



Parents' Guide : Assessment in School

The Government has made a huge change in the way that children in schools are to be assessed, to tie in with the new National Curriculum that started to be used by all schools last year. This is a new way of thinking for schools, and assessment will look 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 the changes that are happening in Education across the country, and what that means for the children here at Graffham and Duncton Schools.

Before we even think about assessment we need to be clear on what changes the new curriculum has brought to subjects that are traditionally assessed.

Curriculum 2014 The main changes to core subjects are highlighted below.

English

The new programme of study for English is knowledge-based; this means its focus is on knowing facts. It is also characterised by an increased emphasis on the technical aspects of language, and less emphasis on the creative aspects. English learning objectives are set out year by year in Key Stage 1 and two-yearly in Key Stage 2 : there are also specific objectives in the areas of spelling and vocabulary, grammar and punctuation which are set out yearly across both key stages.

At our schools, we continue to place huge emphasis on developing children's creativity within their skills, and we will be looking for children to show their abilities independently and within their own interests.

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.

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 learning objectives being brought down to earlier years than previously – ie specific mathematical concepts will be taught at earlier ages than in the past. Maths understanding is expected to be seen in class and also applied independently.

County and locality moderators look regularly at our work, and that of all schools in the locality, and they will be expecting to see breadth of work in teaching and learning (ie the same learning objectives taught and reinforced in a variety of different contexts).

The End of Curriculum Levels

The Department for Education (DfE) have ruled that last year's year 2 and Year 6 children will be the last pupils to be awarded a 'level' in their end of Key Stage tests.

The old National Curriculum was sub-divided into levels, but these were not linked to children's national curriculum year group. For example, a Year 4 child could be a 'Level 3' or even a 'Level 5'.

Children may have been achieving a 'Level 5' or 'Level 6' at the end of Key Stage 2, but the DfE think that a significant number may have been able to achieve this *in a test* even though their understanding was not secure at that level. The DfE now feels that the old national curriculum and



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the levels system failed to adequately ensure that children had a breadth and depth of knowledge at each national curriculum level.

They have also decided that what has been termed 'The Level Race' (where children have moved through the old National Curriculum levels quickly to achieve higher attainment and demonstrate rapid progress) is not a good thing for their learning.

They have therefore abolished the entire national curriculum levels assessment system, and given clear instructions to schools to stop using it.

Assessing Without Levels

So, 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. At Graffham and Duncton we have spent a long time researching various different methods of assessing pupils, as we clearly want to be sure we are properly reflecting children's abilities and communicating accurately with parents.

The new school Assessment format we have developed is described later in this document.

The biggest difference is how we will talk to you about your child's progress 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 currently at.

We could use the levels system this way because there was no correlation between a level and a child's year group; this was demonstrated in the way that in a Year 6 class there could be a range of levels, from level 2 to a level 6. However, the new National Curriculum now sets out clear, detailed expectations for each year group in different areas of learning, and children will be assessed against those every year. So a child in Year 4, for example, will always be assessed in the first instance against the expectations for all children in their age group, nationally.

So how will the process in school work?

In each Autumn term, by October/November teachers will have had an opportunity to assess how children are working. Using their professional knowledge and judgement, teachers will know what children can already do, and what they think they can go on to achieve by the end of the year.

West Sussex County Council Assessment advisors have given us a very straightforward two-point scale for commenting on children's overall achievement, both during and at the end of the year.

- During the year, we will be looking to see if children are **ON TRACK** or **NOT ON TRACK** to meet the end of year expectations.
- At the end of the year, we will be looking to see if children have **MET** or **NOT MET** the year end expectations.

Similarly during the year, when we have conversations with you about your child's progress, we will advise you whether your child is on track to meet their end of year expectations.

The document below is a summary of the findings from the Commission set up by the Department for Education to examine and report on all these issues. Their report, published in September 2015, determines the basis of all in-school assessment nationally.

If you wish to read the whole report, you can find it by clicking on this link :

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commission-on-assessment-without-levels-final-report>



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Summary of the Final report of the Commission on Assessment without Levels.

Here is a summary of the findings of the recent government report on assessment without levels (based on a summary published by PG Online, September 2015)



* Note :

Formative assessment means the ongoing tracking of pupil ability that teachers do continuously through the year, and use to inform their lesson planning and specific planning for individual pupils.

Summative assessment refers to the tests and assessment applied to measure pupils' ability at the end of a term, year or key stage – for example, SATS.

Effective lessons should provide ample scope for “high quality formative assessment that goes to the very heart of good teaching”.

With over 15 years of Levels, any teacher (or parent) under the age of 40 is unlikely to have experienced any other system, including throughout their own education. The “system has been so conditioned by levels that there is considerable challenge in moving away from them” and there are concerns that some schools feel the need to “recreate” a levels assessment system based on the new national curriculum.

Moving away from Levels therefore “requires a radical cultural and pedagogical change” where the focus needs to move away from constant and time-consuming attempts to match a child's performance to poorly-defined, generic ability statements.

A new system that relies on “high quality, in-depth teaching, supported by in-class formative assessment” is required.

The dominant use of Levels, and a ‘best-fit model’ has crept into everyday teaching and become frequently used for all in-school assessments to track progress over time against expected performance targets. These Levels were also aggregated to give pupils and parents an unrealistic and largely meaningless summary of progress and understanding. “The commission believes that this has had a profoundly negative impact on teaching” - and the pressure from teachers' perceptions of what OFSTED inspectors want to see has meant that “time spent on creative teaching, investigation, play, practical work etc. has reduced considerably, and lessons more often have a standard format”.

Too much time has been spent using complicated data management systems, time which could be much better spent planning and delivering high quality lessons to deepen pupils' understanding of a subject.

The commission found that the “expectation to collect data in efforts to track pupils' progress towards target levels considerably increased teachers' workload”. “Over-frequent summative testing and recording is also likely to take time away from formative assessments, which offer the potential not just to measure pupils' learning, but to increase it.”

A new system that relies on “high quality, in-depth teaching, supported by in-class formative assessment” is required.

It is recognised by the report and by OFSTED that schools cannot be expected to implement a rigorous new assessment system overnight, and that over time, teachers “should feel a growing confidence in using assessment to better inform their teaching practices and lesson planning”.

New forms of assessment will “become an integral part of day-to-day teaching, avoiding the need for unnecessary tracking and recording”. It is work in progress for schools and OFSTED are looking to ensure that schools are doing the best they can for their pupils.

“OFSTED does not expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback; these are for the school to decide through its assessment policy.”

“Inspectors recognise that schools are at different stages in the development of assessment without levels, and will take this into account when considering how schools are monitoring the progress of pupils.”

David Brown (National Lead for ICT and Computer Science, OFSTED), has said schools “should be left to their own devices, to do what works best for each of them, individually, and that as long as they can justify a method of assessment... and show that progress is being made, OFSTED will find it difficult to disagree”.



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Graffham and Duncton Assessment policy

In accordance with the Government directive, we are in the process of developing our own Assessment Policy, with **high standards and challenge for every child** at the heart of our system. We are lucky to have Mrs Lucy Whiffin, our Graffham Deputy, working for the locality and county as a moderator, so she is specifically trained in ensuring our robust systems will support and challenge every child.

Below are some key points from the document that we are using across both schools to inform all of our planning and ongoing assessment : this is still 'work in progress' but we are now at a stage where we are confident we will be doing the best by all our children by adopting these practices. The Leadership team and subject leaders in English and Maths, linked to a named Governor, will monitor work on a termly basis as part of our School Improvement Plan.

Formative Assessment in books- development of a learning journey

Various levels of assessment strategy will be followed through the year. However, the most important of these is what is happening in children's books. This is what any observer – including parents, the Headteacher and leadership team, Governors and OFSTED – will be looking at.

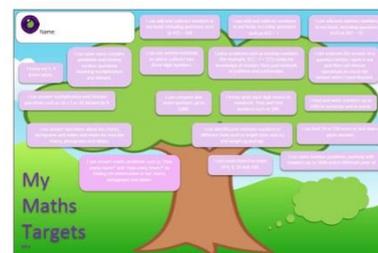
Each book needs to be a 'learning journey' of what a child is achieving and what they will work on next. This will be driven by and summarized by our new **Assessment Trees**, described below.

Key things that OFSTED will be looking for in an effective school are :

- Teachers provide adequate time for practice to embed the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills securely. They introduce subject content progressively and constantly demand more of pupils. Teachers identify and support any pupil who is falling behind, and enable almost all to catch up.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding systematically and effectively in lessons, offering clearly directed and timely support.
- Teachers provide pupils with incisive feedback, in line with the school's assessment policy, about what pupils can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. The pupils use this feedback effectively.

All children will have a Maths and English book, and also a 'Learning Journal' - this could include work in the topic book, journal, hub/snug or 'show me' books. We will also aim to show progression in writing at the front of this learning journal, as writing is of critical importance across the curriculum.

Progression in skills for English and Maths will be shown at the front of children's English and Maths books, in the highlighted 'I can' statements of the **Assessment Trees** (see example, here. We aim to send you copies of your child's Trees, next week). Teachers will highlight aspects of the Assessment Trees using a given colour for each term, so that progress over the year can be viewed and monitored.



A learning objective will be written (or printed and stuck) on all pieces of work. Marking, in purple and green, will relate specifically to lessons' learning objectives (or 'I can' statements) : marking will become a 'conversation' between child and teacher, and they will use it as a basis from which to discuss together where the child needs to go next in their learning. (All marking will be dated and initialed, so that different teaching staff working with a child can be identified, all working as one in the moving on of each child.) Children will be given time to respond to marking comments, and to practice skills identified.