Northern Ireland
Curriculum

Prere Q uisite Skills (Q Skills)
Building towards Level 1 of
the Cross-Curricular Skills

Non-Statutory
Guidance

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Rationale – Prerequisite Skills (Q Skills)

The Q Skills are a non-statutory assessment resource for teachers and classroom assistants. You can use them to assess the cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT for pupils, aged 3 to 19 years, working below Level 1 of the Northern Ireland Curriculum Levels of Progression. Teachers in mainstream schools, learning support units and special schools can use the Q Skills with pupils who may benefit from this form of assessment.

The Q Skills provide a broad and inclusive framework for assessing pupils with mild, moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties. They take into account age, cognitive ability, learning difficulties and other significant complex needs.

The requirements for Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT, outlined in the Q Skills, align with the mainstream Levels of Progression. We have broken these requirements down into five skill areas (Q1 to Q5) and used a continuum of learning statements to describe them:

Q1 Experience	pupil is present during an activity but shows minimal response;
Q2 Respond	pupil shows signs of enjoyment, surprise, frustration or dissatisfaction;
Q3 Engage	pupil shows interest and enthusiasm, communicated through body language, focused looking, or listening, and redirects attention when the activity ends;
Q4 Actively participate	pupil shares, takes turns and anticipates familiar events; and
Q5 Consolidate	pupil combines learning and generalises skills, knowledge, concepts and understanding, relating to curricular experiences.

The Q Skills provide a common structure and language for schools and services to assess the skills of pupils working below Level 1. They also provide:

- consistency of approach;
- age-appropriate learning experiences and contexts for learning;
- a range of rich learning experiences;
- support for teachers to write highly specific Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets; and
- contexts for teachers to provide a variety of resources and learning situations for pupils to experience, learn, interact and communicate.

You can track pupils' progress in each skill area by moving horizontally across the Q Skills (from Q1 to Q5). You can also indicate their progress by decreasing the level of support they need from adults to achieve each Q Skill.

You can also demonstrate pupils' progress vertically, by increasing the breadth of their learning experiences and activity-based learning, ensuring that tasks are meaningful, purposeful and age appropriate. For pupils with more complex needs, you could evidence progress as a 'broadening of skills, knowledge, understanding or awareness' (Male, D. 2000, page 10[1]). For example, a pupil may display the same skill to the same standard but in different contexts rather than by forward progression. Alternatively, they may exhibit a greater willingness to experience new learning contexts. It is important to note that pupils with special educational needs (SEN) may present strengths in some areas of learning and significant deficits in others. Using the Q Skills for pupil assessment helps you to report accurately on their strengths and areas for development, instead of using a 'best fit' model. For example, a pupil may demonstrate skills at Q5 in one aspect of Communication but at Q3 in another.

All pupils are entitled to equality of opportunity and have a right to high quality learning experiences. You should give them a motivating, interesting and broad curriculum. You can do this by drawing content from the real world and using purposeful and meaningful experiences to make connections in their learning.

Many pupils with SEN have fragmented and unsystematic patterns of learning. Their acquisition of knowledge may be delayed. They might need help in processes that others develop naturally. Although their rate of academic development may be slow, this does not mean they will not make progress. Like everyone else, they will have strengths and deficits in their development.

We need to recognise that some pupils may not make horizontal progress at the same rate as their peers. They may need time and wide experiences to consolidate their learning and apply it in meaningful circumstances. This is vertical progress.

Vertical progress involves:
- reinforcement of learning;
- constant repetition;
- individualised work;
- specific pace of delivery linked to each pupil's learning style;
- acknowledgement that pupils may have difficulty making the leap from the concrete to the abstract;
- support in functioning in a group situation; and
- generalisation of skills across different situations and using a variety of resources.

[1] British Journal of Special Education, Vol. 27 pp. 6–12

Assessment Advice

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Assessment is part of the planning, teaching and learning cycle. You should use evidence of learning, in a range of settings and contexts, throughout the school year to assess pupils' progress. Effective assessment identifies pupils' individual strengths and needs and provides information about pupil progress.

The Q Skills provide an assessment framework for teachers of pupils, with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are working below Level 1 of the Northern Ireland Curriculum Levels of Progression. The Q Skills allow you to assess pupils' skills from the earliest stages of cognitive development and help to progress them towards Level 1. They help you to assess pupils' individual needs, enabling you to inform planning and improve teaching and learning.

Using the Q Skills will help you to:
- make reliable and consistent judgements about your pupils' progress;
- highlight where to make improvements to the teaching and learning of pupils with SEN;
- develop dialogue with other teachers and professionals;
- share practice; and
- report consistently to parents and others.

Assessment Policy

When developing your school's assessment policy, consider the following points:
- purpose of assessment;
- how to assess pupils;
- when/how often to assess pupils;
- record keeping;
- target setting, for example:
    - School Development Plans; and
    - Individual Education Plans;
- sharing assessment information:
    - with pupils;
    - in school;
    - across educational establishments;
    - with parents/guardians; or
    - with other agencies;
- standardisation and moderation in school; and
- the role of an assessment co-ordinator/team.

Planning for Progression

To enable pupils to progress through the Q Skills, it is essential to plan experiences that will help them to develop the required skills.

Encourage pupils to develop new skills by offering:

- a broad and balanced curriculum so that they receive a variety of experiences to promote their learning;
- experiences that value various outcomes as appropriate;
- challenges and extension within activities;
- consolidation exercises; and
- a suitable range of materials and resources to meet their needs.

You can achieve this through:

- careful planning, flexibility, ongoing review and evaluation;
- observations, evaluations and monitoring progress to assist pupils in planning for progression;
- meeting individual needs by acknowledging that pupils develop, learn and progress at different rates;
- recognising the needs of individual pupils and ensuring their efforts are valued; and
- differentiation of support provided such as resources, physical support, prompts or modelling.

Effective Observations

All members of staff should carry out effective observations to assess pupils' progress through the Q Skills. These observations give staff opportunities to select data from live situations to track the complex detail of pupils' learning. Effective observation also provides detailed insight into pupils' knowledge and application of skills.

You can use observations to review how pupils:

• respond to their learning environment;

• engage in a range of activities;

• use resources and equipment; and

• interact with staff and peers.

You can record your observations by:

• using formal observation forms/recording sheets;

• writing short anecdotal observations on sticky notes;

• taking photographs; or

• recording video clips (enabling staff to see things they might have missed).

Effective observations allow staff to:

• identify pupils' responses in a variety of situations and learning environments;

• understand and consider current interests, appropriate learning styles, strengths and areas for development;

• highlight pupils' achievements;

• identify levels of support required; and

• develop records of learning and progress.

Support and Prompts

Use appropriate levels of support/prompting to encourage individual pupils to achieve the relevant Q Skill. This support/prompt may help pupils to reduce their frustration, stress and anxiety.

Where appropriate, you should reduce levels of support over time to:

• avoid prompt dependency; and

• achieve the best possible level of independence.

Try to avoid unintentional prompting such as:

• mouthing the answer;

• looking at the correct response; or

• leaning towards the correct response.

Support/prompts to help pupils to achieve the desired response can be:

• Physical – such as hand over hand, hand on wrist or hand on elbow;

• Modelling – demonstrating a behaviour; this support is best suited to pupils who learn through imitation and can attend to the behaviour you are demonstrating;

• Positional – place the target item closer to the individual;

• Gestural – a physical gesture such as pointing;

• Visual – a cue such as object, symbol, sign or picture;

• Verbal – a vocalisation, or simple instruction; and

• Independence – no support/prompt required.

When teaching a skill, use supports/prompts based on the pupil's individual needs in relation to the specific skill they are trying to achieve.

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Alternative Methods of Communication

Use alternative methods of communication to accurately assess pupils' responses and gauge where they have progressed to in the Q Skills.

Pupils with learning disabilities or communication difficulties may struggle to make themselves understood and to understand others. This can provoke intense frustration, challenging behaviour and isolation and act as a barrier to achievement. Using alternative methods of communication helps pupils to express their needs.

Receptive communication means understanding what someone is communicating to you. Expressive communication means conveying a message to someone else. You can use a range of strategies to support receptive or expressive communication, including:

- **Makaton** – a communication system that uses various methods, including speech, gesture, facial expression, eye contact, body language, signs, symbols and words. For example, to ask a child if he or she would like a drink, you sign the word drink and also say 'drink', raise your eyebrows and show the symbol. Each gesture or sign reinforces the other. In this multi-modal approach, words are referred to as concepts. Unlike sign language for the deaf, Makaton does not presuppose knowledge of letters, the alphabet or reading words. For more information, visit www.makaton.org

- **Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)** – an approach that develops early expressive communication skills, using objects/pictures. Go to www.pecs.com for further information.

- **Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children (TEACCH)** – an approach that uses visual structure to reduce stress and promote learning for pupils with autism by making their environment more easily understood. For more information, visit www.teacch.com

- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)** – a strategy for communication that includes signing, facial expression, objects, pictures, symbols or using digital devices. It offers an alternative to, or replacement for, spoken language. You can find more information at www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Meeting the Needs of Pupils with Special Educational Needs

The Department of Education has published guidance documents to help schools to implement strategies to improve the teaching and learning of pupils with SEN. These strategies include supporting pupils to access the curriculum, appropriate resources, environmental and social factors. These guidelines are not an exhaustive list and are interchangeable between categories of SEN. You can find the *Good Practice Guidelines* at:
www.selb.org/specialeducation/Documents/GoodPracticeGuidelines.pdf

The Department of Education has also developed a resource file about effective practice for schools to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. You can find *A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs* at www.deni.gov.uk/updated_resource_file.pdf

Glossary

1:1 Correspondence – an exact match between two sets

Two Factor Pattern – an arrangement with two elements such as red bead, blue bead, red bead, blue bead

A set – a defined collection of objects

Actively participate – anticipate, join in, take turns, share, take part in or comment on an event

App – a piece of software that can run on the internet, computer, phone or other electronic device; an abbreviation of application

Digital devices – items that use digital technology such as a digital camera, mobile phone, e-reader or camcorder

Encounter/Experience – be present during an activity where teachers present stimuli to pupils, ensuring they have an opportunity to engage at any level

Engage – direct focus and attention, listen and look, show interest and recall

Eye pointing – direct eye contact to a person, picture or object in response to a question, when requesting and/or making a choice

Imitate – copy or attempt to copy actions

Independently exchange – bring a picture, or object, to an adult or peer to make a request or answer a question, without any prompts, usually associated with PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

Intermittently – responding or focusing attention at intervals without sustained focus or attention, happening occasionally, stopping for a while and then starting again

Mixed media – tools and textures such as paint, pens, sand, dough, chalk, clay, ink stampers, interactive tools (interactive whiteboard) etc.

Object permanence – understanding that objects continue to exist even when they cannot be seen, heard or touched

One criterion – a characteristic of a group applied for sorting, for example red or not red

Parallel play – a form of play where pupils are in close proximity to each other but involved in individual activities

Pattern – an arrangement of repeated or corresponding parts; things that are arranged following a rule

Pictorial representation – a method of presenting information in visual form

Recall – the ability to remember information or experiences

Respond/Interact – pupils show attention, surprise, enjoyment or dissatisfaction in response to activities.

Roamer – an educational robot designed to teach sequencing, estimation and problem solving. Pupils enter commands, using directional keys that move the roamer in the direction indicated.

Glossary (continued)

Sensory stimuli – objects, sounds, lights, food, air currents, textures etc. that stimulate the senses

Social sight vocabulary – words, symbols and signs used widely in the environment such as toilets, entrance, welcome, fire exit, stop, danger, no entry etc.

Subset – a set within another set

Switch – hardware that pupils may use to activate a range of equipment and software such as cause and effect toys, household appliances, sensory equipment, etc. Pupils may also use switches as augmentative communication devices.

Task board – a sequence of clear instructions that break down tasks into simple components to promote task completion

TOBI – true object based icon, this is a clear 2D representation of a 3D object, which some pupils may find easier to read than a picture. It can be a line drawing or scanned photograph cut out in the shape of the item it represents.

Touch technology – technology that includes a computer display screen that is also an input device. The screens are sensitive to touch. A user interacts with the computer by touching pictures or words on the screen.

Videoconferencing – a form of electronic communication that enables groups of pupils at different locations to communicate

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a pupil's learning experience by including computers and the internet in the learning process. This may include pupil tracking, online support for both teacher and pupil, electronic communication (email, threaded discussions, chat, videoconferencing, web publishing), and internet links to resources outside the curriculum.

Visual timetable – also known as a schedule, this may comprise a sequence of objects, TOBIs, pictures, photos, line drawings and words that communicate activities and events taking place in a given timescale.

Visual tracking – pupil follows a moving stimulus with his/her eyes.

Vocalise – any sounds or word approximations (a pupil can make vocalisations as a response to another person, or to self-stimulate regardless of the presence of others)

Work system – a systematic and organised presentation of tasks and materials that visually communicates at least four pieces of information to the pupil, for example the tasks/steps the pupil must do, how many tasks/steps the pupil must complete, how the pupil knows he/she has finished, what the pupil must do when he/she has finished.

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