



St Mary's Church of England Primary School
an academy in the Good Shepherd Trust
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Dear Parents/ Carers,

New Curriculum and Assessment without Levels

St Mary's Primary School has identified (through parent questionnaire) that it needs to develop and improve how it engages with parents about their children's learning. We want to become better at talking to parents about their children's attainment and progress so that we can work together to encourage children to make the best gains in their learning.

We have already scheduled our Parents' Evenings (3rd March and 5th March 2015) when teachers will be talking to you about your child's attainment and progress. Teachers will prepare well in advance of the meetings to enable them to conduct structured and focused conversations with you. Your child will be invited to attend all or part of the meeting, should you wish.

We have listened to what you have told us in your feedback and decided to extend the length of our consultation times. You will be allocated a 15 minute slot for each child. To help us achieve this, for classes other than Reception Class and Year 1, we will be offering a third evening on **Wednesday 4th March 2015**.

It is hoped that these meetings will enable you to have a better understanding of how your child is doing in school and help you to support them at home. The meetings will also help you to gain a better understanding of the new curriculum and new methods of assessment both of which have been introduced by the DfE this year. I thought it might be helpful for you to have some prior guidance about the changes so that you can make the most of the time you have with teachers during the consultation evenings.

Below is some more information which is intended to help you understand the new curriculum and assessments.

New Curriculum and Assessment without levels

The Early Years curriculum is a curriculum in its own right. It is likely that there will be changes to this in the coming years. For now, we have welcomed the new curriculum and changes in assessment for other year groups and we see it as an exciting opportunity to review our assessment and reporting systems to create a more holistic approach that will make sense to children and their parents.

Why the changes?

- The National Curriculum was not fit for purpose
- Assessment dominated the curriculum
- Formative assessment was underdeveloped
- There was an escalation in the purposes/uses of assessment



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Respect,
Endeavour,
Achievement,
Creativity,
Happiness

Teachers have been concerned that levelling pupil progress as an assessment tool has dominated and controlled everything that schools have been doing for too long ... a case of 'the assessment tail wagging the curriculum dog'! We are pleased to have been given the authority to take control and devise an assessment tool that enables us to report on pupil progress in a more meaningful way. As an Academy School we already have more of a choice about what we teach; our curriculum and topic work already reflects not only the new, more demanding National Curriculum but also the interests and enthusiasms of our children and their teachers. This is reflected in our curriculum themed events e.g. maths weeks, world weeks, arts weeks and book days and fairs. We are increasingly promoting music and sport and we are looking forward to promoting and focusing on science in our forthcoming science week.

We have been very clear that whatever assessment tool we devised, we would need it to be robust enough to track pupils' progress across the school and not just at the end of a Key Stage.

We have been working hard to get this aspect of our school just right. A Senior Leader has been deployed to be responsible for coordinating our assessment, reporting and recording. We have consulted widely with colleagues in our own school and in other schools and we have taken account of advice from experts. Our new assessment procedures will be subject to constant review so that we can be sure they continue to work and remain fit for purpose.

Our assessment and reporting systems will triangulate with other sources of evidence including:

- Regular scrutiny of pupils' work
- Pupils' work being shown to parents' in the March parents' meetings
- Structured conversations between teacher, parent/s and child (if the parent/s wish) during parents' evening meetings or in pre-planned meetings at the end of the school day if requested
- A summary of areas for improvement, key issues, progress in other curriculum areas and a review of previous targets provided for parents
- Brief reports on progress in core subjects (reading writing, mathematics and science) distributed at Autumn and Spring term parents' evenings
- A full end of year report
- External review by consultants through the academy trust

We believe that parents know their children best and we know that we should make time to listen to what parents have to say. Each child has a pupil profile which is prepared with the help of parents. This helps teachers to understand individual children as well as helping them with their planning.

New curriculum and assessment without levels

Since the beginning of this academic year (September 2014), the Government made huge changes to the way that children in schools are to be assessed. This is to tie in with the new National Curriculum that started to be used by all schools at the beginning of the year. This is a new way of thinking for schools and assessment will look very different to how it has done for the past 20 years.

The aim of this guide is to hopefully give you some clear information about all the changes that are happening in education across the country and what that means for your children here at St Mary's Primary School.

Before we even think about assessment we need to be clear on what changes the new curriculum has brought to subjects that are traditionally assessed.



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Curriculum 2014/2015

What are the changes?

It would take far too long to cover the whole curriculum in any great depth. But the main changes to the key core subjects are highlighted below.

English: The new programme of study for English is knowledge-based; this means its focus is on knowing facts rather than developing skills and understanding. It is also characterised by an increased emphasis on the technical aspects of language and less emphasis on the creative aspects. English is set out year by year in Key Stage 1 and two-yearly in Key Stage 2. Appendices give specific content to be covered in the areas of spelling and vocabulary, grammar and punctuation. These are set out yearly across both key stages. Children are encouraged to develop a love of reading and given opportunities to develop a wide vocabulary.

Mathematics: The main areas in the new programme of study for mathematics are called domains. These are: number, measurement, geometry, statistics, ratio and proportion and algebra. Two of these, number and geometry, are further subdivided into sub-domains. The way that the curriculum is organised varies across the primary age range; every year group has a unique combination of domains and sub-domains. There is no longer a separate strand of objectives within the other areas of study. Most of the changes to the mathematics curriculum involve content being brought down to be covered in earlier years. This means that the expectation in each year group is higher than before.

The end of curriculum levels

The Department for Education (DfE) has decided that children who are currently in Year 2 and Year 6 will be the last pupils to be awarded a level in their end of Key Stage tests (SATS Summer 2015).

So why are levels disappearing?

The DfE want to avoid what has been termed 'The level Race' where children have moved through the old National Curriculum levels quickly to achieve higher attainment. The old National Curriculum was sub-divided into levels, but these were not linked to children's national curriculum year group. For example, a child in Year 4 could be a Level 3 or even a Level 5. Children were achieving Level 5 and 6 at the end of Key Stage 2 but the DfE thought that a significant number were able to achieve a level of 5 or 6 in a test – but that they were not secure at that level outside of the test situation. The view of the DfE was that the old National Curriculum and the levels system was failing to adequately ensure that children had a breadth and depth of knowledge at each national curriculum level.

Assessing without levels

The DfE announced last year that there would no longer be National Curriculum levels, and that schools would have to set up their own way of assessing pupils. We have spent a long time in consultation with other schools and researching various methods of assessing pupils. We have looked at commercial software tracking systems, and we have looked at systems developed by other agencies. We noticed that almost all of the systems used the same format, which is similar to the system used in the Early Years and Foundation Stage. This is to take the end of year expectations for each year group and split this into 3 categories as follows:

- Emerging – Yet to be secure in the end of year expectations
- Expected – Secure in the majority of the end of year expectations
- Exceeding – Secure in all or almost all of the end of year expectations and able to use and apply their knowledge and skills confidently.

Under the old levels system children who were exceeding might have moved into the next level. The DfE now want children who are in the 'exceeding' bracket to add more depth and breadth to their knowledge and to



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have more opportunities to develop their skills of using and applying their knowledge. They are calling this phase of learning 'mastery' and 'fluency'. Only exceptional children will move into working towards the end of year expectations for the year above. Similarly, children who are perceived to be unlikely to be emerging at the end of the year may work towards the expectations from the year below. So how will this look at the end of each Key Stage?

Key Stage 1

It is anticipated that the majority of children will reach the assessment point of Year 2 'expected', a smaller number of children will reach Year 2 'exceeding', and a small number will be Year 2 'emerging' or possibly Year 1 'exceeding/expected/emerging'.

Key Stage 2

The expression 'Secondary Ready' has been previously coined to refer to the standard children must achieve by the end of Year 6. The DfE have slightly distanced themselves from this phrase and they are preferring to talk about children reaching the assessment point of Year 6 'expected'. Similar to Year 2 there will be some children who may be Year 6 'exceeding' and some children who are Year 6 'emerging'. There may also be a small number of children who are still working at a lower level e.g. Year 4/5 'exceeding/expected/emerging'.

Assessment Without Levels

After investigating many different Assessment and Tracking systems, we have decided to use the Rising Stars assessment systems for English, Mathematics, Science and Computing. We are still looking at systems for assessing foundation subjects but we are increasingly drawn to combining a skills based assessment system with the assessment ladders produced by leading expert and well respected educationist, Sue Hackman.

How we give an end of year assessment is going to be almost identical to how I described assessing without levels above, using the language of 'Emerging', 'Secure' and 'Exceeding'.

The biggest difference you will notice is in respect of how your child's teacher will talk to you about how your child is progressing during the school year. With the old National Curriculum levels, each year, children were given a target for the end of the year, and during the year we would tell you what National Curriculum level your child was at. For example: A child could finish Year 3 with a level 3a and in Year 4 would have a target of a 4b for the end of the year. At Parents' Evenings throughout the year you may be told that your child had moved to a 4c and then on to a 4b.

We could use the levels system this way because there was no correlation between a level and a child's year group and this can be seen in the way that, in a Year 6 class there could be a range of levels from low 2 to a level 6. However the new National Curriculum sets out expectations for each year group and children will be assessed against those every year so a child in Year 4 will always be judged in the first instance against the expectations for the end of Year 4.

Your child's teacher will help you to understand the new assessments. The most important thing to remember is that expected progress and targets relate to the child's chronological age so that a child may be working at 'expected' level for his/her age, for the whole of his/her school career and yet still making age-related progress.



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So how will the process work in school?

In each Autumn term, by October/November, the teachers will have had an opportunity to assess how the children are working. This is why we spent time on the test and assessments at the beginning of the academic year; it was imperative to gain a good understanding of the starting point for each child and to ascertain if there were any gaps in their knowledge and understanding. At the start of each year group, every child will be emerging/low because they are being judged against the End of Year statements. By using their professional knowledge and judgement teachers will know what children can already do and what they think the children can achieve. They will then give a forecast as to where they think a child will be by the end of the year. So for example children in Year 3 could be given a forecast of 3 'Emerging', 3 'Expected' or a 3 'Exceeding'. Only very exceptional children will have a forecast from a higher or lower year group. AS far as we are aware, Year 6 'Exceeding' is likely to be the highest grading possible for the end of Key Stage 2.

During the year, when we have conversations with you about your child's progress you won't be given an actual definitive position of where your child is on this scale. Instead you will be told whether your child is on track to meet their end of year target. It may well be that they are above or below where they need to be, in which case their end of year target may be adjusted. At St Mary's we have further sub-divided our assessments to try to provide you with as much information as possible. For example, where a child is 'emerging' we will be in a position to tell you how far they are off achieving 'expected' and for a child who is 'expected' we can tell you how far they are above 'expected' and how close to achieving 'exceeding'.

We hope you find this guide useful to help you understand how and why assessment has changed and it is hoped that it will make for a more informative experience in our forthcoming Parents' Evenings.

Thank you for your patience in allowing us to embed these new procedures.



Janis Radcliffe
Headteacher



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