

National changes in pupil assessment

You may already be aware that the Government has recently implemented the most significant change to National Curriculum (NC) assessment for over 20 years, namely the removal of levels of attainment. In the past you will have been familiar with teachers informing pupils and parents of what level the child is at e.g. level 2b (average for year 2), level 4b (average for year 6). Our annual report to parents has included NC levels for reading, writing and maths. These have been removed as part of the new National Curriculum which schools have been delivering since September 2014.

“We took the decision to remove levels from the national curriculum because it was clear that they were no longer fit for purpose. Since their introduction in 1988, national curriculum levels came to dominate all forms of assessment, and were often having a negative impact on teaching. In removing the levels, we are clear that we want schools to have the freedom to develop their own approach to assessment to align with their curriculum and to meet the needs of their pupils.”

Department for Education (DfE), Sept. 2015

A new approach to assessment

Whilst the Government is encouraging freedom for individual schools and their assessment process, they have also produced guidance on how to approach “assessment beyond levels”.

“The new national curriculum..... is about deep, secure learning for all, with extension of able students (more things on the same topic) rather than acceleration (rapidly moving on to new content). Levels were not consistent with this approach because they encouraged undue pace and progression onto more difficult work while pupils still had gaps in their knowledge or understanding.”

DfE Sept.2015

The new NC contains detailed programmes of study for English and Maths that set the expectations for knowledge and understanding in each year group. The emphasis is strongly focused on securing and deepening knowledge and understanding within the year group programmes and not going beyond them. This has led to government guidance which describes pupils as “working at the expected standard” by the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6). The implication is that upon completion of each year group programme of study teachers, pupils and parents should have an understanding of whether the child is “working at the expected standard” for that year group.

End of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) Statutory Assessment Tests - SATs

In July 2015 the government issued guidance to schools on the new SATs test for Year 6 in 2016. Tests will continue to be taken in reading; grammar, punctuation and spelling; and maths. Levels will no longer be awarded. Instead there will be a new “scaled score”. A score of 100 will represent attainment of the “national standard” for end of Key Stage 2. There will be a range of scores above and below 100 which will represent attainment above and below the national standard. In addition teachers will be required to report their own assessments in reading, writing and maths in terms of “working at the expected standard”.

Parent/teacher consultations at St. Andrew's

Taking into account all these national changes, you will have picked up that teachers and parents will no longer be having conversations about levels. With the new curriculum and new expectations teachers cannot even answer the question “Can you give me a rough indication of what level he/she might be at

under the old system?" – the old and the new curriculum do not match up in this way. As teachers get closer to the end of each academic year and complete the programmes of study for each year, they will be able to make an informed judgement as to whether children will be "working at the expected standard" or above or below the expected standard. At the beginning of a school year, and even half way through it, this judgement will not be able to be made securely as there will still be plenty of year group curriculum content that remains to be taught. Nevertheless, based on what they see as each topic or theme is completed, teachers will begin to make judgements on how well each child is likely to do in relation to end of year NC expectations. However, we would agree with the government guidance which envisages that without levels there will be.....

"....more informative and productive conversations with pupils and parents. They [schools] can ensure their approaches to assessment enable pupils to take more responsibility for their achievements by encouraging pupils to reflect on their own progress, understand what their strengths are and identify what they need to do to improve. Focussing assessment on the content of the school's curriculum will allow for communications with parents to provide a clearer sense of how to support their children to build and consolidate learning."

DfE Sept. 2015

Behind the scenes

As you might expect, staff at St. Andrew's have been planning for the new curriculum and the associated changes on assessment for some time. But it is only since September 2015 that we have been working fully with the new expectations for assessment. In common with most schools across the nation our understanding and approach is evolving as we begin work with the new curriculum and the brave new world of life beyond levels! We are working with colleagues at several infant, junior and primary schools in the area to explore effective ways forward and common good practice across our schools. We are also working with new IT software to begin to build a record for each child which, in the long term, should assist the new assessment process.

It is early days and our understanding of the requirements of the new curriculum assessment process is in a development stage. The present government guidance on end of Key Stage 2 assessment (Sept. 2015) has been issued as "interim guidance" so we expect further developments in the months ahead. What remains as strong as ever, though, is the commitment of our teachers to ensure the very best in teaching, learning and progress for every child. Every teacher is secure in what a child can do and what they need to do next to improve and this, in essence, is what lies at the heart of all good assessment, a knowledge of what you can do and what you need to do next to do it better!