

Dear Parent/Carer,

We want to inform you about government plans to introduce a compulsory test for all children when they start school in Reception. This test is called 'baseline assessment' and will involve questions on reading, writing and maths.

As Early Years practitioners, we are concerned that this "baseline" test is not in the best interests of your children or their school. We would like to tell you more about it so that you can make your views known.

What does the Government want to do?

The government wants to measure children's abilities when they enter Reception so the results can be compared to the SATS scores children achieve when they are eleven. This is because they believe it is important to judge schools by the progress children make. This is not a bad idea, but the problem is that the test they are proposing will not be fair on children. Here's why:

- The government is proposing to test your child during their first few weeks in Reception. A time when they are still settling in
- The main focus of this test will be reading, writing and mathematics. Things that may be unfamiliar to many children when they start school because every child has different experiences
- There is already substantial research to suggest that the test – which is likely to be done on a tablet device - will disadvantage boys, summer-born children, children from less privileged homes and those who speak English as an additional language.
- The results will be used to predict how well your child is likely to do a full seven years later in Year 6. This is a nonsense because the original data is not reliable and children develop at different rates
- With so much focus on literacy and maths at such a young age, there's a danger that opportunities for children to be creative and learn through play, being physical and challenging themselves will be squeezed out
- We know from research that children in Reception need to have a grounding in spoken language, personal and social skills and physicality; this prepares them for future learning
- The government has planned this focus on maths and literacy because the curriculum in Y1 and Y2 (up to seven years old) has been redeveloped and children are expected to be ready for it. However, the youngest children do not learn in the same way as their older, more experienced brothers and sisters

There is already an effective and much more sophisticated system in place to assess children when they start school. This system continues through the Reception Year and is summed up in the Summer Term

What does this look like?

- During the first few weeks of your child's first term in Reception, the Staff spend time carefully observing all children individually. They take time to talk and interact with them to find out what makes them unique, what they know and can do
- This takes time but is worth it. The picture built up from these observations helps the team decide exactly what opportunities and teaching each child needs to help them achieve the best they possibly can
- At the end of the Summer Term, the Team are asked to assess how well each child has achieved within the Early Learning Goals. There are 17 Goals altogether, four of which are related to reading, writing, numbers and shape, space and measure. Decisions are made based on the observational evidence gathered through the year.

By the end of Reception the school already has a good picture of what each child can do. The child is not tested to get this information – it is built up over the year through observation and evidence from the activities they do both with the teacher and independently.

This existing system does not need to be replaced by unreliable tests, and the Government does not understand how early assessment works

So what can you do?

- If you are concerned about these plans, which are due to start in 2020, please speak to your child's teacher first. Perhaps you will be able to speak to the Headteacher as well
- Share your concerns with friends who also have young children
- Share and sign this petition

<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/four-year-olds-dont-need-exams>

- Write to your local MP about this issue and the concerns you have for your children's well-being
- Thank you for sparing the time to read our letter. Please support this important campaign for a more appropriate future for our children
- Follow the "More Than A Score" coalition (which includes Keeping Early Years Unique) on Facebook and Twitter

Together we CAN make a change

With kind regards

The "Keeping Early Years Unique" Team (part of the "More Than A Score" coalition)

Keyu.co.uk

