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2005 Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) English Language and Core Skills

Introduction

A new, more robust system for measuring pupils' performance has been introduced in Scotland. The Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) uses a sample survey to find out how well pupils are learning in Scotland as a whole. It allows the Government to make sure schools are obtaining the results that every parent and every pupil deserves.

This leaflet aims to help you understand the results of the SSA.

2005 English Language and Core Skills

In May and June 2005, around 28,000 pupils in P3, P5, P7 and S2 from around 1,300 Scottish schools were tested. For reading and numeracy, 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 barriers to learning, who will need more support.



What does the survey assess?

In Scotland, we 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.

Level A – this is the level which most 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?

Reading

Overall, most pupils were reading well. The charts show that around three quarters of all the pupils in the survey had very good or well-established skills or had at least made a good start at the level expected of them.

In fact, half of the P3 pupils were already reading at the level for P4 and almost a quarter were reading at the level for P6.

In P5 too, over half were already reading at the level for P6 and almost a quarter were reading at the level for P7.

Around half of pupils in P7 and S2 showed well-established reading skills at their expected levels with one in three P7 pupils reading at the level for S2. In this survey almost nine out of ten S2 pupils had made a good start with reading skills at least at Level D, showing that they could read a passage of the standard shown opposite.

Example of Level D Reading

In the very early morning, Julilly saw an old man hobbling along the road, pulling a cart behind him. She crawled quickly from their hideout and walked up to him. She had no fear of this ancient white-haired, black-faced man.

“Can you tell me what town I’m comin’ to next?” she asked.

The old man jumped a little. Julilly startled him. It seemed as if he had trudged this road a thousand times and never had a black youngster bound out right in front of him before. He stopped his cart and looked at her carefully.

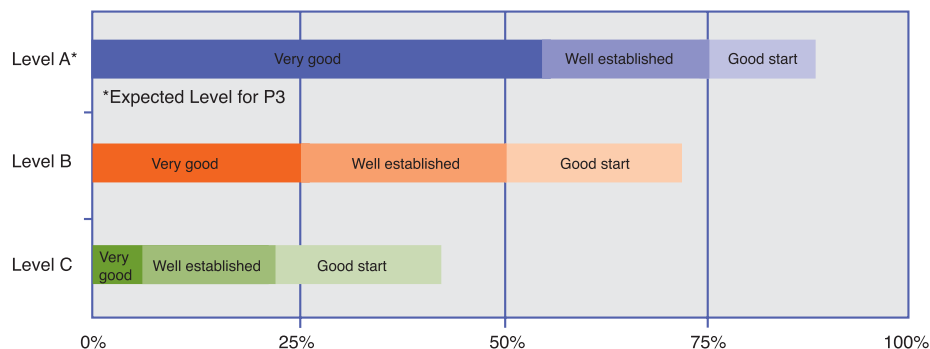
“Lexington, Kentucky,” he answered kindly. Then he whispered, “You a slave? You runnin’ away?”

Julilly didn’t have to answer. The old man knew. He looked cautiously down the road behind him as though expecting someone. Then he pulled his cart to the side of the road and lowered the handles to the ground. He reached inside his loose jacket and drew out a half loaf of bread.

“This is for you, child,” he said softly. His wise old eyes lighted on her briefly, then focused far away with tired patience. (Part of ‘Julilly’, Level D example from national 5-14 Assessment Bank, www.aifl-na.net)



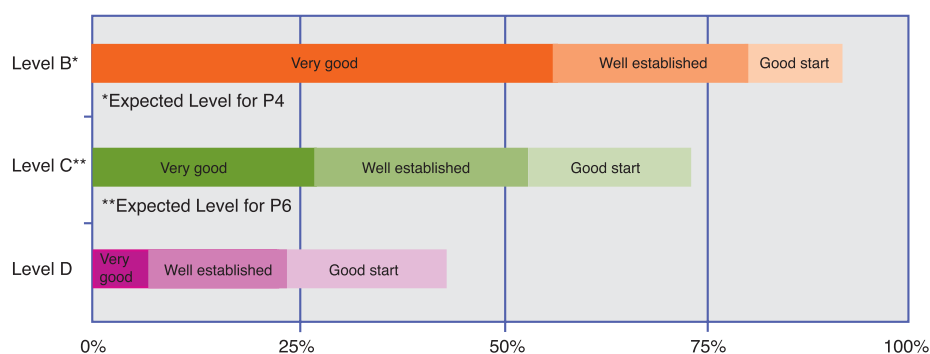
ATTAINMENT IN READING - P3



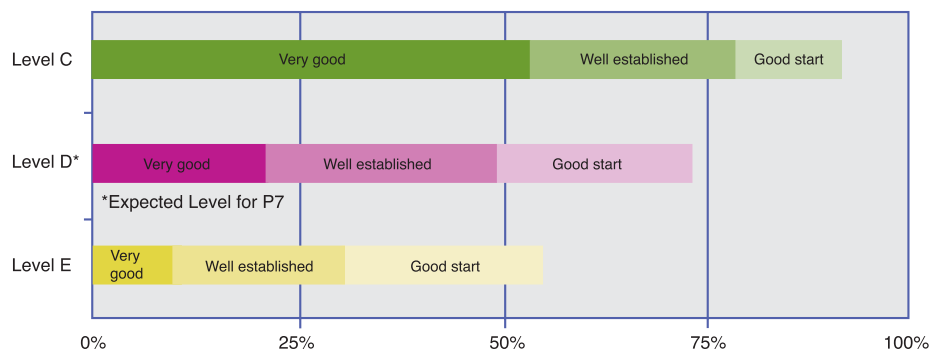
How to read these charts

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 successfully demonstrate the skills for one level and build on them for the next.

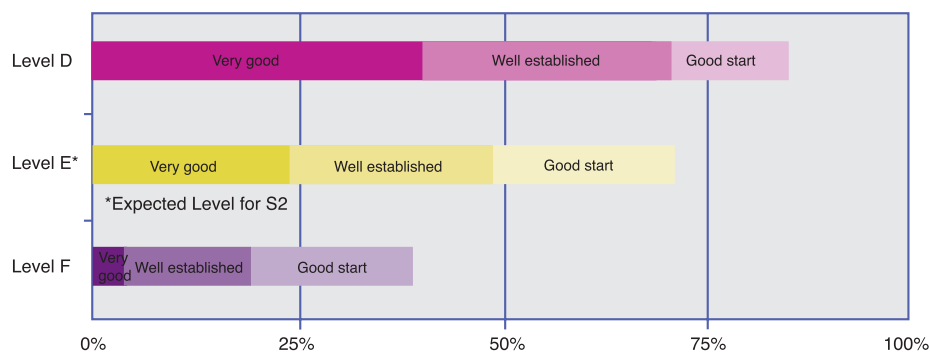
ATTAINMENT IN READING - P5



ATTAINMENT IN READING - P7



ATTAINMENT IN READING - S2





Writing

We asked teachers to send in examples of their pupils' writing done during class time. Overall, around one in ten P3, P5 and S2 pupils – and one in seven at P7 – achieved higher levels than expected for their stage. Nine out of ten pupils in S2 showed well-established writing skills at least at Level D. The standard of writing expected at Level D is shown in the box below.

Level D Writing

The writer describes his/her ideas in detail and organises them well. The writing includes good details to support the ideas and different kinds of sentence. The writer uses punctuation correctly and spells most of the words in the writing accurately. (Adapted from SQA's 'Best fit' 5-14 writing criteria, Level D)

Numeracy

P3 pupils were coping very well with numeracy. The charts show that more than nine out of ten had well-established skills at the level for P3 and two out of five were reaching the level for P4. As many as one in five had made a good start at the level for P6.

More than eight out of ten P5 pupils had well-established numeracy skills at the expected level. Half were reaching the P6 level and one in five had well-established skills at the P7 level.

Two-thirds of P7 pupils had well-established skills at the level expected for their stage. Most of the others had made a good start at this level. Around two-thirds of S2 pupils had made a good start with Level E skills and more than two in five showed well-established skills at this level.

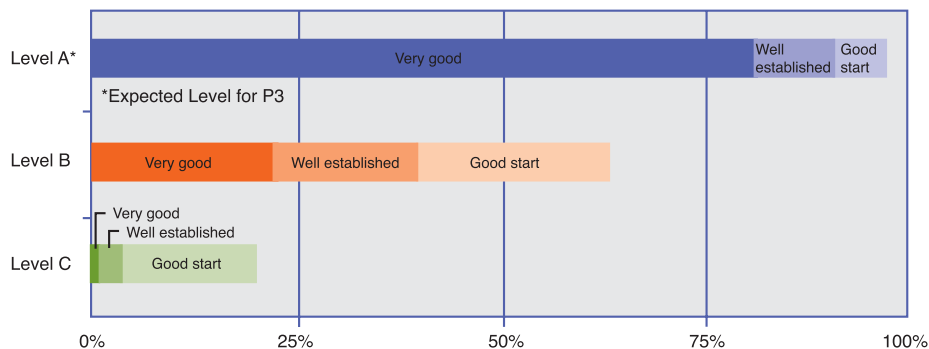
Maths literacy - applying maths skills in everyday life

The results showed that P3, P5 and P7 pupils improved their maths literacy skills throughout primary school. These results reflect the outcomes of a similar study in 2004. Pupils also improved their skills between P7 and S2, but less rapidly than the primary pupils.

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ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - P3



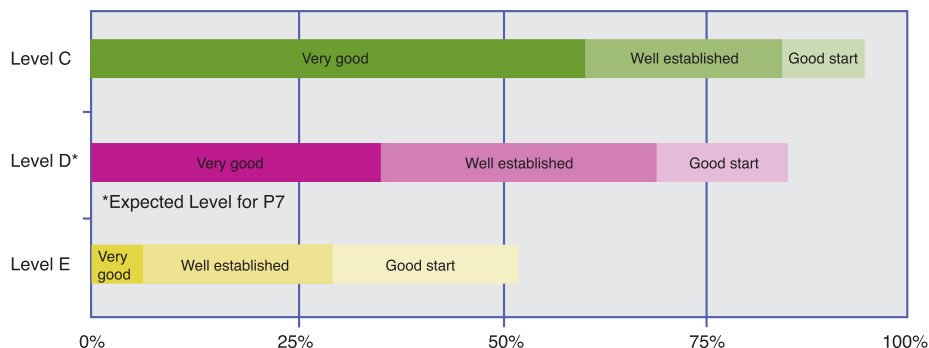
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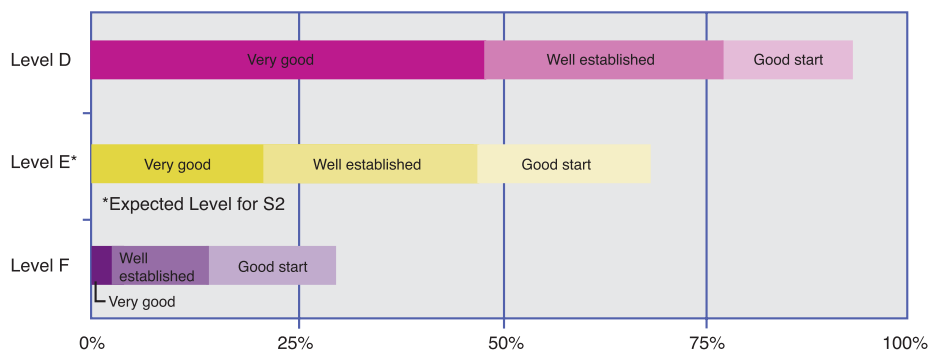
ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - P5



ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - P7



ATTAINMENT IN NUMERACY - S2





Core skills

Teachers nominated by local authorities visited some of the survey pupils in their own schools to assess their core skills - listening and watching, talking, knowledge about language, working with others, problem-solving and ICT. Because the number of pupils involved was smaller than for the written assessments and based on teachers' observations, the results are less dependable, but still provide useful information about important learning skills.

Listening and watching

The pupils were played audio tapes or shown video clips, then asked questions by the teachers about what they had seen and heard.

More than half of all the pupils answered questions successfully beyond the levels expected for their stage, though one-third had difficulty answering questions at the levels below what was expected. We will follow up these results in the future.

Talking

The visiting teachers assessed the pupils both in groups and on their own, asking them to talk about their school and about their outside hobbies and interests. As the pupils got older, the numbers responding successfully at the levels expected, decreased.

Knowledge About Language (KAL)

The pupils were questioned about their understanding and use of terms needed to talk about language and grammar. As expected, the number of pupils answering these questions successfully increased as the pupils got older – five out of six S2 pupils, for example, successfully answered the different questions for Levels D, E and F.

Working with others

Here pupils were assessed individually on how well they got on with the set task, came up with ideas and were motivated to finish the job. Overall, around four out of five pupils reached the levels expected for their age group.

Problem-solving

The pupils were assessed in groups on how well they understood and resolved a problem-solving task. Nine out of ten of all pupils tackled their task successfully.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Some pupils were assessed on how well they were able to use ICT in their schoolwork – for example, doing research for projects and getting to grips with different programmes such as PowerPoint – and were also given a questionnaire to complete.

The primary pupils all showed good progress in ICT skills. The results were not as good for S2 when it came to the more advanced skills at higher levels. Nearly one-fifth of all S2 pupils had difficulty with the tasks set at the level expected for P7.

Three out of four pupils who filled in a questionnaire said they used a computer at home, and two-thirds had internet access. The results showed that they logged on to computers more at home than at school – for games as well as homework – and this use increased as they got older.

Boys' and girls' language and core skills

Overall in reading, girls performed better than boys at all levels. Girls' writing was rated more highly than boys' and more girls achieved higher levels of attainment. At all stages, girls outperformed boys in talking skills. There was little noticeable difference between boys' and girls' attainment in numeracy.



The views of teachers and pupils

What the teachers said

Around half the primary teachers said that the results of the national assessments they used in the classroom were close to their own judgements in almost all cases in reading, maths and writing. Only one in three S2 teachers felt national assessment results matched with their opinions about their pupils' attainment almost all of the time. Around half the S2 teachers said that the results coincided with their own judgements in reading, maths and writing the majority of the time.

Generally, the primary teachers judged the attendance, motivation and behaviour of their pupils twice as highly as the secondary teachers did their S2 pupils. It was noticeable that teachers thought pupils' motivation to learn steadily decreased as they got older, from P3 through to S2.

What the pupils said

The pupils themselves were asked how they thought they were doing in English.

Overall, two out of three rated their language skills as good or very good, with the younger pupils the most positive. As they got older their confidence in their own abilities seemed to decrease and they assessed themselves less highly.

Most of the pupils in the survey said they spent quite a lot of time in English lessons being taught either as a whole class or on their own, and writing in their jotters, rather than working in pairs or groups. More primary than secondary pupils said they spent English lesson time working with a group or a partner, and using textbooks and worksheets.

How will the results of the survey be used?

These SSA results show some very good achievement in reading and numeracy, especially for the pupils in P3 and P5. Most of these children will have benefited from free pre-school education, which research evidence suggests has benefits for child development. The results for S2 are more mixed, with some very good attainment but too many pupils still not reaching the levels expected of them, many of whom would not have had the benefit of pre-school education. The results of the PISA international study show that at age 15, Scottish pupils do very well in reading and maths compared with other 15 year-olds from over 40 countries world-wide – but we can do even better.

To continue to improve overall levels of attainment, the results of the SSA suggest that the challenge for Scottish primary and secondary schools is to

continue to build on pupils' learning and skills at the early stages, and to maintain their progress especially as pupils move from primary into secondary school. Pupils who are struggling to achieve the expected levels in reading and numeracy will need more support and encouragement. That is why we have pledged to reduce class sizes in P1, and in S1 and in S2 Maths and English, why we are radically reviewing the curriculum, particularly for S1 to S3, and embarked on our "*Ambitious, Excellent Schools*" reform agenda. The work already going on in schools through developments like *AifL – Assessment is for Learning* and *A Curriculum for Excellence* will help schools support pupils' learning in these ways.





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 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, including 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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