

Assessment Without Levels

From this September, the Government has made a change in the way that children in schools are to be assessed. This is to tie in with the new National Curriculum that started to be used by schools at the beginning of this academic year in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5. All year groups will be taught the new National Curriculum from this September. [We wrote our school curriculum based on the revised National Curriculum but we regularly review it to make sure that it meets requirements and expectations for the children are high.]

The Government has removed attainment 'Levels' because: *"Levels have detracted from real feedback and schools have found it difficult to apply them consistently – the criteria are ambiguous and require teachers to decide how to weight a huge array of factors... It will be for schools to decide how they assess pupils' progress."* DfE (2013)

The DfE wanted to avoid the situation in which children have moved through the old National Curriculum levels quickly to achieve higher attainment. The old National Curriculum was sub-divided into levels, but these were not linked to their national curriculum year group. For example, a child in Year 4 could be a Level 3 or even a level 5. Children were achieving Level 5 and 6 at the end of Key Stage 2, but the DfE thought that a significant number were able to achieve a Level 5 or 6 in a test but were not secure at that level. The feeling from the DfE was that the old national curriculum and the levels system failed to adequately ensure that children had a breadth and depth of knowledge at each national curriculum level.

The new curriculum is also harder than the last one. For example, many of the knowledge, skills and understanding in Maths that would typically have been taught in Year 4 under the old curriculum are now expected to be taught and mastered in Year 3 or some even Year 2.

What does this mean?

Levels have gone. Your child has been assessed using levels (eg. as a level 2a or 5c) for the last time.

Schools have had to set up their own methods of assessing pupils. Together with other schools in the cluster, we have spent a long time researching various different methods of assessing pupils, and we have had demonstrations of various commercial software tracking systems.

We have decided on a system published by Hertfordshire Grid for Learning. Towcester Primary, Greens Norton Primary and Nicholas Hawksmoor Primary have all decided to use this system which means that we can continue to work together to check our judgements and teachers can continue to work with each other sharing a common assessment language. The Hertfordshire system assesses children at the end of the year based on the National Curriculum expectations for that year and uses terminology used by the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- Emerging— Yet to be secure in the end of year expectations.
- Expected—Secure in the majority of the end of year expectations.
- Exceeding—Secure in almost all or all the end of year expectations and is able to use and apply their knowledge and skills confidently.

Under the old levels system children who were exceeding might have moved into the next level. The DfE now want children who are in the exceeding bracket to add more depth and breadth to their knowledge, and to have more opportunities to develop their using and applying skills. They are calling this phase of learning 'Mastery and Depth'. Only exceptional children will move into working towards the end of year expectations from the year above. Similarly, children who are unlikely to be emerging at the end of the year may work towards the expectations from the year below.

How will this look at the end of each Key Stage?

Key Stage 1

It is anticipated that the majority of children will reach the assessment point of Year 2 'Expected', a smaller number of children will reach Year 2/Phase 2 'Exceeding', and a small number will be Year 2/Phase 2 'Emerging', or possibly Year 1/Phase 1 'Exceeding/Expected/Emerging'.

Key Stage 2

The DfE are talking about children reaching the assessment point of Year 6 'Expected'. Similar to Year 2 there will be some children who may be Year 6/Phase 6 'Exceeding' and some children who are Year 6/Phase 6 'Emerging'. There may also be a small number of children who are still working at a lower level e.g. Year 4/5/Phase 4/5 'Exceeding/Expected/Emerging'.

The new National Curriculum sets out expectations for each year group and children will be assessed against those every year, so a child in Year 4 will always be judged in the first instance against the expectations for the end of Year 4.

How will this process start to work at Blakesley CE Primary?

We are going to spend the first three weeks in September transferring your child onto the new system. Because of the higher expectations of the new curriculum and the different expectations of grammar, punctuation and spelling this will not be a simple conversion process. We will be discussing our assessments with you during the Autumn Term.

At the start of each year group, every child will be 'Emerging' as they are being judged against the End of Year Statements. By using their professional knowledge and judgement teachers will know what the children can already do and what they think the children can achieve. They will then give a forecast as to where they think a child will be by the end of the Year. So, for example, children in Year 3 could be given a forecast of 3 'Emerging', 3 'Expected' or 3 'Exceeding'. Only very exceptional children will have a forecast from a higher or lower year group. As far as we are aware Year 6 'Exceeding' is likely to be the highest grading for the end of Key Stage 2. The DfE announced a Commission to look at Assessment Without Levels in March 2015. This Commission is due to report on assessment approaches, best practice and how OFSTED should judge schools with different assessment systems during the summer. Therefore, it may be that their expectations and advice change over the next few months and we will have to adapt accordingly.

If your child has been working as a level higher than national expectations in the past, this may not be the case now the expectations have been raised although we will certainly be aiming for the highest possible standards for all our children.

Blakesley CE Primary

July 2015