

Flexible grouping – Secondary R.E

By Liam Milne

Flexible grouping uses pupil data to organise pupils into temporary groups. These groups will change regularly, based upon the needs, knowledge and skills of the individual pupils. A key factor of flexible grouping is that while all pupils are working towards the *same* learning goal, the work addresses pupils' varying learning needs. Flexible grouping is a powerful and effective form of scaffolding, which can have a positive effect on pupil engagement and attainment.

Flexible grouping is most effective when it utilises different forms of data, such as that taken from formative and summative assessments or from teacher observation in prior lessons to create groups, with the desire to improve every pupil, regardless of the teaching task. For example, I used flexible grouping when I taught a lesson on exams skills and specifically, the benefits of using appraisal – by this I mean, giving value to a piece of evidence – in RE extended writing answers. I spent two thirds of an hour-long period looking at examples of when appraisal is applied correctly and incorrectly in model answers, whilst also giving my pupils the opportunity to practice this skill. At the end of the hour the pupils completed an exam question in which they were expected to demonstrate an understanding of how to appraise effectively. However, after marking these answers it became apparent that six pupils were still unsure of what appraisal was and how it could be applied in their answers.

So, with this in mind, in the next lesson I placed all pupils in the class in groups and gave them tasks based on their performance in the exam question attempted. The six pupils who had shown a lack of understanding with regards to appraisal and its application were placed into a group led by me. I was able to work with these pupils closely, giving them, at times, one-to-one tuition and guidance regarding how they could appraise. I was able to use flexible grouping to break down the concept and address any misconceptions that the pupils had in this area. Once I was confident that they had understood how to apply this skill, we completed an exam question together, creating a model answer which they were able to use as a point of reference in the future.

One of the real benefits of using flexible grouping regularly is that you can work closely with all pupils that you teach at different times, depending on their needs and the task you are giving them. This helps to reduce the stigma associated with working with the teacher, as it becomes a common part of your lessons.