

Information for teachers: reception baseline assessment



Standards
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Agency

What is the reception baseline assessment?

The reception baseline assessment (RBA) is an assessment that must be administered in all primary, infant and first schools in England to pupils attending reception classes. It has been statutory since September 2021.

Why is it being introduced?

The RBA will replace end of key stage 1 (KS1) national curriculum assessments as the baseline for primary progress measures. This allows the government to take account of the fact that schools have different experiences in terms of their pupils' starting points. Under previous arrangements, we were not able to give full credit for the important work that schools do between reception and year 2.

The RBA changes 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. Removing statutory end of KS1 assessments also reduces the overall burden of the statutory assessment system. End of KS1 assessments became non-statutory from September 2023. The phonics screening check remains statutory.

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 digitally on a separate tablet, laptop or computer. The assessment reflects 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 is 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 entered reception in the 2021/22 academic year take the key stage 2 tests at the end of year 6. The new progress measure will ensure 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) worked with the Standards and Testing Agency to develop and deliver the assessment. NFER has been developing assessments for over 70 years, used by teachers, schools and government departments. Working with early years practitioners, schools and other education experts, they trialled and piloted the RBA prior to 2021 and now deliver the statutory RBA with schools.

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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