

Response ID ANON-6FQ1-T6SP-B

Submitted to **Primary assessment in England**

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Ministerial Foreword

Introduction

1 What is your name?

Name:

Dr Terry Wrigley

2 What is your email address?

Email:

terrywrigley@gmail.com

3 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Journal editor 'Improving Schools'

4 Which of these categories best describes your role?

Categories:

Academic/Researcher

5 Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

Reason for confidentiality:

Current system: statutory assessment in key stages 1 and 2

Preparing children to succeed at school

6 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.

Please write your response in this box.:

It is vital to maintain breadth in the EYFSP. There is ample research to show that it is the breadth of development which underpins later success. A narrower focus on pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, such as has been hinted at, would lead to a neglect of spoken communication and of the self-regulation exercised through play, making things and interaction with other children and adults.

7 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?

Please write your response in this box.:

I believe it is generally sound, and expressed positively. I can see no reason why it isn't appropriate for children with SEND. We should note that SEND covers multiple conditions and degrees of difficulty.

Early years foundation stage profile: workload

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

Please write your response in this box.:

I am unable to comment in detail on the workload issues. However, I would be seriously opposed to its replacement in the name of efficiency by a misleading and inappropriate short test.

Early years foundation stage profile: moderation

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

Please write your response in this box.:

Experience with other contexts of moderation suggests that it can become lighter with greater experience. It may no longer be necessary to examine all 17 ELGs during each visit.

The best starting point for measuring progress in primary school

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.

Please write your response in this box.:

It may appear fairer to schools to start in Reception but there are major obstacles in objective and predictive assessment of very young children, as shown by the Baseline pilot. Its most experienced provider is only able to show sound predictions for 4 in 10 children, and its own researchers have expressed serious doubts as to its utility with SEN or EAL children. The DfE unfortunately seems to have set very low criteria for approving providers, in that two of those approved had no longitudinal data to show.

A common problem with the tests was the use of test items designed for children after literacy and numeracy teaching for children before they had been taught, as an indicator of whether or not they were capable of learning. This resulted in test items which were entirely inappropriate and misleading. The Department should no longer attempt to overlook children's natural development, or continue to assume normal linear progress from 4 to 7 or indeed older.

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.

Please write your response in this box.:

I do not agree that there should be a formal test at any stage of Reception. It is inappropriate and misleading, and will simply result in nurseries narrowing down children's early experiences of learning.

12 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?

Please write your response in this box.:

I agree. Moreover, KS1 assessment should be a continuation of the EYFS approach in all its breadth though with some shift of emphasis.

The best starting point for measuring progress in primary school: interim years

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?

Please write your response in this box.:

The measurement of progress has proved parlous, in the various forms this has taken. In general it is clear that poverty slows development and conversely that the children of well-educated parents tend to progress faster. This is the case even after controlling for the initial position. Although there are some outliers, there is a well-established consensus in School Effectiveness research nationally and internationally that schools are responsible for only about 10% of the difference. Meanwhile, the collateral damage of standardised assessment is enormous, including narrowing teaching and curriculum-as-practised which leads towards stagnant PISA performance.

It is of course useful to learn from the most successful schools, and also to identify those which could benefit from additional support, but this can best be achieved by sample assessments which avoid the problems of mass assessment.

The role of key stage 1 statutory assessments

14 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?

Please write your response in this box.:

As stated above, baseline tests have proved extremely misleading. It is unfortunate that the Department seems to believe the only problem was incompatible between different providers, when even the most experienced provider has so many difficulties.

Monitoring national standards at key stage 1

Measuring progress in different types of school

15 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?

Please write your response in this box.:

The frequent repetition of "If we were" in this questionnaire suggests that the Department's mind is already made up.

A proportionate assessment system

16 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?

No

Please write your response in this box.:

No. Teacher assessment would provide far more reliable information for school improvement and pupil progress, though only if the pressures of high-stakes were reduced, as suggested by the Select Committee.

The Standards and Testing Agency's record in test provision has not been good. It has resulted, for example, in reading tests with texts to which many young children cannot relate, to maths tests which fail to assess mathematical thinking. Even the writing assessments, nominally teacher-led, have been constrained by very tight criteria which do not reflect composition or expression, as the Select Committee identified. Test items, but also more open tasks and challenges, should be used on a sample basis and as an ancillary to teacher assessment, not the reverse. Teacher assessment in reading would be capable of much greater breadth than tests in recent years.

Key stage 1 English grammar, punctuation and spelling test

17 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?

Yes

Please write your response in this box.:

Multiplication tables check

18 At what point in key stage 2 do you think the multiplication tables check should be administered? Please explain the basis for your views.

Not Answered

Please write your response in this box.:

There is little point to a national multiplications table test if it is not an accountability measure. This is yet another sign that teachers are mistrusted. Multiplication tables have their value but so do many other pieces of arithmetic knowledge: number bonds for addition and subtraction, an understanding of place value, the ability to move between different forms of fraction, etc. It is pure nostalgia that leads to their being seen as particularly central. If the purpose really is diagnostic, the Department should consult properly on which aspects of mathematics potentially block later success, rather than imposing this test.

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

Please write your response in this box.:

As above.

Reducing burdens within the primary assessment system

20 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?

Please write your response in this box.:

One of the greatest burdens of unnecessary work, which is damaging to teachers and pupils, is assessment of such high-stakes that much unnecessary time is devoted simply to test preparation.

Improving end-of-key stage statutory teacher assessment

21 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.

Yes

Please write your response in this box.:

The 2016 / 2017 assessment of writing places overwhelming emphasis on technical aspects to the detriment of register, style, meaning, expression and persuasive power. As various consultants to schools have commented, it has become a further SPAG test. The consequence has been that teachers devote much effort to 'shoe-horning' surface features (semicolons, frontal adverbials etc.) inappropriately into texts, desensitizing children to textual features which pertain to the writing purpose.

It was demonstrated by research over 50 years ago into the assessment of writing at age 16 that have two markers without a mark scheme was more reliable than a single marker with fixed criteria and marks allocations.

Supporting and strengthening the assessment of English writing

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

Please write your response in this box.:

as last question:

a balance between surface features (provided they fit the genre and purpose) and aspects of composition, meaning and expression;

a best-fit approach;

CPD and moderation.

Alternative approaches to moderation

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

Please write your response in this box.:

Such methods as described were current during the 1980s for 16 year olds. Moderation in such a form also becomes staff development as teachers share a professional sense of what counts as a good standard.

The Department should not jettison moderated teacher assessment after this brief experiment, as teachers develop their skills and objectivity.

A further form of moderation could include tests applied to a sample of pupils and schools, to examine the mis/match.

Equalities

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.

Please write your response in this box.:

It was indeed appalling, as the Select Committee pointed out, that so many children were failed in 2016. In particular, it is invidious to send two-thirds of FSM pupils to secondary school wearing a failure label. This can only be damaging, both individually and to national standards.

The Department should show greater sensitivity to the different starting points and pace of development of EAL pupils.

25 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.

Please write your response in this box.:

as above