



Department
for Education

An Investigation of Key Stage 2 Access Arrangements Procedures

Research Brief

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The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick to investigate current practice for identifying pupils who are eligible for access arrangements for Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Tests (NCT), and gather evidence to inform the refinement of the draft flowchart for identifying pupils who require access arrangements, and those pupils who should not sit KS2 NCTs because the arrangements cannot provide them with sufficient access.

Key Findings

Current practice

- The majority of schools currently use teacher assessment, staff discussion and standardised tests to assess pupils' needs for access arrangements; use of reports from specialist professionals is also common:
 - 90% use teacher assessments
 - 73% use standardised tests of reading and writing
 - Use of reports from professionals includes: educational psychologists (73%), speech and language therapists (46%), medical practitioners (30%), and physiotherapists (29%).
 - Judgements about pupils' access needs and also special considerations typically involve discussions between the head teachers, Year 6 teacher(s) and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO).

Clarity, usability, fairness, and efficiency of the draft flowchart

- There is evidence that the large majority of teachers, SENCOs, educational psychologists, and Local Authority (LA) officers found the draft flowchart efficient, clear and easy to use.
 - 85% of teachers and SENCOs in the national survey judged it efficient
 - 81% judged it clear
 - 84% judged it easy to use
 - 87% judged it fair

Suitability of the draft flowchart

- The large majority (95%) of teachers reported that the draft flowchart draws on and respects their knowledge of pupils and their ability to assess pupil levels and corresponding access needs.

Accuracy of the draft flowchart

- The study found that the majority of teachers (83%) considered that the draft flowchart enhanced their understanding of pupils' access arrangements requirements.
 - 97% were in agreement that the behaviour descriptors included in the draft flowchart avoided the use of labels that compartmentalise pupil behaviour.
 - 92% thought that the behaviour descriptors included in the draft flowchart were clear and unambiguous.
 - Just over two thirds (68%) thought that the draft flowchart would not influence the likelihood of some teachers choosing *not* to submit applications for pupils who *are* eligible for access arrangements.
 - Conversely, 32% considered that the draft flowchart *may* lead to erroneous judgements in this respect.
 - 87% considered that the draft flowchart would accurately identify pupils who *should not* sit NCTs.

Potential improvements to LA systems

- With respect to the role of the LA, LA officers considered that use of the flowchart would improve their authority's system for managing schools' applications for access arrangements for pupils, and improve efficiency.

Areas for improvement of the draft flowchart

- In addition to their generally positive comments, teachers, SENCOs, LA officers and educational psychologists also made helpful improvement suggestions which will enable the draft flowchart to be revised prior to the development of an online version.

Background

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) of the DfE specifies the access arrangements for KS2 tests in its document *National Curriculum Assessments: Assessment and Reporting Arrangements: Key Stage 2*¹. This guidance specifies for whom the access arrangements are intended and the types of arrangements allowed. It is stressed that the arrangements are intended to achieve equity not produce an unfair advantage. The target pupils are those:

¹ Standards and Testing Agency (2012). *National curriculum assessments: Assessment and reporting arrangements: Key Stage 2*. <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213221/2013-assessment-and-reporting-ks2>

With a statement of SEN.

For whom provision is made at School Action or School Action Plus, whose learning difficulty or disability significantly affects their ability to access the tests. Who require alternative access arrangements because of a disability – which may or may not give rise to SEN.

Who are unable to sit and work for a long period because of a disability or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).

With English as an additional language (EAL) and who have limited fluency with English.

The guidelines specify the access arrangements that must be approved by application to the STA, e.g. additional time and set out the evidence necessary to support an application. In addition schools have the discretion to make other access arrangements without seeking approval: e.g. rest breaks, prompters and readers.

The Government is committed to equality of opportunity in education and providing a robust and fair assessment system. The former Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) undertook work in 2011 to update DfE guidance for teachers on identifying Year 6 pupils who would be eligible for access arrangements for KS2 NCTs and those pupils for whom access arrangements will not provide sufficient access to enable them to sit KS2 NCTs. This work, designed to address perceived inadequacies with the then current system, included a review of existing guidelines and practice. It drew on behavioural theory to produce a new draft of DfE guidance, in the form of a paper-based draft flowchart that could be used by teachers to identify eligible pupils.

The Government plan to introduce a new system in 2014. Under these arrangements it is proposed that an updated and more efficient version of the DfE guidance will also be introduced in the form of online software that schools will use to identify eligible pupils. It is envisaged that this software will be an online version of the paper-based draft flowchart.

Methodology

The research comprised a combined methods study consisting of three strands:

- *Strand 1:* A representative national survey of 589 mainstream primary schools providing 648 responses from 128 LAs and 642 schools (50% teachers, 36% SENCOs and 14% from teachers who were also SENCOs).
 - 589 mainstream schools.
 - 59 special schools.

- *Strand 2: comprised visits to 15 schools in four LAs where educational psychologists observed teachers and SENCOs as they used the flowchart to assess the access needs of:*
 - Pupils who were considered to have needs for access arrangements.
 - Pupils who should not sit KS2 NCTs because access arrangements cannot provide them with sufficient access.
 - Pupils who were not eligible for access arrangements.

The educational psychologists also interviewed 17 teachers or SENCOs (two teachers were interviewed in each of two schools) who undertook the assessments and interviews were conducted by one of the research team (GL) with the educational psychologists who conducted this fieldwork.

- *Strand 3: Interviews with 27 LA officers with responsibility for managing the LA's system for applications for access arrangements.*

The survey provided quantitative data which were analysed by both descriptive and inferential statistics. The interviews were semi-structured, face to face and largely qualitative but with some quantitative elements. Together the three strands provided rich data on the interviewees' current practice, views of the flowchart as an instrument, its practical use, and improvement suggestions.

The research had the following two objectives:

Objective 1: To gather the perceptions of teachers, SENCOs, Educational Psychologists and local authority (LA) officers of the suitability, clarity, usability and efficiency of the draft flowchart as a new tool for identifying all pupils who are eligible for access arrangements for KS2 NCTs, pupils who are not eligible and pupils who should not sit KS2 NCTs because the arrangements cannot provide them sufficient access.

Objective 2: To assess the accuracy of the draft flowchart as a tool for identifying all pupils who are eligible for access arrangements for KS2 NCTs, pupils who are not eligible and pupils who should not sit KS2 NCTs because the arrangements cannot provide them with sufficient access.

The study took place during November 2012 to February 2013.

Conclusions

The research indicates that the large majority of teachers, SENCOs, LA officers and educational psychologists rated the draft flowchart positively for suitability, clarity, usability, and efficiency as a new tool for identifying all pupils who are eligible for access arrangements for KS2 NCTs, pupils who are not eligible, and pupils who should not sit NCTs because arrangements cannot provide them with sufficient access.

Furthermore, the large majority of respondents judged the draft flowchart to be generally accurate but respondents did also identify specific aspects of the draft flowchart that could and should be improved.

Recommendations

Evidence from the study suggests:

- An online version of the draft flowchart should be developed to aid teachers undertaking assessments of pupils for access arrangements for KS2 NCTs.
- The development of the online version should be guided by the evidence from the research contained in this report and the full range of specific suggestions from the research participants. In particular, the STA should consider that:
 - Guidance should be produced to advise on the completion of the online flowchart.
 - The Guidance should stress at the start the importance of considering all pupils' access needs in the context of normal classroom practice.
 - Items 1-4 of the draft flowchart be omitted as they are confusing, or inappropriate.
 - Any statement that a pupil should not sit NCTs be replaced by stating that *consideration should be given* to the pupil not sitting NCTs.
 - More guidance be provided on the use of 'age appropriate' in order to stress the wide range of normal development.
- The Guidance should include advice on tests to be used by schools where evidence from standardised assessments is required.
- The new system be kept under review.



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