

<b>Local Authority</b>	<i>Aberdeenshire Council</i>
<b>School</b>	<i>Fettercairn Primary School</i>
<b>Headteacher</b>	<i>Ian Clarke</i>

### **School Context**

*Fettercairn Primary School is a rural school set in the middle of the small Aberdeenshire village of Fettercairn. It has 65 pupils who are taught within 3 composite classes and a nursery of 18 children. The primary 1/2 class has 22 pupils of which 12 are primary 1. Last year's primary 1 class was taught by the headteacher and the class teacher until October and then by two new teachers. The headteacher is in all the classes regularly and therefore knows the children very well.*

### **Before the assessment**

#### **How did you decide the right time to administer the SNSAs?**

Guidance on when assessments were to be delivered was given by the local authority. It was felt that it was better to carry out the assessments later in the session and so they were completed in May. In previous years, primary 1 pupils sat commercially available standardised assessments at both the beginning and at the end of the session. These were 1-to-1 assessments for primary 1 and this approach was replicated with the Scottish National Standardised Assessments. As part of the delivery of Emerging Literacy, children had already completed two literacy assessments, so the concept was not new to them.

#### **How did you plan for the assessments?**

The primary 1 children required little or no preparation as they were already being supported well. Any fuss was deliberately kept to a minimum to avoid anxiety on the part of the children. For those with additional support needs in particular, the assessment was explained as a game on the computer. However, there was no need to make any special arrangements as such.

Throughout the process of completing the assessments, the class teacher was vigilant in making sure no child felt stressed or remained 'stuck' because they were unsure of an answer. Instead, they were simply encouraged to move on to the next question.

#### **Were there any other preparations you had to make?**

As the task was undertaken by one member of staff, there were no special preparations that had to be made except to ensure that there would be sufficient uninterrupted time to sit with the children. It was a pleasure to spend some time with the children in a 1-to-1 situation.

## **Did you need support to figure out the system?**

No particular support was needed, however, looking forwards, it is felt that there now needs to be an emphasis on training for classroom teachers to understand and fully benefit from the diagnostic information the assessments provide.

## **During the assessments**

### **How did the children respond to the process?**

The children just did it. They did not regard the assessments as anything particularly different or unusual. Occasionally, they needed to be encouraged to remain focussed, particularly where there was a child with a specific learning difficulty. The key thing was to keep the atmosphere relaxed and low key. After all, the Scottish National Standardised Assessments are just another learning and teaching activity. Really, it all comes down to relationships.

### **What were the challenges and how did you overcome them?**

Some of the reading was challenging for some of the primary 1 pupils. Consequently, when appropriate, for example where a child had additional support needs, the headteacher read the text again for them to ensure there was no frustration from having to press repeat on the pre-recorded voice icon. Also, the 'drag and drop' type questions were difficult for some children, but where there was a problem pupils were supported to deploy the mouse correctly.

On average, the assessments took around 30 minutes to complete and none of the children needed to take a break, though some needed a little encouragement to stay focussed. It was important to make sure that, if they were hesitant or appearing 'stuck', they were provided with reassurance there and then by being told that they should just try their best and move on to the next question. Children were told it did not matter, that they were doing well and should complete the task to the best of their ability.

The only other challenge was making sure that there was enough uninterrupted time set aside to support the primary 1 class with this. The process did take up some management time, but it was worthwhile in order to have first-hand insight into the assessment process.

## **After the assessments**

### **Is there anything you would do differently?**

Having had first-hand experience, the headteacher would approach things differently by covering the class and releasing the teacher to deliver the assessments. The headteacher would always involve a teacher who the children knew and who knew the children well so as to be sure they were not unduly concerned or stressed. This would benefit both the teacher and pupils.

The importance of drawing on positive relationships cannot be stressed enough. The trust that children have with staff when undertaking something that is a bit unfamiliar depends on high quality relationships, but probably all learning is a bit like that.

Overall, in this first year of implementation, the involvement of the headteacher in the administration of the national assessments has been beneficial as it means being in a better position to support staff and children in the future.

### **What did you conclude about the children's learning from the assessments?**

The staff have not as yet fully utilised the information that has come from the assessments. However, the children performed pretty much as expected. This was helpful to staff as it improved confidence in their own judgement. The diagnostic feedback has been reassuring to see that teachers are supporting children to learn well.

One of the benefits that emerged was when children did not perform in line with teacher judgement. This led to questioning why this might have been the case. On further investigation into the circumstances, it became clear that there were other issues having an impact on the child. This really helped to reinforce the importance of being aware of all the factors that affect children's learning and staff were then in a much better position to provide the right support.

### **How will this help you to support learning further?**

Looking forward, the Scottish National Standardised Assessments will help identify aspects of learning that may have been missed and pick up any patterns within particular cohorts of learners. They will help to redirect learning and support teachers in looking at how certain groupings might be working. They have already supported staff to challenge perceptions about learners and shine a light on areas that might have been missed.

### **What advice would you give on the administration of the assessments?**

It's all about relationships. Where relationships are positive, very little can go wrong. So keep the children relaxed, and deliver the assessments in a familiar place with a familiar adult to support.

Standardised assessments have been used in the school for some time and it is important to draw on any previous experience of when administering the Scottish National Standardised Assessments for the first time.

#### **Education Scotland comment on any issues raised within this case study:**

- The issue of scrolling using a mouse within the P1 assessments is considered as part of the Education Scotland quality assurance process. While this cannot be removed completely, each question is reviewed on an individual basis to limit how much scrolling is necessary.*

- *All SNSA content is reviewed regularly. Feedback from practitioners helps to inform these discussions better and the format of P1 reading questions continues to be improved upon as a result.*
- *Length of assessment – the assessments can be stopped at any time and will be saved at that point. The child can then return to the assessments and start from where they left off. This allows teachers to plan breaks for children if that supports their needs. It avoids children sitting for too long at an assessment and is a safety net for technical problems. Evidence shows that most children complete an assessment in one sitting.*