

## Key Stage 2 Response Summary

### Context:

This response has been drawn up through consultation with members of the Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment (AAIA) and addresses the key issues specified in the Review Panel's remit. *A leaflet giving more information about AAIA accompanies this response.*

### Response:

- ***How best to ensure that the system of assessment in primary schools can improve standards of attainment and progress of pupils, and help narrow gaps.***
- ***How to ensure that tests are rigorous, and as valid and reliable as possible, within an overall system of assessment (including teacher assessment) which provides the best possible picture of every child's progress.***
- ***How to avoid, as far as possible, the risk of perverse incentives, over rehearsal and a reduced focus on productive learning.***

i) The improvement of standards of attainment and progress is dependent upon high quality learning and teaching. At classroom level this is achieved by teachers whose training and continuing professional development (CPD) is of the highest calibre. This equips them to make accurate and consistent judgements, use this information effectively and involve their pupils fully in the assessment process. There is no equal to the knowledge and understanding that a primary teacher can have of a pupil, as it embraces not only what the pupil knows, understands and can do but also *how* skills have been acquired and what the potential 'next steps' are in learning for each individual. A continuing commitment is required by teacher training providers and those offering CPD such as Local Authorities (LAs) and consultants/organisations, to supply informed and practical guidance to teachers and their managers.

ii) At school level, a priority for senior and middle managers is the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and the impact that the teaching and the associated assessment are having on attainment and progress. National and international research is clear about the power of the latter to effect improvement, for example that of Professors Dylan Wiliam, Paul Black and Wynne Harlen, the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) and Shirley Clarke. The government's recent White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' makes reference to some of this research.

iii) Currently, the system of summarising attainment in KS2 relies predominantly on tests not teacher assessment (TA). As a primary head teacher commented, "*This is the crude yardstick by which we are judged*", no other measures being taken into account. Thus the high stakes nature of the tests encourages 'teaching to the test' for fear of failure and all that may follow from it. Preparing pupils to take the tests, administering them and the fact that they are externally marked, reduces significantly teachers' need for and opportunities to develop their own professional judgements, based not on test outcomes but a much broader range of representative evidence. The assessment systems for colleagues in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Year 2 have enabled enhancement of their assessment skills with the added bonus of an associated enrichment of their teaching and, thereby, their pupils' learning.

iv) Equally appropriate for KS2 would be the introduction of a similar assessment model to the ones in use in the EYFS and KS1, i.e. employing the outcomes of TA to build up a picture, over time, of what children know, understand and can do, identifying gaps which in turn informs the 'next steps' in learning and thus impacts on planning and provision. At KS1, tests/tasks are interwoven in to the process and used both diagnostically and/or to complement TA and are marked by teachers. All pupils, and in particular those in vulnerable groups, benefit from such a system in that teaching, assessment and interventions are tailored to their needs, teachers choosing when to test and which test to use so that there are benefits for teacher and pupil alike.

v) Developing assessment skills and consistency in TA takes time, however the vast majority of (LAs) and schools already have significant expertise in securing robust and reliable assessment through standardisation and moderation processes, both within and across schools and across LAs. An external monitoring process would be required based on a rolling programme so that validity and consistency of

judgements could be assured and maintained year on year, coupled with random sampling such as is currently in place for testing in science at the end of KS2.

- ***How to ensure that parents have good quality information on the progress of their children and the success of schools.***

vi) Schools must be accountable for the quality of the education they provide and the progress of every child in their care. It is essential that every parent has clear, intelligible information about their child and the context in which they are learning – attainment, progress, comparisons with national expectations and how the school is succeeding. Information shared with parents must be accurate and meaningful thus schools have a duty to ensure, through standardisation and moderation of assessments and the scrupulous administration and precise marking of any tests used, that outcomes are reliable. It is essential that approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are shared with and clearly explained to parents. This helps them to understand and make use of the information they receive and fosters a willingness to work with the school to support their child's learning at home. For many schools this can pose a considerable challenge, especially where parents' own experiences of education were not good and/or they have low expectations for themselves and for their children. However, many schools have proved that persevering with the building of strong, trust-based relationships with parents can affect children's attitudes to their learning and impact positively on attainment and progress. Drawing on the successful experience of these schools can help other schools implement good practice that enables parents to have confidence in the information they receive. Good communication systems, providing regular, welcoming opportunities for parents to be engaged in using information to help steer how the school moves forward and shape priorities and policies are essential for every school.

- ***How to ensure that performance information is used and interpreted appropriately within the accountability system by other agencies, increasing transparency and preserving accountability to parents, pupils and the taxpayer, while avoiding the risk of crude and narrow judgements being made.***

vii) The current dominant system of school accountability relies primarily on the data from the 'one-off' KS2 tests. The performance tables constructed from this information and christened 'league tables' by the media have led to '*crude and narrow judgements*' being made. This regrettable feature of English education puts schools under significant pressure to ensure that pupils 'perform' well in limited aspects of English and mathematics. Inevitably, this demand has a pervasive effect on the breadth and depth of the curriculum in Year 6 and Year 5 and reverberates throughout the rest of the key stage. As one primary headteacher said, with considerable feeling:

*'If league tables were not published, this would reduce the need for drilling children to achieve in tests and would allow teachers to teach the children the things they need to learn to be successful in their education and in the world they live in today.'*

It is not that data is generated and used that concerns schools and LAs; it is *how* this is done, coupled with the lack of contextualisation and understanding by 'other agencies' that presents issues. It is essential that the presentation of information, analysis/interpretation and use is based on an appreciation that children's learning is complex and this is how it is used pedagogically. At KS2 the system seeks to refine this complexity for the purpose of statistical convenience. This compromises entitlement and produces information which is at best incomplete, at worst, inaccurate, and so is of limited use.

- ***How best to ensure that schools are properly and fairly accountable to pupils, parents and the taxpayer for the achievement and progress of every child, on the basis of objective and accurate assessments; and that this reflects the true performance of the school.***

viii) It is important that regular inspections by HMI and Ofsted remain to provide stakeholders with a system of very public accountability of the performance of schools. The resulting reports are freely available and are frequently the subject of reports in the local press. Thus maintained schools, academies and free schools will continue to be openly accountable through this system, though proposals indicate that this will not be the case for schools deemed as 'outstanding'. One of the benefits of inspection has been the emphasis on school self – evaluation, through dialogue with school improvement partners (SIPs)

and the completion of the comprehensive, evidence – based School Evaluation Form (SEF). Although these are to be dispensed with, schools have developed considerable expertise in evaluating the impact of what they do and justifying their statements with hard evidence. A form of self - evaluation, for example a commentary using assessments derived as in paragraph (iv) and published with open access, would enable readers to see the 'true performance' of the school. Accountability at the end of primary education for what has been achieved by schools and their pupils is important. Reporting of the outcomes of the model outlined in paragraphs (i) to (v) would provide this, coupled with accessible inspection and school self - evaluation information.

- ***How best to ensure that the assessment system allows us to make comparisons with education systems internationally.***

ix) Headteachers take issue with international comparisons. They may cite the fact that cultural and structural differences between this country and, for instance, many continental countries, makes valid comparisons difficult. Children do not start school until the age of 7 in much of Europe, whereas English children are in school by 5, or in some cases earlier. Headteachers' experience indicates to them that some racial groups may appreciate the worth of education more than others and that what teachers in England do is more akin to social work on occasions than the role required of say, a German colleague. These are not attempts to duck the issue or make excuses, but a genuine concern that the comparison is not 'like for like'. The Programme for International Assessment (PISA) and the McKinsey report both offer useful pointers towards the improvement of education systems. They identify from research that '*improvement needs to be integrated into the very fabric of the system's pedagogy*' and that sustaining change requires '*changing not just the way teachers teach ...but what they think about teaching.*' This is mirrored to a significant extent by what has happened with teaching and assessment in Early Years and in Year 2 and, to a large extent, in Year 1 also, pressurised by the need for continuity for the children's learning. The McKinsey report identifies that a key factor in making and sustaining such change is professional collaboration and it is no accident that this is also a key feature of the assessment system proposed throughout this response.

- ***How to make administration of the system as simple and cost-effective as possible, with minimal bureaucracy.***

x) The potential alignment of arriving at end of KS2 judgements with systems used for the EYFS, KS1 and TA in KS3 makes comparisons valid and has the added bonus, in line with the governments' drive for improving the quality of teaching, of developing further the skills of teachers that work in Year 6. It represents a significant investment in the professional development of the teaching workforce and therefore likely to be better value for money over time. The model has additional benefits in terms of cost reduction and minimising bureaucracy in that no year on year test production has to be funded (with all the attendant pre – testing, distribution, collection and monitoring costs) nor would any external marking be required or the provision of systems to support online access arrangements applications.

xi) The government's stated aim is '*that improved standards and narrowing of gaps are best achieved through ensuring that schools and teachers are free to set their own direction, trusted to exercise their professional discretion and accountable for the progress of the children in their care.*' The model outlined in paragraphs (i) to (v) provides the most effective and cost efficient way forward, particularly as it draws on the 'in situ' professional resource, teachers themselves. As Michael Gove in a recent article (17<sup>th</sup> Dec.2010) stated, "In our teachers and our students we have the raw materials – if we work together – to build a world class education system."

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