



## Using the P scales



Assessing,  
moderating and  
reporting pupil  
attainment at  
levels P1 to P8

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# An introduction to these materials

## The purpose of the materials

This guidance is designed to help staff in mainstream and special schools to:

- use the P scales to make and share professional judgements about pupils' attainments below level 1 of the national curriculum
- carry out the internal and external moderation of judgements made in relation to the P scales
- report judgements that are sound and consistent
- improve the teaching and learning of pupils with learning difficulties by using aggregated assessment data.

Staff in schools need to have a common understanding of the P scales. You can use this pack of materials to help develop a common understanding and, in particular, to:

- promote greater and more effective use of the P scales in mainstream and special schools, across clusters of schools, and within and between local authorities
- help schools with experience of using the P scales to share effective practice and provide outreach support to neighbouring schools
- support wider initiatives in using the P scales.

## The structure of the materials

This pack of materials contains this guidance booklet and a DVD.

The DVD, which should be used in close association with this guidance, contains a number of video presentations: 'What are the P scales?', 'Contexts for learning', 'Getting ready to learn', 'Evidence of progress', 'Working with evidence', 'Working together for moderation', and a series of case studies of individual pupils. When the DVD is used in a computer it contains, in PDF format:

- examples of pupils' performance in English, mathematics and science at levels P4 to P8
- the P scales.

The materials on the DVD illustrate many of the points made in the guidance. This guidance links to specific sections of the DVD at key points in the text and provides references to other useful materials and sources.

## How to use the materials

These materials are for staff working in a variety of posts, including teachers, teaching assistants, special educational needs coordinators, subject coordinators, assessment coordinators and school managers.

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

You do not have to read the materials from start to finish. Staff can refer to the sections that are most relevant to their particular purposes.

# An introduction to the P scales

## What are the P scales?

The P scales are differentiated performance criteria. They outline attainment for pupils working below level 1 of the national curriculum and describe some of the important skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils may gain from the programmes of study of the national curriculum. The P scales assess only selected parts of the programmes of study. Teachers will wish to give equal importance to the skills that these pupils can develop through the whole curriculum. These include:

- communication and interaction
- personal and social development
- social inclusion
- preparation for adult life.

There are P scales for each subject in the national curriculum (including personal, social and health education) and for religious education. The P scales use eight performance levels to illustrate the learning that leads to national curriculum level 1.

- Levels P1 to P3 show the earliest levels of general attainment with subject-focused examples.
- Levels P4 to P8 show subject-related attainment.

The P scales, like the programmes of study they relate to, should be used with pupils from 5 to 16 years of age. They are particularly relevant to pupils with learning difficulties, whose attainments may not register on the national curriculum level descriptions.

## Uses of the P scales

Staff can use the P scales in the same way as the national curriculum level descriptions. This means that the P scales have a number of functions in both mainstream and special schools. Staff can use the P scales to:

- support summative assessment, enabling staff to make and record judgements about pupils' attainment at the end of a year or key stage
- track individual pupils' linear progress towards subject-specific attainment at national curriculum level 1 and beyond
- identify and record individual pupils' lateral progress by helping staff to look for related skills at similar levels across subjects
- look for patterns in the attainments of pupils
- provide information for school managers setting targets for whole-school improvement.

Later sections of this guidance deal with these functions in more detail.

The P scales are not designed to be used:

- as a crude performance indicator for making staff or schools accountable for effectiveness
- for detailed formative assessment
- to define curriculum content or as a detailed step-by-step curriculum
- to assess progress outside the 5 to 16 age range
- as labels to describe pupils
- for diagnosing or identifying pupils' special educational needs
- as targets for individual pupils. The broad, subject-focused nature of the P scale level descriptors means that they do not make good short-term targets for addressing the individual needs of particular pupils.

Staff working with pupils who use English as an additional language (and whose performance is at or below level 1 of the national curriculum in English) should refer to the EAL performance indicators (*A language in common*, [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_5739.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5739.aspx)). Unless these pupils have additional special educational needs, staff should use the EAL indicators in preference to the P scales.

Staff should 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 do not invalidate pupils'

attainments at these levels. When pupils have additional disabilities teachers should note the following guidance:

- In any subject, staff should adapt and reinterpret elements of the performance descriptions that are unavailable to pupils with sensory impairments (such as making 'eye contact' for pupils with visual impairments or 'listening' for pupils with hearing impairments). Pupils with sensory impairments in addition to learning difficulties may learn to focus, attend and communicate using alternative strategies and staff should regard different but equivalent responses as valid evidence of progress.
- In English, staff should ignore criteria that apply exclusively to handwriting when assessing pupils with physical disabilities. Pupils may attain a level in writing by producing or contributing letters, marks or symbols with a computer keyboard rather than handwriting. In reading, pupils may gain level P4 by scrolling through material on a computer screen using a switch rather than holding the book the right way up and turning the pages.
- In science it may be inappropriate to expect pupils with significant hearing impairments to imitate or copy sounds. Pupils with physical disabilities may 'show', 'demonstrate' or 'try out' activities by directing the actions of other participants rather than performing the actions themselves.
- Pupils may solve problems in mathematics using computer simulations rather than real objects.

There is further guidance in 'Making best-fit judgements'.

## Using the P scales for assessment

### Assessing pupils using the P scales

The P scales do not meet all assessment needs. Staff will continue to need other tools for identifying pupils' individual difficulties and special educational needs and for carrying out detailed and comprehensive assessments across the whole curriculum.

The P scales support summative assessment of the national curriculum. They summarise attainment at the end of a year or key stage. The descriptions given in the P scales do not provide a full account of all that pupils might achieve, even within a subject or strand. They do, however, provide a framework onto which teachers can map the progress of pupils. Staff may also wish to use other materials, for example:

- detailed records of pupils' responses in class
- systems for measuring the progress that pupils make within and across the whole curriculum
- the school's own assessment materials, often incorporated into schemes of work
- commercially available assessment schemes, for example those designed to identify early indications of communicative behaviour or small increments of progress in relation to subject studies.

Teachers can use the P scales on their own or in association with these more finely graded materials. The P scales can, however, provide a means of summarising, aggregating and reporting assessments based on these tools.

### School example

One school calibrates the assessment opportunities against the P scales in its schemes of work. This helps staff make summative judgements at the end of the year. The following is from the school's key stage 1 science scheme of work on physical processes.

Pupils may respond to these activities by:

- reacting to sensory outcomes, for example flashing lights, buzzing sounds or movements – P1
- attending to sensory outcomes in a focused way, for example looking, listening or tracking – P2
- participating in controlling events, for example by co-actively operating switches – P3
- anticipating outcomes, for example by responding before, during and after sensory events – P4
- initiating sensory events, for example turning on lights or buzzers – P5
- actively joining in with circuit making, for example joining components – P6
- recording their circuits, for example sequencing photos – P7
- responding to questions, for example 'Was that louder or quieter?' – P8.

## The P scales and pupil progress

The levels in the P scales operate independently of chronological age. A 7-year-old child may attain level P8 while some 16-year-olds work at levels P1 to P3. Teachers should not expect pupils to reach any given level at a particular age or to progress through the levels at a predetermined rate. However, the P scales level descriptors are designed to identify the kinds of progress a pupil may make over a year or key stage.

Expectations of progress will vary depending on a pupil's age when they attain a given level. The prospects for a pupil attaining level P3 at the age of 5 may be very different from those for a pupil working at P3 at the age of 14. It is therefore inappropriate to:

- expect the P scales to predict how far or how fast individual pupils or groups of pupils should progress
- hold staff to account for the fact that pupils with learning difficulties do not make progress in accordance with any supposed national norms or expectations of progress.

### Linear and lateral progress

Pupil responses echoing the subject-focused examples given alongside the descriptions of general attainment at P1 to P3 can indicate early progress within a subject. The subject-related attainments of P4 to P8 lead smoothly into the national curriculum level descriptions. Many schools have found the P scales useful for tracking progress towards level 1 for individual pupils in particular subjects.

For many pupils with learning difficulties, progress within or across the levels is as important as progress through the framework. Lateral progress, where pupils begin to generalise their learning in new contexts and develop a more even profile of responses, can be highly significant for some pupils with learning difficulties. It may be important, for example, for staff to ensure, in their planning, that pupils have opportunities to apply emerging skills in a wide range of contexts and to generalise their learning.

#### School example

Maleeha communicates preferences consistently using actions and gestures. She is beginning to use a small range of signs but her teachers assess her as working largely at level P2, with some P3 responses, in terms of communication. However, Maleeha sorts colours consistently (P5 in mathematics) and she operates simple computer programs using a mouse (P5 in information and communication technology). Given this evidence of her cognitive strengths, staff are working to bring Maleeha's attainments in English into line with her progress in other areas of the curriculum.

Fraser has started to make more controlled responses when listening and responding using a resonance board. When the teacher taps three times and says 'Give me three', he responds by making three bangs on the board. Fraser needs to learn to identify and reproduce this pattern in other circumstances, for example responding to hand claps or drumbeats.

### School example

In the classroom, Khaled can follow a three-part instruction using symbols in his picture-exchange communication book. He now needs to learn to do this in the hall, where there is a much higher level of environmental stimulus for him to overcome. The next stage will be to follow three-part instructions in even more complex circumstances outside school.

### Individual profiles of learning

The nature of individual pupils' learning difficulties and other circumstances will affect teachers' expectations of their progress. The combination of difficulties may be unique, and pupils may demonstrate progress in unusual ways. More guidance on recognising progress is given in the *General guidance* in the 'Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties' series ([www.qca.org.uk/ld](http://www.qca.org.uk/ld)).

Many pupils with learning difficulties tend to develop uneven or spiky profiles of development across subjects, in different aspects of subjects or in different contexts.

### School example

In structured settings, for example when working in his chair during mathematics lessons, Elijah often engages in self-absorbed behaviour or withdraws from activity. When he is sitting in a circle with his peers during music sessions, Elijah is focused, attentive, engaged and happy to join in.

In 'Number' in mathematics Nadim uses counting words to 100, forwards and backwards, but in 'Using and applying mathematics' he is unable to respond to a request to give five items.

In 'Writing' in English Helena makes scribbled marks in attempts to represent her name without using letters. In 'Expressive communication' she is able to relate information about the past, present or future using symbols.

These differences in response might result from individual difficulties or indicate aptitudes in, or preferences for, particular subjects. They could also be related to preferences for particular people, environments, items of equipment or activities. The examples of pupil performance on the DVD accompanying this guidance address these and other issues relevant to assessment.



- set up separate assessment tasks or activities, use tests or set up arbitrary rules, criteria or conditions when making assessments – teachers can use observations and materials collected as an integral part of teaching and learning as an evidence base.

Notes based on observation and professional knowledge are often the most vital forms of evidence. Where staff collect other forms of evidence, comments and annotations make a crucial contribution to the assessment process.

Inadequately explained samples of work or photographs make poor pieces of evidence.

Contributions from the whole classroom team are valuable. Staff will often share their thoughts about the emerging attainments they see in pupils' everyday work. Sometimes the discussions highlight the need to collect a particular piece of work or to make a note of a particular response in a pupil's record.

Dates on pieces of work can reveal trends and rates of progress, but good annotation is more than merely dating work. Providing staff with annotation sheets in an agreed format will make the annotation process more efficient and more useful. Some approaches involve various members of staff simply writing their comments onto samples of work. Where pupils are working at earlier P levels, staff may append a dated set of notes onto a photograph of a pupil responding in a new and significant way. Other examples involve schools and local authorities providing formats that encourage staff to provide more consistent annotations.

## Collecting evidence

### Working with evidence

Assessments and judgements about attainment should always be supported by evidence, but that evidence can take a number of different forms. Evidence for making judgements in relation to the P scales can include:

- staff records based on observations
- witness statements from other people, for example parents or professionals from other services
- pupils' written work
- comments or commentaries from pupils
- artwork and artefacts created by pupils
- photographs, video and audio tapes.

Collecting evidence should be manageable and avoid duplication and bureaucracy. When using the P scales, there is no need to:

- collect all these forms of evidence to support each judgement – staff records and witness statements can stand alone as evidence
- collect evidence from every lesson or illustrate every increment of progress – staff should focus on collecting clear evidence and making brief, telling annotations in relation to significant attainments or landmarks in pupils' learning

### School example

One school uses a system of coding samples of work with coloured stickers according to the support received. The symbols on the stickers indicate whether the work was done with no help, gestural prompting, signed or spoken support or physical support.

*Supporting school improvement: emotional and behavioural development* ([www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_8401.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_8401.aspx)) offers further guidance on observation. Evaluations of work and notes of observations should acknowledge the contextual factors (see 'Making best-fit judgements') that may have influenced the work produced.

### Video and photographs

Staff do not need to create large collections of photographic or video evidence to substantiate best-fit judgements.

A comment based on observation is often more efficient. However, video and photographic evidence is particularly useful:

- to reveal new reactions and progress made when pupils are working at the earliest levels of response
- when reviewing progress with pupils and parents
- for moderation training, where these materials can bring discussion to life
- to provide exemplars for quality control, for example within the school portfolio.

For some pupils, evidence of learning may build slowly over time and depend upon records gathered in a range of contexts. Evidence may not be consistent and staff may need to be alert to emerging patterns and clusters of responses. Classroom files can be used to store evidence in the short term. Teachers can use these working collections of materials to provide samples for:

- end of year or key stage assessment and reporting
- developing progress files
- review processes
- moderation.

### Observations

Observations play an important part in the process of collecting evidence. Different forms of observation include:

- informal observations of pupils made during everyday whole-class activities
- observations of pupils working in structured groups
- observations made during individual work
- impressions recorded by staff after a communication session or a period of intensive interaction
- observations of responses to specific demands
- observations of pupils in play and social activities.

Video and photographic evidence demands good annotation. Often the annotations rather than the images themselves provide the actual evidence upon which any judgements are based.

'Working with evidence' and 'Working together for moderation' on the DVD show staff using the annotations attached to photographic evidence to help them agree a level.

## Making best-fit judgements

### Assessing the overall performance of a pupil

Staff should use their professional judgement to decide which P level descriptor offers the best fit for a pupil's performance according to the evidence gathered. Staff should remember that pupils may attain different levels in different subjects. Staff will need to work together 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, has been 'more P5 than P4 or P6'. Considering pupils' work against elements of the levels above and below a proposed level is an effective way of clarifying a best-fit judgement. Discussion between members of staff can often confirm the significance, in terms of attainment, of pupils' responses as observed over time and in a range of contexts.

Staff should make best-fit judgements on the basis of normal, everyday teaching and learning processes. There is no need for testing or setting up special assessment tasks or activities.

### Flexibility in using the P scales

Best-fit judgements are based on:

- the teacher's knowledge of the learner
- an awareness of the contexts in which learning takes place
- consideration of a variety of different forms of evidence gathered over time.

Staff should not make judgements about levels on the basis of a single piece of work or any single item of evidence. However, pupils do not need to repeat responses that are regarded by staff as secure (by performing a given skill five times over, for example).

A pupil does not necessarily have to demonstrate every element in a level descriptor or demonstrate an element a certain number of times in order to be awarded a given level. Pupils do not need to demonstrate mastery of a certain percentage of the elements in a level descriptor. There is no need to create further sublevels or subdivisions within each P level.

For some learners, it may be appropriate to ignore elements of a descriptor to acknowledge the impact of particular impairments. When making best-fit judgements, staff will need to take account of:

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

The examples of activities and responses in the P scales are illustrative rather than prescriptive. Staff can be confident that it is acceptable to look for alternative but equivalent learning. The commentaries on the DVD show members of staff acknowledging, as evidence of progress, responses that

are different from those listed in the performance descriptions, for example when pupils have sensory impairments.

### Influences on pupils' learning

Learning in relation to the P scales will often be interactive and this should be acknowledged when judgements are made.

#### School example

'What are the P scales?' on the DVD shows Kevin, a 15-year-old student from a special school, attending a link session at his local mainstream secondary school. The video was taken on the third week of this link arrangement and shows staff from both schools discussing the P scales. Kevin's teacher wants to assess his progress in communication by observing him interacting and 'communicating with peers of his own age'. She discusses this target with students from the mainstream school (who are working for an ASDAN award). The interaction becomes an integral part of Kevin's communication target and of the link activity. It also forms a natural part of Kevin's assessment.

Staff development activities can help staff to gain the experience they need to balance contextual factors when making best-fit judgements.

## Moderation

### Cycles of moderation activity

Moderation is a process that enables staff and others to review and confirm assessment judgements. Its key purpose is to help schools ensure that assessments are sound and consistent. This section provides guidance on moderation processes 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 regular moderation activities at each level. A cycle of moderation activities can be very effective. This could start with staff working with colleagues in their own teaching teams, then developing skills and confidence through whole-school activities, and finally becoming involved in cross-school, local authority or regional initiatives.

### Moderation within a class or teaching group

Moderation between staff in class teams and in teaching groups within a school will:

- tend to be informal
- focus on the attainments of pupils
- be used to achieve agreement about the level to be awarded to a pupil through summative assessment at the end of a year or key stage.

Considering the following factors can help staff arrive at best-fit judgements about levels of attainment:

- context and environment
- involvement of peers and staff
- aids and adaptations
- physical and cognitive support.

The key task in each category is to decide whether the contextual factors changed the nature (and perhaps the level) of the pupils' responses, or merely enabled the pupils to participate.

#### School example

Phoebe has recently been assessed as having a significant hearing loss and has been provided with hearing aids. Phoebe is now able to participate more effectively in group activities and to enjoy interactions with her peers. Now that this barrier to learning has been addressed, staff are able to acknowledge new responses that indicate higher attainment for Phoebe.

Dylan's physical and sensory disabilities mean that many of his responses have to be fully prompted. Until Dylan has developed more consistent patterns of communicative behaviour, it will be difficult for staff to evaluate the significance of these co-active explorations for Dylan in terms of learning.

annotate samples of work that go forward for more formal moderation so that other people can appreciate contextual influences on the performance. Staff need time to discuss, select and annotate samples of evidence to be put forward for moderation in this way.

### Whole-school moderation

Moderation between staff working in teams across a whole school will:

- tend to be more formal
- focus on the evidence collected and selected by staff to support their judgements
- be used explicitly for staff development and to assure the quality of the summative assessments made by staff, the assessment process and the teaching and learning experiences offered by the school.

Schools may decide to carry out different kinds of moderation activities depending on the priorities established in school improvement plans. Staff teaching pupils in the same age group can come together to review assessment judgements in a range of subjects, for example for pupils working in a given key stage. Phase-specific moderation meetings can help staff:

- develop age-appropriate activities and resources that are relevant to the needs and interests of pupils in a certain age group but that will also enable pupils to respond at a range of levels
- manage consistency in levels and continuity in the application of skills across subjects.

Individual members of staff can confirm their best-fit assessments through discussion and review with teachers, teaching assistants and other professionals (see 'Making best-fit judgements').

Discussion with family members and pupils themselves can enhance moderation processes. Staff will recognise that:

- discussing work with pupils and sharing the development of their files of work can provide fresh insights into learning and attainment (see 'Wider uses of the P scales')
- discussing progress with people who know the pupil in a wide range of settings can help to resolve uncertainties over best-fit judgements.

#### School example

Elijah's parents provide regular reports about their son's responses at home, allowing school staff to acknowledge that Elijah has consolidated many of his skills and can use them in a range of settings. This information helps to confirm the best-fit judgements made by staff.

Staff working with Phoebe, who has a profound visual impairment, maintain a tactile record of her daily activities in a 'big book' format. This record allows Phoebe to review her experiences, after the event, with a member of staff. Her reactions to events recalled in this way help staff to confirm their judgements about her attainments.

Informal moderation within a class team or teaching group can also provide an important foundation for other developments, including enhanced awareness of assessment and moderation processes for all staff. Staff should carefully

Staff can also meet to agree assessment judgements within subjects for pupils across age groups. Cross-phase, subject-focused moderation meetings can help staff to decide how:

- different activities and responses can be awarded the same level in different age groups
- the delivery of the curriculum and contexts of learning should differ in different phases.

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

#### School example

As one headteacher featured in 'Working together for moderation' on the DVD says, whole-school moderation activities are extremely beneficial. Involving teachers, teaching assistants and subject coordinators in the moderation process 'draws on the skills and knowledge of a range of staff and ensures that there is continuity and a whole-school approach'.

After moderation, samples of evidence, comments and annotations from staff and pupils and the associated assessment judgements can be included in a whole-school portfolio. Developing a whole-school portfolio can be useful because:

- the process of creating the portfolio moves the school towards agreed interpretations of levels

- the portfolio becomes a reference resource and reduces the need for staff to collect large amounts of evidence to substantiate individual assessments.

#### School example

One school introduced moderation initially through classroom observations. Members of staff from different classes paired up and each would observe in the other's classroom. They then compared notes about the pupil outcomes they saw, first with their partner and then with other colleagues. This process led to better understanding of the P scales because staff had to relate the level judgements to contexts such as each pupil's individual needs, the learning environment and different approaches to teaching.

The school then introduced a planned programme of moderation meetings. These meetings involved discussions looking at a wide range of evidence. The coordinator of these meetings felt that the experiences of the paired observation sessions had played an essential role in preparing staff for the moderation meetings. Pairing colleagues for discussions of observations can give staff confidence and time for reflection before working in whole-school or cross-school groups.

## Moderation between schools

Moderation between schools working in clusters, within local authorities or regionally, will:

- be formal
- focus on the evidence selected and maintained by schools, local authorities and others in order to support the assessment process and the reporting of data
- be used to assure the quality of the assessment, moderation and reporting processes used across a number of schools.

Moderation activities between schools can be organised in ways that mirror whole-school moderation, scrutinising, for example:

- attainments at a range of levels through a given subject
- attainments across a range of subjects in a given age group.

An ongoing cycle of moderation meetings can therefore be organised to meet the needs of staff working in similar roles in different schools, for example:

- coordinators for particular subjects
- team leaders or managers for pupils working in particular key stages
- assessment coordinators.

Whatever the key purpose of cross-school moderation activity, it is helpful to involve members of staff with different areas of responsibility in presenting and discussing pupils'

work and responses. Cross-school moderation of the work of pupils with learning difficulties is particularly productive when mainstream and special schools work together.

### School example

In some areas, advanced-skills teachers from special schools have worked with staff from local authority support services to provide initial P scales training sessions for staff from mainstream schools. Building on the samples of work shared at these initial sessions, colleagues in mainstream and special schools have gone on to develop portfolios of evidence drawn from all the schools in a cluster. The portfolio is under ongoing review through regular moderation meetings involving staff from all the schools in the cluster.

'Working together for moderation' on the DVD suggests that there is great scope for developing regional groupings of special and mainstream schools to extend moderation activities out from local clusters. Regional groupings can develop packs of moderation materials that can be used for quality assurance purposes in all the schools involved. One headteacher says that 'the professional development opportunities created for our subject coordinators were just tremendous'.



## Wider uses of the P scales

### Reviewing progress with learners

The P scales can be used as a focus for dialogue with pupils about the progress they are making. Knowing how to recognise attainment can help pupils to move their learning forward.

#### School example

One school's assessment policy emphasises the importance of involving pupils in reviewing their own work. The headteacher suggests that discussing their progress, for example by using some of the statements from the P level descriptors, 'helps the children to appreciate what is expected of them'. Staff do not focus on the P level numbers with the pupils.

The same headteacher also argues that the process of discussing work with pupils helps staff to 'refine their thoughts about pupils' levels'. Pupils' own perspectives can reveal 'what they found easy, the extent to which they need to consolidate skills or work on lateral progress', and even 'if they are close to the attainment of a higher level'.

Staff can use sound recordings, photographs, video clips, object prompts and tactile cues to help pupils to recall and review their learning. Parents will also appreciate participating in these sessions, for example as an element in formal review and reporting processes.

The key purpose of moderation activities between schools may be to ratify the quality of teachers' assessments for reporting. However, when well managed, moderation between schools also fulfils a number of other valuable purposes, for example:

- contributing to staff development
- supporting the development of common understandings about performance
- helping to secure and maintain the quality of the judgements made about pupil attainment and progress
- monitoring and reviewing the role of assessment, moderation and reporting materials provided by commercial organisations, local authorities and/or regional groupings.

Many local authorities and regional consortia have promoted and supported moderation conferences and other development activities related to the P scales. Some have produced their own guidance booklets, videos and web-based resources to promote and support staff development and moderation activities. Activities that encompass more than just allocating levels to written work are most valuable. Video clips and photographs with good annotations are useful for moderation training, especially where pupils are working at the earliest levels of response, for example at P1 to P3, because they present vivid, real-life scenarios for discussion. The interplay between the annotations and the context seen in the video or photographs can be very instructive.

Pupils should be involved in self-assessment and self-review, but it is the job of staff to map assessments onto the P scales. Pupils will usually wish to discuss progress and achievement in real terms without referring to levels or the text of level descriptors. Staff should celebrate the importance of all aspects of progress, both in relation to the national curriculum and in terms of pupils' wider experiences and achievements. Pupils are likely to want to review their most recent achievements in areas where they regard learning as being highly relevant and important, for example their individual targets. However, members of staff 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
- 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
- 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.

Photographs or video clips can be very effective in involving pupils actively in reviewing their own learning (see 'Collecting evidence'). Visual images can sometimes prompt responses where spoken language does not.

Many schools now involve pupils in planning and review meetings. Where pupils maintain records of their experiences and achievements in a suitable format, they can present their own accounts of the progress they are making. Video, CD-ROM, PowerPoint and websites have all been used to great effect to generate progress files that pupils can share with professionals and family members at such meetings. Pupils with the most profound disabilities can get involved in these presentations. Digital technology makes pupil-centred planning, recording and review a reality for all.

### Communicating with other professionals

Staff will wish to exchange information about pupils' attainments and the progress they have made at points of transition, for example when they move class, key stage or even school. Where pupils have learning difficulties, schools are likely to amass significant amounts of detailed and highly individualised information. Assessments of attainment and progress using the P scales can form a useful part of this material. Information about prior attainments set out against the P scales can:

- provide a baseline from which to measure further progress
- identify gaps in learning or dips in a profile that may suggest matters to be worked on in a new setting
- help a new teacher to set work at an appropriate level for a pupil.

In 'Working together for moderation' on the DVD a teacher and a teaching assistant discuss the pupils in their class with a teacher who is due to return to school after maternity

leave. Referring to the P scales enables these colleagues to share basic information about pupils' attainments (and the starting points for further progress) swiftly and using a common language. The meeting also allows them to develop detailed and productive insights about individual pupils and their preferences in learning.

Good transfer of information using the P scales can also help when pupils transfer from class to class or into a new school. As one headteacher says, it helps to maintain 'joined-up thinking' when staff can relate directly to the assessment information they receive. This promotes continuity for pupils, helps teachers in the new class and saves pupils from being reassessed all the time.

The P scales also have a role at key points of transition, for example from early years into key stage 1 or from key stage 4 into post-16 or further education. The P scales are not designed to be used in early years nor beyond the age of 16.

### Reporting to parents

The government requires schools to report to parents:

- annually on the progress made by pupils over the year
- at the end of each key stage on the pupils' attainments in the national curriculum.

Where pupils are working below level 1, the P scales can provide a useful medium for such reporting. Staff may wish to use the level descriptors in the P scales, like the national curriculum level descriptors, to reflect upon and summarise the subject-focused learning a pupil may demonstrate over a key stage.

When the school needs to report to parents, staff can review the evidence collected for each pupil and decide which of the level descriptors offers the best overall fit for the pupils' attainments. When allocating a level using the P scales, it is important to:

- take account of the range of a pupil's work in a subject
- consider pupil progress in the light of a range of pieces of evidence gathered over time.

Schools should report on the diversity of what they provide in order to meet the complex needs of pupils with learning difficulties. The P scales offer a measure of progress relating to the national curriculum programmes of study, but they should be presented to parents as one part of a rich learning context that meets pupils' wider needs.

- A report, in words, of the progress made by pupils will be more meaningful than the number attached to any level descriptor.
- Small increments of progress within a level represent important achievements for some pupils. Staff can make sure that progress within a level is recorded and reported positively so that pupils receive credit for it.
- Reports can acknowledge the lateral progress pupils make when they extend their range of experiences, make equivalent responses in a range of subject settings or use pre-existing skills in new contexts.
- Reports to parents can reflect not only pupils' attainments (established learning measured against set criteria) but also their wider achievements (which may include important gains in confidence or fluency or be in terms of

wider experiences that do not register on the level descriptors). Taking account of the significant difficulties in learning experienced by some pupils, these achievements may be considerable even when they register as progress within a level or across levels rather than from one level to another.

- Some pupils experience regressive conditions. In these circumstances, the school may report its intention to support the maintenance of prior skills, the introduction of fresh experiences and sustained quality of life. Supporting realistic expectations with positive attitudes is of paramount importance.

### School example

One school states that its ambition for pupils with degenerative conditions is to ensure that each day is focused on learning – personally, socially and in terms of the curriculum – and development from the baseline that the individual pupil presents on that occasion. The school is therefore able to conceptualise a slowing or reduced rate of regression, in its reports to parents, as a form of progress.

Another school prepares annual reports for parents by providing a brief, standardised summary, based on the wording of the relevant P level, of the experiences pupils have had in each subject. Staff then prepare individual written reports of pupils' learning over the year. The following extract gives Alan's science report:

'Alan has shown that he recognises the features of living things in their environments and that he knows where

these features belong, for example, eyes on a face or leaves on a tree. He can match objects with photographs. Alan closely observes the changes that occur, for example when materials are heated, cooled or mixed. He is beginning to make generalisations, connections and predictions from experience, for example expecting that ice cream will melt or that wheeled toys will move faster down a slope.

'Alan has worked hard this year and has shown interest and enthusiasm in his science lessons. He particularly enjoyed the unit of work on light and shadows, exploring and investigating light sources and making and identifying shadows. Alan often requires prompting and individual attention to encourage him to participate but, when he chooses, he can work independently and with minimal guidance. When Alan focuses, he produces some lovely work. A good year – well done, Alan.'

The report then records Alan's attainment at P6, although it emphasises that he is already beginning to achieve some aspects of P7.

### Whole-school improvement

School managers may wish to use the P scales as one of several useful mechanisms for setting targets for whole-school improvement. Aggregating data for a class, phase, key stage, department or whole school may help staff to identify and focus upon priorities for development.

In the video case studies on the DVD, staff often suggest that pupils are 'working towards' or 'working on elements of' the

level above their actual attainment. It may be useful to share these insights when reporting to parents or discussing progress with other members of staff or with the pupils themselves, but it is the best-fit level of attainment, given in each of the case studies, that should be reported.

Pupils can experience a wide range of learning difficulties. Any evaluations of progress therefore need to appreciate that:

- the P scales relate to progress in the subjects of the national curriculum only and are part of a complex matrix of other valuable aspects of development
- it is important to be wary of making comparisons between small samples. The composition of small samples can be subject to random and wide variations in age, prior attainment levels and the nature of individual pupils' learning difficulties
- because of the individual and unusual combinations of learning difficulties experienced by some pupils, the information gathered using the P scales may be unique to the group or school from which it is taken.

Data collected from the analysis of progress through the P scales is insufficient for making comparative judgements about teacher or school performance. However, schools will be able to use P scales data to compare the performances of different cohorts of pupils, year on year, and to measure the progress that groups of pupils make as they move through the key stages against a developing national database. Senior managers will be able to pinpoint areas where rates of progress and achievements give cause for concern and help staff to focus on appropriate remedial action.

### School example

Aggregates of assessments using the P scales suggested to senior staff in one school that pupils were not progressing as well in 'Using and applying mathematics' as in the other strands of mathematics. The staff therefore agreed a whole-school target to try to improve attainment in that area. When development activities focused on how staff were teaching mathematics, they realised that their lessons were isolated from real applications and that pupils needed more opportunities to emphasise practical activities and the cross-curricular uses of mathematics. Using data originating from the P scales helped the school to focus on important issues of teaching and learning in a key subject area.

The data in another school suggested that pupils were not doing as well in information and communication technology as in English and mathematics. The school committed funding to the area and set targets for improvement in the school development plan. As the headteacher says, 'We redefined our policies and the curriculum. We did some staff development. We employed consultants to help us look at resources and buy some new equipment. And when we looked at the data the next year, we found there had been real improvements. So it has been of great value.'

Schools may also benefit from processes of voluntary and informal data exchange with schools that make provision for comparable groups of pupils. These processes can be

## Resources

### The P scales

The P scales are available as a downloadable PDF on the DVD accompanying this booklet: *Using the P scales* (QCA/09/4060).

The P scales are also available as part of the *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties* series, now revised and republished by QCA and on the QCA website at [www.qca.org.uk/ld](http://www.qca.org.uk/ld).

### Curriculum materials

*Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties*. Updated February 2009. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. ([www.qca.org.uk/ld](http://www.qca.org.uk/ld)).

*Practice guidance for the early years foundation stage* (DCSF00266-2008BKT-EN). London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008. ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/resources/downloads/practice-guidance](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/resources/downloads/practice-guidance)).

*Designing a learner-centred curriculum for 16- to 24-year-olds with learning difficulties*. Updated July 2007. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. ([www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_8372.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_8372.aspx)).

*The early years foundation stage profile*. Updated December 2007. Department for Children, Schools and Families. ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs)). Path: EYFS profile.

facilitated within local clusters of schools or across local authorities or regions. Sharing data based on the P scales may help schools to have purposeful dialogues focused on school effectiveness and improvement.

Data gathered and analysed in respect of the P scales, literacy and numeracy and the national curriculum can represent only part of the work that schools do. School communities will wish to find more focused and individual ways of recognising their effectiveness and driving forward improvements. Where pupils have learning difficulties, other indicators of effectiveness are likely to be important, including:

- levels of pupil participation
- support for advocacy
- the work of the school council
- partnership with parents and families
- measures of social inclusion.

Schools are encouraged to explore these possibilities in parallel with their use of the P scales when setting targets for school improvement. More detailed guidance on whole-school target setting can be found at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk).

*Early years foundation stage (EYFS) profile*. Revised January 2009. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. ([www.qca.org.uk/eyfsp](http://www.qca.org.uk/eyfsp)).

*Key stage 4 for students with learning difficulties*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004. ([www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_8402.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_8402.aspx)).

### Related materials

*A language in common: assessing English as an additional language* (QCA/00/584). London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000. ([www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_5739.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5739.aspx)).

*Adult pre-entry curriculum framework*. Updated February 2009. Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills. ([www.dcsf.gov.uk/curriculum\\_preentry](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/curriculum_preentry)).

*Supporting school improvement: emotional and behavioural development* (QCA/01/717). London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2001. ([www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_8401.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_8401.aspx)).

For guidance on target setting, data collection and the Pupil Achievement Tracker, see [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk).

For support with the analysis of school and pupil performance data, see [www.raiseonline.org](http://www.raiseonline.org).

For more advice about assessing pupils' progress using the P scales, visit the National Strategies website at [nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk](http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk).

# About this booklet

- Who is it for?** Teachers in mainstream schools, special primary and secondary schools, specialised units and independent schools; special educational needs coordinators; assessment coordinators; headteachers
- What it is about?** This document introduces the P scales and outlines ways of using them
- What is it for?** It supports teachers in making judgements about pupils' attainment below level 1 of the national curriculum
- Related materials** See the 'Resources' section of this booklet

**For more information:** [www.qca.org.uk/ld](http://www.qca.org.uk/ld)

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