



Open Letter – April 2016 Better without Baseline Coalition

The Better Without Baseline coalition welcomes the government's decision to abandon the planned baseline assessment system for school accountability purposes, but many of our fundamental concerns remain. The government acknowledges that the lack of data comparability between the approved schemes means the system simply will not work, but it remains committed to measuring pupil progress through primary school and will be considering other options.

We urge a constructive re-think, including serious engagement with the issues raised in the sustained argument and evidence against baseline assessment that we have presented from teaching unions, early years organisations, researchers and parents.

Any assessment system should be founded on protecting and promoting children's well-being, recognising the holistic nature of children's development in their early years. The Early Years Foundation Stage offers a tried and tested basis for understanding and supporting children's learning through observation so that practitioners can work with all of children's talents and interests, and best meet their learning and development needs. Reception teachers already use well-established EYFS approaches to assess and record children's progress, continuing for children aged 4-5 with the same kind of detailed assessments that have been supporting their learning since they entered early education at age 2, 3 or even younger.

Unfortunately, the DfE appears to be disregarding plentiful evidence that baseline schemes represent

- a waste of public money in a time of austerity
- a waste of teachers' valuable time
- disruption to the settling-in period in the reception year
- potential damage by attaching simplistic labels to children
- a narrowed curriculum focus with potential negative effects on children's early experiences and on parental involvement and confidence
- an inability to provide an accurate or useful picture of children's current development or to predict their future attainment.

For the next academic year, the DfE is encouraging schools to use a commercial baseline scheme for on-entry assessment and will continue to pay for it, on the mistaken assumption that this will add to teachers' ability to identify and meet the needs of their pupils. If schools opt to use these schemes, there will be needless increase in the millions of pounds already wasted on this flawed policy.

We remain opposed to the reintroduction of on-entry assessments such as these when there are far better ways for teachers to get to know and understand the learning needs of children new to school. We question the reasoning behind inserting an accountability measure into the beginning of the reception year, when large numbers of children will already have been receiving EYFS education in the school from age two or three.

The coalition opposes the DfE's plan to make the EYFS Profile non-statutory after this year. Although no assessment tool is perfect, the EYFSP remains a widely respected, meaningful and practical assessment, and should be retained at least until a clear, principled and effective improvement can be introduced.

We note that the DfE intends to begin a process of engagement with stakeholders around issues of early years assessment. We look forward to participating in these discussions, and will continue to press for policies which are based on firm evidence and made in the best interests of young children.

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