

What is the reception baseline assessment?

The reception baseline assessment (RBA) – essential for building a fairer progress measure for primary schools – is an assessment that must be administered in all primary, infant and first schools in England to pupils attending reception classes. It became statutory from September 2021.

Why is it being introduced?

Currently, a key measure of how well a primary school is serving its pupils is the progress that pupils make between the end of key stage 1 (year 2) and the end of key stage 2 (year 6). This allows the government to take account of the fact that schools face different challenges in terms of their pupils' starting points. However, under the current arrangements, we are not able to give full credit for the important work that schools do between reception and year 2.

The RBA will change this by providing a snapshot of where pupils are when they arrive at school, establishing a new starting point to measure the progress that they make by the end of year 6. It will also enable us to remove statutory end-of-key stage 1 national curriculum tests and teacher assessments, as they will no longer be required to provide the baseline for the progress measures, reducing the overall burden of the statutory assessment system.

What will it look like?

The assessment is short (the majority take less than 20 minutes to administer), interactive and practical, covering early mathematics, language, communication and literacy. Pupils use practical resources to complete the tasks and teachers record the results on a laptop, computer or tablet. The assessment will reflect familiar foundation-stage practice and encourage positive interaction between the teacher/teaching assistant and the pupil. There is no need for pupils to prepare for the assessment, either in a pre-school setting or at home, and in most cases pupils should not be aware that they are being assessed.

The RBA should not replace the good practice of schools liaising with early years settings to gather and share information on children starting reception. The assessment will be inclusive and accessible to the vast majority of pupils as they join school in reception. Most pupils with special educational needs or disability (SEND), or English as an additional language (EAL), are able to take part in the assessment. Modified resources are available for pupils with

visual impairments where adaptations to the standard resources would not be sufficient. Accompanying materials and detailed guidance are provided.

Teachers, or teaching assistants, are able to administer the assessment in normal teaching time, recording the outcomes digitally. It should sit alongside the important activity that takes place during the first term of reception.

How will the results of the assessment be used?

Pupils do not 'pass' or 'fail' the assessment; it provides a snapshot of where they are when they start school in the reception year. The results of the assessment will not be used by government to track or label individual pupils, or to judge the performance of early years settings. We will use the data from the assessment to create a baseline for school-level progress measures for primary schools. This will show the progress pupils make from reception until the end of key stage 2 in year 6.

We will publish these new measures for the first time in the summer of 2028, when the pupils who enter reception in autumn 2021 take the key stage 2 tests at the end of year 6. The new progress measure ensures schools are recognised for the work they do with their pupils, in particular for those with a challenging intake and those who have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

The assessment development process

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has worked with us to develop and deliver the new assessment. This included trialling and piloting the assessment, as well as making provision for the early adopter year. NFER is now providing statutory delivery.

NFER has been developing assessments for over 70 years, used by teachers, schools and government departments. They have worked with early years practitioners, schools and other education experts to develop the new assessment. All aspects of the assessment development have been informed by an extensive evidence base of early years research. NFER collected more evidence during the trial and pilot phases to ensure that the baseline assessment is robust. NFER will also ensure that the data collected is valid and reliable for the purposes of creating a value-added progress measure.

Key facts about the reception baseline assessment

April 2018 to August 2019	Developing and trialling the assessment
2019 to 2020 academic year	National pilot
October to December 2020	Early adopter year
2021 to 2022 academic year	Assessment is statutory for all schools in England

We invited a sample of schools to take part in trialling the assessment in 2018 and all schools with reception classes were invited to take part in the national pilot, which took place during the 2019/2020 academic year. Due to COVID-19, the statutory roll out, which was due to take place from September 2020, was delayed. However, all schools with reception classes were invited to take part in the early adopter year in the autumn term of 2020.

The early years foundation stage profile

In the primary assessment consultation, we also confirmed that the early years foundation stage profile will continue as a highly valued, teacher-observed, holistic assessment of an individual child's development. The profile ensures that all children are prepared by the end of reception year for the starting point of year 1.

Contact us

If you have any questions about administering the RBA, please contact the RBA helpline on 0330 088 4171 or email receptionbaseline@nfer.ac.uk.

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