

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

Analysis of Local Association Survey Responses on Standardised Tests

Following discussion of the draft National Improvement Framework (NIF) at the September meeting of Council, a survey of Local Associations on the use of standardised tests in Primary and Secondary schools within each local authority area was carried out.

This was done in response to the rationale provided by the Scottish Government within the draft NIF for the introduction of standardised testing for all pupils in P1, P4, P7 and S3 on the basis that almost all local authorities were using standardised tests to assess pupil progress.

The survey was intended to find out the extent to which this was the case, as well as to ascertain the nature of the standardised testing being conducted and the degree to which class teachers were involved in administering such tests.

24 Local Associations responded with information relating to standardised testing in Primary, 21 for Secondary.

(Since conducting the survey, the Scottish Government published the final draft of the NIF which refers to standardised assessment rather than standardised tests.)

PRIMARY

Responses confirmed that nearly all- 23 of the 24 local authorities for which data was supplied (96%)- are using a form of standardised test/assessment in either all or some of their Primary schools.

Types of standardised test/ assessment

The kinds of standardised test/assessment that are typically being administered include the following combination of summative and diagnostic:

- ASPECTS
- PIPS
- INCAS
- Baseline Assessments
- GL Suffolk Reading Test
- Quest
- GL PIM Assessment
- Single Word Spelling Test
- NFER tests and assessments
- NGA
- SEAL Assessment
- PIE
- YARC
- NGRT Baseline
- CEC
- AFE
- SWST

Which groups of pupils sit standardised tests/ assessments?

In 7 (approx. 30%) of the local authority areas which use standardised tests/assessments all pupils from P1 to P7 sit them annually.

In 1 (approx. 4%) all pupils from Nursery to P7 are tested.

5 local authorities (approx. 22%) follow a pattern of using standardised tests with all P1, P3, P5 and P7.

In 3 local authorities (approx. 13%), the pattern is all of P3, P5 and P7.

1 local authority (approx. 4%) tests all pre-5s, P1, P2, P4 and P7.

2 local authority areas (approx.9%) test all of P1 and pupils in other year groups according to need as identified by individual schools.

1 local authority (approx.4%) uses standardised tests with all of P3 only.

Information supplied for 3 local authorities (approx. 13%) indicated that standardised testing occurs but that the groups of pupils tested vary from school to school.

1 Local Association did not supply information in this area.

Frequency and timing of standardised testing/ assessment

Responses indicated that in 13 of the 23 local authorities (approx. 57%) which use standardised tests, pupils are tested once per year. The information supplied by local associations suggests that this is on whole cohort basis.

In 8 local authorities (approx. 5%) for which information was supplied, P1, and Nursery pupils where applicable, are tested twice, the pattern suggesting that this occurs at the beginning and the end of the session. The other year groups identified as being involved in standardised assessment are tested once in the session.

In 1 local authority (approx. 4%), the number of times that pupils sit standardised tests within the session varies from school to school.

1 Local Association did not supply information on this area.

In 17 local authorities (approx. 74%), the tests are administered at a set time each year. The pattern varies though the beginning and the end of the session is common for P1.

In 4 local authorities (approx. 17%) the pattern varies from school to school.

2 Local Associations did not supply information for this question.

Who administers standardised tests/ assessment?

The majority of standardised tests/ assessments are administered by class teachers and in some instances assistance is provided by support staff and SMTs.

In 4 local authorities (approx. 17%) class teachers and SMTs administer tests.

In another 7 local authorities (approx. 30%) class teachers and SMTs are assisted by support staff in the delivery of tests.

In 5 local authorities (approx. 22%) class teachers deliver the tests without the involvement of SMTs; in 3 local authorities (approx. 13%) teachers are assisted by support staff only.

In 3 local authorities (approx. 13%) standardised tests are administered by SMTs only.

One Local Association did not respond to this part of the survey.

How is standardised test/assessment data used?

Within 18 local authorities (approx. 78%), data generated by standardised tests/assessment remains at school level and is used for a variety of purposes: to assist the class teacher with identifying gaps in learning; set targets with pupils and parents; target additional support where required; measure and track pupil attainment; set ability groups within classes; inform planning for learning; is included in the package of information supplied at transition.

The data is, in 4 local authorities (approx. 17%), used to measure and compare the performance of schools within the local authority. In one case information was supplied to the effect that the data collected is used to set targets for individual schools and in another case, for the purposes of identifying where ASN support should be targeted. In one of these local authorities, test results are supplied to the Educational Psychologist Team who record and track the results.

One Local Association did not supply information for this part of the survey.

SECONDARY

From the 21 responses received, it is clear that the majority of local authorities for which information was provided- 19 in total (approx. 91%) - are making use of standardised tests/assessments in all or some of their Secondary schools.

Types of standardised test/ assessment

The types of standardised test/assessments that are typically being administered included the following include the following combination of summative and diagnostic:

- MidYis
- SOSCA
- GL CAT Test
- ALLESS (Hodder & Stoughton)
- CAT
- GL PIM Test
- NGRT
- PIE
- PIP
- NFER.

Which groups of pupils sit standardised tests/ assessment?

According to the information supplied by Local Associations, in 3 local authorities (approx. 16%) S1 and S2 complete standardised tests/ assessments.

In 2 authorities (approx. 11%) pupils sit standardised tests/assessments either in S1 or S2.

7 local authorities (approx. 37%) test S2 only while 2 (approx. 11%) test only S1.

2 local authorities (approx. 11%) test S1 and (some) S3.

For 1 local authority (approx. 5%) information suggested that there is no uniform policy applied in relation to the standardised testing/ assessment of Secondary pupils.

Information supplied by 2 Local Associations was unclear.

Frequency and timing of standardised testing/ assessment

Survey responses indicated that where standardised testing/assessment is taking place in Secondary schools, it occurs once for each of the year groups targeted.

In 12 local authorities (approx. 52%) which use standardised tests, they are administered by schools at set times in the year.

A variable pattern of timing exists in 3 local authorities (approx. 16%).

The information supplied by 4 Local Associations was inconclusive in this regard.

Who administers standardised tests/assessments?

In almost all local authorities for which information was supplied, class teachers are identified as being involved in administering standardised tests/assessments.

In 5 local authority areas (approx. 26%) the tests are administered solely by class teachers; in 2 (approx. 11%) by class teachers and support staff; in 4 authorities (approx. 21%) class teachers are assisted by support staff and SMTs; in a further 4 (approx. 21%) they are assisted by SMTs only and in 1 (approx. 5%) by a PT Raising Attainment.

Information supplied on 2 local authorities (approx. 11%) suggested that there was no set pattern in terms of personnel involved in delivering standardised tests.

1 Local Association did not supply information on this part of the survey.

How is standardised test/assessment data used?

In 13 local authority areas (approx. 68%) the data generated by standardised tests/assessment remains within the school and is used for a range of purposes: to inform planning both by class teachers and school improvement plans; target setting for pupils; setting of classes by ability; monitoring and tracking; identification of additional support needs; supporting course choices; measuring 'added value' across transitions; making predictions of pupils' longer term SQA attainment.

In 3 areas (approx. 16%), it is used at school and local authority level. Responses stated that standardised test results are used to compare the performances of individual schools and in one case that results are reported to the Education Committee of the local authority.

Three responses were unclear.

Conclusions

Within the majority of local authorities for which responses were given standardised tests are in use in both Primary and Secondary.

Most testing occurs at a set time in the year currently, though there are variations across and within local authorities.

The information supplied by local associations suggests that tests/assessments are administered on a whole cohort basis.

Standardised testing of Primary pupils in particular occurs both with regularity and high frequency across a large number of local authorities.

In many cases- 13 out of 23 (approximately 56%) - the move, as outlined within the NIF, to test at three stages in Primary, these being P1, P4 and P7, could represent a reduction in Primary pupils' exposure to standardised assessment/testing if local authorities do not continue with current approaches.

In the majority of cases, Secondary pupils sit standardised tests once within the designated year group; this amounts to a comparable degree of standardised testing/ assessment as indicated in the NIF for S3 (or possibly S2, this still to be decided). For some pupils, (in approx. 16% of local authorities) testing in S3 (or S2) only will represent a reduction in their exposure to standardised assessment/testing if local authorities do not continue with current approaches.

In almost all cases, class teachers are involved in the delivery of standardised tests. They are assisted to varying degrees from local authority to local authority by support staff and SMT members.

ICT is being used in some local authorities as the mode of delivery of standardised testing.

In most local authorities, data is held at school level to inform assessment judgments, target setting, planning, etc. Only a minority of local authorities currently collect standardised test/assessment data.

The move towards uniform collection of standardised assessment data at local authority and national level as had been outlined in the original draft of the NIF would therefore have been a significant development on current practice.