



## Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: the National Improvement Framework

The Scottish Government wants to make sure that all children and young people:

- have the skills they need to do well – particularly in literacy and numeracy
- can do their best, no matter where they live or who their parents are
- feel healthy and secure
- go on to succeed once they have left school.

Evidence shows that six things make the biggest difference to the quality of children's learning:

- strong leadership
- high quality, professionally trained teachers and practitioners
- parents and carers who understand and are actively engaged in their children's learning and their school
- information that tells us how children are progressing
- good schools, which involve children, parents, carers, teachers and the community in planning to become even better
- an understanding of how information about what's happening in schools now can be used to improve things for the future.

As part of the National Improvement Framework, the Scottish Government will gather a range of data and evidence, to show us how well we are doing in each of these areas at school, local authority and national levels, and where we need to make further improvements.

This information leaflet is focused on the information we will gather to tell us how children are progressing with their learning.

### Assessing children's progress

The Scottish Government wants children to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

To find out whether we are achieving these aims, we need to gather information across the full span of children's learning, from the early years, through to the point where they leave school. This information will tell us how children are progressing individually, as well as at school, local and national levels.

Teachers will use the information to make decisions about next steps in learning, both for individual children, and in terms of the particular approaches and interventions they use in the classroom.



In assessing how children are progressing, we will collect information on a wide range of areas, including:

- **Health and wellbeing** – Children must feel healthy and secure if they are to do well in other aspects of their learning and life. Children must feel ready to learn. Existing surveys give us a lot of national level information about children’s health, attitudes, behaviours and wellbeing, which helps us to understand how children are getting on, to identify differences in health behaviours and wellbeing between different groups of children and to take action to improve the life chances of every child and young person. The Scottish Government is developing a new survey which will give us information at a local level and so can be used by schools and local authorities, to identify the aspects of children’s health and wellbeing that are of greatest interest to them and to plan how best to support the children and young people in their area.
- **Early years** – The sooner we can identify and act on any issues affecting children, the greater chance they will have of succeeding in later life. Health Visitors will continue to carry out child health reviews of all children at 27-30 months, to highlight whether there are any concerns about a child’s development at a young age, and to provide additional support as necessary.
- **Literacy and numeracy skills** – Reading, writing, talking and listening skills, and the ability to understand and work with numbers, are the building blocks for success in all other aspects of children’s learning. The majority of this leaflet focuses on explaining how children’s progress in literacy and numeracy will be measured.
- **National qualifications and awards** – While national qualifications are an important measure of young people’s learning, recognising broader achievements too, provides a richer understanding of how children are progressing. All young people benefit from gaining recognition for their achievements and the skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work that are developed through them. The National Improvement Framework will gather information on the number of national qualifications and the wider range of awards and achievements young people obtain.
- **The success of young people on leaving school** – Education is not an end in itself, but a way of preparing children and young people for their future lives. The National Improvement Framework will gather information about the quality of support young people are being given to help inform their choices about the future and about the number of young people who go on to and then sustain further education, employment or training.





## Measuring literacy and numeracy skills

The assessment of children's progress throughout primary school and in secondary S1 - S3 is based on teachers' views: their professional judgement.

We recognise that teachers are best placed to know how the children in their classes are progressing. That is why, at the end of every school year, the Scottish Government is asking all teachers of P1, P4, P7 and S3 classes whether children have achieved the relevant Curriculum for Excellence level in literacy and numeracy for their stage (i.e. the early level by the end of P1, first level by the end of P4, second level by the end of P7 and third and fourth level by the end of S3).

Teachers will make those judgements based on their own professional knowledge and understanding; 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 informed by how each individual child has been progressing over the full year. Teachers will work together within their school, local area and with national teams to make sure that their judgements are consistent. Education Scotland is leading a new programme to make sure that the judgements teachers make meet the national standards for the curriculum levels.

The Scottish Government will publish annual teacher professional judgement data on the percentage of children who have achieved the Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy relevant to their stage. That information will be published at school, local authority and national level.

## Using information appropriately

All schools are unique, so to understand how well a school is doing it is important to look at a range of different data sources, together with information about the individual school and the characteristics of the children and young people in that school. It is not appropriate to rank schools, based on teacher professional judgement of Curriculum for Excellence levels data. Creating league tables which imply that schools at the top of the table are the best in Scotland and those at the bottom are the worst would be entirely misleading. Schools operate in very different circumstances and cannot be compared in this way. The context of a school must be taken into account in understanding how well a school is doing.

## Assessing achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels

Assessment is a central part of everyday learning and teaching. The vast majority of evidence teachers consider when making their judgements is gathered frequently and informally, from day-to-day classroom activities.

This ongoing assessment can take the form of children assessing their own work, or the work of their classmates, teachers asking questions and teachers observing children working together. It will also include teachers commenting on children's work.

More formal assessment can include projects, investigations, case studies, design folios and question papers/more formal tests. This kind of assessment may take place at set points in the school calendar, for example, after a short course, at the end of a school term or year or at points of transition.

Teachers use assessment information on a day to day basis to help children plan next steps. **They will draw on all assessment activity when deciding whether the children in their class have achieved the Curriculum for Excellence level relevant to their stage.**

In addition, the Scottish Government is developing new national standardised assessments in aspects of reading, writing and numeracy, for all children in P1, P4, P7 and S3. These will replace the various standardised assessments currently in use in schools across Scotland. The results from the standardised assessments will provide an additional source of nationally consistent information to inform teachers' professional judgement, both when planning next steps and when considering whether children have achieved Curriculum for Excellence levels.

## Using assessment appropriately, proportionately and inclusively

The new national standardised assessments will cover aspects of reading, writing and numeracy. This type of assessment is not suitable for assessing listening and talking or extended writing. As the national standardised assessments will only cover some aspects of literacy and numeracy, they cannot and should not replace teachers' professional judgement of achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels.

Children will take the standardised assessments online. The system 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.

The standardised assessments will be as short as possible and will be age and stage appropriate.



Children will not be expected to take standardised assessments covering the three areas of reading, writing and numeracy in one sitting. No child should sit a succession of assessments which would, in combination, last as long as an hour.

Teachers, in consultation with schools and local authorities, will decide the most appropriate time during the school year for children to take standardised assessments.

Some teachers may decide to carry out the assessments at the start of the session or midway through, to help them to understand how individual children are progressing in aspects of literacy and numeracy, and to plan next steps in learning. Other teachers may carry out the assessments at the end of the school year, to confirm the stage children have reached in aspects of literacy and numeracy, as part of their broader judgements of whether children have achieved the Curriculum for Excellence level relevant to their stage. In this case, the results of each child's assessment would be shared with their next year's teacher, so that future learning can be planned.

We will ensure that the 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 assistive technology, and other methods of communication such as speech-to-text and braille. Those who work with children and young people with complex additional support needs will use their knowledge and understanding of the individual child and their needs, strengths and challenges, to reach a decision, with parents, on whether or not the use of standardised assessment is appropriate.

### **Using assessment information to drive improvement**

The Scottish Government wants to improve educational outcomes for every child and young person. We know that reading, writing and numeracy are the core skills children and young people need to succeed in all other areas of learning, both at school and beyond. We know that children living in deprived communities are doing less well at school, purely on the basis of where they were born. We know that identifying and addressing individual children's skills gaps early in their education pays dividends in their future successes as learners. Waiting until children sit national qualifications is too late to find out whether they are progressing as they should be.

Through the use of national standardised assessments and teacher professional judgement of achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels, the National Improvement Framework will provide better information about how children and young people in Scotland are progressing with their learning.

This information will help teachers and practitioners to understand where children and young people are doing well and where they need further support; and to plan next steps accordingly.



It will help parents to understand any particular learning challenges their child is experiencing as early as possible, and to know how best to support their child's learning at home.

It will also help schools, local authorities and national government to see which learning and teaching approaches are working well within schools and classrooms and where changes need to be made.

## **Reflecting Curriculum for Excellence**

We know that teachers across Scotland already use a variety of standardised assessments. These assessments, however, have not been developed to meet the specific needs of Scottish education, and may not be measuring the aspects of children's learning in which we're most interested. As children in different schools are taking different assessments, there is no consistency in what is being measured.

The Scottish Government is replacing the variety of existing standardised assessments that local authorities and schools currently buy in with a single, nationally consistent set of standardised assessments, designed to reflect the way we deliver education in Scotland, through Curriculum for Excellence. They will therefore provide a much better tool to help teachers help children.

Alongside a range of other evidence, the national standardised assessments will inform teacher professional judgements of Curriculum for Excellence levels. The assessment should not be used in isolation and should not be viewed as a replacement for the ongoing assessment of children's progress which is central to Curriculum for Excellence.

Bringing standardised assessments into line with Curriculum for Excellence, also ensures that daily classroom learning is in itself all the preparation a child will need to take the assessments. Children will not have to revise or prepare for assessments. There will be no additional workload for teachers or children, and the assessments will offer no distraction from children's core learning.

## **Providing comparable, objective assessment**

Different assessments serve different purposes. Ongoing classroom assessments provide immediate information to teachers about how the children in their classes are progressing in their learning. This information supports teachers' professional knowledge and understanding, enabling them to consider individual children's needs and adapt their learning and teaching strategies on an ongoing basis in response to individual children's progress. As these assessments are developed, delivered, assessed and marked by individual teachers, however, they cannot provide a comparable measure of children's performance.

The new national standardised assessments have been developed by independent, objective experts in assessment and reporting tools. They have been quality assured by specialists and have been tested extensively in schools.

Assessments will be delivered online and will be marked automatically through the online system. The standardised assessments will therefore provide a fully objective and comparable measure of children's progress in some aspects of reading, writing and numeracy.

The national standardised assessments will sit alongside a wide range of other evidence, including ongoing classroom assessment of all aspects of literacy and numeracy. Taken together, ongoing assessment information and national standardised assessment results will provide a more complete and balanced picture of how children are getting on, giving teachers the information they need to support every child to succeed.

### Using assessment results appropriately

The Scottish Government is clear that the purpose and value of all assessment, including national standardised assessment, is in its ability to help teachers understand how children are progressing, and to tailor aspects of future learning accordingly. Assessment data should be used to improve educational outcomes for every child and young person.

It is important not to place a distorted value on an individual child's national standardised assessment results. National standardised assessments results cannot be considered in isolation. **Teacher professional judgement is the key measure of children's progress.** It is these judgements that take account of all aspects of a child's literacy and numeracy skills over the course of the full school year.

### Providing better information for parents

The online assessment system will produce individual feedback reports for each child, outlining where that child did well, and where further support is required. Teachers will use these reports, alongside a wide range of other assessment information, to discuss with parents how their child is progressing with their learning.

The information will also be used to plan next steps in learning and to help parents to see how they can support their child's learning at home.

Education Scotland published guidance in January 2017 for schools on how best to report children's progress and achievements to parents.

For any further queries please contact [nationalimprovementframework@gov.scot](mailto:nationalimprovementframework@gov.scot)