

# What is DESSA?

## The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment



**The DESSA is an empirical, standardised Social and Emotional Competency (SEC) assessment supporting pupils from Year 1 to Year 13. It empowers City Year mentors to build a measurable and actionable social and emotional programme for the pupils they support. It ensures that our mentors can reliably assess and measure progress and deliver interventions that are relevant to changing pupil needs.**

Grounded in resilience theory and directly aligned to the commonly used CASEL™ framework, the DESSA offers a user-friendly, practical SEC assessment tool that meets the highest professional standards and is able to:

- Accurately identify pupil strengths and behaviours that may inhibit learning
- Surface the underlying social and emotional skill needs
- Build critical resilience skills with data-driven instruction.

### The assessment

City Year mentors will use the DESSA to conduct up to four assessments of their Focus List pupils throughout the year, based on observations and interactions. With a minimum of four weeks in between assessment points, the DESSA will enable mentors to accurately evaluate pupils' growth and progress and measure the impact of the interventions being delivered by them.

The assessment is entirely strength-based; meaning that the focus is on pupils' positive behaviours (e.g. getting along with others) rather than maladaptive ones (e.g. annoying others). For each item, the City Year mentor is asked to indicate on a five-point scale how often the pupil has engaged in that behaviour over the past four weeks. City Year mentors and Impact Officers will use these scores to inform progress and development of interventions, focusing on areas of need and ensuring that the programme can make a positive impact on these.

Based on results, the DESSA system will also provide data-driven recommendations for Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions for the City Year mentors to implement.

**Need more information?  
Contact our school  
partnerships team at  
[schools@cityyear.org.uk](mailto:schools@cityyear.org.uk)**

## Tier 1 interventions focus on promoting universal SECs across the Focus List.

They may include:

- Standalone strategies such as integrating SEL-focused activities into daily routines or group discussions.
- Whole-group delivery of practices like mindfulness exercises, empathy-building games, or problem-solving scenarios.
- Guidance on how to help foster a positive classroom environment that supports all pupils in developing critical SEL skills.

## Tier 2 Interventions are for pupils requiring additional, targeted support.

The DESSA system will recommend:

- Individualised strategies tailored to specific areas of need, such as self-regulation, resilience, or relationship-building skills.
- Structured, multi-week intervention programmes designed to address identified gaps. These might involve regular, mentor-led sessions focusing on areas like managing emotions, improving decision-making, or strengthening peer connections.
- Collaboration with teachers and support staff to ensure consistent reinforcement of skills across different contexts.

Additionally, the system will provide practical guidance and tools for mentors, such as step-by-step intervention plans, progress tracking templates, and suggestions for follow-up actions. This ensures that interventions are actionable, measurable, and aligned with each pupil's unique developmental needs. Further guidance [here](#).

## 8 Skills Measured by the DESSA



Self-Awareness



Self-Management



Personal Responsibility



Decision Making



Goal-Directed Behaviour



Social Awareness



Relationship Skills



Optimistic Thinking

