initiates steps to improve her outcomes
- Willingly participates in all class activities
- Plans/manages her time
- Work in the areas of ... has been very good
- Uses appropriate strategies to plan and organize her work
- Needs to practise/make use of a range of study strategies to improve her ability to recall information
- ... responds well to constructive criticism and advice
- Her commitment to improving her knowledge and skills is to be commended
- Reflects on her work; practices self-reflection to improve her learning
- ... provides constructive comments to her peers

#### Skills/knowledge

(These comments should be explicitly linked to syllabus outcomes and student work and should include comments on how the student can improve. You could also consider cross curriculum content – e.g. literacy and numeracy skills; ICT skills; and key competencies – e.g. collecting, analyzing and organizing information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organizing activities; solving problems; using technology.)

- ... assessment task demonstrated deep knowledge/understanding of the subject matter
- Made effective use of ICT to organize and present her assessment task on ...



## REPORT WRITING FOR PARENTS

### L White

- When editing her written responses ... needs to focus on her word choice and use of punctuation marks to improve her written expression
- ... is able to ... However, she needs to ...
- ... has improved her ability to/skills in the area of ...
- ... has an extensive vocabulary
- Her written responses are well structured and include a wide range of relevant and accurate information
- Her written responses demonstrate her understanding of the key issues and ability to make comparisons/draw conclusions
- ... needs to plan her responses to ensure all key aspects of the topic are included
- ... could use mindmaps to structure her written responses
- Pay closer attention to key words in questions
- When reading texts ... should highlight key words to focus her attention
- ... has a good grasp of key concepts