

## Summary

This chapter examines how formative assessment – frequent, interactive assessments of student understanding and progress to identify learning needs and shape teaching – can help countries realise both quality and equity in educational outcomes. Between 2002 and 2004, the OECD examined formative assessment policy and practice in exemplary classrooms in lower secondary schools in eight systems (Australia [Queensland], three Canadian provinces, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand and Scotland). *Formative Assessment: Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms* (OECD, 2005) also included reviews of English-, French- and German-language literature on formative assessment.

Each of the case study countries has made important strides in advancing the practice of formative assessment. They are motivated by quantitative and qualitative evidence that teaching which incorporates formative assessment has helped to raise levels of student achievement, and has better enabled teachers to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations, helping to improve the equity of student outcomes.

While each of the countries participating in the study has policies to promote the wider practice of formative assessment, policy can do more. Countries that use a mix of approaches and make important investments in promoting change and building capacity are likely to push changes much further.

There is *legislation* promoting and supporting the practice of formative assessment and establishing it as a priority. There are efforts to encourage *the use of summative data for formative purposes*. *Guidelines* on effective teaching and formative assessment have been embedded in the national curriculum and other materials. The *provision of tools and exemplars* supports effective formative assessment. Investments in *special initiatives and innovative programmes* incorporate formative assessment approaches. There is also *teacher professional development* for formative assessment. All education systems will need to strengthen the policy mix and to make deeper investments if they are to promote real changes in teaching and assessment throughout education systems.

Countries will also need to better align macro- and micro-level policy approaches. At the most basic level, alignment means that education stakeholders ensure that policies do not compete with each other. At a more sophisticated level, the elements of formative and summative assessment reinforce each other. More consistent use of formative assessment throughout education systems may help stakeholders address the barriers to its wider practice in classrooms.