

Child Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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SACE
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CHILD STUDIES

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Practical Activity

Research Task

It was good to see that the quality of students' investigative and critical thinking skills in the research component has continued to improve. Students benefitted from learning to develop a clearer task design, a context for their research topic, and framing more explicit guiding questions. Students generally achieved better results when tasks were well-designed.

A positive trend was the significant increase in the number of students who demonstrated well-developed skills in critical analysis, resulting in a more in-depth exploration of contemporary trends. In addition, they also showed an ability to select appropriate primary and secondary sources, and use in-text referencing.

Some research tasks only required students to provide a one-word 'yes or no' answer, which limited the amount of knowledge they could reveal and therefore the level at which they could achieve. Other research tasks continued to ask students merely to 'develop an opinion', rather than directing them to investigate or critically analyse a contemporary trend or issue and thus show a greater depth of understanding.

In general, students demonstrated sound literacy and numeracy skills, particularly in relation to using appropriate terminology, and providing relevant graphs and statistics.

Action Plan: Problem-solving

The more successful students were able to identify a range of strategies showing how to respond to a scenario or problem relating to the health and well-being of children.

Students presented action plans in a variety of formats, including the creative use of tables to illustrate their plan. Teachers and students are encouraged to work together to find the most appropriate method for presenting their work. Some students limited themselves to choosing only one decision about what action to take and how

problems could be solved; students who outlined a series of decisions within the context of the problem were more successful. The majority of action plans outlined clear and relevant justifications for the decisions made.

Implementation strategies should show how decisions made in the action plan will be implemented in a practical way. Students presented these strategies in a range of styles, and provided more explicit descriptions than last year.

Practical Application

Teachers and students used technology creatively in order to make connections between the practical activity and research from the area of study. For example, there was a significant increase in the quality and quantity of photographic and written evidence from students about their practical achievements.

The more successful students were able to document what they had achieved using the language of the specific features, and providing detailed evidence of what had occurred in the practical assessment.

While much of the practical evidence tended towards photographs with notes, teachers and students are reminded that practical evidence can be presented in a range of different formats.

Individual Evaluation Report

This year saw some students continue to present tasks which assessed the four specific features for every individual evaluation report. While this is permitted, covering every feature is not necessary and can promote problems: the report tends to be repetitive and the analysis can be superficial. The more successful evaluations addressed fewer than four specific features, allowing a more in-depth evaluation of the practical.

Task Design

It was pleasing to see that some tasks were designed more effectively: this included assessing fewer specific features and ensuring that there was a good match between the evaluation and specific feature. This approach enabled students to 'sharpen their focus' and display an ability to investigate the issue in depth and provide insightful and perceptive analysis. It also allowed them to show more complex skills in relation to problem-solving.

However, there were tasks that had not been developed beyond the scope of the previous course and merely repeated the language of the performance standards without explanation or analysis. This made it harder for students to achieve at the highest level, because evidence demonstrating achievement against the performance standards were not explored or made clear.

Those students who performed well were helped by the expectations of their work being manageable and clearly explained, but also interesting and inspiring. The provision of open-ended tasks also gave students the opportunity to perform at a range of levels. The assessment — particularly the performance standards — was made explicit, and students were given the opportunity to choose aspects which engaged their decision-making ability and also gave them an opportunity to direct their study.

Importantly, a wide range of topics reflected current issues which relate to children's experiences in a variety of settings; these are crucial starting points for identifying and developing an understanding of contemporary topics.

Regarding the look and presentation of their work, it was good to see that most students wrote within the word limit; however, they should take care when presenting information in tables that it is integrated into the text, not just inserted with no explanation. Students should continue to be made aware that presentation of tables and word count are important issues.

Assessment Type 2: Group Activity

Group Decision-making

An encouraging variety of group tasks was presented; this allowed individual students a chance to contribute and linked strongly to the relevant area of study and performance standards. These tasks clearly focused on the health and well-being of children.

Teachers should continue to support students so that they include recordings of oral presentations or other multimodal documentation as evidence of discussion; this type of documentation must be provided for each student in the group.

Collaboration

Most tasks were flexible and inclusive of each member of the group, thus allowing individual students to perform at their best. It was also impressive to see that more group activities provided a range of opportunities both within the school and in the wider community. The more successful tasks and responses gave students a variety of leadership opportunities. Again, teachers are encouraged to guide students in how to provide evidence in relation to each of the collaboration-specific features. Evidence can be presented regarding the group decision-making, practical evaluation, and individual evaluation.

Group Practical Application

The diverse range of practical activities available to students was reflected in the evidence provided. Being given new and varied practical opportunities allowed students to demonstrate their ability to problem-solve current contemporary issues; those who embraced these tasks performed well overall. Teachers had designed tasks for small and large groups, as well as groups which split up in smaller formations. This approach supports collaboration within the group decision-making process. The documentation of student evidence was more varied in the group task than in the practical activity tasks. Teachers should encourage students to present evidence of learning in the practical component in the way which best suits them as individuals; this can vary across the different members of the group.

Individual Evaluation Report

There was an improvement in the variety and range of evaluations compared with last year. However, some evaluations continued to provide only a basic description of the practical, rather than making wider links to the area of study, the context of the group decision-making, or the research. Teachers can refer to the subject outline for the current guidelines on evaluations.

For oral reports, the student work and teacher notes should clearly demonstrate evidence of the grade awarded.

Teachers are encouraged to remind students to evaluate the effectiveness and collaboration of both their own performance, and that of the team, as well as providing evidence to support this learning. Students performed better in this area when one or two specific features were linked strongly with the group plan. In these situations, students could clearly see the links and make the connections which resulted in them being able to achieve at a higher level.

Learning and Assessment Plan Design

For the required assessment design criteria for each task, teachers continue to be strategic by selecting specific features rather than attempting to cover all of them in every task. Learning and assessment plans have been updated to consider the new course outline. On the whole, teachers are using the addendum to make changes to tasks when necessary.

Teachers are reminded that confidential information about students should not be included either on the addendum or in the package for moderation.

Task Design

While some new and inspiring tasks were designed this year, it was noted that others were simply repeats of an earlier course. In the practical activity, the 'closed' tasks set by teachers have not always allowed the students to demonstrate their problem-solving abilities or to show that they can perform at a higher or more complex level. The presentation of oral/multimodal tasks by students needs to continue to be supported and encouraged by teachers. Evidence also needs to be recorded and kept for assessment.

When designing tasks, it is recommended that teachers focus on one area of study. They should include the area of study in the learning and assessment plan and also ensure that it links closely to the tasks. Some tasks were linked to two or three areas of study; due to the constraints of the word count, this made it difficult for students to address evidence against the criteria at the highest level.

Packaging

The majority of teachers included the approved learning and assessment plan, a copy of all the tasks with the performance standards assessed, and an addendum if applicable. While there was significant improvement in the packaging of the materials, some student work was still submitted in folders, rather than the plastic bags supplied by the SACE Board. Some teachers provided an overview coversheet of each student's grades, which was helpful for moderators. Some samples were missing tasks, without an explanation of why they were not included.

To help the moderation process:

- assessment tasks may be attached to the front of the student's work, including the performance standards
- materials for moderation of Assessment Type 1: Practical Activity and Assessment Type 2: Group Activity should not be packaged together as they are moderated separately

- each assessment type may include a cover sheet giving the student's SACE registration number, and the assessment decision
- student work should not be presented in plastic folders or sleeves
- schools should not include drafts of student work (e.g. garments or learning activities); instead, teachers should support students in providing photographic evidence of their practical activities
- teachers should include the Variation to Moderation Materials form, if appropriate.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Students who focused on the health and well-being of children generally met the performance standards at a higher level. While selecting an appropriate topic still proves to be challenging, this year there was a range of topics selected, including many which were a new twist on 'old favourites'. Others were more controversial, offering two clear sides to an argument with the potential for either a 'yes' or a 'no' conclusion. This gave the study much more scope and possibility, as well as providing a clear framework within which to write.

The majority of the topics selected related to the subject outline; when students were able to clearly link their investigations to at least one of the areas of study, they tended to have some direction and maintained focus in their investigation. There were still some students who focused their investigations on issues not appropriate to the exercise: for example, relating to children older than eight years of age or exploring topics such as child abuse and domestic violence. Students with well-crafted research questions or hypotheses were able to present a debate, as opposed to just stating a topic.

ICA 1 — Critical analysis of contemporary trend/or issue related to the health and wellbeing of children

Investigations which met the performance standards at a high level tended to 'tease' out the information and data thoroughly. Many of these investigations drew conclusions along the way rather than just leaving them to the end in the evaluation. These students tended to compare and contrast opinions, offering reasons for any incongruity. Many constantly related back to the focus question and the overall topic for the investigation.

More successful investigations enabled the student to analyse the selected issue from a range of viewpoints and develop an argument in their writing.

The less successful responses tended to present the research without drawing conclusions or analysing the information in any way.

The majority of students coped well with the research component, finding relevant sources of information. Many used their main focus or guiding questions to help structure the research. Those who achieved well against the performance standards conducted quality interviews with people who were strongly connected to the investigation; this enabled them to present highly relevant primary information.

For some students, however, providing primary sources of research proved to be more problematic and challenging. For example, a number of students included surveys of teenagers regarding an issue which focused on children under the age of eight; this information had little relevance to the investigation topic and was not an appropriate primary source.

Graphs, tables and diagrams were used extensively. Students who presented these illustrations well made sure that they both supported and had strong links to the research. Students who achieved higher grades tended to refer to the methodology throughout their investigation. Some students however, are not using illustrations appropriately; for example, instead of just inserting the graph or table into the investigation without explanation, they need to use the data provided in their discussion and help the reader connect it to the rest of the investigation.

ICA2 — Analysis of information for relevance and appropriateness, with appropriate acknowledgement of sources

It is important for students to include primary sources of information in their reference list and bibliography. While the majority of investigations included primary sources, the more successful responses used sources that were also credible, such as experts in the chosen field. Those less successful used the general public as a source or, in many cases, their own peers. Students need to understand that this kind of information is more likely to be general opinion rather than actual fact.

Generally, students accessed reliable and relevant internet sites as part of their research, and displayed more critical thinking about the reliability and validity of the sources of secondary information included. Some students used observations as a source of information, and these were generally used well.

The vast majority of investigations referred to current sources of information, with very few opting to use out-dated sources. Students who clearly referenced their sources were able to meet the performance standards at a higher level for this criteria. Often, the more successful responses included sources of information which held conflicting views. A few students addressed the issue of bias in terms of their research, but this was not common. In a number of investigations, the methodology included a list of what the student planned to do, but in the investigation the sources of information varied greatly from what had been stated earlier.

ICA3 — Application of literacy and numeracy skills including terminology

The research undertaken by students was reflected in this section with a wider vocabulary, knowledge and greater depth in their writing. Many of the investigations were well structured and logical. Students who achieved in the higher grade bands tended to write in the third person, and this helped to give the investigation a more professional tone. Many students used statistical information either in the form of a graph or had statistics as part of their investigations. This was done well and students who used data from their graphs to inform their investigations generally achieved to a high level in this area. The less successful responses had spelling and grammatical errors.

E4 — Evaluation of contemporary trends and/or issues related to child development in different settings

Students who achieved to a high level against the performance standards tended to include evaluation throughout their investigation, often at the end of a focus or guiding question. There was a trend towards providing short conclusions at the end of the investigation, which was appropriate when students are evaluating throughout the investigation. Students who only presented a short evaluation at the end of their investigation were often not able to demonstrate the depth necessary to achieve to a high level. Best practice investigations gave evaluation comments that were impartial and recognised that there was both potential for bias and that some areas were open to interpretation. These studies often had an excellent topic question/hypothesis, which weighed up all perspectives on the topic and came to reasonable conclusions as well as avoiding generalisations.

Appendices and surveys are not looked at when investigations are marked. It is important that students understand this and make sure that they don't include information in the appendix which they want to count towards their grade.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Investigations are blind marked; to achieve this, student names, school names, and marks sheets should be removed from the investigations before sending them to the SACE Board.

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