

Primary assessment in England consultation

June 22nd 2017

This consultation seeks views on the future of primary assessment and the implications for accountability.

For full information about the consultation see

https://consult.education.gov.uk/assessment-policy-and-development/primary-assessment/supporting_documents/Primary%20assessment%20in%20England.pdf

The response below was submitted jointly on behalf of The Mathematical Association and the Association of Teachers of Mathematics on June 22nd, 2017.

Q1. The EYFSP measures a child's development against the ELGs set out in the EYFS statutory framework. Should the profile be improved to better assess a child's knowledge, skill, understanding and level of development at the end of the early years? If so, please describe which elements could be added, removed or modified.

- *Yes we believe the profile should be improved. Our suggestions include:*
 - *Focus on numbers 1-10;*
 - *Remove doubling and halving;*
 - *Remove adding and subtracting by counting on and back from the EYFSP as these are wholly inappropriate for some young children and there is no research evidence that children of age 5 can do this;*
 - *Ensure a focus on number sense (Nuffield Foundation Report: Using manipulatives in the foundations of arithmetic 2017);*
 - *Include conceptual and relational understanding (e.g. comparison, reasoning, composition).*

Q2. The EYFSP currently provides an assessment as to whether a child is 'emerging, expecting or exceeding' the level of development in each ELG. Is this categorisation the right approach? Is it the right approach for children with SEND?

- *We do not support this type of summative labelling of children and therefore disagree that this level of categorisation is appropriate. Reasons include:*
 - *Labelling children should be avoided. In particular, this will disadvantage summer born children, who are likely to be 'emerging' simply because of their birth date. In EYFS there is a large difference in experience and development between the youngest and oldest children at this age (25% difference);*
 - *Some research points to any labelling as a self-fulfilling prophecy;*
 - *There is a reluctance from teachers to label children as 'exceeding' as at this age it is impossible to predict that this label will be realised;*

- *'Emerging' includes a very wide range of children, encompassing all children from those with serious SEN to those not quite reaching the 'expected' level.*

Q3. What steps could we take to reduce the workload and time burden on those involved in administering the EYFSP?

- *We would welcome approaches that reduce workload and time burden. Gathering evidence detracts from teaching. Assessment for learning is an essential part of the process of teaching; however, it is the burden of evidence that is onerous for teachers to compile. Our suggestions on how to do this include:*
 - *Reducing the mathematics content in the EYFSP, so it requires less time, in particular those elements detailed in our answer to Q1 which are inappropriate and thus difficult to gather evidence of. Instead use simpler number tasks linked to key foundational elements of mathematics (cardinality, subitising, simple number relationships 1-10);*
 - *Teachers find it hard to collect evidence as much is verbal and practical. Photographs only go so far. This makes moderation difficult. So we would recommend that teachers' judgements are accepted and recognised, reducing the evidence required. This should be supported by professional development. It should be sufficient for a moderator to ask 'Is what the moderator sees consistent with the assessments made?'.*

Q4. How could we improve the consistency and effectiveness of the EYFSP moderation process whilst reducing burdens?

- *We would suggest simplifying the EYFSP so children are easily and quickly assessed through everyday activity. The following points need to be considered:*
 - *The use of sampling for accountability;*
 - *Improved funding for in-school support;*
 - *There need to be clear criteria and high quality exemplification to enable robust moderation;*
 - *Moderators need more training to moderate in mathematics (most EY professionals are language and literacy experts) and this needs addressing urgently;*
 - *Moderators and teachers need funding to maintain and further develop their expertise;*
 - *Professional judgements need ongoing professional development. This currently does not exist.*

Q5. Any form of progress measure requires a starting point. Do you agree that it is best to move to a baseline assessment in reception to cover the time a child is in primary school (reception to key stage 2)? If you agree, then please tell us what you think the key characteristics of a baseline assessment in reception should be. If you do not agree, then please explain why.

- *Our position would be that there should not be a baseline assessment in reception. Our reasons include:*
 - *All teachers make a formative assessment of children on entry to reception, but this should not provide robust data for accountability measures. Only measures strongly correlated with KS2 attainment would serve as a suitable baseline. Baseline should be about children's learning, not accountability;*
 - *Measures of progress need to be based on the cohort not on individuals;*
 - *Perhaps look at the health visitors' reports for the cohort, and use this as a basis. Other measures of deprivation/disadvantage could also be used to compare cohorts.*

Q6. If we were to introduce a reception baseline, at what point in the reception year do you think it should be administered? In particular, we are interested in the impact on schools, pupils and teaching of administering the assessment at different times.

- *As stated in Question 5 we do not support a baseline in reception. Neither should a baseline be used for accountability purposes. However, if a baseline is introduced, the following points need to be considered:*
 - *Any baseline assessment should be based on observations of the child over at least half a term (see NAHT document on assessment);*
 - *There needs to be research that demonstrates the assessment can provide an adequate baseline – this would require an adequately funded longitudinal study;*
 - *We question the extent to which PIPS is an effective predictor of KS2 performance.*

Q7. Our view is that it would be difficult to change key stage 1 assessment in order that it could be used as the baseline for progress in the long term. If you disagree, what could be done to improve the key stage 1 assessments so that they would be sufficiently detailed, and trusted as a fair and robust baseline?

- *We agree that it would be difficult to change current KS1 assessment, based on testing, to provide a baseline for progress. The KS1 NCTs skew the curriculum because teachers ‘teach to the test’ and avoid the use of manipulatives due to the fact these are not allowed in the tests. This is despite the fact that the mastery curriculum is fully supportive of the use of manipulatives;*
- *Our suggestion is to remove KS1 tests and use Teacher Assessment, supported by the development of high quality exemplification;*
- *Exemplification materials should illustrate and review fewer, key mathematical ideas in greater depth. There is a reliable body of research pinpointing key ideas in young children’s mathematical development that should be referred to when developing these;*
- *The Teacher Assessment framework should be re-written to take the above point into account.*

Q8. If we were to introduce a new reception baseline measure, do you agree that we should continue to use key stage 1 teacher assessment data as the baseline for measuring progress in the interim years before a new measure was in place? If you disagree, what do you think we should use as the baseline instead?

- *As stated in Question 5 we do not support a national baseline introduced in Reception.*
- *We do not agree that KS1 teacher assessment data should be used as the baseline for the following reasons:*
 - *We believe that measuring progress against a Reception ‘baseline’ is flawed and unnecessary. You may find that parental socio-economic status and current health visitors’ reports would form an adequate basis. These are already available;*
 - *We recommend funding a longitudinal research study into the extent that different forms of baseline assessment are linked to end of KS2 attainment;*
 - *Children at the end of KS1 still have significant age differences which relate to time in school. High stakes testing will inevitably lead to teachers teaching what is tested. This will not only skew the baseline but also narrow the curriculum.*

Q9. If a baseline assessment is introduced in reception, in the longer term, would you favour removing the statutory requirement for all-through primary schools to administer assessments at the end of key stage 1?

- *As previously stated (answers to Qs 5,6 & 8) we do not believe a baseline assessment should be introduced. We would also favour removing the statutory requirement to administer tests at the end of KS1 for the following reasons:*
 - *Assessment should be integral to learning – hence teacher assessment is a more effective and accurate measure of children’s progress;*
 - *Problem solving and reasoning (both key elements of the National Curriculum) can only be assessed through on-going teacher assessment and are best assessed by the teacher;*
 - *The current requirements for KS1 teacher assessment are not appropriate. These should change to be ‘best fit’ rather than ‘meets all’; even tests and exams are a ‘best fit’ model;*
 - *Assessment should not be linked to accountability as it is currently. If it is, ‘gaming’ takes place. Perhaps we need a better resourced moderation if assessments are to be used for accountability purposes. For accountability, sampling is a cheaper alternative that is less likely to distort the curriculum experience;*
 - *When children first start school international research indicates they need to be building relationships with their peers and with adults, rather than being tested, in order to benefit fully from the educational opportunities offered. Teacher assessment is ongoing and integral to everything teachers do. While teachers are assessing all the time, including from the beginning of Reception, it doesn’t make sense to try to use these assessments as a baseline. These assessments should be for internal use rather than external accountability;*
 - *There is no evidence that the EYFS is a good predictor for KS2 attainment. Without a funded longitudinal research study, progress based on this baseline is meaningless.*

Q10. If we were to introduce a reception baseline to enable the creation of reception to key stage 2 progress measures for all-through primaries, what would be the most effective accountability arrangements for infant, middle and junior schools’ progress measures?

- *As we have previously stated, we do not think a baseline assessment should be introduced. In addition, the process of assessment needs to be disentangled from that of accountability:*
 - *A national, Reception baseline will distort the young children’s experience as they begin school, as previously described;*
 - *Teachers’ conversations reveal a lot more about pupils’ progress than a one-off test.*

Q11. Do you think that the department should remove the statutory obligation to carry out teacher assessment in English reading and mathematics at key stage 2, when only test data is used in performance measures?

- *We believe that teacher assessment is the only way of assessing the entire curriculum for the following reasons:*
 - *National Curriculum Tests can only assess those few aspects of the curriculum that can be assessed in a timed written test;*

- *Teachers see pupils on a regular basis; their assessments compare favourably to testing which is necessarily a snapshot. In addition, pupils' performance can be affected by family circumstance, test environment, for example, on a single day;*
- *Teacher assessment, with clear criteria, high quality exemplification and robust moderation, is a far more effective, reliable method of assessment than testing.*

Q12. Do you agree that the key stage 1 English grammar, punctuation and spelling test should remain non-statutory beyond the 2016 to 2017 academic year, with test papers available for teachers to use as they see fit?

- *No response*

Q13. At what point in key stage 2 do you think the multiplication tables check should be administered? Please explain the basis for your views. a) At the end of year 4 b) During year 5 c) During year 6

- *Whilst we recognise that it is important that children know their multiplication facts, we are not in favour of such a test for the following reasons:*
 - *All teachers already teach fluency in children's knowledge of multiplication facts. There is no need for an expensive national test to ensure this takes place.*
 - *Such an approach undermines teachers' professionalism and places undue stress on parents and primary aged children;*
 - *While all teachers work hard with children to help them learn multiplication facts, the proposed test emphasises rote learning and rapid recall over understanding of mathematical structures*
 - *Introducing a separate test on multiplication facts is highlighting one aspect of mathematics over many other important ones;*

Despite the concerns raised above should the government decide to go ahead with such an assessment we would make the following recommendations:

- *The test should take place at either the very end of year 4 (July) or in the autumn term of year 5 in line with end of year expectation for year 4*
- *No test should be held in year 6; this is too late to address any difficulties*
- *In effect the year 6 NC tests test the application of this knowledge hence this new proposed assessment needs to precede them*
- *Any test should include a range of formats, including gap filling, completing products and quotients, and not attempt to be an exhaustive test*
- *The time given should be ample so that pupils are not under undue stress*
- *An online assessment would preferable to a paper based version*
- *No test should be used for teacher or school accountability*

Q14. How can we ensure that the multiplication tables check is implemented in a way that balances burdens on schools with benefit to pupils?

- *Although we do not support any multiplication tables check it is worth re-iterating that any such test should not be added to the existing year 6 assessments because they already result in skewed teaching and stress in year 6.*

- *Easy access to an online test would allow teachers to administer it efficiently*
- *Randomly generated questions would ensure that the result is reliable and a true reflection of the child's knowledge and allow pupils to sit the assessment one after the other*
- *Online access would also be a comfortable format for children to access*

Q15. Are there additional ways, in the context of the proposed statutory assessments, that the administration of statutory assessments in primary schools could be improved to reduce burdens?

- *Our position is that we do not support the view that Y2 and Y6 children need to take tests that distort the primary mathematics curriculum, and in addition cause stress for teachers, parents, carers and children at points of the child's educational journey where excitement and engagement in learning mathematics needs to be nurtured, preparing them for their next educational phase. We would like to suggest a reduction in the quantity and implementation of the KS2 NC tests. Whilst we argue for the removal of KS1 national tests we would like to suggest a reduction in the quantity and implementation of the KS2 tests for accountability purposes. Our suggestions apply to KS2 only and include:*
 - *Not testing every child; use of sampling to generate a national picture;*
 - *A more nuanced assessment of the entire mathematics curriculum would be accomplished if sampling was used e.g. that used by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU). (APU allowed children to undertake different types of tasks not just timed written tests).*
 - *Consider testing of this sort every other year rather than every year;*
 - *Remove the current timing restriction of 40 minutes and extend this to at least 1 hour per test;*
 - *Relax the current exam conditions; e.g. allow children to use equipment;*
 - *Spread the mathematics tests out over the term or year so children are not sitting three mathematics tests in one week (along with three English tests);*

Q16. Do you agree that the statutory assessment of writing should afford teachers greater flexibility in determining a pupil's overall standard of attainment than is currently the case? Please give reasons for your answer.

- *No response*

Q17. Please give details of any robust alternative approaches to the assessment of English writing, which the Department for Education should explore.

- *No response*

Q18. Please give details of any effective models of moderation or standardisation of teacher assessment that the Department for Education should explore.

- *Our suggestions include:*
 - *Effective moderation requires funding;*
 - *Provide high quality exemplification materials and provide (fund) teachers with time to work together within and across schools, with expert external support. Teachers' conversations reveal much about pupils' progress and teachers learn much about progress by discussion between themselves;*

- *Develop a nationally agreed and centrally run system for moderation with moderators trained in mathematics – currently most KS1 moderators are language and English specialists;*
- *Produce higher quality and variety in the exemplification materials offered for standardisation;*
- *In addition funding needs to be provided to enable teachers to be released from the classroom in order to organise material for moderation meetings, otherwise there is a significant increase in an already extremely heavy workload;*
- *Awarding organisations rely on teachers being trained and external moderators all working to clear criteria using high quality exemplification. It would be good to see these successful systems adopted in primary. This is what happened when the EYFSP was first introduced and it worked well.*

Q19. Do you think that any of our proposals could have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific students, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics' (including disability, gender, race and religion or belief)? Please provide evidence to support your response.

- *Our view is that without a definition and alongside high quality exemplification of national standards any child who transfers between schools is at a disadvantage. The removal of levels without any alternative has caused a hiatus in schools.*

Q20. How could any adverse impact be reduced and are there any ways we could better advance equality of opportunity? Please provide evidence to support your response.

- *Our position is, as previously stated (Q18), that we need to ensure there is high quality exemplification of standards, training and support for all teachers (and those that advise and train teachers) and experts who can undertake cross-school moderation.*