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Reception baseline assessment tests explained for parents

Starting school used to be about settling in, making new friends and learning to be independent. Then 'Reception tests', due to take place within weeks of walking through the school doors, were announced. The Reception Baseline Assessment check will now be introduced in September 2020; we explain the latest developments.



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In September 2017 the Department for Education announced that a new assessment in Reception would be introduced from 2020 as a baseline measure to track pupils' progress during primary school.

The government said the proposed Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) would be developed in conjunction with the teaching profession, and would be 'teacher-mediated', meaning the teacher would be present while the Check is administered.

Reception Baseline Assessment: new test to be introduced in September 2020

Children who start Reception in September 2020 will be the first group to take the new RBA. It is proposed that it will take place during the first six weeks of the autumn term.

The RBA will be piloted / trialed in schools nationally in the 2019 to 2020 academic year. All schools with Reception classes have been invited to take part in the pilot, and around 10,000 schools have signed up.

Schools are not obliged to tell parents whether they're piloting the RBA.

The focus of the RBA will be on communication, language and literacy, and maths. It will take around 20 minutes.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has been chosen as the preferred supplier to design and deliver the RAB and will be running the trial and pilot phases of the assessment and the first two years of its implementation in primary schools.

The RBA data will be used to judge how much progress children have made by the end of KS2 (Year 6 SATs). There will be no "pass" or "fail" or numerical score, and the results of the RBA will not be used to track individual pupils or to judge schools' Foundation Stage performance.

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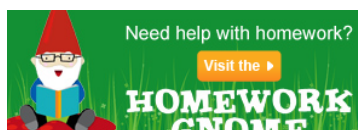


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The government has also stated that if the Reception Baseline Assessment check is introduced, children will no longer have to take **KS1 SATs** when they reach the end of Year 2. It's thought they'll be discontinued in 2023.

The current **Phonics Screening Check**, carried out at the end of Year 1 to assess reading ability, will remain unchanged.



Reception Baseline Assessment before 2017

The RBA has a long and complicated history.

In September 2016, the Department for Education was due to introduce a Reception Baseline Check for all children in Reception in England. This was to assess each child's level of development at the beginning of their formal schooling in order to measure their progress by age 11. The government suggested the new tests would ensure higher standards and allow all pupils to receive the attention they needed to build on areas of weakness.

Schools in the September 2015 pilot of the assessments were free to choose from a number of approved assessments.

- About a third of schools were planning to opt for tests carried out one-to-one with a Reception teacher, which focused on the very basics of learning such as counting, picture, letter and number recognition. The NFER assessment used common Reception classroom resources like counting beads, plastic shapes and number and picture cards. Children worked through the activities (which took around 30 minutes) while the teacher recorded the child's progress on a digital device or in individual paper pupil booklets.
- The other two-thirds of schools had decided to use an assessment that relied on teachers' observations of children's skills within the normal day-to-day school routine. This method of assessment, devised by a small educational consultancy called Early Excellence, was designed so that children didn't even know they're being tested.

In summer 2016 the Baseline Check was put on hold indefinitely, and teachers were instructed to continue to complete the **Early Years Foundation Stage Profile** (a broad assessment of your child's abilities in all areas of their learning and development), pending further decisions about assessment in Reception.

The decision was made because the government conceded that **the three different methods of baseline assessment that schools were able to choose from in 2015 – a computer-based assessment, an assessment based on tasks and observation, and an observation-only assessment – were not comparable.**

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The same child could take all three types of assessment and come out with different results. This meant that the results of the baseline assessment in its 2015 form couldn't be used as a comparison between schools, or to accurately measure children's progress from Reception to Year 6.

How will Reception assessments work?

The Department for Education says that by giving each child a Baseline Assessment when they first start primary school, schools will not only have a clearer idea of how much progress their pupils are making, but should also be able to identify which children are likely to need extra help.

The government feels that the RBA will also help to recognise the good progress that schools make with disadvantaged lower-ability children, and will give a "snapshot of where pupils are when they arrive at school".

Test results will be used for the school's purposes in measuring progress. Children's school reports are unlikely to include their scores, and will continue to use the [Early Years Foundation Stage Profile](#) as a teacher-observed, complete assessment of each individual child's development and progress in Reception.

What will the Reception Baseline Assessment look like?

The Department for Education has stated that the RBA will be about 20 minutes long, covering language and communication, and early maths. Teachers will administer the check and record their results electronically.

It's not yet known how it will be administered, but the DfE suggests that "in most cases pupils should not be aware that they are being assessed". The RBA will be "inclusive and accessible to the vast majority of children as they join school in Reception. Most children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) or English as an additional language (EAL) will be able to take part in the assessment."

The RBA will be administered in normal teaching time.

Reception baseline assessment: a new...



How do parents and teachers react to the prospect of Reception assessments?

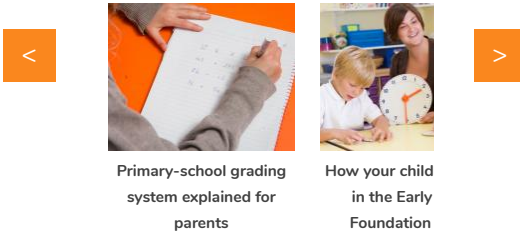
The idea of testing children was unpopular amongst parents in 2015, and the same is likely to apply in 2020.

Children of just four and five already have to contend with the anxiety of starting school and are often daunted by unfamiliar tasks at this age.

Concentration levels may well be an issue, particularly for summer-born pupils who are almost a whole year younger than their autumn-born peers.

Checks administered on a one-to-one basis are time-consuming for teachers, too.

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