

# Call for Evidence: Key Stage 2 Testing and Accountability Review

## Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 ASCL represents 15,000 members of senior leadership teams working in schools or colleges with students of secondary age. While most of our members do not administer KS2 tests we do have members in middle schools or all-through 5-18 schools who are directly involved and all of our members receiving students at age 11 are obviously very interested in the work of this group. Our members also have experience of the impact of the removal of the KS3 tests.
- 2 ASCL believes that there must be a robust process of assessment for pupils as they leave the primary phase of education. This is essential for the pupils themselves, their parents and for the school to which they are moving. It is essential that the outcomes of this process should provide nationally standardised information which is sufficiently reliable to be used with confidence by secondary schools.
- 3 The current testing regime using the national curriculum levels does not provide secondary schools with sufficiently sophisticated information to enable them to assess each child's needs and to provide an appropriately personalised curriculum. In addition, the timing of the tests and the high stakes nature of the accountability regime leads, in some schools, to over-preparation and focus on training for and practising tests, followed by a reduced focus on English and maths during the summer term of Y6. It is not therefore surprising that some pupils' skills in English and maths appear to be at a lower level in September of Y7 than they were when the tests were taken.
- 4 Secondary schools need this information about the pupils who are due to come to them in Y7 well before the end of the summer term so that informed decisions can be made about setting where this takes place and teachers can begin to plan for their students in advance of the beginning of term. Where a secondary school has a clear catchment area with identified primary feeder schools much of this information can be passed on through discussion but this is not an option for many secondary schools who now receive pupils from 30 or more primary schools. Some secondary schools test Y7 students at the beginning of the school year but this is usually so that they can obtain information which is more detailed and helpful than the simple test level. Students with a level 4 for example can vary enormously in their skills and teachers need to know more than this if they are to plan effectively. Many use alternative tests such as CATs.
- 5 ASCL believes that both of these challenges could be solved by the implementation of an assessment process which included nationally devised tests combined with teacher assessment. KS2 is now an anomaly within educational assessment since there are few, if any, other assessment processes, whether in professional qualifications, higher education or secondary education, which rely entirely on a test taken on one day. It

seems wrong to impose this mode of assessment on 11 year olds when they will not be judged in this way at any later stage in their lives.

- 6 ASCL would prefer to see a combination of the use of test banks (produced and marked nationally by a test agency) which could be administered at any point during Y6 and teacher assessment based on national standards accompanied by an agreed moderation process. Eventually the tests could be on-line and marked on-line, (as CAT tests already are).
- 7 Moderation and standardisation would be led by Chartered Educational Assessors (CEAs). ASCL supports the process developed by the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) and believes that every school (or clusters of small schools) should have a CEA who would train staff and ensure that a proper moderation process was being carried out. Groups would meet during the summer term (which could include secondary CEAs) to sample the evidence which would include test results and pupils' portfolios. Pupils and their parents would then receive their summative assessments in English and maths and there would be much more detail available to be passed on to secondary schools as well as to inform parents about their child's attainment and progress. These meetings would take place early in the summer term so that the assessments could be passed on to secondary schools well before the end of term. There would be a nationally agreed date for completion of this process.
- 8 ASCL believes that a robust process of this sort would promote confidence in the outcomes and that there would be a diminished chance of such outcomes being skewed by teachers and schools worried about accountability measures. Awarding Bodies, for example, use statistical evidence to decide whether a centre's own teacher assessment judgements are reliable and have ways of investigating when there appears to be an anomaly. Such processes could be employed in a similar way at KS2. These assessments could then be used to provide information about the school's performance since it is right that schools should provide information about the attainment of their pupils when they move on to another phase.
- 9 It would be essential for such a process not to provide additional workload for teachers, not to become overly bureaucratic, and to be cost effective. Good on-line tests which are electronically marked can be very cost effective and money thus saved from the current testing regime could be used to support training and moderation time for teachers.
- 10 The experience of ASCL members following the removal of the KS3 tests has been very positive both in terms of curriculum development and the development of teachers' professional skills in assessment. Evidence shows that standards of literacy and numeracy are rising in secondary schools and that this trend has not been adversely affected by the removal of tests.
- 11 All of the above makes good educational sense provided that a simple system, which does not become too bureaucratic, could be established. However, our members are becoming increasingly concerned by the information which is gradually being published about the future of performance tables and accountability measures. If a progress measure of three levels of progress from KS2 to KS4 with no contextualisation were to be implemented as one of the chief ways of judging secondary schools then they would worry about any change to the measurement of levels at the end of KS2; and their chief concerns would be that KS2 results are reliable, cannot be artificially inflated and are nationally standardised. Although they would prefer to see a combination of test and teacher assessment, they will need to be convinced that such a measurement would meet the concerns listed above.

- 12 This brings us back to the issue raised earlier about the nature of National Curriculum levels. Not only do they not provide secondary schools with sufficient information to plan for individual students but they are too wide to act as a baseline for a reliable and equitable progress measurement. A pupil who has just scraped a level 4 in a test but is more generally working at the top end of level 3 is not comparable with a pupil who has a secure level 4 in a test and is working constantly at the top end of level 4.
- 13 ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

**Sue Kirkham**

ASCL Education Policy Specialist  
Association of School and College Leaders  
9 February 2011