

**Ark**

Using the best evidence to support a network of schools

Ark is an international charity, transforming lives through education. We exist to give every young person, regardless of their background, a great education and real choices in life.

In the UK, Ark is a network of 35 schools, educating more than 22,000 pupils. These schools are all non-selective and in areas where they can make the biggest difference.

Ark's Early Years Network Lead, Lydia Cuddy-Gibbs, spoke to us about Ark's approach to gathering evidence on what works in Ark's classrooms and sharing the best practice with teachers.

With the future of baseline assessment in question, why has Ark continued to use a standardised baseline assessment across all schools in the reception year?

We have to take into account a number of perspectives; Ark's network perspective, the schools' perspective and individual teacher perspectives.

With regards to the government policy on assessment and accountability, I think that the way the EYFS profile is at the moment, the quality of the curriculum is really strong. However, there are things in there that do need to be adjusted. I like it, but there are tweaks that need to be made.

With teacher observation, for example, the term 'exceeding' just doesn't give you a really clear picture of children's progress... If you are 'exceeding', you are 'exceeding', but where do you go then? There's nowhere else to go.

Obviously the reception policy is in flux and data is not needed to meet government requirements, so it can be really difficult to justify spending on the assessment. Schools are stretched at the moment with budget cuts and fewer members of staff in school to cover everything, but we recognise that for most of our schools the best data they get on the children is from using a baseline assessment.

Why did you choose BASE?

We really need to get a baseline score that is helpful for looking at progress for the future, and I think that's what the BASE assessment gives us.

BASE is just a really good summative assessment, whereas the EYFS profile is a formative assessment, so together they work really well.

I like the granularity of the BASE feedback and the fact that I can compare across the network, because one thing that we find really difficult to show across the network for example, is the progress of children who are doing really, really well. What is great about BASE is that it can show that.

How do you use the BASE data across the network?

Across the network there is something interesting about the cross-pollination of all schools choosing to use the same assessment effectively.

Over the last few years, we have developed a culture of talking about data in a comparative way. It is about seeing which schools are doing well, how we can learn from them and asking how we can improve our practices. This can then be shared across the network.

In terms of analysing the data for a whole network, we love the BASE assessment because it is really useful to compare the teacher assessment with this objective assessment. It gives us a combined picture as well as separate pictures that are interesting.

Having this data means I can get an idea about the teachers' experiences across the network, and what's working for the teachers in each school, and it allows me to ask prompt questions with teachers and principals.

Across our network of schools, our children are doing very well in the early years. We know that 72% of children in our network who are 'below' in terms of getting GLD (Good Level of Development), actually end up getting GLD. Plus, another 37% who are 'well below' end up getting the GLD.

So our next step is to build those scores and having the BASE data has really helped us with that as we are able to identify the children much more quickly.

How does the data help Ark to support its schools?

We use continuous teacher assessment, and the Read Write Inc phonics data, alongside the BASE data. We have termly meetings with Early Years' Leads and look at all the data, but with the BASE data we talk about it all the time, in every meeting actually.

We look at the data to see where schools are doing really well and what we need to do next. We also look at it on a pupil level, to help schools then recognize the children who have significant BASE scores. For example, if they score under 70 or over 140, it's really important that they are picked up straightaway.

We can then discuss this data with Early Years Leads in the schools and see if we can unpick their practices. Is it to do with curriculum? Is it teacher assessment data? How can we learn from schools with a high APS (Average Point Score)? It's important to have those conversations and ask the questions that come from the data.

I also look at the schools in relation to performance to help them reflect on their practices. I am interested in comparing the BASE and the teacher assessment. I can compare the BASE score, or each module of the BASE assessment against all of the 17 areas, or just one of the areas, against the GLD areas and we examine all aspects of the data.

Do the schools feel they benefit from using the assessment?

We hear from schools that the BASE data is really important for their planning and has helped them to better target the children. One headteacher who was initially sceptical of the data has found she now loves it, because it can be used in conjunction with teacher assessment, and because of how granular the feedback is.

It gives schools a narrative around the pupils and allows them to ask the right questions and look at all the different components. The children whose scores are low obviously need something different to be able to accelerate their progress.

The BASE data makes sure we can see the cohort differences and schools can learn from the other schools, get tips and adjust their curriculum to make it bespoke for their needs.

The schools are also excited about the possibility of comparing it with KS1 and KS2 because of the standardised element of the feedback. They have been able to show monitoring visit teams, or Ofsted, the data and talk through the data clearly by using both the BASE objective data and the APS.

We have used BASE for two years now and it's a really robust way of assessing the children. Assessing with BASE over the initial two week period and then taking time to get to know the children makes it a far less intensive way of assessing and allows the teachers to really get to know the children.