

Getting to grips with data: six cautionary tales

A number of cautionary tales have emerged from Starpath's partner schools when it comes to storing and managing data. We have gathered some of this advice for schools wishing to improve student achievement through an evidence-based approach.

Cautionary Tale 1: Use the SMS to store all achievement data

- Establish a school-wide policy that all achievement data is stored on the SMS.
- A comprehensive academic profile for individual students is needed.
- Departing staff often means departing data.

Cautionary Tale 2: Always use and retain the student's unique ID

- Matching data electronically requires the use of a unique ID for each student for accuracy.
- When downloading a list of students to record achievement data, or saving the Tabular Report of an e-asTTle assessment, always include and retain the student ID or NSN in the saved record.

Cautionary Tale 3: Store all original data files in a data archive file

- Data uploaded into the SMS often updates a student's status but does not retain the actual data entered.
- Level 1 credits obtained in the current year are usually added to and over-write the Level 1 credits obtained in any previous year, so the actual number of credits earned prior to the current year are 'lost'.
- Retaining the original files in an archive file helps when you want to analyse the number of Level 1 credits obtained in any given year.

Cautionary Tale 4: Check data for integrity

- Make sure that the data entered in the SMS match the original data file – errors in transfer are possible.
- Check the values are valid.

Cautionary Tale 5: Avoid missing data

- You will need as much achievement data about individual students as you can possibly obtain in order to build a comprehensive academic profile.
- Follow up student absences from assessments and ensure that all completed assessments are marked and recorded.
- Where possible, seek achievement data from a student's previous school to help complete their academic profile.

- Be prepared to share your data with other schools when a student leaves.

Cautionary Tale 6: Changing the school's SMS is a time for carefully planned change management

- A change in SMS provider requires careful planning to ensure that all records are successfully migrated from the old system to the new.
- All staff who use the system need adequate and timely training to make the best use of the new SMS.
- Such a move will need a clearly articulated change management plan which includes widespread consultation to check that all aspects of the change are considered and able to be addressed.