



PRESS RELEASE
GOVERNMENT CONSULTS ON REHASH OF FAILED PROPOSALS FOR
BASELINE ASSESSMENT IN RECEPTION

30 March 2017

Today the Department of Education has released a consultation on its latest proposals for Primary Assessment, including another attempt to reintroduce a “baseline assessment” in the Reception Year.

In 2016, the government was forced to scrap its last attempt at a reception baseline due to lack of comparability between the different schemes approved, at a cost of up to £7million to the taxpayer. At a time of scarce resources for schools we cannot afford to waste time, money and above all, children’s interests on a second misconceived attempt at introducing a policy against the best advice of early years assessment experts and early years teachers and practitioners.

The early years sector, teaching unions and parents have consistently expressed concern at using a reception baseline as part of a high stakes school accountability measure because it:

- risks damaging children’s self-confidence and stigmatising parents by attaching **simplistic labels** to children which do not provide an accurate or useful picture of children’s current development
- is neither valid nor reliable, and **does not predict their future attainment**, especially in the case of a assessment focused on narrow aspects of numeracy and literacy
- cannot function effectively as both an **accountability tool** for school performances and an **assessment which informs teachers’ planning** for the learning of individual children.
- **Increases teachers workload** by needing to be done in addition to teachers’ own routine assessments of children’s starting points and **disrupts the settling-in period**
- does not reflect the reality that children may start in school at a range of points between age 2 and the start of statutory school age in the term after their fifth birthday. It therefore **fails to capture the input schools have made for 2- and 3-year-olds in nursery provision**, or disincentivises them from raising attainment for these younger children.
- acts a **disincentive for schools to work with feeder nurseries** to raise the attainment of children prior to the age of 4
- risks having a **distorting effect on the reception year**, which is part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with its own statutory assessment principles culminating in the EYFS Profile at the end of reception
- may result in a **narrowed curriculum focus** with potential negative effects on children’s early experiences and on parental involvement and confidence

A 2016 study by UCL Institute of Education revealed that schools and children had already been negatively impacted by the introduction of last year's schemes. Only 7% of the teachers surveyed felt that Baseline Assessment was an accurate and fair way of assessing children and 85% believed that it was unnecessary and had increased their workload.

Mary Bousted, General Secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers said:

The introduction of reception baseline assessment in 2015 was a failure; the Government was forced to abandon the policy. We do not believe that a new reception baseline assessment will provide the accurate and reliable data needed for a fair accountability system, or that a new assessment will support teaching and learning. Ministers have been unable to produce any evidence that an effective reception baseline assessment can be designed. Children, parents and teachers have endured too many rushed and ill- conceived assessment reforms in recent years. Our children are not guinea pigs, they should not be subject to further experimental tests.

Beatrice Merrick, Chief Executive of Early Education said

The concept of using an assessment in reception as the baseline a progress measure in primary schools is inherently flawed. There is very little predictive validity in the measures that have been proposed. Couple this with the huge cohort changes between reception and year 6, and the measure is so crude as to be of no real value – contextual data could be used if decisions were based on judgement not simply data. The arguments in support of its introduction are extremely weak, given the negative impacts of over-simplistic labelling of children at an early age, and the waste of teacher time and government money which would be better spent on raising quality of early years provision.

Wendy Ellyatt, Chief Executive, Save Childhood Movement said:

It simply is not acceptable for any system of accountability to compromise children's natural developmental processes. English children are increasingly being pressurised to perform to adult expectations and are not allowed to develop at their own pace. Instead of a culture that puts the wellbeing of children firmly at the centre of policymaking, we instead have a situation where evidence is ignored and the production of high-stakes national assessments has become the key goal. We believe this is a tragic betrayal of childhood.

Notes to editors

Better Without Baseline is a coalition of organisations including:

Save Childhood Movement (SCM)

TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in Early Years

British Association for Early Childhood Education (Early Education)

Cambridge Primary Review Trust

National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)

Pre-school Learning Alliance
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)
Unison Education and Children's Services
The Government's own Assessment Reform Group
The Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM)
The Mathematical Association (MA)
The British Educational Research Association (BERA)
Mothers at Home Matter (MAHM)
What About The Children? (WATCH)
Reclaiming Schools Network

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