

Assessing Children's Progress: Questions and Answers

How are children assessed in Scotland?

The assessment of children's progress throughout primary school and in secondary school S1-3 is based on the professional judgement of teachers. In making these judgements, teachers draw on their professional knowledge and understanding of the child; on the recently published benchmarks for literacy and numeracy, which provide clear information about what children and young people should be able to do and demonstrate by the end of a Curriculum for Excellence level; and on a wide range of assessment information.

Assessment is a central part of everyday learning and teaching for every child and young person. Teachers gather evidence on an ongoing and informal basis through asking questions, observing children working together and making comments on their work. Children may assess their own work or that of their classmates. Other assessments can be more formal, such as projects, investigations, case studies and question papers/tests.

Why is this important?

Children, parents, carers, teachers and headteachers need to know how individual children are getting on: where they are doing well and where they need further support. Assessment information can be used by teachers to make decisions about next steps in learning and to help parents understand better how they can support their child at home. It can be used by headteachers to understand how to make learning better for all children in the school.

Why are you introducing National Standardised Assessments?

To give every child a better chance of reaching his or her potential, parents, carers and teachers need objective, consistent and comparable information about how well children are progressing. This information will be used to identify strengths and to understand and act upon areas where children need further support.

At school, local authority and national level, we need information to show us which learning and teaching approaches are working best and where changes need to be made. That way, we can learn from the best, and ensure time and efforts are focussed on the approaches which have the greatest impact on learning.

Does this mean national testing?

No. We are not introducing a national testing regime. The national standardised assessments are not "high stakes tests". The results will not determine any key future outcomes for students (such as which school they go to, or whether they can progress to the next level). There will be no pass or fail. Children will not be expected to revise or prepare for assessments. They will simply continue to undertake routine classroom learning activities.

Does this mean that ongoing, classroom assessment will no longer be used?

No. Ongoing assessment is, and will continue to be, a central part of everyday learning and teaching. The new national standardised assessments will provide an excellent source of evidence for teachers to use when assessing children's progress. Teachers will continue to draw on the full range of assessment activity when considering children's progress and planning the next steps in their learning.

What will the national standardised assessments involve?

The new national standardised assessments will cover some aspects of reading, writing and numeracy. This type of national standardised assessment is not suitable for assessing listening and talking or extended writing.

Children will take the national standardised assessments online.

How long will the national standardised assessments take?

The standardised assessments will be as short as possible and will be age and stage appropriate. A time limit of 50 minutes for each assessment has been set. This is an absolute maximum, to ensure that no child feels an unnecessary time pressure when undertaking the assessments. We do not expect the majority of children to require the full 50 minutes.

When will the national standardised assessments take place?

There will be no set day or period of time during which the national standardised assessments must be taken. Individual teachers and schools will decide the most appropriate time during the school year for children to take the national standardised assessments.

Will all children take the national standardised assessments?

In order to provide national consistency, the new national standardised assessments will be taken by all children in P1, P4, P7 and S3, whatever their background and ability, except in exceptional circumstances, such as where individual complex additional support needs make it inappropriate for them to do so.

What about children with additional support needs?

We will ensure that the national standardised assessments are as inclusive as possible and accommodate the needs of the vast majority of children who require additional support. The system will be accessible to those who already use technology to help them learn, or other methods of communication such as speech to text and Braille. Practitioners who work with children and young people with complex additional support needs will use their knowledge and understanding of the child and their needs, strengths and challenges to reach a decision, with parents, on whether or not the use of standardised assessment is appropriate.

Will the national standardised assessments be marked by class teachers?

No. The national standardised assessments will be delivered online, using technology that provides results automatically. The system will quickly and automatically generate information for teachers on where a child has done well and where further support may be required.

What will you do with the results?

At a classroom level, the information provided from individual children's national standardised assessments will help teachers to understand how children are progressing, based on a nationally consistent picture of those aspects of reading, writing and numeracy that the assessments cover. Training and guidance will be provided to help teachers interpret and use the national standardised assessment results.

Information at a school and local authority level will help to inform local improvement planning.

National level information will help to inform national improvement plans and policy.

Will children get to see the results?

Teachers will discuss with children how they got on in their national standardised assessment, and will plan next steps with the individual child based on that information. Teachers will ensure that standardised assessment results are considered alongside other evidence of the child's progress, from ongoing assessment and classroom activity.

Will parents get to see the results?

Feedback information produced by the online assessment system will be used for discussion with parents about their child's learning, along with other assessment evidence that teachers use to assess a child's progress.

Education Scotland will be working with teachers and parents and carers, to agree how best to share the results from the standardised assessments, so that parents understand their child's progress and how best to support their learning at home.

Will you publish the results?

Data on the percentage of children who have achieved the Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy relevant to their stage will be published at school, local authority and national levels. Teachers will use their professional judgement to decide if children have achieved those levels, based on a wide range of assessment information from across the full school year.

How will the national standardised assessments affect children?

Standardised assessments are just one element of a wider range of evidence used by teachers who know children and work with them daily, to understand how they are progressing.

The new standardised assessments will be designed so that if a child is struggling with the questions they will get easier, and if a child is doing well, questions will become more challenging. In this way, the assessments will establish children's ability, without them having to face lots of questions that are too easy for them or too hard to answer.

Children will not have to prepare for assessments. There will be no additional workload for children or teachers. The assessments should not distract from core learning.

The Scottish Government will ensure that the impact on children of the new assessments is monitored closely.

Isn't P1 too young to assess children?

There is widespread recognition that children's early development and their progress during the first year of school are crucial for their later success.

Many local authorities already use standardised assessment at Primary 1. Schools find this information useful to ensure the right support is in place to secure good outcomes for children and plan for future learning.

Can parents opt out of the assessments/decline to take part?

The intention of all assessment is to assess progress and put in place support where a need is identified. As these assessments are designed to help teachers understand whether children need additional help or support, there is no benefit to opting out for parents or for children.

Parents who are concerned about any aspect of their child's learning and assessment should discuss this with their child's teacher.

How can parents help their child?

Parents and carers have a key role to play in helping their child's learning to progress. Teachers should keep parents informed about how their child is progressing. Parents and carers should talk to the school if they have any concerns about their child's learning or progress. Teachers should talk to parents about how they can support their child's learning at home.

The standardised assessments should be seen by children as just another aspect of daily learning. There is no need for parents to prepare children for assessment or practice any specific tasks or activities.

Who will develop and deliver the new national standardised assessments?

The National Standardised Assessments will be developed and delivered by ACER International UK Ltd. ACER International UK Ltd is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), a not-for-profit organisation with 85 years of experience in educational research. ACER has extensive experience of delivering large-scale online assessments similar to those they will deliver in Scotland. ACER currently provides online assessments in more than 80 countries around the world.

When will the new national standardised assessments be introduced?

August 2017.

How will you ensure that the online system works, in advance of children taking the assessments?

Implementation testing of the standardised assessment materials will begin by the end of 2016 and continue through to May 2017. Implementation testing will take place in local authorities in urban and rural areas and will include local authorities who do not currently use standardised assessments as well as those local authorities who do.

What will happen if schools do not have the necessary technology or internet connection to enable children to sit the tests online?

If a school has significant difficulties with providing online assessments that cannot be overcome, we will make sure that the national standardised assessments can be taken in another way.

Where can I find out more?

Further information about the assessment model used in Scotland can be found here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/NationalImprovementFramework>

Further information about the National Improvement Framework can be found here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/NationalImprovementFramework>

If you have any other questions, comments or concerns to raise about the way in which children's progress is being assessed as part of the National Improvement Framework, please email nationalimprovementframework@gov.scot