

Portishead Primary School



Learning and Achieving Together

A Parent Guide to
Assessment without Levels

February 2016

Assessment Without Levels

From this September, the Government has made significant changes to the way that children in schools are to be assessed. This is to tie in with the new National Curriculum that started to be used by all schools at the beginning of 2014. This is a new way of thinking for schools, and assessment now looks very different to how it has done for the past 20 years. The aim of this guide is to give you some clear information about all of the changes that are happening in education across the country and what that means for the children here at Portishead Primary School. Before we think about assessment we need to be clear on what changes the new curriculum has brought to subjects that are traditionally assessed.

Curriculum 2014

So, what are the changes to the curriculum? It would take far too long to cover the whole curriculum, particularly in any great depth. But the main changes to the key core subjects are highlighted below. You can find out more about this with a quick internet search for the National Curriculum.

English - The new programme of study for English is knowledge-based; this means its focus is on knowing facts rather than developing skills and understanding. It is also characterised by an increased emphasis on the technical aspects of language and less emphasis on the creative aspects. English is set out year by year in Key Stage 1 and two-yearly in Key Stage 2. Appendices give specific content to be covered in the areas of spelling and vocabulary, grammar and punctuation. These are set out yearly across both key stages.

Mathematics - The main areas in the new programme of study for mathematics are called domains. These are number, measurement, geometry, statistics, ratio and proportion and algebra. Two of these, number and geometry, are further divided into subdomains. The way that the curriculum is organised varies across the primary age range – every year group has a unique combination of domains and subdomains. There is no longer a separate strand of objectives related to using and applying mathematics. Instead, there are problem-solving objectives within the other areas of study. Most of the changes to the mathematics curriculum involve content being brought down to earlier years.

The End of Curriculum Levels

The Department for Education (DfE) decided that the children who are were in Years 2 and 6 during the academic year 2014/15 were the last pupils to be awarded a level in their end of Key Stage tests (July 2015). This applies also to the use of levels across every year groups from Year 1 to Year 6. We have been busy preparing staff for this change, working with local and national partners to develop our own school practice.

So why have levels disappeared?

The DfE want to end what has been termed 'The level Race' where children have moved through the old National Curriculum levels quickly to achieve higher attainment. The old National Curriculum was sub-divided into levels, but these were not linked to their national curriculum year group. For example, a child in Year 4 could be a Level 3 or even a level 5. Children were achieving Level 5 and 6 at the end of Key Stage 2, but the DfE thought that a significant number were able to achieve a Level 5 or 6 in a test—but were not secure at that level. Teachers nationally used a best fit model when assessing children which sometimes meant that children moved levels with gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The feeling from the DfE was that the old national curriculum and the levels system failed to adequately ensure that children had a breadth and depth of knowledge at each national curriculum level.

Assessment across the school

The DfE announced last year that there would no longer be National Curriculum levels and that schools would have to set up their own way of assessing pupils. Senior leaders have attended training and briefings from the local authority, DfE, professional associations and specialist assessment software providers. We have also continued to work with partners schools in the Portishead Cluster, North Somerset and likeminded schools nationally. We have shared practice with schools in South Glos and Dorset.

At Portishead Primary School we currently use an assessment tool call School Pupil Tracker. This is a database where teachers assess children against key national curriculum objectives in each year group in reading, writing and maths. These key objectives are being used across our cluster schools in Portishead to ensure that assessment is similar which supports transition between schools and onwards to Gordano School.

Assessments at the end of KS1 (Year 2) and KS2 (Year 6)

At the end of KS1 and KS2 children's outcomes will still be collected by the DfE and reported to parents as has always been the case. This data is then used to compare schools and judge the effectiveness of the school by OFSTED as well by us to in our school own self-evaluation. Using teacher assessment and the SATs score children will be given a scaled score from 100. This will then be used to decide whether children fall in to one of 3 categories:

1. Meet the expected standard for the end of their key stage
2. Exceed the expected standard for the end of their key stage
3. Are below the expected standard for the end of their key stage

The government are expecting that nationally a minimum of 85% of children will meet the expected standard at the end of Year 6 in Reading, Writing and Maths.

Reporting to Parents

The biggest difference is how we will talk to you about how your child is progressing during the year. With the old National Curriculum levels, each year children were given a target for the end of the year, and during the year we would tell you what National Curriculum level your child was at.

For Example: A child could finish Year 3 with a level 3a, and in Year 4 would have a target of a 4b for the end of the year. At Parent's Evenings throughout the year you may be told that they have moved to a 4c and then on to a 4b.

We could use the levels system this way because there was no correlation between a level and a child's year group, and this can be seen in the way that in a Year 6 class there could be a range of levels, from level 2c to a level 6. However, the new National Curriculum sets out objectives for each year group and expectations for the end of each Key Stage. Children will be assessed against those every year, so a child in Year 1 will always be judged in the first instance against the objectives in Year 1 and their progress towards meeting the expected standard at the end of KS1, and a child in Year 4 will always be judged in the first instance against the objectives in Year 4 and their progress towards meeting the expected standard at the end of KS2.

So how will the process in school work?

Teachers will continue to assess children using a range of formal and informal assessments across the school year. The school will review these assessments 3 times a year at the end of each term. By using their professional knowledge and judgement teachers will know what the children can already do and what they think the children can achieve.

At parents evenings you will be told what your children are doing well at and what they need to do to improve rather than what level they are at. This will help you work in partnership with the school to support the children to make progress. At the same time and on the school report at the end of the year you will be told whether your child is:

On track to meet the expected standard for the end of their key stage,

On track to exceed the expected standard at the end of their key stage

Not on track to meet expected standard at the end of their key stage.

In the school report and at parents evenings, if your child is not on track to meet the expected standards the class teacher will outline in what areas of learning support is needed and what additional support the school is providing your child.

This will mean that you will always know how well your children are doing as well as specifically what they need to do next, regardless of their ability.

A school strategy to support excellence for all – “Learning Without Limits”

The school delivers a broad and balanced curriculum based on the “Learning without Limits” philosophy. This is an approach to education based on empowering learners and stakeholders to shape school improvement at all levels. At its heart is a belief that ability is not fixed or predetermined.

In a classroom this means that children can select the level of challenge in the lessons that they take part in by self-selecting activities from a choice. This is carefully monitored to ensure children are not selecting work that is too hard or too easy. They have been supported on this journey and may be able to talk to you about the three zones of learning: The Comfort Zone, The Challenge Zone and The Danger Zone. The best learning happens in the challenge zone but some activities e.g. practising x tables require time in the comfort zone to build confidence or limited time which is carefully supported in the Danger Zone e.g. the climbing wall at Camp.

The philosophy brings the practice in KS1 and KS2 in line with the way that learning is planned and scaffolded in Reception which is arguably where you can see the children with the most independence in their learning.