CHAPTER 1

The National Curriculum and the Development of the P scales

Francis Ndaji and Peter Tymms
A Brief History

The Education Reform Act 1988 established the National Curriculum as a nationwide curriculum for all primary and secondary schools in the state school sector in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It ensured that state schools in all Education Authorities had a common curriculum. On the other hand, Independent Schools were left free to set their own curriculum.

Prior to the publication of the National Curriculum in 1988, the education system was, to a large extent, governed by the Education Act 1944, which had no curriculum requirements with the exception of religious instruction. Until 1988, schools could decide their aims and the curriculum they thought would lead them to those desired aims. This was a potentially problematic situation because schools vary as do teachers and there could be a wide range of differing aims, curricula and standards. Inconsistent standards might lead to:

- schools that did not reflect societal values or the perceived needs of society.
- some pupils leaving school more prepared than others to find jobs and better equipped to adapt to the outside world. Pupils must have the same life chances no matter which school they attended and a National Curriculum should lead to greater equality and to students being able to compete for positions in the job market on an equal footing after they leave school.
- some teachers ill-equipped to deliver curricula that would ensure their pupils could compete fairly with others for jobs on leaving school. Pupils in a school with less sophisticated teachers would be at a disadvantage.

The establishment of the National Curriculum was a recognition that the direction education should take must be determined by the needs and desires of the larger society, and not by teachers at individual schools. Although, initially, many argued against the introduction of the National Curriculum, it was one of those rare initiatives that was later almost universally appreciated. It provided the framework within which schools could develop their own strengths and standards.
The aims of the National Curriculum were:

- the promotion of the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of society
- the preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

The official position was that in order for it to achieve these aims the National Curriculum must:

- ensure that each pupil, no matter their social background, gender, culture, race, abilities or disabilities, had access to a number of areas of learning to enable them to gain knowledge, understanding, skills and the correct attitude required for self-fulfilment and development as responsible members of society.
- make clear to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the general public the purposes of learning and what learners were expected to gain from their education. It must also set national learning standards based on which the performance of every pupil would be assessed, thereby creating criteria for setting improvement targets and comparison between individual pupils, cohorts of pupils, and schools.
- promote continuity that gives rise to progression in pupil learning. This continuity would make it possible for pupils to move easily from one school to another and to progress from one phase of education to the next. It actually provided a foundation on which lifelong learning profiles would be built.
- enhance the public understanding of the importance and work of schools, and the public appreciation of what schools contribute to the growth of society, in that it provides a common basis on which discussions of educational issues among educational stakeholders could be held.

But society and its needs do not remain static. In order for it to continue to meet the needs for which it was originally established, the National Curriculum has undergone reviews on a regular basis.

The original aims and contents of the National Curriculum were not without criticism. In two separate essays, Professors John White
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(2003) and Richard Aldrich (Aldrich and White 1998) of the Institute of Education in London described the National Curriculum, as set out in the Education Reform Act 1988, as being ‘excessively brief and thin in substance’ and unconnected to the content of the curriculum. In their opinion the relationship between the aims and the 10 subjects of the National Curriculum were not clear. The essays also criticised the fact that the National Curriculum was made compulsory only in the maintained sector, thereby increasing the differentiation between the experiences of children in maintained and independent schools.

In the 1990s pressure started to be exerted to clarify further the purposes of the National Curriculum. The view of teachers, teaching organisations, local authorities and researchers was that the current education system including the National Curriculum was not adequately clear about what it was meant to achieve. This view was not very different from that of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA); that the aims and priorities of the school curriculum needed to be better specified. In 2000, a revised National Curriculum was introduced to address the issues with clearer aims and objectives. In a nutshell it stated that:

- the school curriculum should aim to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and to achieve
- the school curriculum should aim to promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life.

The details of the amendment, especially the full descriptions of the points above are to be found in the amended document (see also White, 2003).

The importance of education to the individual and society as a whole cannot be over-emphasised. It is the means by which individuals access spiritual, social, cultural and mental development. It should equip them with the ability to respond positively to the challenges of a rapidly changing world and help to establish a commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty to each other and society.

With these values in mind, the National Curriculum outlines a clear statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils up to the age
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of 16. It determines what will be taught at every stage of their education and how to assess their performance. The plan is that the curriculum contains the learning items that will enable pupils to acquire the benefits of accessing education. In fact the National Curriculum provides the framework on which schools can devise a curriculum to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils.

Maintained schools can use the National Curriculum to ensure that pupils receive a balanced and consistent education. Effectively, it lays out the subjects to be taught, the knowledge, skills and understanding required and the standards and attainment targets in each subject. It also sets out how pupils’ attainment and progress can be measured. To be effective, a curriculum must aim to give teachers, pupils, parents, employers and the wider community a clear understanding of the skills, knowledge and experience that young people are expected to gain from their education.

Key Stages

The state education system in the UK is divided into Key Stages. Each Key Stage is a broad segment populated by pupils of a given age range. Each Key Stage develops the educational knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils of that age group are expected to achieve by the end of the Key Stage. The Key Stages, the corresponding age groups and the tests that students take at the end of each Key Stage are shown in Table 1.1.

The structure of the National Curriculum is organised by subjects and Key Stages, see Table 1.2. It sets out the targets to be achieved in various subject areas at each Key Stage. Hence each Key Stage has a programme of study setting out what pupils should be taught, and attainment targets indicate the expected standards of pupil performance. Schools are then left to choose how they organise their school curriculum to include the programmes of study which will provide the basis for planning schemes of work.

Many schools develop their curriculum using the National Curriculum as the framework but some schools use the QCA Schemes of Work for help in translating the National Curriculum’s objectives into teaching and learning activities.
Table 1.1: Key Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation Stage Profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>Reception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>Key Stage 1</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>National assessments in English and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–8</td>
<td>Key Stage 2</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>National tests in English, Maths, and Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–12</td>
<td>Key Stage 3</td>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13–14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>National tests in English, Maths and Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–15</td>
<td>Key Stage 4</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Some children take GCSEs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Most children take GCSEs or other national qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Key Stages and corresponding school year, pupil age and expected level of attainment in the National Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Age of pupil</th>
<th>Expected NC level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subjects of the National Curriculum

The National Curriculum is set out in blocks according to the ages of pupils:

1. Early Learning for 3–5 year olds – the Foundation Stage.
2. The National Curriculum for 5–11 year olds – Key Stages 1 and 2
3. The National Curriculum for 11–16 year olds – Key Stages 3 and 4

The early learning stage for 3–5 year olds

Also known as the Foundation Stage, this is the period from nursery to the end of reception class after which the pupil goes into Year 1 of the primary school. During the Foundation Stage, young children need a well planned and resourced curriculum to take their learning forward and to provide opportunities for all children to succeed in an atmosphere of care and in an environment and with an attitude that gives them the feeling that they are well valued. They follow the Foundation Stage Curriculum, which is organised in six subject areas as shown in the QCA document entitled ‘Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage’ (QCA 2000). The subject areas are as follows:

- **personal, social and emotional development:** gives children self-confidence, to confer upon them the ability to identify their own needs, to differentiate between right and wrong, and to encourage independence, for example in dressing and undressing themselves.
- **communication, language and literacy:** teaches a child how to speak confidently through participation in activities such as storytelling, singing, speaking and relaying sounds. It also encourages them to attempt to write some words with which they are familiar.
- **mathematical development:** enables a child to understand mathematics through the activities they undertake in the point above, and helps them to familiarise themselves with numbers, shapes and space.
- **knowledge and understanding of the world:** encourages a child to acquire an inquisitive and exploring mind that empowers them to learn about current technologies, different cultures and beliefs.
- **physical development:** teaches a child how to move confidently while controlling their bodies.
- **creative development:** encourages a child to appreciate colours and shapes, to make music and dance, and to acquire and develop particular skills.
The National Curriculum for 5–11 year olds

Children move through Key Stages 1 and 2, where the compulsory National Curriculum subjects are the same for both stages. Of these, English, Mathematics and Science are the ‘core subjects’ in which pupils take compulsory national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. They study:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Design and Technology
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- History
- Geography
- Art and Design
- Music
- Physical Education.

The National Curriculum for 11–16 year olds

Children move through Key Stages 3 and 4. They take national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and choose the subjects they will study at Key Stage 4 in preparation for a national qualification, usually GCSEs. They study:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Design and Technology
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- History
- Geography
- Art and Design
- Modern Languages
- Citizenship
- Music
- Physical Education.
Levels of the National Curriculum

The National Curriculum levels are used to describe the results of compulsory assessments of pupils at the end of Years 2, 6 and 9; that is, at ages 7, 11 and 14. Pupils are given levels by their teachers at the end of Year 2 (aged 7) and take national tests at the end of Years 6 and 9. The levels are also used to describe the results of optional tests taken by pupils at Years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8.

There are eight National Curriculum levels, the highest being Level 8. To derive the levels the range of scores that correspond to each subject level is given to teachers and markers each year. Because they are given each year the scores ranges for the subject levels may vary from one year to another.

There is a level description for each level in each subject. This enables teachers to make a judgement as to which level a pupil has achieved in each subject. The teacher can refer to the National Curriculum levels to make their own assessment of the pupil based on their current work. These assessments are usually fed back to parents at parent–teacher evenings or in the pupil’s school report, and they usually indicate at what level of the National Curriculum a child is working in a given subject.

Disapplication of the National Curriculum

Disapplication of the National Curriculum refers to a situation where any part or all of the National Curriculum is not made available to a child because it does not satisfy the child’s needs.

The National Curriculum emphasises inclusion and aims at securing learners’ participation as well as ensuring that there are appropriate opportunities for them to achieve their potential. However, schools have considerable flexibility within the National Curriculum to develop their own curriculum appropriately to serve the needs of their pupils.

Although the National Curriculum allows headteachers a good degree of flexibility to develop the curriculum in line with the needs of the majority of their pupils, there are cases where the National Curriculum may not maximise the learning and achievement of
some pupils. In such cases the full National Curriculum may not be the most appropriate route for the child to pursue learning and achievement and headteachers may in such cases consider disapplying some or all parts of it.

Disapplication may be from all or part of the National Curriculum, all or part of separate programmes of study, or all or part of the statutory assessment arrangements. The advice is that schools should retain pupils’ access to a broad and balanced curriculum or learning programme, including as much of the National Curriculum as possible.

There are three conditions under which the National Curriculum can be disapplied:

1. *Temporary disapplication:* This can come about through regulations under Section 93 of the Education Act 2002. Essentially, this section gives permission to headteachers to temporarily discontinue the application of the National Curriculum or parts of it to a pupil or pupils of their school if prevailing conditions do not allow the pupil(s) maximum benefit of the curriculum. The section states that ‘regulations may enable the headteacher of a maintained school or maintained nursery school, in such cases or circumstances and subject to such conditions as may be prescribed, to direct in respect of a registered pupil at the school that, for such period as may be specified in the direction (the ‘operative period’ of the direction), the National Curriculum for England (a) shall not apply, or (b) shall apply with such modifications as may be specified in the direction.’

2. *Statement of Special Educational Needs:* Under Section 92 of the Education Act 2002, a statement of Special Educational Needs could lead to the National Curriculum being disapplied to a child. In essence, this section of the Education Act empowers headteachers to disapply the National Curriculum completely from a child or apply it with necessary modification if that child has been identified as having a Special Educational Need under Section 324 of the Education Act 1996. Disapplication could also be for groups of pupils or the whole school community. The relevant section of the act states that ‘the special educational provision for any pupil specified in a statement under Section 324 of the Education Act 1996 (c. 56) of his Special Educational
Needs may include provision (a) excluding the application of the National Curriculum for England, or (b) applying the National Curriculum for England with such modifications as may be specified in the statement.

3. **To enable curriculum development or experimentation:** Under Section 90 of the Education Act 2002 the National Curriculum can be disapplied for a time-limited period, to enable curriculum development or experimentation. This section of the act states that ‘for the purpose of enabling development work or experiments to be carried out, the Secretary of State may direct in respect of a particular maintained school or maintained nursery school that, for such period as may be specified in the direction, the National Curriculum for England (a) shall not apply, or (b) shall apply with such modifications as may be specified in the direction.’

**Development of the P scales**

The P scales were intended to rationalise the apparent conflict between the National Curriculum and the statement of special educational needs (SENs).

The conflict arose because, while a legal requirement demanded that all children, including those with Special Educational Needs, should access the National Curriculum, it was practically impossible for some because of their Special Educational Needs. It was not until the publication of the P scales that it became possible to determine the attainment and progress of those pupils whose attainments and progress were too low to register in the National Curriculum; that is, below Level 1, of whom many will be found in special schools, though many others will be found in mainstream schools as a result of the increasingly inclusive nature of these schools. Such pupils generally found the National Curriculum too advanced, most of them were classified as having more severe and complex Special Educational Needs.

The P scales are descriptions of attainment levels below Level 1 of the National Curriculum. They describe some of the important knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils may gain from each subject area and were introduced in response to the failure of the National Curriculum assessments to serve the needs of pupils.
working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum. The scales were first published in 1998 by the DCSF but have since undergone a series of revisions.

Prior to the publication of the P scales, teachers used the code W (working towards Level 1) when the statutory data were collected at the end of the Key Stages, but the code W did not give any information about how far below Level 1 the children were working, neither could it indicate if the children had made any progress over a given period of time. The P scales are now the recommended tool for assessing such pupils.

Other pupils for whom the statutory end of Key Stage tests/tasks were judged to be inappropriate were disapplied from statutory assessments altogether, signified by D. A lot of data were lost this way.

As a result, in the mid 1990s a group of headteachers of special schools came together in order to develop criteria that would be appropriate for measuring the attainment levels and progress of their pupils who had been classified as having Special Educational Needs and for whom the National Curriculum had proved inappropriate. The DfES (as it was then called) became interested in the work the headteachers were doing and the need to develop such criteria and subsequently commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to develop the criteria further by consultation with special and mainstream staff. Publication of the P scales was the outcome of that consultation.

The development of the P scales enabled teachers to set improvement targets for pupils with Special Educational Needs. They were aimed at summative assessments at the end of Key Stages, although the summative assessments could be conducted at the end of each academic year for those pupils who were making more rapid progress. The P scales did not constitute a curriculum, but were complementary to the National Curriculum in the sense that data collected using the P scales filled the data gap that existed in the national information as a result of the inapplicability of the National Curriculum to the assessment of pupils with Special Educational Needs.

In order for the P scales to apply to any pupil they must have a statement of Special Educational Need. There are many cases where children who have recently arrived in the UK from non-
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English speaking countries are achieving below expectations because of their deficiency in the English language. The P scales are not applicable to such pupils.

The first version of the P scales published in 1998 covered three subject areas, namely, English, Mathematics and Personal and Social Development (PSD). These subject areas were further split into strands as follows:

**English**
- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking and listening.

**Mathematics**
- Using and applying
- Number
- Shape, space and measures.

**Personal and Social Development (PSD)**
- Interacting and working with others
- Independent and organisation skills
- Attention.

The attainment levels in the English strands of the first version of the assessment criteria were from P1 to P8 and extended to the National Curriculum Levels 1–3. Levels 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum were each subdivided into three such that Level 1 comprised 1A, 1B and 1C, and Level 2 comprised 2A, 2B and 2C.

Each of the Mathematics strands had P scales attainment levels of P1–P8 while each of the three strands of PSD had attainment levels of 1–15.

A major review of the P scales took place in 2001 leading to the publication of a booklet titled *Supporting the target setting process – Guidance for effective target setting for pupils with special educational needs*. The booklet contained P scales assessment criteria for the core subjects, namely, English, Mathematics and Science. Subsequently P scales were published for all National Curriculum subjects (QCA
The review of the P scales in 2001 split each of the levels P1, P2 and P3 into two sub levels. P1 was split into P1(i) and P1(ii), P2 into P2(i) and P2(ii), and P3 into P3(i) and P3(ii). Levels P1(i) to P3(ii) in each subject indicated the earliest levels of general attainment and were common to all subjects. The splitting of P1 to P3 of the P scales into sub-levels was in response to a report by teachers who had found that some of their pupils, especially those who had very serious Special Educational Needs such as Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD), found it very difficult to progress through even the very lowest levels of the P scales. The aim of splitting P1, P2 and P3 of the P scales into sub-levels was to increase the sensitivity of the scales at these very low levels of attainment.

The science subject area had four strands:

- Scientific enquiry
- Life processes and living things
- Materials and their properties
- Physical properties.

P1(i) to P8 were generic to all four strands of Science, unlike English and Mathematics where only P1(i) to P3(ii) were generic to all strands. Thus P1(i) to P3(ii) applied to all strands of English and Mathematics while P4 to L2A were subject-specific descriptions of each attainment level from P4 to L2A. Likewise, P1(i) to P8 applied to all strands of Science while Levels 1 and 2 were subject-specific descriptions of attainment levels (see Table 1.3).

In the 2001 review, PSD (Personal and Social Development) was replaced with PSHE (Personal Social and Health Education). While PSD had three strands and 15 levels of attainment in each strand, PSHE had only one strand of 8 attainment levels.

The review also produced P scales criteria published in separate booklets for the following subjects:

- Modern Foreign Languages
- Geography
- History
- Developing Skills
- Art and Design
Table 1.3: Generic levels of the cognitive scales (2001 version)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using and applying</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Life processes and living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Materials and their properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1(i), P1(ii), P2(i), P2(ii), P3(i), P3(ii)</td>
<td>P1(i), P1(ii), P2(i), P2(ii), P3(i), P3(ii), P4, P5, P6, P7, P8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Music
- Design Technology
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- Religious Education
- Physical Education.

In 2004 a further review of the P scales was carried out resulting in:

- the creation of separate strands for Speaking and Listening from a combined measure
- the review of attainment level descriptions between P4 and Level 1 in response to the request of practitioners
- the creation of a combined Speaking and Listening strand for pupils who achieve above P8 in the Speaking and the Listening strands of English.

Following this review Speaking and Listening strands have attainment levels in the range of P1(i) to P8. At levels 1 and higher they are combined under the heading Speaking and listening. The creation of a combined Speaking and listening strand (for NC level
scores) in addition to the separate strands of Speaking and Listening resulted in a lot of confusion for teachers during data collection and recording. The problems arising from this will be discussed in a later chapter.

**Introduction of the P scales into Schools**

In 1999 the QCA appointed the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University to conduct a data collection exercise. The aims of the data collection were:

- to present a national picture of the performances of pupils who work below age-related expectations; that is pupils who work below Level 1 of the National Curriculum
- to analyse the data and prepare feedback for schools so that they could use it for self-evaluation and for setting improvement targets for their pupils.

The Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University conducted the data collection exercise annually from 1999 to 2004 on behalf of the QCA. The participation of schools in the data collection exercise was voluntary. The starting number of schools was 295 and by 2004, the last year the exercise was conducted on behalf of the QCA, the number of schools had risen to 1029. Similarly, the number of pupils in the data collection rose annually from 12,554 in 1999 to 30,029 in 2004. The numbers are shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 respectively.

Since 2005 the CEM has conducted the data collection exercise not on behalf of the QCA but as a CEM project, paid for by the schools. This project has involved about 500 schools. In the summer of 2005, the DfES (now the DCSF) invited schools to report as a P level the attainment levels of any child having Special Educational Need and working below level 1 of the National Curriculum. This invitation was one of the first steps towards making mandatory the use of P scales and the collection and submission of P scales data by schools starting from the summer of 2007 – a change that would make the P scales part of the National Curriculum. Although Section 87 of the Education Act 2002 empowered the Secretary of State to
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revise the National Curriculum for England for the Foundation Stage and the Key Stages whenever they considered revision necessary or expedient, the Secretary of State was required to issue the appropriate orders and regulations under that section in order to carry out the changes. Therefore, from 7 September to 29 November 2006 the QCA consulted, on behalf of the Secretary of State, on
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the proposed change to make the P scales part of the National Curriculum.

Following a satisfactory consultation by QCA, the P scales (originally planned for summer 2007) became part of the National Curriculum from September 2008 and the recording of pupils’ achievement and progress using the P scales became statutory. From 2008, schools will be required to report the attaintments of pupils with Special Educational Needs who are working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. This means that relevant pupil Key Stage data will be collected with their achievement and progress from 2008. P scales will be used to report pupils’ attaintments and progress in National Curriculum core subjects at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, and on core and foundation subjects at the end of Key Stage 3.

Uses of the P scales in Schools

The P scales were established to provide schools with an appropriate system with which to assess the attainment of pupils who have Special Educational Needs, but to what use can schools put the attaintment data?

Summative assessment

The P scales can be used for summative assessment of pupils. Such summative data might be useful in reporting to parents or as general information for the school.

Target setting

The data can be used in setting improvement targets. The average attainment in a chosen subject for pupils with the same principal educational need but a year group higher should be the starting point in the process of setting a target for a pupil in that subject. This assumes that the older year group has made an average attainment that is higher than the pupil’s attainment. The current attainment level of the pupil must also be taken into consideration so that the target is neither too high nor too low.
Identification of pupil skills

The data can be used in identifying the subject areas in which a pupil is doing better than in others. It could also identify a pupil’s skills.

Identification of progress

The attainment data can be used in tracking a pupil’s year on year attainment in each subject. The information can be used in identifying the subject areas in which the pupil makes more progress and in establishing a pattern of progress.

Identification of general patterns in the school’s data

The aggregation of data by cohorts of pupils enables the P scales data to be used in examining the overall school performance in all subjects and by cohorts, such as special need categories and year groups. For example, the average pupil performance in each subject could be calculated and a comparison made between the school average score in each subject. Also the average score of each year group for each special need could be calculated and compared.

Feeding back to parents and guardians/carers

Parents and carers evenings afford parents and carers the opportunity to discuss pupils’ achievements. Prior to the publication of the P scales teachers of pupils working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum had no official means of showing parents/carers the attainment or progress that their children had made. The P scales give parents and guardians the chance to celebrate the progress of their children who are working below Level 1.

Comparison of data with other schools

Schools may want to compare their pupils’ attainment data with those of other schools. The P scales give them the opportunity to do so, but they should take care to compare like with like. They should be able to compare the average attainments of a particular category of special need and year group with those of a similar cohort in other schools.
Special Need Groups

According to Section 312 of the Education Act 1996 a child has Special Educational Needs if: ‘he [sic] has a learning difficulty that calls for a special educational provision to be made for him.’

A child could also be defined as having a learning difficulty if:

- the child has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of their age, or
- the child has a disability which either prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of their age in schools within the area of the local education authority.

The same Act states that ‘a child is not to be taken as having a learning difficulty solely because the language (or form of the language) in which he [sic] is, or will be, taught is different from a language (or form of a language) which has at any time been spoken in his [sic] home.’ This is very relevant to pupils who have arrived in the U.K. from non-English speaking countries to whom English is a second language. In order that such pupils are classified as having a learning difficulty it must be established that learning difficulty is the only reason for which they perform below expectations. The DCSF advised teachers to record as W the attainments for children who are learning English as a second language and working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum.

Categories of Special Educational Needs

There are several types of educational need but they can be placed in four main categories which can then be subdivided.

1. Cognition and learning needs
   - Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)
   - Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD)
   - Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)
   - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD)

2. Behavioural, emotional and social development needs
   - Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulty (BESD)
3. Communication and interaction needs
   - Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
   - Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
4. Sensory and/or physical needs
   - Visual Impairment (VI)
   - Hearing Impairment (HI)
   - Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI)
   - Physical Disability (PD)

A fifth category named ‘Other’ only applies to pupils at School Action Plus where the educational need is not clearly identified.

Children are not to be recorded as having a Special Educational Need unless a statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) has been obtained for them. The category ‘Other’ must not be used if a child already has a statement of SEN. The procedure for obtaining a statement of Special Educational Need is described in the SEN Code of Practice on the DCSF website at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/dfeepub/jul00/020700/index.htm

Pupils who have English as their second language or have medical conditions must not be categorized as having Special Educational Need unless a statement identifying a Special Educational Need has been obtained for them. In cases where more than one Special Educational Need is recognised the most serious need is identified as the primary need.

**Use of the P scales in Mainstream Schools**

Although special schools were established for pupils with learning difficulties and other disabilities, a large number of pupils with statements of Special Educational Need are in state-maintained mainstream schools. In fact DCSF figures show that about 75% of pupils with statements of SEN are placed in mainstream schools. This figure has been increasing since the Special Education and Disability Act 2001, which required LEAs to place children with SEN in mainstream schools unless it is incompatible with the choice of their parents or with the provision of efficient education for other children, for example where a pupil presents a challenging
behaviour that significantly disrupts other pupils’ learning. This policy is known as ‘inclusion’ and it aims to ensure that pupils with Special Educational Needs and other disabilities can learn, play and live together with other pupils in pre-school provision, schools, colleges, etc., with the appropriate support. Inclusion enables pupils with statements of Special Educational Need to participate in the normal activities of mainstream schools to the best of their abilities.

Because they are expected to play a role in society in their adult lives, pupils with Special Educational Needs should, like other pupils, be prepared properly for such roles, and an early start in mainstream nursery schools and, later, admission to mainstream schools and colleges is seen as essential.

With so many pupils with statements of SEN in mainstream schools it was expected that the P scales would be widely used in mainstream schools. This does not seem to have been the case. The participation information in the P scales data collection project at Durham University sponsored by the DCSF/QCA from 1999 to 2004 is shown in Table 1.4.

As explained previously, the P scales data collection and analysis project from which Table 1.4 was derived was financially supported by the QCA from 1999 to 2004. It was expected that all schools or at least a large majority of schools that used the P scales would participate as they did not have to pay participation fees. However, it can be seen from Table 1.4 that more than 75% of pupils who were enrolled in the project each year came from special schools. Similarly, it was expected that a larger percentage of the pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pupils from mainstream schools (%)</th>
<th>Pupils from special schools (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>75.7</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would come from mainstream schools in view of the government’s inclusion policy that required most pupils to be taught in mainstream schools irrespective of whether or not they have Special Educational Needs. However, it was possible that most pupils with SEN in mainstream schools were working above the P scales.

References


Further Reading

Education Act 2003, Section 93.
www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/dfeepub/jul00/020700/index.htm
www.parentscentre.gov.uk/educationandlearning/whatchildrenlearn/curriculumandassessment/thenationalcurriculum/
www.teachernet.gov.uk.