



Response to DfE Consultation on Primary Assessment

Better Without Baseline

June 2017

Question 8. What steps could we take to reduce the workload and time burden on those involved in administering the EYFSP?

The workload for the EYFSP need not be problematic, but we do not believe it is reasonable to ask reception teachers to additionally administer a baseline assessment for accountability purposes within the same year.

Question 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.

The proposal to establish a baseline assessment in the reception class is fundamentally flawed and should not be adopted. The Better Without Baseline coalition is highly concerned about the harmful effects of bringing high stakes accountability into the early years. The negative impacts include:

- labelling children as under-performing, which can result in lower expectations and therefore less effective support for the progress of these children who may in fact simply be younger, developing at different rates, have more limited life experiences, be growing up in disadvantage, or have home languages other than English
- distorting the early years curriculum, both in the reception year and in the preschool years; focus on the narrow curricular targets assessed is likely to detract from the rich, playful experiences which most benefit young children's well-being, learning and development
- disruption of the settling-in period in the reception year, where teachers' first priority is building relationships with children and parents, including getting to know each child as a complex individual in order to support their well-being and learning

We are also convinced by a substantial body of evidence that it is not possible to establish a reliable and valid reception baseline assessment that could map to later progress in any useful way. Rather than restate the evidence here, we would refer you to the evidence submitted by members of the Better Without Baseline coalition:

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)

Baseline assessment has been tried, and failed, before. It is a policy that has already cost millions of pounds at a time of intense financial pressure in education, wastes the time and energy of teachers who have much better ways of understanding children's starting points, and is opposed by those with expertise in the nature of learning and development of young children. While it may seem to offer an attractive solution to judging the effectiveness of primary schools, this is based on the false expectation of linear predictability of data, and does not take account of mobility of school populations. Rather than providing schools with a sound basis for judging later progress, the sealed data will be more like an unpredictable data time bomb.

Question 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.

There is no good time for a baseline assessment to be introduced in the reception year – if introduced too early children will not be sufficiently settled to be fairly assessed and the process will impact on settling in, and if too late there will be perverse incentives to delay teaching to suppress results and show greater progress.

Question 13. 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?

We challenge the validity of the idea of accountability based on a flawed progress measure. Accountability measures for the later years of primary must not be allowed to distort the curriculum within the EYFS which is carefully designed to give children age appropriate opportunities to develop and learn.

Question 24. 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.

As stated in response to Question 10, the baseline assessment proposals will have a particularly negative impact on children growing up in disadvantage, learning English as an additional language.