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Dear Sir/Madam,

4Children welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Education (DfE)'s consultation on Primary Assessment and Accountability under the new curriculum.

4Children is the national charity all about children and families. We have spearheaded a joined-up, integrated approach to children's services and work with a wide range of partners around the country to ensure children and families have access to the services and support they need in their communities. We run Sure Start Children's Centres as well as family and youth services across Britain.

4Children develops, influences, and shapes national policy on all aspects of the lives of children, young people and families. Consequently, we take a particular interest in those aspects of policy with implications for parents and children. As the Government's strategic partner for early years and childcare through The Children's partnership we represent the sector's views and experiences. We also work to put the needs of children and families firmly with the political and policy agenda.

Overall, we view this consultation as presenting an opportunity to get assessment right for children in the reception year, and our response focuses on those elements within the consultation.

## **6 Should we introduce a baseline check at the start of reception?**

In principle yes as we see the introduction of a Baseline Assessment as an opportunity to cement strong and appropriate early years formative/observational assessment practices.. The positive response is ground in the following caveat of it being entirely dependent on how the assessment is constructed and how it would be used.

As schools already carry out a baseline to support the data they need to present to Ofsted in relation to children making progress there is a case for a consistent national model that will ensure strong, robust transition practices between preschools and reception to support children's learning and teaching practices; a model which builds on the integrated check at two years (on which there is positive feedback), that has a diagnostic element, truly giving

information as to what a child needs to learn and how as well as giving the all important baseline information on entry into the reception year which for the majority of children is their entry to school..

We therefore support the introduction of baseline checks, albeit with the following qualifiers:

- **Diagnostics:** That we use the baseline to build on existing two year old checks to truly inform early identification for the pupil premium, meaning working closely with and receiving support from and the involvement of parents in the formative and summative assessments. This is about informing the next learning steps and the support needed for each child and should link clearly to funding from the pupil premium.
- **Continuum (1):** That any baseline assessment is in sympathy with a child starting school: to formally assess a child at Early Years stages (<5) within their first weeks of reception is unlikely to give valid results as this is a time when they will be settling in and assessments at too early a stage are unlikely to identify true potential and need. Ofsted already recognises (in its Additional Guidance) that entry to school is affected by age and pre-school experience; and
- **Continuum (2):** Therefore there needs to be balance between a baseline assessment and the profile of a child's learning over time. Any assessment therefore should not be a simple (for example, computer based) test alone, but is an opportunity to join up a baseline with the EYFS profile and to have a monitoring / tracking system of children's progress. This should be grounded in Early Years effective assessment practice – through a mixture of observation, questioning and discussion with a child over a period of time. This would be similar to the system outlined in “Progress Matters: Reviewing and enhancing young children's development”, published in 2009 and used by many schools and nurseries when we had for the 2008 Early Years Foundation Stage, which built this ongoing assessment into a simple summative assessment to inform both parents and year 1 teachers. It needs to be a process that assesses not only what children learn but how they learn.

Whatever the decision on this proposal, the current Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and profile should remain statutory.

## **7 Should we allow schools to choose from a range of commercially-available assessments?**

No, any baseline assessment carried out needs to be consistent across schools, particularly if it is to be used to measure progress. So, whoever the provider of the assessment may be, it is essential that some mechanism is put in place to ensure they are all working to the same standards and baseline.

## **8 Should we make the baseline check optional?**

If a baseline check is introduced it should not be optional, but standard and universal across all schools and ages, operating within a national system/framework. For example, children will often move school over time, and a baseline check would not be helpful for the new school unless standardised.

We would be very happy to discuss the matters covered above further.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Longfield  
Chief Executive, 4Children