

## EAL Formative Assessment - Key Stages 1 and 2

### Reasons and purposes for assessment in school

It is generally recognised that there are two main approaches to assessment of pupil performance: summative assessment and formative assessment. Summative assessment is primarily concerned with finding out how much pupils have learned and can do at given moments (e.g. at the end of a topic/module, a year, or a Key Stage). In the National Curriculum summative assessment is largely associated with standardised tests such as SATs and end-of-Key Stage 1 Teacher Assessment, which are administered as part of the current statutory assessment requirements. The outcomes of summative assessment are often used for purposes such as ranking performances (pupils and schools) and public reporting of levels of pupil attainment. Formative assessment, in contrast, is primarily concerned with teaching and learning. The descriptors presented in this trial document are intended for use for formative purposes. It is assumed that teachers will conduct summative assessment in accordance with statutory arrangements.

### Formative assessment and EAL

Teachers have found informal day-to-day assessment, e.g. talking to pupils about work or marking pupil writing of pupil learning an important part of their teaching; the insight gained in this informal assessment can be used to work out the help pupils need in order to make progress with their curriculum work. This kind of assessment is referred to as formative assessment, also known as Assessment for Learning.

Professional experience in school over the past thirty years has shown EAL development is a very complex phenomenon. In our multiethnic and multilingual school population we have bilingual/multilingual pupils who may have a mother tongue in a minority community language but their level of English language competence is close to that of their mother tongue English speaking peers. At the same time there are other pupils who are at the very beginning stage of learning English at the point of arrival at school. Between these two types there are countless others who at various stage of learning to use English for academic and social purposes. We recognise that for the pupils who begin their English language learning at the point of entry into the Key Stage 1 or 2 National Curriculum, many aspects of their EAL development are different and more challenging than that faced by their mother tongue English speaking peers learning English (the National Curriculum subject). For instance, they will have to grapple with everyday vocabulary and pronunciation, something that their mother-tongue speaking peers would have attained through experience at home and in school. Beyond that, there are the more demanding tasks of learning English grammar and social/academic rules of use which, if unassisted, can present formidable difficulties and can require years of hit-and-miss efforts.

The descriptors set out in this document are intended for use in formative assessment (or Assessment for Learning) by teachers. They relate to day-to-day assessment of pupil learning as part of their teaching (e.g. talking to pupils about work or marking pupil writing), and using the insight gained from informal assessment to help pupils make progress with their curriculum work. More specifically, they are designed to assist teachers in:

- recognising the language accomplishments made by many of the EAL learners-users as they move through the various stages in the long process of developing English language competence in ordinary curriculum and school contexts
- gaining an overview of the long term EAL developmental trajectories; this professional knowledge of EAL development is vitally important in any attempt to assist pupils to make progress with their language development through the curriculum on a day-to-day basis
- developing professional expertise in noticing pupil EAL accomplishment, diagnosing their language learning needs, and offering informed guidance to lead pupils to achieve their next level of learning.

The descriptors, building on the earlier work published by teachers and researchers in this country, Australia and North America (see Bibliography), have been adapted and formulated in ways that can be understood in a variety of curriculum and subject teaching contexts. We also recognise that the curriculum demands and the associated uses of English in different Key Stages can be different. We have therefore produced two separate sets of descriptors for Key Stages 1 and 2. These descriptors can be seen as a metaphorical EAL road map - it provides an overview of the key milestones and stages to assist teachers to negotiate the actual journeys of planning, teaching and assessment (for learning).

The promotion of formative assessment as part of the recommended good practice by the curriculum authorities and the Personalisation initiative in the newly revised National Curriculum all point to the educational importance of this approach to assessment. These trial descriptors represent an important step in the development of professional materials that are useful for teachers working in increasingly linguistically diverse classrooms. In so far as these descriptors have been designed to foreground EAL developmental features embedded in everyday National Curriculum teaching and learning contexts, they are conceptually complementary to curriculum assessment in the broadest sense. The professional insights gained through informed and disciplined EAL-sensitive formative assessment can, of course, enrich teachers' summative judgements on pupils' achievement in English language and curriculum learning.

### Using the descriptors

Descriptors are provided for Understanding and Use of English, Reading, and Writing at seven levels. At each level, there are bullet point descriptors, followed by brief additional comments. The bullet point descriptors consist of statements which are necessarily phrased in different ways (beginning with 'can', 'will', and 'may'). These carry subtle differences in meaning which reflect the fact that a range of language proficiencies and repertoires may be exhibited by individual EAL learners with more or less frequency and/or stability, particularly bearing in mind that they will be from diverse backgrounds - linguistic, cultural, and educational. The descriptors have been organised to reflect language abilities and emerging capabilities at different levels:

- the 'can' descriptors provide examples of uses of language for communication which are likely to be frequently observed and relatively stable (e.g. "Can comprehend social English in familiar contexts with ease and with only occasional help");
- the 'may' descriptors provide examples of uses of language that are likely to be emerging (e.g. "Will be beginning to initiate short, routine exchanges");
- the 'may' descriptors also indicate the language resources that learners are likely to have available to them at a particular level (e.g. "Will have a growing vocabulary to name and describe objects"), or the support required (e.g. "Will need time to process questions before responding");
- the 'may' descriptors indicate what some learners may be able to do, but not others, depending on their language and literacy background and prior experience of schooling, or which may be infrequently observed or less stable (e.g. "May be influenced by features of spoken discourse and mother-tongue sound-symbol relationships when reading aloud").

It is important to note that learners are likely to present a 'staggered' profile, i.e. they will not be at one level across the board in all areas. Not all behaviours at a particular level may be observed at one time - a significant sample of language will be needed from a range of activities. Where a learner is exhibiting some behaviours at a level in a given area, but not others, these may provide a focus for next steps in teaching and learning, as will the descriptors in the next level.

We welcome feedback from colleagues on these formative assessment descriptors in terms of:

- the clarity of the phrasing of the descriptors
- the fit between the descriptors (at different levels) and observed pupil developments
- formats of presentation (combined descriptors organised under levels or separate sets of descriptors for each language 'skills').

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