

A response to Lord Bew's Independent Review of Key Stage 2 testing, assessment and accountability.

Lord Bew's final report, which was delivered in June, examined the suitability of Key Stage 2 tests in their current form for assessing standards and progress. This followed a period during which teachers and school leaders became increasingly critical of the fitness of KS2 SATs for purpose. In particular, the use of data in league tables was felt to be unfair since progress was measured by comparing benchmark testing at KS2 with summative teacher assessment at KS1. The domination of the Year 6 curriculum by the need to teach to test caused frustration and concerns about the quality of marking grew year on year. This culminated in 2010 with one quarter of schools boycotting the process. The consultation was wide, with over 4000 online responses and many more written responses. The principal concerns of the profession have been acknowledged. Many have been addressed, in particular serious concerns about the marking quality of the writing test and the use of data in the creation of public league tables.

Two positions were balanced in the review – a belief that external accountability is essential in driving the rise in standards and an intention to allow schools more freedom in choosing their own direction and becoming professionally accountable for the progress of their pupils.

Key Points for teachers

- externally marked reading tests will continue, with refinement to ensure that fluency, accuracy and comprehension are tested; wider access for SEN pupils will be considered as future tests are developed
- writing composition will be teacher assessed, across a wide range of genres and writing styles throughout Year 6. Evidence should be drawn from routine class work across the curriculum, not from the preparation of show pieces. Teacher assessment judgments will be subject to external moderation and it is suggested that moderators could meet pupils
- the writing test will assess spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary and probably handwriting
- Speaking and Listening will continue to be teacher assessed
- optional level 6 testing will be available to challenge able pupils
- teacher assessment data will be published ahead of test results in order to emphasise the importance of formative teacher assessment data in the accountability process
- detailed information will be provided to parents, including the breakdown of each attainment target
- cluster moderation will be encouraged
- Year 7 teachers will work more closely with Year 6 colleagues in the moderation of writing judgements.

Implications for teachers

How secure are individual teachers about their assessment skills and their ability to protect against bias? According to the report, research suggests that Minority Ethnic pupils are disadvantaged by teacher assessment as 'Black Caribbean and Black African pupils are

under-assessed relative to white pupils, and Indian, Chinese and mixed white-Asian pupils are over-assessed'. Cluster moderation will support the collaborative development of assessment skills, but individual teachers will need to consider the issue of reliability. In addition, teaching at level 6 requires a significantly greater depth of subject knowledge than is currently required for teaching in Year 6. How will this be addressed? The challenges of teaching from levels 2 – 6 within one class are considerable, particularly in a mixed-ability context. There is, as yet, no guidance on how a composite English level will be derived using summative data from the benchmark testing of reading and writing together with formative assessment data for writing composition.

Key points for school leaders and governors

- KS2 data should be used for: school accountability, parental and transition information, and the monitoring of school performance locally and nationally
- individual pupil progress will be equally weighted with attainment in any judgements made about a school – future OFSTED inspections will balance achievement against attainment
- an additional indicator of progress for the lowest achieving pupils will be published
- the introduction of 3 year rolling average data will overcome cohort specific variations
- the composite English level will be published as separate reading and writing level; in addition, schools will provide parents with a detailed breakdown of their child's individual attainment targets within each subject
- an additional progress and attainment measure will be published for children who have completed both Years 5 and 6 in the same school to overcome the detrimental effect of turbulence on data
- in future years, tests can be taken up to 1 week after the set date in the case of pupil absence
- the publishing of 'Families of Schools' data will allow for comparison between schools which are similar, although RAISEonline will continue to provide data for Heads to evaluate the performance of their school against local and national standards
- parental views should be sought through surveys initiated by the school, in addition to those applied as part of an OFSTED inspection
- level 6 testing will be optional for able pupils
- participation in international studies will become statutory for selected schools.

Implications for school leaders and governors

Changes to data usage should both overcome the worst excesses of league tables and provide a more comprehensive picture of achievements of pupils within a school over a rolling three year period. Internal assessment, recording and reporting protocols may need to be reviewed to ensure that parents receive the detailed information which is suggested. The weight of accountability is clearly shifted to parents – schools will need to decide how they are going to meet this accountability, how they are going to ensure that parents understand the information which they are given and how they will empower parents to ask informed questions in order to hold their child's school accountable for progress.

In addition, school leaders will need to ensure that staff subject knowledge meets the requirements of Level 6 teaching, that teacher assessment is reliable and that skills are developed collaboratively within clusters. The impact of Level 6 testing on the rest of the school will be significant in order to achieve 3 full levels of progress across the key stage.

Key points for parents

- changes in performance information (parents will now be given both progress and achievement information) will make it easier for parents to hold their child's school accountable
- information about their child's progress within each attainment target will show if support is necessary as their child moves into secondary school
- a recommendation that parental views are sought through surveys initiated by the school will provide opportunity to comment, question and feed back to the school
- the outcome of Level 6 testing will be given to parents of those children entered for the test.

Implications for parents

Evidence about parental views appears to conflict, one report suggesting that 79% of parents felt that testing was of value, whilst another report suggested that most parents valued teacher assessment information more highly. Both forms of assessment information will now be available to parents in order to enable the formation of a more complete picture of progress and the facilitation of more informed discussions with teachers.

Key points for Key Stages 1 and 3

- monitoring of KS1 teacher assessment will become more consistently rigorous and will focus on those schools where attainment between KS1 and KS2 are inconsistent. It is intended that this will address the issue of grade inflation in Infant Schools and grade deflation in Primary Schools.
- cross-phase moderation with Year 3 teachers should be developed
- detailed progress information against each separate attainment target will facilitate clearer understanding of the needs of pupils at transition to Year 7
- Year 7 teachers will become involved in the Year 6 moderation process
- results of level 6 testing will be made available at transition to ensure appropriate challenge for able pupils as they enter Year 7.

The way ahead

There is no doubt that the change in data usage will lower the stakes for schools. The report attempts to create sustainability by establishing a 'whole child' picture. This both acknowledges the role of ongoing formative assessment and the continued importance of benchmark testing to ensure reliability and provide a consistent national picture of both progress and attainment. The report argues that if OFSTED judges only 53% of schools to be good or better at assessment, a move to teacher assessment as the sole indicator of standards is not appropriate. Whilst cross-phase moderation and increased parental

information will secure sustainability for pupils throughout their education, externally marked tests will still be necessary to ensure consistency nationally.

Concerns about the testing of writing are fully acknowledged by all the agencies involved in the review. This ranges from the subjectivity and poor quality of the marking process to the practice of cold testing which is both unrealistic and damaging to the creative process of writing for a real purpose and in context. It is acknowledged that allowing pupils time to draft, write, edit and review over a period of time will produce more accurate examples of a child's compositional skills and creativity.

Some suggestions are made about computer marked and computer adaptive testing for future consideration which could also be compatible with 'testing when ready,' rather than end of key stage testing. Some aspects of the process are acknowledged but not addressed, in particular the suitability of levels in assessment. These issues will be considered further as part of the National Curriculum revision, as it is suggested that new indicators could be designed to more effectively measure progress against the attainment targets of any curricular revision.

Acknowledging the time needed to design and evaluate new test procedures, a date for the implementation of the changes recommended in this report is not given.

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