

Brushing up on assessment

# Sharing assessment information with different audiences

10

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

For school practitioners, assessment forms an everyday part of teaching and learning. However, there will be times when information about assessment will need to be shared outside of the classroom setting. This guide covers how assessment policy and outcomes can be shared with parents and carers, governors and other stakeholders.

When communicating information about assessment, consider these questions:

- What information about assessment does your audience need to know?
- How well does your audience understand assessment policy and practice?
- How can information be presented most effectively?

## Sharing assessment information with parents and carers



Parents need to understand how their child will be assessed and, when appropriate, they will be informed of assessment outcomes. When communicating with parents, it's important to also be aware that terms you may not think of as jargon or technical (such as mean, formative, summative and standardised score) may be unfamiliar to parents. Our *Glossary* is a good place to start should you need help explaining some key assessment terms. ([www.nfer.ac.uk/assessment-glossary](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/assessment-glossary)).

When discussing assessment outcomes, be honest but constructive. Focus on a child's strengths and explain progress as well as achievement. Many parents are surprised by the differences between education now and when they went to school. Understanding the current system better will help them to support their children at home, to engage with teachers in more meaningful conversation about attainment and progress, and help solve misconceptions. For example, parents of a pupil with low test scores may think that their child is 'failing'. Putting their child's score into context (for instance, by reminding them of his/her starting point) may reassure them that their child is in fact making progress.

### Top tips for communicating with parents:

- Inform parents of assessment policy and class expectations in advance
- Avoid providing unnecessary assessment information
- Clarify any terms that may be technical or seem like jargon
- Give honest but constructive feedback on assessment outcomes
- Put scores into context, and focus on progress as well as attainment

**Focus on a child's strengths and explain progress as well as achievement.**

## Ways to share assessment information with parents and carers

There are several ways, both formal and informal, that schools may wish to share assessment information with parents and carers. However, it is helpful to follow an established protocol for communication in order to manage the expectations of parents and carers, and help keep reporting manageable and proportionate for teachers. The following page outlines a few ways schools may communicate assessment information with parents and carers: face-to-face, in writing, and digitally.

## Face-to-face meetings

---



As well as informal meetings and parent evenings, some schools meet with parents at the beginning of the year to explain what is expected of the class. This is a good time to share relevant aspects of the assessment policy and examples of assessment activities or feedback.

This can help reduce frustration arising from misunderstandings (for example, parents worrying that homework has not been marked simply because they are not aware that the school's policy is to mark selectively). Some parents will consistently be unable to attend face-to-face meetings. You may want to consider other ways of maintaining contact with these parents.

## Written communication

---



Many schools send out curriculum newsletters or topic sheets to tell parents what their child will be studying and assessed on. The frequency of newsletters varies between schools, but they are a good way of maintaining contact with parents and encouraging more involvement with their child's education.

When writing reports, it is important to limit the quantity of information provided so that it is consistent with the level of detail needed by parents and carers, and doesn't become burdensome for teachers. Focus on assessment information that they will find useful – clear information, outlining the pupil's strengths and areas for development. It may help to summarise any key terms or caveats. For example, you may want to point out that test performance can vary and that care is needed in interpreting results where a pupil is just above or below a particular boundary or threshold.

To minimise report length, some schools use a grading system of achievement and attitude for individual subjects, with written sections providing information about particular strengths and weaknesses rather than generalised comments. There is often a page for self-assessment of progress by pupils and for parents' comments. If reports are produced early in the school year (for example, in the spring term) with only statutory reporting (see overleaf) at the end of the school year, there is time for follow-up action to improve areas identified for development.

Some commercial assessment providers, such as NFER, offer online analysis tools (at no further cost) to support their assessment materials, which can generate easy-to-interpret reports based on pupil data in a few clicks. These can be useful in efficiently summarising information that can be shared with parents and carers. You may come across other software or technologies that offer automated reporting. However, be aware of those that may still be resource intensive despite appearing to save time, or that may appear too impersonal to parents and carers.



**When writing reports, it is important to limit the quantity of information provided.**

## Statutory Reporting

In England, it is currently a statutory requirement to report national curriculum assessment outcomes for pupils in years 2 and 6 to parents. These should be complemented by results from ongoing teacher assessment. For all year groups, reported results should be put into context and should reflect the school's assessment policy. For instance, achievement can be reported in relation to national expectations, such as 'below', 'in line with' or 'above'. This can help to make test scores more meaningful for parents.

In Wales, teachers and/or practitioners are required to report progress twice during the Foundation Phase – a baseline and an end of Foundation Phase assessment. At key stages 2 and 3 statutory reporting is required at the end of the key stage, for each eligible learner in specified subjects. Teachers are also required to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum formatively using the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and report to parents annually on progress and next steps. A new curriculum and accompanying assessment arrangements will be published in 2020, for use throughout Wales from 2022.

## Digital communication



In the past, communication between the school and home relied heavily upon 'pupil post.' In recent years, however, technology has played an increasingly key role in creating more effective channels of communication. Many schools now share information with parents via web portals, emails, e-newsletters, automated electronic messaging systems or a variety of digital apps. This reduces the risk of printed information getting lost and can better facilitate two-way communication between schools and parents.

### What schools MUST share publicly

In England, each school must publish specific information on its website to comply with The School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016. For schools with Year 6, this includes the most recent key stage 2 results and a link to the performance tables service.

In Wales, schools have a regulatory duty to publish their most recent comparative report on school performance in their Reports to Parents, the Governors' Annual Report and the School Prospectus.

## Sharing assessment information with governing bodies

---



Relevant assessment data should be shared with the full governing body or the committee that deals with the curriculum with an opportunity for the governing body to ask questions and act as a critical friend. However, they should be prepared to receive information in whatever form it is being used in the school, and should agree with school leaders what data they need and when in order to fulfil their role effectively and avoid making ad hoc requests.

Like parents, governors may need help understanding assessment terms. Some may come from a business background where similar terms may have different meanings. Governors need a wide view of assessment issues and it is particularly helpful to put assessment information into context, so they know what is expected of each cohort and can understand why (particularly in a small school) performance may vary from year to year. It might also be helpful to invite governors into school to observe assessments, especially types they may be unfamiliar with, such as assessment for learning (AfL). Make sure you keep governors with specific responsibilities for assessment up-to-date with relevant issues.

Relevant assessment data should be shared with the full governing body or committee dealing with the curriculum

## Sharing assessment information for school self-evaluation

---



The aim of self-evaluation is to identify evidence of strengths and weaknesses, leading to improved outcomes for the school and its pupils. School managers may ask teachers to provide assessment information for the purpose of self-evaluation, which may include data from formal assessment, teachers' anecdotal observations and records of self or peer assessment. Good self-evaluation should be like good assessment practice – an ongoing, continuous process used to ensure that all pupils make good progress. However, the record-keeping involved should not be cumbersome and unnecessary recording should be avoided. Your school's assessment policy should set out what is expected in regards to recording and reporting assessment outcomes. New guidance on data management in relation to assessment has also been published by the **Teacher Workload Advisory Group** in their *'Making data work'* report released in October 2018.

## Sharing assessment information with Inspectors



In England, Ofsted will take into account a school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, and the inspection contributes to the process of self-evaluation. Schools are encouraged to ensure their self-evaluation is up-to-date, so you may be asked to provide assessment information throughout the school year. Analyse School Performance (ASP) and other similar packages provide comprehensive information about summative test data. Ofsted has access to this information but will want to know what it says about your school and how standards can be raised. It is worth also thinking about evidence that can be provided of assessment for learning or peer assessment. Reports generated by online analysis tools can also help schools to communicate with Ofsted.

### REMEMBER:

Ofsted will want to see evidence that a school has an effective assessment system in place which:

- supports pupil learning
- is used to raise standards

Ofsted is not looking for:

- a specific type of assessment system
- a specific volume of data or frequency of marking
- predicted attainment or predicted progress

### 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 primary assessment.

Sign up to our assessment newsletter ([www.nfer.ac.uk/assessment-newsletter](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/assessment-newsletter)) to be the first to receive further exclusive assessment-focussed content direct to your inbox.

Visit [www.nfer.ac.uk/brush-up-assessment](http://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](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/tests) to find out more.