

Assessments in schools today

In this post, we explore how assessment is conducted in schools across England during the 2024-25 academic year. Our focus is on high-level summative assessments, the types typically recorded in school databases and shared with governors, trusts, and parents.

Assessment in primary schools

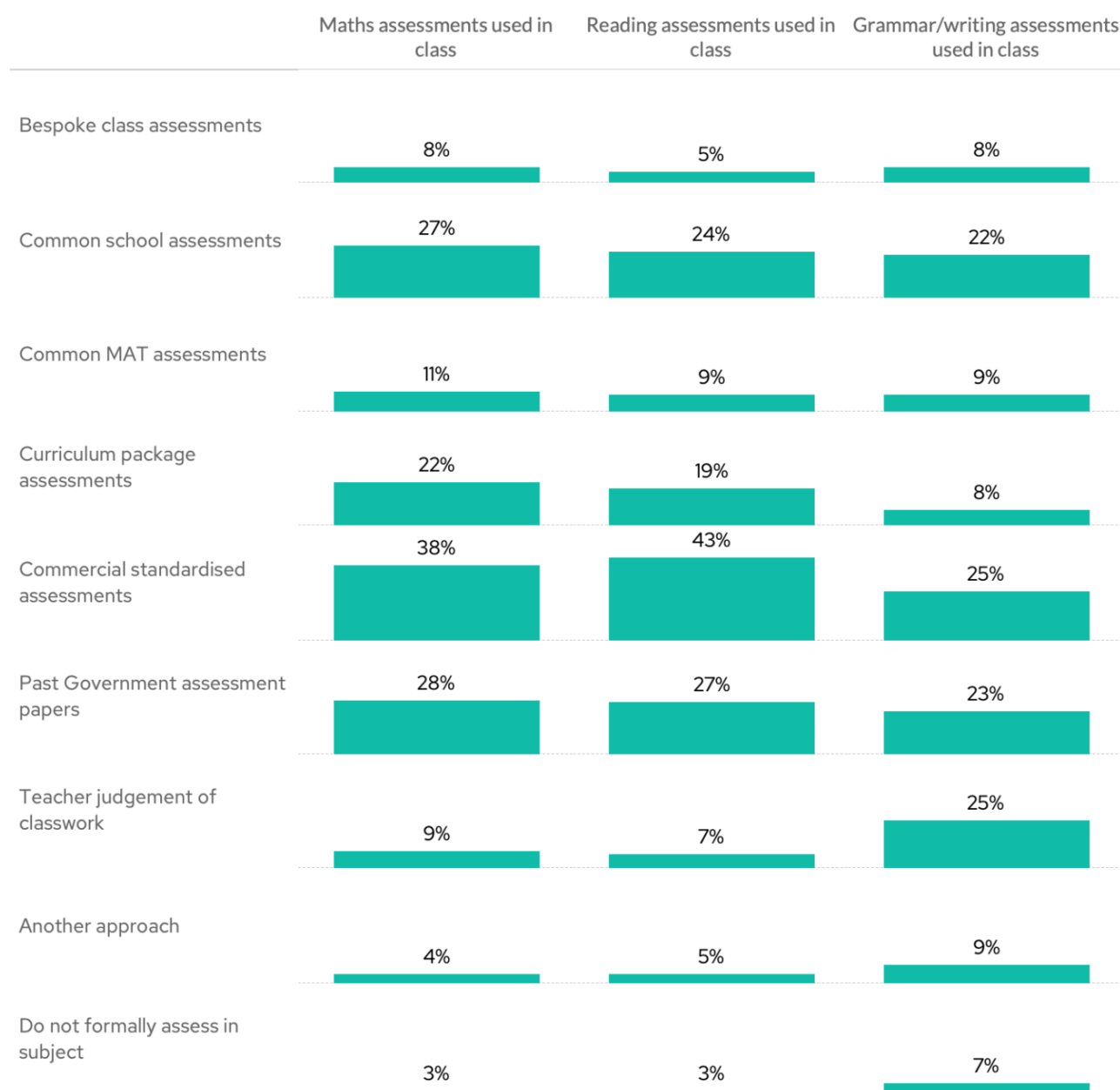
The majority of primary schools rely on externally sourced assessments for core subjects. Across all subjects, a clear pattern emerges: in Reception classes, formal assessments are least common, with many schools relying solely on the class teacher's judgement of students' work. By Year 6, however, the use of past SATs papers to assess students becomes widespread.

External assessments, whether shared MAT assessments, commercial standardised assessments or curriculum provider assessments, are extensively used in primary schools. They are actually least used in Year 6 (64% of teachers report using them in at least one subject) and Reception (70%). They are most used in Year 5 (82%). However, as the table below shows, the mix of assessment used by subject changes as students progress through the school.

External assessments are most commonly used in maths, with around half of teachers opting for commercial standardised assessments and one in five using assessments tied to their curriculum package. In reading, curriculum-linked assessments are more prevalent in Reception and Key Stage 1, likely due to their connection with phonics programmes. For older students, however, over half of teachers use commercial standardised assessments.

		Yr R (N=293)	Yr 1 (N=128)	Yr 2 (N=236)	Yr 3 (N=215)	Yr 4 (N=313)	Yr 5 (N=271)	Yr 6 (N=628)
What is the primary method you use to assess annual or termly attainment in **maths** in your class?	Bespoke class assessments	20%	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%	6%
	Common school assessments	18%	28%	34%	30%	31%	35%	19%
	Common MAT assessments	8%	7%	16%	14%	14%	11%	8%
	Curriculum package assessments	20%	27%	26%	25%	21%	20%	20%
	Commercial standardised assessments	16%	26%	39%	45%	50%	51%	38%
	Past Government assessment papers	13%	8%	34%	13%	12%	17%	61%
	Teacher judgement of classwork	21%	19%	7%	10%	6%	4%	3%
	Another approach	8%	6%	4%	5%	6%	4%	2%
	Do not formally assess in subject	14%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%
What is the primary method you use to assess annual or termly attainment in **reading** in your class?	Bespoke class assessments	10%	5%	3%	5%	3%	3%	5%
	Common school assessments	20%	16%	27%	30%	30%	26%	18%
	Common MAT assessments	8%	9%	7%	14%	14%	9%	7%
	Curriculum package assessments	41%	34%	25%	15%	12%	14%	14%
	Commercial standardised assessments	26%	29%	38%	54%	55%	56%	37%
	Past Government assessment papers	12%	14%	29%	10%	9%	10%	63%
	Teacher judgement of classwork	8%	22%	12%	3%	7%	5%	4%
	Another approach	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	6%	2%
	Do not formally assess in subject	6%	3%	4%	2%	4%	1%	2%
What is the primary method you use to assess annual or termly attainment in **grammar or writing** in your class?	Bespoke class assessments	15%	8%	6%	9%	3%	8%	7%
	Common school assessments	19%	21%	29%	21%	27%	26%	18%
	Common MAT assessments	8%	9%	8%	13%	12%	9%	6%
	Curriculum package assessments	11%	8%	6%	6%	9%	9%	7%
	Commercial standardised assessments	14%	15%	17%	29%	34%	35%	24%
	Past Government assessment papers	10%	5%	17%	6%	8%	9%	58%
	Teacher judgement of classwork	28%	46%	30%	31%	27%	22%	16%
	Another approach	8%	10%	13%	10%	6%	9%	11%
	Do not formally assess in subject	18%	6%	8%	4%	7%	7%	3%

The table below shows the overall proportion of teachers who say they use each type of assessment in their class.



Beyond the core subjects of English and maths, external assessments are rarely used in primary schools. Even in science, fewer than 10% of teachers utilise a shared assessment.

Do you use external assessments that are shared across multiple schools for any of the following subjects in your class?

	Yr R (N=230)	Yr 1 (N=110)	Yr 2 (N=212)	Yr 3 (N=194)	Yr 4 (N=273)	Yr 5 (N=234)	Yr 6 (N=555)
Science	6%	6%	6%	9%	9%	6%	9%
Art and Design	1%	2%	1%	2%	3%	1%	2%
Computing	4%	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%
Design and Technology (..	3%	5%		3%	4%	1%	2%
Geography	2%	2%	1%	4%	5%	2%	3%
History	2%	3%	1%	3%	6%	2%	3%
Religious Education (RE)	4%	2%	1%	4%	3%	3%	4%
Modern languages	2%	2%		4%	4%	1%	3%
Music	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Physical Education (PE)	3%	2%	3%	3%	3%	1%	2%
None of the above	89%	89%	91%	86%	87%	91%	87%

NB. Where teachers teach multiple year groups, results shown under the oldest year group.

Assessment in secondary schools

The organisation of assessments varies significantly by subject. Formal end-of-year exams are most common in Year 10 for core academic subjects, with around 90% of teachers reporting that their schools conduct these assessments. In younger year groups, the approach is more varied. For instance, between 50% and 60% of English and humanities teachers report holding end-of-Year 7 exams.

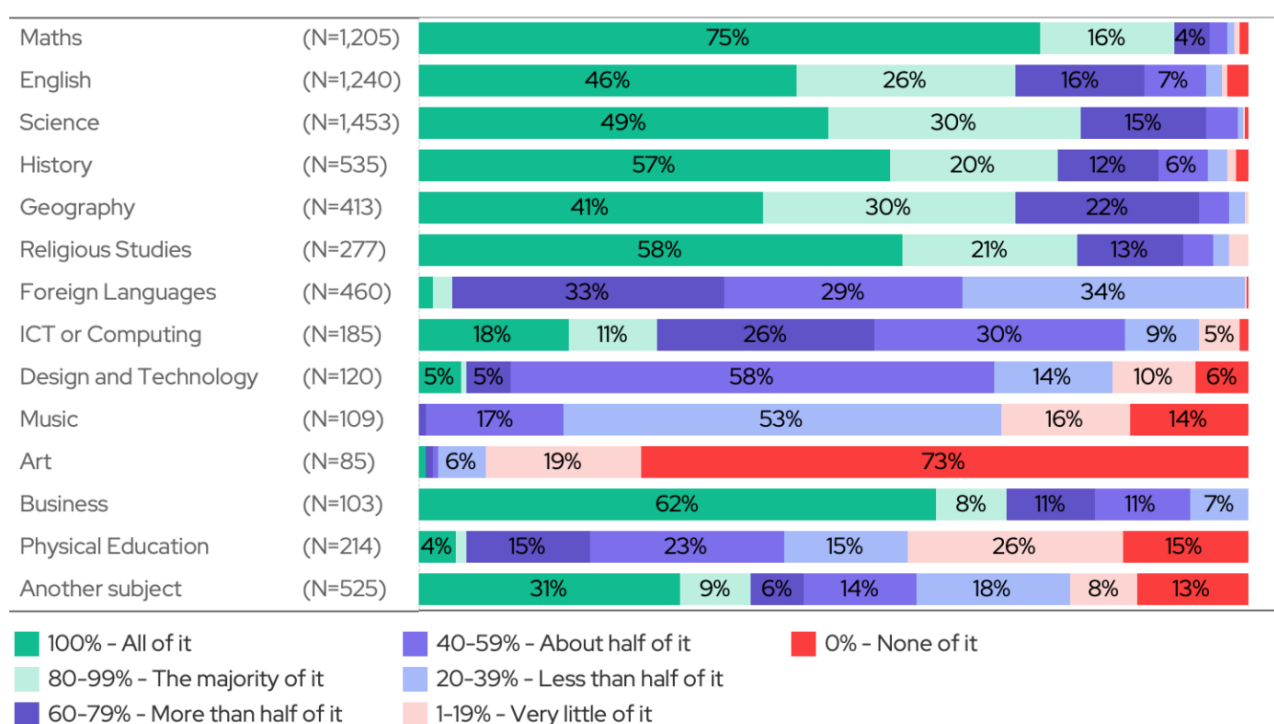
In smaller curriculum subjects, end-of-Year 10 exams are often held to prepare students for their GCSEs the following year. However, only about a third of teachers conduct formal exams in these subjects during Key Stage 3.

In the main subject you teach, which of these year groups sit a formal end of year exam (or similar formal performance assessment)?

		Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	None
Maths	(N=1,098)	78%	81%	86%	92%	4%
English	(N=1,124)	57%	59%	67%	86%	10%
Science	(N=1,284)	69%	73%	80%	92%	5%
History	(N=492)	50%	51%	60%	86%	11%
Geography	(N=368)	57%	60%	65%	91%	6%
Religious Studies	(N=251)	54%	54%	59%	88%	11%
Foreign Languages	(N=417)	61%	65%	66%	88%	7%
ICT or Computing	(N=166)	42%	42%	50%	80%	18%
Design and Technology	(N=104)	38%	38%	50%	80%	14%
Music	(N=107)	38%	38%	41%	72%	23%
Art	(N=78)	34%	35%	43%	56%	34%
Business	(N=85)	12%	15%	22%	93%	7%
Physical Education	(N=182)	25%	26%	31%	64%	33%
Another subject	(N=405)	32%	34%	39%	69%	27%

This variation in examination practices partly reflects differences in how well curriculum knowledge and skills can be assessed through written exams. While maths teachers generally believe their subject can be almost entirely evaluated in this way, teachers in most other subjects view written exams as an incomplete measure of student mastery. Subjects where written exams are perceived to be particularly misaligned with the curriculum include foreign languages, computing, design and technology, music, art, and physical education.

What proportion of your main subject's curriculum can be effectively assessed through a written assessment conducted in an exam hall?



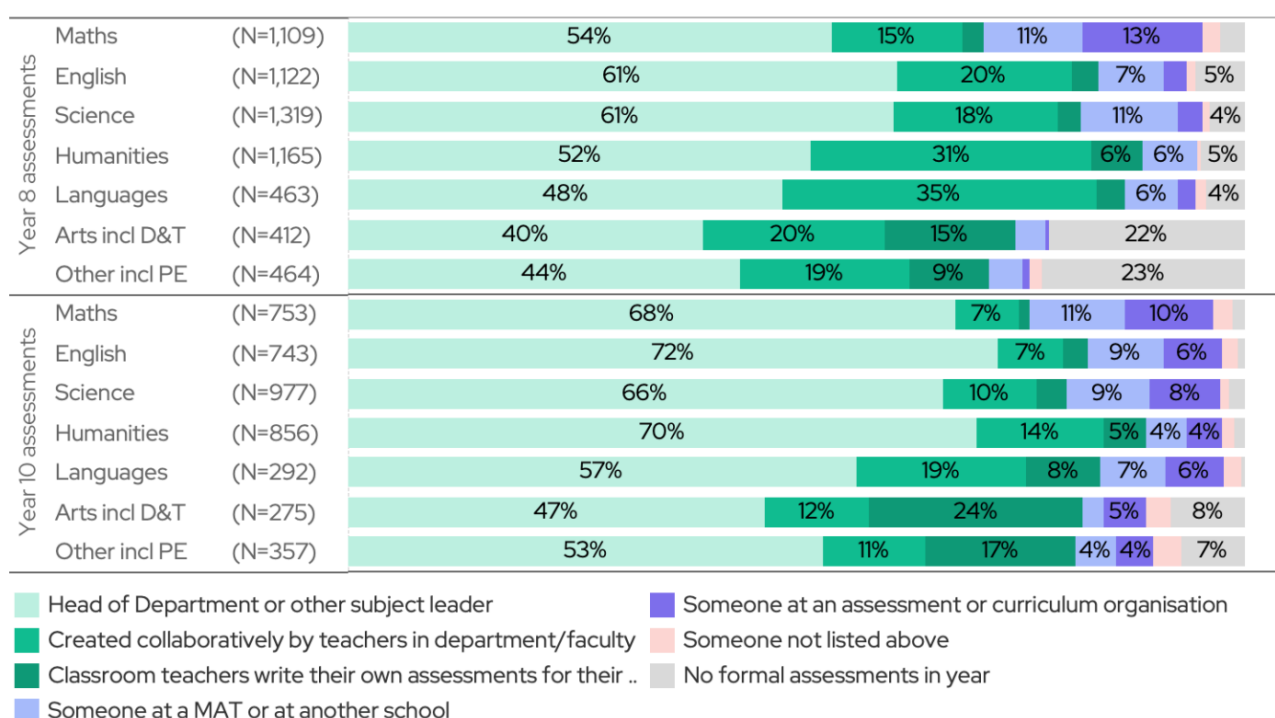
As students progress through secondary school, assessments increasingly shift from regular classroom settings to dedicated examination halls with formal timetables, likely to prepare them for the structure of GCSE assessments. For instance, 24% of maths exams in Year 8 are conducted according to a special examination timetable, compared to 82% in Year 10. In Year 8, teacher judgement of classwork remains a significant component of end-of-year assessments in English, humanities, and many smaller subjects in numerous schools.

How are students assessed at the end of Years 8 and 10?

			Exam/test - sat in classroom during normal lesson time	Exam - sat outside lessons on a special timetable	Formal performance assessment or observation in school	Teacher judgement based on class/home work	An end of year assessment students complete at home	No formal end of year assessment
Year 8	Maths	(N=1,073)	70%	24%	2%	12%	0%	5%
	English	(N=1,083)	53%	20%	6%	24%	0%	16%
	Science	(N=1,239)	61%	27%	2%	12%	0%	11%
	History	(N=477)	52%	14%	6%	22%	1%	21%
	Geography	(N=362)	56%	18%	4%	16%	2%	21%
	Religious Studies	(N=250)	53%	20%	5%	17%	2%	18%
	Foreign Languages	(N=415)	64%	19%	4%	12%		17%
	ICT or Computing	(N=160)	41%	7%	12%	37%		31%
	Design and Technology	(N=100)	33%	10%	10%	49%	1%	19%
	Music	(N=107)	30%	8%	29%	40%	1%	34%
	Art	(N=76)	28%	8%	17%	53%		19%
	Physical Education	(N=180)	15%	7%	16%	53%	2%	32%
Year 10	Maths	(N=763)	17%	82%	3%	6%	0%	3%
	English	(N=767)	21%	78%	4%	9%	0%	5%
	Science	(N=947)	17%	83%	1%	7%	0%	2%
	History	(N=357)	24%	76%	4%	12%	1%	4%
	Geography	(N=272)	20%	82%	1%	7%	1%	2%
	Religious Studies	(N=187)	20%	80%	2%	5%	0%	3%
	Foreign Languages	(N=269)	35%	77%	2%	6%		2%
	ICT or Computing	(N=119)	25%	65%	5%	14%	1%	9%
	Design and Technology	(N=80)	14%	60%	8%	20%		14%
	Music	(N=98)	31%	54%	35%	27%	1%	4%
	Art	(N=56)	9%	24%	8%	51%	1%	19%
	Physical Education	(N=97)	20%	52%	15%	20%		12%

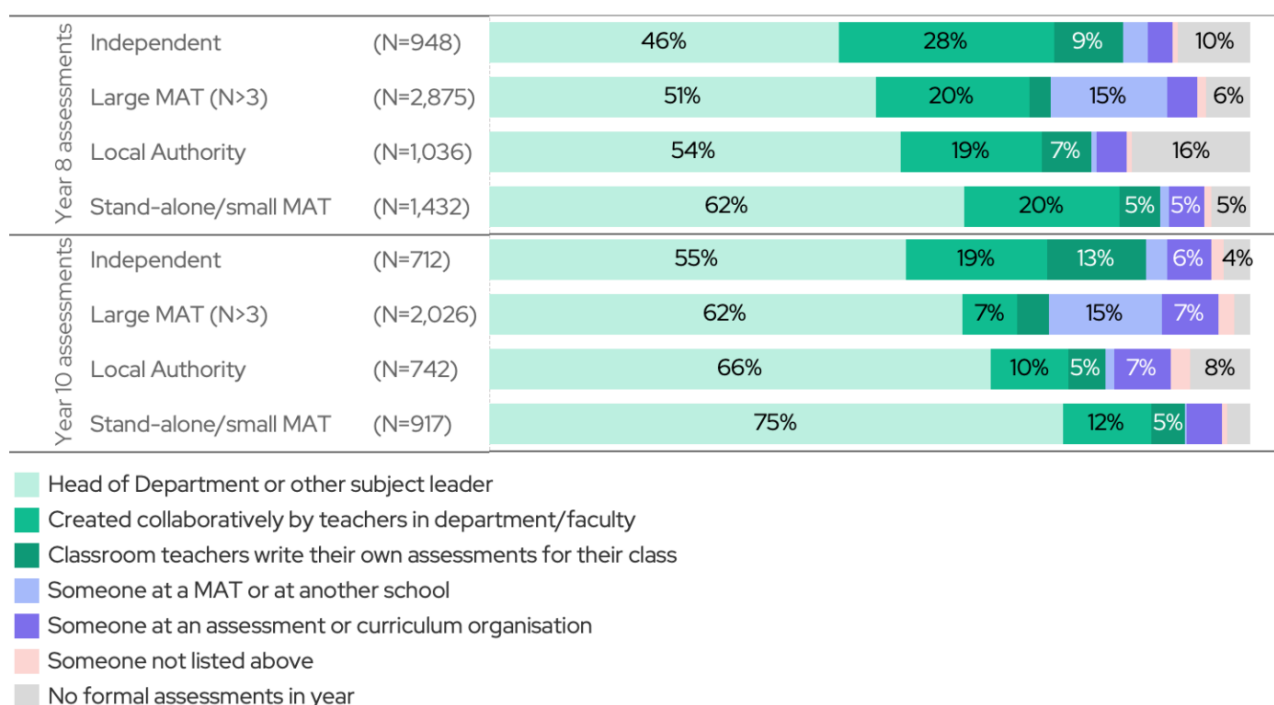
Across the country, most formal assessments are created in-house, typically by the Head of Department or through collaboration among teachers. External assessments are most commonly used in maths, with 24% of Year 8 assessments and 21% of Year 10 assessments written externally.

In the main subject you teach, who writes the formal assessments that are used in Years 8 and 10?



The internal creation of assessments remains common, even within multi-academy trusts. In trusts with more than three schools, only 15% of teachers report using assessments created by the trust or shared with staff from other schools.

In the main subject you teach, who writes the formal assessments that are used in Years 8 and 10?



The communication of assessment performance varies by subject and evolves as students progress through school. By Year 10, most subjects report attainment using grades, with half of teachers also providing students with a predicted GCSE grade based on their assessment performance.

In Year 8, nearly half of students across all subjects receive simple descriptors indicating whether they are meeting expectations. For more detailed feedback, subjects such as maths, science, languages, and humanities tend to use percentage marks on tests. Standardised metrics, such as scaled or standardised scores, are rarely employed.

In the main subject you teach, how are formal assessments communicated to students in Years 8 and 10?

		Descriptor, e.g. Above expectations, below average etc.	Raw mark	Percentage	Grade (letter or numerical) - representing current attainment	Grade (letter or numerical) - representing predicted GCSE a..	Scaled score	Another approach to communicating results
Year 8	English	(N=1,026)	46%	21%	31%	31%	8%	12%
	Maths	(N=1,056)	40%	47%	55%	26%	5%	6%
	Science	(N=1,226)	42%	39%	57%	33%	6%	5%
	Humanities	(N=1,083)	44%	29%	46%	30%	6%	8%
	Languages	(N=429)	41%	31%	51%	30%	5%	7%
	Arts incl D&T	(N=339)	47%	16%	31%	36%	5%	9%
	Other incl PE	(N=371)	50%	20%	32%	38%	6%	4%
Year 10	English	(N=751)	14%	26%	19%	81%	2%	2%
	Maths	(N=759)	7%	34%	33%	79%	2%	2%
	Science	(N=959)	12%	31%	36%	83%	2%	1%
	Humanities	(N=848)	8%	25%	27%	80%	2%	3%
	Languages	(N=293)	10%	24%	32%	77%	3%	2%
	Arts incl D&T	(N=270)	11%	14%	17%	69%	3%	5%
	Other incl PE	(N=340)	12%	21%	22%	72%	3%	4%

(This post can be referenced as: Allen, R. (2025, January 3). Assessments in schools today. Teacher Tapp blogpost. <https://teachertapp.com/uk/articles/assessments-in-schools-today/>)