



Analysis of the Pre-Key Stage Standards and Teacher Assessment Frameworks for 2018–19:

Life Without Levels—Four Years On

By Alex Hurle

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Alex Hurle,
Head of Education

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| History | 1 |
| The levels are dead... | 2 |
| Review and revolution | 2 |
| Clear as mud | 2 |
| The useful bits | 3 |
| What's changed? | 4 |
| Reading—a greater focus on understanding | 4 |
| At Key Stage 1 | 4 |
| At Key Stage 2 | 5 |
| Writing—creativity makes a comeback | 6 |
| At Key Stage 1 | 6 |
| At Key Stage 2 | 7 |
| Mathematics—less is more | 8 |
| At Key Stage 1 | 8 |
| At Key Stage 2 | 9 |
| Science—what science? | 9 |
| ...long live the levels! | 11 |
| Appendices | i |
| Current documents: | i |
| Previous documents: | i |

Introduction

The Department for Education ('the DfE') have released the updated Pre-Key Stage Standards for Key Stage 1 and 2. These are designed to enable teachers to report assessment outcomes for pupils working below the standard of national curriculum assessments at the end of these key stages. In tandem with the SATs and the teacher assessment frameworks at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2, they will create pupil progress and pupil attainment measures which will be used by the DfE to hold schools accountable for the academic affect they have on their students.

History

When the primary curriculum was released in 2013, it was obvious that provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities ('SEND') had not been considered. Whilst the National Curriculum ('NC') programmes of study may have repeatedly used the term 'every pupil', it was clear that they were not designed to meet the needs of all children, but rather those of pupils who were capable of undertaking the end of key stage statutory tests. With the change of curriculum, the obligation to report progress against NC levels was also removed. Some professionals believed that, as the P scale no longer correlated with the new curriculum, the requirement to report progress against P levels was inappropriate and therefore unnecessary. So how should teachers assess pupils who were working beneath the level of the tests? There was a lack of clear information. The DfE produced only a limited amount of guidance, and this was often convoluted or contradicted by some local authorities ('LAs'), multi-academy trusts ('MATs'), Ofsted inspectors, and a range of other parties from the broader education sector. The whole situation left many senior leaders and classroom practitioners feeling exasperated and unsure of how proceed. At this time, specific guidance from the DfE would have been extremely useful, particularly for the teachers and the families of children with SEND.

It was not until July 2015 that Schools Minister, Nick Gibb MP, announced a review into the assessment of pupils with lower attainment. Overseen by executive headteacher Diane Rochford, a group of experts with backgrounds in assessment and working with SEND and disadvantaged children was established to '*advise on a solution(s) for the statutory assessment arrangements for pupils working below the standard of national curriculum tests*' (STA, 2015). In December 2015, the Group released their interim recommendations. These recommendations included a new performance descriptor for the assessment of Key Stage 1 ('KS1') pupils and three new performance descriptors for the assessment of Key Stage 2 ('KS2') pupils. From our analysis, these new descriptors were similar to the capabilities of pupils working between P8 and below the level of the respective end of key stage test.

In October 2016, the Standards and Testing Agency ('the STA') released and published 'The Rochford Review: final report' ('the Report'), in which the Group had given us their ten recommendations. These recommendations reflect many of the ideas and attitudes that we have observed being independently put in to practice over the last few years. There were many positives within the Report, and it appeared to be welcomed by many educational practitioners

On 30 March 2017, the DfE launched its own consultations; the questions they asked gave an idea of their intentions and concerns. Both of these important consultations were designed to give educational practitioners, parents and other stakeholders their chance to join in the conversation about the future of statutory assessment in order to help shape government legislation. Both of these consultations closed on 22 June 2017. The Primary Consultation received 4,165 responses, whereas the Rochford Consultation only received 594. The DfE published their responses to these consultations on 14 September 2017.

These Pre-Key Stage Standards are one part of the DfE's updated resources following their response to the consultations.

The levels are dead...

In 2014, we were told that the National Curriculum level descriptors were bad. Possibly because teacher assessment was not as *'accurate'* as testing. Possibly because the old level descriptor content didn't match Gove's new National Curriculum attainment targets. Possibly because a best-fit approach to assessment left *'gaps'* in children's learning. Possibly because parents and children didn't understand them.

Four years on and The STA have finally published the *'permanent and extended'* pre-key stage standards; and at first glance, they look very different to the last edition. What is particularly interesting is that they also look very different to the recommended standards that were published in the appendices of *The Rochford Review: final report*.

And yet, they still somehow look quite familiar: **cough* levels *cough**.

Review and revolution

Following the long-delayed final report of The Rochford Review and the subsequent open consultations, The STA sought advice and guidance from classroom staff and educational practitioners regarding the content of these suggested pre-key stage standards.

The pre-key standards are almost unrecognisable from the Rochford-recommended standards. I'm glad to see that the 'experts' hard work was worth the wait. And, whilst I have no real idea how much attention was paid to the responses garnered, the extent of the changes seem to indicate that a lot more thought and effort went in to the production of these new assessment standards. It makes me question why the STA didn't go straight to the experienced grass-roots professionals in the first place.

But I still have a problem with the name! The pupils who will be assessed against these standards are not *'pre-key stage'* learners.

Clear as mud

The STA state that the standards are provided for the statutory assessment of pupils who are in Year 2/6 and are engaged in subject-specific learning but who have not completed the programme of study, and are therefore working below the level of SATs.

They make it incredibly clear that: *"The standards are not a formative assessment tool"* and then immediately contradict this simple instruction by suggesting that:

The pre-key stage standards may also be useful for teachers to refer to for pupils of all ages, including those attending secondary school

Pre-Key Stage Standards (2018–19), p.2

So once again, we have been given mixed messages!

The useful bits

The STA spell out what it meant by their qualifiers and examples. This aspect of the guidance is actually quite useful. According to the document 'most' indicates that the statement is generally met with only occasional errors; 'many' indicates that the statement is met frequently but not yet consistently; and 'some' indicates that the skill/knowledge is starting to be acquired and is demonstrated correctly on occasion, but is not yet consistent or frequent.

The STA also state that reasonable adjustments should be made for pupils with disabilities and that the pupil's individual method of communication or study can constitute as an acceptable substitution. Additionally, and in line with the recent adaptations to the English writing aspect of the teacher assessment framework, The STA points out that statements can be disapplied on the basis of a pupil's physical disability.

However, this seems to be contradicted later in the notes on English writing, whereby The STA state that:

*This approach applies to English writing **only**.*

Pre-Key Stage Standards (2018–19), p.6

What's changed?

Most noticeably, there is an extra standard in both the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 frameworks. I believe that The STA have raised the skill-level required by pupils to achieve some of the lowest standards. This means that the pupils who may have just achieved an aspect of the proposed '*entry to the expected standard*' descriptor (recommended in the Rochford Review) will now be assessed against P levels 1–4 currently, and whichever non-subject-specific criteria is decided upon after the Engagement Scale pilot. However, the '*entry to the expected standard*' descriptor was huge—by our reckoning, it covered aspects of P levels 4–7. By raising the entry requirements in some areas, and introducing this extra standard, I believe The STA have balanced the new pre-key stage standards to create more evenly spaced attainment brackets.

Reading—a greater focus on understanding

The teacher assessment descriptors for pupils working at the level of the test have been removed in Key Stage two and there is a greater level of emphasis put on language comprehension.

At Key Stage 1

'Working at greater depth' is the same in the 2018–19 framework as it was in the 2017–18 framework.

'Working at the expected standard' in the 2018–19 framework is similar to the content identified by the previous framework with some minor additions. Pupils are now expected to correct inaccuracies in their reading and explain what has happened in the story. The statement relating to reading '*words accurately and fluently*' has been elaborated and pupils are remarked to be able to read words '*sufficiently fluently*'.

'Working towards the expected standard' is the same in the 2018–19 framework as it was in the 2017–18 framework.

Within the new pre-key stage standards, The STA have sub-divided the statements between word reading and language comprehension.

In Standard 4, there is a change of focus from '*letters of the alphabet*' to '*graphemes*', in line with the 2014 curriculum. There seems to be a higher expectation of word recognition than the '*foundations for the expected standard*' descriptor. This is demonstrated through accuracy, blending known graphemes, and reading some common exception words. There also seems to be a higher expectation of language comprehension than the previous '*foundations for the expected standard*' descriptor. This is demonstrated through retelling some of the story, and linking events with their own experience.

In Standard 3, there is a new emphasis on sequencing events to help children retell stories, and a change of focus from '*letters of the alphabet*' to '*graphemes*', in line with the 2014 curriculum. As mentioned before, we see no explicit mention of indicating or signing within the standard itself, unlike the previous iteration. Instead, The STA have stated this within the subject guidance, identifying that '*teachers should assess each individual pupil based on their own method of communication, and disregard statements which a pupil is physically unable to access*'.

In Standard 2, the language comprehension aspects were covered in the Rochford Review recommended descriptor '*emerging to the expected standard*'. As with the other standards, there is a change of focus from '*letters of the alphabet*' to '*graphemes*', and the word reading aspects focus on saying and blending sounds rather than choosing a matching picture, object, or letter.

In Standard 1, they seem to have raised the skill-level required to enter this standard by assuming that the child has already developed the understanding of specific reading conventions, such as: '*follow what is being read by focusing on text, pictures or sounds*'.

At Key Stage 2

There are no teacher assessment descriptors for pupils in Key stage 2 who are *'working at greater depth'*, *'working at the expected standard'*, or *'working towards the expected standard of national curriculum tests'*.

In Standard 6, the descriptor now completely aligns with the *'working at the KS1 expected standard'*. However, The STA have sub-divided the statements between word reading and language comprehension, unlike the equivalent level in the Key Stage 1 teacher assessment framework. There seems to be a higher expectation of word recognition than the previous *'growing development of the expected standard'*. This is demonstrated through reading suffixes and sounding out unfamiliar words. There also seems to be a higher expectation of language comprehension than the previous *'growing development of the expected standard'*. This is demonstrated through checking it makes sense, correcting inaccuracies, and explaining what has happened.

Standard 5 is pretty much the same as the 2017–18 iteration (early development of the expected standard) but the first two statements have been split out. As with Standard 6, the descriptor now completely aligns with its equivalent at KS1, and the statements have been organised between word reading and language comprehension.

Standards 1–4 are the same as they are in Key Stage 1.

In Standard 4, there is a change of focus from *'letters of the alphabet'* to *'graphemes'*, in line with the 2014 curriculum. There seems to be a higher expectation of word recognition than the *'foundations for the expected standard'* descriptor. This is demonstrated through accuracy, blending known graphemes, and reading some common exception words. There also seems to be a higher expectation of language comprehension than the previous *'foundations for the expected standard'* descriptor. This is demonstrated through retelling some of the story, and linking events with their own experience.

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In Standard 2, the language comprehension aspects were covered in the Rochford Review recommended descriptor *'emerging to the expected standard'*. As with the other standards, there is a change of focus from *'letters of the alphabet'* to *'graphemes'*, and the word reading aspects focus on saying and blending sounds rather than choosing a matching picture, object, or letter.

In Standard 1, they seem to have raised the skill-level required to enter this standard by assuming that the child has already developed the understanding of specific reading conventions, such as: *'follow what is being read by focusing on text, pictures or sounds'*.

Writing—creativity makes a comeback

There is a greater level of emphasis placed on the content and style of the pupil's writing, not just the handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. This, alongside the fact that certain statements can be discounted for pupils with disabilities, means that there is less of a focus on the physical aspects of writing which previously seemed to discriminate against pupils with physical impairments or co-ordination issues.

At Key Stage 1

'Working at greater depth', *'working at the expected standard'*, and *'working towards the expected standard'* are the same in the 2018–19 framework as it was in the 2017–18 framework.

Within the new pre-key stage standards, The STA have sub-divided the statements between word reading and language comprehension.

Within Standard 4, there is a greater emphasis on creativity than in the previous pre-key stage standards. This is demonstrated through speaking sentences aloud and writing down what has been practised. There is still a focus on physical letter, word, and text formation but this seems to have been balanced by the increased focus on composition. This is good news for teachers of pupils with physical impairments, or reading and writing disorders.

As with Standard 4, the content of Standard 3 has a greater emphasis on creating text. Although in this descriptor, the quantity of text produced is less than that of the higher descriptor, e.g. writing captions and phrases rather than whole sentences. There is still some emphasis on letter formation, grapheme/phoneme correspondences, and spelling.

Standard 2 is completely different to the Rochford recommended descriptor. Again, attention is paid to the creative task as well as the physical task of writing but additionally this descriptor seems to be more fairly placed within the scale, for example, pupils are expected to form 10+ letters/graphemes rather than correctly writing most of the alphabet.

In Standard 1, less attention is put on holding a pencil and more is aimed at verbally completing sentences. Mark-making at this level now does not have to convey meaning.

At Key Stage 2

'Working at greater depth', 'working at the expected standard', and 'working towards the expected standard' are the same in the 2018–19 framework as it was in the 2017–18 framework.

As with the English reading framework, Standard 6 now completely aligns with the 'working at the KS1 expected standard'. However, The STA have sub-divided the statements between composition and transcription, unlike the equivalent level in the Key Stage 1 teacher assessment framework. In the new framework, greater emphasis is placed on the content and style of the pupil's writing, not just the spelling punctuation and grammar. There are also a larger number of statements for children to achieve.

Standard 5 also aligns with its equivalent KS1 standard, and The STA have yet again sub-divided the statements. This standard is almost identical to its 2017–18 predecessor, with the addition of using 'spacing between words'.

Standards 1–4 are the same as they are in Key Stage 1.

Within Standard 4, there is a greater emphasis on creativity than in the previous pre-key stage standards. This is demonstrated through speaking sentences aloud and writing down what has been practised. There is still a focus on physical letter, word, and text formation but this seems to have been balanced by the increased focus on composition. This is good news for teachers of pupils with physical impairments, or reading and writing disorders.

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In Standard 1, less attention is put on holding a pencil and more is aimed at verbally completing sentences. Mark-making at this level now does not have to convey meaning.

Mathematics—less is more

The teacher assessment descriptors for pupils working at the level of the test have been removed in Key Stage two, much of the content has been removed from the higher levels and there is a greater emphasis placed on arithmetic recall and mathematically reasoning. Much content has moved up and down and many of the higher levels has a reduced number of statements.

At Key Stage 1

The '*working at greater depth*' descriptor contains less statements in the 2018–19 framework than it did in the previous version. There is no longer any mention of fractions or remainders, and the more complex skills seem to have been removed.

The '*working at the expected standard*' descriptor contains less statements in the 2018–19 framework than it did in the previous version but is fairly similar. There is no longer any mention of inverse relationships or estimation; however, there is now a requirement for pupils to recall all number bonds which was previously in the '*working towards*' standard.

The '*working towards the expected standard*' descriptor is fairly similar to the previous version. There is no longer any mention of doubling or halving, and the level of recall of number bonds has been lowered (four out of six of the number bonds to 10); however, there is now a requirement for pupils to know the value of different coins.

Much of the content of Standard 4 is similar to that of the old '*foundations for the expected standard*'; some of the content in this standard also comes from the Rochford-recommended '*emerging to the expected standard*'. In many cases the statements have been expanded upon or combined with parts of other statements in order to provide more clarity. An additional statement relating to shape-recognition has been added to make bring the statement in line with the rest of the maths framework.

Some of the content in Standard 3 comes from the Rochford-recommended '*emerging to the expected standard*'. This focus is on quantity recognition, counting, adding and subtracting one, and copying patterns.

As with Standard 3, the content of Standard 2 has broad coverage. Although in this descriptor, the complexity of problems is less than that of the higher descriptor, e.g. copy and continue simple patterns rather than more advanced patterns.

Standard 1 is less complex than previous '*entry to the expected standard*'. Pupils are expected to distinguish between one and lots, and demonstrate one-to-one correspondence, specifically in the context of transaction.

At Key Stage 2

There are no teacher assessment descriptors for pupils in Key stage 2 who are '*working at greater depth*', '*working at the expected standard*', or '*working towards the expected standard of national curriculum tests*'.

As with the English frameworks, Standard 6 now completely aligns with the '*working at the KS1 expected standard*'. In the new framework, greater emphasis is placed on arithmetic recall and mathematical reasoning. There is no longer any mention of inverse relationships or estimation; however, there is now a requirement for pupils to recall all number bonds which was previously in the '*early development of the expected standard*'.

Standard 5 also aligns with its equivalent KS1 standard. This standard is almost identical to its 2017–18 predecessor. There is no longer any mention of doubling or halving, and the level of recall of number bonds has been lowered (four out of six of the number bonds to 10); however, there is now a requirement for pupils to know the value of different coins.

Standards 1–4 are the same as they are in Key Stage 1.

Much of the content of Standard 4 is similar to that of the old '*foundations for the expected standard*'; some of the content in this standard also comes from the Rochford-recommended '*emerging to the expected standard*'. In many cases the statements have been expanded upon or combined with parts of other statements in order to provide more clarity. An additional statement relating to shape-recognition has been added to make bring the statement in line with the rest of the maths framework.

Some of the content in Standard 3 comes from the Rochford-recommended '*emerging to the expected standard*'. This focus is on quantity recognition, counting, adding and subtracting one, and copying patterns.

As with Standard 3, the content of Standard 2 has broad coverage. Although in this descriptor, the complexity of problems is less than that of the higher descriptor, e.g. copy and continue simple patterns rather than more advanced patterns.

Standard 1 is less complex than previous '*entry to the expected standard*'. Pupils are expected to distinguish between one and lots, and demonstrate one-to-one correspondence, specifically in the context of transaction.

Science—what science?

Despite the increased national focus on '*STEM*' subjects, both the assessment frameworks for KS1 and KS2 science are almost entirely the identical to the previous iteration of the teacher assessment frameworks. They still only have a '*working at the expected standard*' descriptor for each key stage and this means that the statutory assessment of science for pupils with working below these standards is not required.

Technically, a few sentences have been rearranged and The STA have helpfully identified in which school the content should be taught; but other than that, no big changes.

A comparison of the old and new assessment frameworks

The following images aim to represent how the new Pre-Key Stage Standards and Teacher Assessment framework compare to the old National Curriculum and P Scale level descriptors.

| Old P/NC level equivalent | KS1 English reading | KS1 English writing | KS1 mathematics | KS1 science |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| NC 7 | | | | |
| NC 6 | | | | |
| NC 5 | | | | |
| NC 4 | | | | |
| NC 3 | GDS | GDS | GDS | EXS |
| NC 2a | EXS | EXS | EXS | |
| NC 2b | WTS | WTS | WTS | |
| NC 2c | | | | |
| NC 1a | Standard 4 | Standard 4 | Standard 4 | |
| NC 1b | | | | |
| NC 1c | | Standard 3 | Standard 3 | |
| P8 | Standard 3 | | | |
| P7 | | Standard 2 | Standard 2 | |
| P6 | | Standard 1 | | |
| P5 | Standard 1 | | Standard 1 | |
| P4 | | | | |

| Old P/NC level equivalent | KS2 English reading | KS2 English writing | KS2 mathematics | KS2 science |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| NC 7 | | | | |
| NC 6 | | | | EXS |
| NC 5 | | GDS | | |
| NC 4 | | EXS | | |
| NC 3 | | WTS | | |
| NC 2a | Standard 6 | Standard 6 | Standard 6 | |
| NC 2b | Standard 5 | Standard 5 | Standard 5 | |
| NC 2c | | | | |
| NC 1a | Standard 4 | Standard 4 | Standard 4 | |
| NC 1b | | | | |
| NC 1c | | Standard 3 | Standard 3 | |
| P8 | Standard 3 | | | |
| P7 | | Standard 2 | Standard 2 | |
| P6 | | Standard 1 | | |
| P5 | Standard 1 | | Standard 1 | |
| P4 | | | | |

...long live the levels!

Despite having it rammed down our throats that levels were bad and stifling children's progress, it looks an awful lot like we've got them back.

The removal of the Key Stage 2 teacher assessment frameworks for English reading and mathematics, and the impending move away from end-of-KS1 assessments towards a reception baseline assessment may have alleviated the government's distrust in teacher assessment, and allowed examinations to play a more solitary role in the assessment of mainstream pupils. However, they are still aware that this format will not work for around 20% of the school-age population, many of whom have SEND. I'm sure they're not happy about that!

In the creation of the new pre-key stage standards, they have successfully updated the language of these new (not level) descriptors to match that of Gove's National Curriculum. If you ask me, it seems like a lot of chaos, stress, and extra effort for very little reward, but at least Pob gets to put his name down in the history books.

The best-fit approach of recording pupil performance as and where it is demonstrated has all but gone. With such broad areas as English reading, this is a loss to all those pupils with spikey attainment profiles. I always remember two pupils I once taught. One child was had severe dyslexic tendencies, she could barely distinguish the letters on the page, let alone recognise many words. However, when read to, she was able to use inference and deduction to explain how characters were feeling and predict upcoming events. The other student was statemented with autism. He could read words of inordinate complexity but very rarely comprehended their meaning. Because of the amalgamated nature English reading assessments, they were both recorded as operating at the same level but their capabilities couldn't have been more different.

If we thought that parents didn't understand levels, we've got another thing coming. How is Standard 3 any clearer than P8? It was reported that pupils felt bad because they had only progressed from a 2c in Year 2 to a level 4 in Year 6. Think how bad they're going to feel when they are reported as working toward the standard in both key stages (or not achieving the standard as is the case in science).

However, I do think that these new frameworks are more balanced than the Rochford-recommended descriptors and the 2017–18 frameworks. With the English reading framework, I am happy that The STA have increased the focus on comprehension; and in writing, I am very pleased that there has been a move away from just the physical skills required to transcribe. Both of these elements open the framework up to children with a broader range of special educational needs and disabilities. However, with the government still fixated on the idea of a secure-fit approach (albeit slightly softened in English writing), many pupils will still be reported as working at a lower ability level than accurately reflects their individual assessment profile.

But the real questions are:

1. Will this new framework allow schools to show accurate and meaningful progress over a key stage for those students operating within the pre-key stage standards?
2. With the impending move away from end-of-KS1 assessments towards a reception baseline assessment, will pupils with SEND sit a test at the age of 4 too? And what will their results look like?

Appendices

Current documents:

[Pre-Key Stage 1 Standards \(2018–19\)](#)

[Pre-Key Stage 2 Standards \(2018–19\)](#)

[Teacher Assessment Framework for Key Stage 1 \(2018–19\)](#)

[Teacher Assessment Framework for Key Stage 2 \(2018–19\)](#)

Previous documents:

[The Rochford Review: Final Report \(2016\)](#)

[Interim Pre-Key Stage 1 Standards \(2017–18\)](#)

[Interim Pre-Key Stage 2 Standards \(2017–18\)](#)

[Teacher Assessment Framework for Key Stage 1 \(2018–19\)](#)

[Teacher Assessment Framework for Key Stage 2 \(2018–19\)](#)

BSquared

Registered Office:

B Squared Ltd

A2 Building

Cody Technology Park

Ively Road

Farnborough

Hampshire

GU14 0LX

Registered in England & Wales No: 04088829

For further information visit www.bsquared.co.uk

Or contact research@bsquared.co.uk