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2006 Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) Social Subjects (Enquiry Skills) and Core Skills

Introduction

The Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) uses a sample survey to find out how well pupils are learning in Scotland as a whole. The information is used to help plan for improvement to support quality learning and teaching. Every year, the SSA focuses on a different subject area. In 2006, the subject focus was the enquiry skills element of Social Subjects. Alongside this, the survey assessed pupils' skills in reading, numeracy, writing, working with others, information and communications technology (ICT) and problem solving (known generally as Core Skills). The survey also provides information about the experiences and views of teachers and pupils in Scotland. In 2006, parents of Primary 3 pupils were asked about their views on their child's pre-school experience, as well as their experience of contact with the primary school.

In May and June 2006, around 27,000 pupils in P3, P5, P7 and S2 from around 1,300 Scottish schools took part in the SSA. This leaflet explains some of the high-level results.



What does the survey assess?

In Scotland, we currently assess pupils' performance in primary and early secondary against levels which provide an indication of their knowledge and skills. The 5-14 curriculum guidelines set out Levels A to F in each broad subject area as follows:

Level A – this is the level which almost all pupils should be able to reach by the end of P3

Level B – this is the level which most pupils should be able to reach by the end of P4

Level C – this is the level which most pupils should be able to reach sometime between P5 and the end of P6

Level D – this is the level which most pupils should be able to reach by the end of P7

Level E – this is the level which most pupils should be able to reach by the end of S2, although some pupils may be able to reach Level F

What do the results tell us?

Social Subjects Enquiry Skills

Pupils were assessed against the three 5-14 Social Subjects attainment outcomes, *'People in the past'*, *'People and place'* and *'People in society'*. Through written assessments, pupils were assessed across a range of investigation skills. These 'enquiry skills' are set out in the 5-14 Environmental Studies guidelines for Social Subjects and can be summarised as:

- › Preparing for tasks: planning activities and finding suitable sources of information
- › Carrying out tasks: selecting and using information from these sources, and deciding how relevant and reliable it is
- › Reviewing and reporting on tasks: presenting findings and conclusions (for Levels C, D and E only)

The report describes pupils' attainment for 'enquiry skills' across all three Social Subjects: carrying out tasks (next page) and reviewing and reporting on

Social Subjects (Enquiry Skills) & Core Skills

To estimate performance in Social Subjects Enquiry Skills, reading and numeracy, pupils completed written tests. The results are reported as follows:

Pupils who answered 80% or more of the questions correctly – 'very good' skills

Pupils who answered 65% or more of the questions correctly – 'well-established' skills

Pupils who answered 50% or more of the questions correctly – 'made a good start' with skills, but needing more practice

Pupils who answered less than 50% of the questions correctly at the level expected may include those with additional support needs, who will need more help.

To estimate performance in writing, working with others, problem solving and ICT, teachers submitted examples of written work and a number of pupils took part in practical assessments. Performance in these parts of the survey is reported based on the judgements of class teachers or field officers (teachers trained to carry out SSA practical assessments in schools).

tasks. These 'enquiry skills' involve pupils in combining and using their communication and numeracy skills as part of their learning in Social Subjects.

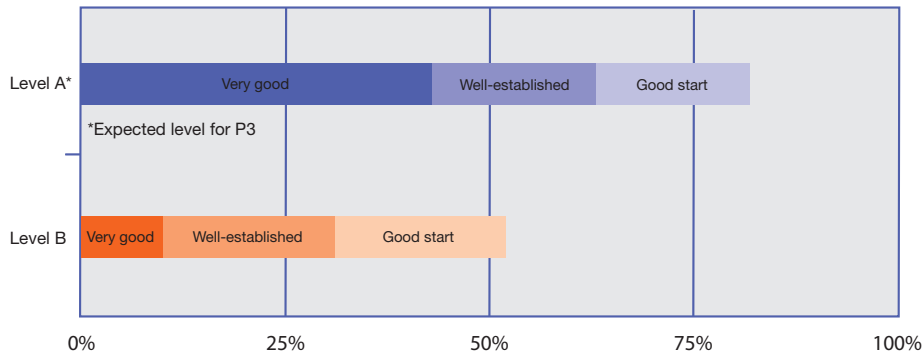
As the charts on the next page show, a high proportion (almost two-thirds) of P3 pupils were well-established at the level expected of them and just under one-third were already working at the level for P4. Just over half of P7 pupils and one-third of S2 pupils were well-established at the levels expected for their stage.

Gender differences in Social Subjects attainment were also investigated. There were no significant differences in how well boys and girls attained in Social Subjects.

Social Subjects Enquiry Skills for a small number of pupils were also assessed by using practical tasks. The results from these assessments show a similar pattern to the written assessments, although higher proportions of pupils were judged to be at the expected levels at each stage.



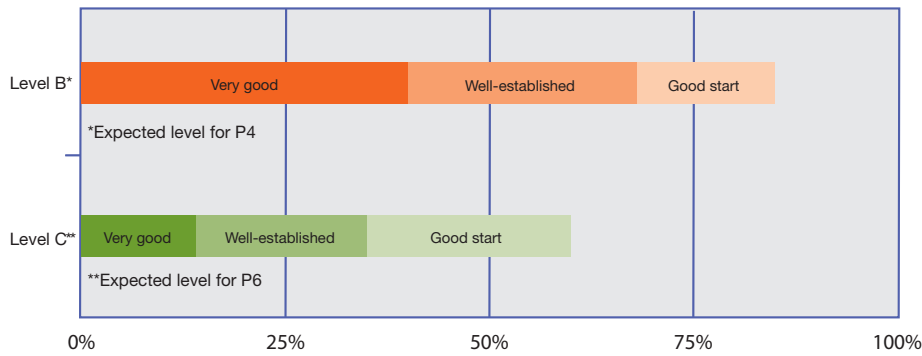
ATTAINMENT IN SOCIAL SUBJECTS ENQUIRY SKILLS- P3



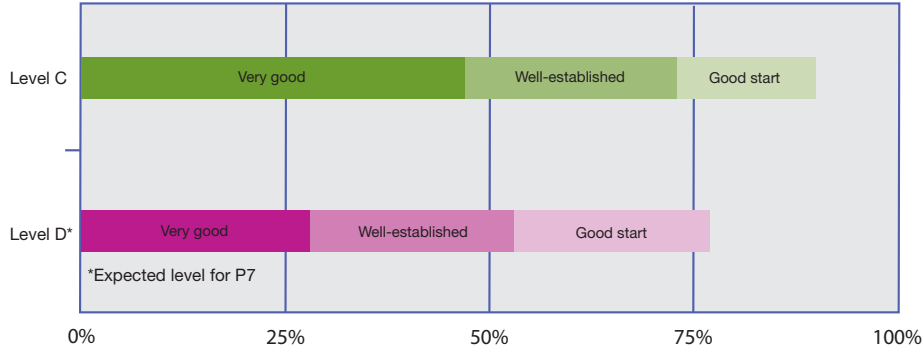
How to read these charts

Each level is shown in a different colour. By following the colour down the page for the different stages (P3, P5, P7, S2) you can see how progressively more pupils at each stage demonstrate successfully the skills for one level and build on them for the next.

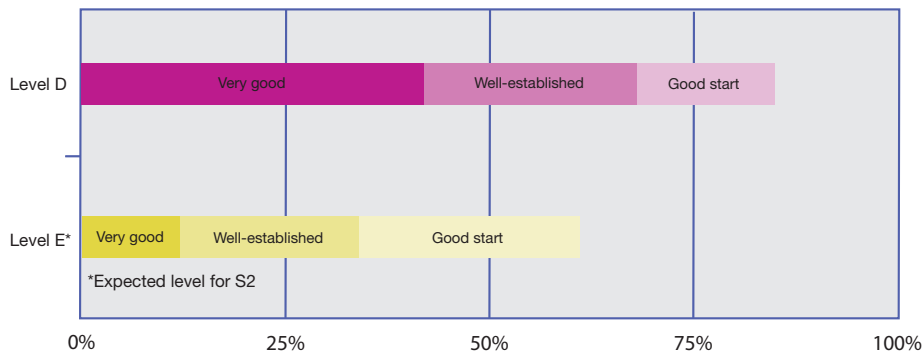
ATTAINMENT IN SOCIAL SUBJECTS ENQUIRY SKILLS- P5



ATTAINMENT IN SOCIAL SUBJECTS ENQUIRY SKILLS- P7



ATTAINMENT IN SOCIAL SUBJECTS ENQUIRY SKILLS - S2





Core Skills

The SSA also reports on pupils' performance in a range of Core Skills, including reading, writing and numeracy which underpin pupils' performance in Social Subjects Enquiry Skills. These results are described in the following sections.

Reading

Pupils' reading skills were assessed in the context of Social Subjects and the tasks covered three different types of reading: informative, personal and narrative.

The charts show that around three-quarters of P3 pupils had very good or well-established skills at the level expected of them. Around half were already reading at the level expected for P4 (Level B) and one in five were well-established or better at Level C, which is the expected level for P6. Around half of P5 pupils had also already reached Level C.

In P7, around half of pupils showed reading skills which were well-established or better at their expected level with a quarter already well-established or better at Level E, which is expected for S2. A slightly lower number of S2 pupils were well-established or better in reading at Level E, although almost two-thirds had made a good start at this level. One in five S2 pupils were well-established or better at Level F, one level above that which is expected for their stage.

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Extract from Level E informative reading task 'The Oscar'

...It was the first day of April, 1813 – April Fool's Day. The early morning was calm and bright, carrying the promise of spring. Five whaling ships were riding at anchor in Aberdeen Bay – the *Hercules*, *Latona*, *Middleton*, *St Andrew* and the *Oscar*. They had taken advantage of a favourable breeze to haul out of the harbour, intending to lie-to outside and wait for the remainder of their crews.

Then, between eight and nine o'clock, nature played a deadly April Fool's trick on them. The wind changed, snow fell, and a gale began to whip the water, quickly building up to hurricane proportions. The snow became so thick that the men on the ships could scarcely keep their feet. People who remembered that day said that the suddenness and violence of the storm made many townsfolk experience a kind of awe.

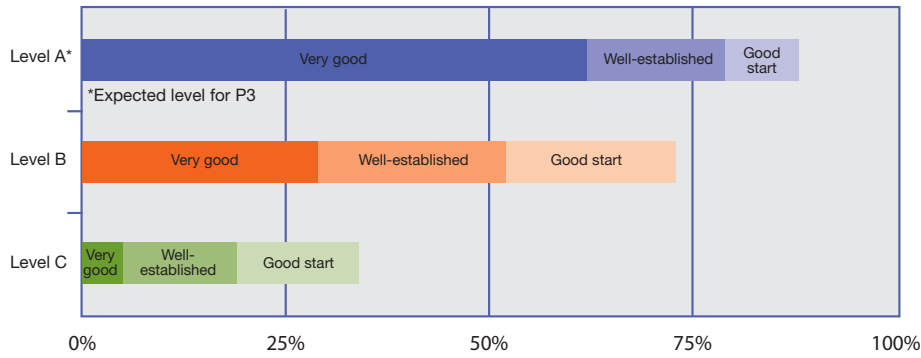
There was a curious feeling, a dread almost, that some terrible calamity was about to happen. It was a foreboding, as one local writer put it later, that 'was soon to be fearfully verified'.

A boat from the *Oscar* had gone ashore to pick up some late crew arrivals. By the time it had taken them to the *Oscar*, the whaler was far inshore. The heavy rolling sea and a strong flood tide pushed her closer toward the rocky shore. Now the gale unleashed its full fury and about noon the *Oscar* dragged her anchors and went ashore on the rocks at Greyhope.

When the alarm was raised, people from the town crossed the water to Torry by ferry and made for the wreck. There was nothing they could do. They could scarcely see the *Oscar* because of the blinding snow. Helpless, they lined the shore and watched as the vessel broke up and, one by one, the whalers were swept to their deaths...



ATTAINMENT IN READING - P3



How to read these charts

Each level is shown in a different colour. By following the colour down the page for the different stages (P3, P5, P7, S2) you can see how progressively more pupils at each stage demonstrate successfully the skills for one level and build on them for the next.

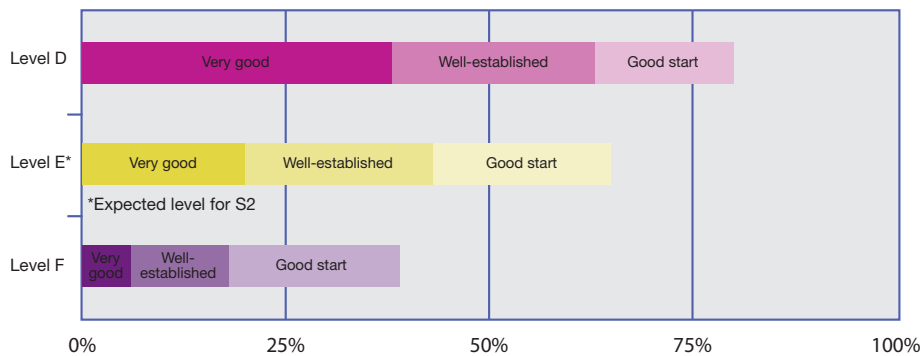
ATTAINMENT IN READING - P5



ATTAINMENT IN READING - P7



ATTAINMENT IN READING - S2





Numeracy

Pupils' attainment in numeracy was assessed using the test items drawn from the mathematics section of the 5-14 national bank of assessments and new numeracy items developed for this survey. The charts show that nine out of ten pupils at P3 had well-established skills or better at the level expected of them, one-third had reached the level for P4 and some were working at the level for P6.

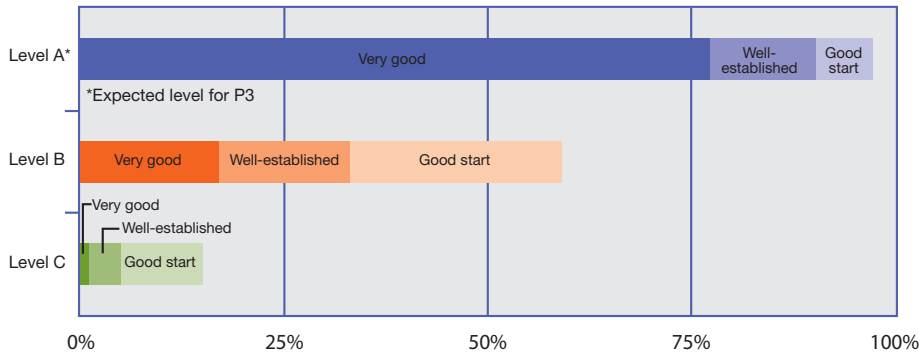
More than eight out of ten P5 pupils had well-established numeracy skills at Level B (the expected level for P4) and around half were well-established at Level C (the expected level for P6).

Two-thirds of P7 pupils and almost half of S2 pupils had well-established skills or better at the level expected for their stage. At S2, almost one in five pupils were well-established or better at Level F.

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ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - P3



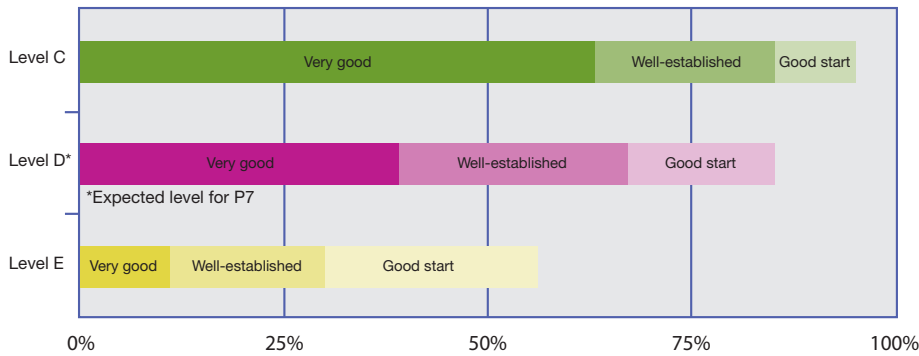
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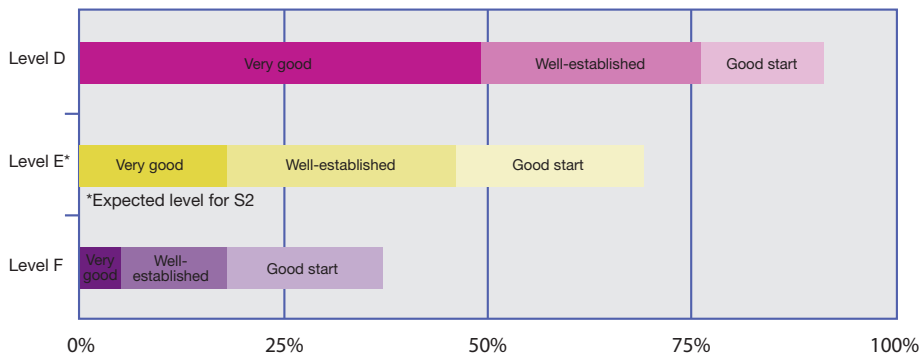
ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - P5



ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - P7



ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - S2





Writing

We asked teachers to send in judgements for their pupils' level of writing. Teachers told us that nine out of ten pupils at P3 had achieved the level expected of them and almost half of P5 pupils were already working at Level C (the expected level for P6). Two thirds of P7 pupils and half of S2 pupils were writing at the level expected for their stage.

The standard of writing expected at S2 (Level E) is shown in the box below.

Level E Writing

The writer begins to convey discernment. The writer's ideas are logically organised and are well-linked and supported with appropriate detail. The writer uses a variety of sentence structures. The writer uses punctuation correctly and spells almost all of the words in the writing accurately.

(Adapted from 5-14 National writing criteria, Level E)

Practical assessments

Teachers nominated by local authorities visited some of the pupils participating in the survey in the pupils' own schools to assess their Core Skills of working with others, problem solving and ICT. Working with others and problem solving were assessed by the field officers observing groups of pupils working on a set task. ICT was assessed by field officers observing individuals working at a computer on a set task. Because the number of pupils involved was smaller than for the written assessments, the results are less dependable, but still provide useful information about important learning skills.

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Working with others

Here, pupils were formed into small groups. Field officers observed each group working together to complete a particular task. Pupils were assessed individually on how well they got on with the set task, came up with ideas and were motivated to finish the task.

Overall, around four out of five pupils contributed ideas within their group and a similar number contributed actively without dominating or disrupting the group. Performance was similar between stages (P3, P5, P7, S2).

Problem solving

At the end of the 'working with others' task, each group was asked a number of questions which allowed field officers to assess how well the pupils, as a group, understood, resolved and then completed a problem solving task.

Eight out of ten groups showed evidence of coming to a consensus on the approach to the problem, with a similar number showing evidence of agreeing different roles to resolve the problem. Nine out of ten groups showed evidence of completing their task successfully. Performance was similar between stages (P3, P5, P7, S2).

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Some pupils were assessed by field officers on how well they were able to use ICT in their schoolwork – for example, doing research for projects and learning to use different programmes such as PowerPoint.

Almost all P3 pupils were assessed to be at their expected level or better and almost one in four P7 pupils demonstrated skills at the levels expected for S2 pupils. Secondary school pupils also demonstrated good ICT skills. Almost two-thirds of S2 pupils were judged to be at the level expected for them, with one in five of these pupils demonstrating skills at Level F.

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The views of pupils, teachers and parents

What the pupils said

The pupils were asked how they thought they were doing in Social Subjects.

Overall, three in every four pupils rated their skills in Social Subjects as good or very good. However, as they got older, pupils assessed themselves less highly. Primary school pupils were also more positive about wanting to do well in topic work than those in S2. A much lower proportion of S2 pupils considered their Social Subjects topic work to be important either for helping with other school subjects or in future occupations. That said, more than eight in ten pupils at S2 reported that they very often or sometimes get interesting tasks relating to Social Subjects lessons.

Pupils reported on their activities in Social Subjects lessons. Most of the pupils in the survey said they spent quite a lot of time in lessons being taught as a whole class and writing in their jotters. More primary than secondary pupils said they spent lesson time working with a group or with a partner.

What the teachers said

Over nine in ten primary teachers and eight in ten secondary teachers rated their pupils' behaviour and motivation to learn as very good or good.

Teachers reported using a wide range of activities in Social Subjects lessons during most lessons or weeks. While the most common approach at both secondary and primary stages was teaching the whole class together, "working with a partner or a group on a shared task" was also a common approach reported by primary teachers. Around a quarter of primary teachers reported "handling objects and artefacts" and more than half reported "making things to do with the topic" during lessons most weeks. "Watching and talking about videos and DVDs" was an activity used by almost two-thirds of secondary teachers most weeks.

What teachers and parents said about learning

Teachers were asked about their use of formative assessment and personal learning planning in Social Subjects lessons. More than three-quarters of primary teachers and half of secondary teachers reported using personal learning planning in the classroom to talk about learning. Just over half of primary teachers stated that they always used formative assessment approaches in the classroom, compared with around a third of secondary teachers.

Parents were also involved in personal learning planning to support their child's learning. About four in ten parents of P3 pupils who completed a questionnaire said that they talked with their child's teacher about learning progress at least once a term. Almost half said they were given information at least once a term about how they, as parents, could help at home and a similar number said that they had the opportunity to comment on homework more than once a term.

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How will the results of the survey be used?

The SSA provides information about what pupils at different stages know, and can do, across a wide range of activities including reading, writing and numeracy. Results provide information to inform education policy in Scotland and will assist curriculum developments.

Over time, the SSA will build a picture of pupils' performance in Scotland in core skills and selected subject areas. The SSA provides more than headline figures about performance. The scale of surveys means the SSA is able to highlight those aspects of learning where pupils generally perform well, and those where they are weaker. The SSA also provides valuable information about approaches to learning and teaching, gathered from the questionnaires teachers and pupils complete, focusing mainly on their classroom experience. This information is helpful in planning teaching programmes and targeting resources, contributing to the development of learning environments which promote success.

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Want to know more?

The SSA in Scottish schools

This survey is about attainment in Scottish schools as a whole. If you would like more information about the results of the SSA, for this and other surveys, and how the survey works, please visit Learning and Teaching Scotland's assessment website, www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/of/ssa

HMIE

HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) promote sustainable improvements in standards, quality and achievements for all learners in Scottish education through independent evaluation. If you would like information about inspections of Scottish schools, or are interested in knowing more about good practice in Scottish education please visit, www.hmie.gov.uk

International studies

If you would like to learn more about international studies, that include Scotland, please visit, www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/Excellence/IE

Your child's progress and achievements

If you would like to know more about how your own child is progressing, or you have concerns about their learning, you should get in touch with the school and talk to your child's teachers.

You will find more information about education in Scotland, and advice on supporting your child's learning on the Parentzone website, www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

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