



# Primary Assessment Consultation briefing notes

**Do you agree that the reception baseline assessment should not go ahead?**

**The Primary Assessment consultation is a great opportunity to raise your concerns with the Government. These notes will support you to make your views heard.**

The consultation can be found here: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/assessment-policy-and-development/primary-assessment/>

**It closes on the 22nd of June at 5pm.** You can respond to any questions you choose, and do not need to offer responses to all the questions.

Feel free to include the points raised in this briefing in your response – but it will have the most impact if you express your points in your own words.

On the consultation website, you will be asked to complete sections with your

- name
- email address
- organisation (complete if relevant to you)
- role (parent, teacher, school leader, governor, academic, organisation, etc.)

Following some background information, you will find **Questions 6 - 9 relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile** -- including possible revisions, workload and moderation -- to which you may also want to respond.

**Baseline assessment consultation begins on Page 7 of the website, entitled 'The best starting point for measuring progress in primary school'**

## Question 10

**10. 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.**

**We do not agree. Our top concerns are:**

- **Baseline assessment is an invalid way of holding primary schools to account**
  - the difficulty in making valid and reliable assessments of very young children
  - the inability of early assessments to predict later attainment
- **Baseline assessment is harmful to children**
  - the risk that children with low scores are indiscriminately labelled as low ability
  - early labelling is particularly damaging to children from deprived backgrounds and those in the early stages of learning English

- tests distract from the priority of building relationships and settling children into school
- high-stakes accountability has a negative impact on early years practice, in both preschool and reception
- **It is a poor policy which has already been tried – and abandoned**
  - the policy has already failed
  - most schools have rejected baseline assessment, even when offered the schemes for free
  - the DfE would be ill-advised to rush a new assessment through for September 2019, without proper development and trialing

Question 11 also relates to baseline assessment. Assuming that the policy were to go ahead, it asks when it should take place. We suggest using this opportunity to again state your opposition to it being administered at any point in the reception year.

#### **Question 11**

**11. 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.**

## **Background notes**

### ***Assessing 4- and 5-year-old children***

It is extremely difficult to judge the attainment of four- and five-year-old children in a snap-shot assessment. The 2015 attempt at a reception baseline for accountability included both observational and snap-shot assessments – neither approach worked. The observational model was seen as unreliable and very time consuming, whilst the snap-shot assessments disrupted the children’s learning, and were not adaptable enough to be inclusive for all children.

### ***The impact of low scores***

One major concern with reception baseline assessment is that children could be inappropriately labelled with damaging consequences for their future development: children with low scores could be identified as low ability. This would result in low expectations being set for these children, which is especially worrying for children who have SEND or speak English as an additional language as well as summer born children, and also children who just aren’t ready to be assessed in this way.

The consultation suggests that to prevent the negative uses of data, schools will not be told their results. This won’t work. The DfE has said that the assessment will be “teacher mediated,” so teachers will know how children performed. The prospect of high stakes data moving through the system will be unacceptable for head teachers, whose jobs are at risk if the results don’t come out right. Furthermore, it is not clear what will happen if parents, schools or journalists request the data under the Freedom of Information Act.

### ***There is no evidence that the policy can work –it is experimental***

Assessment at the beginning of school is not a valid predictor of how much progress they will show six years later. There is no international precedent for the DfE’s reception baseline assessment and no evidence that it can work for school accountability.

This is an experimental policy and it should not be rushed through when so many issues remain unresolved.

### ***Baseline failed in 2015***

This consultation document does not acknowledge the reasons why baseline assessment failed in 2015, and it also fails to offer any new information which could explain why reception baseline assessment might work in the future. The problems extended far beyond having three different providers.

### ***Schools have rejected baseline assessment***

Schools have rejected baseline assessment: in 2015 15,421 schools undertook DfE approved baseline assessments; in 2016 just 3901 did, despite DfE incentives and encouragement from the providers to sign up again for one of the schemes at no cost to the school (the DfE was paying).

### ***Disrupting the reception year***

In order to gain a favourable outcome for the league tables, schools will feel under pressure to secure a low baseline. This could undermine high quality early years practice, and also disrupt the essential work of schools with nursery classes. The reception year is an important time for children and this policy risks undermining the work that needs to take place in this class.

### ***Children who change schools***

Many children change school between starting reception and taking the Year 6 SATs, but DfE has not said how this assessment will work for the children and schools affected by pupil mobility. In the last year for which data is available (2011) 38% of children had moved school at least once before taking their Year 6 SATs. The DfE doesn't know how many children change schools now.

### ***Children will be assessed before they legally need to start school***

The assessment will be designed to hold schools to account, but it will be taken by children before they have reached statutory school age. Children are not legally of school age until the term after their 5th birthday.

### ***The DfE doesn't have a plan, but it wants baseline to be introduced quickly***

The DfE intends to introduce the new reception baseline assessment in September 2019, but does not yet know how the assessment should work or what it should look like. This timeline leaves very little scope to develop and trial a new assessment. In fact, given that the DfE must give schools one year's notice of new assessments, they will only have one year to prepare. Our children deserve better than a rushed assessment.

### ***Useful research and reports:***

**Research undertaken by UCL into the implementation of the reception baseline assessment in 2015 found the following:**

- Teachers and school leaders had serious doubts as to the accuracy of the assessments and their use in measuring progress, in relation to all three baseline providers. **Only 7.7% of respondents to the survey agreed the data was an 'accurate and fair way to assess children'** because of the wide range of variables in the assessment process.

- Many teachers and school leaders doubted the use of measuring progress from Reception to Year 6 given the problems of assessing accurately at age four and the variability of children's patterns of progress and development. **Only 6.7% of survey respondents agreed it was 'a good way to assess how primary schools perform'**.
- **The majority of schools already used informal on-entry assessments** to plan teaching and to identify children with particular needs; the Baseline Assessment was not seen as an improvement on these methods.
- Most schools selected the Early Excellence baseline due to the similarity to the existing EYFS and the promotion of this scheme as 'early years friendly'; some felt under pressure to do so from their local authorities or because other providers were removed.
- **Baseline assessment had a negative impact on teaching and learning**, including encouraging the practice of 'stopping teaching' and was not seen as helping teachers get to know pupils better.
- Baseline assessment had **little use in terms of identification of additional needs**.
- There was a **significant effect on teachers' workloads** particularly where schools were continuing to use their existing on-entry assessment, which fitted better with data tracking systems or with the existing EYFS Profile. Survey data suggests this workload effect occurred with all of the three providers.
- Few schools planned to provide information on Baseline Assessment scores to parents. A limited sample of parents revealed that most were unaware of the assessment; some were content that the assessment would help teachers get to know children better but others had concerns about accuracy and the young age of the children.
- School leaders were **uncomfortable with the use of private providers** and the related marketing that they received, and felt vulnerable at a time when there had been a great deal of policy change related to assessment.

**The Education Select Committee, a cross party group of MPs, has recently published a [report](#) on primary assessment that was highly sceptical about the DfE's plans for reception baseline assessment.** It held evidence sessions with expert witnesses, as well as Nick Gibb and two baseline providers. Here are some of the issues that they raised:

- whether the data collected will be valid and reliable and can accurately be used to measure progress to Key Stage 2
- The impact on pupils' experience and wellbeing
- The impact on early years practitioners, including workload
- Inaccuracy resulting from the measurement of small cohorts
- children who move or join schools partway through primary

The report states that **“the government fails to appreciate potential harmful consequences of introducing a baseline measure for school accountability in reception”** and **“the primary purpose of a measure of children at age 4 should be a diagnostic tool to help early years**

practitioners identify individual needs of pupils and should only be carried out through teacher assessment.” The majority of schools already undertake this form of assessment in reception, which helps children to settle into school and teachers to understand each child’s individual development.

Rob Coe, the Director of CEM, whose organisation runs one of the DfE approved reception baseline assessment, and therefore has an interest in reception baseline continuing, appears sceptical about the policy. Speaking at the Education Select Committee oral evidence session he made the following statements:

“Yes, there are massive risks. It is deeply unpopular with the vast majority of early years teachers, so that is a big problem .... As a baseline, obviously the pressures are different. The incentive is to want to do badly on a baseline if it is progress you are going to be measured on.”

Rob Coe appears to make a strong case for the existing arrangements in most schools, where teachers complete on-entry assessments to help children settle into school and support teaching and learning, not for school accountability.

**Better without Baseline believes the DfE’s proposals for reception baseline assessment are problematic and the policy should not go ahead. The DfE has not addressed the failure of reception baseline assessment in 2015 and lacks a clear vision for this policy.**



TACTYC – Association for Professional Development in Early Years

Early Education – British Association for Early Childhood Education

Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA)

The Primary Charter

Early Childhood Forum (ECF)

The National Union of Teachers (NUT)

Association of Teacher and Lecturers (ATL)

Professional Association for Childcare and the Early Years (PACEY)

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

London Early Years Foundation (LEYF)

Save Childhood Movement (SCM)

Unison Education and Children’s Services

University of Sheffield School of Education

Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT)

The UK Assessment Reform Group

The Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM)

The Mathematical Association (MA)

The British Educational Research Association (BERA)

National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)

Mothers at Home Matter (MAHM)

What about the Children? (WATCH)