

For:

- › Teachers
- › Headteachers
- › Local authorities



**Qualifications
and Curriculum
Development
Agency**



2011
Guidance for
practitioners and
school leaders

Using the P scales to assess pupils' progress

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QCDA/11/4841

ISBN 978-1-84962-401-5

First published in March 2011

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Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 5 Conceptualising progress
- 8 Using evidence
- 11 Making judgements
- 13 Partnerships for assessment
- 16 Securing reliable judgements
- 20 Using assessment information
- 23 References, further reading and other resources

You can use this written guidance together with the accompanying video materials to improve provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and learning difficulties in your school who are working below level 1 of the national curriculum.

The guidance will be of use to practitioners and support staff in both mainstream and special schools who work with pupils, and to school leaders and governors as they determine policy in relation to assessment and special educational needs.

Local authority officers will find these guidelines helpful in implementing support programmes for those working with this group of learners.

This package of guidance builds on previous QCDA publications, and contains:

- ▶ written guidance that addresses key issues and suggests talking points for school discussions
- ▶ complementary films of supporting material for the key issues
- ▶ new pupil case study films
- ▶ 2009 pupil case study films
- ▶ the P scales.

The materials are available for download from the QCDA website at www.qcda.gov.uk.

All the filmed material stimulates discussion. It is very much about real-life work in progress – to illustrate some of the processes and practices involved in assessing pupils' progress using the P scales.

There are additional supporting resources included on the website for which full references are listed on page 23.



This symbol indicates that there is additional relevant information in the accompanying films.

Introduction

Using these materials

Assessing pupils' progress (APP) puts the learner at the heart of assessment. It equips teachers to track pupils' progress, diagnose strengths and weaknesses and improve teaching and learning.

By using the P scales you can personalise the assessment process. You can include pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and learning difficulties in this national, structured approach to teacher assessment.

This booklet and the associated video case studies guide teachers in mainstream and special schools on:

- ▶ using the APP approach when reviewing the attainments of pupils who experience difficulties in learning
- ▶ making secure and reliable judgements in relation to the P scales
- ▶ sharing and reporting judgements that are rigorous, sound and consistent
- ▶ improving the teaching and learning of pupils with SEND or learning difficulties, by using assessment information collected over time.

These materials are designed for teachers, including special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), assessment coordinators and subject leaders. But others, including teaching assistants and school managers, will find the materials useful.

Individual teachers or, more effectively, staff working in groups can use these materials as a sound basis for professional development within and between schools and across local authorities.

« We would like to see the P scales used more widely in mainstream schools. So we are asking schools with experience of using the P scales to share their practice and provide outreach support to other schools in their clusters and around the region. »

Regional SENCO

The APP approach to assessment

APP is a national approach to assessment that's consistent with using the P scales for assessing pupils' attainments below level 1. Four key principles guide the APP approach:

- ▶ the learner is at the heart of assessment
- ▶ assessment needs to provide a view of the whole learner
- ▶ assessment is integral to teaching and learning
- ▶ assessment includes reliable judgements about how learners are doing in relation, where appropriate, to national standards and expectations.



« APP is a straightforward approach that relies on the professional judgements of teachers. As teachers build up their expertise in using this approach, there will be less reliance on tests or tasks. Integrating assessment within teaching and learning processes in this way will minimise demands upon pupils. »

Local authority team leader

Plan to embed assessment using the P scales within the planning, teaching, learning and assessment cycle. This way, assessment can draw on evidence of learning in a range of settings and contexts that are paced through the rhythm of the school year. To work in this way, you need to be aware of three phases of assessment:

- › day-to-day assessment, which gives pupils immediate feedback and helps you plan the next steps in learning
- › periodic assessment, in which you step back two or three times a year to take a broader view of progress against national standards
- › transitional assessment, in which you formally recognise achievements and report them to parents, carers and family members, pupils and other professionals.

This guidance focuses on periodic assessment as part of a cycle in which professional reflection is key, rather than the collection of evidence. Periodic assessment enables you to judge the progress that pupils make over time, involving them in self-reflection where possible. Using the APP approach reduces bureaucratic burdens.

The insights that emerge from day-to-day assessment can feed periodic assessment as you take account of significant evidence. In turn, the broader view that periodic assessment provides can inform transitional assessments (for example, at Annual Review or when reporting to parents, carers and family members at the end of the year or key stage). Engaging with this assessment cycle will also provide you with the information you need to:

- › inform planning to improve teaching and learning
- › identify priorities for professional development
- › consolidate and improve policies and practices in the broader context.



Using the P scales

The P scales support periodic assessment of the national curriculum. They provide a framework that you can use to map the progress of pupils as part of the cycle of planning, teaching, learning and assessment.

There are P scales for each subject in the national curriculum (including personal, social and health education) and for religious education. They outline attainment across eight levels for pupils working below level 1. They describe some of the important skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils may gain from the programmes of study.

The P scales are designed, like the programmes of study they relate to, for learners from 5 to 16 years of age. They're particularly relevant to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. But you can use them with any learner working below level 1 who has SEN.

You can use the P scales in the same way as the national curriculum level descriptions. The P scales don't meet all assessment needs, however. The descriptions given in the P scales aren't a full account of all that pupils might achieve, even within a subject or strand. You'll continue to need other tools for identifying pupils' individual difficulties, disabilities and special educational needs and for carrying out detailed and comprehensive assessments across the whole curriculum.

The P scales are not designed to be used to assess English as an additional language

(EAL) learners unless they also have a special educational need, unrelated to their language need, which means that they are working below level 1 of the national curriculum.

« We've used the P scales to calibrate all the learning outcomes in our school schemes of work – so we know we're offering assessment opportunities across the range. Then we also have other sets of materials – for diagnosing specific problems, or for doing more finely-grained assessments, or for looking for progress in other areas. »

School assessment coordinator

You can use the P scales on your own or in association with other assessment tools for some learners. On their own, however, the P scales provide an integrated means of reviewing, summarising and reporting judgements.

Please remember that, to comply with wider policies on assessment, school improvement and data collection, submitting P scales data on an annual basis has been mandatory since September 2007.



For an overview from a special needs advisory teacher, watch the *Introduction* film accompanying this guidance.



« In our school, we've got a 7-year-old who's working at P8 and 14-year-olds who work at P1 to P3. »

Special school teacher

Conceptualising progress

The P scales and progress

The P scales level descriptions identify the kinds of progress a pupil may make over a year or key stage. However, the P scales operate independently of chronological age. So you shouldn't expect pupils to reach any given level at a particular age or to progress through the levels at a predetermined rate.

The starting points for assessing progress should be the pupil's age and their prior attainment. You should have high expectations for all pupils and set challenging targets for their learning. As the *Department for Education's progression guidance* indicates, however, rates of progress are likely to vary depending on a pupil's age when they attain a given level.

« When we look at the data for maths, we can see that pupils coming into key stage 3 working at P2 or P3 make slower progress than those who leave key stage 2 working at P5 or P6. »

Special school headteacher



Linear and lateral progress

Many schools have found the P scales useful for assessing fresh responses and behaviours that indicate new learning within a subject. You can use the P scales to track this kind of linear progress towards level 1.

For many pupils with learning difficulties, progress within or across the levels is as important as progress to higher levels. You can acknowledge lateral progress where pupils begin to generalise the skills and understandings they've gained in one area of learning into new contexts and to develop a more even profile of responses.

« Musa can follow a three-part instruction using the symbols in his picture-exchange communication book when he's in the classroom. Now we want to see if he can do it in other lessons, or even outside school, where there's a lot more going on to distract him. »

Special school teacher in key stage 2



It may take some time for many pupils to become proficient in most or all the elements within a level description in the P scales. You don't need to break down the level descriptions in the P scales into sub-skills or quantify progress within a level using number or percentage scores. However, it can be useful to look at the profile of a pupil's performance within a level.

You can find more support for assessing progress for individual pupils, and for helping them to apply their language, number and personal, learning and thinking skills across the curriculum, in the *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties* guidance materials available on the QCDA website at www.qcda.gov.uk. These materials might prompt you to ask a series of questions about lateral progress, where there is insufficient evidence of progress between P levels.

Talking points

When discussing the nature of progress, you might consider the following:

- is a pupil responding with less support or prompting?
- are pupils using secure or established skills more confidently or independently?
- can a pupil apply established skills in new contexts or settings or with different people?
- are pupils more willing to negotiate their learning?



To learn more about how to identify progress, watch the case study films *Conceptualising progress: Daniel* and *Conceptualising progress: Lauryn*.



Individual learning profiles

Some pupils may demonstrate progress in unusual ways. Many pupils with learning difficulties (for example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, multi-sensory impairments and complex physical disabilities and medical conditions) tend to develop uneven or spiky profiles of development across subjects, in different aspects of subjects or in different contexts.

« For communication, Maleeha is working mostly at P2 with some P3 responses. In some areas of the curriculum she is working at a much higher level, for example in maths where she is able to sort colours (which is P5) and in ICT she uses a mouse to run her computer programmes. We'd like to get her English in line with her progress in other contexts. »

Mainstream support teacher in key stage 3

You can focus on raising attainments in specific areas to secure lateral progress when pupil evidence reveals an uneven profile across subjects, or within a subject. However, some pupils will retain their uneven or spiky profiles since these may result from particular peaks or islands of ability or aptitude or from particular aspects of their disability or condition. Occasionally, it may be difficult to support a particular pupil in gaining new skills.

« We do, at times, have pupils who seem to reach a plateau in their learning – maybe because they're adjusting to a new drug regime, or there are problems at home, or when they're settling down after some big changes in their lives. »

Special school class teacher

Under these circumstances (or when a pupil is losing skills as a result of a deteriorating medical condition) you may decide to recognise and report that the pupil has consolidated or maintained skills.

« We've carried on doing co-active signing with Helen. We're hoping that she will get back to being more proactive if we keep the signing going this way. »

Speech and language therapist

Contextual factors in learning (for example, working with a preferred member of staff, with trusted peers; with preferred resources; at a particular time of day; or in a conducive environment) can have a major impact on perceived progress for some pupils. You can find more guidance on these issues in the 'General guidance' in the *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties* series on the QCDA website at www.qcda.gov.uk.

Using evidence

Working with evidence

The judgements made periodically about attainment should be informed by evidence. However, evidence from pupils working within the P scales is by its nature likely to differ from that of pupils making typical progress through national curriculum levels. To reflect the judgements staff make on pupil progress, this evidence is likely to take a number of different forms including, perhaps, a greater reliance on the views and interpretations of others.

When using the APP approach you can support judgements with staff observations. A few brief, telling annotations about significant new attainments or landmarks in learning can capture the essence of a pupil's progress over time more effectively than incremental illustrations.

Judgements can rely on observations and materials arising from day-to-day teaching and learning. Normal classroom assessment practice provides the necessary information. You don't need to set up separate assessment activities, with specific criteria or conditions, to make periodic judgements on pupils' progress.

Observation has a crucial role in the process of assessment. Reflections based on your professional knowledge and experience often provide the most vital evidence when you step back to make a judgement.

« We try to observe the children in all sorts of settings – during whole-class lessons, working in groups, doing things on their own, working one-to-one with a member of staff, playing – it's all relevant. »

Mainstream primary school
assessment coordinator

Other forms of evidence

Talking points

When reviewing evidence of progress, consider the following:

- ▶ how I can take account of contributions from other people, for example comments made by parents, carers and family members in home-school diaries or notes written by professionals from other services?
- ▶ what telling evidence of pupils' own written work or scribed annotations have we seen?
- ▶ can we capture comments or commentaries from pupils and their peers, of key moments?
- ▶ which artwork and artefacts created by the pupils have they selected as evidence of their own progress?
- ▶ do we have any other incidental records such as photographs, video or audio tapes that provide significant insights?



To learn more about how some schools manage evidence of pupils' progress, watch the *Using evidence* film accompanying this guidance.

A brief comment or annotation based on observation is often an efficient recording method. However, video and photographic evidence can be useful when pupils are working within the P scales.

« We do collect some photos and bits of video – video can sometimes help you see why a pupil responds in a particular way. We use it for staff development. Pupils love to watch it. And parents can comment on progress they can actually see. »

Deputy headteacher in a special school

Where you make use of a variety of forms of evidence, including photographs or videos, comments and annotations can make a crucial contribution to the assessment process. Such annotations, along with the images themselves, contribute to the evidence upon which you base any judgements.

Dates on pieces of work can reveal trends and rates of progress that are significant in periodic assessment. But to support accurate teacher assessment, annotation should involve more than merely dating work

« In our school, teaching assistants and learning mentors write their comments straight onto samples of work. Or the therapist will clip her notes onto a photograph of a pupil responding in a new way that she thinks is important. »

Primary school assessment coordinator

Some schools and local authorities have developed ways of encouraging staff to provide more consistent annotations. Sharing annotation sheets in an agreed format with other teachers, for example, can help make the assessment process more accurate and efficient.

Refining evidence

As the picture of the pupil's progress builds over time, they can be involved in reviewing evidence and making decisions about what to keep. The key objective is to capture significant new responses, outcomes, indications of learning or attainment rather than to confirm established responses. Stepping back at regular intervals, using these working collections of materials, enables you to take a broader view of your pupils' achievements.

You don't need large collections of evidence to substantiate best-fit judgements. To ensure this part of the process isn't cumbersome, you need to use your professional discretion in deciding what is sufficient evidence to support a secure judgement.

Making judgements

Assessing the overall performance of a pupil

You should base periodic, best-fit judgements on a review of the significant evidence generated by normal, everyday teaching and learning processes. You should use your professional judgement to decide which P level description offers the best fit for a pupil's performance.

Considering pupils' work against elements of the levels above and below a proposed level is an effective way of clarifying a best-fit judgement. You'll need to work with colleagues to review their perspectives and decide whether a pupil's performance in a given subject, taken as a whole over a year or key stage, represents secure attainment at a given level.

« At the end of the year, we decided that Kirsty's attainment in mathematics was more P5 than P6. She had previously demonstrated P4 securely, she was working on some elements within P6, and she had attained most of the aspects of P5. So we agreed that the best fit for Kirsty in mathematics was P5. »

Key stage 2 class teacher

As this example suggests, a pupil doesn't have to demonstrate every element in a level description or demonstrate an element a certain number of times for you to judge that they're working at a given level. You should view the level descriptions in the P scales holistically and decide when the pupil has reached a level. Have confidence in your own professional judgements, especially where you reach these in dialogue with colleagues.

Also remember that pupils may attain different levels in different areas of learning. The examples of responses we give within the descriptions of the P scales are designed to help staff identify the distinctive aspects of judgements made in different curricular contexts (for example, core 'mathematical' responses as opposed to 'musical' responses).

Flexibility in using the P scales

Don't make judgements about levels on the basis of a single piece of work or any single item of evidence. Use evidence from day-to-day assessment processes to come to provisional judgements about a pupil's performance, then you can step back to confirm and formalise those judgements against the national standards provided by the P scales on a periodic basis. However, pupils don't need to repeat responses that you regard as secure (by performing a given skill five times over, for example).

Remember that all pupils working at these levels are likely to need some form of prompting with the task. Elements of the performance descriptions at P1 to P3 in particular acknowledge that responses at these levels may be 'fully prompted', 'co-active', 'shared' or 'supported'. These and equivalent forms of support don't invalidate pupils' attainments at these levels.



The *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties* materials offer more detailed support for making assessments of progress at these early levels, and for helping staff to identify, for example, reflex reactions, prompted participation and more proactive engagement.

When making best-fit judgements, teachers will need to take account of:

- pupils' prior attainments
- the levels of support, modelling or prompting pupils receive
- other contextual issues that might influence learning and responses
- the effects of the barriers to learning experienced by pupils.

« Harrison finds communication really difficult and works at a much lower level than any of his other timetabled activities. He's doing really well in the lessons where he isn't dependent on using language – in maths (P8) and practical lessons like PE (P8); he loves art and the art teacher judges him to be working at level 3 »

Head of autistic spectrum disorder resource base in a secondary school

Some pupils with uneven profiles of development may reveal peaks or troughs in their learning within a subject. If there's sufficient evidence, you may also award pupils a level on the basis of a best-fit judgement.

« Kyle's particular difficulties made it hard for him to demonstrate his understanding of P4 in science, but we were still able to recall sufficient evidence to agree that P4 was the best fit. »

Special school assessment coordinator

The examples of activities and responses in the P scales descriptions are illustrative rather than prescriptive. We encourage you to treat these examples with flexibility. You'll be able to draw on your professional expertise to recognise other responses that represent alternative but cognitively equivalent learning. This is particularly the case where other activities are more meaningful or are preferred by pupils, or where barriers to learning make some aspects of the level descriptions inappropriate.

We encourage you to personalise assessment in this way, negotiating with pupils to minimise barriers to assessment. When acknowledging evidence of progress in your judgements, you can note activities that are different from but equivalent to those listed in the performance descriptions that enabled a pupil to make a valid response at a given level.

« Jamal's interests are really important to how he does. If we use train sets to do sequencing (in numeracy), he'll do this really well for 30 minutes. He's following instructions in trampolining now – jump, stop, seat drop, time to get off. »

Learning support teacher in key stage 3



Influences on pupils' learning

Learning in relation to the P scales will often be interactive. This should be acknowledged when making judgements. Staff development activities can help you gain the experience you need to balance contextual factors when making best-fit judgements.

Talking points

Considering the influences on learning of the following factors can help you identify levels of attainment, for example:

- ▶ is there regular coverage of the topic and enough repetition?
- ▶ do we consider the pupils' learning preferences or interests in our approaches?
- ▶ which learning context or type of environment offers most success to this pupil?
- ▶ who does the pupil work best with? What is it about that person or the way they work that influences this success? Consider this for their peers and staff
- ▶ do these factors change the nature (and perhaps the level) of the pupils' responses – or merely enable the pupils to participate?

Confidence in making best-fit judgements will build up over time as you develop expertise in using the APP approach. Sharing interpretations and insights with others will help you to develop your skills in making more reliable judgements about learner progress and the factors that promote it.

« We worked with some special school teachers so we could benefit from their experience of working with the P scales – and I think they learned quite a bit from us about how to teach science. »

Mainstream school assessment coordinator



To learn more about how teachers make judgements in classroom contexts, watch the *Making judgements in mathematics* and *Making judgements in English* films accompanying this guidance.

Partnerships for assessment

Collaboration for assessment

While teachers are ultimately responsible for making periodic assessment judgements in relation to national standards, many people can contribute to the evidence that supports these judgements. Indeed, where pupils have SEND or learning difficulties, dialogue is crucial to the process of making judgements. You shouldn't make judgements in isolation.

If you work with pupils with SEND or learning difficulties you'll be used to working in a variety of forms of partnership:

- ▶ with support staff, including teaching assistants and learning mentors
- ▶ with other professionals, including therapists, sensory support staff, educational psychologists, residential staff, respite care staff and staff who support learners making links with their communities
- ▶ with parents, carers and family members, who provide evidence from home
- ▶ with pupils, who can provide important insights into their own learning and into the learning of their peers.

The APP approach will allow you to capitalise on these existing partnerships. It will also inform conversations about learning and assessment.

Working with support staff

Classroom support staff, teaching assistants and learning mentors can often offer valuable insights into the responses made by pupils with SEND or learning difficulties on a day-to-day basis. Encourage these colleagues to share their thoughts about the emerging attainments they see in pupils' everyday work.

« I expect my teaching assistant to make notes about new responses in pupils' files. She might ask me if we can look at a particular piece of work together. And sometimes talking to her will highlight something new that one of the pupils is doing – but, of course, it's my job to do the assessment. »

Teacher in a mainstream secondary school

Shared reflections, collaborative processes of review and record-keeping practices that welcome contributions from all the members of the classroom team can help you secure valid periodic judgements using the P scales.



Working with other professionals

Dialogue with other professionals can often confirm the significance, in terms of attainment, of pupils' responses as observed over time and in a range of contexts. You can improve the quality of your assessments when you work closely with therapists, sensory support staff or psychologists to review and reflect upon pupils' learning or to carry out an audit of the significance of the responses that pupils make.

Talking points

Consider whether the progress (or lack of progress) you've seen has been:

- ▶ affected by disabling factors or impairments
- ▶ supported by the use of aids and adaptations
- ▶ facilitated by physical or cognitive support
- ▶ associated with working with a particular person or learning partner
- ▶ influenced by other external factors?



To learn more about how partners can contribute to the teacher's judgements, watch the *Partnerships for assessment* film accompanying this guidance.

An exchange of views with staff from residential or respite settings or who work with pupils on community links can often inform assessment judgements in similar ways.

Working with parents, carers and family members

Discussion with parents, carers and family members can enhance assessment processes. Discussing progress with people who know the pupil in a wide range of settings can help to inform periodic assessment and resolve uncertainties over best-fit judgements by providing evidence of the application of learning in contexts beyond the classroom.

« I think I've got a good relationship with the school. When we're at home and my daughter does something she hasn't done previously, such as using a new word, or a word in a new context, I tell the teacher 'If you ask Lauryn, this is what she'll say to you now. It's really good,' and the teacher will encourage her to practise her new skill. »

Parent of a year 6 pupil



Working with pupils

All pupils can be meaningfully involved in the assessment process. The comments they make, using their preferred method of communication, as they review and think about their achievements can yield valuable evidence of progress. In turn, involving pupils in self-assessment can help them to become more aware of their own learning.

« Discussing their own progress with teachers can help the children to appreciate what is expected of them. Listening to children can reveal what they found easy, the extent to which they need to consolidate skills or work on lateral progress. It can even show if they are close to attainment at a higher level. »

Primary school headteacher

Photographs, video clips, sound recordings, object prompts and tactile cues can be very effective in involving pupils actively in recalling and reviewing their own learning. Visual images can sometimes prompt responses from pupils in situations in which spoken language is ineffective.

« Phoebe has a profound visual impairment, so we keep a tactile record of her daily activities in a big book. This means Phoebe can review her experiences, after the event, with a teacher or a teaching assistant. The way she reacts can help us to think about what she has really achieved. »

Primary school SENCO

Assessment within group activities is often of particular relevance where pupils have SEND or learning difficulties. Pupil assessment folders can include evidence of peer-supported learning and peer review in the form of comments from other pupils. Take account of these notes and comments when using the APP approach to make periodic judgements about the progress made by individual pupils. The key task for you here will be to decide on the impact of the group activity on performance.

« I talked to the students at the mainstream school where Jeff goes for his link sessions and we set this up as one of Jeff's communication targets. Now the other students tell me how Jeff has done and this forms a natural part of Jeff's assessment. »

Special school class teacher in key stage 3

Securing reliable judgements

Securing reliable judgements through dialogue

Discussion is a key part of the process that enables you to review and confirm the accuracy of assessment judgements. Professional dialogue can help ensure that the best fit is the right fit and that judgements you make are sound and consistent.

There's no single way of securing reliable judgements, but this section provides guidance on assessment dialogue operating at three levels:

- ▶ in class teams and in teaching groups within a school
- ▶ across a whole school
- ▶ between schools in clusters, local authorities and regional or national groupings.

Good practice can be supported through a cycle of activities operating at all three levels.

« We started off working with the P scales by getting class teachers to look at assessments with the people in their own teaching teams. Doing some whole-school activities helped to develop skills and confidence. Now we're becoming involved in cross-school, local authority and regional initiatives. »

Primary school headteacher



Dialogue within a class or teaching group

Assessment-focused discussions between staff working in class teams and in teaching groups within a school are likely to be informal. But they may include some more formal aspects such as planned progress meetings, as part of the school assessment cycle. You're likely to focus discussions on the attainments of pupils and agreeing the level awarded to a pupil through periodic assessment.

« We like it when individual teachers talk to teaching assistants and the therapy staff about assessment. It makes the best-fit judgements better for a start. Then getting people talking about assessment in their class teams has helped us get other important developments off the ground – like moderation. Everyone is so much more aware of what this is all about. »

Special school headteacher

Talking points

Class teams and other staff groups might consider the following:

- ▶ given prior knowledge of the pupil (which level is secure? which is emerging?) what overall level are we considering, and in which subject/areas of their learning?
- ▶ how are we judging evidence from a range of contexts?
- ▶ how do we share interpretations of the level of support or the specific context needed by the pupil?
- ▶ do we have strong enough evidence (and/or annotation) to support the judgement?

- ▶ are there any issues that need further discussion before we can reach agreement? Why?
- ▶ what can we learn from mainstream practice to support P scales assessment?

You could select, discuss and annotate samples of work to go forward for more formal review, so that other people can appreciate contextual influences on the performance of pupils.

Whole-school standardisation

Schools may decide to carry out different standardisation activities depending on the priorities established in school improvement plans.

« I run in-service training (INSET) sessions for our newly qualified teachers with the head of our SEND resource base. This term we've been using video (real pupil evidence) to support these new teachers in making more reliable P scale judgements. »

Assistant headteacher of a secondary school

Staff teaching pupils in the same age group could come together to review assessment judgements in a range of subjects or colleagues could meet to agree assessment judgements within subjects for pupils across age groups.


« We use phase-specific meetings to make sure levels are consistent across subjects. The cross-phase groups look at how the delivery of the curriculum should differ across the key stages and how pupils can be awarded the same level doing different activities in different age groups. »

Headteacher in an all-age special school



Discussions like these can promote the development of progression as an aspect of curriculum planning, improvements in schemes of work and age-appropriate curriculum delivery.

« Whole-school standardisation activities are extremely beneficial. Involving teachers, teaching assistants and subject leaders in discussion draws on the skills and knowledge of a range of staff and ensures that there is continuity and a whole-school approach. »

 Primary school headteacher

Talking points

Senior leaders wanting to secure consistent whole-school judgements might consider the following:

- › how formal should these discussions be and who should lead them?
- › what evidence will we use to support judgements?
- › can we use our regular cycle of meetings to discuss pupil progress and assure the quality of teachers' judgements across subjects, year groups and key stages?
- › how can this process contribute to staff development and improve the learning experience for pupils?

Dialogue between schools

Inter-school moderation activity will lead to increased teacher confidence and enhanced rigour in the P scale judgements being made in different settings. Collaborative moderation is particularly productive when mainstream and special schools work together.

« In our area, advanced-skills teachers from the special schools worked with local authority staff to provide initial P scales training sessions for teachers from mainstream schools. The mainstream and special schools have gone on to develop portfolios of evidence drawn from all the schools. The professional development opportunities created for our subject coordinators were just tremendous. »

Primary school headteacher



The key purpose of moderation activities between schools is to support the development of common understandings about performance in relation to the descriptions in the P scales. This will ensure that the judgements you make about how pupils are doing in relation to national standards are reliable. This is particularly important at points of transition when pupils move between schools, key stages or phases to ensure a smooth and continuous learning experience that supports their continued progress.

« Inter-school moderation activities are essential for us because we have mainstream teachers who are out there in their own individual schools, each of them working with very few pupils assessed using P scales. We make sure these meetings happen so we can be sure the judgements are comparable. »

Local authority assessment coordinator

Talking points

School staff, SENCOs or individual teachers might consider the following:

- › how can I ensure my P scales judgements are sound?
- › who's using the P scales and where can I meet with them?
- › is there a local cluster, neighbourhood special school, SENCO network? If not, how can we start one? Who can I ask?
- › does my local authority run any P scales-focused events?

« Activities that are about more than just allocating levels to written work are most valuable. Video clips and photographs with good teacher commentaries are really useful, especially where pupils are working at P1 to P3. It's good to have real-life examples to talk about – and to compare your own ideas with people who maybe know the children better. »

SENCO



To learn more about consistency and moderation, watch the *Securing reliable judgements* film accompanying this guidance.



Using assessment information

Informing teaching and learning

The key purpose of assessment is to inform teaching and promote further learning. Using the P scales and a broad range of evidence can help you identify the strengths, needs and interests of individual pupils and the conditions that enable successful learning to take place.

You'll wish to exchange information about learners' attainments and the progress they've made at points of transition – for example, when they move class, key stage or school – to help a new teacher to set work at an appropriate level for a pupil. However, you can use assessment information in other ways, and this section explores some of those possibilities.

Reviewing progress with learners

Pupils will benefit from being involved in self-assessment and self-review. They're likely to want to review their most recent achievements in areas where they regard learning as being highly relevant and important: for example, their personal targets. You should discuss progress related to the P scales where appropriate because:

- ▶ involving pupils in self-review may help them to reflect upon the processes of learning and therefore help them become better learners
- ▶ inviting pupils to review their learning can encourage them to repeat and consolidate important skills, responses or behaviours
- ▶ involving pupils in the development of their own progress files can motivate them to learn
- ▶ review sessions can give staff insights into the stability of recently acquired learning and how the pupils interpret it or connect it to other aspects of their knowledge.

« Talking about their work with pupils can help staff to refine their thoughts about pupils' levels and provide fresh insights into learning and attainment. »

Primary school headteacher

Periodic judgements you make using the P scales can provide a focus for dialogue with pupils about the progress they're making. Knowing how to recognise attainment can help pupils to move their learning forward. Of course you need to recognise and celebrate all aspects of progress, both in relation to the national curriculum and in terms of pupils' wider experiences and achievements.

Reporting to parents

Where pupils are working below level 1, the P scales can provide a useful medium for reporting to parents, carers and family members. The P scales offer a measure of progress relating to the national curriculum programmes of study. You can present them to parents, carers and family member as one part of a rich learning context that meets pupils' wider needs.

« We've been very lucky with the people working with Daniel. We do let them know when he does something at home and they set goals for him, and he does try to achieve them. And they tell us when he's done something new. »

Parent of a year 6 pupil

Some pupils experience regressive conditions. In these circumstances, the school may report its intention to support the pupil in maintaining prior skills, introduce fresh experiences and sustain quality of life. Supporting realistic expectations with positive attitudes is of paramount importance.

Informing school improvement

School managers, working with their school improvement partners, may wish to use aggregated assessment data to inform programmes of staff development and determine priorities for school improvement. For example, you'll be able to use P scales data to compare the performances of different cohorts of pupils, year on year and in different subject areas, against a developing national database. You'll also be able to measure the progress that groups of pupils make as they move through the key stages. Senior managers, working with their school improvement partners, will be able to pinpoint areas where rates of progress and achievement give cause for concern and help staff to focus on appropriate remedial action.

« We noticed that pupils were not doing as well in using and applying maths in our school as they were in other strands in maths. When we looked at the data, the staff agreed that we needed to do something about it. We did observations and realised that we didn't give the pupils enough opportunities to apply their skills in real-life situations – across the curriculum. The P scales data helped us to focus on an important teaching and learning issue – and eventually to raise attainments in that area. »

Special school headteacher



Schools may also benefit from processes of voluntary and informal data exchange with schools that make provision for comparable groups of pupils. You can facilitate these processes within local clusters of schools or across local authorities or regions. Sharing data based on the P scales may help schools engage in purposeful dialogue (with one another and with their school improvement partners) focused on school effectiveness and improvement.

« The data showed that our pupils were not progressing in terms of ICT skills like similar pupils in other schools in our cluster – especially the pupils with SEN. We employed consultants to help us review our policies. We set aside money to upgrade our equipment and ran training for all the staff. When we looked at the data the next year, we could see definite improvements – so it has been of real value. »

Primary school headteacher

School leaders are required, as part of statutory end of key stage assessment and reporting arrangements, to submit data on the attainments of pupils below level 1 generated using the P scales. The Progression Guidance has been developed to help schools to use these data to support whole-school target setting. More information is available at www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk.



To learn more about using assessment information, watch the film accompanying this guidance.

References, further reading and other resources

Assessing pupils' progress: assessment at the heart of learning (2008)
QCA/08/3867

Assessing pupils' progress: learners at the heart of assessment (2010)
QCDA/10/4768

Performance – P level – attainment targets, (2009)
QCA/09/4060

Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties (2009)

Guidance: QCA/09/4020

Developing skills: QCA/09/4029

English: QCA/09/4021

Mathematics: QCA/09/4033

Science: QCA/09/4036

Design and technology: QCA/09/4027

ICT: QCA/09/4024

History: QCA/09/4030

Geography: QCA/09/4028

Modern foreign languages: QCA/09/4025

Art and design: QCA/09/4022

Music: QCA/09/4031

Physical education: QCA/09/4032

Religious education: QCA/09/4026

PSHE and citizenship: QCA/09/4023

Using the P scales (2009)

QCA/09/4060

The publications listed above are available from the QCDA website

www.qcda.gov.uk

Progression guidance: improving data to raise attainment and maximise the progress of learners with special educational needs, learning difficulties and disabilities (2009)
Ref: 00553-2009BKT-EN

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/app>

Acknowledgements:

Cumberland School, Newham

John F Kennedy Special School, Newham

North Beckton Primary School, Newham

Sir John Heron Primary School, Newham

Thorplands Primary School, Northampton

West Gate Special School, Leicester





About this publication

Who is it for?

Special needs practitioners and senior leaders in schools.

What is it about?

How a broad range of evidence can be used with the P scales to improve provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or learning difficulties and disabilities who are working below level 1 of the national curriculum.

What is it for?

To help equip teachers to recognise pupils' strengths and weaknesses, track their progress and improve teaching and learning.

Related publications

See page 23.

For more copies

Download from www.qcda.gov.uk

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