

# Press release: Pioneering new approach to assessing pupils with complex disabilities to be introduced in schools

A new approach that will enable primary schools to better assess pupils with the most complex needs will be rolled out across the country from 2020.

The statutory assessment will replace P scales 1 to 4 and will be based on the '7 aspects of engagement', an assessment approach that focuses on pupils abilities in specific areas like awareness, curiosity and anticipation.

This assessment approach will – for the first time – enable every kind of progress made by these pupils to be identified. This addresses a key issue with P scales, which focused on linear progress, which is not always how children with the most complex needs progress. This will help teachers to best tailor their teaching and provision to meet the pupils' specific needs and to allow them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

This is a significant milestone in our drive to make sure every child – even those with the most complex needs – receives the highest standard of education and care.

We have already introduced education health and care plans that are tailored to children. This new approach to assessment will make sure that individual focused approach is replicated in the classroom.

Around 7,000 pupils in primary schools have such complex needs that it would be inappropriate to measure their attainment in school according to the national curriculum tests.

An in-depth review, led by Diane Rochford, concluded that P scales did not best serve these pupils and recommended an assessment approach that instead focuses on engagement. This was backed by the [findings of a pilot](#) that the DfE ran earlier this year.

An expert group, led by Diane Rochford, will now refine the approach based on the findings of the pilot, ready for it to be introduced in all state-funded schools which have pupils not in subject-specific study from 2020.

Diane Rochford said:

As the executive head of a special school in the Learning in Harmony Trust, I am passionate that we have high aspirations for all of our pupils, regardless of their background.

The new aspects of engagement approach will enable a more flexible and personalised assessment to take place for pupils with the most complex needs, allowing all of their achievements and progress to be recognised. It will also help teachers to best tailor their teaching and provision to meet the pupils' specific need, allowing them to achieve the best possible outcomes. We will now make sure that schools and other stakeholders have the support they need to familiarise themselves with the new assessment approach.

A detailed guidance and training package will be developed and provided for stakeholders, including schools, local authorities, Ofsted and parents. This will equip them with the skills and confidence to conduct and understand the assessment in a way that will minimise additional workload burdens, building upon the best practice of schools who are doing it well.

The 7 Aspects of Engagement approach was originally developed through a DfE funded project led by Professor Barry Carpenter in 2011.