

The principles of effective assessment



The NFER has worked with hundreds of schools and thousands of pupils to develop its Reception Baseline Assessment. **Catherine Kirkup** and **Marian Sainsbury** look at some of the principles of effective assessment that have emerged

Starting in a reception class is an important step in a child's educational career. It is the beginning of school education which will continue throughout the primary and secondary phases. Wherever children have been in their pre-school years, a positive start in reception is a crucial springboard for later learning.

Correspondingly, the reception teacher needs to get to know each young learner quickly upon arrival in school, to plan the right learning experiences and address any difficulties. It is this natural process of finding out about each child's personality, likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses that, when formalised, becomes a reception baseline assessment.

Our new NFER Reception Baseline Assessment provides a scheme which reflects and structures the very same characteristics that the classroom practitioner will be observing in new pupils in the first half term of school. By pinpointing accurately and reliably children's achievements on school entry, a baseline score also offers a starting point for measuring progress over the school years.

It is this accountability purpose that has driven the current Department for Education policy, but a well-designed baseline assessment can meet the needs of early years practitioners and of school leaders too. Parents and carers are also closely involved in their children's learning, and need updates on progress at this important time.

Involving practitioners in development

Developing the baseline assessment was a research process involving tried and tested procedures and analyses. At the heart was our systematic collection of information and responses from a large number of reception teachers and other early years practitioners. Starting from a review of the research background, we drafted a range of assessment approaches – far more than we would eventually need.

The aim was to be in line with current thinking on pedagogy and with expert opinion on how to assess children of this age. These draft approaches were then reviewed and trialled over a series of development stages, so that we could select and refine our ideas and finally devise an assessment that best meets the needs of those who will use it.

More than 500 schools and 3,000 children helped to shape our assessment over the summer and autumn of 2014. Alongside their busy classroom schedule, they tried out the activities and observations and offered systematic feedback on their experiences. At the same time, researchers visited reception classes to talk to the practitioners and the children and to observe how the assessments work in the real world.

In this way, we have built a baseline assessment that embodies many of the principles and practices that reception practitioners have told us they find natural and useful.

Engaging children in meaningful activities

One central principle behind the assessment is the importance of engaging children's interest in a meaningful task, rather than setting up a random series of "hoops to jump through".

Underpinning our view of what an appropriate baseline assessment should look like is the recognition that social and cultural interactions play an important role in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). In other

words it is taken as a given that assessment is an educational experience that will have an impact on the child and must therefore be appropriate and meaningful.

For example, 92 per cent of reception teachers thought it was "very important" for children to have concrete objects to manipulate in the numeracy tasks.

Reception children are naturally curious and already have an impressive range of skills and interests on starting school. The assessment activities should tap into this interest, curiosity and enthusiasm.

Although the assessment tasks are pre-planned and teacher-led, the aim is to provide a "playful orientation" (Wood, 2007) by means of authentic interactions and attractive materials. Tasks are set in everyday contexts that are familiar to most children and give them plenty to talk about. Many of the assessment activities reflect everyday classroom practices. The resources we provide are appealing to children and enjoyable for them to use.

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The structure of the assessment

The assessment consists of a combination of assessment tasks and observations. It covers the three core domains (Language and Communication; Literacy and Numeracy) plus an optional module (Foundations for Learning) that, together with the core modules, provides a holistic picture of each child. Language and communication is widely recognised as a fundamental building block for children's overall cognitive development.

Children's talking and listening is spontaneous, and the assessment recognises this by asking practitioners to record an overall judgement based on observations of their pupils' abilities, for example, listening with attention, recounting events that have happened to them, or following instructions. Children's enjoyment of stories and books underpins both language and literacy and is also assessed by means of observations over time.

The foundations of literacy are found in children's knowledge of language, their growing abilities to pick out sounds in words and link these with letters, and their early mark-making and writing. These specific achievements lend themselves to simple assessment activities covering, for example, vocabulary, sequencing, letter recognition and writing the child's own name.

We provide a set of appealing resources and straightforward instructions so that a teacher or teaching assistant can take a child through these activities in a few minutes.

Similarly, early numeracy achievements such as counting, number recognition, addition, subtraction and recognising shapes are assessed through a straightforward series of one-to-one activities. Children manipulate actual objects and the tasks are set in a natural and meaningful context. The "counting bears" have proved to be a firm favourite with children during the development research.

The characteristics of effective learning that a child exhibits and key aspects of personal, social and emotional development that help a child to settle in at school can only be assessed by observation over time. The optional Foundations of Learning checklist has been carefully designed with the help of views from many practitioners about the most informative and manageable observations that can be made over the first few weeks in reception.

Children starting school have a wide range of abilities, likes and dislikes and it is crucial that the assessment should be sensitive to each individual child, including those with SEN. The assessment tasks are in the hands of the practitioner who knows the child best, and each one has natural discontinuation points so that a child is not presented with demands he/she finds too daunting. Practitioners can give help and support to a child who

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is struggling, as long as they reflect this in the assessment judgements they make.

Scores and data

For the practitioner, our main aim in developing the NFER Reception Baseline Assessment has been to offer a systematic way of making and recording key judgements about each child's development and attainment. Each judgement is framed as a simple yes/no choice, rather than requiring interpretation of complex performance descriptions.

Practitioners can choose to record their judgements directly on screen or on paper, transferring the data later. For each individual child, the system provides a summary score, together with a number of analyses of performance. These analyses offer some suggestions to set alongside the practitioner's growing knowledge of each child in planning learning activities.

The summary scores can also be used to provide a management overview of each intake and, over time, the baseline for tracking progress throughout infant schools and all-through primary schools. This fits with current policies on school accountability, which seek to pinpoint the contribution a school has made to children's progress, rather than reflecting the characteristics of the intake.

This high technical quality, in combination with an assessment approach which is sympathetic to the real world of the reception class, has been our goal throughout the development of the NFER Reception Baseline Assessment. **lu**

• Catherine Kirkup is a research director at NFER's Centre for Assessment. Marian Sainsbury is an NFER research associate.

Further information

To find out more about the NFER Reception Baseline Assessment or to pre-order for September 2015, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/baseline

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Tackling bullying: Knowledge is power

Information, both about national trends and about what is happening in your own school, is a powerful and crucial weapon in the fight against bullying. **Dorothy Lepkowska** looks at how schools are keeping on top of the problem

The safety and security of pupils is paramount in every school. Keeping children happy and free from harm – and free from the fear of harm – is vital for effective learning and concentration in the classroom, for good physical and emotional health, and an overall sense of wellbeing.

For many youngsters, school represents the only safe haven from what can be a turbulent and unhappy home life.

But when push comes to shove, how many teachers really know what their pupils, and their parents, feel about bullying – or the extent to which the problem may exist in their school?

However vigilant and aware teachers think they are to the problem themselves, pupils and parents cannot always be relied upon to reveal that incidents of bullying have occurred.

Children can be embarrassed or intimidated and may be living with the fear that there will be worse to come if they tell. Nor is bullying always visible, even to the most vigilant teacher – and in any event, bullies can be cunning in their methods.

Some schools have used tools, such as NFER's School Surveys, to delve into the heart of a whole range of issues, including pupil behaviour, standards of teaching and communication, by presenting pupils and parents with questions on matters that directly concern and affect them.

What the answers to the surveys reveal, through careful analysis of the overall results by statisticians at NFER, can help heads and governors to understand the extent and nature of any problems and, in turn, to implement effective policies and guidelines to manage them.

The outcomes are shown compared to the rest of the schools in the sample, weighted to be nationally representative, so schools know where they sit alongside other schools.

Mark Trott, head of Ocklynge Junior School in Eastbourne, East Sussex, knows this only too well. The school runs questionnaires of its parents using NFER's School Surveys every two years, safe in the knowledge that these are independently produced, ask the right questions and ultimately save staff a great deal of time in distribution, collection and analysis.

Ocklynge is the largest junior school in the country, so handling huge amounts of paper would be unwieldy and time-consuming, Mr Trott says. But by using the specially designed surveys he can send out a request in the school's electronic newsletter to parents asking them to complete the questionnaires, and even add instructions on how to access them on their Smartphones.

Mr Trott feels he knows his pupils and parents well, so he never really expects any surprises from the findings. But what has been particularly interesting, he says, were the comparisons between his school's results and those from other schools that have completed the surveys.

"Previously I felt our results were quite good, but when I saw the comparisons I saw that others' results were generally good too," he said. "You can't make false assumptions now, and I've got real data to compare with which is really helpful. In a way, it is reassuring to see how well the education system is working in this country."

One of the responses to the survey provided a bigger surprise than others, however, and that was on the issue of bullying.

"One of the questions about bullying was a bit too high for my

liking," he said. "Even though it was the same as the national average, I felt we could still do something about it, so our School Council is now working on some recommendations."

"These surveys are only any good if you do something with the results to take the school forward. They have helped to shape our plans and we will certainly check progress against them."

NFER's School Surveys can provide useful information, in particular if facing an Ofsted inspection. As well as providing a Parent View preparation report, (which includes a question on bullying), the findings give heads and governors an opportunity to address any matters and to put appropriate measures in place to mitigate any parental and pupil concerns.

To create a national picture of the extent and types of bullying going on in our primary schools, NFER carried out an analysis of more than 35,000 responses to its School Surveys. On the question of whether pupils had been picked on or bullied at school, 30 per cent of respondents replied that they had, 53 per cent said no, and 16 per cent were unsure or didn't respond.

"Exclusion from a particular group could have a particularly devastating effect, and NFER analyses showed that this type of bullying could be more strongly associated with poor emotional wellbeing than other types, including physical or verbal abuse"

Meanwhile, national results from the parent survey, which examined the issue of whether their child's school's approach to anti-bullying was effective, showed that 28 per cent strongly agreed that they were, 44 per cent agreed, and seven per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This left a further 21 per cent who neither agreed nor disagreed, were not aware of the school's policy, or did not feel able to answer the question.

But overall, the findings suggest that it is important for schools to know how parents feel about this issue before an inspection.

Some types of bullying are, of course, more prevalent than others, and have a greater negative impact on children's emotional health and wellbeing, as highlighted in NFER's 2011 report *Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones But Being Left On My Own Is Worse: An analysis of reported bullying at school within NFER attitude surveys*.

Pupils who had fallen prey to bullies were most likely, for example, to mention lies or rumours about them or their appearance as the main reason they believed they were being bullied.

Exclusion from a particular group could have a particularly devastating effect, and NFER analyses showed that this type of bullying could be more strongly associated with poor emotional wellbeing than other types, including physical or verbal abuse. This problem was particularly prevalent among girls, who used emotional rather than physical tactics. Knowing how to support a child when relationships between pupils break down can be an important aspect of a school's anti-bullying policy.

For older girls, "unwanted sexual contact", although relatively rare, was found to be the type of bullying most strongly associated with poor emotional wellbeing.

The most common type of bullying among all age groups was verbal



abuse, and this was more strongly linked to poor emotional wellbeing than physical violence. Overall, however, boys were more likely to be bullied than girls.

In a recent analysis of the data, just over a third, 37 per cent, of primary children said they had been called "horrible names" or talked about by other children during the previous year and 42 per cent admitted to having been pushed or hit.

A similar proportion said they had felt excluded and left out of friendship groups, or had been stopped from joining in a game or activity, and 23 per cent had had their belongings stolen or broken by another child on purpose.

Caroline Fisher, of NFER, who works with researchers who analyse the surveys, said: "The surveys offer solutions to a range of issues that affect schools, and can create a useful means of communication

between the school and pupils' homes. The day-to-day bustle of a school can make relationships between staff and parents very transient but conducting surveys at intervals can help to keep that dialogue open.

"By offering these surveys, schools are telling parents and pupils that their views are important and that the school is prepared to act. In some cases we know they have provided a narrative for school improvement, or acted as a gauge to find out what parents think about a particular school policy change or implementation.

"To a newly arrived head who is still finding their feet, or trying to turn around a school in challenging circumstances, having some feedback can test the atmosphere in the school on a particular issue at any given time.

"While schools need to be mindful of reviewing their policies on bullying periodically, Anti-Bullying Week is a good time to revisit this issue and ensure that everything that can be done to tackle this potential problem is being done."

• Dorothy Lepkowska is a freelance education journalist.

Further information

- More information about NFER School Surveys is available from www.nfer.ac.uk/ss8
- The report *Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones But Being Left On My Own Is Worse: An analysis of reported bullying at school within NFER attitude surveys* can be accessed at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/ASUR01
- Further statistics on bullying related to SEN and disabilities are available online from charity the Anti-Bullying Alliance. Visit www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/research/key-statistics
- A recent Research Insights article, *In Pursuit of Happiness*, published in *Headteacher Update* in January 2014, discusses emotional and school wellbeing. To read this and other Research Insights advisory articles, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/schools/htu.cfm

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Baseline assessment

In March 2014, the Department for Education announced plans to introduce a baseline assessment for all children at the start of reception. Catherine Kirkup, from NFER's Centre for Assessment, answers some of the big questions that schools have been asking about the plans



Why is a baseline assessment being introduced?

The introduction of a baseline assessment is integral to the government's changes to the primary assessment and accountability arrangements, which focus not only on the attainment of pupils but also on the progress that they make within a school.

In order to take account of progress in primary schools more fully, this will be measured from the earliest point at which most children are in a school, i.e. at the start of reception. There will be a list of approved baseline assessment schemes and the scheme providers will forward school and pupil-level data from the assessments to the Department for Education (DfE).

The case for change is detailed more fully in the DfE's response to the consultation on assessment and accountability in primary schools (DfE, 2014b). The policy of baseline assessment is also supported by the shadow education secretary, Tristram Hunt (Griffiths, 2014).

When is this going to start?

From 2016 onwards, all schools that wish to demonstrate progress for accountability purposes will have to adopt an approved baseline assessment scheme. In 2023, when this cohort of pupils reaches the end of key stage 2, the reception baseline will be the starting point used to measure pupil progress for all-through primary schools.

Schools can opt to use an approved baseline assessment from September 2015 if they wish to do so. When these children reach the end of key stage 2 (in 2022), their progress will be measured both from the reception baseline and from the end of key stage 1 and schools will be allowed to choose whichever starting point shows the most progress. For schools that do not use a baseline assessment in 2015 (and until 2022), pupil progress will be measured, as now, from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2.

Will baseline assessment be statutory?

The use of a reception baseline assessment has not been made mandatory; schools may elect not to adopt an approved baseline scheme. However, there is a strong incentive to do so. Under the new accountability arrangements, a school will be considered to be above the floor (the minimum requirements) if it meets either the progress standard or the attainment standard.

In 2023, schools that do not use an approved baseline assessment in 2016 will be judged solely on the attainment of their pupils at the end of key stage 2, i.e. they will have to meet the attainment floor standard. The extent of progress required to meet the standard is not yet known

“The use of a reception baseline assessment has not been made mandatory; schools may elect not to adopt an approved baseline scheme. However, there is a strong incentive to do so”

but the principle is that pupils will be compared with other pupils with the same starting points, within schools using the same baseline assessment scheme.

I already assess children on entry – can I carry on as I am doing now?

Only if the baseline assessment scheme you are currently using is included on the DfE's approved list (see later). If it is approved, you may wish to continue with your current scheme. However, you may wish to consider the alternative schemes that are being newly developed for this purpose.

What will be assessed?

All approved baseline schemes will have to provide assessments linked to the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage in three areas of learning: communication and language, literacy, and numeracy. There may be additional areas of learning at the discretion of the individual scheme providers.

Although all schemes will have to assess the same core areas of learning, the individual skills and knowledge assessed may vary slightly from scheme to scheme. Also, each supplier may offer a slightly different assessment approach; for example, assessments might be delivered, on-screen, on paper or as task-based activities using resources that children can interact and engage with.

Baseline assessments will need to address the different experiences and the different levels of attainment, knowledge and skills that children bring to school. They must be accessible to at least 99 per cent of children, although some children may be able to complete

only a small part of the assessment. Schemes may be adaptive or offer appropriate routing to enable all children to demonstrate what they can do. The assessor must make a single yes/no decision for each assessment “item”. Decisions such as these may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable to early years practitioners but this is a DfE requirement of all approved baseline assessment schemes, in order to provide the data outcomes necessary to measure progress.

All suppliers on the DfE's approved list will have to provide evidence that they meet the stringent criteria for baseline assessments (DfE, 2014a).

When/how will the assessments be administered?

A child's baseline assessment will have to be administered in their first half-term in a reception class (full-time or part-time attendance) – so for some children this will be in the spring or summer term. The assessment can be administered by a teacher or teaching assistant. Administration guidance will be provided by the scheme provider.

Funding

Funding arrangements have yet to be announced.

What about the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile?

Although the Early Years Foundation Stage will continue to be statutory, from September 2016 the EYFS Profile will no longer be compulsory.

What about key stage 1 assessments?

Key stage 1 assessments will remain statutory but will not be used to measure progress for accountability purposes in all-through primary schools.

What about schools that are not all-through?

All schools will be judged on both attainment and progress. Junior and middle schools will be judged on attainment at the end of key stage 2 and on progress from key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2. First and infant schools will be judged on attainment at the end of key stage 1 and consideration is being given as to how progress from the reception baseline will be measured in those schools.

What information will I have to report to parents?

The DfE is yet to announce how results from a reception baseline might best be communicated to parents and how such results should be contextualised. They will be carrying out a research study in autumn 2014, after which they may publish further information on this issue.

How will I choose a baseline scheme?

In early 2015, an approved list of reception baseline assessment schemes will be published by the DfE. You will be able to look at the various schemes available and choose one that you feel is most appropriate for the children at your school. In reaching your decision you may wish to think about the following aspects of each scheme:

- Is the assessment approach adopted engaging and age-appropriate?
- Which areas of content are included?
- What do I know about the experience, expertise and reputation of the scheme provider?
- What additional information, guidance and services are included that are of value to my school (for example, age-standardised scores, additional data analysis, next steps guidance)?
- Does the scheme offer real value for money/added value?

• Catherine Kirkup is research director at NFER's Centre for Assessment.

Further information

NFER is developing a baseline assessment scheme for use from September 2015, subject to DfE accreditation. It will be available to pre-order from the end of January 2015.

If you would like more information about this assessment as the development progresses, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/ba1 and register your interest.

References

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- Griffiths, S. (2014). *Labour to defy teachers' unions with tests for five-year-olds*, *The Sunday Times*, 11 May (online). Available: http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Education/article1409461.ece (4 August, 2014).

Key dates

- **November/December 2014: Scheme providers will submit evidence of baseline assessments under development to the Department for Education.**
- **Early 2015: The Department for Education will publish a list of approved baseline assessments that meet their criteria.**
- **Spring term 2015: Schools will be asked to choose a baseline assessment scheme if they wish to use one in autumn 2015.**
- **September/October 2015: Optional use of baseline assessments.**
- **September/October 2016: Baseline assessments used as part of future accountability arrangements.**
- **Summer term 2022: Progress will be measured both from the reception baseline and from the end of key stage 1.**
- **Summer term 2023: Progress will be measured from the reception baseline only.**

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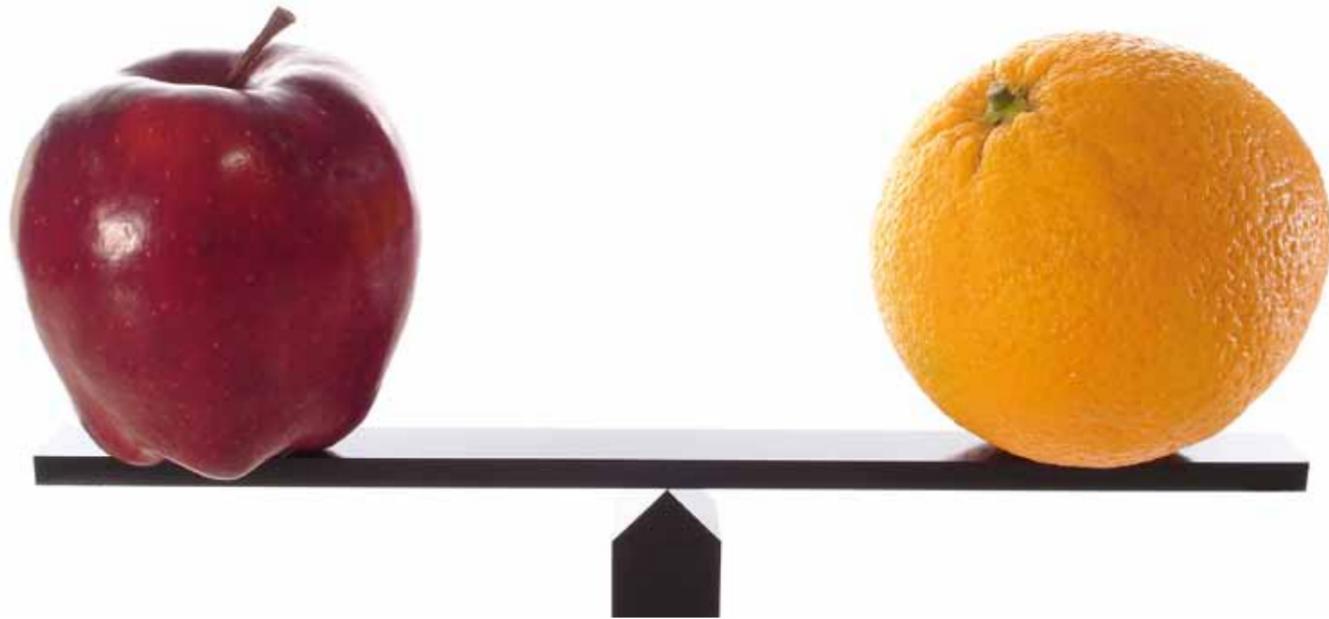
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Weighing up the assessment revolution



You could be forgiven for feeling a little dizzy with all the recent changes to assessment policy and practice, not least the removal of levels. The NFER's **Liz Twist** gives us a useful summary of the changes to date and offers her advice on handling the new assessment regime

In December 2011, the report of the Expert Panel for the national curriculum review was published by the Department for Education (DfE). It was this report that recommended the abolition of the national curriculum levels in order to separate what should be taught from the description of standards.

This radical shift in assessment practice was adopted by the government as part of the policy to increase school autonomy. There followed a consultation on primary assessment and accountability which ran from July to October 2013. In setting out the framework for the consultation, the DfE made a case for change, arguing that it was essential to improve performance in English, maths and science in order to match the highest standards internationally.

The consultation collected views on how attainment and progress should be measured and where progress should be measured from. The term "secondary-ready" was introduced to describe the minimum expectations that schools should have at the end of key stage 2.

This is intended to be a higher expectation than the current Level 4 on the basis that, in 2012, "fewer than half the pupils who had only just reached the current expected standard in both of these subjects went on to achieve five A* to C GCSEs at 16, including English and mathematics". The term "secondary-ready" did not feature in the government's response to the consultation and appears to have been abandoned.

Before this response was published, the report of the National Association of Head Teachers' (NAHT) Commission on Assessment was released. Among the recommendations were that:

- Assessment should be driven by the curriculum.
- Schools should adopt a consistent approach to assessment across the country. The commission produced an assessment system "evaluation design checklist" to underpin this.
- Pupils should be judged against objective criteria rather than ranked against each other and their attainment communicated as descriptive profiles rather than on a numerical scale.

- All assessments need external moderation and that this moderation needs real teeth.
- Schools should work in collaboration with other schools and identify a lead assessment co-ordinator who has received training.
- Schools should retain the use of levels as a temporary measure while designing a new system.

The report included a description of seven "principles of assessment" which focused on overarching aims such as ensuring assessment is consistent and that the outcomes are meaningful.

At the end of March 2014, the government's response to the primary assessment and accountability consultation was finally published.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, currently completed by the end of the reception year, is to become non-statutory from September 2016 although the Foundation Stage itself remains statutory.

Alongside abandonment of the eight-level scale was confirmation about how progress in primary schools was to be measured. This involves the introduction of a non-statutory measure of pupils' knowledge and skills on entry to reception through the use of a baseline assessment from a range of schemes that will be approved by the DfE.

This means that the progress of pupils who leave primary school in July 2023 will be measured from their entry to reception in September 2016 for schools which use one of the baseline schemes. Schools which elect not to adopt an approved baseline scheme will be judged on the proportion reaching the new expected standard at the end of key stage 2 (estimated at Level 4b on the current scale), the new floor standard being 85 per cent (currently 65 per cent).

Before this, schools which elect to use a baseline measure in September 2015 will be able to choose whether this is used to measure progress in 2022 or whether the measure of progress used is still between key stage 1 and 2.

Following concerns about the removal of levels from contributors to the consultation, the DfE also announced that detailed performance

descriptors based on the new curriculum will be developed to support teacher assessment. At key stage 1, there will be several performance descriptors in mathematics, reading, writing and speaking and listening and a single performance descriptor of the expected standard for science. At key stage 2, there will be several performance descriptors for writing (to support teacher assessment) and a single performance descriptor of the new expected standard for science, reading and mathematics.

The NAHT welcomed the status afforded to teacher assessment in the new assessment approach and the focus on progress rather than absolute attainment. There was also a guarded welcome for school entry being the starting point for the progress measure, with the suggestion that the focus should be on the attainment of the cohort rather than the individual pupil.

In April 2014, the government published a set of Assessment Principles. These are intended "to help all schools as they implement arrangements for assessing pupils' progress against their school curriculum". They are described as characteristics of effective assessment systems and are grouped into three overarching themes:

- Give reliable information to parents about how their child, and their child's school, is performing.
- Help drive improvement for pupils and teachers.
- Make sure the school is keeping up with external best practice and innovation.

In the preface to the principles, it is clear that schools are expected to have evidence to support teachers' assessments. The nature and extent of this evidence is not yet clear. In the past, this has been an area of considerable variability in terms of the nature and amount of evidence.

The NAHT took the view that all schools should undertake some moderation work with one or more individuals who were independent of the school. The commission suggested that it was essential that schools engaged in external moderation in order to develop teacher assessment practices that were reliable and comparable over time.

What will Ofsted expect?

In a speech to the North of England Education Conference in January, chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw emphasised that: "Inspectors will expect to see good formative and summative assessment. They will want to know how often pupils are assessed and what tests are being used. Inspectors will want to see how well the tests are linked to the curriculum and how the results are being used to inform the school about the quality of teaching and the progress of children."

He pointed out the autonomy schools had in terms of both teaching and assessment practices, but also indicated that he did not know of any good or outstanding schools that did not "set targets for children to achieve at the end of any key stage ... use assessment to establish whether children are hitting those targets ... have summative tests at the end of each year".

What about national tests in 2015?

The national tests in 2015 at both key stage 1 and 2 will be based on the current (1999) programmes of study. Therefore pupils in years 2 and 6 in September 2014 should continue with this curriculum. Science will continue to be teacher assessed, and the science sample test will continue biennially from 2014.

And in 2016?

In May 2016, pupils in years 2 and 6 will take tests based on the new (2014) curriculum. At key stage 1, this will include, for the first time, an assessment of grammar, punctuation and spelling to help to inform the teacher assessment of writing. At both key stages, results on the tests will be scaled scores, with a score of 100 representing the expected achievement for pupils at that stage of schooling. The scores will not be age standardised.

What about assessments for the most able?

The current Level 6 tests will last feature in national assessments in 2015. Thereafter, the intention is that all pupils, whatever their ability, will be assessed using the same instruments (with the exception of the small group of pupils whose attainment is best assessed using the P-scales). The test frameworks suggest that the tests from 2016 should "provide a suitable challenge for all children and give every child the opportunity to achieve as high a standard as possible".

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And will the P-scales continue?

In their response to the primary assessment and accountability consultation (March 2014), the DfE reported that they would "retain P-scales for reporting teachers' judgements. The content of the P-scales will remain unchanged".

Innovative assessment methods

In order to support schools now that the national system of assessment has been abolished, in May 2014 the DfE announced the results of a competition to "develop and share innovative new assessment methods for other schools to use".

Just two of the nine winning schools are primary. In addition, one secondary is working with local primaries and one school is an all-age special school.

What it all means

There are many changes in the world of primary assessment: new test content such as spelling, grammar and punctuation; new and higher expected standards and a different measurement scale; new baseline assessments leading to new progress measures.

The big news is clearly the removal of the familiar eight-level scale. Despite its imperfections, it provided a common language for teachers across primary education around the country.

Nevertheless, the autonomy created by its removal provides school leaders with an opportunity to identify or develop assessment systems and processes that more clearly meet their school circumstances.

- *Liz Twist is head of NFER's Centre for Assessment.*

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Tackling low-level neglect

Based on recent research evidence, **Caroline Sharp** offers some practical advice on how schools can identify and support pupils who are suffering from low-level neglect

Child neglect is a serious problem in this country. It is the most common reason that children are made subject to a child protection plan and it features as a main or contributing factor in 60 per cent of all Serious Case Reviews (1). Yet it can be difficult for primary teachers to know how to spot neglect and what to do next.

According to Action for Children (2013): “Neglect can take different forms, ranging from obvious physical signs such as being severely under or overweight, to children being left alone in the house or on the streets for long periods of time. Children may lack parental support to go to school, miss health appointments, have no opportunities to have fun or be ignored when distressed.”

NFER and Research in Practice recently reported the results of a collaborative research study by nine local authorities into early intervention in cases of low-level child neglect. It is based on interviews with more than 105 multi-agency practitioners (including headteachers, teachers, support staff, SENCOs and education welfare officers from both primary and secondary) and 40 parents, children and young people.

How do you identify neglect?

Practitioners say that there is a lack of agreed definitions to help them identify neglect, so they tend to rely on their professional judgement.

One explained that they relied on the “knowledge of the staff within the school and visual and verbal indicators from parents and children”. They added: “That’s how you pick up on it, there’s no matrix set up to say this is what you’re looking at and watching. It’s a gut instinct and it’s knowing your families.”

In practice, staff tend to identify child neglect in relation to four areas: physical neglect, emotional neglect, parental behaviours, and meeting children’s educational needs.

- Indications of physical neglect might be issues with a child’s health, nutrition, poor hygiene or inappropriate clothing.
- Signs of emotional neglect include poor interaction between children and parents, inconsistent parenting, a failure to establish appropriate boundaries, a lack of family routines, children staying up late or roaming the streets, and social isolation.
- Parental behaviours associated with neglect include parents prioritising their own needs over those of their children, behaving inappropriately in front of their children, leaving children without adequate supervision, exposing their children to substance abuse, domestic violence or risk of harm.

- Educational indicators of neglect include children with poor attendance, a poor home learning environment and parents who appear indifferent or unsupportive of their children’s achievement.

How to respond to signs of neglect

So what should a teacher do if he or she spots one or more of these warning signs? First, there should be someone on the school staff with responsibility to monitor all child safeguarding concerns, usually called the “designated child protection lead”. Teachers should report their concerns to that person and reach agreement on what to do next.

Of course, if a child is at risk of harm, schools have a duty to report it immediately to the relevant services under child protection procedures. It may be that the concerns fall below this threshold but do require a multi-agency response – in this case the school should consider involving the relevant agencies, for example by starting a formal CAF process (the Common Assessment Framework is for frontline services to use to assess, engage with and holistically support a child or family).

For those cases that do not warrant social care intervention, there is a range of things that teachers can do. In situations where neglect is low-level (for example, where the impact of the neglect appears minor and most of the child’s needs are met, most of the time), it may be appropriate for a class teacher or another member of staff to have an informal meeting with the parents to make them aware of the concern and find out what’s going on.

Child neglect can be a sign that parents are dealing with on-going issues, or have recently found themselves in a particularly challenging situation. School staff are in a good position to gain a family’s trust, suggest solutions and signpost them to other sources of help, as necessary.

If no-one takes an interest and offers support at an early stage, families

are likely to keep quiet and struggle on. The research emphasises that parents and children are much more likely to let a professional know of their difficulties if that person seems approachable and trustworthy.

Important personal qualities in dealing with families facing difficult circumstances are openness, honesty and not rushing to judgement. Many parents say they want help, but are frightened to ask because they think their children will be taken into care. Teachers can help to reassure parents that this is not the case as long as children are not in danger of serious harm.

One parent support worker told the research: “From reception to primary, being a familiar face all the time. Everyday, I am the lady on the gate ... and knowing that they see you there, they haven’t got to wait ‘til next week or a three-month waiting list.”

“If no-one takes an interest and offers support at an early stage, families are likely to keep quiet and struggle on. The research emphasises that parents and children are much more likely to let a professional know of their difficulties if that person seems approachable and trustworthy”

Some children’s centres and schools already provide basic and much-appreciated help for parents on a range of topics, such as providing advice on home safety, potty training, securing children safely in the car, and dealing with head lice.

Others offer more extensive evidence-based parenting programmes, such as Triple P and The Incredible Years. If you know of parents who have attended parenting classes or benefited from other forms of support, you can encourage them to pass on the recommendation so other parents can benefit too. Another important message from the research is that transition can be particularly challenging for vulnerable families. They may have formed a good relationship with a member of staff at a primary school, resulting in the family feeling more supported, only to be faced with a whole new set of challenges when their child moves to a different school.

Schools can help by focusing support on vulnerable families in the run up to transition, ensuring that parents and children have the best possible preparation, introducing them to a contact in the new school and making sure they pass on crucial information that will help their new school provide on-going support.

Teachers, not social workers

One of the clear messages from the research was that teachers wanted to teach and not be social workers. This sense of frustration at being asked to do too many things that take you away from your main role is quite understandable, but it has to be balanced by the fact that teachers are working on the “frontline”, which puts them in a position to identify neglected children. In addition, children who are not having their developmental needs met are highly likely to find it harder to learn, which means that neglect is an educational issue.

Vital support: Some of the ‘enablers’ that research has shown allows vulnerable families to engage and get help



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Teachers shouldn’t feel the need to act alone. Research by the NSPCC (2) has shown that teachers feel most supported in schools which take a proactive approach to safeguarding issues, if they have attended training, and if their school has clear processes in place.

It is also important for local authorities to put the principles of multi-agency working into practice, so that the people and services who are best placed to address safeguarding issues can take the lead. You don’t have to be a social worker, but by being alert to signs of neglect and doing something about it straight away, you can make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children.

• Caroline Sharp is a research director at the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Further information

- More information about the Local Authorities Research Consortium research on early intervention can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/larc
- The report *We Should Have Been Helped From Day One: A unique perspective from children, families and practitioners* can be accessed at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRCF01
- A research summary, *Teachers Want to Teach and Not Be Social Workers: Key messages about neglect and early intervention for schools*, can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRCF03
- The CAF: www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/integratedworking/caf

References

- 1, Brandon et al. (2011) cited in Action for Children, 2013. *The State of Child Neglect in the UK: Recommendations for the UK Government*: <http://bit.ly/1hLLVRM>
- 2, NSPCC report by Mortimer et al. (2012) on outstanding safeguarding practice in primary schools: <http://bit.ly/1jKNxtt>

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How prepared are you for the new curriculum?

What areas of the new primary core curriculum are schools most prepared for and where do they feel least confident? **Elizabeth Pope** looks at the findings from NFER's latest Teacher Voice survey

The new national curriculum is upon us. With the majority of frameworks to be rolled out in September 2014, abundant media coverage has seen commentators both criticise and congratulate Michael Gove's curricular revisions. However, regardless of the controversy surrounding it, the new curriculum is here to stay – and beyond the rhetoric are the teachers and support staff who will be responsible for implementing it.

Teacher perspectives

Since 2008, NFER has conducted regular Teacher Voice surveys about key educational issues (see panel below). Administered to a panel of 5,000 teachers, these surveys provide insight into practitioners' own perspectives.

In light of the curriculum overhaul, questions in our most recent survey (November 2013) asked how teachers are feeling about introducing the new content into the classroom. We received responses from 750 primary teachers to two sets of questions. The first asked teachers how prepared they personally feel to teach the new national primary curriculum for reading, writing, mathematics and science. The second expanded on the new writing curriculum, asking teachers how difficult they think it will be to assess grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing within the new guidelines.

Preparedness to teach

Using a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "not at all prepared and 5 being "completely prepared"), we asked teachers how prepared they feel to teach the new curriculum for the core subjects. The results show that a number of teachers feel that they are "not at all prepared" to deliver the new curriculum.

The exact percentage varies by subject; with the fewest teachers feeling concerned about maths (14 per cent), but with 20 per cent of teachers currently feeling unprepared to teach the new science curriculum. At the other end of the scale, only six per cent of teachers feel "completely prepared" to deliver the reading and maths curricula, five per cent to deliver writing, and four per cent to teach the new science curriculum.

Difficulty in assessing writing

Given the emphasis on writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar in the new curriculum, we were particularly interested to discover how teachers feel about assessing writing. Encouragingly, the percentages of teachers who feel that assessing grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing will be "very difficult" were low, with only three per cent of respondents selecting this option for grammar, punctuation and spelling, and six per cent for writing.

Percentages of teachers who believe that assessing the new curriculum will be "not at all difficult" were, however, also low, with the highest being 17 per cent of teachers for spelling. Only six per cent of teachers feel this way about the assessment of writing itself, highlighting this as a particular area for concern.

What is Teacher Voice?

Teacher Voice is NFER's teacher omnibus survey. It is a regular survey that reports up-to-the-minute views from more than 5,000 teachers on topical issues.

The panel represents the whole teaching workforce from headteachers to NQTs, drawn from a representative sample of publicly funded primary and secondary schools in England.

The sample of primary schools from which the 750 respondents to this survey were drawn is nationally representative. Visit: www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-voice

Classroom teachers and senior leaders

An interesting element of the survey was the comparison of classroom teacher and senior leader perspectives, which can be seen in the table on this page. The table simplifies the main findings by combining points 1 and 2 on the scale to represent respondents who felt in some way unprepared to teach the new national curriculum, and points 4 and 5 to represent respondents who felt "prepared" to teach the new national curriculum.

As points 2 to 4 on the scale were not labelled, it is likely that some teachers may have interpreted the scale differently. These responses should therefore be interpreted with a degree of caution.

For all four areas, more classroom teachers feel unprepared rather than prepared to teach. Senior leaders were consistently more inclined to answer that they feel "prepared" than classroom teachers. Though noticeable, these percentage differences remain relatively small, and are arguably explained

Preparedness to teach writing	Senior leader (%)	Classroom teacher (%)
Not prepared to teach writing (1 & 2)	27	43
Neither prepared nor unprepared (3)	36	25
Prepared to teach writing (4 & 5)	33	25
Preparedness to teach reading	Senior leader (%)	Classroom teacher (%)
Not prepared to teach reading (1 & 2)	28	43
Neither prepared nor unprepared (3)	35	26
Prepared to teach reading (4 & 5)	33	24
Preparedness to teach mathematics	Senior leader (%)	Classroom teacher (%)
Not prepared to teach mathematics (1 & 2)	25	36
Neither prepared nor unprepared (3)	35	30
Prepared to teach mathematics (4 & 5)	35	25
Preparedness to teach science	Senior leader (%)	Classroom teacher (%)
Not prepared to teach science (1 & 2)	33	47
Neither prepared nor unprepared (3)	37	28
Prepared to teach science (4 & 5)	24	16

Results from the NFER Teacher Voice, November 2013 (both charts). Number of respondents: 217 senior leaders and 533 classroom teachers. Charts exclude respondents who marked 'not applicable' or gave no response to the question

by the greater number of classroom years accumulated by most senior leaders.

On the issue of the difficulty of assessing aspects of writing, senior leaders were generally slightly more confident than classroom teachers (see chart opposite). For spelling, punctuation, grammar and writing composition respectively, a higher proportion of the senior leaders rated the assessment

Difficulty in assessing writing (composition)	Senior leader (%)	Classroom teacher (%)
Very difficult (1)	7	5
2	16	14
3	31	29
4	24	19
Not at all difficult (5)	11	4
Don't know	9	23

"Almost half of classroom teachers and a third of senior leaders feel unprepared to teach the new science curriculum, and teaching and assessing writing seems to be a particular worry"

of these aspects of writing as "not at all difficult" compared to classroom teachers. However, the proportion of senior leaders at each of the other points on the scale was more similar to the proportion of classroom teachers.

Both groups of respondents were least confident about the assessment of writing (composition). On the positive side, the proportion of classroom teachers who feel that the assessment of grammar punctuation and spelling will be "not at all difficult" is at least double the proportion of classroom teachers who feel that it will be "very difficult".

Of all the findings, perhaps the most important are those which indicate that almost half of classroom teachers and a third of senior leaders feel unprepared to teach the new science curriculum, and that teaching and assessing writing seems to be a particular worry to the profession.

However, it is important to note that at least 20 per cent of all respondents to each question indicated the mid-point of the rating scale, suggesting that they were neither prepared nor unprepared, or that they were unsure how difficult the assessment of writing would be.

It is clear that large numbers of teachers remain uncertain. Given the proximity of the reforms, with some schools having already begun delivering the new curriculum, it is hoped that by the end of the year, with relevant training and access to the various types of support on offer, teachers will be feeling better prepared.

Why preparedness matters

Understanding how prepared teachers feel is important, as these feelings reflect not only confidence, but the efficacy and relevance of previous training. Crucially, teacher preparedness has been found to operate with student engagement in predicting achievement. The 2011 TIMSS and PIRLS studies of international student achievement in science and mathematics, and reading consider well-prepared teachers to be one of the six crucial components of "effective schools" – defined as schools which have "an effect on student achievement over and above home influences" (Martin & Mullis (eds.), 2013).

The studies, which include data from 180,000 students, 170,000 parents, 14,000 teachers, and 6,000 school principals, claim that there exists an interaction between teacher preparedness and student achievement, mediated by engagement. Teachers who are more prepared, the authors argue, are better equipped to provide "effective, engaging instruction" (Martin & Mullis (eds.), 2013), while students who are engaged are more likely to be high-achieving.

Overall, our survey seems to suggest that classroom teachers and senior leaders alike remain cautious about the new curriculum. Therefore, headteachers need to ensure that appropriate training and support is in place during this important phase of preparation and transition.

• Elizabeth Pope is a researcher with NFER.



Are you prepared? Key survey findings

- Very few teachers feel completely prepared to teach the new curriculum for reading, writing, mathematics and science.
- Furthermore, a larger number of teachers do not feel at all prepared to teach the new curriculum for reading, writing, mathematics and science.
- Very few teachers feel that assessing spelling, grammar, punctuation and writing under the new curriculum will be very difficult.

Key areas for concern

- The percentage of teachers who feel completely prepared to deliver the new curriculum is very low (between four per cent and six per cent).
- The percentage of teachers who feel confident in assessing writing (composition) under the new curriculum ('not at all difficult') is much lower than that indicated for grammar, punctuation and spelling (six per cent compared to 11, 15 and 17 per cent respectively).

Sources of help

- NFER Curriculum Guides: www.nfer.ac.uk/curriculum-guides
- Assessing writing at key stage 2: www.nfer.ac.uk/ks2-guides
- NCTL: www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/leading-curriculumdevelopmentresource
- National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics: www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/40851
- National Literacy Trust: www.literacytrust.org.uk/schools_teaching/curriculum
- The Association for Science Education: www.ase.org.uk

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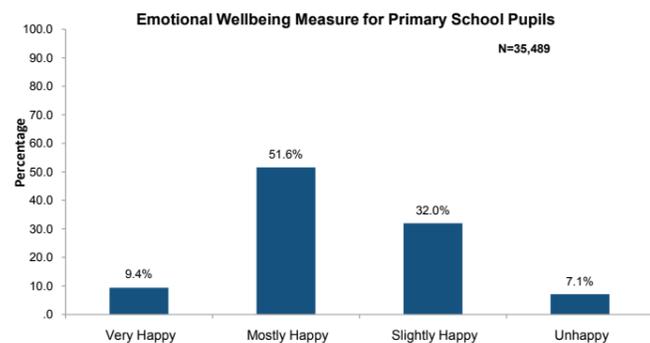
Happiness is a fairly nebulous concept, but with the right support it can be measured to provide insights into the wellbeing of your school. We consider how this can be achieved

We all want our children to be happy, well-rounded individuals, and recognise that the huge amount of time they spend in school plays a crucial role in their sense of wellbeing. But how can individual schools determine the emotional health of their own pupils or, indeed, the whole school community, in a meaningful way?

In search of an answer, the Centre for Statistics at NFER looked back at the data from the last two years of NFER school surveys completed by parents, pupils and staff – more than 90,000 respondents.

With the original questions based around the Every Child Matters format, they were conscious that the data could potentially be developed to provide more evidence on wellbeing in schools. They were right. This data-rich environment gave the statisticians some interesting initial findings, suggesting two distinct measures for pupils.

- 1) School wellbeing measures pupils' perspectives on the overall values and ethos of their school. The values the school instils into their pupils include behaving well, working hard, helping others, and keeping fit and healthy. The ethos the school creates for the pupils includes fairness, friendliness, confidence-building.
- 2) Emotional wellbeing measures pupils' happiness and is based on questions exploring, for example, how they feel about how they look and whether they like the way they are. It measures their feelings (sadness, happiness, loneliness, etc) and how well they feel they get on with others.



Source: NFER School Surveys, 2011-2013

The measure is similar to some of the domains identified by the Office of National Statistics that would be relevant to children and young people (see *What do we mean by 'wellbeing'* panel opposite).

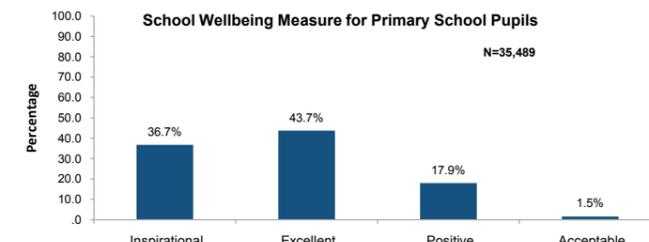
Using these measures, the statisticians and researchers have been able to build-up a good picture of the school and emotional wellbeing of pupils who have taken part in the NFER school surveys over the past few years (see graphs, below). The results paint an interesting picture of the range of happiness of pupils, schools' ethos, and the ways they instil values in their pupils, all from the pupils' perspective.

What developing these measures actually means in practice is to give schools the ability to base changes and improvements on detailed evidence related to the hugely subjective issue of "happiness". Being able to compare their results for these measures against an average weighted to be nationally representative would show significant differences and could, therefore, contribute to planning. Indeed this data can be tracked over time to help evaluate any changes schools introduce to tackle wellbeing issues – such as particular interventions or new practices.

Measuring staff engagement

The NFER researchers did a similar exercise for school staff using the data from the NFER staff surveys. This resulted in an overall measure of staff engagement, which looks at involvement, commitment and enthusiasm from staff about their work.

In the business world, several studies have looked at the correlation between engagement of staff and business outcomes. The same can apply to



Source: NFER School Surveys, 2011-2013

a school setting. School leaders can use the information from measuring and tracking staff engagement levels to help drive improvement plans and tailor CPD more effectively to the specific needs of individual teachers.

So what is included in staff engagement measures? The researchers believe there are 16 elements in the education arena that sit together to create an overall engagement measure of either "engaged", "not engaged" or "actively disengaged". Some of these include staff job satisfaction, whether they feel part of the school community, and how they feel they can contribute to the school's goals. Changes in leadership or status of a school could potentially have an impact on staff engagement, so monitoring engagement levels in these situations could be important too.

"What developing these measures actually means in practice, is to give schools the ability to base changes and improvements on detailed evidence related to the hugely subjective issue of 'happiness'"

Data from the NFER school surveys on staff engagement is represented graphically comparing individual school results to a weighted nationally representative sample, showing the split between engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged staff. As with the pupil measures, comparing themselves to this wider picture can provide schools with a solid evidence base for changes to improve or maintain staff engagement.

From measurement to action

Of course, measurement should only be the starting point: what really matters is what school leaders then do with the findings. NFER would recommend that these surveys are used as part of a three-step improvement process:

- 1) Establish the current situation. What do the survey results tell you about what's going well, and where there's room for improvement? The inclusion of comparisons with samples that are weighted to be nationally representative can help with this process
- 2) Plan and implement a response. You may already have a strategy in mind, you may look to the experiences of other schools you know, or you may look for solutions from research that has already been shown to work elsewhere
- 3) Evaluate progress. Have the changes you made led to the improvements you expected? The NFER surveys enable changes over time to be tracked, so can help you again here.

The majority of schools are actively running parent, pupil and staff surveys, whether they are developed by the school or a bought-in professional service, but many are not getting the most out of the data.

It is not just about whether a parent would recommend the school

What do we mean by 'wellbeing'?

At the 2007 OECD World Forum a declaration was issued calling for the production of high-quality facts-based information that can be used by all of society to form a shared view of national wellbeing and its evolution over time.

Within the UK, there is a commitment to developing wider measures of wellbeing so that government policies can be more tailored to the things that matter. The Office for National Statistics has an ongoing programme to develop wellbeing measures across the UK which include 10 domains: personal wellbeing, our relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, economy, education and skills, governance, and natural environment.

This is all well and good for adults, but what is relevant to our young people? And how can we best measure their wellbeing?

Visit www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/well-being/index.html

(although Ofsted might be interested in this one), it is about how the school is developing happy individuals who will go into the workplace enthused, motivated and ready for life.

It is also about how schools provide a workplace for staff who are committed to their jobs and will make positive contributions to the school. And those, for sure, are reasons to be cheerful.

New for 2014: School Surveys

The emotional wellbeing measures for pupils, school wellbeing measures for pupils and staff engagement measures developed by NFER have been included in NFER's new School Surveys service.

Devised by experts and developed with the help of more than 330 school leaders, the service offers professionally written questionnaires and extensive online reports that compare the results of a school with nationally representative results from other schools in the sample.

It has been designed to be as flexible as possible, to make it easier for schools to get precise, useful and detailed information about how parents, pupils and staff feel about their school.

Schools can follow-up a general survey that indicates potential problem areas that need to be investigated further with a themed survey.

For example, if there is a known issue with home-school communication, running the themed survey on communication for parents will highlight exactly where the issues are. They are shorter surveys and the themes, which have been chosen by headteachers, are: curriculum, behaviour, and safety and bullying (for pupils); communication, teaching and behaviour (for parents).

Headteachers have also said they want to include their own school-specific questions in their survey, so NFER has made it possible to do that too. For details, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/th1a

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