

Parental Confidence in Assessments from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3



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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Approach	3
Findings	4
Levels of parental confidence	4
Factors contributing to parental confidence	4
There is a correlation between levels of parental confidence and levels of parental understanding.....	4
There is a correlation between levels of parental confidence and how well parents perceive a school communicates with them	5
The legal requirements for reporting pupils' progress to parents in England vary across the key stages.....	6
Overview.....	7
Legal requirements: reporting to parents in the Early Years Foundation Stage	7
Legal requirements: reporting to parents during Key Stages 1 to 3	8
Legal requirement: reporting to parents of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)	10
Recommendations.....	11

Introduction

One of the objectives of the Office of Examinations and Qualifications Regulation (Ofqual) is to promote public confidence in regulated assessment arrangements. It is that objective which is the starting point for this report.

The report has two purposes, to summarise the evidence gathered about levels of parental confidence in the assessment of 3- to 14-year-olds, and to identify the factors which may positively or negatively impact on the level of that confidence.

In this report we outline our findings and provide recommendations to the Department for Education and other bodies responsible for national assessment arrangements.

You can find information on the current arrangements for the assessment of 3- to 14-year-olds on our website: www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/national-assessment-arrangements/559-how-are-children-assessed

Our approach

The project started in March 2011. We examined a range of evidence. In June 2011 we commissioned an external company to undertake a large-scale survey, which involved face-to-face interviews with more than 1,200 parents. Of these parents, approximately:

- 260 had children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (that is, up to the age of 5)
- 290 had children in Key Stage 1 (ages 5 to 7)
- 390 had children in Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11)
- 360 had children in Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14).

For qualitative evidence, and to gain the opinions of practitioners, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with practitioners from our 12 'retainer settings'. These are Early Years practitioners in a range of schools and settings across England. No additional interviews were conducted with teachers and practitioners in other Key Stages.

We also interviewed members of our Early Years Advisory Group, a group of 12 Early Years professionals involved with various aspects of the EYFS and Key Stage 1 assessment system. They included local authority staff, moderators, teachers, and academics. Both groups were interviewed in October 2011.

We undertook desk research to evaluate existing literature on parental confidence in assessments. There was little large-scale research on the issue, with the exception of the *Lamb Inquiry: Special educational needs and parental confidence*: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-01143-2009>. Under the chairmanship of Brian Lamb, Chair of the Special Educational Consortium, the inquiry investigated a range of ways in which parental confidence in the special educational needs (SEN) assessment process might be improved. Where appropriate, findings from the Lamb Inquiry, and other existing research, have been referred to.

Findings

Levels of parental confidence

Just over three in five parents (62 per cent) are confident in the current assessment process.

There is no significant difference in views between parents with children in different key stages. Nor are there any significant differences in levels of parental confidence between parents belonging to different age groups.

There are some small differences in overall confidence levels according to the ethnic background of parents, with parents from an Asian or 'other' ethnic background likely to express more confidence in the assessment process than white parents.

There are some differences in parental confidence according to socio-economic group, with parents in more upwardly mobile groups (A and B) less likely have confidence in the process than those in the lower groups (D and E).

Factors contributing to parental confidence

There is a correlation between levels of parental confidence and levels of parental understanding

Parents who say they know a great deal or a fair amount about key-stage assessments are also likely to agree that they are confident in the assessment process. 72 per cent of this group state that they are confident. By contrast, parents who say they don't know very much or anything at all are much less likely to agree that they are confident; only 47 per cent of this group agree.

A similar pattern emerges when cross-tabulating responses to the question about confidence levels with those to the question about whether parents feel they know enough about key-stage assessments. A significant minority say that they disagree with the statement, "Overall, I feel I know enough about key-stage assessments", and this group is far less likely to be confident in the key-stage assessment process. More than three in four parents, 77 per cent, who feel they know enough about key-stage assessments are confident in the process, whereas only 41 per cent of parents who disagree are confident. This suggests that there may be some appetite among a number of parents for more and better information.

The link between parental confidence and parental understanding is also identified by the practitioners who participated in our semi-structured interviews. When asked, "Do you think there is a link between parental understanding of assessments and parental confidence in assessments?" the majority agreed.

“Yes, the more understanding, the more likely they are to be confident. It’s better for them to be informed.”

“Yes, if parents understand assessments or know what’s going to happen, for example the language that will be used or the skills that children will be assessed against, they will be more comfortable to ask questions, gain confidence in them.”

“They will know what to look for, what to expect and be able to understand where their child is at, see their children performing at expected levels and have confidence.”

There is a correlation between levels of parental confidence and how well parents perceive a school communicates with them

Of the parents who agree that, “At the start of the relevant key stage my child’s school explained how they would inform me of my child’s progress throughout that key stage”, 81 per cent are confident in the process compared with just 31 per cent who disagree. Similarly, 77 per cent of those who agree that “my child’s teachers have kept me informed of my child’s progress throughout the relevant key stage” are confident compared with 29 per cent who disagree.

Of the parents who agree that “my child’s teachers took my knowledge of my child’s abilities into account when they assessed my child”, 81 percent are confident compared to 43 per cent who disagree. Parents who are more positive about how well their school keeps them informed or the degree to which it takes account of the views of parents themselves when assessing children are more likely to have confidence in the process.

Levels of confidence in the assessment process also appear to be linked to the levels of confidence parents have in the system supporting their child’s needs going forward. For example, as many as 79 per cent of parents who agree they are confident that their “child’s school will use these assessments effectively to inform the teaching of [their] child at the next key-stage level” are confident in the process currently. This compares with just 14 per cent of those who disagree with this statement.

Just over half of parents (56 per cent) agree that their “child’s school has explained how these assessments will be used to inform the teaching of [their] child at the next key stage level”. Of those who actively disagree (22 per cent), as many as two in five (40 per cent) lack confidence in the assessment process overall. This finding is supported by qualitative evidence from the semi-structured interviews. When asked what could be done to increase parental confidence in the assessment of 3- to 14-year-olds, practitioners frequently referred to the need for on-going dialogue with parents. The building of trust was deemed important. One practitioner summed up the views of many when stating:

“Parents need to be a part of the assessment process. Dialogue at the beginning especially, but on-going, both formally and informally.”

Practitioners provided many examples of the content and format they thought was good practice in promoting confidence in an on-going dialogue. These examples have been grouped together and listed below:

- resources shown to all parents at the start of the EYFS and each subsequent key stage
- information about the type of assessment to be used, and when and how it would be conducted
- the purpose of each assessment and what its outcomes will be used for, including how it will be used to inform teaching into the next key stage
- information for parents on what steps are taken to ensure the accuracy of assessments, for example the moderation of teachers’ judgements
- opportunities for parents to input into their child’s assessment on an on-going basis
- information that is simple and user friendly
- information at timely intervals; not too much too soon
- consistent information across key stages.

The legal requirements for reporting pupils’ progress to parents in England vary across the key stages

When undertaking review work in any aspect of assessment of 3- to 14-year-olds, there is a need to identify the body responsible for establishing and governing any legal requirements. We intend to clarify who is responsible and to establish what the legal requirements are for each aspect and how they contribute to meeting the primary purpose of each assessment. This approach is in line with international standards of assessment development and our Regulatory Framework for National Assessments, which can be found at: www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-regulatory-framework-for-national-assessments.pdf?Itemid=198 .

Overview

On 5th November 2010 the Secretary of State for Education announced that a new executive agency was to be established within the Department for Education (DfE), accountable to him for the secure delivery of statutory assessment and reporting arrangements.

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) was launched on 1st October 2011 and responsibility for the relevant functions passed from what was the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency to STA.

STA has responsibility for the development and delivery of all statutory assessments at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. STA's framework document, providing further information on its operation, is available from the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk .

In November 2011 we asked the DfE to tell us which internal teams were responsible for reporting pupils' progress to parents in each key stage, from the EYFS to Key Stage 3.

Legal requirements: reporting to parents in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Responsibility for the EYFS legislative and governance procedures for providers to communicate with and report progress to parents sits with the DfE Quality and Standards Division.

For EYFS, the legislation which underpins reporting requirements is outlined below.

The requirements of, and statutory guidance on, the EYFS and EYFS Profile are set out in the statutory framework for the EYFS, published in May 2008. The framework is available on the Department's website at:

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00261-2008 .

It includes (paragraph 2.19) the responsibility for Early Years providers to involve parents in their children's assessment, using on-going dialogue and encouraging their input.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile handbook provides additional information and guidance on the EYFS Profile. The handbook is available on the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/eyfsp .

The Assessment and Reporting Arrangements Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS ARA) provides further guidance on the EYFS profile for schools.¹

Where an EYFS Profile has been completed in relation to a child, it is the statutory responsibility of the provider to give the parent of that child:

- a written summary reporting the child's progress against the early learning goals and the assessment scales
- a copy of the EYFS Profile – where the parent requests it
- details of the arrangements under which the EYFS Profile and its results may be discussed between a practitioner and the parent, giving a reasonable opportunity for the parent to discuss the profile and its results with that practitioner.

Legal requirements: reporting to parents during Key Stages 1 to 3

At Key Stages 1 to 3, legislative and governance procedures for schools to communicate with and report progress to parents sits with the DfE's Family Engagement Division.

The legislation which underpins reporting requirements is outlined below.

The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005 – and the subsequent amendments set out in the Education (Pupil Information) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 (Pupil Information Regulations) – set out the requirement for schools to:

- report at least annually on their pupils' educational and curricular achievements
- provide a report to school leavers
- keep and update pupils' curricular records
- ensure that parents can have access to their children's educational records.

¹<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/e/assessment%20and%20reporting%20arrangements%20early%20years%20foundation%20stage%20profile.pdf>

Guidance for schools on reporting arrangements with parents is included in the annual Assessment and Reporting Arrangements (ARA) booklets published by STA. They provide further information from Foundation Stage to the end of Key Stage 3 (and, from 2012, include the Year 1 Phonics screening check).

The Pupil Information Regulations require head teachers to provide an annual written report on pupils' educational achievements for every registered pupil at their school and to make arrangements for the recipients of the report to discuss its contents with the pupil's teacher if they so wish. The report must be provided to the pupil's parents every school year.

The regulations set out the minimum content of the report, which can be provided in one or more such reports. Schools can, of course, provide more than the minimum information required.

The minimum content required of annual report for pupils in Reception Year to Year 13 includes:

- brief particulars of the pupil's achievements in all subjects and other activities forming part of the school curriculum
- comments on the pupil's general progress
- the attendance record (information about attendance, showing the total number of possible attendances and total number of unauthorised absences expressed as a percentage of the possible attendances) during the period to which the report relates, unless the child is in Reception Year, or Years 12 or 13 and is no longer of compulsory school age
- the results of any national curriculum tests taken in the year where the pupil is in Key Stages 2 to 3
- national curriculum teacher assessment levels and national curriculum test results, as appropriate, with explanatory material where the pupil is in the final year of Key Stages 1 to 3
- comparative information about the attainments of pupils in that year in the school, and nationally, where the pupil is in the final year of Key Stages 1 to 3
- any public examination results by subject and grade, including any vocational qualification or credits towards any such qualification gained
- arrangements for discussing the report with the pupil's teacher if the recipient so wishes.

There is no statutory responsibility for schools actively to engage parents in their children's learning (including assessment) through on-going dialogue.

Legal requirement: reporting to parents of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Additional responsibility for the legislative and governance procedures specific to SEND for schools to communicate with and report progress to parents sits with the DfE's Special Educational Needs and Disability Division.

Under the Education (Special Educational Needs) (Information) (England) Regulations 1999, schools must publish information about the individual school's policies for the admissions, identification, assessment and provision for all pupils with special educational need, including information about the school's staffing policies and partnership with bodies beyond the school regarding provision for children's with such needs.

Recommendations

The findings from our large-scale survey of parental views underline the strong link between parents' confidence in assessment information and their understanding of how the information is arrived at and how it is used to support their children's future learning. As the findings from the Lamb Inquiry, 2009, state, "Parents have told us that good, honest and open communication is one of the important components of building confidence and good relationships."

We are aware of the steps already being taken by the DfE to implement the recommendations of *The Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (2011) <http://www.education.gov.uk/tickellreview>, one of which was provide user-friendly resources for the EYFS for parents. The final report of Lord Bew's *Independent Review of Key Stage 2 Testing, Assessment and Accountability* (2011) www.education.gov.uk/ks2review also stated that, "One of the main uses of statutory assessment data which we have identified is providing information to parents about the attainment and progress of their children. The evidence we have received shows that there is widespread agreement about the importance of providing good quality information to parents." (Bew Review, final report, page 37). The current review of the National Curriculum may also provide an opportunity to consider this aspect of national assessment arrangements.

Our recommendations are:

- The Department for Education makes available to schools information about statutory assessment arrangements in a form which schools can then use to promote two way communication and an on-going dialogue with parents about the assessment of their children's attainment and progress. The information could include what current statutory assessments are in place, when they are undertaken, their purpose(s) and their intended use(s). The resources could also briefly outline what steps are taken to promote the accuracy and reliability of the assessment outcomes (e.g. moderation, test development).
- To enable us to meet our objectives and undertake our review work in relation to reporting national assessment outcomes to parents, the Department for Education should specify which team has the lead responsibility for this aspect of assessment arrangements at each stage from Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3.
- As national assessment arrangements change in the light of recent and on-going reviews, the Department for Education considers the legal requirements for informing parents of pupils' attainment and progress in relation to national standards to make sure that they are as consistent and coherent as possible,

from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3, and support schools in promoting greater parental understanding of assessment information.

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