



St. Mary Queen of Martyrs
Voluntary Catholic Academy

A Guide to Parents: Assessment without levels

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Assessment Without Levels: A Guide for Parents

This year, the Government has made a huge change in the way that children in schools are to be assessed. This is to tie in with the New National Curriculum that started to be used by all schools at the beginning of the Academic Year 2014. This is a new way of thinking for schools, and assessment will look very different to how it has done for the past 20 years. The aim of this guide is to hopefully give you some clear information about all the changes that are happening in Education across the country and what that means for the children here at St Mary Queen of Martyrs. Before we even think about assessment, we need to be clear on what changes the new curriculum has brought to subjects that are traditionally assessed.

New National Curriculum

So, what are the changes to the curriculum? It would take far too long to cover the whole curriculum, particularly in any great depth. But the main changes to the key core subjects are highlighted below.

English - The overarching aim for English in the National Curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment. English is set out year by year in Key Stage One and two-yearly in Key Stage Two. Appendices give specific content to be covered in the areas of spelling and vocabulary, grammar and punctuation. These are set out yearly across both key stages.

Mathematics - The main areas in the new programme of study for mathematics are called domains. These are number, measurement, geometry, statistics, ratio and proportion and algebra. Two of these, number and geometry, are further divided into subdomains. The way that the curriculum is organised varies across the primary age range - every year group has a unique combination of domains and subdomains. There is no longer a separate strand of objectives related to using and applying mathematics. Instead, there are problem-solving objectives within the other areas of study. Most of the changes to the mathematics curriculum involve content being brought down to earlier years.

So why are levels disappearing?

The DfE (Department of Education) want to avoid what has been termed 'The level Race' where children have moved through the old National Curriculum levels quickly to achieve higher attainment. The old National Curriculum was sub-divided into levels, but these were not linked to their national curriculum year group. For example, a child in Year 4 could be a Level 3 or even a level 5. Children were achieving Level 5 and 6 at the end of Key Stage 2, but the DfE thought that a significant number were able to achieve a Level 5 or 6 in a test— but were not secure at that level. The feeling from the DfE was that the old national curriculum and the levels system failed to adequately ensure that children had a breadth and depth of knowledge at each national curriculum level.

Assessing Without Levels

The DfE announced last year that there would no longer be National Curriculum levels and that schools would have to set up their own way of assessing pupils. At St Mary Queen of Marytrs, we have decided to assess our children using the steps below. Orange demonstrates working towards age related expectations. Green is to highlight age related expectations (for example, S1 is secure in Year One) and purple is where some children may exceed their end of year expectations and achieve a greater depth within the curriculum (for example, S1+ in Year One).

Beginning (B)	Children are beginning to develop within their year group objectives and have achieved some knowledge of key facts .
Beginning + (B+)	As above and have achieved more objectives.
Developing (D)	Children are securing knowledge of key facts within their year group and are starting to apply these . They are developing a deeper understanding .
Developing + (D+)	As above and have achieved more objectives.
Secure (S)	Children have mastered most/all objectives within their year group.
Secure + (S+)	Children have exceeded their end of year expectations as they have gained skills which they can apply to a range of contexts independently .

Under the old levels system children who were 'secure' might have moved into the next level. The DfE now want children who are in the secure bracket to add more depth and breadth to their knowledge, and to have more opportunities to develop their using and applying skills. They are calling this phase of learning Mastery and Depth.

The biggest difference is how we will talk to you about how your child is progressing during the year. With the old National Curriculum levels, each year children were given a target for the end of the year, and during the year we would tell you what National Curriculum level your child was at.

For Example: A child could finish Year 3 with a level 3a, and in Year 4 would have a target of a 4b for the end of the year. At Parents' Evenings throughout the year you may be told that they have moved to a 4c and then on to a 4b.

We could use the levels system this way because there was no correlation between a level and a child's year group, and this can be seen in the way that in a Year 6 class there could be a range of levels, from level 2 to a level 6. However, the new National Curriculum sets out expectations for each year group and children will be assessed against those every year, so a child in Year 4 will always be judged in the first instance against the expectations for the end of Year 4.

During the year, when we have conversations with you about your child's progress you won't be given an actual definitive position of where they are on this scale. Instead you will be told whether your child is on track to meet their end of year target. It may well be that they are above or below where they need to be, in which case their end of year target may be adjusted.

We hope that you find this guide useful to help you understand why and how assessment has changed.