

[Home](#) ▾ [Education, training and skills](#) ▾ [School curriculum](#) ▾ [Early years curriculum](#)
▾ [Reception baseline assessment: assessment and reporting arrangements \(ARA\)](#)



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Agency](#)

Statutory guidance

2026 reception baseline assessment: assessment and reporting arrangements (ARA)

Updated 18 May 2026

Contents

1. [About this guidance](#)
2. [Changes for the academic year 2026 to 2027](#)
3. [Reception baseline assessment](#)
4. [Important dates](#)
5. [Responsibilities](#)
6. [Assessment participation](#)
7. [Assessment administration](#)
8. [Narrative statements](#)
9. [Security](#)
10. [Quality monitoring](#)
11. [Maladministration](#)
12. [Reporting to parents](#)

[13. Keeping and maintaining records](#)

[14. Legal requirements and responsibilities](#)

[15. Further information](#)

1. About this guidance

This guidance sets out the statutory requirements for the reception baseline assessment (RBA) and related reporting arrangements for the academic year 2026 to 2027.

These assessment and reporting arrangements (ARA) apply to the following schools with a reception cohort:

- maintained schools
- academies, including free schools
- special schools, including maintained special schools and special academies
- Defence Children Services (DCS) schools and settings

This guidance is for:

- all staff responsible for administering the RBA
- headteachers and senior leadership teams
- governors and trustees

The ARA contains delegated supplementary provision made under Article 3D of [The Early Years Foundation Stage \(Learning and Development Requirements\) Order 2007](#). The Secretary of State has consulted the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) before making these provisions. Article 3D is made by the Secretary of State under powers in [Section 42 of the Childcare Act 2006](#). This ARA gives full effect to the provisions made in the 2007 Order concerning the RBA and has effect as if made by the Order. The ARA also contains information that does not form part of the law. The [Legal requirements and responsibilities](#) explain how the arrangements apply to different types of schools.

The statutory requirements in this document are indicated by the use of the word 'must'. Additionally, providers must take into account other provisions in this document and should not depart from them unless there is good reason for doing so. These provisions are indicated by the use of the word 'should'.

2. Changes for the academic year 2026 to 2027

2.1 Accessing different years' activities within the assessment services

The 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments' and 'Assessment service: start an assessment' include activities for each academic year.

The 'RBA 2025' activity within each service will remain open until Monday 20 July 2026. Schools should continue using this activity to administer assessments to pupils who start reception later in the academic year 2025 to 2026 and download their pupils' narrative statements.

The 'RBA 2026' activity within both services will open for schools to upload their new reception cohort and administer assessments from Monday 24 August 2026.

Further information on how to access the services will be available in the 2026 [RBA administration guidance](#) from Monday 1 June 2026.

2.2 New ways to prepare for the 2026 assessments

We recommend practitioners administering the RBA in the 2026 autumn term use the current 'RBA 2025' activity to prepare. Practitioners can view the training topics and preview the assessment using 2 devices to ensure they can successfully connect and pair their devices.

We will introduce a new training topic, supporting schools to pair and connect their devices, on Monday 1 June 2026.

3. Reception baseline assessment

3.1 What is the reception baseline assessment?

The RBA is an age-appropriate assessment of early mathematics and early literacy, communication and language. It is delivered in English and administered within the first 6 weeks of a pupil starting reception.

The assessment has 2 components, each consisting of questions the pupil responds to by interacting with a touchscreen device, verbally with the practitioner or, in some of the mathematics questions, by using toy bears.

The system will mark some questions automatically. For other questions, the practitioner will need to mark them. This depends on the type of response needed.

The Department for Education (DfE) will use the data from the RBA to create primary school progress measures, which will show the progress schools make with their pupils from reception until the end of key stage 2 (KS2).

3.2 Assessment framework

The [RBA framework](#) is intended for assessment developers but may also be of interest to schools. It sets out:

- what the RBA assesses
- assessment design and delivery

Teachers should not use the assessment framework to guide teaching and learning.

Schools should continue to follow the [early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#) until the end of the reception year.

Schools may also find it useful to refer to [Development Matters](#), non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS, which supports providers to deliver the EYFS learning and development requirements. Ofsted and the Independent Schools

Inspectorate will not take the Development Matters guidance into consideration during their inspections, as it is non-statutory. Providers can decide how they approach the curriculum.

3.3 Making adaptations to the assessment

We have developed the RBA to be an inclusive assessment, accessible to the majority of pupils who start school. We have designed it so that pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and those learning English as an additional language (EAL), can participate.

Practitioners can view accessibility settings that can be applied to the standard assessment within the 'Assessment service: start an assessment', if required. These settings include:

- changing the background colour
- selecting greyscale or simplified images
- amending the colour contrast

The [RBA modified administration guidance](#), available from Monday 1 June 2026, provides further information on accessibility settings and other adaptations for pupils with a visual or hearing impairment. Practitioners can apply accessibility settings for individual pupils when they are uploaded within the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments' in the autumn term.

Some pupils with a specific need may not be able to access a touchscreen but could access a paper-based version of the assessment. Schools should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013, selecting the option for RBA, or submit a [contact us form](#) to request this.

Schools may find that some pupils are unable to access the assessment even with necessary adaptations. If this is the case, schools must record those pupils as 'Pupil is unable to access the assessment' within the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments' (see [Pupils who are unable to access the assessment](#)). This includes schools where all pupils are unable to access the assessment.

4. Important dates

These dates are subject to change. If any changes are needed due to circumstances beyond our control, we will inform schools at the appropriate time in our [assessment updates](#) and on [GOV.UK](#).

4.1 Important dates for 2026

Date	Action
Monday 1 June	RBA 2026 administration guidance and modified administration guidance published on GOV.UK
Monday 1 June to Monday 20 July	Practitioners can complete training using the 'RBA 2025' activity within the 'Assessment service: start an assessment' and preview the assessment using 2 devices to check devices can pair and connect
From Monday 24 August	Practitioners can complete training using the 'RBA 2026' activity within the 'Assessment service: start an assessment' and preview the assessment using 2 devices to check devices can pair and connect
From the start of the autumn term	Schools must upload pupil data and provide a status for pupils who are not participating in the RBA within the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments'
From the start of the autumn term	Schools must administer the assessment within the first 6 weeks of a pupil starting reception
Monday 21 September	Narrative statements for pupils who have completed both assessment components are available for practitioners to view and download within the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments'
Friday 6	Deadline for headteachers to submit the headteacher's declaration

4.2 Important dates for 2027

Date	Action
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Friday 23 July	'RBA 2026' activity closes within both services for the academic year – schools should ensure they have downloaded pupils' narrative statements
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5. Responsibilities

5.1 Headteachers' responsibilities

All references to headteachers include acting headteachers or anyone with delegated authority in the absence of the headteacher.

Headteachers must ensure that:

- the requirements outlined in the ARA are implemented in their school
- teachers and other staff comply with the ARA
- the deadlines in the ARA are met
- the needs of all pupils are considered and suitable arrangements are put in place to enable pupils to take part in the assessment, where possible (see [Participating pupils](#))
- parents are issued with a [privacy notice](#) that explains how pupils' personal data is processed
- a delegated member of staff has uploaded data for all reception pupils to the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments' at the start of the

autumn term

- any pupils who start reception later in the academic year are added to the pupil data in the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments'
- they work with practitioners to identify which pupils will take the RBA and whether there are any pupils who cannot participate in the assessment
- they discuss with practitioners whether any pupils will need any accessibility settings applied or other adaptations made to assessment materials, as detailed in the [RBA modified administration guidance](#)
- practitioners administer the assessment securely and keep any RBA materials and content secure and confidential
- those administering the assessment are encouraged to complete the training modules
- those administering the assessment are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the assessment
- those administering the assessment are familiar with the digital devices and have checked they can successfully pair and connect
- those administering the assessment have followed the [RBA administration guidance](#)
- assessments are administered in the first 6 weeks of participating pupils starting reception
- they work with practitioners to ensure that they have recorded an appropriate assessment taking status for any pupils not participating in the assessment (see [Assessment participation](#))
- they notify the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) of any incident that may have affected the integrity, security or confidentiality of the assessment (see [Maladministration](#))
- they complete and submit the RBA HDF by Friday 6 November 2026

Headteacher's declaration form

The HDF confirms that either:

- all assessments have been, or will be, administered according to the [RBA administration guidance](#)
- any issues have been, or will be, reported to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013, selecting the option for RBA

The HDF will be available from the start of the autumn term and must be submitted by Friday 6 November 2026.

If you cannot complete the HDF, or have made errors in your submission, you should notify the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013, selecting the option for RBA.

5.2 Schools' responsibilities

Teachers and other practitioners administering the RBA must comply with the statutory provisions of this ARA. The same applies to Annex B of the [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#) when carrying out assessment and reporting functions.

6. Assessment participation

6.1 Participating pupils

Schools must register all enrolled reception pupils for the RBA using the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments'. This includes any pupils who are unable to access the assessment.

Schools will only be able to upload pupils within the service from the start of the autumn term.

6.2 Pupils who are unable to access the assessment

Headteachers make the final decision about whether it is appropriate for a pupil to participate in the RBA. In exceptional circumstances, headteachers may decide that a pupil is unable to access the assessment, even when making appropriate adaptations.

In these cases, the headteacher should:

- discuss the pupil's circumstances and needs with their parents and teachers
- consult the school's SENCO, an educational psychologist, medical professional, or other specialist staff, if appropriate, to consider whether adaptations may make the assessment accessible (see [Making adaptations to the assessment](#))

If a pupil is unable to access the assessment, their status must be changed to 'Unable to access' within the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments'.

6.3 Pupil status

Schools must upload their full reception cohort to the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments'. The system will automatically record pupils as taking the assessment initially.

If a pupil is not participating in the assessment, schools must change the pupil's status within 6 weeks of entering reception to one of the following statuses:

- 'Pupil is unable to access the assessment' (see [Pupils who are unable to access the assessment](#))
- 'Pupil has left the school' without completing the RBA
- 'Pupil was uploaded in error' – for example, the pupil is in a different cohort

Pupils who are unable to complete the assessment within the first 6 weeks of the academic year should be assigned the status 'Pupil will take the standard version of the assessment (delayed)' – for example, a pupil may not start school at the intended time due to deferred entry or a long period of illness. STA uses this information to understand why some assessments have not been completed.

Schools that have a pupil join reception from another school must confirm if the pupil has completed the RBA yet. If the pupil has only completed one component, they should apply the 'Pupil will take one component of the assessment (joined from another school)' status and administer the remaining assessment component. STA uses this information to understand why part of the assessment has not been completed.

7. Assessment administration

7.1 Administering the assessments

Schools must follow the [RBA administration guidance](#). We will publish this annually on behalf of the Secretary of State to ensure that practitioners can administer the assessments consistently and fairly.

The 2026 RBA administration guidance will be available from Monday 1 June 2026.

7.2 When to administer the assessment

Practitioners must administer the RBA to participating pupils in the first 6 weeks after they enter reception. Assessments must continue throughout the academic year for any pupils who join reception and have not already participated in the RBA.

7.3 Digital devices

Schools must have a minimum of 2 compatible devices to administer the RBA:

1. The practitioner will use one device to administer the assessment.
2. The pupil will need to use a separate touchscreen device to respond to some of the questions.

The [RBA IT guidance](#) contains important information on preparing devices for the assessment and device requirements.

7.4 Assessment services accessed using DfE Sign-in

Schools are required to use 2 services to prepare for and administer the RBA.

Schools must use the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments' from the autumn term to:

- register pupils
- record reasons for pupils not taking the assessment
- complete their HDF
- view and download narrative statements

Schools must use the 'Assessment service: start an assessment' to:

- complete training
- preview the assessment using 2 devices to check devices can pair and connect
- manage accessibility settings
- administer an assessment

Schools should ensure they have access to both services in preparation for the autumn term.

Further information on how to access the services using DfE Sign-in will be available in the 2026 [RBA administration guidance](#) from Monday 1 June 2026.

7.5 Toy bears

Schools should continue to store the toy bears securely, for reuse with future reception cohorts.

If schools have any questions about the toy bears, they should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013, selecting the option for toy bears.

8. Narrative statements

Narrative statements on how pupils performed in the assessment, across both

components, will be available for schools to download from the 'Assessment service: manage your school's assessments' from Monday 21 September 2026 until Friday 23 July 2027.

Schools will not receive numerical scores for their pupils. DfE will only use the assessment data for the purposes of calculating primary progress measures.

9. Security

Headteachers must ensure the assessment is administered securely. All staff involved in administration must keep any materials used secure and ensure assessment content is treated as confidential at all times. Schools must not use assessment materials for any purpose other than administering the assessment.

Headteachers must ensure that teachers and any other staff who may handle the materials understand the need to maintain the integrity, security and confidentiality of the assessment.

10. Quality monitoring

Schools will not receive any monitoring visits relating to the administration of the RBA in the academic year 2026 to 2027.

We will monitor the RBA by collecting and reviewing assessment data from the assessment services and we may contact schools with questions about their administration – for example, if an assessment is completed outside of school hours.

11. Maladministration

The term 'maladministration' refers to any act that:

- affects the integrity, security or confidentiality of the RBA
- leads to an outcome that does not accurately reflect a pupil's independent input

STA has a statutory duty to investigate any matter brought to its attention relating to the accuracy or correctness of any pupil's outcome. The [maladministration investigation procedures](#) explain how we process allegations.

Potential maladministration can arise from misunderstandings about how to administer the RBA. To help avoid this, headteachers should ensure that practitioners are familiar with the training modules and they must ensure that the assessment is administered in accordance with the guidance.

If headteachers, teachers, practitioners and other staff do not comply with the provisions of this ARA, and other published guidance, this could result in the school being investigated for maladministration. If we find that maladministration has occurred, the data of any affected pupils will not be used to calculate the KS2 progress measure.

Anyone with concerns about the assessment, its administration, or any allegations of maladministration, should report them to STA.maladministration@education.gov.uk or the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013, selecting the option for RBA.

12. Reporting to parents

Schools should inform parents that they will administer the RBA to reception pupils. Schools have access to [model privacy notices](#), which they can use as a basis for their own. Schools should share privacy notices with parents at the beginning of the school year.

There is no legal requirement for schools to report RBA narrative statements to parents, but:

- it may be helpful to use them as the basis of any feedback to parents
- schools must share a pupil's RBA narrative statement with the child's parents if they request it

13. Keeping and maintaining records

13.1 Pupils' educational records

Maintained schools and non-maintained special schools must ensure that educational records are maintained and disclosed to parents on request, as prescribed in [The Education \(Pupil Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2005](#).

Educational records include information about pupils, and former pupils:

- processed by, or on behalf of, the governing body or a teacher
- originating from, or supplied by, local authority employees
- originating from, or supplied by, teachers or other employees of the school

Information processed by a teacher solely for the teacher's own use is excluded from the definition of educational records.

Maintained schools and non-maintained special schools must also keep curricular records on every pupil. Curricular records form a 'subset' of a pupil's educational record. They are a formal record of a pupil's academic achievements, skills, abilities and the progress they make at a school. You must update these records at least once every academic year.

Schools are data controllers and therefore required to comply with data protection legislation including the [UK General Data Protection Regulation \(UK GDPR\)](#) and the [Data Protection Act \(DPA\) 2018](#).

This means schools are responsible for ensuring that any processing of personal data (the collection, retention, storage and security of all personal information they hold) meets the provisions of the DPA 2018 and complies with data protection legislation. This includes:

- personal information appearing in a pupil's educational record
- any other information they hold that identifies individuals, including pupils, staff and parents

13.2 Disclosure of educational records

For the RBA, schools will not receive information on numerical scores and therefore cannot disclose these to parents. We designed the narrative statements to be

shared with parents and they must be disclosed on request (see [Narrative statements](#)).

There are several pieces of legislation under which information may be accessed from public organisations, including schools. These include the UK GDPR, DPA 2018 and [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#). Access to a pupil's educational record held by a maintained school or non-maintained special school is covered by a parent's right of access under the 2005 Regulations.

Under the 2005 Regulations, a maintained school's governing body must ensure that a pupil's educational record is made available for parents to see, free of charge, within 15 school days of receipt of the parent's written request. If a parent makes a written request for a copy of the record, this must also be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the request. Governing bodies can charge a fee for these copies, but this must not be more than the cost of supply. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) provides further information on charges for [accessing pupils' information](#).

The 2005 Regulations describe the material that is exempt from disclosure to parents. This relates to information that the pupil could not lawfully be given under data protection legislation. It also relates to information to which they would not have a right of access. This includes material that may cause serious harm to the physical or mental health or condition of the pupil or someone else. A school may not fulfil a parent's request for these records if there is a court order in place that limits the parent's exercise of parental responsibility. This affects the parent's entitlement to receive such information. The ICO can provide further advice on the [right of access](#).

14. Legal requirements and responsibilities

14.1 How the arrangements apply to different types of schools

Maintained schools

This ARA applies to maintained schools, including maintained special schools, with a reception cohort.

Academies (including free schools)

This ARA applies to all academies, including special academies and free schools, with a reception cohort.

Defence Children Services schools and settings

This ARA applies to all DCS schools and settings with a reception cohort. Overseas schools that are not DCS schools and settings cannot participate in the RBA.

Maintained nursery schools

This ARA does not apply to maintained nursery schools, even if a nursery has pupils of reception age.

Independent schools

This ARA does not apply to independent schools or nurseries. Independent schools cannot participate in the RBA, even if the school has pupils of reception age.

Home-educated pupils

This ARA does not apply to pupils who are being educated at home.

14.2 Special educational provision and reasonable adjustments

Schools should put in place the right support for pupils with special educational needs. Schools must also make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services, to ensure that disabled pupils are not at a disadvantage compared to their peers. For information about the adaptations that can be made to the RBA, see [Making adaptations to the assessment](#).

14.3 Regulatory concerns

If you have any regulatory concerns that STA has not fully addressed in line with the published procedures, you can raise them with [Ofqual](#). Ofqual regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England.

15. Further information

For further guidance and help to answer any questions you might have, you can:

- refer to the full [collection of RBA guidance](#)
- visit our [RBA help centre](#)
- use our [virtual assistant](#)
- [contact us](#) directly

If you are still unable to find an answer to your question, you can contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013, selecting the option for RBA.

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