

Purpose and use of National Standardised Assessments in Scotland

Introduction

National standardised assessments in Scotland (the Scottish National Standardised Assessments – SNSA – and the Measaidhean Coitcheann Nàiseanta airson Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig – MCNG) are designed to provide valuable diagnostic information to teachers on children’s progress in aspects of literacy and numeracy. They provide nationally consistent assessment data to teachers and are intended to be indicative on next steps in learning and teaching and support effective teacher professional judgement as part of wider assessment evidence.

The purpose and use of national standardised assessments in Scotland must be considered within the wider context of the assessment approach for the broad general education.

The assessment approach in Scotland places teacher professional judgement at the heart of the process. It is teachers who are working most closely with the children, who have access to a wide range of information on children’s learning and who are therefore best placed to judge how well children are progressing.

Assessment is an integral part of everyday learning and teaching. It helps to provide a picture of a child or young person’s progress and achievements and to identify next steps in learning. Assessment supports learning. Within an empowered system, teachers and practitioners have the confidence and capacity to identify the needs of their learners and take steps to meet those needs in innovative and creative ways. Assessment practice is most effective where teachers use a wide range of assessment approaches flexibly to identify strengths, learning needs and appropriate support.

The Scottish Government is clear that the key national measure of children’s progress in literacy and numeracy is the annual Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL) data collection, which is based wholly on teachers’ professional judgement and provides data at school, local and national level. For this reason, data from the SNSA and MCNG will not be gathered or published nationally.

The place of national standardised assessment in the approach to assessment in Scotland

A range of standardised assessments have been used in the past by schools and local authorities, however, the National standardised assessments were established in Scotland to support children and teachers by providing nationally consistent and standard information on children’s strengths and development needs in some aspects of literacy and numeracy. National standardised assessment data should be used as part of a range of evidence to plan next steps in learning and teaching. SNSA and MCNG outcomes can contribute to a teacher’s understanding of children’s progress.

National standardised assessments assess aspects of literacy and numeracy

The SNSA and MCNG questions are aligned to the literacy and numeracy standards articulated in the relevant experiences and outcomes. National standardised

assessments do not replace or undermine teachers' own judgements and as such, intentionally cover only some aspects of the literacy and numeracy curriculum.

National standardised assessments should be used for formative purposes

National standardised assessment is not an end in itself, nor should information from the assessments be used in isolation to form judgements about a child's progress, to group children or to predict future achievement. By providing valuable diagnostic information the SNSA and MCNG give teachers the chance to confirm, identify and address gaps in understanding, or to add greater challenge as appropriate.

National standardised assessment data may be used to help inform summative evaluations

National standardised assessment in Scotland is low stakes not high stakes. The SNSA and MCNG can help to inform, but are not in themselves definitive, when teachers consider summative evaluations.

The national standardised assessments are adaptive assessments

The SNSA and MCNG are adaptive assessments rather than pass/fail assessments. They have been designed to respond to a child's answers as they progress through the assessment, so questions will become easier or harder depending on the previous answers the child has given. In this way, the child should experience some questions that can be challenging but many more questions that they can manage.

Administering national standardised assessments in Scotland

Teachers and practitioners should have a role along with their senior leadership team in determining the most appropriate means of delivering the SNSA/MCNG for their learners. National standardised assessment should be part of normal classroom activity. The SNSA and MCNG do not require any special preparation and should not be administered in a way that creates tension or stress for children. The timing of the assessments should be based on the judgement of the teachers and schools within the parameters of the local authority assessment policy that has been agreed on a collegiate basis. The decision should be made after considering the individual needs and wellbeing of children, the diagnostic purpose of national standardised assessment and how teachers and schools intend to use information. Taken earlier in the year, the assessments can provide information on children's areas of strengths and development needs to help inform next steps in learning. Taken later in the year, they can help to inform teachers' own judgement of the child's progress and highlight any anomalies. Consideration should also be made of the logistics and management of administering the assessments, the digital skills required, particularly for younger children and the suitability of the assessments for children with additional support needs.

The use of national standardised assessment information

The teacher receives an immediate detailed report on how well the child has managed the questions within the assessment.

The information provided by the SNSA/MCNG has been designed to be used in a number of ways. While the data provided are primarily intended for use by class teachers and school leaders they also have value to local authorities and national agencies.

The data can:

- provide valuable diagnostic information to teachers about the key strengths and development needs children have demonstrated, which can in turn help to identify next steps for learning.
- contribute towards the range of assessment information being considered by teachers when making judgements on achieving a level.
- offer teachers and school leaders a standardised form of assessment aligned to the standards within the experiences and outcomes.
- provide teachers and schools with an indication, through analysis of the data generated, of general patterns where, individuals, groups and classes of children are doing well or where they need support. This can then inform planning for learning and teaching for an individual child or class, including through the identification of areas which may need revisited at individual or class level.
- provide school leaders with a source of information, about how well the needs of children and groups are being met in relation to the aspects of literacy and numeracy assessed by SNSA and MCNG, leading to changes of approach or learning and teaching policy where appropriate.
- inform teaching and learning discussions amongst practitioners in relation to areas of strength and areas for development in aspects of literacy and numeracy
- provide clusters of teachers or schools with a source of comparable information on children's strengths and development needs in aspects of literacy and numeracy. This can be used to inform joint improvement strategies and support transitions from one stage to another.
- provide local authorities with a source of information which can be part of the range of evidence considered when having conversations about school improvement. It can also help identify where improvements have been made, to enable the dissemination of good practice, as well as highlighting possible areas for authority wide professional learning.
- provide Education Scotland and Scottish Government with national trend information on aspects of curriculum areas in Literacy and Numeracy. This can be used to support professional learning and national improvement strategies.

National Standardised Assessment - Practical advice on how standardised assessments can be used in the context of the Scottish assessment approach.

Practitioners

Do	Don't
Plan the SNSA/MCNG as part of normal teaching, learning and assessment	Don't set up the SNSAs/MCNGs as a special or extra activity
Remember that the SNSAs/MCNGs only assess some aspects of the literacy and numeracy curriculum	Don't consider SNSA/MCNG outcomes as the sole means of identifying whether or not children have achieved CfE levels
Administer the SNSAs/MCNGs at a time of you and your school's choosing, based on how you will use the diagnostic information	Don't limit SNSAs/MCNGs to an assessment window
<p>Think about how SNSA/MCNG diagnostic information can be used as part of a range of evidence, to <i>contribute</i>, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying learners' strengths and development needs • planning next steps in learning • moderation activities • teacher professional judgements on progress • ongoing, holistic feedback for parents • information for transition • decisions about grouping children 	<p>Don't use SNSA/MCNG data in isolation or give it greater weight than other assessment evidence, when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying learners' strengths and development needs • planning next steps in learning • undertaking moderation activities • making professional judgements on learners' progress • providing ongoing, holistic feedback to parents • considering information for transition • grouping children
Consider the wellbeing of your children and use your professional judgement on the level of involvement and support that children with additional support needs require.	Don't create unnecessary tension or stress around assessments which are intended to be low stakes and diagnostic.

Headteachers and Local Authorities

Do	Don't
Empower teachers and schools to make decisions about the most appropriate time for delivering the assessments to their learners	Don't enforce assessment windows on schools for SNSA/MCNG
Use the analysis from SNSA/MCNG as part of wider monitoring and tracking approaches to inform improvement strategies	Don't use SNSA/MCNG data to rate school performance
Place the SNSA/MCNG within your school's or local authority's wider assessment policy	Don't use SNSA/MCNG data to trump teacher professional judgments
Give clear information about the role of the SNSA/MCNG to parents within the wider approach to assessment in the broad general education	Don't over-emphasise the role of the SNSA/MCNG with parents
Use the SNSA/MCNG to evaluate individuals against the national norms provided in the report	Don't use the SNSA/MCNG to compare groups or schools