

Reception baseline assessment:

What schools need to know

What is the reception baseline assessment?

The reception baseline assessment – essential for building a fairer progress measure for primary schools – is a new national assessment that will be administered in all primary, infant and first schools in England to children in reception classes. It will be introduced in the autumn of 2020.

Why is it being introduced?

Currently, a key measure of how well a primary school is serving its pupils is the progress that they make between the end of key stage 1 (year 2) and the end of key stage 2 (year 6). This allows the government to take account of the fact that schools face different challenges given their pupils' starting points.

However, under the current arrangements, we are not able to give full credit for the important work that schools do between reception and year 2.

The new reception baseline assessment will change this by providing a snapshot of where pupils are when they arrive at school, establishing a new starting point to measure the progress that they make by the end of year 6. It will also enable us to remove statutory end-of-key stage 1 assessments, as they will no longer be required to provide a baseline for progress measures, reducing the overall burden of the statutory assessment system.

What will it look like?

The new reception baseline assessment will be short (approximately 20 minutes), interactive and practical, covering language and communication, early mathematics and (subject to trialling) self-regulation. It will use age-appropriate resources that children can handle and manipulate.

The assessment will reflect familiar foundation-stage practice and encourage positive interaction between the teacher/teaching assistant and the pupil. There will be no need for children to prepare for the baseline assessment, either in a pre-school setting, or at home, and in most cases pupils should not be aware that they are being assessed.

The introduction of the reception baseline assessment should not replace the good practice of schools liaising with early years settings to gather and share information on the children starting reception.

The intention is that the assessment will be inclusive and accessible to the vast majority of children as they join school in reception. Most children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) or English as an additional language (EAL) will be able to take part in the assessment.

Accompanying materials and detailed guidance will be developed through the pilot period and made available to schools in due course. Teachers, or teaching assistants, will be able to administer the assessment in normal teaching time, recording the outcomes digitally. It should sit alongside the important activity that takes place during the first term of reception.

How will the results of the reception baseline assessment be used?

Children will not 'pass' or 'fail' the assessment; it will provide a snapshot of where they are when they start school in the reception year. The results of the assessment will not be used by government to track or label individual pupils, or to judge the performance of early years settings.

We will use the data from the assessment to create a baseline for school-level progress measures for primary schools. This will show the progress children make from reception until the end of key stage 2 in year 6. We will publish these new measures for the first time in the summer of 2027, when the children who enter reception in autumn 2020 take the key stage 2 tests at the end of year 6.

As we develop and trial the baseline assessment, we will explore whether any information it produces should be shared with schools and parents.

The assessment development process

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is working with us to develop and deliver the new assessment. This includes trialling, piloting and the first 2 years of statutory delivery.

NFER has been developing assessments for over 70 years, used by teachers, schools and government departments. They will work with early years practitioners, schools and other education experts to develop the new assessment.

All aspects of the assessment development will be informed by an extensive evidence base of early years research. NFER will collect more evidence during the trial and pilot phases to ensure that the baseline assessment is robust. NFER will also make sure that the data collected is valid and reliable for the purposes of creating a value-added progress measure.

Timeline for development	
April 2018 to August 2019	Developing and trialling the baseline assessment
2019 to 2020 academic year	National pilot
2020 to 2021 academic year	Rolled out to all schools in England as a statutory assessment

We will be inviting a sample of schools to take part in trialling the new assessment this autumn and all schools with reception classes will be invited to take part in the national pilot of the assessment, which will take place during the 2019/2020 academic year.

The early years foundation stage profile

In the primary assessment consultation, we also confirmed that the early years foundation stage profile will continue as a highly valued, teacher-observed, holistic assessment of an individual child's development, ensuring that all children are prepared by the end of reception year for the starting point of year 1.

Contact us

If you have any questions about the new reception baseline assessment, then please contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or email assessments@education.gov.uk.

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Reception Baseline Assessment: what schools need to know

Electronic version product code: STA/18/8173/e ISBN: 978-1-78644-933-7

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