

Brushing up on assessment

Understanding your assessment policy

2

One of
ten guides for
school practitioners
and those looking
to brush up on
their assessment
knowledge

Since the removal of National Curriculum levels in 2014, schools have been free to develop their own approaches to assessment and it is now commonplace for schools to have their own assessment policy in place to outline assessment practice. This guide will provide an overview on what these policies include and how they can be used effectively.

What does Ofsted want to see?

Ofsted does not advocate any particular approach to assessment. The assessment policy should reflect the culture and practices of the school. During inspections, Ofsted will expect to see practices that reflect the stated policy.

Policy content



Assessment policies are generally written and reviewed by the school management team in consultation with the teaching staff. Your local authority (or academy chain) may offer help by giving suggestions of principles that should be considered or by supplying a format for developing a policy. Some schools put their assessment policy on their website alongside the statutory information (e.g. the school's curriculum) that must be published.

The policy should cover all aspects of assessment practice in the school and identify the responsibilities of staff in relation to assessment. The assessment policy should also reflect any school targets relating to assessment issues and concerns about workload. In particular, school leaders will want to ensure that the policy is not advocating or leading to excessive amounts of data collection or marking.

Schools commonly include sections on each of the following:

- **aims of assessment** – how assessment will support teaching and learning, identification of children requiring additional support, resource planning, provision of information for parents and governors, etc. The policy may also include longer term aims, such as raising standards of attainment in particular areas of the curriculum or for specified groups of pupils.
- **curriculum and assessment planning** – from whole school to individual lessons.
- **target setting** – what targets if any will be set, the frequency with which they will be set, and how these targets will be monitored.
- **types of assessment** – including formative and summative.
- **assessment timetable / milestones** – how and when.
- **assessment of children with SEND** – how and when.
- **marking** – some schools choose to have a separate, more detailed marking policy.
- **record keeping** – how and where.
- **reporting** – how feedback will be given to pupils and parents and how information will be shared with other bodies.
- **roles and responsibilities** – including the name of the person responsible for monitoring and reviewing the policy, and how this will be done.

How can an assessment policy be made relevant to learning?



Shared ownership of the policy can be encouraged by involving the whole school in its development. This may include seeking the views of teachers, learning support assistants and pupils, as well as governors and parents. You may wish to share your policy at meetings with parents about assessment or give pupils an opportunity to have a say about issues that affect them, such as what sort of marking they find most helpful. Involving as many groups of people as possible who are linked to the school can be a helpful way of discussing the purpose of assessment, and how practices can be improved.

Making your policy accessible



The purpose of an assessment policy is to help pupils to make progress. In order for it to do this consistently, it must be brief and easily understandable. Assessments should be practical for teachers to carry out. For instance, the schedule when different types of assessment need to be carried out should be stated so that both informal and formal assessments are built into the school year. Assessment should not be seen as a bolt-on activity but as an integral part of teaching and learning.

The policy document should be in an accessible place where it is shared with everyone, including learning support staff. This can be especially useful for new teachers or when a class is being covered by a long-term supply teacher.

It is sometimes difficult to translate policy into practice. If the policy is succinct and links aspects of assessment to the reasons why they are done, this task should be made easier.

Assessment should not be seen as a bolt-on activity but as an integral part of teaching and learning.

How often should an assessment policy be reviewed?



How often policies need to be reviewed depends on the size of school and type of policy. Many schools find it useful to review their assessment policy annually. This can be done in a number of ways. Some schools have an annual staff meeting when the policy is discussed to see what changes need to be made. In other schools, the principal role in updating and implementing the policy is delegated to one person. In addition to such formalised reviews, it is also common for schools to revise their policies as the need arises, in response to changes in teaching or assessment practice. This sort of review may arise as a result of staff changes, new ideas from networking or training, or from feedback from members of the school community.

What should be reviewed?



Your school management team will evaluate the extent to which changes or new additions to the policy have changed assessment practice and any perceived benefits or disadvantages. This may apply, for instance, to assessment for learning initiatives or new marking strategies. If your policy is not having an impact on pupil performance, your management team will need to ask why. They will need to consider whether this is because more time is needed for staff to adapt to new practices or if these areas of the policy need reviewing. They will think about staff familiarity with policy – how often is it looked at? Is it just the summative assessments that are being followed and not other aspects?

Your school's assessment policy should be constantly evolving, and everyone involved should be in a position to consider future developments in relation to present assessment practice. At particular intervals, your school management team may wish to carry out an audit of assessment practice, and then modify the policy as necessary in line with your school's short, medium and long-term goals.

If your policy is not having an impact on pupil performance, your management team will need to ask why.

Found this useful?

This guide is part of NFER Classroom's '*Brushing up on assessment*' series, a collection of free guides providing those looking to build their knowledge with an overview of key elements in assessment.

Sign up to our assessment newsletter (www.nfer.ac.uk/assessment-newsletter) to be the first to receive each guide as soon as it is published, as well as other exclusive assessment-focused content direct to your inbox.

Visit www.nfer.ac.uk/brush-up-assessment to view all the guides in this series.

Looking for assessment materials?

Termly NFER Tests to support attainment and progress monitoring

NFER Tests have been trialled with over 60,000 children to provide standardised scores, enabling you to:

Monitor progress and attainment against national standards.

See how pupils are progressing relative to other pupils their age.

Generate age-related expectation measures in the summer term.

Visit www.nfer.ac.uk/tests to find out more.