

Position Paper Summary

**Say ‘no’ to baseline assessment**

The government is planning a major shift in the assessment of young children, which carries significant risks both for the education and well-being of children in the early years and for their strengths as learners in their futures.

Standardised baseline tests are being developed in order to judge effectiveness of primary schools, to be administered to young children in their first three weeks of starting school. **TACTYC is strongly opposed to a move toward this form of standardised baseline assessments because this form of assessment would be**

* **Unreliable.** Children at such a young age will not show their true abilities in a test taken out of the context of familiar relationships and practical experiences;
* **Invalid.** The tests will be based on narrow checklists of basic skills and knowledge which do not take account of the different ways and rates at which children learn and develop, nor of the ability of children to build conceptual understanding and apply their knowledge. They will not include attitudes and dispositions which research shows are critical to children’s later achievement and capacity to learn.
* **Harmful to effective practice and therefore to children’s learning and development.** The assessment will result in pressure on practitioners to ‘teach to the test’, distorting the curriculum and detracting from the rich physical, exploratory, playful, creative, and intellectual experiences which research shows benefit children in the early years;
* **Harmful to the home learning environment and parent partnership.**  Parents will be misdirected in terms of the most important markers of their child’s progress and attainment, toward supporting narrow measures rather than engaging in the responsive, playful interactions which best support children’s well-being and learning.

The Department for Education intends to introduce baseline assessment of children on entry to full-time school, in reception classes for children aged four. Use of approved commercially produced baseline tests will be optional for schools from September 2015, and from September 2016 these tests will be the only measures used for judging progress through primary school in Ofsted inspections although schools can choose to be judged by challenging floor standards instead. The use of the currently statutory Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), which is not a test but a rounded assessment of children’s development based on observation over time, is to become optional from September 2016.

**Recommendations**

* All summative assessment approaches in the EYFS should be appropriate to such young children, based on formative observational assessment across contexts including play and children’s self-initiated activities, over time, carried out by people the children know well, and including parents’ perspectives.
* Summative assessment should include the prime areas of personal, social and emotional development; communication and language; and physical development.
* Summative and formative assessments should reflect the ways children learn, motivation, self-regulation and resilience such as through reference to the EYFS characteristics of effective learning.
* Schools should develop data tracking systems based on holistic, principled formative and summative assessment rather than standardised baseline tests.
* Ofsted should develop inspection systems that take account of a wider range of evidence of school effectiveness.
* The Early Learning Goals, particularly for literacy and mathematics, should urgently be reviewed.
* The definition of ‘Good Level of Development’ should be reviewed.
* A national data set should be developed based on an EYFS Profile completed in the term in which children reach *statutory* school age, i.e. the term *after* they reach five years of age.
* Children who do not reach a good level of development as measured by the EYFS Profile should continue to benefit from the approach to curriculum and pedagogy required in the EYFS.
* A system designed purely to test cohort or school level attainment should not be used for individual feedback on a child’s learning and development. Instead, an approach which can reconcile the two purposes for assessment is needed.

*For full position paper with discussion of each point and references, go to* http://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TACTYC-Baseline-position-paper.pdf