

# THE P1 PRACTITIONER FORUM:

## Recommendations for Scottish National Standardised Assessments



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“ I used the practice assessments as a free choice activity in the playroom. [Children] did them on their own and with friends. There were no problems. It made the actual SNSA go that wee bit quicker.”

# Introduction

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The P1 Practitioner Forum was formed to give Primary 1 teachers a voice in the debate concerning the Scottish National Standardised Assessment (SNSA) for P1, and to generate practical advice to address the well-documented challenges and discussions that arose from SNSA's first year of implementation. The SNSA consists of assessments in literacy and numeracy.

It has been a pleasure to be part of the Forum. My aim as Independent Chairperson has been to ensure that Forum discussions were grounded in the realities of teaching P1 and informed by the experiences and professional knowledge of expert P1 teachers. The Forum process was one of iterative discussion to identify the practice-focused 'architecture' of the problems, and through this, provide concrete advice and pragmatic solutions.

Forum discussions were vibrant, and at times passionate, but always collegial. Assessment discussions inevitably raise interconnected, cross-cutting and complicated issues that benefit from calm professional consideration. As teachers, we wanted to examine the potential for SNSA to improve teaching and learning. We agreed that the SNSA addresses specific *Curriculum for Excellence* outcomes and that the associated professional development for classroom practitioners, although high quality, was difficult to source and access. We discussed how the SNSA fits with play-based learning approaches; noted evidence that low-scoring children lack experience, not ability; and acknowledged that primary schools in Scotland vary in their capacity to support data-driven discussions. We shared our different understandings of the purpose and design of the SNSA, and agreed 'standardised' as meaning that the SNSA addresses a known set of outcomes using standard questions. We talked about myriad challenges of implementing the SNSA in P1, and the solutions that colleagues had developed. The work of the Forum is available on the [National Improvement Hub of Education Scotland](#).

This report outlines recommendations that we believe should be carefully considered by Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities and schools.

I would like to thank all the members of the Forum for their time and commitment, and for their direct engagement and helpful advice. I also thank Strathclyde University for providing the facilities for hosting our discussions and the Scottish Government for the administrative support that was provided.

**Professor Sue Ellis**  
University of Strathclyde



# Executive Summary

The establishment of a P1 Practitioner Forum was one of the recommendations of the Scottish Government's 2017/18 Scottish National Standardised Assessment (SNSA) User Review report published in August 2018. The objective was to create a professional Forum to advise the Scottish Government and education policy and practitioner communities on the implementation and use of SNSA in Primary 1 classrooms. The Forum has an independent chairperson and the majority of members are Primary 1 practitioners nominated by local authorities and professional networks. Other members are school leaders with responsibility for administering SNSAs, representatives from stakeholder groups, including Unions and independent bodies, academics and researchers. Where possible these people also have Primary 1 teaching experience. The Forum has served to give P1 practitioners a voice in the debate on standardised assessment and an opportunity to discuss with other professionals the implementation of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments in P1.

The decision to establish the Forum was taken in advance of the separate decision by Ministers to set up an independent review of P1 assessments led by David Reedy. One possible outcome of that review is a decision to stop the assessments. The work of the Forum does not pre-judge the outcome of the review, but helps ensure that, if the P1 assessments are to continue, steps are being taken to enhance their value and to improve the experience of those involved.

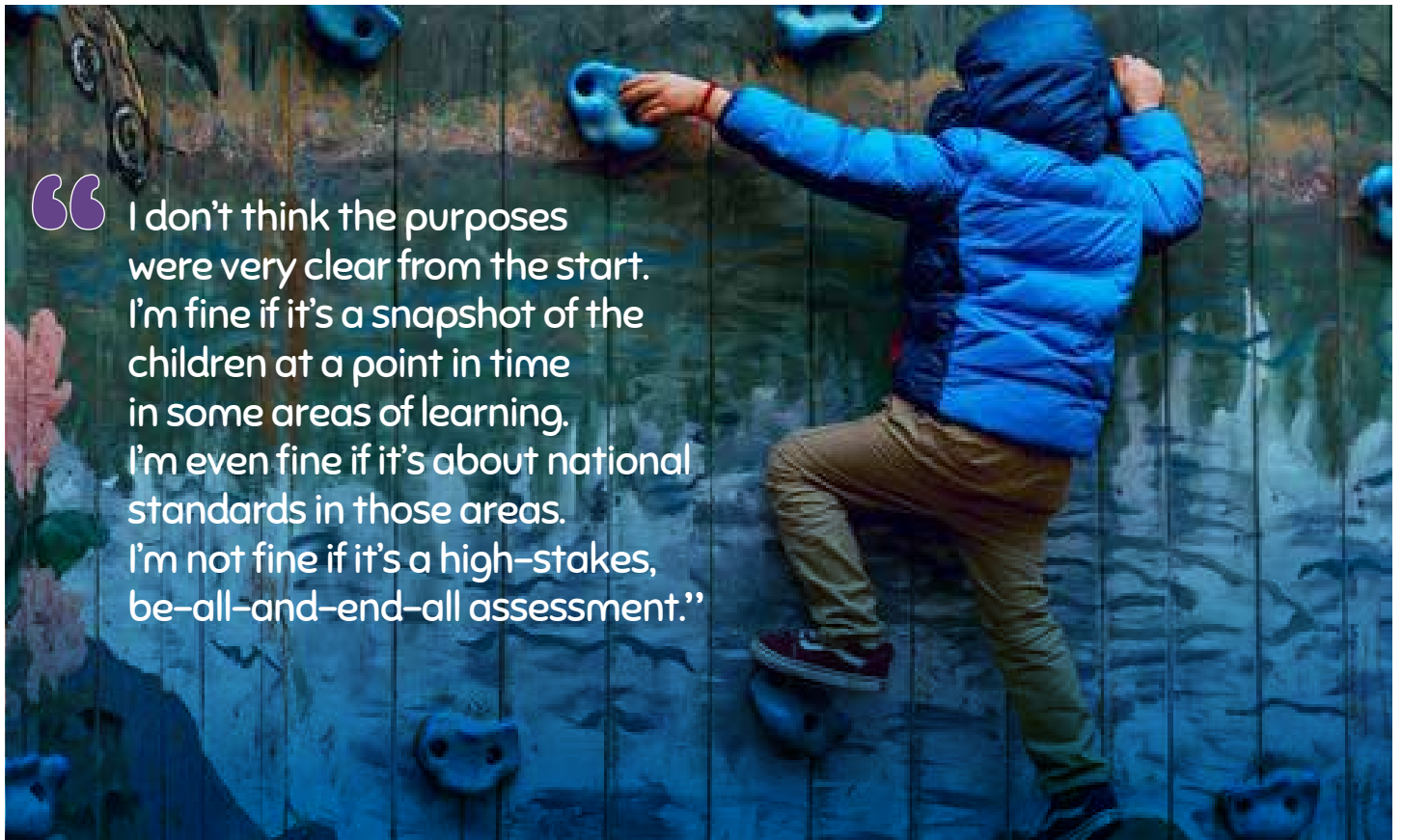
The Forum has considered recommendations about the SNSAs' suitability for, and fit with, Early Level curriculum planning and assessment principles and with Primary 1 play-based pedagogies. The recommendations in this report are relevant to Primary 1 practitioners and school leadership teams and to politicians, third sector organisations, local authorities, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, Education Scotland, and the Scottish Government. The report suggests some of the agencies and system actors that might be responsible, with partner organisations, for ensuring the collaborative implementation of each recommendation.

This report on the discussions and recommendations of the Forum is organised under the following four topics:

- **The purpose of the SNSA**
- **The SNSA fit with play-based pedagogies**
- **The implementation of the SNSA**
- **Using the SNSA data**

In relation to the **purposes of the SNSA**, the Forum recommends that the Scottish Government should ensure:

- 1a** That there is a clear national rationale setting out the possible purposes and uses of the SNSA within the broader assessment framework of Scottish schools. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government and Education Scotland]*
- 1b** That this rationale is publicly available. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 1c** That each school indicates its own specific purposes and policy for SNSA, accounting for the school context, its wider assessment policy and how the SNSA and other data are woven into professional conversations. There should be a clear link between these stated purposes and the procedures for ensuring that SNSA and other data inform teaching and learning discussions, planning, monitoring and assessment. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Schools]*



“ I don’t think the purposes were very clear from the start. I’m fine if it’s a snapshot of the children at a point in time in some areas of learning. I’m even fine if it’s about national standards in those areas. I’m not fine if it’s a high-stakes, be-all-and-end-all assessment.”

In relation to the **SNSA fit with play-based pedagogies**, the Forum recommends that the Scottish Government should ensure:

- 2a** That there is support for play-based approaches as an important pedagogy to deliver the learning that *Curriculum for Excellence* articulates, and practical exemplars and explanations of how play-based literacy and numeracy learning/teaching in P1 address a wide range of the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences, outcomes and benchmarks. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 2b** That there is detailed consideration of the format and presentation of every SNSA item added to the item-bank to ensure it is appealing and intuitive for P1 children to use. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 2c** Clear guidance is available on how the SNSA might be presented in ways that offer P1 children choice and agency, and be interrupted if children need a break, and perhaps a mechanism to record such interruptions. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 2d** Worked examples are made available detailing how SNSA data might be triangulated with observational data from play-based activities and interactions to provide robust evidence of learning and/or attainment, with a choice of sustainable and time-efficient recording formats. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*



In relation to the **implementation of the SNSA**, the Forum recommends that the Scottish Government should ensure:

- 3a** Implementation guidance and training are available online, outside of the SNSA system and maybe on a protected forum such as 'GLOW', so that all educators can access it easily at a time that is convenient to them. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3b** A list of the online training opportunities about how to implement SNSA is available, with clear signposts to indicate the suitability for class teachers, other school staff, senior school leaders or local authority staff. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 3c** Online staff development videos are made available on how SNSA implementation has been organised in different school/class situations, including play-based and non play-based classrooms. They should offer advice on using the practice assessments as playful activities and on children choosing the school technology they use for the SNSA. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3d** That school staff make their own decisions about when and how SNSAs are conducted, and how the SNSA data are woven into professional conversations about children, teaching and the curriculum. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Schools]*
- 3e** That clear expectations are set that senior leaders in schools will discuss the SNSA implementation arrangements with P1 class teachers, and will seek their views and advice on this and on working with particular children. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Schools]*
- 3f** A succinct 'Implementation Checklist' is published which includes an 'Administration Checklist' of practical things senior leaders and class teachers should consider/decide before implementing the SNSAs. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3g** Stronger guidance is made available to inform how teachers interact with, and support, children during the SNSA, particularly on: how much help to give P1 children; the kinds of help not to give; how to choose the materials provided; when it is appropriate to offer a break, and specific kinds of support for children with Additional Support Needs or English as an Additional Language. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3h** That there are time-efficient ways for educators to record their professional observations of P1 children's SNSA experience if they so wish. These may be paper-based and outside the SNSA system. *[Responsibility: Schools]*





In relation to the **use of SNSA data**, the Forum recommends that the Scottish Government should ensure:

- 4a** Training opportunities are available to help practitioners explore the nature of SNSA data, its links to *Curriculum for Excellence* and the information it can generate about the learning of both individual children and groups of children. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 4b** Clear signals in the SNSA reporting and recording formats to show which items contribute to professional judgements about which experiences, outcomes and benchmarks. This will widen understanding of what SNSA does and doesn't do. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 4c** The publication of case studies and exemplar material showing how educators use the SNSA data and triangulate it with other assessment evidence to make robust, holistic judgements and detailed analysis of a child's learning. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 4d** Online staff development materials showing effective and time-efficient use of SNSA data for analytical and responsive teaching, class planning, school management and professional evaluation purposes. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 4e** The publication of technical reports on SNSA data and on teacher judgement data to assist educators, researchers, Education Scotland and local authority staff in making educationally sound decisions about how to respond to children's needs, and not overlay the reliability or predictive capacity of the standardised assessment data. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 4f** Detailed measures are in place to avoid the SNSA becoming 'high stakes' for children or for educators. This might include creating a 'Code of Practice' for data-use that outlines responsible, ethical, attainment discussions and decision-making processes, with systemic checks and balances that prevent misuse. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 4g** That the teaching unions and school/local authority staff work to establish a forum for educators to debate ethical data-use, to discuss any concerns about data-use that may breach the Code of Practice, and processes that allow them to raise concerns with those who can act on them. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Local Authorities, Schools, Practitioners, Unions]*



# THE P1 PRACTITIONER FORUM REPORT

## Introduction: Scottish National Standardised Assessments

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In 2017-18, as part of the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education, the Scottish Government introduced Scottish National Standardised Assessments. The assessments provide a standard set of information that gives a snapshot of some aspects of the literacy and numeracy attainment of children in P1, P4, P7 and S3. They are intended to complement the assessment information that teachers gather as they observe and interact with children during normal classwork and play situations. In combination with observational and classwork data, the Scottish National Standardised Assessment data provide information to support teachers in identifying children's progress. They can also help teachers to use the flexibility afforded by *Curriculum for Excellence* to adopt a diagnostic approach to curricula provision and to children's learning.

The assessments address *Curriculum for Excellence* outcomes and benchmarks. They are adaptive, so the questions get easier or harder depending on how a child is doing. There is no pass-mark, and schools rather than the government or local authorities, decide when the assessments take place. They are provided free to local authorities and schools. Teachers can get instant feedback on the children's attainment and can automatically generate a report on individual children, on groups of children or the whole class.

### The P1 Practitioner Forum

There was much discussion of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments in the media and amongst politicians, unions, charities and pressure groups. These debates voiced particular concern about the appropriateness of SNSA for children in Primary 1, given the very different experiences of literacy and numeracy that young children bring to school and the play-based curriculum that operates in some Primary 1 classrooms in Scotland.

The Primary 1 Practitioner Forum was established to give Primary 1 practitioners a clear voice in these discussions. The main function of the Practitioner Forum is to share experiences and to offer advice to obtain an appropriate balance between assessment as part of ongoing learning within a play-based learning environment and the need to ensure teachers are supported in making nationally consistent judgements about children's learning and progress. The outcome of the P1 Practitioner Forum is to inform national debates and support teachers, schools, local authorities, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, Scottish Government and Education Scotland by making recommendations about best use of the SNSAs in:

- **Early level curriculum planning and assessment**
- **Play-based learning**



## Forum Membership

Forum members were recruited by invitation through local authority and stakeholder networks. There was an emphasis on ensuring representation by professionals with practical experience of teaching Primary 1, of administering and managing the SNSA in school, and of using the data it generates. All nominating bodies were asked therefore, to nominate staff with experience of teaching Primary 1, who had a commitment to play-based or playful teaching approaches, and experience of implementing the SNSA in its first year.

To ensure that the Forum membership profile represented a range of opinions on the SNSA, all members were asked, before the first meeting, to provide up to four comments on their experience of the SNSAs. We categorized these comments as positive, negative or neutral. This analysis indicated that the members held a range of initial views about standardised assessment in Primary 1: 44.5% of the comments were broadly positive, 50% were broadly negative and 5.5% of the comments were neutral.

## Forum Meetings

The work of the Forum is available for open scrutiny and after each meeting, the agenda, the meeting notes and the presentations were posted on Education Scotland's National Improvement hub (see: [Scottish National Standardised Assessment P1 Practitioner Forum](#)). The independent chair located speakers and ensured a suitable level of scrutiny, focus and challenge.

The Forum members debated the extent to which standardised assessment data, when triangulated with other information about children's learning, can inform Primary 1 teaching and planning decisions. In the context of this report, 'triangulating data' means considering the various insights offered by data derived from many different sources and making judgements that lead to a meaningful moment of practice. Such data might include: SNSA item scores; observations of children; conversations with children; children's interests, home lives and outside school activities; their friendship groups; and their classwork. The term 'triangulation' suggests an active use of professional knowledge to verify data and forge more complete professional insights before determining what it might mean for teaching and learning. Debate of these issues in the Forum was informed and underpinned by the experiences,

knowledge and observations of the P1 practitioners and senior school leaders, and by presentations from researchers, key stakeholder groups, assessment experts and academic knowledge brokers.

The Forum discussions repeatedly revisited particular topics. These included:

- **the use of play-based pedagogies in Primary 1;**
- **the structure and focus of the SNSA and its links to *Curriculum for Excellence*;**
- **the purpose of standardised assessment in relation to teaching and learning;**
- **the role of observation and assessment in Primary 1;**
- **the limitations and affordances of the SNSA data, and implications for data-use;**
- **the organisation and implementation of the SNSA in schools, including the time required;**
- **the fit between the SNSA and children who are taught using play-based pedagogies;**
- **the staff development needs of P1 practitioners, school leaders and staff in other agencies in relation to the SNSA.**

## Forum Discussions and Recommendations

This report of the P1 Practitioner Forum discussions and recommendations is organised around four topics:

1. The Purpose of the SNSA
2. The SNSA fit with play-based pedagogies
3. Implementing the SNSA
4. Using the SNSA data



# The Purpose of the SNSA



“It’s an additional tool in the assessment profile. It gives us some consistent elements and a language common across classes, schools & authorities.”

“What is the purpose of the SNSA? We need a clear message ... Local authorities, schools, parents, HMIE, the media – they all need to hear the same thing.”

“I’d feel very uncomfortable if they used the results to put children in different classes depending on their assessment report.”

“I haven’t heard how my children did. They were just extracted from the class by the Depute to do the SNSA.”

“I don’t think the purposes were very clear from the start. I’m fine if it’s a snapshot of the children at a point in time in some areas of learning. I’m even fine if it’s about national standards in those areas. I’m not fine if it’s a high-stakes, be-all-and-end-all assessment.”

“Obviously SNSA won’t capture everything. It’s extra information about what a child can do and what they can’t yet do.”



Forum members note that information about the purpose of the SNSA was delivered to local authorities and head teachers but did not always reach classroom teachers. Forum members appreciated the Deputy First Minister's clarification that the SNSA is a professional tool, its primary purpose is to inform teaching, and that it should not supplant professional judgement about a child's learning. All decisions about a child's attainment at the end of Early Level rest with the teacher, who should draw on a range of evidence reflecting the capacities, skills and knowledge a child demonstrates during class activities, including play activities. Forum members are pleased that, in line with this, teachers/schools decide when SNSA information is most useful and that they should devise their own SNSA arrangements and rationale for using SNSA data, and for triangulating it with data from other teaching and learning activities.

There are different views about the purpose of the SNSA. Forum members recognise suitable school-based purposes as to:

- **Provide a snapshot for the teacher of where an individual child is in aspects of literacy and numeracy learning at a particular point in time;**
- **Provide more detailed 'deep dive' data to better determine the kinds of teaching input and experiences likely to benefit a particular child;**
- **Provide information for teachers on the profile of their own class/groups, enabling them to make best use of the affordances of *Curriculum for Excellence* to re-balance the range of experiences and teaching so that it meets the children's needs;**
- **Provide information for school leaders on how well the planned curriculum may be meeting particular experiences, outcomes and benchmarks of *Curriculum for Excellence*, and help them develop a profile of particular groups in the class/school. This information will enable the senior leadership team in a school to work with teachers to identify gaps in the curriculum or additional resources and experiences that might benefit children. It will also help them to reflect on, and modify, school planning systems or expectations to better address systematic patterns or persistent gaps in learning.**

The last two purposes require a school to collect SNSA data from the whole year group within a limited time-span. An implementation model that echoes the old 5-14 Assessments (where individuals were assessed at different times, and only to confirm achievement of a level) cannot easily identify patterns across the class and enable professional reflection or school-wide conversations about how to adapt the planned curricula provision so that it better meets children's needs.

Children have different experiences and personal histories of literacy and numeracy outside school, and learning does not progress at an even rate, or in a straight line. This is particularly true for children who begin their school career with less experience of using and enjoying literacy and numeracy in the home. The group recognised inappropriate purposes for SNSA as: using it to label children as 'able' or as 'less able'; to make predictive judgements that result in setting, streaming or vertically grouping children for instruction and activities, or to justify decontextualized, narrow or skills-focused 'practice' activities. The Forum members recognise that the numbers in a class are too small for SNSA data to be used to make comparisons between schools, or between classes within a school, and that the predictive validity of SNSA assessments is unknown.



Purpose matters because it shapes action. Some Forum members worked with senior management teams who articulated clear and specific purposes for using SNSA in their school. Here, the SNSA data was triangulated with other data and used to inform discussions about children, teaching plans and the curriculum. However, this was not the experience of all Forum members. Senior management teams in schools should work with staff to articulate clear purposes for SNSA and how it contributes to their school's mission.

## Recommendations

The Scottish Government should ensure:

- 1a** That there is a clear national rationale setting out the possible purposes and uses of the SNSA within the broader assessment framework of Scottish schools. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government and Education Scotland]*
- 1b** That this rationale is publicly available. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 1c** That each school indicates its own specific purposes and policy for SNSA, accounting for the school context, its wider assessment policy and how the SNSA and other data are woven into professional conversations. There should be a clear link between these stated purposes and the procedures for ensuring that SNSA and other data inform teaching and learning discussions, planning, monitoring and assessment. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Schools]*



# The SNSA Fit With Play-Based Pedagogies



“Some of my children couldn't listen to the voice reading the story, so I read it to them.”

“They don't look like play activities. The presentation's visually dull and wouldn't keep my children's attention.”

“Play based observations and assessments are valuable but quite subjective to the individual teacher. Using the SNSA offers a consistent element for discussion of some areas.”

“We did it as an adult-mediated free-choice activity during a normal play session. Over the week, they all chose it except one child, and they had a ball.”

“The SNSAs are not play but they are consistent with the learning I'm looking to get from play.”

“Play-based activities are planned with the benchmarks in mind, so I don't have a problem with children demonstrating their learning through SNSA.”

“I used the practice assessments as a free choice activity in the playroom. [Children] did them on their own and with friends. There were no problems. It made the actual SNSA go that wee bit quicker.”



The Forum members use play-based pedagogies but there is no single practice, rationale or approach. Current pedagogic practices include: Froebelian approaches (highly individual and responsive; the teacher takes the lead from each child); playful teaching and learning approaches ('skilled recruitment' where the teacher recruits children to playful tasks designed with particular learning intentions in mind); and withdrawal group teaching (where children engage in play-based learning and the teacher withdraws small groups for adult-led literacy/numeracy instruction and tasks). Forum members knew of no national information on how widely different approaches to play are used across Scotland.

Forum members recognise that play itself is not a learning outcome and the SNSAs are not designed as play-based learning activities in and of themselves. Play-based pedagogies are a way of working so that children achieve the learning that *Curriculum for Excellence* articulates. It is the main vehicle for learning in nursery and pre-school settings. However, in Scotland, despite a strong rationale for using play-based pedagogies in P1-3, national advice on play-based learning approaches for school-age children is vague. It is hard to find specific national exemplification of how the range of *Curriculum for Excellence* learning outcomes for literacy and numeracy can be addressed through play in P1, for example. This, along with the different staffing ratios between pre-school and school (nursery has one adult to ten children; Primary 1, one adult to 25 children; Primaries 2 and 3, one adult to 30 children), risks leaving P1 teachers unsupported in applying play-based approaches in classrooms. We need to be sure that play-based pedagogies and activities for school-age children are inclusive, address the fullest-possible range of literacy and numeracy outcomes, raise attainment, and deliver equity. Without examples of how this is achieved, literacy and numeracy learning may be positioned as 'work' rather than as exciting opportunities for playful thinking and learning that recognise and celebrate emergent competences.

In terms of how well the SNSA caters for children who are being taught mainly through play-based pedagogies, Forum members raised issues about the demands of the SNSA on P1 children's attention spans, their knowledge and familiarity with particular content, contexts and question formats, and the visual appeal of SNSA items for P1 children. Specific issues were:

- **Some Forum members questioned whether children raised on play-based learning could attend to external, adult-led agendas for sufficient time to complete the SNSA. Some suggested that practitioners note when children struggled to attend during the SNSA to inform action points for future teaching. The average time for the P1 assessment in 2017/2018 was 27 minutes (literacy) and 22 minutes (numeracy).**
- **The practice assessments were used differently across schools. Some teachers introduced the practice assessments as a free choice activity. They explained the activities to the whole class (which is normal practice when introducing new materials or activities) and the children engaged with the practice assessments individually and with friends during free play. The children were ready and confident to do the SNSA the following week.**

- Some teachers offered the SNSA as an adult-supported activity during play and children chose when they wanted to do them. Some teachers took the opportunity to watch how individual children completed the SNSA, treating it as a structured observation and writing notes to inform future professional discussions and decisions.
- The format and appearance of the SNSA is less appealing and intuitive for P1 than some alternative assessments. Forum members suggested that: the 'click' boxes be repositioned and resized; that pages and illustrations be made more colourful, and that schools be given clear direction about whether a person (rather than the electronic voice) could read the short story to children.
- Most Forum members agreed that play-based learning should contribute to a curriculum that seeks to meet all the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences, outcomes and benchmarks, but not all play-based philosophies support this. There was debate, for example, about whether children should be expected to hold a pencil correctly in P1, whether they should be allowed to colour-in pictures to build muscle strength and pencil control, and whether they should have sufficient alphabetic knowledge to recall letter forms and write unaided. There appears to be mixed messages and some political and professional confusion, but further discussion was outwith the remit of the Forum.

## Recommendations

The Scottish Government should ensure:

- 2a That there is support for play-based approaches as an important pedagogy to deliver the learning that *Curriculum for Excellence* articulates, and practical exemplars and explanations of how play-based literacy and numeracy learning/teaching in P1 address a wide range of the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences, outcomes and benchmarks. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 2b That there is detailed consideration of the format and presentation of every SNSA item added to the item-bank to ensure it is appealing and intuitive for P1 children to use. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 2c Clear guidance is available on how the SNSA might be presented in ways that offer P1 children choice and agency, and be interrupted if children need a break, and perhaps a mechanism to record such interruptions. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 2d Worked examples are made available detailing how SNSA data might be triangulated with observational data from play-based activities and interactions to provide robust evidence of learning and/or attainment, with a choice of sustainable and time-efficient recording formats. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*



# The Implementation of the SNSA



“We should agree in advance the type of help to give and not give children during the SNSA and stick to it. Otherwise we won't have a common understanding of what the scores actually mean for future teaching.”

“I did it as a structured observation. I noted where [children] made lucky guesses. I also jotted down strategies they used, whether they persisted, how they coped when they didn't really know the answer.”

“If a child gets upset, the adult needs to think hard about how they presented it.”

“We had a really good training session from the local authority beforehand so I knew what it was all about.”

“We need staff development on SNSA. If you're busy, bite-sized videos available online are easier than webinars you have to pre-book or things you can only access online while you are in school.”

“The instructions are vague, especially about pupils entitled to learning support or with English as an Additional Language.”

“I was amazed about what other people had been told. I didn't know we could stop mid-way, that there were practice activities they could do beforehand or that I could let children choose what [technology] to use.”





Some Forum members with class commitments had received little or no information about implementing the SNSA; children were simply extracted from their class, they had been given minimal information and were unaware of the kinds of benchmarks and outcomes the SNSA assessed or the implementation choices that could be made. The current training strategy, with Webinars, video materials and 'tutor' training materials was poorly advertised and local authority meetings did not always reach P1 classroom teachers. There is no printed manual that describes what the SNSA offers or how it works. The digital training materials are available on the SNSA website, which can only be accessed from an approved IP address (i.e. at school or via a VPN link to the school server). This does not offer sufficient 'reach' across the profession and teachers who are committed full-time in school cannot easily access training that is only offered at specific times or via the school intranet.

Forum members welcome the knowledge that practitioners decide when to implement the SNSA and that the assessment can be interrupted for children if necessary. They would welcome clearer communication of this, as well as further advice on the practicalities of organising the SNSA, accompanied by short 'Implementation and Administration Checklists' detailing practical measures that senior management teams and class teachers should consider for the SNSA process to run smoothly.

Forum members had different kinds of engagement in SNSA. Some Forum members did not execute the SNSA themselves and a few had been given little or no information about their children's reaction to the SNSA or what the assessment could show. This is obviously not ideal. Even those Forum members who implemented the SNSA with their own class did not always appreciate the range of implementation decisions they could make. They did, however, find it interesting and useful to observe how individual P1 children engaged with the various SNSA items. Observing how children tackled various items is a good reason for suggesting that class teachers implement the SNSA for their own children. Some Forum members felt that this was not always practical and that it could enrich professional discussion if implementation (and observation) was shared between the class teacher and other educators. Some senior leaders found it helpful to see for themselves how individual children responded so they could discuss these observations with the class teacher, who obviously holds a wider knowledge of the child. Where such

observation took place, professionals noted a range of behaviours, including: when children used the 'read aloud' features; the strategies used to answer particular questions; when they used materials, revisited or checked questions and information before answering; which children appeared to be 'swipe happy' or guessing at answers; which children enjoyed challenging questions and which were unsettled by them; which children appeared tired or lacking in concentration; and which children needed (and took) a break. Forum members felt that this kind of observation is particularly helpful for P1 children, given the particular impact of differences in age/maturity across a P1 class, and the different level and quality of experiences that P1 children bring to school.



Forum members feel that more specific advice/direction needs to be given about:

- The concrete materials to be provided. The current instructions are unclear. Obviously a child who completes the SNSA with no materials on offer is in a different position from one who has materials readily available and who uses them. Perhaps the guidance should say 'Provide all children with the materials they would normally get in class...', and suggest the teacher or supervisory adult might note when a child did/did not use them, and maybe the strategies used. Some Forum members used such procedural information about how individual children approached SNSA tasks to inform their knowledge of the child, and feed into professional reflection and dialogue.
- The amount, and nature, of help to give children. The guidance could suggest useful phrases to use and also specify the kinds of help that should not be given. This is important to ensure a common understanding between teachers and school senior leaders about what the SNSA data might mean so that appropriate interpretations are made.
- The importance of offering the same technology for the SNSAs that is used in the P1's normal ICT curriculum so that they are familiar with working a 'drag and drop' or 'swipe' mechanism.
- The value, as noted earlier in this report, of allowing children to play with the 'Practice Assessments', and engage with them multiple times if necessary to familiarise themselves with both the technology and the style of the questions. This can be done several days prior to the SNSA. Some Forum members did not know practice assessments were available, and others introduced them only at the start of the SNSA assessment (which made the SNSA process rather long).
- The importance of the SNSA assessments being administered by someone familiar to the child, be it a senior leader in the school, class teacher or classroom assistant.
- The importance of involving P1 class teachers in school decisions about how to implement the SNSA so that their knowledge of specific classroom routines, activities and children informs the process.
- The importance of noting that if a child becomes distressed for any reason, the educator has a professional and moral responsibility to intervene. Although many educators would find this advice unnecessary, some Forum members feel that, given media stories about this, the instruction should be explicitly stated.
- The adaptive nature of the SNSA necessarily involves children in engaging with some items that they will find challenging and teachers should consider children's reactions to these. Scottish schools strive to teach for a 'Growth Mindset', where children (and their educators) are confident to try unfamiliar or challenging tasks and learn from them. Those with a 'Fixed Mindset' prefer to tackle only familiar tasks that are well within their capabilities, which results in less efficient learning.
- The need for greater clarity and guidance on the kinds of reasonable support and adaptations required for children with Additional Support Needs or English as an Additional Language. This, for example, might mean ensuring an adult reads instructions to the child (because the child cannot attend to the electronic voice of the SNSA) or that an adult records the child's answers (because the child cannot 'swipe' or 'click' accurately).
- The procedures for giving children breaks, encouraging them to attend more closely to a task, or to attempt a task rather than give up, and ways to record this information to enable a shared understanding of what the SNSA data might mean.
- How long individual children took to complete the SNSA.

## Recommendations

The Scottish Government should ensure:

- 3a** Implementation guidance and training are available online, outside of the SNSA system and maybe on a protected forum such as 'GLOW', so that all educators can access it easily at a time that is convenient to them. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3b** A list of the online training opportunities about how to implement SNSA is available, with clear signposts to indicate the suitability for class teachers, other school staff, senior school leaders or local authority staff. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 3c** Online staff development videos are made available on how SNSA implementation has been organised in different school/class situations, including play-based and non play-based classrooms. They should offer advice on using the practice assessments as playful activities and on children choosing the school technology they use for the SNSA. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3d** That school staff make their own decisions about when and how SNSAs are conducted, and how the SNSA data are woven into professional conversations about children, teaching and the curriculum. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Schools]*
- 3e** That clear expectations are set that senior leaders in schools will discuss the SNSA implementation arrangements with P1 class teachers, and will seek their views and advice on this and on working with particular children. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Schools]*
- 3f** A succinct 'Implementation Checklist' is published which includes an 'Administration Checklist' of practical things senior leaders and class teachers should consider/decide before implementing the SNSAs. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*

- 3g** Stronger guidance is made available to inform how teachers interact with, and support, children during the SNSA, particularly on: how much help to give P1 children; the kinds of help not to give; how to choose the materials provided; when it is appropriate to offer a break, and specific kinds of support for children with Additional Support Needs or English as an Additional Language. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 3h** That there are time-efficient ways for educators to record their professional observations of P1 children's SNSA experience if they so wish. These may be paper-based and outside the SNSA system. *[Responsibility: Schools]*



# Using the SNSA Data



“We need protected time in schools to go through the SNSA results and discuss them.”

“When we saw how the SNSA items linked to the benchmarks and outcomes, that’s when I saw how I could use it in my planning and with individual children. It was a ‘light-bulb moment’ for me.”

“It’s new so I think it’ll probably take a while to get to know what it can really do. We’re getting better at data-use in primary schools but we’re not there yet.”

“I’d like a chance to talk some more, and in more detail, about some of the results for my children.”

“It was useful for us in identifying areas where there wasn’t a depth of knowledge across the whole class or there were significant gaps in an individual’s learning.”

“The data training focused on generic principles and case studies but it didn’t help me with looking at my own class.”

“In our school we discussed our SNSA in our normal progression and planning meetings. Often it confirmed things I knew but there were a few surprises, which I’m checking-out in other ways.”



Forum members recognise that the SNSA is a tool and that learning to make good and efficient use of the data it generates will take time and require staff development. The current staff development strategy has insufficient 'reach' across the profession. Its content emphasises generic data use and assessment principles and it needs to be more specific and tailored to support teachers in exploring their own class data and to support senior leaders in exploring the data of the school. It should offer specific examples/advice on using the data to inform classroom planning and practice. A mix of 'bite-size' online staff development videos and bookable opportunities for teachers to discuss with experts any questions raised by their data would be highly supportive.

The Forum members agree that the SNSA question items are attuned to key *Curriculum for Excellence* benchmarks and outcomes. However, the match between these and specific SNSA items is not clearly signalled in the reporting and recording formats for SNSA. Supplementing the reporting and recording formats to make this link explicit would enable teachers to verify SNSA data with their own observational and classwork data, and thus inform professional conversations about the curriculum, children's achievement and teacher planning.

Forum members recognise that the SNSAs do not, and cannot, offer data for every benchmark, experience or outcome, and that some (for example those on Problem Solving, Engagement) are assessed in other ways. Recommendations for ways to triangulate data should be trialled to ensure that any formats and processes suggested are time-efficient and sustainable for busy staff.

Forum members recognise that young children's learning is complex. Close-up, it is characterized by plateaus and leaps in understanding rather than by a continuous line of improvement. Young children bring different experiences to school and follow different paths to a common outcome. An inexperienced learner is neither a 'low ability' nor a 'low capacity' learner. Early Level teachers must be especially flexible and work towards a broad horizon by creating rich and tailored learning environments. They have multiple goals for a single session, offer responsive teaching, precise explanations, interesting, contextualized activities and link learning to children's out-of-school lives. They are well-planned but also able to 'seize the teachable moment'. Information from the SNSA needs to be woven into this learning tapestry, rather than sit outside it.

Given this, the SNSA offers a useful 'snapshot' of aspects of numeracy and literacy learning but its conditions of use need to be clearly articulated to prevent data misinterpretation or misuse. To ensure that the SNSA data is as robust as it can be, we need to know the kinds of support, materials and conditions provided and the extent to which they make a difference to children's outcomes. This would enable teachers and school leadership teams to have a common understanding of what the scores mean. The SNSA provides a facility to track children's progress over time but its predictive capacity is unknown and should not be assumed. A child with a low outcome in P1 may do very well in P4 as long as they are offered rich learning opportunities, rather than entered into a 'simplified' or 'skills-driven' curriculum that diminishes their curiosity and agency. In most schools, sample sizes are too small to reliably compare children across classes or schools. All educators (teachers, schools, local authorities, Scottish Government advisors and Education Scotland) have a professional responsibility to ensure that their systems do not overplay the reliability or predictive capacity of SNSA, or any other data. A negotiated and voluntary 'Code of Practice' with a clear processes to ensure that educators at all levels understand the power and the limitations of data and enact good data-use practices would underline this. Such understanding could help to prevent SNSA data becoming high-stakes.



Whilst some class teachers had productive conversations with other teachers and their school's senior leadership team to analyse the SNSA data for their class, others were still awaiting an opportunity to do this. All class teachers need multiple opportunities to discuss the kinds of insights they gain from SNSA and other data if they are to become skilled at verifying, integrating, interpreting and acting on data derived from many different sources. Schools should ensure time within working time agreements, development days and/or regular scheduled progression and planning meetings for this.

## Recommendations

The Scottish Government should ensure:

- 4a** Training opportunities are available to help practitioners explore the nature of SNSA data, its links to *Curriculum for Excellence* and the information it can generate about the learning of both individual children and groups of children. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*
- 4b** Clear signals in the SNSA reporting and recording formats to show which items contribute to professional judgements about which experiences, outcomes and benchmarks. This will widen understanding of what SNSA does and doesn't do. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 4c** The publication of case studies and exemplar material showing how educators use the SNSA data and triangulate it with other assessment evidence to make robust, holistic judgements and detailed analyses of a child's learning. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*
- 4d** Online staff development materials showing effective and time-efficient use of SNSA data for analytical and responsive teaching, class planning, school management and professional evaluation purposes. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*

**4e** The publication of technical reports on SNSA data and on teacher judgement data to assist educators, researchers, HMIE and local authority staff in making educationally sound decisions about how to respond to children's needs, and not overplay the reliability or predictive capacity of the standardised assessment data. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government]*

**4f** Detailed measures are in place to avoid the SNSA becoming 'high stakes' for children or for educators. This might include creating a 'Code of Practice' for data-use that outlines responsible, ethical, attainment discussions and decision-making processes, with systemic checks and balances that prevent misuse. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland]*

**4g** That the teaching unions and school/local authority staff work to establish a forum for educators to debate ethical data-use, to discuss any concerns about data-use that may breach the Code of Practice, and processes that allow them to raise concerns with those who can act on them. *[Responsibility: Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Local Authorities, Schools, Practitioners, Unions]*



# Reflections on the P1 Practitioner Forum

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“It was exciting reading the report. Thank you.”

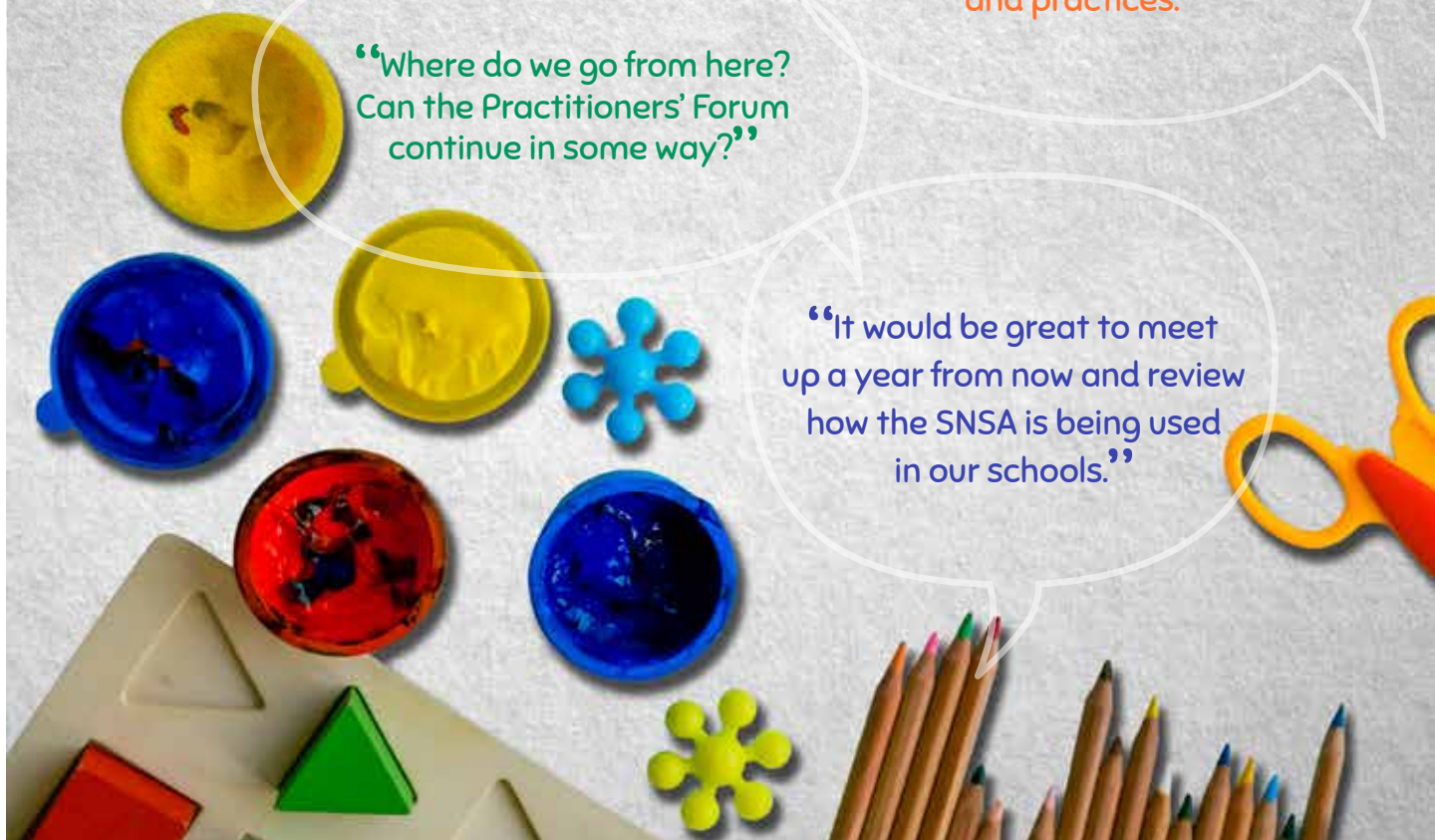
“Sometimes you read a report and you think ‘Were they at the same meeting as me?’ but this is a terrific report. It really does reflect what we talked about.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed being a member of the Forum. I loved meeting people from other schools and authorities, and hearing their experiences. Count me in if you’re doing anything again.”

“I’m keeping in contact with a girl I met, even though we are in different authorities. We’ll continue swapping ideas and practices.”

“Where do we go from here? Can the Practitioners’ Forum continue in some way?”

“It would be great to meet up a year from now and review how the SNSA is being used in our schools.”





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