

Content and format of the June 2008 single level tests

Introduction

Who is the guidance for?

This guidance is for teachers involved in piloting the June 2008 single level tests in English reading, English writing and mathematics.

What is it about?

The guidance includes:

- information on the design and development of single level tests
- information on the standard setting process for single level tests
- information on the differences between the June 2008 and December 2007 single level tests
- information on levels in the tests
- guidance on the importance of teacher assessment in selecting appropriate pupils for testing
- details of the format and content of the June 2008 single level tests
- details of the timing and administration of the June 2008 tests.

What is it for?

This guidance gives teachers information about the content and format of single level tests to help them prepare for the testing window in June 2008. Single level

tests are an integral part of the Making Good Progress pilot (see below for more information). As part of the pilot the tests are evaluated after each cycle. Feedback from the evaluation is used to improve the tests for the next cycle. This iterative process will continue throughout the pilot to help develop the most appropriate test model. The test model, therefore, is liable to change throughout the pilot phase. This guidance explains the format of the June 2008 tests and the changes that have been made since December 2007. It also sets out the assessment foci for each paper.

Background to the single level tests

In January 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) launched a consultation document, *Making good progress – how can we help every pupil to make good progress at school?* The consultation paper proposed a two-year pilot to be carried out in a national sample of schools to trial ways to improve pupils' progress throughout the key stages. The Making Good Progress pilot, which started in schools in September 2007, will run until July 2009. There are four strands in the pilot: assessment for learning (including single level tests), one-to-one tuition, progression targets and progression premiums.

For more information on the Making Good Progress pilot, visit the DCSF *TeacherNet* website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/schoolstandards/mgppilot.

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Overview of the June 2008 single level tests

While the current statutory national curriculum tests are designed to assess a pupil's level of attainment at the end of a key stage programme of study, single level tests are designed to be more flexible and to be administered to pupils throughout the key stage. Pupils should take the single level tests when teacher assessment confirms that they are working securely at a particular level and where this assessment represents progress by a national curriculum level.

Single level tests can be administered to pupils within a December or June test cycle. Pupils can be entered for different subjects at different times so it is not necessary for a pupil to be entered for English reading, English writing or mathematics in the same test cycle or at the same test level.

The single level tests are:

- available in English reading, English writing and mathematics
- intended to assess the knowledge, skills and understanding demonstrated by a pupil working securely at the level being assessed, following a teacher's assessment
- meant to confirm pupils' progress through key stages 2 and 3
- for pupils in years 3 to 9 in both key stage 2 and key stage 3
- available at levels 3 to 8
- short – the tests last between 50 and 70 minutes
- marked by external markers
- available in modified large print, braille and enlarged print where required.

As with statutory national curriculum tests, schools can use a range of different access arrangements for the single level tests. For more information visit the 'Single level tests' section of the NAA website at naa.org.uk/singleleveltests.

What do we mean by levels in tests?

The current statutory national curriculum tests are designed to award a level based on a pupil's performance on a range of questions. These questions are of differing difficulty and allow the award of one of three or four levels, depending on the key stage and subject. The single level tests have been designed to assess whether a pupil is working at a single level and therefore contain questions with a more restricted range of difficulties. Although more restricted, the questions need to cover a range of difficulties to encompass the range of performance that pupils working at each level will demonstrate. The questions have been developed and pre-tested to ensure they are appropriate for pupils working at a single level.

The national curriculum programmes of study do not define the content at each level but define the required coverage at each key stage. The national curriculum level descriptions introduce the notion of required attainment at each level, as do the Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) assessment criteria, but they should not be viewed as a sole reflection of the content for each level. The single level tests will be designed to reflect the assessment criteria as set out in the APP materials and to ensure sufficient coverage of the programmes of study for pupils to demonstrate enough evidence to be awarded the level. More information about APP can be found on the QCA website at qca.org.uk/qca_13581.aspx.

Developing the single level tests

During test development, there are several processes that help the NAA decide which questions are of appropriate demand for inclusion in a single level test. These include:

- the use of experienced test developers with a background in developing national curriculum tests
- the review of test materials by educational experts at test review groups and teacher panels, including local authority advisers and practising teachers

- the review, by an inclusion panel, of accessibility of the test materials for pupils with differing assessment needs
- formal pre-testing with a sample of pupils to determine how questions perform for pupils working at a range of levels
- the use of judgements based on pre-test findings and advice about the most appropriate individual items for inclusion in test papers.

Setting the standard for each level of the single level tests

Before the December 2007 tests took place, ministers decided that, in order to continue to monitor standards over time, standards on the single level tests should be linked to the standards on the end of key stage national curriculum tests. For example, a level 4 in the single level tests will be equivalent to a level 4 in the end of key stage national curriculum tests. In order to do this, the NAA is conducting a second formal pre-test where pupils in non-pilot schools sit a single level test and a national curriculum test, where standards are already established, in order to compare the two sets of tests and set the standards on the single level tests appropriately. This link will enable the NAA to set standards on the single level tests. These standards will be confirmed by a number of judgemental exercises involving teachers and markers and will ensure continuity of standards between single level tests and the national curriculum tests.

Timing and administration of the tests

The timing of the tests varies depending on the level and subject. The table below details the timing for each test.

An additional 10 minutes will be needed for the administration of each test.

Full guidance on administering the single level tests can be found in the *Test administrators' guide* available from the 'Single level tests' section of the NAA website at naa.org.uk/singleleveltests.

Assessing pupil progress and single level tests

Single level tests are designed to confirm a pupil's ability to work at a particular national curriculum level following a teacher's assessment. Teacher assessments should be made using the APP criteria. Only those pupils working securely at a level should take a single level test. If teacher assessment suggests that a pupil is displaying only some of the features associated with performance at a level, teachers should wait for a later test window. This will ensure the pupil has a better test experience.

The APP materials have been developed to support teacher assessment over an extended period. The APP programme includes a set of guidance documents that help teachers assess pupils' progress and make level-related judgements. The descriptions of performance within the APP criteria at each level are matched to assessment foci for reading and writing and attainment targets for mathematics.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Mathematics	50 minutes	50 minutes	50 minutes	60 minutes	70 minutes	70 minutes
English reading	50 minutes	50 minutes	50 minutes	60 minutes	70 minutes	70 minutes
English writing	50 minutes	50 minutes	50 minutes	60 minutes	70 minutes	70 minutes

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Single level tests in English reading

The English reading paper has the familiar style of the current end of key stage national curriculum test paper. It is made up of a reading stimulus booklet and a separate question booklet for pupils to complete.

The choice of texts is linked to the reading ability of pupils working at the level being assessed, to provide appropriate opportunities for questioning. Care has been taken to match the nature and type of text to differing levels of maturity and types of interest.

Each English reading test will contain questions on two or three texts on an underlying theme. Each test will contain questions over a range of difficulty to generate sufficient evidence that a pupil is working at the level being assessed.

The level 3, 4 and 5 English reading papers must be administered in one 50-minute session. Pupils should be given 10 minutes' reading time, during which they are not allowed to open the answer booklet. They then have 40 minutes to complete the questions.

The level 6 English reading paper must be administered in one 60-minute session. Pupils should be given 10 minutes' reading time, during which they are not allowed to open the answer booklet. They then have 50 minutes to complete the questions.

The level 7 and 8 English reading papers must be administered in one 70-minute session. Pupils should be given 10 minutes' reading time, during which they are not allowed to open the answer booklet. They then have 60 minutes to complete the questions.

Pupils should be encouraged to refer back to the reading booklet when they answer the questions.

The assessment foci that underpin the national curriculum tests are also applied to single level tests. Each question addresses one assessment focus. Assessment focus 7 will be addressed where the text can support it. The proportion of questions asked on each assessment focus varies with the level being assessed.

Assessment foci for reading

The aspects of reading to be assessed are the pupil's ability to:

1. use a range of strategies, including accurate decoding of text, to read for meaning
2. understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to text
3. deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts
4. identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and presentational features at text level
5. explain and comment on writers' use of language, including grammatical and literary features at word and sentence level
6. identify and comment on writers' purposes and viewpoints, and the overall effect of the text on the reader
7. relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions.

Level	Assessment focus	Maximum number of marks per question
3	Mainly 2 and 3, with most emphasis on retrieval and simple inference	3
4	Mainly 2 and 3, with most emphasis on inference, some of which is complex	3
5	Mainly 3, 4, 5 and 6, with some complex inference	4
6	Mainly 3, 4, 5 and 6, with some complex inference	4
7	Covers 3-7 with some complex inference	4
8	Covers 3-7 with some complex inference	4

Assessment focus 7 will be addressed where the text can support it.

Four-mark questions for levels 5 to 8

At levels 5 and above, four-mark questions will be used. Four marks provide sufficient opportunity to differentiate pupils' performance in longer answers when assessing whether a pupil is working at a single level. Four-mark questions require a thoughtful and considered response that draws on the text. Sometimes bullet point prompts will support pupils in structuring their answer.

Single level tests in English writing

Each English writing test will consist of two set tasks, one longer and one shorter. The tests differentiate between pupils through what they write rather than through getting questions correct or incorrect. Therefore, the features of performance of pupils working at a level are embedded in the mark schemes.

For all levels the prompt for the longer task will be in a separate booklet, which will also contain the planning sheet. Pupils may use this for their planning or request a blank sheet of paper. Customised planning sheets must not be provided. The planning will not be marked. Pupils must write in the *Writing answer booklet*. The prompt for the shorter task has no planning sheet provided and is contained within the answer booklet.

Test administrators should hand out all English writing paper booklets to pupils at the start of the test. Pupils should complete the shorter task first, followed by the longer task. Test administrators should prompt pupils at the appropriate time to move on to the longer task.

For levels 3 to 5, pupils should spend up to 20 minutes on the shorter writing task and the remaining 30 minutes (which includes 5 minutes' planning time) on the longer writing task.

For level 6, pupils should spend up to 20 minutes on the shorter writing task and the remaining 40 minutes (which includes 5 minutes' planning time) on the longer writing task.

For levels 7 and 8, pupils should spend up to 30 minutes on the shorter task and the remaining 40 minutes (which includes 5 minutes' planning time) on the longer writing task.

For levels 3 and 4, test administrators can read the prompt aloud to the group of pupils taking the test. If the group taking the test is made up of pupils taking a number of levels, test administrators can read the prompt to the group of pupils sitting the level 3 or 4 tests separately before directing them to their desks.

Spelling will not be assessed in a separate test, but as part of the marking for the writing tasks. The allocation of marks for spelling is greater at the lower levels.

Level	Number of marks for spelling
3 and 4	4
5, 6, 7 and 8	2

Handwriting will be assessed at levels 3 and 4 only. A maximum of two marks will be available. The writing mark scheme will be based on the writing assessment foci and will highlight features of performance that demonstrate a pupil is working at the level being assessed.

Assessment foci for writing

The aspects of writing to be assessed are pupils' ability to:

1. write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts
2. produce texts that are appropriate to the task, reader and purpose
3. organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events
4. construct paragraphs and use cohesion within and between paragraphs
5. vary sentences for clarity, purpose and effect
6. write with technical accuracy of syntax and punctuation in phrases, clauses and sentences

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7. select appropriate and effective vocabulary (this is not assessed separately, but contributes to text structure and organisation, and composition and effect)
8. use correct spelling.

Assessment foci will be grouped into strands, as they are in national curriculum tests. The strands are as follows:

Strand	Assessment focus
Sentence structure and punctuation (SSP)	AF5 AF6
Text structure and organisation (TSO)	AF3 AF4
Composition and effect (CE)	AF1 AF2
Sentence structure, punctuation and text organisation (SSPTO)	AF4 AF5 AF6
Handwriting (HW)	N/A
Spelling (SP)	AF8

The mark scheme will describe features of task-specific performance at the level being assessed and the level below for each strand. The spelling mark scheme will describe level-related features of spelling in a similar way to the APP criteria. Pupils will be assessed on the accuracy of their spelling, rather than completing a test of specific words. They will be marked on the level-related features of their spelling across both pieces of writing.

Single level tests in mathematics

Comparison between single level papers in mathematics for June 2008 will show that there are some common questions between consecutive level papers. This is because the questions will be appropriate for pupils working at both levels to demonstrate what they can do and understand.

The mathematics paper is administered in one test session and is divided into two parts, a calculator paper and a non-calculator paper, with 25 minutes permitted for each part at levels 3 to 5, 30 minutes for each part at level 6 and 35 minutes for each part at levels 7 and 8. Pupils must complete the non-calculator paper first. Mental mathematics strategies will be assessed in the non-calculator paper.

The mathematics paper will assess all four mathematics attainment targets.

Strand	Assessment focus
Using and applying mathematics	Ma 1
Number and algebra	Ma 2
Shape, space and measures	Ma 3
Handling data	Ma 4

The ratio and coverage is related to the level being assessed. The number of marks available for each national curriculum attainment target for each test will be in the following ratios:

- for levels 3 and 4, Ma2:Ma3:Ma4 will be in the ratio 5:2:1
- for levels 5 and above, Ma2:Ma3:Ma4 will be in the ratio 9:4:3.

At all levels, Ma1 will feature in approximately 20 per cent of the marks available across the two papers.

The key stage 2 and key stage 3 programmes of study have very slight differences in content. The level 5 mathematics paper may include questions on areas such as algebra and probability which, although they are common to both key stages, are covered more explicitly at key stage 3 than at key stage 2.

The tests are designed to be accessed by pupils of all ages (years 3–9). However, teachers will be aware that key stage 2 pupils working securely at level 6 will necessarily already be working to, and familiar with, the key stage 3 programme of study.

More information

For more information on the single level tests, you can:

- visit the NAA website at naa.org.uk/singleleveltests
- email any queries to sltqueries@naa.org.uk
- call the national curriculum tests helpline on 08700 60 60 40.

For more information on the Making Good Progress pilot, visit the DCSF *TeacherNet* website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/schoolstandards/mgppilot.

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Notes