

# **Creating an Ofsted story: the role of early years assessment data in schools' narratives of progress**

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This paper explores the growing importance of measures of progress in judgements of schools' effectiveness in England, with a focus on the role of the early years (settings for children aged 2-5) in providing data for these measures. Qualitative data from a research project involving three diverse school-based and pre-compulsory early years settings is used to explore how teachers and school leaders prioritise the collection of data in their every-day practice, in order to show how children make continual progress. The need for a narrative of progress as children move up through the primary school, an 'Ofsted story' for the school inspection service, is discussed alongside recent policy which requires a 'baseline' assessment at age four. We argue that there is a reification of progress in schools and early years settings, and that this changes the status of early years within the sector.

Keywords: Ofsted, Early Years, assessment, data, primary schools, baseline assessment, progress measures, accountability

## **Introduction**

During the era of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in the United Kingdom (2010-2015), measures of progress became increasingly important in judgements of schools' effectiveness. The revised framework for school inspections carried out by Ofsted included reference to 'sustained and substantial progress' as a key indicator of a school's effectiveness. Towards the end of this government, new methods of monitoring primary schools were introduced which involved tracking children from when they enter the school in Reception (age 4-5) to their statutory assessments (Sats) at the end of their final year (age 10/11) (DfE, 2014); this long-term strategy of measuring progress from 'baseline' to Year 6 Sats will bring new pressures on schools (it has yet to be implemented at the time of writing). This paper seeks to explore, in

response to both this recent development and longer-term trends of monitoring and accountability, the importance of schools' *narratives of progress* as constructed through the production of attainment data and the presentation of this data to Ofsted inspectors. In particular, we consider the increased significance of assessments of the youngest primary children within this framework of accountability, given previous research on the ways in which teacher assessments in Reception can be manipulated (Bradbury 2013). Using data from a qualitative research project in early years settings, we argue that the need to create an 'Ofsted story', as one of our participants termed it, starting with Reception assessments, is increasingly a priority for schools. This need for a narrative is set within a wider reification of 'progress' as a measure of effectiveness, which is evident in our data collected in both primary schools and other state-funded early years settings, such as Nursery Schools and Children's Centres. We conclude by reflecting on the potential impact of the new baseline assessment with this context.

### **Shifting measures of schools' standards**

This exploration of the shifting priorities produced by accountability measures builds on a wealth of research in this field which has identified the complexities and temporary nature of pressures on schools (Perryman 2009; Perryman et al. 2011; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Ball 2003). As measures and methods of judging schools shift with different governments, teachers have responded; Perryman's research on Ofsted inspections in the 2000s provides evidence of how teachers reacted to the inspection regime at the time, for example, but the pressures of the current system of 'no notice' inspections are different. Changing measures of school performance in league tables, such as the introduction of the EBacc measure under the Coalition government and the disqualification of some courses from measures of A-C passes, have altered which subjects schools provide (DfE 2015b), as the Coalition government

intended. The uncertainty and precariousness what is being measured and how is part of the ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball 2003), as played out in teachers’ every-day lives.

At first sight, measures of judging attainment in primary schools in recent years have remained relatively stable in comparison with secondary education: the proportions of children attaining a Level 4 in the Sats tests in English and Maths at age 11 remain the main measure, and are used in league tables. However, changes such as the removal of science Sats tests and the altering of the content of the English and Maths tests (such as introducing a spelling and grammar test, and removing the calculator paper) have altered how teachers are encouraged to prepare children. An additional measure has also been introduced into primary schools in the form of the Phonics Screening Check at age six, and there have been reforms in the form and range of data including in published league tables. Moreover, there have also been changes to the assessment in early years (a term used to refer to Reception classrooms in primary schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and settings for younger children in the private and voluntary sector). The statutory assessment for five-year-olds, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFS Profile), introduced in 2003 by the Labour government, was revised in 2012 under the Coalition government as part of their aim to reduce bureaucracy, though there is debate over whether it achieved this aim (Bradbury 2014). This assessment, which covers all areas of the curriculum and is based entirely on teachers’ judgements, produces data on the proportion of children reaching a ‘good level of development’ (GLD) at the end of the first year of school in Reception. This data, we argue in this paper, has become increasingly important in the production of schools’ ‘Ofsted stories’, as it provides a starting point for children’s progress through the primary school and thus forms a key part of how inspectors assess schools.

In order to be judged ‘outstanding’, schools must demonstrate that ‘Pupils make substantial and sustained progress throughout year groups across many subjects’ (Ofsted 2014, p71). This reification of progress as a measure of schools’ effectiveness was confirmed by the announcement in 2014 that primary schools would be judged on progress measures as opposed to raw attainment figures (DfE, 2014)<sup>i</sup>. From September 2016, children entering Reception are assessed using a Baseline Assessment, chosen from a range of DfE-approved options and provided by a number of educational organisations and universities. This information will then be used in seven years’ time as the basis for a measure of progress for the same cohort of children, alongside their Key Stage 2 Sats results. Schools can opt in to this system from September 2015.

This policy builds on a complex history of the use of progress measures in education in England. Measures of ‘value added’ have been included in league tables since 2002, based for primary schools on progress between tests at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. A more complex ‘contextual value added’ measure was introduced in 2007; this measure compared progress between two given points with data from similar children for previous years; controversially, it aimed to take into account the ‘context’ of the school, in terms of a number of characteristics of pupils including gender, FSM status and ethnic group (Bradbury, 2011). This ‘contextual’ element was removed under the Coalition government in 2011 on the basis that ‘It is morally wrong to have an attainment measure which entrenches low aspirations for children because of their background’ (DfE, 2010 p68)<sup>ii</sup>. A number of issues have arisen relating to the use of value added measures to judge both primary and secondary schools, including the problem of tactical game-playing (such as deliberately reducing earlier scores to ensure more progress) and secondary school teachers’ accusations of inaccuracy of assessments conducted at primary school (Civitas, 2008). Thus this new development of

a progress measure for primary schools is layered over a complicated set of practices relating to the ‘value added’ measures already in place and used in the past.

### **Theorising accountability and performativity and disciplinary power**

Central to our discussion of the use of progress as an accountability measure is the notion of performativity, which is widely used in analyses of school inspections and accountability systems. The idea of performativity, influenced by the work of Foucault and Lyotard has been taken up by Ball particularly to examine the operation of neoliberal policy in the education system (Ball, 2003). Performativity refers to the ways in which professionals adapt to the increasingly complex demands of systems of monitoring and accountability, how these change ‘who we are’ as well as what we do. This is linked also to the concept of disciplinary power, which is useful here in thinking about how the power to judge schools through inspection and monitoring has an impact on practices and priorities in the primary school and early years settings. We argue that schools are increasingly disciplined between inspection visits by the need to produce data for Ofsted. This paper updates thus the discussion on the impact of inspection by considering the key role of data in processes of governance. Data increasingly have a role to play in systems which discipline schools: as Ozga et al argue:

‘the shift towards governance rather than government in education [...] is intimately connected with the growth of data, and the increase in possibilities for monitoring, targeting and shifting cultures and behaviour that data apparently produce’ (Ozga, Segerholm and Simola, 2011:85)

This paper provides an example of how these possibilities can play out in practice; we see shifting cultures and behaviour in early years as a result of the growing importance of data. This analysis builds on our own and others’ discussions of the use of data in education more widely (Lawn, 2013; Lingard et al, 2013; Lingard et al 2014; Roberts-

Holmes, 2015; Selwyn et al, 2015; Williamson, 2014), particularly Selwyn's call for research to 'make visible the flow and circulation of data' in education (2015a, 76)

The paper also updates the work on the workings of accountability in the education system in England by considering the changing balance of significance between different sectors of the sector. We argue that the traditional perception of early years as lower status is challenged by their new roles as key producers of high-status data.

### **The research study**

The research data used here were collected through a qualitative research study involving teachers and school leaders in three sites: a primary school, a Children's Centre run by a local authority, and a combined Nursery School and Children's Centre, also LA-run. We also interviewed an Early Years advisor employed by a local authority to support teachers in their use of data, to provide an alternative viewpoint. The aim of this project was to explore how these settings collected attainment data on children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, both through statutory assessment (the EYFS Profile) and more informal local methods. We interviewed teachers and school leaders across the three sites, undertook informal observations in the settings and collected documentation, including anonymised Excel spreadsheets illustrating the type of data they collected. The data used here arise from the semi-structured interviews conducted with, in total, one head teacher, three deputy head teachers, two EYFS leaders and three early years teachers, plus the external EY advisor. The participants came from a range of local authorities.

We briefly outline some information on the three sites and one local authority here.

Westhill Children's Centre is located in an inner London borough and serves a deprived

community. Children's Centres are publically funded settings where a wide range of activities take place, including nursery classes, drop-in 'stay and play' sessions, midwifery services and postnatal care. Our focus was on the two groups of children who regularly attend the centre: the 'two-year-old group' and the nursery class for three to four-year-olds. The younger group of children attend Westhill for 15 hours a week under arrangements introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2013 to provide 15 hours of free care per week for disadvantaged children. The primary school, which we call Easthorne Primary, is located in a different area of London, but the pupil population has a similar demographic profile. Our third research site, Hopetown, is a combined Nursery School and Children's Centre in a large urban centre in the southwest of England. Hopetown is based on two different geographical sites, with the nursery school in the city's traditional dock and industrial area whilst the recently opened two year olds Children's Centre is located in a poor socio-economic, predominately Somali residential area. The LA advisor is employed by a different local authority. Access was gained through contacts in an opportunistic sampling technique, based on the need to involve settings representative of English state provision<sup>iii</sup> in the early years. The research was conducted within the BERA Ethical Guidelines; all names and details have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

### **Creating a story for Ofsted**

The pressures of Ofsted inspection as well documented, and remain a key feature of teachers' working lives in England (Perryman 2009; Perryman et al. 2011; Jeffrey and Woods 1998). Nonetheless, as Ofsted's inspection framework has undergone reform, the operation of inspections and the information required by inspectors has changed. In the current system, inspectors examine the school's 'attainment and progress' data in preparation for an inspection, and indeed use this data to decide if an inspection is

necessary (Ofsted 2014, p10). This makes this information, which includes the proportion of children gaining a ‘good level of development’ (GLD) in the EYFS, Phonics Screening Tests scores, and Sats results, particularly high stakes for primary schools, both before and during an inspection. One teacher we interviewed commented ‘Ofsted just wanted the data and they kept asking for more!’. Significantly, the criteria on which schools are judged in terms of achievement are based primarily on progress measures: to be outstanding, the schools must show that ‘From each different starting point, the proportions of pupils making expected progress and the proportions exceeding expected progress in English and in mathematics are high compared with national figures (Ofsted 2014, p71). Thus a key part of the inspection is based on the ‘value added’ by the school; for this, they require a narrative of progress:

We have to have a story for Ofsted and there has to be progress from when they came in to the end of Year 6. So Year 6 can come up with good results but if they came in really well then it’s not good enough because there’s not sufficient value added and you have failed them. (Teacher, Easthorne)

Within this framework, raw results (high scores in Year 6) are insufficient if the children were already assessed as high attaining in the early years. As previous research on early years assessments has found (Bradbury 2013), there is therefore pressure to deflate early years assessments in order to provide a lower baseline for measures of progress. The school needs to produce a narrative of progress, from low attainment to high attainment as children progress through the school; this may be particularly the case if the school does not compare well with others on raw data. However, the workings of value added ensures that even schools with high attainment rates in general face pressure: as this teacher identifies, if a child is deemed high attaining in Reception then they must maintain this high attainment through the school:

The tracking begins from Nursery in the Prime Areas and right through to Year 6. If you are exceeding at the end of Reception you have to show that you are exceeding at the end of KS1 and if not then we are not doing our job. (Teacher, Easthorne)

This pressure obviously makes assessing children in Reception as having high scores an unattractive prospect; it is a risk which schools may wish to avoid.

The requirements of an 'Ofsted story' do not simply relate to the attainment data: there is also a need to conduct and document interventions such as withdrawal groups where the data show children are failing to make enough progress:

You have to track children all the time and I have to add everyone's data at the end of each term to the school tracker. Have they performed appropriately and if not, why not and what interventions are going to have go in? Nobody's allowed to fall behind. (Teacher, Easthorne)

Thus the narrative of progress must include details of how the school is intervening to ensure progress is universal – 'no one can fall behind'. The schools is judged on both the identification of the children in need of 'intervention' and the success of these interventions in returning them to the norm of progress.

The story for Ofsted must be complex and nuanced, and consider the complexities of different groups of pupils:

You have to know what the graphs mean and to have a narrative with each graph. So lots of time [is] spent getting the narrative together. (Deputy Head, Hopetown)

I've given them [EY teachers] evaluation questions [...] that will support them to get through an Ofsted inspection. They need to know their data inside out, the Foundation stage coordinator would. [...] Certainly what are the areas for improvement and how have you - what interventions or what have you put into place to improve those outcomes for children? (EY Advisor)

You have to know every single child and every single group. Whether its boy or girl and Somalian and whether SEN and whether FSM, who's had an intervention, what are the home languages. I mean its everything on each child with all the variables. You have to know all the ins and outs of that data and it doesn't necessarily make your practice better. However, you can answer Ofsted and Ofsted like it! (Teacher, Easthorne)

This requirement is based on the Ofsted guidance which states 'Inspectors will evaluate evidence relating to the achievement of specific groups of pupils and individuals, including those eligible for support from the pupil premium' (Ofsted 2015, p19). A school can be judged inadequate if 'There are wide gaps in the attainment and/or the learning and progress of different groups' (p72). Therefore an explanation is required which accounts for the progress of children in different groups, and again justifies any interventions. Thus within the overall narrative of success, there must be nuanced details of the differentials between pupils and the schools' responses; the account must be carefully calibrated to maximise the positive 'story' for the inspectors.

The demands of performativity are such that the construction of an Ofsted story through data is in some schools sub-contracted out to private companies; in others a teacher becomes a 'data expert', ready to answer detailed questions on the data. At Hopetown, the Deputy Head fulfilled this role: she commented 'I'm not classroom based anymore - I don't teach because I have to manage all this data'. As many inspections are now conducted with no notice given, the schools have to be prepared at all times for an inspection and the detailed scrutiny of their progress data, to be 'data-ready'. This is part of what Moss calls 'the endless flow of accountability' (Moss 2014, p65): Ofsted's role as a monitoring and disciplinary force operates between inspections, ensuring that progress is a key focus for senior management. As one senior teacher at Easthorne put

it, 'The head's job rests on whether the data is good or bad'. The threat of inspection hangs over the school, determining how tasks are allocated and where additional support is provided. The focus on progress data also filters into local judgements, including those related to performance related pay: at Westhill Children's Centre, the Deputy Head noted that decisions on her salary increments were determined by the data she produced on the progress of children on Free School Meals. We turn now to this wider move towards assessments of progress over raw attainment.

### **The reification of progress and the need for a baseline**

This second section sets the need for an Ofsted story in a broader context, where there is a wider shift towards using progress measures to judge schools and the use of assessments in early years settings as a baseline. The recent move towards using baseline assessments to judge primary schools is the epitome of a trend, we argue, which is already present in primary schools and Children's centres; a trend towards the constant measurement of progress or value added between two points, in order to justify funding or good Ofsted judgements. The focus placed on 'value added' involves sometimes prioritising progress over performance, as we see in recent comments on 'coasting' schools (BBC News); as Allen writes, 'Nobody is exempt from this preoccupation with process, however well they may be performing' (2015, p226). This process-based focus is informed by an input/output model of education as a linear process where everyone can be improved given the right environment and teaching; 'snapshots' at key points are necessary to measure the effectiveness of intervening events. As one teacher put it 'We have to prove we are making a difference. We need data to do that' (Deputy Head, Hopetown).

As discussed, the first criteria for an Ofsted 'outstanding' judgements for schools is 'substantial and sustained progress'; for early years provision, the equivalent

statement requires that ‘Children make consistently high rates of progress in relation to their starting points’ (2014, p75). The EY Advisor summed up the situation as ‘schools are led by progress data and are judged by progress data’, but in the pre-compulsory settings, practices of regular measurement of progress were also dominant. At both Westhill, the Children’s Centre, and at Hopetown, the combined Nursery School and Children’s Centre, young children were frequently assessed in order to show the required progress:

Our children are tracked from two to three [years old], three to four, and then you have to show that you have made value added by the time they reach the end of Reception. (Headteacher, Hopetown)

...when Ofsted come and ask to see the tracking data, I can show this child, at their baseline, then their first, second and third term and this is where they are now. (Deputy Head, Westhill)

This pressure was linked again to Ofsted inspection, but as we have discussed elsewhere in more detail (Authors, 2014) it was also based on the need to show value for money to the local authority, who are responsible for apportioning the funding for provision for two-year-olds at Children’s Centres.

A fundamental part of these methods of monitoring progress is the establishment of norms, or ‘expected rates of progress’, which can be applied to data to identify who is in danger of ‘falling behind’. One approach to this is to monitor the ‘steps of progress’ made by children through the various levels prescribed by the ‘Development Matters’ framework, which allocates three stages (emerging, working within and secure) to each age range. Here the LA advisor explains how the ‘steps of progress’ measure is calculated in relation to school-based nursery classes:

On entry a child to nursery should be 30-50 [months] emerging, and therefore by the end of nursery, if there they should be 40-60 emerging, so through the year you go [counting four on fingers] 30-50 emerging, 30-50 within, 30-50 secure, so really an expectation is four levels of progress.

Discussion about which children are failing to make the required number of ‘steps of progress’ is a frequent part of Ofsted inspections, this Advisor commented.

Alternatively, as this deputy headteacher comments, the norms employed can be based on the other children in the group, or on general judgements of ‘good progress’:

We record how the children enter when they are two, so we have a baseline and then throughout the year we do three assessments with the children at set points and then compare them with each other to check that are making progress. We have a system which shows where the children should be with where they are so we can see if they are on track. (Deputy Head, Hopetown)

The use of software to track and highlight certain children forms a key part of this management of progress data; it enables the easy identification of those children assessed to be making slower progress against their starting points.

We produce individual graphs for each child at the beginning of each year and end of each year. We see if they have made a good level of progress. So spread sheets for each class. It shows their baseline assessment and then predicts where they should be at. So, the predicted is behind and the front line shows where they are actually at. (Deputy Head, Hopetown)

The use of software here both facilitates and encourages the reification of progress as a key priority. The ability to predict where children should be and measure them against these predictions, and in turn judge teachers on these measures further embeds these principles into professionals’ working lives; as Allen states, software allows schools to ‘experiment with hypothetical futures [...] the potential and predisposition for process-level governance are thereby enhanced’ (2015, p227).

We see in these comments how important the establishment of a baseline is within this reification of progress: without it, nothing can be measured. Equally, with an inaccurate baseline, measures of progress are meaningless. In the case of early years education, this is a further complication to assessment, because some institutions form the starting point, while others measure the end point. For example, assessments of what children attain at the end of their time in a Children Centre at age four are used to judge that Centre's effectiveness, but may also be used to form a baseline for judgements when these children arrive in Reception.

We spend loads of hours getting the data into shape to send to primary school but the primary schools don't have to use that data from Nursery schools. So basically, reception teachers want their children to come in as low as possible, so that they get the value added at end of reception. We don't have any proof that they use our data sheets at all. (Deputy Head, Hopetown)

Here we see how the competing demands of making the data work for the institution may conflict with the aims of the teachers.

More significantly, there is an overall effect of this reification of progress on early years both in schools and other settings: the increased focus on and surveillance of younger children as part of regimes of accountability.

More than ever before EY is valued as a particular stage and that's probably because of the data now being collected in the EY. The government just loves statistics and numerical data and then they realized that EY data can be collected and then all of a sudden we have Prime Areas to measure! (Deputy Head, Easthorne)

I would say that probably, back even three years ago, people didn't take much notice of the data in the rest of the primary school. But now, because there's such a drive on progress, and with the separate judgement [on EY], headteachers have suddenly woken up to the fact that we've got take much more notice of the data

and how it feeds into the rest of primary. [...] I think it's much more high profile.  
(EY Advisor, ).

The first quote makes reference to the Coalition government's reforms to the EYFS Profile – which included the introduction of 'prime areas' of Literacy, Maths and Personal and Emotional development – suggests the increased importance of the early years as a site for data production. The second quote illustrates the increased profile of early years as settings have become additional 'centres of calculation' (Ball and Olmedo 2013, p59). This is in contrast to the traditional view of early years as a lower-status sector of education, a status which relates to long-standing debates over the status of early years professionals, the gendered nature of working with young children, and the balance between academic work and play with under-fives. We argue that the role of the early years in providing the earliest assessments conducted in primary education (the EYFS Profile) has increased its status, although there are of course costs to this increased profile. This is particularly evident in recent policy on Baseline Assessments in Reception.

### **Baseline assessments in Reception**

In autumn 2015 the DfE introduced Baseline Assessments for four-year-olds in their first few weeks of schooling, for use in measuring the progress of children throughout their time in Primary school (Standards and Testing Agency and DfE, 2015). The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFS Profile) will become optional from September 2016. The standardised Baseline Assessment will produce a single numerical data score for each child based upon numeracy and literacy skills that will be tracked through to Year 6: 'pupil progression' from Reception will become Ofsted's main focus. A range of options for the Baseline Assessment are available to schools, provided by a number of commercial organisations and universities following a tendering process (Standards

and Testing Agency and DfE 2015). This reform is the epitome of the reification of progress we have examined here. In preparation for this, some local authorities have introduced (or re-introduced) baseline assessments in Reception, and begun to use this data in their work with primary schools:

We take that in and we do in-depth analysis of it. So that's: which children are on track? How many are on the expected level or above? And then we did a projected GLD as well and then gave that back to the schools. That acted as a challenge, a support and challenge piece of material for us, to get them to drive their data forward. (LA Advisor)

This policy reform further emphasises the now established practice of tracking and predicting children's progress and attainment against set goals, but the high stakes involved mean that there is great potential for 'game playing', or deliberate deflation of results, as previously found in relation to the EYFS Profile (Bradbury 2013):

There is a lot of game playing going on to try to achieve a lower baseline. In some Reception classes they put them at a very low 30 – 50 months. They try to pretend that they are like a 3 year old! A lot of the children have been in an early years setting for a number of years before Reception, so how can that child still be at that level? [...] We are quick at the game playing going on and that's where our challenge comes in as an LA. (EY Advisor, )

The issue of deflating results to provide a low baseline and therefore greater progress is a significant problem in any progress measurement where the organisation under pressure conducts the baseline themselves. In this area, the local authority's role involves monitoring and challenging this game playing; thus they become another layer of surveillance within a data-focused system. With the nation-wide introduction of Baseline Assessment, this issue and additional pressures are likely to be exacerbated. This concern was reflected in the findings of a DfE-produced research study conducted shortly before the introduction of Baseline Assessment:

There was some evidence to suggest that schools may adopt a conscious ‘gaming’ approach i.e. change their current assessment practices to maximise the opportunity for progress, including by carrying out assessments at the earliest opportunity to minimise any learning gain. A ‘gaming’ approach could be harmful for learning, if teachers minimise learning opportunities at the start of reception in favour of concentrating on the administration of the assessment and on keeping scores low at baseline (DfE, 2015a, p6).

Thus the introduction of the Baseline Assessment is an area which clearly requires further research as the policy begins to affect schools. The reform has been criticised by teachers’ trade unions and early education organisations, with the National Union of Teachers calling for a boycott of the assessment on the basis that it will be ‘unreliable and statistically invalid’ and ‘four is too young to test’ (NUT 2015). There is particular concern that the Baseline Assessment, in combining both Literacy and Maths scores, provides a very simple measurement of attainment on entry, that has no worth other than for accountability purposes.

### **Conclusions: the importance of data in governance and the status of early years**

In this paper we have argued that the early years have an increasingly important role to play in the governance and accountability regimes of primary schools, as they provide the foundational data for measures of progress. These data are used during inspections, and form an important part of schools’ narratives of progress, or their ‘Ofsted stories’. This need for a whole-school narrative and an accompanying detailed knowledge of the attainment of different groups are part of the performance required by the current inspection regime (Perryman 2009).

Furthermore, early years settings, both in schools and elsewhere, are drawn into the culture of continual assessment through the reification of progress as a measure of effectiveness; as such, they too become ‘centres of calculation’, or what Lawn calls

‘self-generating hubs of data production and flow’ (Lawn, 2013: 9), where the recording and presentation of data become key features of professionals’ working lives.

Professionals working in early years settings catering for children as young as two are thus subject to ‘the tyranny of numbers’ (Ball, 2015). The growing prominence of progress measures at all stages of education is significant, and particularly in this stage of education where assessment is, due to the age of the children, a complex process.

Policy developments such as the introduction of Baseline Assessment at age four suggest this trend towards progress is set to become a key feature of the education system in England, and potentially may be reflected in international policy.

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<sup>i</sup> It is worth noting that as this policy has been implemented, the Department of Education has clarified that if schools do not conduct a baseline assessment for a given cohort, they will be judged on raw attainment when this cohort reach the end of primary school (Standards and Testing Agency and DfE 2015).

<sup>ii</sup> There was some speculation that a value added measure which takes into account FSM status might be re-introduced in the later years of the Coalition government, with Michael Gove (then Secretary of State for Education) quoted as saying "I agree it is a good thing to have a value-added measure that takes account of socio-economic background". See <https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=63145>

<sup>iii</sup> Although private nurseries are also subject to the same demands as state providers, this study is limited to state provision.