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COMPUTER BASED ASSESSMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS - FINDINGS OF SCHOOL SURVEY

April 2013



Education & Training

RESEARCH REPORT

Introduction

The computer-based assessment of literacy and numeracy has been a statutory requirement for primary schools in Northern Ireland since the introduction of the Education (Assessment Arrangements) Order (NI) in 2007. The Order provides for the assessment of children in years 4 to 7 using a computer-based method of assessment specified by the Department of Education (the Department). The Order requires that this statutory computer-based assessment is carried out during the autumn term and that the outcomes of the assessment are recorded and shared with the children's parents by the end of that term.

The purposes of the statutory computer-based assessment are to support schools in identifying the strengths and diagnosing the learning needs of individual children; to assist teachers in planning to meet the learning needs of all of the children in their class; and to enable schools to track the progress made by individual children. In addition, the outcomes from the computer-based assessment can be used by schools to inform self evaluation, development planning and target setting at whole-school level.

In September 2009, following a phased introduction period, the Department specified the Interactive Computerised Assessment (InCAS) tool as the computer-based method to be used for the statutory diagnostic assessment of reading and mathematics for children in years 4 to 7. In September 2012, at the end of the procurement contract, the InCAS diagnostic assessment tool was replaced by two new computer-based assessment tools known as the Northern Ireland Literacy Assessment (NILA) and the Northern Ireland Numeracy Assessment (NINA).

The Department acknowledges that the implementation of the statutory CBA has been a new, and at times challenging, experience for schools. They are also aware that, since the introduction of the Order in 2007, there has been significant development in assessment practices in primary schools across Northern Ireland. Many schools are now making very effective analysis and use of their own assessment data for diagnostic and planning purposes at individual, class and whole-school level; they are identifying the children who are under-achieving and are implementing appropriate intervention programmes to support these children to achieve the levels in literacy and numeracy of which they are capable. In seeking to ensure that statutory CBA remains relevant and effective and that it reflects more recent key Department policies such as Count, read: succeed and Every School a Good School, the Minister for Education has commissioned a 4 part review of statutory computer-based assessment, policy and practice. As part of that review, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) was requested by the Department to carry out a survey of the use of CBA by primary schools.

The survey had three main components; an on-line questionnaire which was accessible by all primary schools; survey visits to a sample of 24 primary schools representative of size, sector and geographical spread; and consultation with key stakeholders, including parents and children.

This report outlines the key findings from the survey of schools, which will be used in conjunction with the findings from a review by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) on the operation of the CBA; an independent review of the technical issues which have arisen in implementing the new CBA tools; and a review by the Department of the policy of statutory computer-based assessment to inform future developments in assessment and reporting.

Methodology

An online questionnaire was issued to all primary schools in February 2013. The majority of the questions comprised both quantitative and qualitative data, generally using a likert scale followed by an option for the school to provide additional comments.

The volume and diversity of qualitative data received meant it was not practical to report every comment, however every individual response was analysed and grouped into similar broad themes. The most common views or prevalent issues are reported in this analysis.

Throughout this summary report, the key themes have been quantified approximately as a proportion of all responses received for each question. The total therefore refers to the number of responses rather than the number of respondents, since a respondent could submit more than one comment.

Throughout the report, percentages may not always add to 100% due to rounding.

Response rate

Of a total of 847 primary schools in 2012/13, 409 responses were received, a response rate of 48%.

Respondent profile

The following tables show the number of respondent schools by ELB and management type, compared with all primary schools. The figures show that the respondent profile is relatively in line with the composition of all primary schools, with no groups particularly over or under-represented in terms of ELB or management type.

Table 1 Respondent schools by Education and Library Board

Education and Library Board	Number of responses	Percentage of responses	Percentage of all primary schools
Belfast	37	9.0	10.4
Western	92	22.5	21.1
North Eastern	105	25.7	24.6
South Eastern	66	16.1	17.7
Southern	108	26.4	26.2
Missing	1	.2	
Total	409	100.0	100.0

Table 2 Respondent schools by Management Type

Management Type	Number of responses	Percentage of responses	Percentage of all primary schools
Controlled	190	46.5	44.5
Voluntary	5	1.2	1.4
Catholic Maintained	184	45.0	45.7
Other Maintained	10	2.4	3.4
Controlled Integrated	8	2.0	2.2
GMI	11	2.7	2.7
Missing	1	.2	
Total	409	100.0	100.0

Section 1 Achievement and Standards

This section asked schools to report on how useful the outcomes of statutory computer based assessment were for a range of purposes, measured using a likert scale of very useful to not useful. The results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Quantitative data – Achievement and Standards

Respondents were asked ‘How useful have the outcomes from the statutory computer-based assessment been in helping your school to’:

	% of respondents			
	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Missing
Diagnose the learning needs of individual children?	1.0	32.8	66.0	0.2
Identify children who are under-achieving?	1.7	31.1	67.0	0.2
Plan appropriate intervention programmes for individual children?	1.2	31.3	67.5	0.0
Set targets for – individual children?	3.2	37.7	59.2	0.0
– classes?	2.0	24.4	73.6	0.0
– end of Key Stage?	1.2	18.8	80.0	0.0
Track progress of individual children /classes?	1.5	23.0	74.1	1.5

Just under one-third of respondents reported that the outcomes of statutory based assessment were useful to diagnose learning needs of children, identify children who are under achieving or plan appropriate intervention programmes for individual children. A slightly higher proportion of schools (37.7%) felt that they were useful for setting targets for individual children, however this proportion was lower when considering targets for classes or at the end of Key Stages. Less than one-quarter (23.0%) reported that the assessments were useful to track progress of children or classes.

Table 4 Additional comments on Achievement and Standards

A total of 337 responses were received under the additional comments option, some of which addressed a range of issues. As a result, the number of separate comments made was 599 and this forms the base for table 4 below.

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
General concerns in relation to the accuracy, consistency, timing and overall value of the NILA and NINA.	189	32
Measuring pupil progress was difficult for various reasons, primarily due to the absence of quantitative, standardised scores which are required at an earlier stage to measure and track pupil progress, enable comparisons and target setting, particularly at class level.	131	22
Existing data in schools, including alternative assessment testing such as Progress in English / Progress in Maths (PiE / PiM), are more useful and robust.	129	22
NILA/NINA outcomes contradict teacher assessments and professional opinion.	48	8
There are useful aspects to the NILA/NINA for example, identifying individual difficulties and informing Individual Educational Plans, particularly when used alongside or for the verification of existing data.	43	7
Technical difficulties with the process this year meant that it is difficult or not possible to assess the value of the assessments.	38	6
The tests were intensive and required a high level of IT literacy and skill which made them difficult for children to complete, particularly younger children and those with Special Educational Needs.	21	4
Total comments	599	100

Of the total comments made, the majority (32%) were schools highlighting concerns with the accuracy and reliability of the NILA and NINA computer based assessments in primary schools. Specific concerns reported included a lack of consistency, with many schools reporting that results appeared contradictory. For example, children could score well on very complex tasks yet 'require development' of basic related skills. As a result, many respondents felt that the tests did not accurately reflect the pupil's ability and were therefore not a valuable assessment tool. In terms of timing, some schools felt that assessment tests should be completed at the end of the school year, firstly to inform potential intervention strategies for implementation early the following year and also to ensure all aspects of the curriculum were taught before being assessed.

A major issue for schools was that standardised scores were not available early enough to provide quantitative benchmarking information which was considered essential by many schools in order to measure and track pupil progress, enable comparisons and target setting, particularly at class level. Without this information, schools found it very difficult to interpret the results, and this was exacerbated as it was the first year of NILA and NINA therefore no historic data was available.

Around a fifth of the comments received suggested that existing data in schools, including alternative tests such as PiE and PiM or even the preceding INCAS tests, were more robust than the new statutory computer based assessments. This was further supported by 8% of comments which reported that the outcomes of the statutory CBA could conflict with teachers' assessments or professional opinion.

Around 7% of comments recognised the useful aspects of NILA/NINA, particularly for creating an individual pupil profile, identifying difficulties and informing Individual Educational Plans. However, many of these advocated using the data alongside existing information or for verification purposes, rather than as the sole source of information.

Six percent of the comments referred to the technical difficulties experienced by many schools when administering the computer based assessments. These schools found implementation problems stressful for staff and pupils and as a result some were unable to complete the tests and therefore could not comment on their value. A further 4% of comments implied that high levels of IT literacy and skill were required for successful completion of the tests, which could have been disadvantageous to younger or lower ability children and those with Special Educational Needs.

Section 2 Provision

Schools were asked about how useful the statutory computer based assessments were in assisting them to review their planning in order to meet the needs of all of the children. The results are shown in Table 5a and Table 5b below.

Table 5a Quantitative data - Provision

Respondents were asked 'How useful have the outcomes from the statutory computer-based assessment been in':

	% of respondents			
	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Missing
Assisting the school to review planning at whole school level i.e. whole school programmes for literacy and numeracy?	1.2	18.8	79.7	0.2
Assisting the teachers to differentiate to meet the needs of all of the children within their classes?	2.7	30.3	66.7	0.2
Helping the teachers to involve the children in personal target setting?	2.2	28.4	69.2	0.2
Guiding the teachers marking for improvement?	1.7	17.6	80.2	0.5

Around thirty percent of respondents felt that the statutory computer based assessments were useful in assisting teachers to differentiate to meet the needs of all children within their classes while 28.4% reported that they helped teachers to involve the children in personal target setting. Less than two fifths agreed that they assisted in the review of whole school planning or helped to guide teachers marking for improvement.

Table 5b Quantitative data – Administration time

Respondents were asked 'In terms of the impact on learning and teaching time, was the time spent on the administration and completion of the statutory computer based assessments':

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Too much?	293	71.6
About right?	100	24.4
Too little?	13	3.2
Missing	3	0.7

The majority of schools (71.6%) reported that, in terms of the impact on teaching and learning time, too much time was spent on the administration and completion of the statutory computer based assessments. One quarter felt that it was about right while a minority (3.2%) believed that too little time was spent on administration and completion.

Table 6 Additional comments on Provision

A total of 318 responses were received relating to provision, some of which incorporated more than one issue. As a result, the number of separate comments made was 519 and this forms the base for table 6 below.

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
Too time consuming to administer particularly for smaller schools with limited IT resources. Much curriculum time was lost during preparation and delivery of the tests. Interpretation of the results was unwieldy and impractical in terms of the volume of reports to be printed.	134	26
Technical difficulties greatly increased the time required for administration.	100	19
General concerns in relation to the accuracy, consistency, timing and overall value of the NILA and NINA.	88	17
Existing data in schools, including alternative assessment testing such as Progress in English / Progress in Maths (PiE / PiM), are more useful and robust.	54	10
The time taken to complete the tests (particularly literacy) was excessive for many pupils.	53	10
There are useful aspects to the NILA/NINA for example, identifying individual difficulties and informing Individual Educational Plans, therefore it has potential to be useful. However, it is difficult to know how useful it will be since it is the first year and standardised scores are not yet available.	53	10
The tests required a high level of IT literacy and skill which made them difficult for children to complete, particularly younger children and those with Special Educational Needs.	19	4
Administration time was acceptable and at times better than previous years, for example, the option to save as you progress through the tests.	18	3
Total comments	519	100

While some of the issues reflected those raised in the previous question, the majority were in relation to the time element of the tests. Over one-quarter of the comments reported that the tests were too time consuming to administer, particularly for smaller schools with limited IT resources. Many schools had to split classes to complete the tests due to insufficient numbers of computers and this disruption, as well as time spent up skilling children in terms of ICT, negatively impacted on teaching and learning time for all children. Schools also observed that the reports generated by NILA/NINA were extremely lengthy to print and subsequently interpret for each child. Almost two-fifths of the comments noted that technical difficulties experienced this year greatly increased the time required for administration of the tests. Related to this, one in ten comments reported that the time taken to complete the tests, particularly for literacy, was excessive for many pupils. In some cases, this caused stress for the children and potentially skewed results since they became disengaged and just wanted to get it finished.

Sixteen percent of the comments reiterated concerns about the overall value of NILA/NINA including accuracy, timing and consistency. This related to issues such as perceived conflicting results, as well as concerns that the first term was inappropriate for testing since targets were already set and many subjects had not yet been taught. Ten percent of comments believed that existing data in schools, including alternative methods of testing, were more useful for all the purposes mentioned than the new NILA/NINA. However, a similar proportion noted the actual or potential useful aspects of CBA such as identifying individual areas for improvement. Many of these respondents felt that it is difficult to predict the value of the new test at this early stage and prior to the availability of standardised scores.

While a number of schools considered the level of IT skills required to complete the test to be excessive, others reported that the administration time was acceptable and some system functions were an improvement e.g. the ability to save throughout the process.

Section 3 Leadership and Management

Schools were asked for their opinion on the value of the assessments in terms of self evaluation to effect improvement in the standards which the children attain and in communicating with parents about their child's progress. Table 7 summarises the findings.

Table 7 Quantitative data – Leadership and Management

Respondents were asked 'How useful have the outcomes from the statutory computer-based assessment been in':

	% of respondents			
	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Missing
Informing self-evaluation, development planning and target setting?	1.5	21.8	76.5	0.2
Helping teachers to convey clearly to parents information about their child's progress and ongoing learning needs?	3.2	23.7	72.6	0.5

The majority of respondents reported that the statutory assessments were not useful to inform self-evaluation, development planning and target setting or to help teachers inform parents about their child's progress. To quantify, 26.9% felt that they were either useful or very useful for reporting to parents while 23.3% said the same for self-evaluation and development planning.

Training and support

The primary schools were asked about the training associated with delivering the statutory computer based assessments, both within and outside of the school. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Quantitative data – Training and support

Question	% of respondents		
	Yes	No	Missing / Not applicable
Was the training and support provided by CCEA fit for purpose in assisting your school to implement the statutory computer-based assessment?	78.7	18.8	2.5
Did you provide any additional school-based training for the teachers in relation to the statutory computer-based assessments?	55.7	43.5	0.7
Has the statutory computer-based assessment been effective in enhancing the professional development of teachers within your school?	24.4	74.3	1.2

Schools were generally positive about the training provided by CCEA, with almost four-fifths reporting that it was fit for purpose in assisting with the implementation of the statutory CBA. Over half (55.7%) of responding schools provided additional school-based training for teachers prior to the assessments. However, only one-quarter of respondents felt that the statutory assessments were effective in enhancing the professional development of teachers within the school.

Section 4 Non-statutory assessment

The vast majority of schools reported that they used other standardised assessment tools in addition to the statutory testing. Almost 97% of respondents used other tools to assess literacy, with a similar proportion employing additional tests for numeracy (96%).

The following tables list the most common non-statutory tools used for assessing literacy and numeracy levels among primary school pupils. Tests which were specified by more than ten respondents (2% of the total) are included in the list.

Table 9a Non-statutory assessments used in schools – Literacy

Name of Assessment	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Progress in English (GL)	360	91
Suffolk Reading Scale (GL)	75	19
Single Word Spelling Test (GL)	58	15
Middle Infant Screening Test (GL)	50	13
New Group Reading Test (GL)	49	12
Young's Reading / Spelling Tests	34	9
British Picture Vocabulary Scale (GL)	30	8
Salford Reading Tests	30	8
Vernon spelling test	17	4
York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (GL)	13	3
Accelerated Reader	13	3
Assessment Units CCEA	12	3
Other e.g. Bury Infant test, Word Recognition and Phonics Skills (WRAPS), Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA), Quest	61	

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% since respondents could list more than one assessment. The figures are based only on those schools which provided details of other assessments used. It is possible that these were not exhaustive lists therefore the figures are estimates of usage across all schools.

Of the 396 schools which provided information on any additional tests used for literacy within the school, the most common was Progress in English (GL Assessments, formerly NfER) which was used by nine out of ten schools. Other GL Assessments were also popular among schools for example, the Suffolk Reading Scale and the Single Word Spelling Test, used by 19% and 15% of respondents respectively. A myriad of additional tests were mentioned including the Middle Infant Screening Test and the New Group Reading Test (NGRT).

In addition, a number of schools reported that they use tests such as the Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT) and the Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS) as a best measure of individual children's level of ability.

Table 9b Non-statutory assessments used in schools – Numeracy

Name of Assessment	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Progress in Maths (GL)	387	98
Mental Mathematics (GL)	66	17
ALTA Maths	20	5
Other e.g. GL Sandwell Early Numeracy Test, diagnostic numeracy assessments, Mathematics Assessment for Learning and Teaching (MALT)	45	

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% since respondents could list more than one assessment. The figures are based only on those schools which provided details of other assessments used. It is possible that these were not exhaustive lists therefore the figures are estimates of usage across all schools.

Of the 394 schools which reported using additional numeracy assessments, the vast majority (98%) used Progress in Maths (GL Assessments). A small proportion (2%) also listed GL Mental Maths, while fewer mentioned ALTA Maths.

Standardisation

Respondents were asked about the standardisation of assessments and the findings are summarised below.

Table 10 Standardisation

Question	% of respondents		
	Yes	No	Missing / Not applicable
Are these tools standardised to Northern Ireland?	36.6	61.6	1.8
Is it essential to have the statutory assessment tools standardised to Northern Ireland?	53.3	43.8	2.9

Of those schools which reported using non-statutory tools, over one-third (36.6%) said that the tools were standardised to Northern Ireland. Over half of the total respondents (53.3%) felt that it was essential for statutory assessment tools to be standardised.

Preferred assessment tool

Respondents were asked which assessment tools they would find most useful for diagnostic and planning purposes and reporting to parents. A total of 387 schools provided a response to this question. Some made general comments, however the majority specified their preferred tool as requested, the results of which have been quantified in Table 11 below.

Table 11 Preferred assessment tools

Assessment	Number of respondents	% of respondents
GL assessments (formerly NFER) – mainly PiE and PiM	272	70
InCAS	50	13
One quality tool, standardised to Northern Ireland, used by all schools	36	9
The statutory CBA (NILA/NINA) on the proviso that any difficulties with technology and accuracy are resolved	29	7
Suffolk Reading Scale (GL)	14	4
Other tools	31	

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% since respondents could list more than one assessment. The figures are based only on those schools which provided details of their preferred tool. It is possible that these were not exhaustive lists therefore the figures are estimates of usage across all schools.

Overall, approximately 272 of the respondents indicated a preference for NFER/GL assessments, 197 of which mentioned PiE and PiM specifically. This means that around 70% of the schools which responded would use NFER/GL tests given the choice. Although not all schools specified which NFER/GL assessments they would choose, given the previous responses it is fair to assume that most, if not all, are referring to PiE and PiM. The reasons for this choice mirrored those quoted in previous responses, mainly that it is considered to be accurate, easy to administer and interpret and provides consistent data year on year. Another important factor is that it is standardised and while some felt that it would be better if this was at Northern Ireland level only, others were content that NI at least feeds into the UK standardisation process. Schools generally reported that Nfer/GL is useful for identifying areas for development therefore feeding into individual targets and planning but also at class and school level. It was also noted that, with so many schools in Northern Ireland using these assessments, there was more scope for useful comparative data at a wider level.

Around 50 schools felt that InCAS had been an effective tool, particularly for reporting to parents and some felt aggrieved that it had been withdrawn when it had become useful and comparable on an annual basis.

A number of schools pointed out the importance of having one quality tool, preferably standardised to Northern Ireland, which could be used by all schools. Some suggested that this should be paper based to eliminate any potential bias based on IT skills. Around 30 of the schools were positive in terms of the statutory CBA (NILA/NINA) and felt that if certain issues were addressed, the approach had the potential to be a useful tool.

ETI Follow Up

Respondents were asked if there were any aspects of the statutory CBA which would be important for ETI to follow up in their visits to schools. While some of the responses seemed to be general comments about their experience rather than a direct request for ETI to follow up specific issues, they have all been included where possible in the table below.

A total of 290 responses were received but as with previous questions, many of these incorporated a number of individual comments therefore the total number of comments was 471, which forms the base for the table below.

Table 12 Suggested areas / issues for ETI to follow up

Issues	No. of comments	% of all comments
The overall value of the CBA particularly its usefulness, comparability and the level of usage, given that all schools use additional assessments. Dissemination of any good practice or guidance on how results are used by schools.	115	24
The time commitment and administrative burden of the CBA and the associated issues including the loss of teaching and learning time.	55	12
Role of CBA within the wider context of assessment. Results need to be compared with those from other assessments such as NFER/GL, Key Stage, InCAS. The CBA process needs to be evaluated.	46	10
Lack of / inadequate technical resources in primary schools which exacerbated the administrative time required.	46	10
The value of the report to parents which can be difficult to interpret, confusing or negative.	43	9
The impact of the CBA on children, particularly in terms of the IT skills required and the length of time taken to complete the tests.	40	8
The technical problems which complicated the process this year, causing stress to schools and pupils.	40	8
The need for standardisation and a consistent approach.	24	5
None (some schools believed that it was not for ETI to follow up).	24	5
Cost effectiveness – resources required for administration compared with the outcomes.	15	3
Piloting of the process – was the pilot adequate and why were suggestions made by schools not implemented?	12	3
Lack of support for schools (including training, technical support and advice from CCEA).	7	1
Timing of the assessments, with some schools preferring end of year tests.	4	1
Total comments	471	100

First and foremost, respondents were keen for ETI to obtain the views of schools and teachers as to the actual value of the CBA upon completion, in terms of accuracy, comparability and how it is being used practically by schools for planning and reporting. This accounted for one-quarter of all

suggestions. A further 12% of responses related to the time and administrative requirements of CBA and the impact of this on teaching and learning time. Ten percent of responses indicated that it was important to assess how the results of the CBA compare with established tests such as NFER / GL, Key Stage or InCAS, in order to evaluate its value. The same proportion emphasised that generally, primary schools did not have access to the IT resources required for this exercise thereby greatly increasing the administrative time and burden.

Less than ten percent of the responses referred to a range of other issues including the value of the parents' report, the impact of the tests on children and the technical problems associated with the first year of tests.

Section 5 Policy

Section 5 of the survey focused on current policy and asked schools for their views on a range of statements relating to the requirements and potential benefits of statutory CBA. The findings for each statement are summarised below.

STATEMENT a) Computer-based assessment should continue to be a statutory requirement for pupils in the autumn term for years 4 to 7.

Table 13 Extent of agreement with Statement a)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	27	6.6
Agree	150	36.7
Disagree	120	29.3
Strongly disagree	105	25.7
Missing	7	1.7
Total	409	100.0

Over half of all respondents (55%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that CBA should continue to be a statutory requirement in the autumn term for years 4 to 7. Table 14 summarises the comments received in relation to this statement which helps to explain some of the reasons for this. In total, 275 respondents provided a response, providing 327 separate comments since some spanned more than one theme.

Table 14 Comments on Statement a)

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
CBA should not continue in its current format. It should only be implemented if and when the system is efficient, user friendly for pupils and schools, accurate, standardised and compatible with widely used assessment tools.	119	36
Standardised tests such as NFER/GL and the previous system (InCAS) are more accurate and very widely used therefore DE should consider alternatives to NILA / NINA.	66	20
Tests should be carried out towards the end of the year to allow teachers to plan for the next year and feed into the School Development Plan. The first term is unsuitable because children need time to settle in and cover the subject matter for assessment.	46	14
General concerns in relation to the accuracy, consistency and overall value of the NILA and NINA.	29	9
There are some useful aspects to the CBA e.g. validation of existing data. One quality, standardised system which is used by all schools year on year would be very beneficial.	28	9
Impact on pupils was excessive in terms of the time taken to complete it and the IT skills required.	18	6
CBA is not necessary / should be optional / should not be repeated.	12	4
Too time consuming to administer and analyse.	9	3
Total comments	327	100

The majority of respondents did not seem to be opposed to statutory CBA however, they felt that the system needed to be more efficient, user friendly and accurate in order to be worthwhile. It is important that it is standardised and compatible with existing widely used assessments. One-fifth of the responses reported that standardised tests such as NFER / GL are more useful and very widely used, with some schools requesting that DE consider these as an alternative to CBA.

Fourteen percent of the comments related to the autumn term, reporting that this is too early to assess children since they are settling in and have not yet been taught the curriculum for that year, which will be covered in the assessments. Many believed that the end of the year (May / June) was more useful to allow teachers to plan for the next school year, addressing any issues at the outset.

Some responses did not state whether or not CBA should continue, however they reiterated general concerns about the accuracy and value of the assessments. In contrast, a small proportion of responses recognised potential benefits of the CBA and more generally, the value of a quality, standardised system implemented in all schools and essentially, consistent year after year.

Some comments referred again to the high level of IT skill required to complete the assessments and felt that this could disadvantage some children, in some cases prompting calls for a paper based assessment. Only a small number suggested that CBA should be optional or removed as it was not necessary.

STATEMENT b) The requirement to report the results to parents in the autumn term is important.

Table 15 Extent of agreement with Statement b)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	86	21.0
Agree	156	38.1
Disagree	98	24.0
Strongly disagree	61	14.9
Missing	8	2.0
Total	409	100.0

Almost 60% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the requirement to report to parents in the autumn term was important, whereas 38.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The reasons are explored below in the summary of the 272 comments submitted by 249 respondents.

Table 16 Comments on Statement b)

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
It is important to regularly report to parents however this must be based on accurate, comprehensive and meaningful information which teachers have confidence in. It was not useful and at times difficult, to report the results this years' CBA to parents due to problems with the process and the format and quality of the information generated.	128	47
Reporting to parents in the autumn term can be useful, primarily via meetings and mainly to develop a relationship, set targets and discuss support from school and home. Generally, CBA outcomes were not considered essential at this point.	78	29
Results or progress meetings are more useful later in the school year since autumn is too early for testing and reporting.	44	16
Parents prefer a robust report from teachers as to how their child is progressing rather than complex, lengthy test results.	17	6
Some aspects of NILA / NINA are useful for reporting to parents e.g. areas for Improvement.	5	2
Total comments	272	100

There was a general consensus that reporting to parents on the progress of their child, in terms of assessments and other areas, is important or essential. However, schools felt that it is imperative that the information relayed to parents is useful, accurate and has the confidence of teachers. For this reason, many felt that CBA results were not useful for this purpose, due to the many issues and problems which schools encountered during the first year of NILA / NINA.

In terms of the timing of reporting to parents, there were conflicting views on when this should happen. Feedback to parents in the autumn was viewed as useful according to 29% of the comments, primarily in the form of meetings and mainly for the purposes of developing relationships, setting targets and agreeing on the support required in and outside of school. While a small number felt that it was useful to report results at this stage to provide a benchmark, the majority of related comments indicated that it was not essential for this meeting. Possibly linked to this were 16% of comments which supported reports to parents or meetings later in the year, often because they felt that autumn is too early for assessing and reporting on progress.

A small number of respondents provided anecdotal evidence that parents prefer a comprehensive report from teachers on all areas of their child's progress rather than a complex results report which can be difficult to interpret. A minority of comments referred to useful aspects of NILA / NINA for reporting to parents, for example areas for improvement.

STATEMENT c) The requirement to offer a meeting with parents to update them on their child's performance is important.

Table 17 Extent of agreement with Statement c)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	252	61.6
Agree	132	32.3
Disagree	10	2.4
Strongly disagree	10	2.4
Missing	5	1.2
Total	409	100.0

Over 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the requirement to offer a meeting with parents to update them on their child's performance is important. Less than 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The section below expands on the reasons for this.

Table 18 Comments on Statement c)

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
Communication with parents is very important since the home / school relationship and parental involvement is paramount to success.	84	51
Parent meetings are important however these have always happened and do not require CBA results. The meetings often focus on the teacher's professional judgement, standardised test outcomes and class work.	57	35
Only if there is useful and accurate information to report.	23	14
Total comments	164	100

Over half of the comments made focused on the importance of communication with parents, not just to report academic progress but also pupil behaviour, emotional wellbeing, attitude etc. The main reason for this is to build home/school relationships and encourage parental involvement in their child's education. Meetings are useful to identify strengths / weaknesses and discuss how parents can provide support in the home to help improve outcomes.

One-third of the comments pointed out that meeting with parents is important and has always been standard practice in schools, therefore does not require CBA results, which are often not useful for

this purpose. Valuable sources of information used in the meetings include teacher's professional judgement garnered from observation, standardised test outcomes and class work.

Around 14% of the comments reiterated that meetings with parents about their child's performance are only useful if accurate, meaningful information is available.

Statement d) Statutory computer-based assessment has supported / enhanced engagement with parents in their children's education.

Table 19 **Extent of agreement with Statement d)**

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	13	3.2
Agree	97	23.7
Disagree	164	40.1
Strongly disagree	128	31.3
Missing	7	1.7
Total	409	100.0

Table 19 shows that the majority of respondents (40.1%) disagreed that statutory CBA supported / enhanced engagement with parents, while a further 31.3% strongly disagreed. Almost one-quarter of respondents agreed that it promoted parental engagement with only 3.2% reporting that they strongly agreed. Table 20 explores the reasons for this by summarising the key themes emerging from comments submitted by approximately 200 schools.

Table 20 **Comments on Statement d)**

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
Information / reports to parents are difficult to interpret, confusing and rely on teacher explanation, resulting in longer meetings or less focus on other important areas. General lack of confidence among teachers and parents did not help improve parental engagement and this was caused by negative media coverage as well as inaccurate or contradictory data.	130	57
CBA will / did enhance parental engagement, simply through the requirement to report to parents but also by generating some useful and additional data to discuss. However, respondents noted that with improvement to presentation, accuracy and standardisation it could be more useful in future.	41	18
Other assessments, particularly InCAS, were more useful for engaging parents.	30	13
Engagement with parents was already high therefore CBA had little impact.	19	8
Additional information and teacher judgement is essential to provide a holistic picture of a child's progress and engage parents.	10	4
Total comments	230	100

Not all respondents directly specified that CBA did not support / enhance parental engagement however, they provided reasons why it may not and these have been recorded in the table above. Over half of the comments reiterated concerns with the accuracy and difficulty in interpreting the results which were not conducive to increasing engagement of parents. As a result of this and other factors (including negative media coverage), confidence in the CBAs was low among parents and many dismissed the outcomes.

Just under a fifth of comments reported that all assessments (including CBA) helped to engage parents, particularly alongside the requirement to feedback results. However, while some recognised useful information for this purpose, others believed that improvements in the process would increase

this in future. Thirteen percent of comments stated that other assessment data, especially InCAS was more useful for increasing parental engagement.

Smaller numbers pointed out that parental engagement was already high and that a much wider range of information including teacher judgement regarding performance, behaviour and attitude was vital in order to increase this further.

Statement e) Statutory computer-based assessment has supported / enhanced overall assessment in your school.

Table 21 Extent of agreement with Statement e)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	11	2.7
Agree	96	23.5
Disagree	164	40.1
Strongly disagree	130	31.8
Missing	8	2.0
Total	409	100.0

Less than one-third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that statutory CBA had supported / enhanced overall assessment in their school. Respondents were much more likely to disagree with this statement (approximately 72% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

Table 22 Comments on Statement e)

In total, 182 respondents provided replies in the optional section, producing 200 separate comments. The main themes emerging from these views are summarised below.

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
CBA did not support / enhance overall assessment for a range of reasons, namely technical difficulties, lack of added value and standardised scores, inaccuracy and reduced confidence and continuity.	81	41
Other assessments, particularly InCAS were more likely to enhance / support overall assessment. A common complaint was that InCAS was removed just as it had become useful, generating time series data.	69	35
Some aspects of the CBA were useful in terms of overall assessment, even just the increased volume of information and greater focus on assessment. A common view however was that it needed to be used alongside other assessments and has potential to be more useful in future if the process is improved.	50	25
Total comments	200	100

Comments were similar to previous responses when asked about the impact on overall assessment. Around two-fifths of the comments reported that NILA / NINA did not support or enhance assessment in the school due to reasons already provided including the technical difficulties experienced, the lack of added value, standardised scores and confidence in the system. Many referred to the disruption caused by changing the system every few years and the subsequent gap in comparable data. This was supported by a common view (one-third of comments) that other systems, particularly InCAS were more likely to enhance assessment for reasons including that they were implemented consistently year on year.

One-quarter of the comments felt that the CBA either were, or had the potential to be useful simply by increasing the information available and renewing the focus on assessment. However, many added that they were most useful in conjunction with other assessments and have greater potential to be useful if the process is improved.

Statement f) Statutory computer-based assessment has contributed to improved standards in literacy in your school.

Table 23 Extent of agreement with Statement f)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	5	1.2
Agree	69	16.9
Disagree	195	47.7
Strongly disagree	129	31.5
Missing	11	2.7
Total	409	100.0

Almost eight out of ten respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that statutory CBA contributed to improved standards of literacy in their school, with only 18% reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 24 Comments on Statement f)

A total of 170 comments were derived from the 152 overall responses and as before, the main themes emerging have been collated in the table below.

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
Issues noted earlier including lack of confidence, general inaccuracy and excessive IT skills required, suggest that the CBA do not contribute to improved standards in literacy.	54	32
Other information such as teachers' professional opinion, as well as other assessments such as InCAS and PiE, were considered more useful when working towards improved literacy standards.	51	30
It is too early to gauge the impact of CBA on literacy standards since it has only been undertaken once therefore there is no continuity. In addition, standardised results and school / class data is not available.	33	19
Useful aspects were recognised, such as identifying weaknesses or underachievement, however few respondents directly stated that this had contributed to improved standards in literacy. As before, CBA were considered most useful when used with other assessments or following system improvements.	32	19
Total comments	170	100

Again, the respondents did not always directly address the impact of CBA on literacy standards but provided more general opinions or observations, which have been grouped in Table 23.

The common concerns such as accuracy, which have been noted throughout the report, were reiterated in this section, suggesting that the CBA were not useful in improving literacy standards. Slightly fewer responses noted that the professional opinion of teachers and the use of alternative assessments were more useful than CBAs in improving literacy standards.

Some felt that due to the infancy of the new CBA process, it was impossible to measure any impact on improving standards. The main reasons were the lack of comparable information, standardised scores and whole school / class data.

As before, some useful aspects of the process were recognised, particularly identification of under-achievement, however few comments specifically stated that this directly resulted in improved literacy standards. Again, it was perceived that their value would increase if used alongside other assessments or subject to certain improvements with the system.

Statement g) Statutory computer-based assessment has contributed to improved standards in numeracy in your school.

Table 25 Extent of agreement with Statement g)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	5	1.2
Agree	70	17.1
Disagree	192	46.9
Strongly disagree	128	31.3
Missing	14	3.4
Total	409	100.0

As with the previous statement about literacy, the majority of respondents (78.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that computer-based assessment contributed to improved standards of numeracy in their school, whereas 18.3% agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 26 Comments on Statement g)

A total of 144 overall responses were received, generating 114 comments. The main themes emerging have been collated in the table below.

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
Issues noted earlier including lack of confidence, general inaccuracy and excessive IT skills required, suggest that the CBA do not contribute to improved standards in numeracy.	43	38
Other information such as teachers' professional opinion, as well as other assessments such as InCAS and PiM, were considered more useful when working towards improved numeracy standards.	30	26
Useful aspects were recognised, such as identifying weaknesses or underachievement and areas for improvement. However, few respondents directly stated that this had contributed to improved standards in numeracy, with more implying that they had potential to.	22	19
It is too early to gauge the impact of CBA on numeracy standards since it has only been undertaken once therefore there is no continuity. In addition, standardised results and school / class data is not available.	19	17
Total comments	114	100

The responses were similar to those relating to literacy in that respondents did not always directly address the impact of CBA on overall standards, opting to provide more general comments. In addition, many respondents referred to the previous response using 'see above' or 'as before', which have not been included in the analysis. This, as well as the figures presented in Table 25, indicates similar views in terms of the impact of CBA in improving standards in either literacy or numeracy.

As before, most comments suggested that the CBA were not useful when improving numeracy standards for various reasons including inaccurate / conflicting results, excessive IT skills required and general lack of confidence in the outputs which impeded usage. Others pointed out that alternative sources of information (primarily teacher knowledge) and tests such as InCAS and PiM were more useful when improving standards.

Around one-fifth of comments recognised some useful aspects of the CBA, mainly the identification of areas requiring improvement which could then be addressed. Slightly fewer reported that it was too early to gauge the impact of NILA / NINA on overall standards, given that it was in its first year.

Statement h) Statutory computer-based assessment is suitable for use by all children.

Table 27 Extent of agreement with Statement h)

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Strongly agree	3	0.7
Agree	65	15.9
Disagree	191	46.7
Strongly disagree	139	34.0
Missing	11	2.7
Total	409	100.0

Thirty-four percent of respondents strongly disagreed that statutory CBA are suitable for use by all children and a further 46.7% disagreed – a total of 80.7% opposing the statement. Only 15.9% of respondents agreed and a minority strongly agreed (0.7%).

Table 28 Comments on Statement h)

A total of 404 comments were received from 276 respondents. The main themes emerging have been collated in the table below.

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
Given the nature of the tests e.g. computerised, levels of the questions, amount of text etc, the following groups were at a disadvantage:		
- Children with Special Educational Needs	117	29
- Children with lower levels of IT literacy, which can be due to having no computer access at home	105	26
- Younger children	36	9
- Children of lower ability, particularly in reading	30	7
- Children with a physical or sensory disability	22	5
- Newcomer children	22	5
CBA are generally not suitable for all children due to the length of the tests and stress caused to some pupils.	36	9
With some adjustment the CBA approach is generally supported and children seem to enjoy it.	36	9
Total comments	404	100

Around nine out of ten comments seemed to suggest that due to the nature and level of the tests, CBA are not suitable for use by all children. Respondents specified particular groups who had difficulty with the tests and were at a disadvantage to other children when completing them. The largest group mentioned was children with a Special Educational Need and some comments suggested that there should be an 'opt-out' or alternative arrangements for SEN pupils. There was also significant concern that the tests were less suitable for children with lower levels of IT literacy or skill and more proficient users had an advantage, which could affect the results. There were also concerns about the suitability of such tests for younger children, children of lower ability (particularly problems with reading), children with a disability and newcomer children due to reduced understanding of English.

A number of comments suggested that CBA were generally unsuitable for reasons including the length of the test, the stress involved or the risk that some children treat them as games thus take them less seriously. A minority of responses indicated support for CBA, however mostly on the proviso that the process is improved somewhat.

Section 6 Suggested changes

The final section of the survey asked respondents what changes they would suggest to increase the effectiveness of CBA in terms of policy or operation. Table 29 summarises in general the main suggestions generated by 361 respondents.

Table 29 Suggested changes to increase the effectiveness of CBA

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
More user friendly for pupils, specifically by requiring less advanced IT skills as well as less time to complete, and presentational improvements (amount of text, clarity of voice overs etc).	121	17
Improvements required in the quality of IT used (hardware and software) and increased IT resources in schools to facilitate CBA.	109	15
Discontinue use of NILA / NINA or explore alternative systems. Give schools the autonomy to choose alternative tests (mainly GL PiE and PiM) and more flexibility in terms of timing of tests and reporting to parents.	94	13
The process must be more user friendly and efficient for schools, particularly in the area of feedback which must be more useful generally, easier to interpret and more manageable (especially in terms of printing reports).	84	12
Standardised scores and quantitative data must be available earlier.	79	11
In general, the tests must be more accurate, consistent and add value to other information collated by teachers.	77	11
The parental report must be improved to provide more concise, positive and consistent feedback. The reports for NILA and NINA should be in the same style to avoid confusion.	50	7
The same system must be used on a long-term basis in order to provide comparable data. The same provider should be used for both areas – literacy and numeracy – to ease understanding and avoid confusion.	45	6
The system requires much more extensive trials and the lessons from the pilot must be taken on board.	26	4
More training and information is required by schools, particularly regarding the interpretation of the results. A basic improvement would be for teachers to see the questions and answers.	21	3
Total comments	706	100

The majority of responses suggested that a more user friendly process for pupils was essential in order to increase the effectiveness of CBA. The key improvements suggested were a reduction in the level of IT skills required to effectively complete the assessments (or even a return to paper format) and a reduction in the length of time taken to complete the tests. Schools reported that they had insufficient resources to cope with the demands of CBA and called for additional and better quality hardware, as well as improvements in the software to prevent errors during tests. More than one in ten responses suggested either that CBA be abolished altogether or replaced with better systems. Many felt that schools should be allowed to implement the assessment of their choice, with more freedom in terms of timing and reporting to parents.

A number of schools found the process cumbersome, particularly in terms of printing and interpreting reports and called for it to be more user friendly and efficient in order to save time and money. As cited previously, standardised scores and quantitative data were considered essential in order to provide useful data for schools and parents. Some comments simply pointed out the CBA must be amended to improve accuracy, consistency and added-value in general. In addition, some respondents found the parental feedback negative and confusing, often due to the different formats used for NILA and NINA.

A recurring request throughout the survey was that one system be implemented uniformly on a long-term basis in order to provide comparable information, facilitate tracking of pupil progress and increase school / parent confidence in the tool. Others also felt that using the same provider for each test would greatly simplify the process and outputs for pupils, teachers and parents.

More extensive trials were called for by schools, with focused input from the practitioners who are delivering these assessments, as well as increased training for teachers, particularly around interpretation of results.

Section 7 Other comments

There was an option at the end of the survey to provide any additional comments. A total of 133 respondents took the opportunity to do so, resulting in 179 different comments. Many of these were similar to themes emerging throughout the report and have been summarised below in Table 30.

Table 30 Other comments

Key themes emerging	No. of comments	% of all comments
CBA was a generally negative experience in 2012/13. NILA / NINA are not useful for planning, target setting or as a diagnostic tool and therefore not fit for purpose. Key concerns were the contradictory results produced, excessive administration time and unwieldy information produced.	59	33
Existing data in schools, including alternative assessment testing such as Progress in English / Progress in Maths (PiE / PiM), are more useful and robust.	28	16
Improvements required in the quality of IT used (hardware and software) and increased IT resources in schools to facilitate CBA.	26	15
There are useful aspects to the CBA, however with improvements to the process, it has the potential to be more meaningful in future.	22	12
The assessments are not user friendly for pupils, particularly in terms of the level of IT skills required, the length of the tests and individual pupil needs e.g. SEN.	16	9
Consistency of process is vital – across schools, years, assessment providers and reports (i.e. to teachers and parents).	14	8
Standardised scores and quantitative data must be available earlier.	14	8
Total comments	179	100

Of those who provided comments in this optional section, many were generally dissatisfied with CBA for reasons stated earlier including the lack of added value, inaccurate or contradictory results, excessive administration and unwieldy results. This was supported by a number of responses which suggested schools would be more confident in using existing data and systems such as PiE and PiM.

Many called for an improvement in the software to avoid errors during tests and in the levels of hardware available in schools to allow them to deliver a large scale exercise like CBA more efficiently. Despite the issues identified with the process and systems, some respondents recognised some benefits of CBA and felt that with improvement it could be a very useful tool in future.

Others were concerned about the impact on pupils and felt that the system was not user friendly in that it required very advanced computer skills, took too long to complete and was not tailored to pupil levels or needs e.g. those with SEN.

Consistency in the process was considered to be vital, particularly across the years, with many requesting a long-term provider which would not change from year to year. There was high demand for standardised scores or quantitative data to measure pupil progress and for this to be available earlier.