

2013/55

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Pocket Watch – Holding primary education to account

Introduction

A change of personnel but a familiar tone as David Laws rather than Michael Gove launched the consultation this week on primary assessment and accountability. The theme was "*delivering a step change in aspirations and attainment*" with primary education now to be focused on ensuring that pupils are as prepared as can be for a smooth transition to secondary. '*Secondary ready*' is the rather awkward phrase being used, too close to 'oven ready' for some commentators but defined by the percentage of pupils able to reach the floor standard raised recently and now hiked up to 85%

Two other points stand out from this latest announcement, one more controversial than the other. The controversial one is that the Government is proposing to report pupil performance in National Curriculum tests in a national decile ranking, using a scaled score to show how individual pupils have performed nationally within a 10% grouping. The aim is to provide clear information to parents about how Sally and Tom, the two examples given in the document, are doing, a move proving less popular with the profession than parents it seems. The more welcome announcement is that the Government intends to raise the level of the primary pupil premium from 2014/15, up from £900 to £1,300 per disadvantaged pupil, "*the largest cash rise so far*" and evidence of the seriousness of the Government's intent in ensuring as many pupils as possible cross the secondary line as possible

Key features of the consultation

The consultation builds on a number of recent developments in the primary sector including most notably changes to the assessment regime following the 2011 Bew Review, revisions to National Curriculum programmes of study for 2014 on and Ofsted's recent landmark Report on closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged children. Each has left its mark on this consultation

Overall the proposals can be grouped under four headings

1. **Teacher assessment and reporting to parents.** The focus here is on developing a system for monitoring and reporting pupil progress now that level descriptors are being abandoned as part of the National Curriculum changes. School reports, teacher assessments and other more informal forms of reporting by schools will remain but schools will be encouraged to develop their own formative assessment reporting systems to support pupil attainment and progression and the Government "*will not prescribe a single system for ongoing assessment and reporting.*"

Whether this will be seen as a blessing or a burden remains to be seen, views are mixed at present particularly as this is an area that Ofsted will be scrutinising. "*Ofsted's inspections will be informed by the school's chosen pupil tracking data.*" The Government and others will be providing model approaches but with the consultation setting out five core principles that it expects such systems to adopt, it will put considerable pressure on schools to ensure that they have appropriate capabilities in place

2. **National Curriculum tests.** Schools will have to continue with the phonics screening checks at the end of Year 1 while statutory tests in English and maths will remain with further planning details evident in the recently released Standards and Testing Agency Business Plan. The first round of the new National Curriculum tests will not come in until 2016 following the introduction of the new curriculum from 2014, meaning schools will need to plan the transition carefully as tests for 2014 and 2015 will be based on the existing curriculum

More significantly the new tests will not only be more demanding and/or challenging, both descriptors are used, to reflect the new more demanding curriculum but will, as indicated, be reported on a scaled score (of 100) to ensure comparability and with pupil scores ranked on a national scale by decile (10% of the cohort)

- 3. Baseline measures.** In launching the recent 'Access and achievement' Report, Sir Michael Wilshaw had called for a clearer reporting line through the early years. *"In my view a major change is necessary in our approach to assessment in the early years. There should be a direct link between national assessment in Reception and assessment at the end of Key Stage 1."* The removal of the current system of levels and level descriptors provides an opportunity to re-think how best to measure progress in the early years and whether for example to introduce a clear starting point baseline at the start of Reception

The Government has no fixed view on this and is asking for views on two options: whether to retain the existing system of a baseline at the end of KS1 using perhaps published test results or whether to introduce a baseline at the start of Reception, potentially administered by a teacher within a few weeks of a child starting and based on a standard model. The quid pro quo would be to make the current EYFS Profile non-statutory

- 4. Accountability.** Increasing volumes of data are now being made available to enable judgements to be made about school performance, much of which will be gathered together in the new data portal the Government is introducing in 2015. Equally of course Ofsted has introduced a new inspection regime but an important and widely recognised feature of the accountability system is the application of a minimum floor standard. This has been progressively raised over recent years but currently stands at 60% of pupils reaching expected standards (level 4) in reading, writing and maths

The default obviously is that a school can be above the floor standard yet still have a large percentage of its pupils below minimum standards and as the Government is keen to point out, pupils that fail to grasp the essentials at this stage generally go on to struggle to achieve good levels of qualifications later. It is therefore proposing to jack up the floor standard to 85%, arguing that *"a significant number of schools in challenging circumstances"* already manage this. For schools that might need a bit more time to reach this minimum level, it's proposing that a progress measure is used based on comparing the scaled KS2 test scores of pupils with the same prior attainment

Full details of the consultation can be found [here](#)

What happens next?

Consultation runs over the summer and closes on 11 October 2013 with proposed new arrangements due to take effect from 2016



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