

**Inappropriate,
unnecessary,
unhelpful**

**THE HEADTEACHERS' VERDICT
ON BASELINE ASSESSMENT**

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**more
than a
score**

'Inappropriate, unnecessary, unhelpful'

Why this report?

More Than A Score commissioned Dr Alice Bradbury from the UCL Institute of Education, University College London, and her research team to explore headteachers' concerns about England's increasingly contentious system of assessing children in primary schools. It will be published in September 2019.

Although it was intended to focus primarily on Key Stage 2 SATs, the research has produced a wealth of data which reveals headteachers' broader concerns with an assessment system that is growing rather than shrinking. Some of this data relates to the new Reception Baseline Assessment, which will be introduced to schools in 2020/21, following a pilot in September 2019. In this document we briefly present data on Baseline, from the research, and underline its significance.

What is Reception Baseline Assessment?

Reception Baseline Assessment is an accountability measure, designed to provide a starting point for a measurement of children's progress during their time at primary school. It assesses children in mathematics and literacy on entry to Reception at age four or five, so that this score can be compared with children's results in Key Stage 2 SATs seven years later. Schools will be held accountable for the progress that children make, compared with their peers in other schools. In the words of the DfE, 'the purpose of the reception

The Baseline timeline

1997

Baseline assessment introduced by Labour government

2002

Baseline withdrawn, in favour of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

2015

Baseline reintroduced by coalition government

February 2016

Critical report on Baseline published by ATL and NUT

April 2016

Baseline dropped

2017

Conservative government announces plans to restore Baseline

March 2018

Announcement of successful bidder for the new baseline – the National Foundation for Educational Research

June 2018

Critical report on Baseline by an expert panel of the British Educational Research Association

2018/19

Trialling of the test material

September 2019

National pilot tests (one-third of schools decline to take part)

September 2020

Introduction of statutory Baseline Assessment

2027/28

Baseline scores used as basis on which to measure school performance, Reception to end of KS2

What is Reception Baseline Assessment?

baseline assessment is to provide an on-entry assessment of pupil attainment to be used as a starting point from which a cohort-level progress measure to the end of key stage 2 (KS2) can be created'; it is 'not intended to provide on-going formative information for practitioners.' The tender for the new assessment was given to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), who were the only bidders as other providers involved in 2015 objected to the specifications provided by the DfE.

Baseline is already controversial.¹ An earlier attempt to introduce it was subjected to strong criticism by teachers and was withdrawn by the DfE because of inconsistencies between the three different tests that were being used. An expert panel convened by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) concluded that, 'Aggregating scores in a proposed 20-minute test to produce a single number, is misguided' and 'inherently unreliable'.²

In response to the detailed rationale for Baseline published by the Standards and Testing Agency, TACTYC, the Association for Professional Development in the Early Years, wrote, 'There is no evidence to show – and much reason to doubt – that data from a baseline assessment can be of any use in judging schools' performance seven years later. Young children are to be subjected to this experiment in accountability, using an untried assessment for no benefit whatsoever to the children themselves'.³

Over 5000 schools have decided not to participate in the voluntary pilot stage this September. The NFER version of Baseline being piloted is described as a one-to-one task-based assessment using physical materials, recorded by the teacher on a tablet.⁴ It has to be conducted in the first six weeks of school, as specified by the Department for Education. This is in contrast to the three options provided in 2015, the most popular of which was observation-based.

¹ Alice Bradbury and Guy Roberts-Holmes (2016) 'They are children ... not robots, not machines' London: ATL and NUT. <http://www.teachers.org.uk/files/baseline-assessment--final-10404.pdf>

² BERA (2018) 'A Baseline Without Basis: The validity and utility of the proposed reception baseline assessment in England', <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/a-baseline-without-basis>

³ TACTYC (March 2019) 'Young Children as Guinea Pigs: the Reception Baseline Assessment Framework' http://imx07wlgmj30irreljepv8h0-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Young-children-as-guinea-pigs-TACTYC_.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/for-schools/participate-in-research/information-about-the-201920-reception-baseline-assessment-pilot/>

The research study

The research was based on an online survey and interviews and explored headteachers' views on the whole range of primary assessment. The survey was completed by 288 headteachers and executive headteachers in the period March–June 2019. The respondents were leaders at Community Primary Schools, Faith Schools, Academies and other schools, with a range of Ofsted ratings, 'Good' being the most common. A number of questions allowed respondents to write in free text answers, including a question on Baseline. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 headteachers at primary schools in various regions and from different types of school during the same period. Headteachers were asked what their views were on the return of Baseline and about its use in assessing progress. Written survey responses are indicated by the letter W and interview responses by a pseudonym for the school.

Research findings

There were 160 written survey responses to the question 'What are your views on the planned return of Baseline Assessment in Reception in 2020?'. Following analysis, these were categorised into four groups: positive, unsure, qualified negative and negative. The majority of the responses were negative, as indicated below:

Positive	Unsure	Qualified negative	Negative
8%	11%	13%	73%

The following sections provide examples of these different viewpoints, beginning with the number of different reasons why the majority of headteachers had negative views of the return of Baseline.

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

The majority of comments from the survey (73%) and from the interviews were negative about Baseline. The main criticisms were that it is unnecessary, inaccurate, unfair on children, and another way of placing schools under pressure.

An unnecessary test

Firstly, headteachers saw the test as unnecessary given the established informal systems of assessing children on entry, which are not used for accountability purposes but provide useful information for the teachers:

I think this is unnecessary as all schools complete a baseline. (W)

We already have an appropriate Baseline that does not take staff too much time. The Baseline is used to identify gaps in learning and development for the staff to support the child, not locked away for 7 years! (W)

Ridiculous! There is nothing wrong with the way in which Early Years staff assess the children on entry in the Reception class at the moment. They don't need a 'formalised' way of doing this. (W)

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

Absolutely ridiculous in the format which has been suggested- will not give us what we need in terms of information (W)

We will do a baseline anyway. That's what I find frustrating. If it's going to be a one to one interview with a child, I don't see that really helps. We baseline children [...] and we do get quite a good view of the child going into Year 1 and so why have, for a one to one sort of thing where at the moment, you look at the different skills and they do lots of different things, I think it's a bit of an unnecessary addition when there are things that schools do anyway. (School K)

It makes my heart sink, really. We do baselines, when the children come to us, we work out what they can and can't do, of course you do, you're working out where they are, within the Early Years curriculum and what you need to do. [...] I don't know why we need anything else. (School T)

This view of Baseline as unnecessary echoes the finding from 2015/16 research (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes 2016) that most teachers already conducted their own form of Baseline and felt a statutory test did not offer any more information. The fact that data from the new version will not be made available to teachers means that they will still need to conduct their informal systems alongside the statutory test, so that they can use the information to inform teaching and learning. Combined with the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, this will mean teachers potentially doing three forms of assessment in the Reception year.

An unreliable assessment

A second area of criticism focused on the accuracy and reliability of the test and the resulting measure of progress when the children reach Key Stage 2 SATs.

The reliability of this test is questionable. (W)

Utterly ridiculous and should be resisted. Does not offer a valid measure of progress. (W)

NO NO NO! it goes against all good FS practice and is not an effective predictor of future success. (W)

Waste of time. I believe that schools will not be advised of the outcome of the baseline? This means schools will have to repeat the tests for themselves. All tests are subject to interpretation. How will the government ensure such a test provides an accurate picture of every child in a UK school when children are barely walking through the door into their new school? (W)

The pressure is being shifted on our youngest and most vulnerable pupils in our school. The impact of judgements made when a child is four will have significant ramifications throughout the primary phase. Early Years are skilled in accurately assessing young children in a meaningful and age appropriate way. There is already no correlation between ELG and outcomes in year 6 SATs. Therefore how can it be a useful and accurate measure of progress? The baseline will be time consuming and put pressure on EY staff and is not centred in good EY practice. (W)

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

A terrible idea! It seems to completely ignore the fact that when we make any assessment high stakes, it de-voids it of validity and creates perverse pressures which then distort the education system. I suggest trust and dialogue! Will we assume that there are children who at five years old are less intelligent/capable/able than others and we can measure that reliably in some way? It doesn't sound plausible. If this is not the case, what is the thinking behind the assessments? (W)

Schools have always completed baseline assessments in Reception - this is nothing new. The concern arises from the reporting of them - and the fact the school has limited reports from the results - and how a test taken at four can be comparable to a test taken at 11. (W)

Baseline of some sort is essential in order to measure progress. But this is measuring progress from one curriculum to a different one. It doesn't work and shouldn't be made to. (W)

The trouble with that, for me, is that it's proven to be a load of rubbish already and I don't necessarily see what changes they've made to it, to make it any better [...] I suppose I can see the logic to having a baseline but I don't know, it seems far too young to be making judgements on children. I mean I've just had my own kids go through that sort of age in the last couple of years and they change so much, from week to week and you can stagnate for a while and then suddenly leap forward and it just seems bizarre to do it, at that juncture really. (School O)

We are very anxious now that the new baseline is going to be in a tick box form and that, for four year olds, that's not going to be right. It's not going to necessarily give us much information. [...] I'm really worried about the progress measure of going from Baseline Assessment to Key Stage 2 now. [...] I don't quite understand why it's coming back. I don't understand how we can measure, within those different curriculums, from one curriculum to the next. (School P)

Headteachers doubt the reliability of the test for a number of reasons. The use of a one-off assessment with children of this age group was seen as inaccurate, which reflects the views of experts on assessment who argue that the attainment of four- and five-year-old children cannot be assessed reliably.⁵ The relationship between the data produced through Baseline and Key Stage 2 SATs data is seen as incomparable, making the progress measure meaningless.

More specifically, comments suggested that the difference in children's ages when they start Reception, whereby some children are just four and others five, will also distort results.

I think it is appalling! The difference between an almost five year old to a 'just four' year old is huge; the difference between children who have had two years of early education V those having none is huge; the social and emotional development of children at that age is so different and vastly affects their ability to learn and share their knowledge. (W)

⁵Harvey Goldstein, Professor of Social Statistics, University of Bristol, evidence to House of Commons Education Committee, 18th January 2017

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

This is utter nonsense. It is not possible to predict 11 year old attainment based on what they do in the first four weeks of reception. Also the age bias makes the test results invalid when some children have nearly a year's more life experience. A total waste of time which should be spent settling children into school. (W)

This concern about the different ages of children as they are assessed reflects wider discussion about the attainment of summer-born children and also information from the small scale pilot in 2018 which showed a correlation between month of birth and average scores⁶.

The issue of pupil mobility, where children attend a different school in Reception and in Year 6, was also seen as making data inaccurate:

Awful. Who really believes that assessing four and five year olds and using that as a benchmark for seven years of progress is a good idea? Less than 20% of my pupils are at my school for their entire primary education. What will this assessment tell me about my school? Nothing. (W)

That's a massive jump between Reception and Year 6. For lots of schools, the cohorts will be vastly different because children go, children come (School G)

These complicating factors – age, pupil mobility, and the differences in curricula – are seen as rendering the data produced by Baseline worthless, both to the schools themselves and as an accountability measure.

The potential for 'gaming'

A further concern about the use of the assessment related to the potential for schools to 'game' results by deliberately deflating Baseline scores to show more progress over seven years:

My concern is the how we measure progress on individuals. What the impact of mobility will mean. If we assess within six weeks of R isn't everyone going to 'play down' their ability? (W)

Awful – waste of time. Time consuming, worthless data. Everyone will try to get as low as possible and no knowledge of how they scored is ridiculous. (W)

I think schools will assess as low as possible to ensure that good 'progress' is seen in later years. (W)

I guess there's a danger that schools might, sort of, game the system and not do the tests very well or not teach them very well so the Reception baseline is lower. (School I)

I think the new baseline is a fantastic idea, but it's also a fantastic opportunity for people to massage what could come. I'm not going to name names, but one of the Trusts that I work for and other Trusts that I know, I refer to it as being done with smoke and mirrors. And, I think that that gives a huge opportunity to create a playing field which you want to play from. (School F).

⁶ Freedom of Information Request information on the 2018 pilot of Baseline circulated on Twitter by Sue Cowley, available at: https://twitter.com/Sue_Cowley/status/1138390341650984961

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

I think there is a vast scope for not giving a true reflection to baseline and showing value added in a different way. (School A)

Some schools will really downplay it so their results look amazing. (School R)

I think what it does is it raises the game of Reception, doesn't it? But as you'll know with data, you could pay lots of attention to it or not much attention to it and then that's going to affect your progress, isn't it? So will people start to game it? That's the only danger. (School B)

This issue has been raised repeatedly by research before and after the 2015 iteration; it is seen as an unfortunate consequence of making tests high stakes. The use of an adaptive tablet system where teachers do not see results may alleviate the problem, but many headteachers in this research and particularly in the interviews still had concerns about 'gaming' and the resulting accuracy of results.

An inappropriate and potentially damaging test

There were also concerns about the impact on the 'settling in' period of Reception, when children become familiar with classroom routines and expectations, and build relationships with teaching staff:

I think this is inappropriate. In a time when children should be building their sense of belonging in a new school they should be spending time with all their new friends and teachers, not 20 mins 1:1. (W)

Terrible idea, children again are being asked to perform in a test and the time taken away from staff in which they have to complete it does not work in line with the EYFS ethos! (W)

I can't stand the thought of Reception children being assessed like that, it's completely wrong. (School D)

As found in the 2015 research with teachers who were using the assessments, the timing of Baseline at the very start of children's lives in school is problematic. The use of a one-to-one assessment exacerbates this issue as it means children will be removed from the classroom environment.

The lack of trust

Many comments from headteachers indicated that Baseline was further evidence of a lack of trust between the government and schools:

Totally unnecessary. Teachers effectively assess children at the start of Reception through play. Teachers and Headteachers must be trusted to professionally play, teach and assess our children in a way which is least stressful for each child. Establishing a national baseline will not fit all needs and will again cause unnecessary stress. (W)

Absolutely ridiculous. Just trust the teachers to carry out a baseline assessment and trust their judgement. It will be precious time wasted on tests when they should be getting to know the children. (W)

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

Really, really foolish. The information it will provide will be of little merit and not to tell us what the results are and then measure our performance on them is insulting to the teaching profession. (W)

I think assessment should be used to improve learning. This is another way of beating up teachers. (W)

I think that is just a test for the school again and baseline assessment is so open to professional judgement. Is it worth it? Definitely not. I trust my teachers and they are very professional. They have been in Early Years for a long time. I think we will get a true baseline here. (School A)

The assessment is seen as disrespectful to early years teachers as it questions their expertise in assessment which is appropriate for this age group, and as an additional tool to criticise teachers. Headteachers were frustrated by this feeling of not being trusted; this was exacerbated by the fact that Baseline is being re-introduced despite the failure of the 2015 version:

A hopeless effort to try and reintroduce a previously failed project. My school isn't supporting the pilot. (W)

Haven't we been here before? Again, why this 'formal' assessment instead of the far more holistic teacher observational approach? (W)

They have tried so many different types of assessment. I just hope they have learnt from previous mistakes. A lot of time and money has been wasted on this in the past. (W)

In this context, there were a small number of headteachers who commented that Baseline should be boycotted or there should be industrial action:

I am very much against this and would be prepared to take industrial action to prevent it. (W)

I am very much against this and would support any action to boycott them. (W)

We should refuse to implement it. (W)

This strength of feeling was also shown in the very negative language used by some survey respondents: Baseline was described as 'horrendous', 'appalling' and 'total and utter madness'; Others commented:

Absolutely ridiculous! We opted not to take part in the pilot scheme because we are so against it; to test five-years-olds and use this 'secret information' to judge whether the children have made progress by the end of Year 6 is ludicrous. (W)

I strongly disagree with it as it is another stick to beat schools with. It is a game that we are supposed to play. (W)

For these headteachers, Baseline is part of the 'game' of school accountability which is used against rather than in support of schools. The strength of feeling about Baseline among these headteachers is an indication of the overall dissatisfaction felt with the primary assessment regime.

Headteachers' critiques of Baseline

The cost of Baseline

Finally, there were many mentions of the cost of Baseline – which has been reported to be £10million officially, but more if teachers' additional time is included – in comparison with the benefits of the assessment:

Do you know... it's just... It's a joke. It's a waste of time. So, the baseline is going to be a waste of time. Waste of money, waste of my resources. Billions of pounds probably in teaching time, DfE funding and what are the kids going to get? Nothing. [...] you're making a decision for no benefit for the children. I mean, I know that they'll argue that Year 6 SATs raises standards. Okay, fine. But baseline – they can't say that's a baseline assessment. That is not raising standards. It's not about children. So, in which case, what is it for? Well, it's for measuring the success of schools. (School H)

The last time they tried to do it, it was a complete sham and god knows how much money that cost, and when there is so little money for schools for them to be spending this much money on stuff like this, which nobody wants, I just think it's obscene, I really do. I think it's obscene, and yes, we're not entering the pilot because for all I know they will pilot it and it will go, but there's a lot of pressure for schools to enter the pilot. (School L)

As one survey respondent put it, the return of Baseline is seen as an 'Absolute waste of money'; this is of particular concern given the lack of benefit to children and the potential for the policy to change again in the future.

Overall, headteachers provided a number of reasons why they see the return of Baseline as a negative development. There was clear frustration that lessons from 2015 did not appear to have been learnt, and that the policy forms part of a system which is used to criticise schools:

Why should we ignore all the experts and what on earth are the government hoping to achieve? (W)

I don't think children should be measured like a commodity. We really need to reconsider what and who we want to be as a society rather than measuring children on a narrow aspect of school. (W)

Finally, one headteacher summed up the views of many when they wrote 'It is one of the most poorly conceived ideas I have experienced in my 30+ years of working in education'.

Positive comments

The small number of positive responses in the survey (a total of 13 comments, or 8%) and in some interviews related to the advantage to schools of recognition of the progress children make from lower starting points and the improvement on measuring progress from Year 2 to Year 6 (as currently operates). For example:

I welcome it- we can then at least prove progress if we have low attainment at the end of Reception- especially in a school like ours who have nearly 70% non-English speaking children on entry to school. (W)

It is a better way of measuring progress - measuring from KS1 is not a good idea. (W)

It will ensure all schools show a standardised baseline using the same criteria and is fairer to show progress than the Y2 assessments (W)

Better progress measure EYFS - Year 6 than Year 2-Year 6. This should help schools prove we are adding value. (W)

I think, in essence, the fact that they're looking at progress from Reception to Year 6 rather than Year 2 to Year 6, is a good thing. So, you know, they will be looking at our children as they come in to the school and it's really, really low levels. So, for us, it's a win because we make such amazing progress with them. Whereas, I don't know, children that come from middle class backgrounds would come in higher and it might be harder for them to make progress. (School I)

I do quite like that, the testing, because it would give a leveller. For schools like ours, that has to fight for every single ounce of positivity, it's really hard here as a headteacher. Because you do get clobbered all the time when your results aren't good enough, your exclusions are too high, your attendance is low. What are you doing? And it's constant, constant all the time. We never get positive praise from anybody, despite us doing a really good job. Our attendance rate's improving, our standards are improving. It's never good enough. So for us to say, "Well actually, look, we take these kids from rock bottom and we put them out at this level," that'd be really valuable. (School R)

For these headteachers, Baseline could provide recognition of the work they do and a fairer assessment of their schools. This is perhaps driven by a feeling that SATs do not take into account context, whereas Baseline would allow a greater emphasis on the progress children make.

Other positive comments noted that Baseline could be helpful or 'a useful tool', and that it would simply form another part of the regular assessments conducted in some schools and can be conducted appropriately:

That wouldn't be an issue for us. We've done it before. There is always an element of assessing the children. We do assess the children at three points in the year, ourselves internally. So, Baseline would just mean that we do some testing earlier. (School N)

Positive comments

I agree with it – the furore of a ‘test’ is unnecessary since it is not a test but an assessment. I use a baseline assessment in my school now and children enjoy completing it and 1-1 teacher time and it gives clear starting points. (W)

It should be emphasised that these positive comments represented a small minority of the overall sample of headteachers. There were more ‘qualified’ comments, which saw positive elements in the return of Baseline but also some disadvantages, both in the survey and the interviews.

Qualified comments

Some headteachers provided comments on the survey (20, or 13% of the total) and in the interviews which balanced some level of agreement with Baseline with other concerns. These concerns related to workload, accuracy, and the lack of information provided to schools:

Probably more fair than KS1 SATs, but increase in teacher workload. Most teachers can tell you exactly what a child can or can’t do after teaching for a few weeks – they don’t need a tick list. (W)

Think this is a good idea so we can see children’s starting points but is time intensive for staff (W)

Some form of assessment seems reasonable but the assessment process shouldn’t take time and resources away from actually teaching / nurturing reception children (W)

The idea of a baseline measure is something that I agree with, it all depends on the way it is approached. I do not agree with it being the measure from year R to year 6 on progress as a lot can happen in that time. (W)

This might be a good idea in the sense that it provides a clear benchmark for progress. However, schools will have to wait 7 years and a lot can happen to children in that time that could impact the results. (W)

For us, our children come in so low. I mean, this year, they were 14% baseline for a good level of development. So, for us, if they’re going to assess where they were at Reception and where they are at Year 6 and leave out Year 2, for us, that would probably be a better reflection. It would be a really good benchmark for us because we can then show how much progress they have made from when they first come in to when they leave. Whereas, at the minute, they do really well in Key Stage 1 and then not so well by the time they get to the end of Year 6 but if you did it from Reception to Year 6, they do make amazing progress. But it’s how that’s going to work and what the questions are going to be because they’re not doing all the strands. They’re not even doing all the prime areas. (School M)

Qualified comments

Several headteachers provided conditions which would make Baseline acceptable, relating to how the data are used and the form of the assessment:

Depends how it is used. The likelihood is that there will be artificial links created between outcomes at foundation stage and KS2 and consequent judgements and punishments for schools. (W)

For what purpose. Is it once again a test to judge future progress and set targets for Yr 2 and 6? If so it will be flawed. If it is just for schools to look at themselves, to report to parents and look for patterns and trends in their own school it could have some value. Again though at what cost? (W)

Pupils have always been assessed on entry to reception and in most cases pupils are unaware they are being assessed. Therefore, I think if the Baseline Assessment is in line with the EYFS principles, it should not be a problem. (W)

I have no objection as long as the school is in charge of how and when they are administered. There can, however, be no test in Year 2 or Year 6 to measure progress against the Baseline as it would be a flawed comparison. (W)

If Baseline is shared with school to help support the children's learning then it will be an effective tool. However, if the results are not shared then the assessment is worthless. (W)

It's got to be right, but I approve of the use of an assessment at the start of the child's mainstream education. As long as it is consistently applied in all settings, useful to establish exactly what children can do, and as an indicator of progress as they proceed through the education system. (W)

If it's done right, in the correct way, if it's done appropriately, I think it could be useful. But we would need to see the results. (School R)

As with other assessments, the objection here was to how data are used and how much they help the school, rather than the principle of assessing children. It should be noted, however, that many of the conditions stipulated by here by headteachers, under which Baseline would be acceptable, are not in fact met by the current test. Some respondents would be willing to approve Baseline if they did not have to wait seven years for the publication of the data, if the test mirrored established ways of observing and assessing young children's learning, and if Baseline were shared with school to help support the children's learning. In fact, none of these conditions are met by the Baseline tests commissioned by the DfE.

The 2019 National Pilot of Baseline

The national pilot of the new NFER version of Baseline in the autumn of 2019 intends to test out the assessment with a large number of schools, following the smaller scale trial in 2018. Schools were asked to volunteer for the pilot by the DfE, and 9,600 schools signed up. While some have seen this as indicating support for the new Baseline, the comments from this research study suggest that headteachers are more motivated by the need to get to know the assessment before it becomes statutory:

**We signed up for the pilot, actually; just so we can get a grip on what it's like.
(School M)**

**It might give us a head start because it's only a pilot and it doesn't come in 'til 2020, September. So, we can have a look at it and see what it's like and that might give us a bit of guidance to what we need to do and we can prepare for it.
(School I)**

We have signed up to do the pilot because we felt we wanted to find out more about it and give feedback on it from the beginning. (School P)

**We baseline our children anyway and we had a letter recently to ask if we'd like to take part in the trialling of the new... and we said, "Yes, we would." I think for a school like this it would probably be beneficial because it's proof that the vast majority of our pupils come in woefully below age-related expectations.
(School J)**

Schools like these sign up to Baseline not because of the test has any benefits for pupils, nor any usefulness to learning but because they want advance information on how it will work, or because they think it may be beneficial given their school context. These comments reflect a fear of the unknown in assessment and are a form of pre-emptive reaction to Baseline, which of course has the effect of adding to teachers' and senior leaders' workload.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from this research suggest that headteachers' views on Baseline are largely negative. Even those who had some sympathy with the principle of assessing progress expressed some concerns and often only saw Baseline as acceptable if it met certain conditions, which are not present in the new version being piloted in 2019. The limited amount of support for Baseline rested upon two beliefs: it would show the progress made by children with lower starting points (particularly those in more deprived areas), and it was fairer to schools to measure from Reception to Year 6 than from KS1 SATs to Year 6.

The much greater volume of argument against Baseline focused on the assessment as unnecessary, unhelpful, inaccurate and inappropriate for young children. It is also seen as open to gaming and as a waste of money that will produce meaningless data, which will not be available to schools or useful to teachers. These concerns reflect the messages of research and of anti-Baseline campaigning, and reiterate the concerns which were expressed to researchers in 2015/16. Headteachers are frustrated by the return of a policy which was seen as fundamentally flawed and the failure to address the problems identified in 2015. It remains to be seen whether the Department for Education will pay them the attention they deserve.



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