

Help! my class isn't MAKING PROGRESS!



If you feel anxious that some pupils are not improving, **Peter Greaves** has some practical steps that will help you move learning forward...

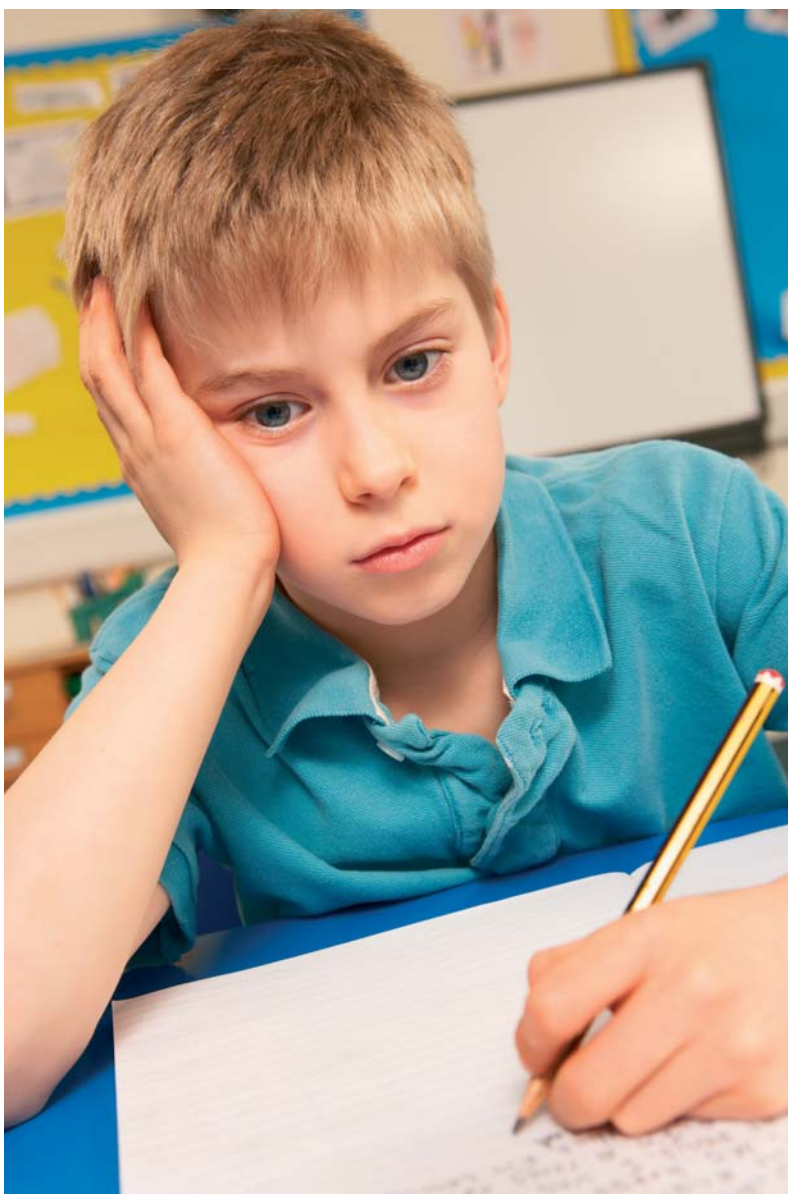
If a teacher feels that their class isn't making progress, the key question to ask them is "What is making you think that?" Broadly speaking, there are likely to be two sources of disquiet.

The first will be voices from outside the classroom, and the loudest external voice these days is data. Nearly all schools track pupil attainment in the main subject areas. This data may be collected half-terminally, meaning we are now far enough into the year for this to be weighing heavily on our minds. We will find ourselves scanning alphabetical lists and talking ourselves down as we perceive there to be too many unchanging numbers and letters as the columns spread across the page.

The second reason we can be thinking our class is not making progress, however, is far more serious – our own gut feeling. We mark the pupils' learning and feel that we are writing the same things in the same pupils' books each time, and this can turn into despair that nothing is changing.

Whatever your reasons may be, act on your concern. It means you are being reflective and that you have high expectations of both yourself and your pupils. Your worry is unlikely to just disappear, so here are some ideas about what you can do to turn a negative feeling into something more productive.

Firstly, identify the pupils in your class whose progress you are anxious about, because it will not be all of them! A practical way of doing this is to take a class list and three colours of highlighter pen – one for 'no worries', one for 'a few worries' and one for 'Aaaagh!' This will help



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you to become more definite about the particular pupils that are causing concern and may also help you to identify a pattern or grouping that needs targeting.

Once you have narrowed it down, begin to look at actual evidence. Look further back at data to see where these pupils were two years ago. Remember, no pupil's improvement is completely linear and it can be hard to spot the stop/start nature of progress across just a couple of terms. Try getting books out and look carefully at work that was being produced at the beginning of the year, or even last year if the books were passed on. Draw all the information together, but make sure you also make notes of any improvements – these can be built on.

Then, and this is by far the most useful part, find someone you can sit down with to share your anxieties. This might be your line manager, but it can be just as helpful to sit down with a colleague you know and trust who teaches in a different part of school. Talk with them about your concerns, show the books, look at the data together and you will find that out of the conversation flows practical steps that you can take, a couple of pupils at a time, to move them on. This may involve using a TA in a different way, or meeting with a parent. Perhaps you will change some groupings or personalise homework? As you articulate your thoughts, and consider the advice of a more detached colleague, you will find creative courses of action that kick-start those key pupils, handing you back your feeling of control.

And just to close, you tend to find that practitioners reflective

enough to be genuinely concerned for the progress of the class are the very ones who are bringing their pupils on, even if that can be tricky to spot from up close.