

The DfE published a consultation document, seeking views on the future of assessment in primary schools and the implications for accountability. This is MEI's response to the questions in the consultation relating to mathematics.

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.

MEI believes that the profile should be improved to ensure that it equips children with key skills they need in order to make a smooth and successful transition into the KS1 National Curriculum. A solid understanding of early number is required if children are to progress. At present the two curricula are mismatched and therefore ELGs do not support progress into Year 1 and into a curriculum based on a Mastery approach.

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?

MEI believes that purely summative judgements are not helpful to SEND (or any other) children and can lead to children being labelled according to their perceived mathematical ability from a very early age, potentially limiting their chances to succeed in the future. The Mastery approach to mathematics currently being disseminated across primary schools in England believes that every child is capable of achieving if exposed to good teaching. This needs to be reflected in any EYFS judgements.

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

A slimmed down EYFSP, with a focus on the key mathematical learning needed as a foundation to maths in KS1 and beyond would reduce the time burden as teachers would not be assessing unnecessary content.

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

Clear guidance and exemplification around what constitutes evidence would lead to greater consistency both for teachers and moderators. Moderators need to be clear about the guidance and that the statement that information to be recorded 'will depend on professional judgement' is understood and interpreted consistently.

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

We do not agree that it is best to move a baseline assessment to reception. Even if not reported, the nature of this assessment as a progress measure would mean that it fell into the category of

'high stakes' testing and therefore place pressure on teachers and also on our youngest children. The KS2 figure draws on mathematics, reading and writing, all of which are emerging skills in these young children. Their home backgrounds will have a huge impact on what skills they have when they enter school but these are not always an indicator of potential.

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 would be an enormous impact on schools and pupils whenever a test were to be administered and we do not support the introduction of a reception baseline.

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?

The current system of teacher assessment has provided the baseline for many years. To be 'trusted as a fair and robust baseline', any assessment would need to be designed to reflect children's thinking over time rather than providing just a snapshot on one day. We believe that it would need to show that children were equipped to meet the demands of the KS2 curriculum and, in terms of mathematics, that they had developed the necessary skills and knowledge and the ability to reason; it would need to show mastery, not just superficial fluency.

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 do not support the introduction of a new reception baseline measure. An improved EYFSP and KS1 teacher assessment system spreads the burden and results in data which suit a variety of settings (infant, primary, junior and middle schools).

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?

We do not support the introduction of a new reception baseline measure; however, if it were to be introduced and used as the measure of progress to the end of KS2, there would be little need for statutory assessment at the end of KS1 in all through primary schools. KS1 progress measures could provoke perverse behaviour such as some schools suppressing KS1 results in order to allow them to demonstrate progress at the end of KS2.

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?

We believe that if a baseline assessment in reception were to be introduced then it should be robust enough to transfer with the child on their journey to the end of KS2. This question seems to imply that it would not be enough to leave an infant school and transfer to a junior school with just the EYFS assessment as a baseline score. This question, along with Q14, seems to indicate a possible move to a many layered system where children would undergo assessments at different times

depending on the nature of the school or schools then attend. MEI would not be in favour of a system where children underwent a different assessment regime depending on the nature of school or schools they attend.

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?’

We believe in reducing teachers’ workload so that more of their time can be focused on planning and delivering high quality lessons. The removal of statutory teacher assessment in English reading and mathematics at key stage 2 would remove from teachers the substantial burden of gathering evidence. In instances where primary teachers felt test results were significantly out of line with their own knowledge of a child’s attainment, they could be encouraged to communicate this to the child’s secondary school. This would help ensure the KS2 assessment process were seen as a reliable and robust method of measuring attainment and judging progress.

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

During Year 5 – We believe that, as complete knowledge of times tables is an expectation at the end of Year 4, a check early in Y5, close to October half-term to allow pupils to settle in, would establish if the facts were embedded and secure in each child’s memory

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

The introduction of another statutory assessment will place an additional burden on schools. Most teachers know if their children have a good knowledge of their times tables because they either can or can’t use and apply them in other areas of the curriculum. If the children were issued with some form of recognition for successful completion then it could be used as an incentive for them to learn their tables.

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?

We believe that having a clear rationale for all tests (and data from them which inform assessment for learning both within schools and at the key transition points) would make the assessments not only seem more worthwhile to teachers, parents and children, but also contribute to ensuring that any proposed changes happen in a measured and appropriate way. Whilst removing statutory teacher assessments will reduce the work load, introducing new and extra tests certainly doesn’t reduce any burden as they impact on planning, teaching and learning.

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

Where schools from different phases work together, it improves continuity and progression at points of transition, as documented in OfSTEDs KS3: The Wasted Years? (2015). If teacher assessment continues, then reducing the burden by requiring evidence from only a sample of pupils would significantly reduce teacher workload, whilst still ensuring consistency in professional judgements.

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.

We believe that the proposed new system places additional pressure on our youngest children and their teachers at a time when fostering a positive attitude to education is crucial. Differences between children through the characteristics listed above can be more extreme due to their young age and the huge variety of their backgrounds. It is almost impossible to create a written test which does not disadvantage some children; the context will be familiar to some and not to others.