

Assessments for primary children

Katie Kraiss reports on how to find out more about your child's potential

Why do some parents arrange academic assessments for their children? Most do so because they receive limited information from their school and that makes it difficult for them to make informed decisions about their child's education. Is the child struggling? Are they coasting? Are they reaching their potential?

Ideally parents should at least know how their child is doing in reading, writing and maths compared to others nationally. It's also useful to know about other aptitudes.

Schools parents' evenings have become the main way of reporting back on a child's progress, but this may be too vague for some parents. Rarely will you find out anything you didn't already know. You might be told the child is hard-working, or daydreams, or is fidgety. You may also find out that they enjoyed their trip to the local art gallery, or performed well in the end of term assembly. This is all useful information, but you also want to know how your child compares with others and, more importantly, whether they are making use of their abilities, and if not, why not.

Comparing a child against the national average requires reference to national or age-standardised figures. Until recently schools were able to do this using national curriculum levels, but since September 2014 these have been phased out. All schools have now been told to track pupil progress in the way that they feel best represents the school. The government stated that by removing levels it would allow schools greater flexibility in the way that they plan and assess pupil's learning.

Unfortunately, this has often led to confusion, lack of consistency, and parents being even less informed than they were before, with schools using vague phrases like 'emerging', 'developing', 'secure' and 'mastery'. In addition, an 'A' in your child's school could be the equivalent to a 'B' at another more academic school. If your child scored 75% score in a test it also sounds good, but what if it was a really easy test and the majority of the class scored 95%? Parents need to be able to put those scores and grades into context so schools should make it clearer what

they mean and put them in simple terms parents can understand.

Ultimately, whatever method of tracking schools use to replace national curriculum levels, parents need to know how their child is working as compared with national expectation.

One thing schools can do is tell parents their child's age-standardised scores in school tests. This is calculated by putting a child's raw score and age into a grid and comparing against national norms. Those who score between 85 and 115 are within the average range with a score of 100 being exactly average. If you are told an age-standardised score for your child, this will put their performance into context, but it still doesn't give in-depth information about their strengths and weaknesses.

Individual assessment

To know more about an individual child you need a tailored assessment, in effect a run-down of their strengths, weaknesses and ability. These provide a benchmark that gauges how they are doing compared to others, and if they are reaching their full potential.

For those children working to their full ability there is no magic wand to further their academic progress. Tutoring would be pointless and take time from all-important extra-curricular activities and just plain fun. It might get them into high flying schools, but those would be too demanding, setting them up to fail.

JK Educate are often asked to provide a tutor to get their child into a specific state selective school; the initial answer given to these enquiries is always no. JK are happy to assess a child to see if it is the right school for them – if they would be happy there and reach their full potential. If it is the right school (and for most state selective schools, the child would need to be scoring in the top 5% nationally), then JK would be happy to enable them to show their best on the examination day. But we firmly believe children should only be prepared to sit entrance examinations for schools that are appropriate for them.

But assessments can also identify the

children who are underperforming in class, and perhaps more importantly understand why this may be the case. For some it is lack of confidence, for others a lack of maturity or motivation. It could be that there are 30 in the class and the child is simply slipping through the net, or that the child does not like their teacher, or struggles to understand the way the teacher is delivering the curriculum to them. It could also be due to a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, ADHD, processing difficulties or poor short-term memory, all of which have the potential to create a barrier to learning, in which case further specialist assessment may be needed.

Where children are not reaching their potential tutoring may help, either simply to get a firmer grounding, or as additional support in preparing for examinations.

How assessments help parents plan an education

Assessments show how a child learns and highlight their strengths and weaknesses, as well as establishing their academic potential. We assess children from Year 1 to Year 8, covering reading, writing and maths as well as for example bilingualism, with a number of tests lasting from one and a half up to three hours and including verbal and non-verbal reasoning, which tests IQ. An assessment costs £395, which includes a comprehensive written report, including suggested secondary schools, and an hour-long face-to-face meeting with parents to discuss the findings.

It is vital for children to go to the right school for them. It can be as difficult for a child to go to a school below their academic level as it is to go to one which is beyond their ability. In both cases it can be a negative experience for the child, which is why an assessment is so useful.

JK Educate (formerly known as Jaderberg Kraiss) specialises in tailored support for children's learning with schools advice, child assessments, specialist subject tutoring, entrance exam preparation and study skills. For more information contact Katie on 020 3488 0754 or jkeducate.co.uk.