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# Supporting Progress for Every Child

## Transforming Statutory Assessment: An Independent Review for Northern Ireland

10 Recommendations for Statutory Assessment  
in Northern Ireland



This document presents the 10 Recommendations of the Independent Review of Statutory Assessment in Northern Ireland. It should be read in conjunction with the full report.

## **Recommendation 1:**

### **Introduce New Assessment Principles**

A set of guiding principles has been developed to underpin assessment policy in Northern Ireland. These principles reflect international standards and best practice in educational assessment. They must be regularly reviewed and updated to remain responsive to evolving policy, context and evidence.

## **Recommendation 2:**

### **A Focus on Pupil and System-Level Data**

Assessment policy should prioritise the collection and use of pupil-level and system-level data to inform teaching and learning, and the development of system-level professional support and resources, rather than data being published or for school-level accountability purposes. This approach will create confidence in the new arrangements and support improvement without creating undue pressure on schools or learners.

## **Recommendation 3:**

### **Remove Levels of Progression**

The current Levels of Progression are not fit for purpose. They are too broad, subjective and open to interpretation. They also do not align with emerging international best practice. They should be removed to allow for a more coherent and effective assessment framework. Instead, assessments will use scaled scores to establish an expected standard.

Internationally, curriculum levels are increasingly not considered appropriate because they oversimplify learning into broad bands, masking gaps in understanding and attainment. They rely on imprecise best-fit judgments, meaning pupils at the same level can have very different strengths, making them unreliable for tracking progress and supporting learning. Originally intended as formative tools, levels can become high-stakes accountability measures, distorting teaching priorities. They also fail to align neatly with what is taught, creating artificial thresholds that fragment progression. International evidence shows that high-performing systems avoid generic curriculum levels, instead using curriculum-based, concept-focussed assessment that supports depth of learning and coherent progression.

## Recommendation 4:

### Establish a New Statutory Assessment Pathway

A clear statutory assessment pathway should be introduced for pupils in Years 1 to 10, based on standardised assessments, which will significantly reduce workload for teachers compared with a system based on teacher-led assessments.

This pathway should include:

- **Year 1:** Baseline check
- **Year 2:** Phonics check
- **Year 3 to Year 5:** Annual reading fluency check
- **Year 4:** Literacy and numeracy assessments
- **Year 5:** Multiplication check
- **Year 7:** Literacy, numeracy and science assessments
- **Year 10:** Literacy, numeracy and science assessments

If pupils reach the required standard in phonics in Year 2, then they will take short reading fluency checks in Years 3, 4 and 5. If they do not meet the required standard, then the phonics check is repeated annually. From the time the phonics standard is met, it is followed by three years of reading fluency checks.

The new framework is designed to provide reliable information for pupils, parents, carers, schools and policymakers on the key areas of literacy, numeracy and science. These assessments will be closely linked to curriculum content and the Year 4, 7 and 10 assessments will use scaled scores to establish expected standards rather than broad curriculum levels.

The assessments proposed take account of curriculum reform, teacher workload and system readiness, with the need for carefully sequenced and phased introduction fully recognised.

The new framework can create a value-added measure for both primary schools linked to the baseline check, and at GCSE, value-added measures linked to prior attainment in Year 7 and Year 10, providing a benefit to schools in having a consistent assessment baseline to inform pupil progress and school development planning.

Writing development in schools will also be supported by a statutory Writing Repository, details of which are provided in Recommendation 7 below.

## Recommendation 5:

### Provide Optional Assessments

Alongside statutory assessments, schools should have access to a range of high-quality optional assessments, including:

- **Years 1–10:** Optional use of CCEA Adaptive Assessments in literacy and numeracy potentially replacing current commercial assessments.
- **Years 2–10:** Optional reading fluency checks, with frequency determined by the school, alongside the statutory fluency checks.
- **Year 8:** Optional baseline checks in literacy, numeracy and science to be available to schools.

## Recommendation 6:

### Develop Dedicated Irish-Medium Assessments

Specific linguistically-appropriate statutory assessments should be promptly developed for Irish-medium schools. These should align with system-wide standards while respecting the distinctive features of Irish-medium education.

## Recommendation 7:

### Establish a Northern Ireland Writing Repository

As part of statutory arrangements, a Writing Repository should be created to allow schools to lodge examples of pupil writing. This low-workload initiative will enable schools to benchmark writing standards against other schools, including those in similar contexts, and encourage internal scrutiny of writing development.

Given their workload intensity, there will not be formal assessments of writing - rather this approach will provide a beneficial comparative tool, with minimal workload for teachers.

Schools will be required to submit no more than five short, unmarked samples, showing the range of writing quality in Years 4, 6 and 8. For other year groups, submissions are optional but encouraged.

## **Recommendation 8:**

### **Introduce a Record of Development and Education Northern Ireland**

A digital record should be developed for every child and young person, integrating early developmental checks from 0-4 and all statutory assessment data.

The Record of Development and Education Northern Ireland will provide a robust, enduring record of progress for each child and young person, supporting smooth transitions between phases and reducing teacher workload associated with information gathering.

To ensure equity and inclusion for all pupils, there are also specific recommendations relating to the arrangements for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Pupils with SEN should be entered for standard assessments within the statutory system wherever possible and where outcomes will enhance each young person's progression and personal development. Where entry is not possible, personal attainment should be recorded in the Record of Development and Education Northern Ireland and used for recognition, support and progression.

## **Recommendation 9:**

### **Establish an Education Reporting Unit**

An Education Reporting Unit should be created to manage and analyse assessment data in Northern Ireland. This unit will enhance early identification of pupil needs, improve collaboration across services and phases, and provide system-level intelligence to inform policy. It will ensure high-quality data is available at pupil, school and system levels, supporting equity and improved outcomes.

## **Recommendation 10:**

### **Strengthen Assessment in Teacher Education and Professional Learning**

The new statutory assessment framework should be supported by enhanced professional development and strengthened assessment components in Initial Teacher Education and early career professional development.

Assessment theory and practice should be embedded as part of the compulsory content within Initial Teacher Education and supported through ongoing professional development, particularly for early career teachers. This will further enhance teachers' confidence and competence in using assessment to improve learning.





