

To: Headteachers of Primary and Special
Schools (Primary), Short Stay Schools
(Primary), and Support Services

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Our ref: LSES/MT/EW/JB/CM
Date: 06 January 2026

Dear Colleague,

Assessment Update: January 2026

Firstly, a Happy New Year to you all! I hope that you had an enjoyable and restful break over the festive period. I am writing to you to provide you with a brief update in relation to assessment for 2025/2026.

The NCA Portal

Over the coming terms you will be using the NCA Portal on several occasions (including Access Arrangements and completing pupil registration of KS2 SATS). I would recommend that you check your login credentials/passwords etc now to ensure you have access. You may also need to create additional logins for senior staff if new colleagues have joined your school.

As a reminder, to sign into the NCA Portal:

- enter your username (this is your email address) and password.
- select the 'Sign in' button at the bottom of the page.

If you don't have an NCA Portal account yet, ask a user within your organisation who has 'account manager' permission to create one for you. For school users, this is usually the headteacher. You will need to provide your full name, email address and information about any [user permissions](#) you need.

The NCA Portal uses multi-factor authentication (MFA), which is required only on your first sign in of each day. Once you select the 'Sign in' button, you will receive an email with a 6-digit verification code. To complete your sign in, please enter this on the system when prompted. Note that you can only use each code once. The following video demonstrates how to access the NCA Portal, including additional information on how MFA works: [Using the NCA Portal](#)

If you have begun a new Headship and do not have access or login credentials, then I would recommend contacting the Standards and Testing Agency as a matter of urgency. This can be done by emailing assessments@education.gov.uk

There are 3 different permission levels for school users:

- 'School account management' allows the user to create or remove user accounts and amend user permissions for the school. We recommend that headteachers, or members of staff with delegated authority, have this level of permission.
 - 'School General User' is the standard account that allows users to view all tasks, except for those involving access arrangements or creating and deleting user accounts. We recommend that account managers give this level of permission to all school users who require access to the NCA Portal.
 - 'School access arrangements' gives users permission to make and view applications for access arrangements. These applications may contain sensitive information about pupils, so schools should consider carefully who needs to have this level of access.
- Schools can have up to 7 users in total but are restricted to a maximum of 2 'School account manager' users.
 - If 'School account manager' users need to view or complete additional tasks beyond managing user accounts, they will also need to add 'School general user' and 'School access arrangements' permissions to their account, as appropriate. Account managers can update their own permissions.

To ensure you receive emails from the NCA Portal, please add the following email addresses to your safe senders list:

- assessments@education.gov.uk
- assessments@service.education.gov.uk
- no-reply.STA@service.education.gov.uk

Access Arrangements 2025/26

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) released the Access and Arrangements Guidance for KS2 in October 2025. These are key documents to be read by Headteachers, and the teachers of the year groups involved in statutory assessment.

They detail guidance for applying for Access Arrangements at KS2 and the School based procedures that you can put into place.

KS2 Access Arrangements can be found here:

[2026 key stage 2 access arrangements guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2026-key-stage-2-access-arrangements-guidance)

Key stage 2 tests: varying the test timetable can be found here:

[Key stage 2 tests: varying the test timetable - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-varying-the-test-timetable)



Support from The Lancashire Assessment Team

As in previous years we have put together a selection of briefing/training sessions that cover the appropriate use and application of Access Arrangements. Details can be seen below:

[ASS132 - Access Arrangements for the End of Key Stage 2: Statutory Assessments in 2026](#)

This half day course will look at access arrangements in key stage 2 for 2026. It will consider all the guidelines from the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) on the use of access arrangements including rest breaks, transcripts, readers and amanuenses. Discussion and guidance will be given around good practice utilised in the organisation of Access Arrangements.

[ASS133 - Access Arrangements for the End of Key Stage 2: Statutory Assessments in 2026. Breakfast Briefings for Experienced Headteachers](#)

These Breakfast Briefings will look at access arrangements in key stage 2 for 2026. These will consider updated guidelines from the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) on the use of access arrangements including rest breaks, transcripts, readers and amanuenses. Discussion and guidance will be given around good practice utilised in the organisation of Access Arrangements.

In addition to the above training sessions, if there are any questions or concerns in relation to the Assessment information released or any other Assessment issues, then please do not hesitate to contact me directly on Mike.Thompson@lancashire.gov.uk or by calling 07717346808 or Elaine Williams Elaine.Williams@lancashire.gov.uk or by calling 07977367408 if you want to discuss specific scenarios.

Statutory Participation in Trialling of national assessments.

STA have released details about statutory trialling of national tests. A selection of schools are chosen for this every year as part of the test development process. It is mandatory to participate if chosen. Approximate timings for KS1 and KS2 are April to June and Reception Baseline is September and October. Further details are available here: [Statutory participation in trialling of national curriculum assessments - GOV.UK](#)

KS1

KS1 teacher assessment and tests are now optional however STA have produced the full range of tests and guidance materials as in previous years. Schools will be able to download the papers from 1 May on the NCA Portal. The guidance documents can be accessed using these links. The recent National Curriculum and Assessment Review recommended that schools take part in optional assessments at the end of KS1 so we would suggest considering this in school and deciding on what approach would be effective on your setting.

[2026 Optional Key Stage 1 Teacher Assessment Guidance](#)

[2026 Optional Key Stage 1 Tests Access Arrangements Guidance](#)

[2026 Optional Key Stage 1 Tests Guidance](#)

Schools may now choose when and how to assess children at the end of Key Stage 1 and to conduct any assessments in the way that best suits their needs.



The Teacher Assessment Guidance states that moderation remains best practice and where possible to moderate wider than in school. To facilitate this, we have put together a range of moderation sessions to support Key Stage 1 teachers throughout the year.

The first of these are half day moderation sessions which are available throughout February and March. The focus will be on bringing children's writing from your school and identifying the next steps to support them moving on.

[ASS160 KS1 Mid-Year Moderation - Supporting Teacher Judgements](#)

We will also be offering half day sessions in July where there will be the opportunity to moderate and discuss writing

[ASS801 End of Key Stage 1 Moderation Discussions.](#)

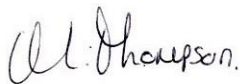
Finally, there will also be full day sessions in June where there will be the opportunity to moderate reading, writing and maths.

[ASS185 Year 2 - Making and Moderating Judgements to Support Optional End of KS1 Assessment.](#)

If you have any general queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Professional Support Team Helpdesk on 01772 531555 or pst@lancashire.gov.uk

Alternatively, email me at mike.thompson@lancashire.gov.uk or Elaine Williams at elaine.williams@lancashire.gov.uk

Yours sincerely



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Assessment and Curriculum Coordinator

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