CAMBRIDGE

Future-ready from the start: Transforming assessment for young learners

Jason Street & Rebecca Wall

December 2025

CAMBRIDGE

Housekeeping

- Health and safety
- Fire safety
- Washrooms

CAMBRIDGE

Agenda

- Introduction
- Future-ready skills and qualities in young learners
- How assessment can nurture future-ready skills and qualities
- How assessment data can be used to identify and respond to learner's needs
- Strategies we can employ to ensure all learners fulfil their potential

CAMBRIDGE

Introduction

Jason Street
Senior Assessment Manager,
Primary & Lower Secondary Assessment

Asst. Director: EF Language Schools, Cambridge

Asst. Director: Lord Byron College, Bari, Italy

Rebecca Wall
Senior Assessment Manager,
Primary & Lower Secondary Assessment

Head of Science: Cayman Prep & High School, Cayman Islands

Director of Science: British International School of Boston, USA

CAMBRIDGE

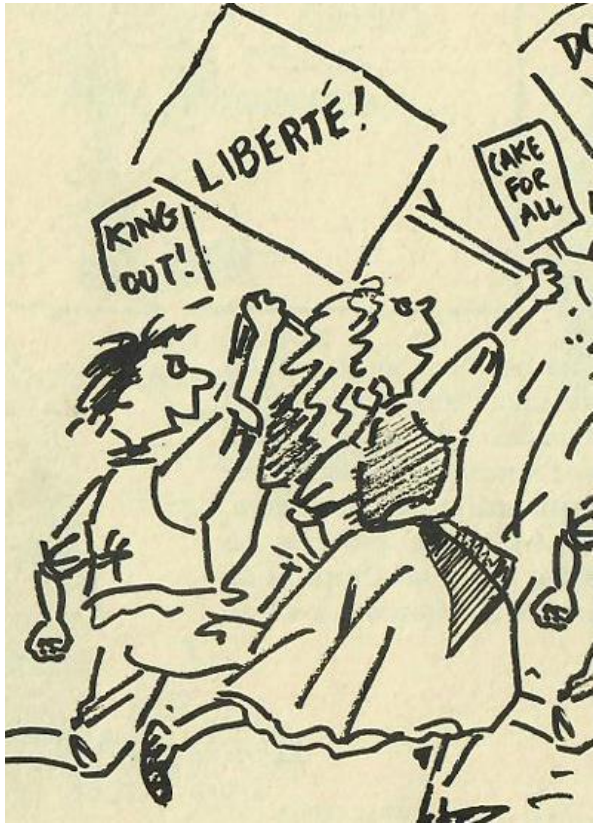
Facts, facts, facts!

‘Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life’

– Mr Gradgrind, School Superintendent, Hard Times, Charles Dickens (1854)

CAMBRIDGE

The Assessment Revolution!

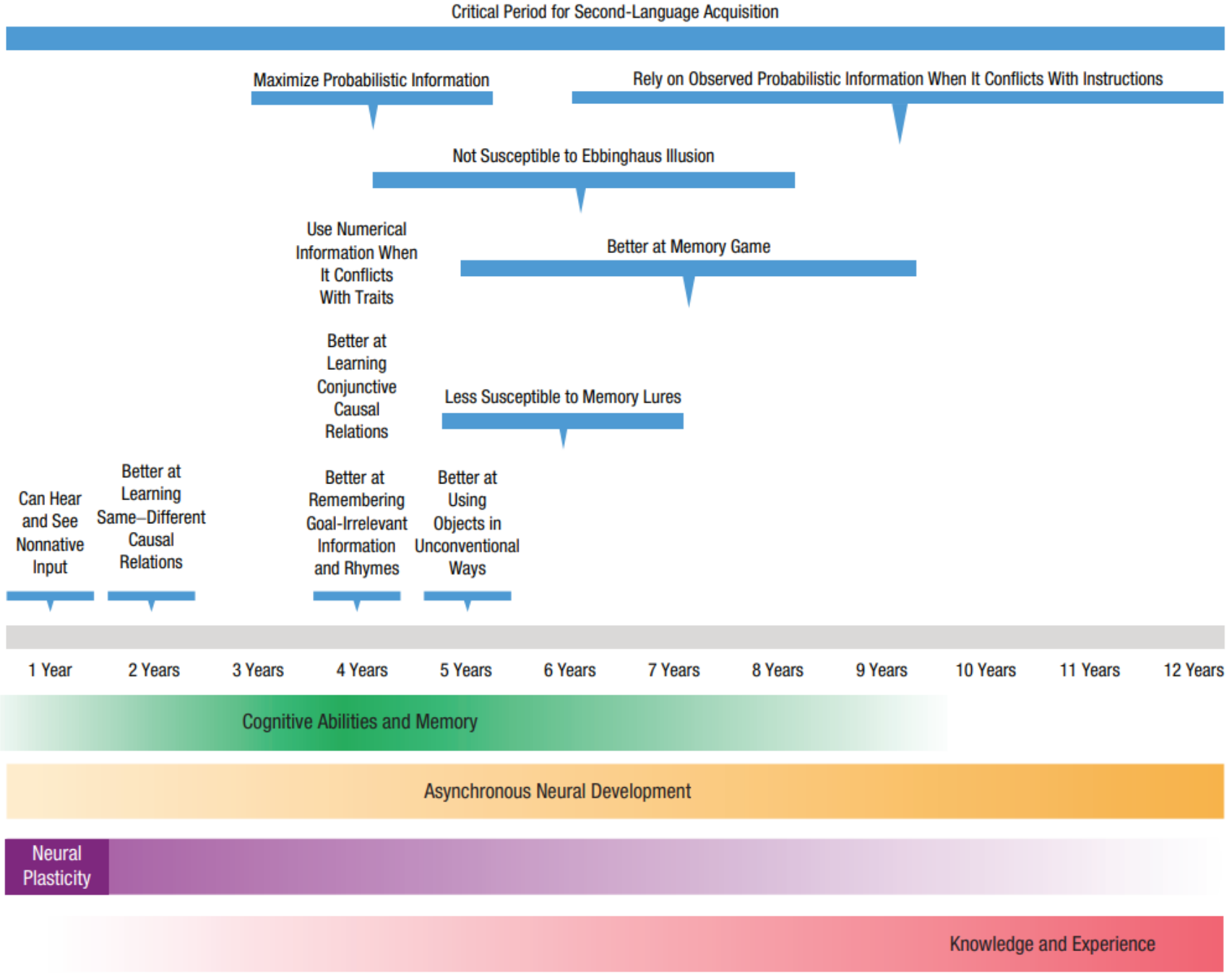


- Assessment criteria (AOs)
- Transparency and fairness
- Formative assessment
- 21st Century skills / Future-ready skills
- Computer-Based Assessment
- Holistic development of the whole learner
- Accessibility

CAMBRIDGE

Our youngest learners are unique

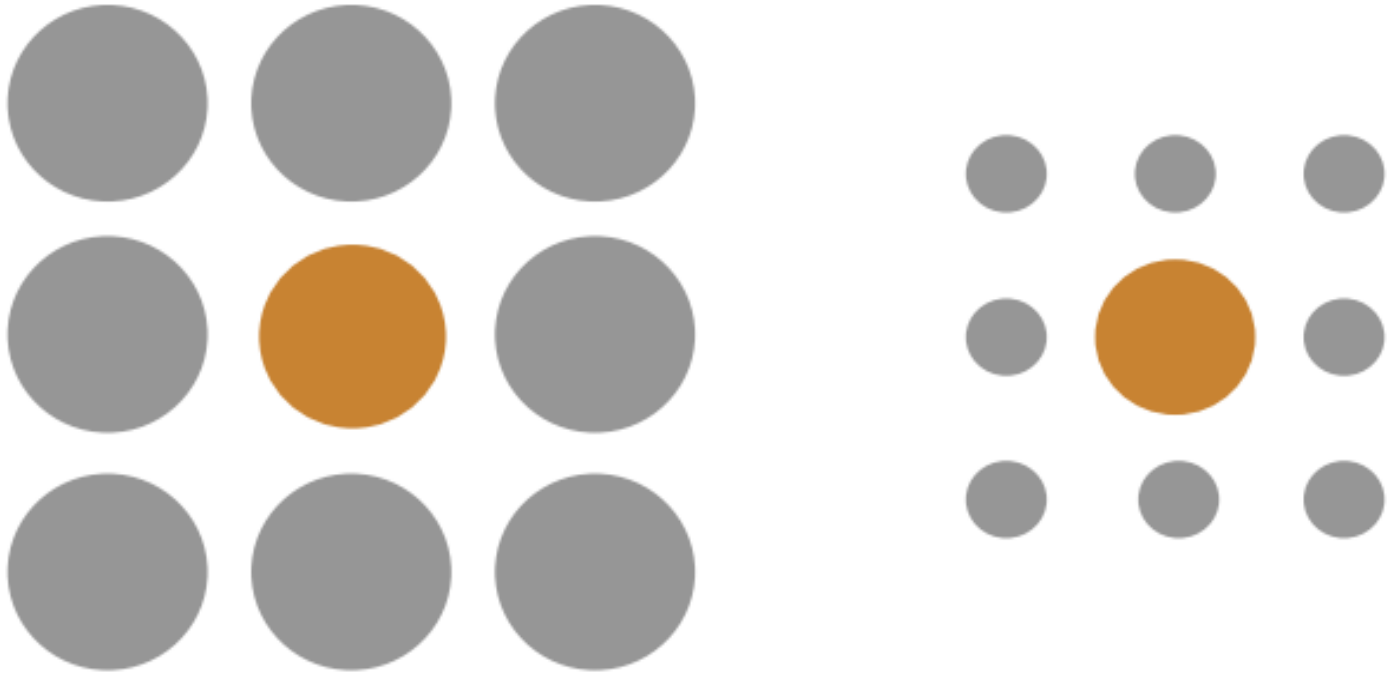
- ~Age 4: children show advantages in reasoning, decision-making and memory over older children.
- ~Age 5-8: children show perceptual & memory benefits
- Critical period for language development ends at age 12.



The Sweet Spot: When Children's Developing Abilities, Brains, and Knowledge Make Them Better Learners Than Adults

CAMBRIDGE

Ebbinghaus Illusion



Children aged between 4 & 7 are not susceptible to this illusion.
Younger children can more accurately perceive what is really there.

CAMBRIDGE

Future-ready skills in young learners

Educators of students aged 14-19 were surveyed for this report, but what do you think 'future-ready skills' means for learners aged **4-14**?

CAMBRIDGE

Something went wrong...

Reload

CAMBRIDGE

Which **future-ready skills** and **qualities** can assessment help to nurture?

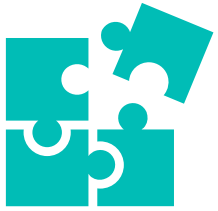
CAMBRIDGE

Something went wrong...

Reload

CAMBRIDGE

How can **assessment** nurture future-ready skills?



Preparing for assessments

determination
positivity
motivation
social-skills
collaboration
creativity

Undertaking assessments

thinking skills
resilience
time-management
focus
independence
hard working

Learning from assessments

self-awareness
emotional wellbeing
love of learning
reflective
open-minded
perseverance

Higher-order thinking in language tests

Texts: retrieval and **inference**

- **Retrieval questions** mean finding a specific piece of information from the text (e.g. Who was the first person to arrive at Rahaf's party?)
- **Inference questions** mean reaching a conclusion based on evidence that may not be directly stated (e.g. How can you tell that Rahaf was disappointed by her birthday cake?).

Writing: cohesion and **coherence**

CAMBRIDGE

Testing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) with multiple-choice questions

Focus on the main idea or global meaning

Focusing on a question or main idea is a central skill in many subjects, e.g., finding the main idea in a text that doesn't state the main idea explicitly.

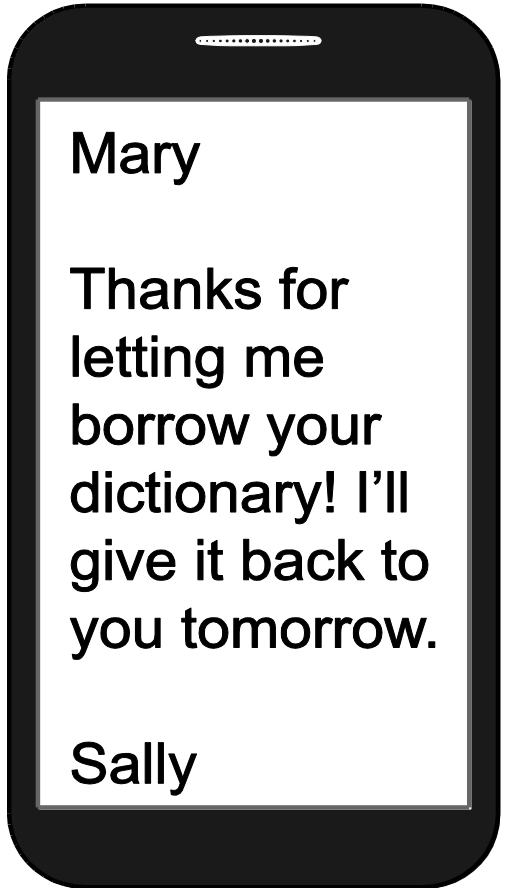
This kind of task is analysis because to identify the main idea, learners have to break the text into parts and see what the parts have in common and what message they point to or support.

Focus on opinions and feelings

E.g. ‘How does the writer feel about…?

CAMBRIDGE

Ways of testing HOTS – Example 1



What will Sally do next?

A get Mary's book

B lend Mary a book

C return Mary's book

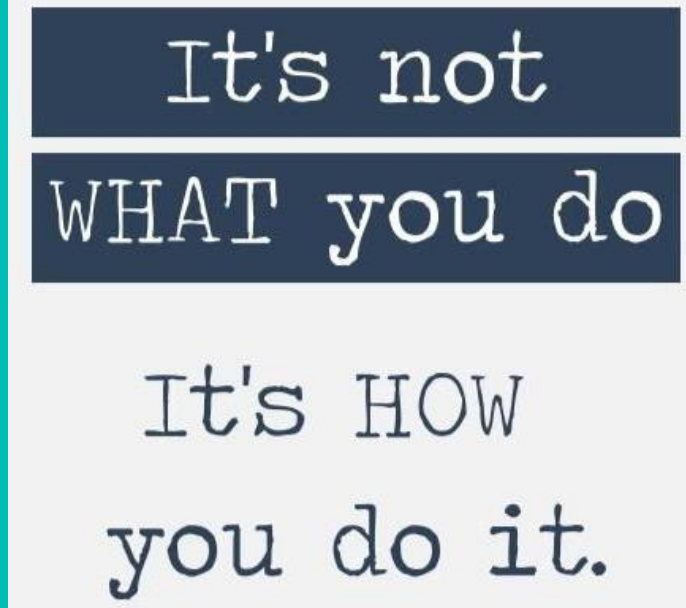
Ways of testing HOTS – Example 2

The teenage ice-skating star

CAMBRIDGE

Today, we are going to be preparing for our **S**tandard **A**ptitude **T**ests.

Today, we are going to do some **S**pecial **A**gent **T**raining!

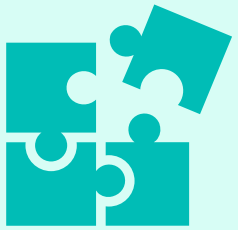


CAMBRIDGE

Map from memory

- Outside the room there is a poster.
- You will work in groups of 5 to attempt to **recreate the poster**.
- Each person will take it in turns to look at the poster for **30 seconds**.
- They will then return to the group and **draw what they recall**.

CAMBRIDGE

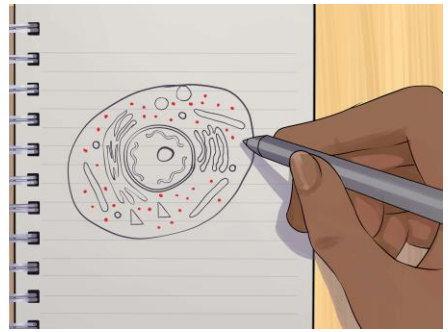


What skills & qualities did that activity require?

CAMBRIDGE

Practical ideas for **preparing** young learners for assessment while also nurturing skills

- Blooket/Kahoot
- ‘Map from Memory’
- Topic in a Minute
- Guess the Question
- What am I?
- Yes/No game
- Articulate
- Pictionary



Blooket/Kahoot: www.blooket.com
Educational games that you can customise and can either be played as a class or individually.

Map from Memory:
Learners work as a group to recreate a poster from memory by taking it in turns to look at the poster and draw what they can remember.

Topic in a Minute:
Give learners 10 minutes to write a prepare a one-minute speech about a topic. They could either deliver these to the whole class or to a partner.

Guess the Question:
Great for encouraging learners to consider the command word for a question, give learners an answer, and they need to suggest the question. e.g. 'the heart' (Answer: Name the organ that pumps blood around the body.)

What Am I:
A good way of reviewing key words or knowledge, learners can see how many clues they need to guess a word, e.g. 1. I am an organ. 2. I am part of the circulatory system. 3. I bump blood around the body.

Yes/No game
A quick game that can be played in pairs/small groups, one learner thinks of something related to a given topic, and the others guess what they're thinking of by only asking questions that can be answered with yes or no.

Articulate & Pictionary
Another good game to review key words that can either be played a class or in a small groups. Learners have to describe or draw the word for the other learners to guess as quickly as they can

CAMBRIDGE

Undertaking assessments

Whilst we can't eliminate all the emotional responses associated with undertaking an assessment, there are steps we can take to help minimise these.

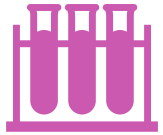
Ensure there is sufficient **time**.

Ensure **accessibility arrangements** are in place.

Make **language** accessible.

Ensure assessments are **not biased**.

Assess **only** what you plan to assess.



Assess **skills** as well as knowledge & understanding.

Include questions of **varying levels** of demand.

Prepare learners for the **format** of the assessment.

CAMBRIDGE

"For assessment systems to **enhance learning** – and not just measure it – students need to be at the centre of the assessment framework. To become **lifelong learners**, they need to be able to assess their own progress, make adjustments to their understanding and take control of their own learning."

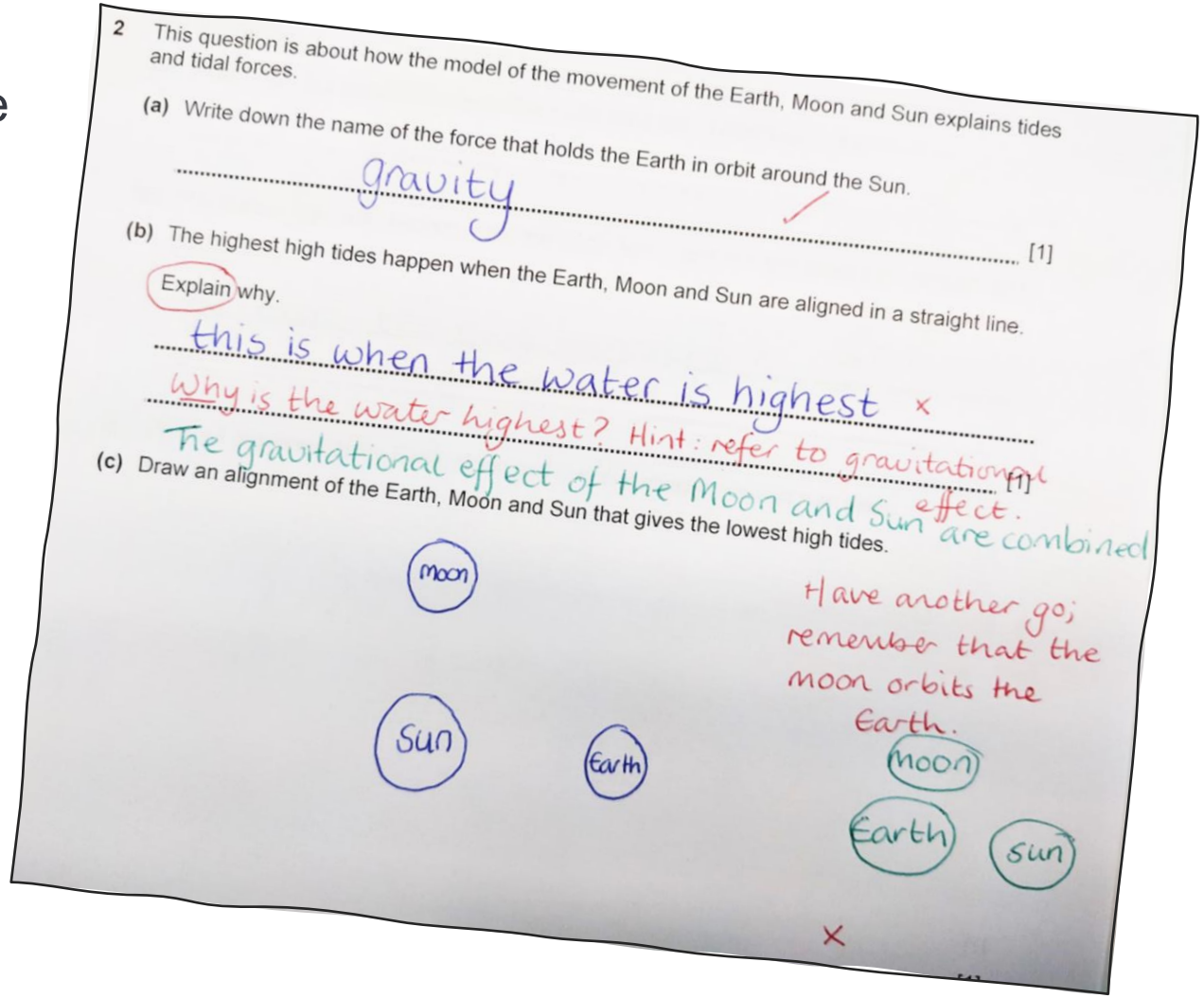
OECD 2013, p 220

Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation & Assessment

CAMBRIDGE

Learning from assessments

- **Metacognition** is about reflecting on the cognitive processes involved in learning.
- Encouraging learners to review their answers and reflect on **why** they made an error is an important step in empowering them to take ownership of their progress.
- Learners could be asked to:
  - correct their answers
  - identify *why* they made an error (e.g. lack of knowledge, misinterpretation of command word, lack of detail, missing scientific terminology)
  - respond to feedback
  - complete a follow-up task to consolidate their learning.



CAMBRIDGE

Paper 1	Number of marks available	My marks
1a	1	
1b	1	
2a	2	
2b	2	
3	1	
4a	3	
4b	2	
4c	1	
5a	1	
5b	2	
5c	3	
6a	2	
6b	2	
7	4	
8	3	
TOTAL	30	

Paper 2	Number of marks available	My marks
1	3	
2	2	
3a	2	
3b	3	
3c	1	
4a	2	
4b	2	
5a	3	
5b	1	
5c	2	
6a	2	
6b	1	
7	3	
8a	1	
8b	2	
TOTAL	30	

Things I need to practice:

Question	Learning Objective	Total marks available	Marks awarded	Reason for any marks lost
1a	I know the functions of cell structure	3		
1b	I can compare plant and animal cells	2		
2a	I know the force that holds the Earth in orbit	1		
2b	I can explain why the highest tides happen when the Earth, Sun & Moon are aligned	1		
	I know how the Earth, Sun & Moon are aligned to give the lowest tides	1		
	I know why you can use models to predict tide heights	1		
	I know that other factors affect tide height	1		
	can interpret particle models presenting different types of substance	3		
	ow that a vacuum has no particles	1		
	the definition of an alloy	1		
	hat alloys have different s to pure metals	1		

CAMBRIDGE

Superhero Skills

Tick which skills you used in this assessment.

- Reading carefully ☐
- Checking my answers ☐
- Staying calm ☐
- Using time well ☐
- Thinking hard ☐
- Remembering what I learnt ☐
- Working independently ☐
- Being prepared ☐

CAMBRIDGE

Key considerations

Workload: ensure learners are doing the work

Time: planning for consolidation of learning

The bigger picture: identifying barriers to progress

Learner self-assessment and HOTS

Learner self-assessment requires higher-order thinking. Ask learners to mark their own work occasionally – and show them the marking criteria. They'll ask themselves:

- Where am I going? (analysis)
- Where am I now? (evaluation)
- What do I need to do to close the gap? (creation)

CAMBRIDGE

Strategies to help develop HOTS using texts

Text reconstruction through action stories for learners aged 6 to 12. This is the gradual construction of a story or stories i.e., sequencing. (See Puchta and Williams)

Pictures as scaffolding. To enable young learners to predict and use preconception and expectation about a text to help them comprehend what they are reading.

Reciprocal teaching in reading. Teachers model the use of four key strategies: summarising, questioning, clarifying and predicting. (See Palincsar and Brown)

Summarise, summarise!

Learners who know how best to summarise information that they read can learn to do much harder reading tasks.

CAMBRIDGE

Strategies to help build metacognition

The assessment of higher-order thinking assumes the teaching of higher-order thinking (!)

Signposting

Need for the explicit signposting of the skills learners are developing through their learning, so that they can recognise the ways they are prepared for their future – from early years onwards.

WALT = 'We Are Learning To...' **WILF** = 'What I'm Looking For'. (As used in UK classrooms.)

Debriefing

Learners should be made aware of how they have solved problems and skills that were useful. Encourages reflection and evaluation.

CAMBRIDGE

How can assessment data be used to identify and respond to learner's needs?

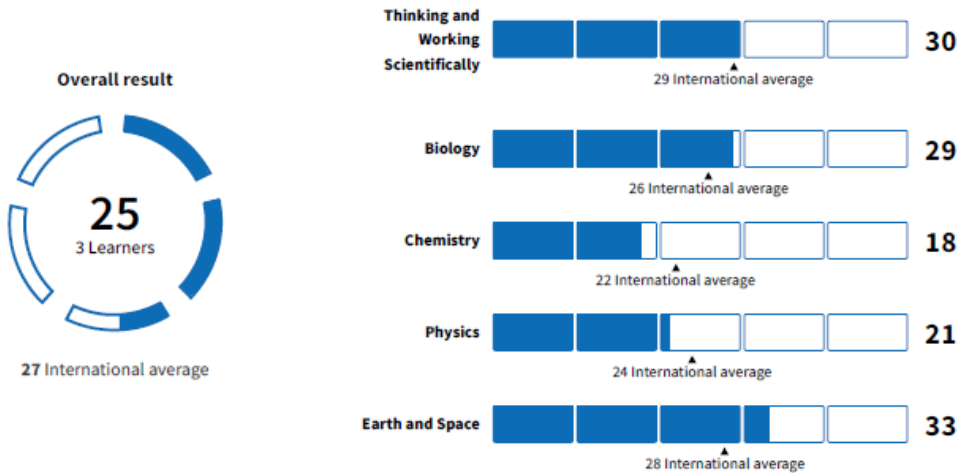
	Start of year or start of stage **Baseline assessment**	End of year or end of stage **Assessment**
	• Identifies student potential and performance • Focuses on skills rather than subject knowledge	Assesses deep subject knowledge, conceptual understanding and high order thinking skills
Cambridge Early Years	**Check Together** shows range of abilities and progress	Observational assessment approaches to measure learners' progress
Cambridge Primary	**Cambridge Primary insight** identifies learning needs and potential	Cambridge Primary Progression tests Cambridge Primary Checkpoint
Cambridge Lower Secondary	**MidYIS** identifies learning needs and predicts IGCSE potential	Cambridge Lower Secondary Progression tests Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint
Cambridge Upper Secondary	**Yellis** identifies learning needs, predicts and supports IGCSE achievement	Cambridge IGCSE Cambridge O Level Cambridge ICE
Cambridge Advanced	**Alis** identifies learning needs and predicts AS/A Level & IB potential	Cambridge International AS & A Level Cambridge AICE Cambridge IPQ

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge Primary Science overview

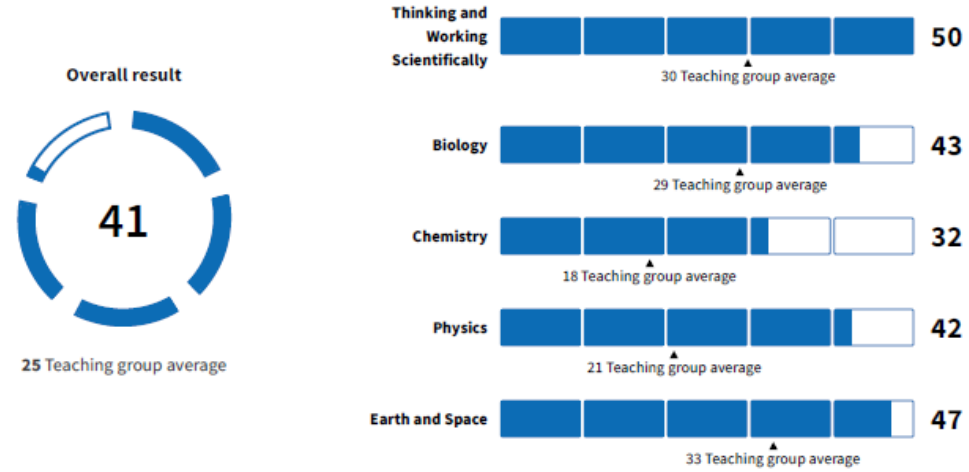
Overall results

These charts show the average Cambridge Checkpoint score for each subject and strand compared to the International average.



S1: CANDIDATE 1

This section includes the average score and strand scores for the above learner. You will see indicators for the teaching group average to allow comparison between the learner and the teaching group as well as specific marks achieved by the learner for each question.



Teaching group overview: Cambridge Checkpoint scores by learner

25 Group average

25 Centre average

27 International average

Learner name	Candidate Number	Thinking and Working Scientifically	Biology	Chemistry	Physics	Earth and Space	Checkpoint subject score
CANDIDATE 1	1	50	43	32	42	47	41
CANDIDATE 2	2	17	19	13	6	27	16
CANDIDATE 3	3	22	24	10	15	24	18

Teaching group overview: Learner marks by sub-strand

Science: Biology

Learner name	Candidate number	Structure and function	Life processes	Ecosystems	Total for strand
CANDIDATE 1	1	4/5	5/7	4/4	13/16
CANDIDATE 2	2	2/5	3/7	3/4	8/16
CANDIDATE 3	3	3/5	4/7	2/4	9/16

CAMBRIDGE

What is baseline assessment and why is it useful?

An objective measure of cognitive and non-cognitive skills at the point of testing.

- Instant insight
- Curriculum agnostic
- Unlocks potential

Ask the right questions.

Make good decisions.

Develop the best teaching and learning plans.

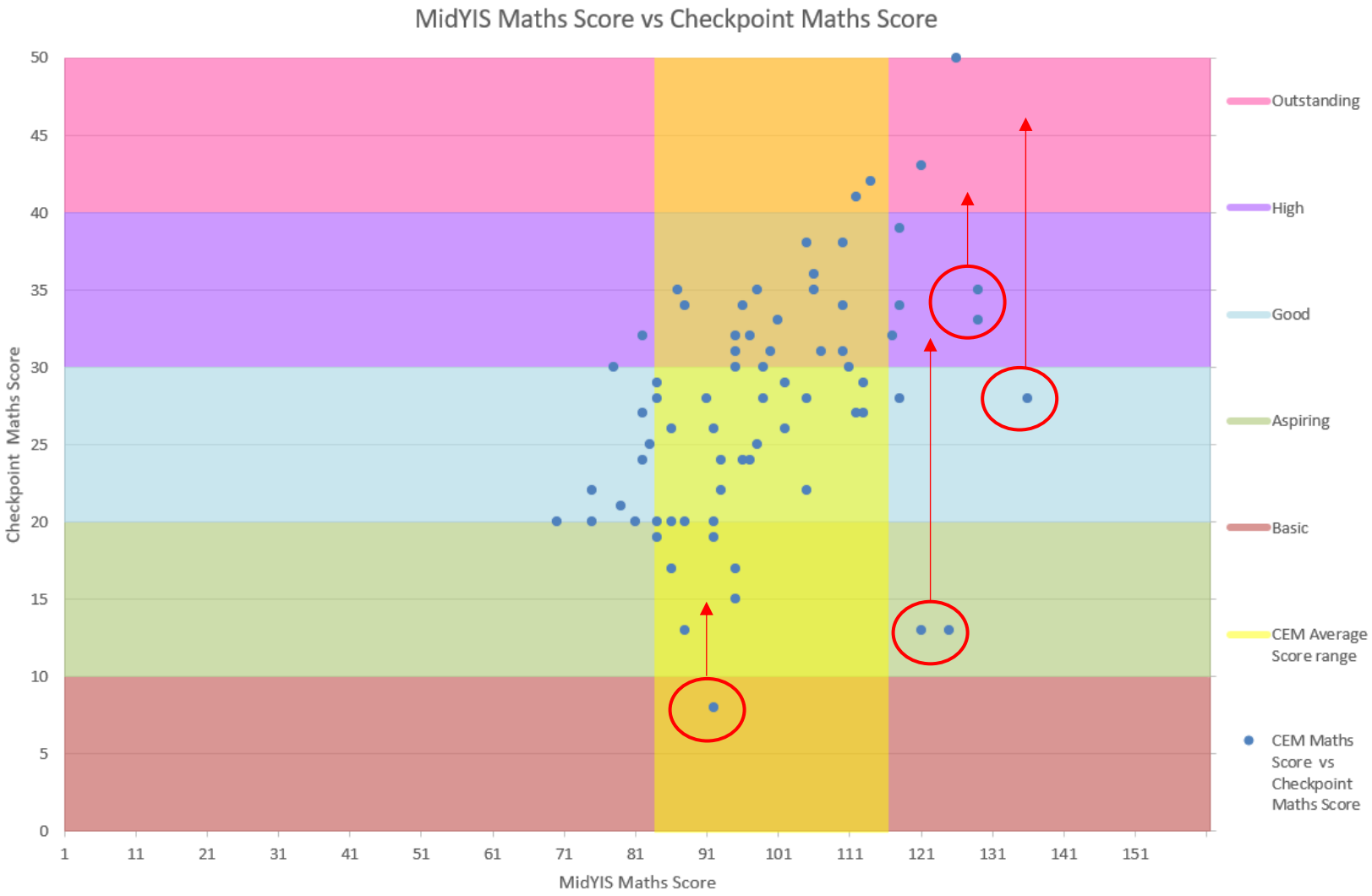
Strategically set realistic goals and ambitious targets.

Drive student motivation and future teaching and learning.

CAMBRIDGE

https://www.cambridge.org/insight/case-study/new-english-school-jordan

Which learners would you be most concerned about?



CAMBRIDGE

Tackle the 'why?'...

New to the school?

English as a second language?

Anxiety?

Exam accommodation requirement?

Low self-esteem?

Poor attendance?

Poor exam technique?

Poor attitude to learning?

Lack of revision?

Behavioural issues?

CAMBRIDGE

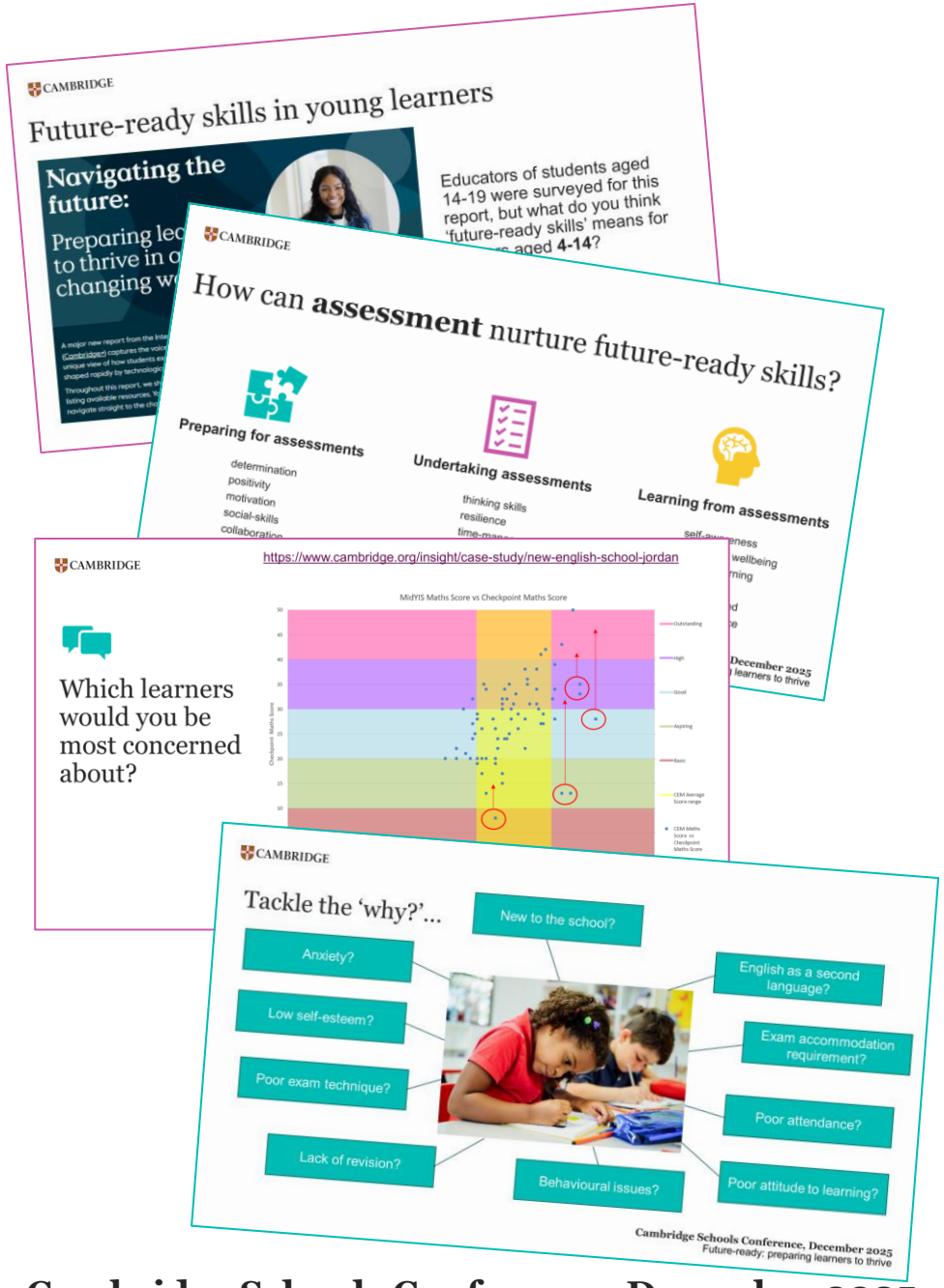
How would you approach supporting learners with these different challenges?

Poor exam technique (answers lack detail, command words are often misinterpreted)	**Low self-esteem** (lack confidence in themselves and their ability, find exams stressful)	**New to the school** (followed a different curriculum, lack confidence in English & reading)

CAMBRIDGE

Summary

- Future-ready skills and qualities in young learners
- How assessment can nurture future-ready skills and qualities
- How assessment data can be used to identify and respond to learner's needs
- Strategies we can employ to ensure all learners fulfil their potential



CAMBRIDGE

Any questions?

CAMBRIDGE

Follow-up activities: reading and more

- Brookhart, S. M. (2010). How to Assess Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Your Classroom. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Palincsar, A. and Brown, A.(1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension-monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1, 117–175.
- Puchta, H. and Williams, M. (2011). Teaching Young Learners to Think: ELT Activities for young learners aged 6–12, CUP.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress, http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrlsx/landing.aspx (Example test questions used in school tests in the USA.)
- Classroom Assessment for Teachers: Transforming Outcomes for Learners - a Cambridge Assessment Network course (https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/the-network/classroom-assessment-for-teachers/)
- Neuroscience: Children are learning even when they're not trying, psychologists find | Faculty of Arts & Science and The Sweet Spot: When Children's Developing Abilities, Brains, and Knowledge Make Them Better Learners Than Adults
- The New English School, Jordan, case study: https://www.cambridge.org/insight/case-study/new-english-school-jordan

CAMBRIDGE

Thank you!

Cambridge Schools Conference, December 2025
Future-ready: preparing learners to thrive

cambridge.org/internationaleducation

CAMBRIDGE

Get in touch!

Rebecca Wall
rebecca.wall@cambridge.org

Jason Street
jason.street@cambridge.org

Cambridge Schools Conference, December 2025
Future-ready: preparing learners to thrive

cambridge.org/internationaleducation

CAMBRIDGE

cambridge.org/internationaleducation