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Dear Parent and Carers,

Re: Changes to the National Curriculum and to the Assessment of Pupils

There have been significant changes to both the National Curriculum and the way we assess pupils' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. These changes are many and complex and I have done my best here to provide some background information and details regarding this. It will feel like 'information overload' but it is difficult to omit any details without leaving gaps and it is all very inter-connected. The summary is as brief as I can make it. So, here goes . . .

Background information about the changes:

Levels were introduced with the new national curriculum in 1988. They were devised with the intention of delivering an assessment system that measured pupils' progress against a national framework. For example, pupils were expected to achieve at least a Level 2 by the end of Year 2 and a Level 4 by the end of Year 6. These levels were then broken down by schools (into a, b and c) to indicate whether a pupil had started attaining the level (2c), were securely attaining that level (2b) or had reached the top of that level and were beginning to move towards the next level (2a). However, it has been argued that these levels potentially provided misleading signals about the genuine attainment of pupils. The government believed that levels were just too vague and imprecise. That they were misleading as to what pupils knew and could do. They argued that the use of levels was pushing pupils on to new material, in the name of pace, when they had not adequately understood vital content and had significant gaps in their knowledge. They also suggested that levels were too vague to enable parents to understand what they needed to do to support their children's education.

Changes recently imposed means that the ongoing assessments that teachers regularly undertake throughout each school year no longer have to be benchmarked to this national standard (levels). Schools are now being encouraged to devise their own assessment systems that shift the purpose of assessment away from assigning a 'best-fit' level to each pupil, to tracking exactly which elements of the curriculum they have adequately achieved and those which require more attention. The only national standard now, is the measurement at the end of the key stages. In primary schools this means the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2) and the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6).

Now the revised national curriculum (implemented in September 2014) has clearly laid out the content of the core academic curriculum. The new primary curriculum delivers 'fewer things in greater depth'. The year-by-year structure of the revised primary curriculum makes clear what needs to be taught in each subject. Teachers are now being required to regularly assess pupil knowledge and understanding of individual concepts and ideas within this new curriculum, and their capacity to use and apply that knowledge (but this is no longer done using the national system of levels).

The government would argue that, by removing levels, they have removed the high-stakes system that Ofsted perpetuated by insisting on 'progress against levels', which encouraged undue pace and resulted in pupils not acquiring a deep, secure knowledge and understanding in their learning. However, a national measure of accountability still exists; one that is far more demanding and equally high-stakes, which will inevitably lead schools into measuring progress between a pupil's entry into school and their progress and attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2, despite the intentions behind the removal of levels. I have provided a summary of all the changes overleaf.



Education – The Changing Landscape

A New National Curriculum

A new National Curriculum was introduced in September 2014 for Years 1, 3, 4 and 5 with the old National Curriculum only being used in Years 2 and 6 for the 2014-2015 academic year. Then, from September 2015, ALL year groups will be learning the new curriculum and will be assessed against the new National Curriculum objectives. The old National Curriculum levels and descriptors are no longer in use as they do not relate to the new National Curriculum expectations.

Government floor targets – how we are judged

At the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) it was expected that:

Under the Old Curriculum -

- 65% or more pupils achieve a Level 4+ (4c or above) in Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

Under the New Curriculum -

- 85% or more of pupils meet the new expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2 (broadly *similar* to a level 4b under the old system but this is a very crude comparison).

Note: The expectation used to be 65% at 4c or above. It is now 85% at what was the old 4b or above. A huge increase in expectations regarding outcomes for pupils at the end of their primary schooling.

Department for Education principles for assessment

So, leading on from the earlier explanation, the DfE has outlined its principles for how we must now assess our pupils. There should be:

- Ongoing, teacher-led assessment (which is a crucial part of effective teaching);
- Freedom for schools to decide how to teach their curriculum and how to track the progress that pupils make;
- Both summative teacher assessment and external formative testing;
- Accountability which must be fair and transparent;
- Measures of both progress and attainment when considering school performance;
- A broad range of information published to help parents and the wider public know how well schools are performing.

Key DfE Changes

New assessments will reflect the more challenging national curriculum. Specifically they will:

- Introduce more challenging tests that will report a precise scaled score at the end of the key stages rather than a level (a score of 100 will be the age-related expectation);
- Provide detailed performance descriptors informing teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. These will be directly linked to the content of the new curriculum.

New National Assessment Points in Primary School

These are the points in school life when pupil performance is formally assessed:

- A short Foundation Stage baseline that will sit within the **teacher assessments** that are made of pupils during their first year in school;
- A **teacher administered** phonics screening check near the end of Year 1;
- A **teacher assessment** at the end of Key Stage 1 in mathematics, reading and writing. These will be *informed* by pupils' scores in *externally set* but *internally marked* tests (writing will be partly informed by a new grammar, punctuation and spelling test);
- **National tests** (externally marked) at the end of Key Stage 2 in mathematics, reading and grammar, punctuation & spelling. And a **teacher assessment** of writing and science.

The New Tests

New Key Stage 1 (KS1) test specifications from 2016:

- **KS1 Mathematics** – Paper 1 will test arithmetic and Paper 2 will test mathematical fluency, problem-solving and reasoning;
- **KS1 Reading** – Two papers, with the second one harder than the first. Teachers will use their judgement regarding when to withdraw a pupil from the second test. The majority of marks will be on comprehension, up to 30% on inference, a few on language for effect.

- **KS1 EGPS** – Paper 1 is a short written task with a focus on grammar and punctuation. Paper 2 has questions on grammar, punctuation and vocabulary and Paper 3 tests their spelling.

New Key Stage 2 (KS2) test specifications from 2016

- **KS2 Mathematics** – Paper 1 will test arithmetic and Paper's 2 and 3 test mathematical fluency, problem-solving and reasoning;
- **KS2 Reading** – One paper with 40-60% on comprehension, 20-40% on inference, 10-25% on language for effect, and up to 10% on themes and conventions;
- **KS2 EGPS** – Paper 1 will test their grammar and punctuation, and Paper 2 their spelling.

Assessing against the new National Curriculum expectations:

When we assess how pupils are achieving, we will summarise this by using one of four statements. A pupil may be:

1. Working below the expected range of attainment (for example, if a pupil is working on the expectations of a year group below the one for their chronological age): this will be known as 'operating **below** Age Related Expectations' (ARE);
2. Working within the expected range of attainment for his/her age (for example, if a pupil is in Year 3, they are working within that attainment band: this will be known as 'operating **within** ARE';
3. Working at the expected range of attainment for the end of that curriculum year group: this will be known as 'operating **at** ARE' (**nationally this is where pupils are expected to be at the end of an academic year**);
4. Working beyond the expected range of attainment (for example, if a pupil has met the expectations of their chronological year group and is now adding more breadth and depth to their knowledge.

Note: - Under the old levels system, pupils who were 'beyond' might have moved into the next national curriculum level. The DfE now wants pupils who are in the beyond bracket to add more depth and breadth to their knowledge and to have more opportunities to develop their using and applying skills. They are referring to this phase of learning as *Depth and Mastery*.

The New National Curriculum

This is a very brief summary of the **key** changes (not all changes) to English and mathematics:

Mathematics

What's out?

- Informal written methods of calculation
- Calculators
- Separate strand for using and applying

What's in?

- Roman numerals
- Times tables up to 12 x 12
- Equivalence between metric and imperial
- Long division and algebra (Y6)

What is there less of?

- Less emphasis on estimation
- Less work on shape
- Less work on data handling (statistics)

What is there more of?

- More challenging objectives, especially in number
- More formal written methods introduced earlier
- More work on fractions

The New Primary Curriculum for English – KS1

Writing:

- Increased challenge, including developing 'stamina' for writing;
- Longer compositions and proof-reading of own writing;
- Increased focus on composition, structure and convention;
- Deeper focus on learning grammar and punctuation;
- Joined writing expected in Year 2.

Reading:

- Emphasis on reading widely for pleasure, re-reading books and reading aloud;
- Increased focus on engaging with and interpreting texts;
- Learning of poetry (including reciting poetry) introduced.

Spelling:

- Specific spellings, e.g. days of the week, prefixes and suffixes;
- Pupils expected to write sentences dictated by the teacher.

The New Primary Curriculum for English – KS2**Writing:**

- Greatly increased expectations in grammar and punctuation;
- Children have to identify and label complex grammatical concepts, punctuation and spelling rules;
- Expectation that children expertly use and apply the grammar and punctuation concepts in independent writing to create specific effects.

Reading:

- Read for pleasure;
- Word reading: pupils applying their knowledge to understand the meaning of new words;
- Learning of classic and modern poetry (including reciting poetry) introduced.

Spelling:

- Statutory lists of words to be learnt throughout Years 3 to 6;
- Specific spelling rules to be taught.

Parent/Teacher Consultations

This is what can you expect during parent/teacher consultations:

- A summary of your child's personal and academic strengths and successes;
- Formative next steps which are individual to your child in order for them to make progress within the age-related expectation for their year group as appropriate;
- An indication of how well your child is progressing. For example; are they making limited, expected or accelerated progress over time?
- An indication of whether your child is working **below, within, at** or **above** age-related expectations based on the areas of the curriculum covered at that point in the school year.

Hopefully this has been helpful and has explained the changes in enough detail for you.