

2015/1

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Primary Policy Watch – Here comes the sun... and a flurry of announcements.

With the last few weeks of the academic year seemingly roaring by, there's been the normal rush to get information out before the end of term.

Since the middle of June we've had new inspection guidelines coming out of Ofsted, confirmation of the approved Baseline providers, new safeguarding advice, a push on pupil premium, and sample materials for the 2016 national curriculum assessments. There's a lot to take in, so here are some of the main headlines:

New Ofsted Common Inspection Framework

The updated Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (CIF) was launched on the 11th June for inspections from September 2015.

It contains some clarification on what Ofsted is looking to see in approaches to assessment post-levels. This includes how well teachers use assessment for establishing pupils' starting points and how testing is being used to modify teaching so that pupils achieve their potential by the end of a year or key stage. Crucially, the document states that Ofsted does not expect to see *any particular system of assessment* in place, which suggests that rumours of a possible return to the levels system may be highly exaggerated.

There also seems to have been some recognition of, and attempt to address, the high levels of pressure that news of inspection places on schools and teachers. Schools last judged as 'good' will have shorter inspections, while in his recent Future of Education Inspection launch speech Sir Michael Wilshaw made reference to teachers needing to be 'focussed on what really benefits children and young people, rather than wasting their time endlessly preparing for an Ofsted inspection which could be years away.' While that statement could perhaps do with being rephrased in such a way that it does not seem to put blame on teachers, there has been support from the unions for the general recognition that teachers should be freed up to do their actual job of teaching, rather than preparing for inspection.

Finally, reflecting the new Counter-Terrorism and Security Act placing a general duty on specified authorities (including schools) to have "*due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism*", there's a greater emphasis on safeguarding to include prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

Assessment

Approved Baseline check providers have been announced, whittling down the field of six to three (those that achieved over 10% of market share in pre-orders). These are the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring, Durham University (CEM), Early Excellence, and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Within this field there are two noticeably different approaches – one ICT based, using adaptive technology, and one based on teacher observation. While this gives schools at least some degree of choice, a significant groundswell of resistance remains among the early years community meaning we're unlikely to have heard the last of this debate.

If you've previously chosen a provider that is no longer on the list of approved providers, you can still use your selected provider. However, the DfE won't reimburse any costs and you will not be eligible to report on progress, rather having to report on attainment in line with the new floor standard.

Meanwhile, sample papers, instructions and mark schemes were released at the beginning of July for the 2016 SATs. The mark schemes come with detailed guidance on marking principles

and common issues. Questions are related to specific strands of learning or 'content domains' which are mapped out in the [test framework documents](#) (updated end June).

We still don't have full information about what the scale will look like. It will be created based on the first full set of data from the new SATs to ensure it is correct, and maintained in subsequent years by using a process known as 'test equating'. The DfE is very clear that the old national curriculum levels are not relevant to the new national curriculum. However, they have confirmed that at KS1, the national standard will roughly equate to an old level 2b, and at KS2 to an old level 4b.

Pupil Premium

A report from the National Audit Office released on the 30th June concluded that: 'While the impact of the Pupil Premium will take time to become clear, it has the potential to bring about a significant improvement in outcomes. However, the Department for Education and schools have more to do.'" This point was taken up by Nicky Morgan in a speech at the Sutton Trust and Educational Endowment Foundation summit – reiterating that more must be done to share best practice across schools and ensure that schools give more reflection to how they use the money in an evidence-based way.

There was little concrete direction in the speech, however, beyond the department's intention to challenge more 'failing and coasting schools' and work more closely with the Educational Endowment Foundation to disseminate thought-leadership around what works so that schools are not only 'narrowing the gap' but helping all children catch up and keep up. Indeed, Ms. Morgan went as far as to say that she viewed them as a 'key partner', suggesting that they may become a more important reference source for schools in the future.

The final pieces of the puzzle...

With the release of all of this new information it feels as though the final pieces of the puzzle in terms of the current reform agenda, are falling into place. The Department's vision of challenging every child to reach their full potential is really gaining substance as we see it reinforced in successive announcements. The new curriculum, as well as the government's policies on assessment and accountability are starting to feel more solid and permanent. While much remains to be done to support schools in achieving these lofty ambitions, it does at least feel as though the government is giving some thought to how to make this happen.

Wishing you a restful summer holiday.

Rosalind Letellier

Pearson Primary

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