



Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment

Leading in learning through Assessment

Our vision

- *All learners are successful learners*
- *All learning communities value effective assessment*

Our aim

- *To secure effective practice within the education community*

AAIA is a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation with membership open to anyone with an interest in educational assessment, whether a teacher, a professional working in an advisory or support capacity with schools, or anyone working in higher education or research. Individual, school and organisational membership options are available.

AAIA RESPONSES TO EDUCATION COMMITTEE PRIMARY ASSESSMENT INQUIRY

1. The purpose of primary assessment and how well the current system meets this

Assessment has a range of purposes. Key purposes include:

- to inform learning in the classroom and, at key points, evaluate effectiveness of teaching and learning
- to communicate achievement to parents, next teacher and next school

Regarding the second purpose, the new system is less understandable to parents and there is a lack of common language e.g. when pupils transfer between schools, when reviewing EHC plans etc.

However, in addition to the two purposes above, assessment is also used for accountability. Currently, this purpose currently overshadows the others. The current accountability system does not meet the requirements of learning because it makes schools focus more on data rather than on the process of learning. There is a discontinuity between ongoing systems and end of key stage assessments.

All aspects of assessment, not just accountability, need to be considered. How can children in all year groups be helped to learn more effectively? Curriculum change was a positive opportunity, but accountability based on data is driving schools' behaviour.

In terms of accountability, the current system is not fit for purpose – there are too many inconsistencies and loopholes and far too high stakes. For example, pupils who entered the KS2 tests but did not achieve highly attracted a very low Value Added score which impacted on the school's overall progress score. However, if pupils were not entered for the tests, they did not count in the progress score. This is a perverse incentive not to enter pupils for the test.

In terms of reporting end of Key Stage summative assessment, the current system of teacher assessment categories (BLW, PKF, PKE, PKG, WTS, EXS, GDS) is less easy to understand than the previous system of numbered levels. Levels were abolished partly because they were being misused

and being conflated with ongoing formative assessment, but in terms of their original intended purpose (end of Key Stage assessment) they were fit for purpose and easier to understand.

The move from a 'best-fit' model of teacher assessment to a 'secure-fit' approach has advantages given its potential for greater clarity/precision. The pitch of the standards for the 2016 assessments has caused concerns but these concerns should not be confused with the principle of a 'secure-fit' approach itself. (However, there are concerns about 'secure fit' with regard to some children with special educational needs – see third specific point in section 4 below.)

See also sections 3 and 4.

2. The advantages and disadvantages of assessing pupils at primary school

Formative assessment underpins good teaching and learning, and is essential. NB "formative assessment" should not be taken to mean the same as "teacher assessment". "Formative assessment" refers to the day-to-day aspects of assessment which are a crucial element of effective teaching and learning, whereas the phrase "teacher assessment" is often applied to a summative process of forming overall judgements to be used for accountability.

External assessment is about comparability and there is a need for that, but we need to be clear about the distinction between assessment that supports learning and assessment for accountability purposes. High stakes accountability measures lead to narrowing of the curriculum and over-testing in some cases. Is there a different way of measuring accountability that will lead to a lifelong learning focus?

We agree pupils should be assessed. But we need to consider the children and their self-image. What did the children who participated in the 2016 testing gain from it? Did it improve transition to secondary school? Many pupils this year were devastated by their results. We are also anxious about the effect on the adults involved. Too many teachers are leaving the profession and high-stakes accountability processes are likely to be a factor contributing to this.

3. How the most recent reforms have affected teaching and learning

Recent reforms were introduced too quickly and in a piecemeal form. They created a lot of stress and anxiety as the full picture was not provided at the outset.

The curriculum is broad and the emphasis in the classroom is on creating learners but tests and teacher assessment frameworks need finite specific teaching, e.g. exclamation sentences at KS1. This creates a dichotomy between providing a rich curriculum and teaching to the test.

This is because summative assessment is high stakes and therefore encourages teaching to the tests/ requirements of interim TA frameworks. The system does not promote risk taking. Thus, the nature of the end of key stage assessments has had a negative effect on teaching and learning.

This has led to a lack of independent writing in the classroom, with the curriculum now very much focused on spelling and grammar etc.

There have been some improvements to teaching and learning e.g. better mathematics teaching. Secondary schools have recognised the higher standards of Y7 this year.

4. Logistics and delivery of the SATs

As noted above, recent reforms were introduced too quickly. There were too many inconsistencies and loopholes, and changes to the systems over the year. Lateness of exemplification and changes of message mid-year have caused confusion and teachers did not know the “goalposts” at the start.

Summative assessment, as before, was comprised of SATs and teacher assessment (TA). Issues noted were not just about SATs but also teacher assessment.

It is vital that Teacher Assessment continues but we must ensure it is more valid/ consistent. For many years we have had a mixture of tests and TA at the end of KS1, but they should reflect the same criteria. Messages on webinars advised people to look at the test development framework – this seems to encourage teaching to the test which therefore has an effect on the curriculum.

Some specific points made and questions raised by our members:

- Will there be an evaluation of how appropriate the **interim TA frameworks** are? The narrow set of criteria in KS2 writing, for example, affected teaching and learning (and encourages a ticklist approach). End of KS2 writing has become formulaic due to the requirements of the interim framework, which has no reference to the engagement of the reader.
- It would have been useful to have **TA examples** of working towards and greater depth, as well as fully agreed examples at the expected standard.
- The issue of **TA secure fit** (in 2016) / **best fit** (in previous years) is important especially when assessing children who had dyslexia or were elective mutes and could meet all the criteria except one. The system does not allow for the fact that a child may not be able to meet a particular criterion due to a disability or special need, and this feels highly discriminatory. (NB some exceptions are made for certain disabilities and conditions, but dyslexia and elective mutism are not covered.)
- At **KS1** we were told that children could not use resources and manipulatives for the test. However, the TA framework says that they can use manipulatives, so there is an inconsistency in approach here which caused confusion.
- The goalposts changed on the **2nd (harder) reading paper at KS1**. First we were told it was “professional judgement” about entering pupils, then “strongly encouraged”. Once scaled scores were published it became apparent that a pupil could not achieve the expected standard if they had not scored any marks on the harder paper.
- Because KS1 children were tested more than before and the testing was also more sophisticated it required **more administration time** which meant less teaching time. Some members questioned the need for KS1 tests since they were not reported.
- In terms of the **KS2 tests**, there were concerns about the reliability of the reading test outcomes, as the test was a single paper comprising of 50 marks in total; this was at the beginning of the test period. By comparison, the mathematics test was spread over 3 separate papers, comprising 110 marks.
- **Timetabling** added to the pressures of the reading test: the one paper was at the beginning of the test period. However well prepared pupils are by schools, this remains a stressful time for them and many do not perform at their best on the first day. In mathematics, pupils could accumulate marks over a period of two days.
- Many schools reported that **courier vans** arrived to collect the KS2 Reading test scripts before they had been completed. This was an added stress to Head Teachers as they felt under pressure to package the papers too quickly.

- **Marking reviews** were described by members as farcical– there were inconsistencies in how the criteria were applied. Very few marks were given on review (even when they appeared to meet the criteria). What quality assurance measures were applied to marking reviews?
- The **STA** was a single point of contact for all schools during the tests and moderation. Managing the huge amount of information, eg for access arrangements, must have been difficult but schools did not always seem to get a consistent response to their queries or concerns.

5. **Training and support needed for teachers and senior leaders to design and implement effective assessment systems**

National/ centralised training is needed for all (but not ‘death by powerpoint’) e.g. on national curriculum expectations and deeper learning.

An effective assessment “approach” would be better than effective assessment “systems” which gives the impression of a focus on tracking. The curriculum changes provided a lot of freedom to schools to design approaches for internal assessment which reflected the curriculum. How effective has this been?

As part of their assessment approach, teachers also need support on making assessment manageable. However, recent suggestions that marking should be limited to giving a grade show a misunderstanding of the purposes of formative assessment. There is a wealth of research pointing to the fact that this is, at best, ineffective and, at worst, damaging. As far back as 1988, Ruth Butler’s research (referred to by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam in this article:

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/cei/34260938.pdf>) explored the effect on students’ progress of three approaches to marking:

- providing just a grade
- providing a grade and a comment
- providing just a comment

The clear result was that comment-only marking was the most effective. Students understood where they had been successful, how to make improvements and what to focus on next. Providing a comment and a grade, or just a grade, produced less impact on progress.

Grades do not communicate to a learner what they have done well and how they could make improvements. All they communicate is how that pupil’s outcome on that day compares to other pieces of work they have produced before, or how they compare to their peers. Neither of these are particularly helpful from a formative point of view and, worse, they could have a detrimental effect by reinforcing a fixed mindset.

Better understanding of the principles and practice of formative assessment would be, in our view, the most valuable area for training and support.

6. **Next steps following the most recent reforms to primary assessment**

When the original National Curriculum was introduced, time was devoted to embed it. New assessment has been rushed through, with no time for training. As indicated above, this is essential. Clarity of purpose of different types of assessment needs to be an integral part of this training.

In terms of summative assessment, STA may consult experts / reviewers etc. and therefore tick the boxes for Ofqual but there is no indication whether or not they act upon the advice received. More transparency is needed.

The government needs to act on the concerns that have been raised.

The changes will take 5 years or so to embed. DfE/Ofsted should take responsibility for “educating” parents and the general public about the changes that have taken place and their impact on children’s and schools’ results.