

Child Studies

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Practical Activity

It must be acknowledged that excellent work is done by teachers to identify the specific features in the task design and match these to the performance standards assessment sheet for students.

It is pleasing to report that almost all teachers and students place the assessment performance standards sheet with clear sections and specific features at the front of each task, thus assisting the teaching and learning process.

Assessment tasks for this assessment type should be designed as *either* a research task with investigation and critical analysis specific features *or* an action plan with problem-solving specific features; there should not be a combination of both within the one task.

Careful task design is critical to the understanding and success of all students in a class. The majority of teachers clearly named the task, identified the area of study, and connected the teaching and learning through the task design. Although there was not a considerable amount of new tasks this year, it was interesting to see that some teachers had further developed tasks to suit their students, facilities, and resources. Teachers presented tasks and assessment in a clear format in most cases. Some continue to be very wordy, almost prescriptive, with some being quite challenging to follow. Teachers are encouraged to review the set of practical tasks as a progressive set where students are encouraged to present original discussions, decisions, and strategies. It is always good to see new tasks or tasks further developed to reflect new resources, contemporary issues, and trends related to the well-being of young children in a variety of settings, be that home, child care, pre-school, school, or other environments. It also must be noted that each task needs a practical application, as noted in the subject outline.

The research component is an in-depth investigation and critical analysis of issues and trends concerning the well-being of young children. It is not an opinion piece. There were some well-structured research tasks presented in which students had selected appropriate and relevant material and referenced it well. While many topics were appropriate for in-depth critical analysis within the word-count, others needed review to be manageable and clearly connected to the practical application. Students benefited from clear research questions that encouraged them to seek a range of resources instead of responding to yes/no questions.

Students who performed at the higher standard in action plan tasks had frequently used headings to address the specific problem-solving features. This made identifying problem-solving more evident, resulting in strong connections between decisions and implementation strategies. In some cases, presenting evidence as a table in the action plan did not allow for astute identification of factors involving problem-solving and higher levels of achievement. It has been noted that there is some overuse of additional material in tables which is often not discussed and puts the student work over the word-count. On the whole, students are making considered to sophisticated and well-informed decisions, and identifying a number of descriptive implementation strategies. Justifications were brief in some sets of student work while others were clear and very relevant. In a number of cases, the justification required further ‘teasing out’ to connect with the identified factors and problem-solving nature of the task. Some headings have been beneficial and appropriate strategies to guide student work. Most activities were appropriate to the age and stage of young children’s development and showed understanding of the importance of safe play.

Students benefited from creative tasks that offered opportunities to use initiative and problem-solving. In this task design, teachers supported students to interpret solutions in a variety of ways. Students have had a variety of practical experiences although a brochure, pamphlet, or PowerPoint presentation is not regarded as an appropriate practical activity where students can demonstrate their skills at the higher standard. In contrast, some students are doing far too much additional work beyond the scope of the task. Practical evidence sheets were often detailed with notes and photographs, which assisted in supporting the majority of teacher grades. These have significantly improved, with more students having better access to technologies. Those students who performed at the higher grade bands had explicitly linked their performance to the specific features. Teacher feedback on the practical supported students when it was thorough, when it included phrases from the specific features, and when it was tailored to the task. Students received valuable praise and suggestions for improvement to support the teaching and learning process. There were a number of practical activities with limited or no evidence of practical learning to support the grades given and this made confirmation of grades challenging. Some students included draft work, food orders, recipes, and patterns — these are considered distractors, not evidence of learning, and therefore should not be included. The evidence component is the place where students can retell what happened and, after this process, the evaluation is a reflection of the success and effectiveness of the practical application.

The evaluations were generally written, with very few oral or multimodal presentations. The vast majority included the specific feature E1 of the assessment design criteria for every evaluation. Some teachers only required the minimum number of two evaluations for the practical assessment. E1 was competently addressed by students. More frequently, when the E2 and E4 specific features were identified, the student evidence was less well written and generally at the lower standard. The E3 specific feature in some instances was rewarded by some teachers where, in fact, little discussion or evaluation was evident. The students who could connect the research and planning to the outcome of the practical application demonstrated skills at the higher standards. Basic description of what happened is achievement at the lower standard.

Teachers continue to find contemporary issues and trends about the health and well-being of young children. It was good to see a variety of tasks, some new, to enable students to meet the assessment design criteria specifically.

It was very good to see that the majority of students identified their word-count and stayed within the limits. Teachers are reminded to stop assessing a student’s work once it has reached the maximum allowed (500 words if written, 3 minutes if an oral presentation, or the equivalent time for a multimodal presentation).

Assessment Type 2: Group Activity

There appears to be an equal number of teachers who prefer two tasks to one for the group activity. It is important to remember that the assessment design criterion of investigation and critical analysis is not assessed in the group activity. Most teachers use one or two problem-solving specific features, being aware that a justification is not required. The majority of teachers included both collaboration specific features and there has been an improvement in students providing evidence of learning in regards to the practical and the collaboration, and in the individual evaluation.

Teachers have created a range of interesting and diverse opportunities for students to learn via the group activity. While play activity events with groups of young children were still popular, others organised learning resources and a variety of other activities. It is always pleasing to see the variety of group activities where students work together to achieve the outcomes.

The first part of a group activity is a group decision-making task and not an action plan. The group decision-making task is an important step for students to work together and make decisions and it requires a different format, as described in the subject outline. A number of students chose to use tables and notes in creative and strategic ways to explain decisions and implement strategies. This was a successful way to keep the group decision-making task within the word-count and at the higher grade band. Tables can be used successfully; however, the same 500-word limit applies.

Large and small groups defined manageable and memorable tasks closely connected to an area of study and children’s well-being. Group activities that were set for smaller groups with a number of elements tended to be better designed and allowed each of the students to demonstrate at the higher levels of the performance standards. The task instructions need to be clear so that each student submits the same copy of the ‘group decision-making’, individual evidence of learning, and an individual evaluation. Teachers are expected to check this at the assessment stage and support the moderation process. If student work is not as required on the task, then teachers must record this on the Variations — Moderation Materials form (see SACE website).

It was clear that the majority of students had followed through their decisions and implementation strategies during the pre-planning and practical application. Students have now embraced technologies and the responsibility to provide their own evidence of their work. There has been significant progress in the last year with students’ skills and pride to showcase their achievements when planning and collaborating as a group before and during the practical. An evidence scaffold/template which included photographs with explanations made it easier to confirm the collaboration grade. It is also important for students to realise that digital multimodal evidence is viewed at moderation and can provide a valuable insight to confirm teacher grades.

In the evaluation, students need to reflect on their own performance, the group activity, and the ability to work collaboratively at the planning and practical stages. Some teachers also include an additional specific feature for students to address in the evaluation, thus providing greater opportunity for in-depth analysis. Those students who achieved at the higher standard had sometimes used headings to assist the structure of their responses, although over-scaffolding from teachers needs to be avoided. Where students have elected to present the evaluation as an oral presentation, they are required to provide a digital copy or written transcript as evidence. Teachers who made this clear on tasks supported students to be more successful.

Generally the group tasks were very good, with strong evidence of the practical and collaboration. The children’s party is a popular group activity and students are reminded that healthy eating practices connect well with this activity. Those students who achieved at the higher standard for this assessment type clearly focused on the well-being of children. The practical expectation needs to match with the specific features. Some tasks were very large, complex, and all-day events with significant challenges, given the size of the groups. Teachers are encouraged to be realistic about the expectations for students to achieve the task successfully.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The vast majority of the investigations focused on the health and well-being of children, with a range of topics being selected. Students with well-considered research questions or hypotheses were able to present a two-sided issue, instead of a topic where there is no real debate. The vast majority of investigation topics related to the subject outline. Students who linked their investigation to one area of study tended to be more successful, as this approach helped focus the investigation. Students who linked to more areas of study often resulted in a very broad investigation which was not able to meet the performance standards to the higher levels. Many of the investigations were well structured and logical, with a clear introduction, discussion of findings, and conclusions.

Technology was a very popular topic this year, as were obesity, discipline, twins, autism, and premature babies.

Students must select topics that are appropriate. It became obvious that students who investigated topics that were outside of the areas of study or were inappropriate struggled to meet the higher levels in the performance standards.

Investigations that presented two clear sides to an argument, with the potential for either a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ conclusion, provided greater scope and a clear framework for students to work with. In some investigations it became obvious that a question was too hard for the student to follow through with. It is important for teachers to assist students to choose topics that they can find success with and that focus on the health and well-being of children.

The majority of topics selected related to the subject outline and students were able to clearly link their investigations to at least one of the areas of study. These students tended to have some direction and were able to maintain focus on the topic and this assisted the scope, depth, and currency of their investigations. Some students focused on inappropriate issues, such as those relating to children older than 8 years of age (the upper age limit defined in the subject outline) or exploring topics of child abuse or domestic violence, although it was pleasing to see that there were fewer students addressing these topics this year. Teachers are encouraged to guide students away from such topics. Students with well-crafted research questions or hypotheses were able to present a debate, as opposed to just stating information on a topic.

Some students are still using obsolete terminology such as ‘special studies’, which is from previous subject outlines. The concern is that obsolete terminology is not allowing students to connect with the specific features and intentions of the investigation in the current subject outline.

On the whole, the investigations were clearly written, which provided levels of insight into the topic being investigated.

The better introductions provided links directly with the health and well-being of children.

Some students had a heavy reliance on two or three sources, for example, the Better Health Channel and the Livestrong Foundation. The majority of investigations referred to current sources, not out-dated information.

The issue of bias in terms of research should be reviewed more closely. At times students accessed expert primary sources but did not fully utilise them.

The majority of investigations included the word-count and this was predominantly accurate. Teachers and students are reminded that appendices are not read by the markers (and therefore should not be included), and that markers stop reading the investigations at 2000 words, in line with SACE guidelines. There has been a vast improvement in students writing to 2000 words and not going over the word-limit.

Care must also be taken when printing coloured graphs in black and white because the information may be difficult for the marker to see.

The following discussion addresses how students provided evidence of their learning in relation to the specific features of the assessment design criteria, as listed in the subject outline for this assessment type.

*ICA1: Investigation and critical analysis of contemporary trends and/or issues related to the health and well-being of children*

Most students were competent in the research component, finding and applying relevant sources of information. Students achieving in the higher grade bands tended to understand trends and could elaborate clearly.

Strong investigations tended to analyse the sources used and often compared and contrasted them to evaluate their findings and provide a balance of views of arguments.

More successful students used a larger amount of well-selected sources of information, while students who met the performance standards at a much lower level demonstrated a limited ability to research. The better investigations demonstrated the use of sound Australian data while occasionally referring to overseas studies to back up statements or to counter or compare them. There has been a trend for students to refer only to research from overseas and, while this is acceptable, the students must clearly show how this research links back to their investigation. Some students require more support in the selection of appropriate research sources.

Best-practice investigations showed evidence of analysis, debate, and critical thinking all the way through the discussion and culminated in a clear conclusion.

It was pleasing to note that many investigations referred specifically to the health and well-being of children, which ensured that they were relevant and focused within the scope of the task. Students who achieved well in this area were able to identify a trend as opposed to a child development issue. A number of students struggled to identify trends; this is an area in which teachers should work with students to help them improve their understanding of trends.

Stronger investigations demonstrated critical analysis in each of their focus questions and drew on this in the conclusion. Less successful investigations tended to just present the research without drawing conclusions or analysing the information.

It was noted, however, that the vast majority of investigations did include research. In more successful investigations, students used current Australian research and their primary research involved interviews with people who were strongly connected to the investigation topic. In less successful investigations, students used surveys as their method of primary research, many of which had little or no relevance to the investigation topic.

Graphs, tables, and diagrams were used extensively throughout the investigations and the students who presented these in a well-structured manner made sure these elements both supported and linked strongly to the research. Students who achieved higher grades tended to refer to the methodology throughout their investigation. However, some students did not use graphs, diagrams, or tables effectively and merely inserted these into the investigation without any form of explanation. Students are encouraged to use any data included in the discussion to help the reader connect the data to the rest of the investigation. Investigations that critically analysed both the data and the information thoroughly met the performance standards at a high level.

Although a number of students used graphs, tables, and diagrams, many were challenged with how to analyse and incorporate this data with secondary resources. Images used were often not relevant and not referenced.

It was pleasing to see a number of investigations drawing conclusions throughout, rather than just leaving them to the end in the evaluation. These investigations tended to perform at a higher level. In lower-level investigations, students tended to find drawing conclusions and analysing the information very challenging and so would just present the information.

Many of the focus questions in lower-level investigations started with ‘what’ or asked for the advantages and disadvantages of the topic. These questions led to the provision of superficial information and very limited critical analysis.

*ICA2: Analysis of information for relevance and appropriateness, with appropriate acknowledgment of sources*

Investigations that met the performance standards at the higher level tended to be selective, and used referenced sources of information that focused on current and relevant material. They also reflected Australian research or drew clear links to Australian children. The vast majority of investigations focused on Australian sources of information that were within the last 5 years.

Nearly all students included referencing of primary research used in their investigations; those students who do not should be encouraged to do so. Students are using either Harvard or in-text referencing. It is important for students to select which form of referencing they are using and maintain it throughout the investigation. There were some investigations in which students used both Harvard and in-text referencing.

Students are encouraged to collect and use relevant primary data. Some students surveyed their classmates as a research method and, as a result, the research was not relevant to the investigation. Although this data was mostly referenced, it was very rare for the student to comment about the bias and inappropriateness of information for the majority of the investigations. Inclusions of graphs sometimes detracted from the investigation, as the information in the graph was often not relevant to the investigation. In other investigations students conducted their own observations which they used solely as credible evidence, whereas an interview with an expert would have provided credible research. Students who considered the bias in their research often achieved higher against the performance standards for this specific feature.

Higher-level investigations often drew comparisons between their primary and secondary sources of information.

The majority of investigations used diagrams and graphs that were well referenced and discussed in the text of the investigation. However, markers were concerned by the amount of text being used in graph or diagram text boxes, as much of this needed to be included in the word-count of the investigation.

Research lists and bibliographies showed that the majority of students were focused and discerning when selecting secondary resources. There was an increase in the use of credible sites such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In higher-graded investigations the research was linked back to Australian research, while in lower-graded investigations these links were not made.

Markers noted that many investigations showed an improvement in referencing, which resulted in a significant decrease in suspected plagiarism.

When the methodology was written in the past tense, students were able to evaluate and analyse the relevance and usefulness of the sources of research more competently.

Students who included surveys were less successful when they did not analyse their survey data.

Teachers should encourage students to draw conclusions or insights in their investigation. It is not advised to copy or quote large sections of source material, linked to just a few words of the student’s own. This limits the student’s opportunity to discuss ideas in their own words and to keep within the word-count.

*ICA3: Application of literacy and numeracy skills, and use of appropriate terminology*

The majority of investigations were generally well written. Numeracy application varied from very poor to good, and this was particularly evident in the presentation of graphs (particularly pie charts) where percentages were included. Literacy has generally improved. Many students still struggle with how to demonstrate numeracy. Those students who did this well showed their understanding of statistics and percentages, and in some situations used graphs. What was evident was that students did not need to have graphs to demonstrate numeracy. The best analyses referenced numbers accurately and followed on with critical discussion and debate regarding their significance. Investigations that struggled to demonstrate numeracy skills were directly linked to the nature of the topic selected.

As the investigation is a formal piece of writing, students are encouraged to use formal language and to avoid colloquialisms such as ‘kids’, and slang.

Students provided evidence of application of numeracy skills in investigations, often in the form of pie charts and bar graphs that were then analysed in the text. When graphs and charts are presented, it is important for numbers or percentages to be included.

Many of the investigations were well structured and logical, with clear introduction, discussion of findings, and conclusions. High-level investigations used strong persuasive writing skills throughout the text.

*E4: Evaluation of contemporary trends and/or issues related to child development in different settings*

Better investigations showed evidence of continual evaluation throughout the entire course of the investigation and summed this up in the concluding comments. In the better investigations, reasoned arguments that were well supported with accurate and relevant evidence were used effectively to draw the topic question or hypothesis to a clear, concise conclusion. This allowed for either ‘realistic’ or ‘grey’ areas to culminate the debate.

Students who met this performance standard in the lower grade bands tended to rely on their own opinions. Some students used the evaluation to provide advice to parents or the government, which is not relevant to this kind of investigation. Some students showed little ability to evaluate.

The SACE cover sheet should be used. Hence, title pages and content pages are unnecessary. Appendices and surveys are not looked at when investigations are marked. It is important that students understand this and make sure that they do not include information in the appendix which they want to count towards their grade.

Stronger investigations were concise and succinct, while lower-graded investigations tended only to summarise key points.

Child development in a variety of settingswas examined clearly by stronger investigations. They tended to have a logical debate that was well supported with accurate and relevant research, which often resulted in the research question or hypothesis coming to a succinct conclusion.

Informing the reader about what was learnt about completing the investigation is not assessed and therefore took up valuable words.

Adept investigations reflected on the richness of the information provided through resources and ‘unpacked’ the information or quotes to provide greater insight into the writer’s understanding. Strong, clear arguments were supported by valid resources in the higher-level investigations.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

For the learning and assessment plan (LAP), it has been observed that some teachers have a large number of specific features in some tasks on their LAPs. Many teachers submitted the required addendum to detail the changes made during the year. It is important for teachers to refer to the current subject outline (see the SACE website for the 2015 Child Studies subject outline) to check the guidelines for the design of the LAP. Please note that, in a practical task, research is required using the investigation and critical analysis specific features, while for an action plan practical task, one to three problem-solving specific features are required. In the group activities, investigation or research is not required, but problem-solving and collaboration are assessed in the group decision-making task.

The majority of teachers presented student work in a helpful way. Teachers are reminded that, for the required students, the sets of practical tasks need to be bagged separately from the group activity tasks. All group samples need to be separated by student, and then put in one bag. Explicitly, at moderation, moderators require the practical activity samples, then separately the group activity samples. Student SACE codes need to be on each bag. It is helpful for a summary sheet to be visible through the bag, although it is not essential. It is essential that teachers check that each student’s work is packaged correctly and not to rely on students to do this.

This year a greater number of teachers submitted a Variations — Moderation Materials form to provide information about individual students’ special provisions, breach of rules, missing tasks, or tasks not completed. This form is available on the SACE website. It was observed that some teachers used one for each student, or the class or each task. Whatever the decision, the moderation processes expect to see an explanation of any variations and this can be submitted with the LAP addendum and set of tasks.

It is pleasing to report that teachers have supported students to provide evidence of practical learning. As mentioned earlier, it is important to note that including recipes and workflow plans, and colouring in templates that show organisational details are not relevant and are unnecessary for the moderation process.

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