

28 February 2015

Guidance on Baseline Assessment in England Summary

The government has designed the criteria for nationally approved baseline assessment in order to measure the effectiveness of primary schools, and not with the interests of young children in mind. **It is important to note that the reception year is the final year of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Early years principles and practices which specifically respect and support the learning, development and well-being of young children should therefore govern assessment approaches within the reception year.**

Recommendations for school leaders:

- **We recommend opting not to use a baseline assessment scheme**, while ensuring robust tracking of individuals and cohort based on principles of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessment. Although the pressure to comply with the baseline approach is considerable, take into account that:
 - The best interests of the child are not served by baseline test schemes.
 - Judgements of school effectiveness derived from baseline will not be relevant until 2022/3; given the changes subject to government policy, current intentions on baseline-based judgements may well be obsolete by then.
 - It will still be necessary to maintain a much broader EYFS assessment. Ofsted school reports contain a specific judgement based on implementation of the EYFS, which includes observational assessment, involving parents, and knowing where children are and supporting progress across all areas of learning and development and the characteristics of effective learning.
 - There are a number of uncertainties in the pilot year, including unresolved issues about comparability of data between schemes. Any chosen scheme might be withdrawn if it does not gather at least 10% of the market.
 - There are ethical issues in using a baseline scheme which does not enable all children to show their full capabilities.
- **We acknowledge there is strong pressure on schools to adopt a baseline assessment scheme, despite its non-statutory status. If doing so:**
 - **Choose the model which adheres most closely to the principles of EYFS assessment.**
 - Ensure ongoing individual formative assessment across all areas following principles of EYFS assessment.
 - If opting to use a baseline which does not fit well with principles of EYFS assessment, put away the resulting data and forget about it until children reach end of KS2. It is not valid as a basis for planning to support children's learning as it does not reflect the most important areas of learning and development in the early years and will not serve children's later success.
 - Think carefully about how you report results to parents, and the impact that such narrowly focused outcomes will have on parents and children.

Given the criteria specified by DfE, no scheme would be able to fully reflect the principles of EYFS assessment.

It is, however, apparent from the analysis that only the Early Excellence model is based as closely as possible on EYFS principles, and would be consistent with ongoing appropriate pedagogical practice.

The following table shows the results of analysis of the schemes in terms of principles of EYFS assessment

Does the scheme	CEM	Early Excellence	GL	Hodder	NFER	Speech Link
cover the prime Areas of Learning - Personal, Social and Emotional Development?	✓	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
cover the prime Areas of Learning - Physical Development?	X	✓	X	X	(✓)	(✓)
cover the prime Areas of Learning - Communication and Language?	X	✓	✓	(✓)	✓	✓
cover the specific Areas of Learning – Literacy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
cover the specific Areas of Learning – Mathematics?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
cover the specific Areas of Learning – Understanding the World ?	X	X	X	X	X	X
cover the specific Areas of Learning - Expressive Arts and Design?	X	X	X	X	X	X
cover the Characteristics of Effective Learning - Playing and exploring?	X	✓	X	(✓)	(✓)	X
cover the Characteristics of Effective Learning - Active learning?	X	✓	X	(✓)	(✓)	X
cover the Characteristics of Effective Learning - Creating & thinking critically?	X	✓	X	(✓)	(✓)	X
involve observation of the child?	(✓)	✓	X	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
involve information from parents?	X	✓	X	X	X	X
cover the assessment of both child initiated & adult directed activities?	X	✓	X	X	✓	(✓)
identify that the child has special educational needs?	X	✓	X	X	O	(✓)
identify that the child has a disability?	X	✓	X	X	O	O
identify that the child uses English as an additional language?	X	✓	X	✓	O	✓

KEY

✓	yes	(✓)	partly	X	no	O	no information
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