

# ASSESSMENT WITHIN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY 2019

## Why we assess: advice for teachers

The purpose of assessment is not to fill checkboxes but to inform better teaching, particularly for pupils with SEND. **Nancy Gedge** explains how you can get to know the children you teach.

Getting to know the children in your class as learners is vital for effective teaching. If you don't know what they know (or what they don't), or what they find easy or difficult, you can't make effective decisions on what they need to know next.

Primary teachers are generally at an advantage to secondary teachers here as they teach the same class every day. Nevertheless, there will always be some children who are easier to get to know than others.

Teachers need to move the learning on for everyone in the class – not just those who like extra attention. Having a system for getting to know your learners means you can avoid such traps.

To get to know your pupils, you need to:

- read the paperwork
- understand and use the data
- talk to parents, support staff and pupils
- teach.



## Read the paperwork

Some children come into your class with very little documentation, and others with reams and reams of it. Where a child has documented SEND, or an EHCP or Statement in place, the class teacher has a responsibility to read the relevant paperwork, no matter how intimidated you might be by it.

SEND can seem like a foreign language to the mainstream teacher, so SENCOs need to be aware of this, and how their teachers might be feeling.

A brief, one-page profile will prove invaluable in the early days of getting to know your pupils. This could be prepared by the SENCO, and contain information from the child on 'what helps me learn'.

At the start of the year, teachers can absorb an enormous amount of information, juggling the demands of the curriculum, planning and marking. Anything that can streamline the process and communicate the essentials clearly will be worthwhile.

The assessments carried out by the multi-disciplinary team in the creation of an EHCP are interesting and insightful in themselves. Equally, it's a good idea to read any notes from Common Assessment Framework or Team Around the Child meetings.

It's vital that you read the appropriate paperwork before too much time has passed. Otherwise, opportunities for learning will be lost and before you know where you are it will be the Easter holidays. A one-pager is useful, but it can never tell the whole story.

## Understand the data

We can think of data as something very numerical. Teachers seem to spend an age filling in online pupil trackers with endless checkboxes, which they then spend another age fiddling with so that the levels of attainment that are shown on the tracker match with what they know about the pupil.



However, with regard to literacy in particular, there is more to data than what appears on the computer screen. Schools are stuffed full of important data sources that teachers can mine for information that will improve their teaching and ensure that all learners make progress.

## **Parents**

There is a difference between what children can do in the heightened learning atmosphere of the classroom and what they can do on their own in their homes, and teachers need to pay attention to this and what it might mean. Equally, there are going to be parents who tell us that their children are bored and finding everything too easy.

## **Support staff**

School support staff are invaluable in many ways, but not least for their unique insight into how a pupil is getting on with their learning. Teachers and TAs need to develop ways of communicating so that this information can be shared effectively.

## **Pupils**

Children with literacy difficulties, which can manifest as memory problems connected to dyslexia for instance, are often far more aware of what helps them to learn than we give them credit for, and they become more able to tell us as they grow up.

Sometimes it is a case of reading the instant feedback in terms of their behaviour. At other times, something more formal such as a pupil conference or review meeting gives us the opportunity to hear their views.

## **Summative assessment data**

There are huge amounts of literacy data you can collect, through tests such as the Single Word Spelling Test (SWST), Helen Arkell Spelling Test (HAST) and New Group Reading Test (NGRT).



Many schools will also hold more formal writing assessments at specific points in the academic year. Bringing these different forms of data together will help teachers to build up a better picture of a learner and their needs.

## Use the data

While tracking progress is important, especially for those pupils we are worried about, we can also use this data formatively, that is, to help us to plan more effectively for learning in the future. With this in mind, it is important to get the right tool for the job – and also remember that one tool can do several jobs.

For instance, both the SENCO and the school's literacy lead can use [dyslexia screeners](#) or [age-related dyslexia screening tests](#) to identify the literacy difficulties pupils have experienced and how to best address them. Then follows a more in-depth diagnostic assessment, using tools such as [GL Assessment's Dyslexia Portfolio](#). Alternatively, you could contact the British Dyslexia Association for an [assessment from a specialist teacher](#).

Spelling assessments and tests are another example of how you can use summative assessment to inform teaching strategies. An analysis of the errors a pupil is making in their spelling will help you to understand what their barriers to learning might be and which teaching strategies are likely to be most effective. It may be that your school needs further training or a refresher in teaching spelling.

It is important that any assessment leads to action (remember the [assess, plan, do, review cycle](#)) and that SENCOs and literacy lead teachers work together to catch not only those pupils with very pressing needs, but also those 'at risk' learners who so easily fall between the cracks.

## Teach

It is worth remembering that the most important, and old fashioned, way of getting to know the pupils you teach is, simply, to teach them.



Talk to them, sit with them, mark their work with them – don't resort to handing them over to someone else, or presume that because they have a SEND of some kind that they somehow belong to someone else. Putting in the time is fundamental to all pupils making progress in their learning.

*Nancy is a consultant teacher for the [Driver Youth Trust](#), a charity working to improve education for children with SEND.*