



Learning Support: A Holistic Approach to Assessment

Assessment is a vital component of education—it forms the bridge between teaching and learning. It involves identifying, gathering, and analysing information about student learning and making informed judgments that guide teaching practices and reporting to parents, council bodies, and government authorities.

As Carol Ann Tomlinson aptly said,

“For teachers, as for students, the most effective evaluation comes from someone who sits beside us and helps us grow.”

Assessment should support learning and must always be analysed in meaningful contexts. In Steiner education, inspired by the indications of Rudolf Steiner, we aim to educate each child in head, heart, and hands. Our educators are trained as keen observers of children, seeking to understand them at every stage of development. This holistic approach broadens our assessment scope—we evaluate not only academic progress (thinking) but also social-emotional and sensory development (feeling), as well as physical capabilities (willing).

Types of Assessment

There are three primary types of assessment used throughout the learning journey:

1. Diagnostic Assessment

- Purpose: identifies prior knowledge, strengths, challenges, and misconceptions before a new unit or learning cycle begins.
- When used: specific developmental stages or time of year.
- Examples: standardised tests, teacher created tests

2. Formative Assessment

- Purpose: monitors progress and guides instruction through continuous feedback.
- When used: ongoing, throughout the teaching and learning cycle.
- Examples: class discussions, Main Lesson books, practice activities, teacher checklists and education staff observations.

3. Summative Assessment

- Purpose: evaluates student achievement at the end of a unit or course.
- When used: at the conclusion of a learning sequence.
- Examples: end-of-unit tests, presentations, portfolios, final projects.

Using a range of assessments ensures we capture the diverse ways in which students demonstrate learning.

Assessment in Practice at West Coast Steiner School

At West Coast Steiner School, teachers integrate a variety of assessment tools—both formative and summative—while considering each child’s unique learning journey. Students are offered multiple modalities to express their understanding. For instance, during a Class 5 unit on Ancient Greece, students might demonstrate learning through:

- Main Lesson book
- Unit tests or quizzes
- Creative projects, such as a board game or pastel artwork depicting Greek mythology
- Oral presentations
- Reports or logical written work
- Musical compositions, like writing and performing a song about the gods

To support assessment, teachers use checklists, observation notes, teacher created tests, rubrics, and reflective practice to ensure teaching remains responsive and relevant.

Multiple Intelligences & Individual Potential

Inspired by Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences, we recognise that intelligence is not a single fixed attribute. Gardner identified nine intelligences:

- Linguistic
- Logical-mathematical
- Musical
- Spatial
- Bodily-kinesthetic
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Naturalistic
- (Later, existential was also considered)

Steiner education shares this belief in the uniqueness of each learner. We must celebrate the diverse talents and learning styles of every child. It is important to actively seek to understand what a student has learned. As Steiner said:

“We must always remember that if we have already formed a conclusion, we cannot learn anything.” (1994)

Our goal is to foster individuals who think critically, feel deeply, and act ethically, while also developing creativity and practical skills. Many factors contribute to a child's success—including nutrition, emotional support, safety, and a nurturing environment. As the old saying goes:

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

Whole-School Assessment and Diagnostic Tools

As part of Learning Support, we maintain a *Whole-School Assessment Plan* that evolves over time to best inform our community about student progress. This plan currently focuses on diagnostic assessment, which:

- Identifies specific strengths and challenges
- Personalises instruction
- Informs intervention strategies
- Provides tangible, analysable data for stakeholders

However, it is essential to remember that children are not numbers. Standardised tests may not always reflect a child's true understanding due to:

- Limited written skills
- Sensory or emotional needs
- Learning differences
- Cultural or social contexts

Our diagnostic assessments are selected with care, alignment to Steiner pedagogy, and student well-being in mind. We review these tools annually to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

Brightpath Writing Assessment

One key tool we currently use (and a personal favourite of mine) is **Brightpath Writing**, a research-based diagnostic and formative writing assessment for Years K–9. Developed over 20 years, Brightpath allows teachers to:

- Assess student writing against a common scale
- Receive targeted next-step teaching points
- Track writing growth over time

Narrative assessments occur twice yearly from Class 2–6, while Persuasive assessments are added for Classes 5–6.

Writing instruction is scaffolded developmentally. Students are taught to:

- Plan and structure narratives
- Include character development, setting, and plot
- Use creative language and punctuation

For example, students might respond to a prompt like:
"I opened the door and to my surprise I saw..."

In younger classes, responses may be verbal, illustrated or include teacher-scribed elements. By Class 6, students write independently, showcasing complex plots and characters. Students who require support receive assistance from Learning Support teachers or educationa, and scribes can be used when appropriate.

Many students are deeply invested in their stories and request to continue them after assessment—an indicator of their engagement and ownership of learning. Teachers can be quite crafty in disguising this test as a fun activity rather than presenting it as a formal assessment in the younger years and the in the upper years, students are able to receive valuable feedback on specific ways to improve their writing. This provides important insights into their own learning, helping them take greater responsibility as they prepare for high school.

Teachers mark writing using the Brightpath Teacher's Ruler, evaluating elements such as:

- Sentence structure
- Spelling and punctuation
- Narrative structure
- Vocabulary
- Creative content

This tool not only guides teaching but also offers valuable insights to understand and support their child's growth. At staff meetings, teachers engage in cross-marking to maintain fairness and objectivity in assessment.

Conclusion

Assessment in a Steiner setting is not just about measurement—it is about understanding the whole child. Through a careful blend of diagnostic tools, formative insights, and summative evaluations, we strive to ensure that every student is seen, heard, and supported in their individual journey.

We assess not to label, but to guide.

We teach not just to inform, but to transform.

If you are interested in reading more about Brightpath checkout these links:

[About Brightpath](#)

[Narrative Learning Progressions](#)

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