

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Primary Assessment](#), HC 682

Wednesday 14 December 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 14 December 2016.

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair); Marion Fellows; Suella Fernandes; Catherine McKinnell; Ian Mearns; William Wragg.

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Witnesses

I Alex Gingell, Deputy Head, Marlborough Primary School; Juliet Nickels, Primary School Teacher; and Michael Tidd, Deputy Head, Edgewood Primary School.

II John Coe, Information Officer, National Association for Primary Education; Russell Hobby, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers; and Binks Neate-Evans, Head Teacher, Headteachers Roundtable.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Marlborough Primary School](#)
- [Juliet Nickels](#)
- [Michael Tidd](#)
- [National Association for Primary Education](#)
- [National Association of Head Teachers](#)
- [Headteachers Roundtable](#)

Examination of witnesses

Alex Gingell, Juliet Nickels and Michael Tidd

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to the first session of our inquiry into primary assessment. We have already had a considerable amount of



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written evidence, but a Select Committee would not be doing its job unless we got people in front of us to probe the issues still further. The reason we are looking at this is, of course, primary assessment has been in the headlines in the last year or so. There has been a lot of comment about changes, and we want to look at those changes, look at the impact of those changes and see where we go from here on in. With that in mind, I would like to invite all three of you to say who you are and where you hail from for the purposes of the viewers.

Alex Gingell: I am Alex Gingell. I am Deputy Head at Marlborough Primary School, which is in Chelsea.

Juliet Nickels: I am Juliet Nickels, and I am a year 6 teacher at Coten End School in Warwick.

Michael Tidd: I am Michael Tidd. I am a year 6 class teacher and deputy head at Edgewood Primary School in Nottinghamshire.

Chair: You also help us understand more through your work with *Times Educational* —

Michael Tidd: I try. I try.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Okay. Is the assessment system at primary school working, Alex?

Alex Gingell: We have been talking about this outside a little bit and I think we need to be quite clear about what assessment is before we talk about whether it is working or not. Different people and different organisations have different understandings of what that means. For us, in-school assessment happens every day in every lesson and there is a range of different strategies that we use to assess pupils. There is the other perspective that assessment is testing and SATs. It is our view at Marlborough, and I am sure at wider schools, that assessment is every single day in classrooms and the purpose of that is to help children move forward in their learning.

Assessment for us at Marlborough is identifying what children can do, what children cannot yet do, and working on adapting and informing our planning, teaching and future lessons to make sure that they can learn those things that they do not know. Is it working? At Marlborough I would say that our assessment is really strong and that the strategies that teachers use are supporting children's learning. We are quite lucky because, as a school, we have taken the time to look at the purpose of assessment. We have answered the question: why should we assess pupils? It has been the head teacher and the senior leadership team's view that, as a school, we should spend money and time thinking about what assessment is, how it works, why we are doing it and focusing on the learning that goes behind it and that really drives assessment.

Q3 **Chair:** Juliet, Alex basically said assessment happens in his school and should happen in basically all schools by implication, because that is part



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of the learning process to find out how children are doing and what they need to do next to improve. Is that something you think is correct, and do you think there is anything else that is behind the word “assessment”?

Juliet Nickels: I think one of the problems is that there are different interpretations of what assessment is, and it is very unclear what the purposes are. If the purpose is to enhance the education of our pupils at primary school, then possibly it is not working at the moment, or there are aspects that are counter-productive in that sense. Alex’s school has a solution, but there are thousands of primary schools and thousands of local solutions. That is another issue, possibly, when everybody interprets things slightly differently—it tends to be pot luck for the pupils around the country.

Michael Tidd: Yes, I would echo lots of those things. It is about this definition of what we mean by assessment. For your purposes, obviously your main focus is going to be the national role of the Government in that, and I would call that mostly accountability. There is very little about the end of the key stage testing process that is about assessment for educational purposes. I don’t say that to suggest there should not be accountability; I think it is perfectly reasonable. We need to be much more honest that we have these systems in place nationally because the Department needs to hold schools to account for the money that is spent on them. That is all reasonable.

I would say that is very different from, and can sometimes have a negative impact on, the things that should and could be happening in classrooms. That differentiation of the purposes that we have mentioned is really clear, and I think probably the work of your board is going to be focused on the accountability end and the impact it has, which is reasonable, but the main thing we need to address from that is: are there things happening in that national system that are undoing the good work that could be happening in classroom assessment? That is probably the case at the moment. In short, no, it is probably not working as well as it could.

Q4 **Chair:** You have put your finger on the issue here. This is not just about what happens in the classroom, but it is about what people think is happening in the classroom from the assessment processes and accumulative figures that come out of those processes. Alex was addressing us as if he was in Finland where, of course, assessment takes place in schools all the time, but none of it is really from a national focus, and that is absolutely understandable. What we want to know, though, is what impact the Government’s changes in the last year or so have made and whether or not that is bringing about an easier assessment process for you in the classrooms, a harder one, a less relevant one or a more relevant one, and what we need to do to improve it. That is the direction of travel we want to go in, which brings me on to this: has the new system affected teaching and learning in your schools? Let’s start with Juliet.



Juliet Nickels: Yes.

Q5 **Chair:** In what way?

Juliet Nickels: It has affected it negatively in all of the ways that are predicted for high-stakes assessment. Even though the teachers in our school have a lot of integrity in that regard, it is unavoidable that we feel the pressures of high-stakes assessment on what we teach. Basically, the prediction that what is assessed is what is taught happens, and other subjects that are not assessed, areas of subjects that are not assessed, get a lower profile.

Chair: We are going to be talking about curriculum later in another set of questions, so let's not veer into that territory now.

Juliet Nickels: Yes, okay.

Chair: Michael, what are your thoughts?

Michael Tidd: It inevitably has an impact, and I think there is a mix of those. I am certainly of the view that going back to a system where we did not have any national assessments would be a problem, because I think there is an element of having a national framework where everybody knows what they are working towards. I am also generally of the view that I don't have an issue with prioritising English and maths at primary school. I don't think I would do it in quite the way it has been done, because I do think there is a narrowing, which is the issue, particularly in year 2 and year 6.

Q6 **Chair:** That is an issue that we are going to touch upon later. For now, what I would like to know is, what would be your reaction if you had a contingent of parents concerned about SATs and whether or not they should be continued?

Alex Gingell: SATs are something that we have to do, and it is something that parents talk about, because they have a little bit of an idea that SATs tests happen. At our school it is not something that we promote, and we don't make a big deal about that, because I think there is a disparity between what we think is important in terms of learning and what SATs tests measure. You are talking about parents and their views?

Q7 **Chair:** Yes. What would be your view if SATs were challenged as a mechanism by stakeholders in your school, and the second biggest would be parents?

Alex Gingell: We were talking about parents outside a little bit as well, and about their understanding of SATs and the way that that is reported. The first thing that I would do is inform them about how it does work, because we were used to levels for so long.

Q8 **Chair:** In short, you are not thinking that SATs should be done away with?



Alex Gingell: They need to be adapted and I think the way that we hold schools to account through summative tests needs to be changed.

Juliet Nickels: Yes, I would agree with that. I am not antagonistic to testing at the end of the year and, in fact, I like standardised tests, and I would possibly extend them through the year groups, but they need to be uncoupled as a single, sole measurement of teaching quality and school quality, because I don't think they adequately measure that.

Chair: Okay. We will probe that later as well. Michael?

Michael Tidd: I am generally of the view that they don't do any significant harm to year 2 and year 6 children. They might not be perfect, but they are better than scrapping the whole thing and saying, "No, let's have nothing." There is definitely work to be done, but—

Chair: Should stay, but need improvement.

Q9 **Catherine McKinnell:** I have one follow-up question on parents. Often we hear parental concerns about SATs and the impact that it may or may not have on their children. Another aspect to the parents receiving the SATs results is that they get a sense of how their child is doing. Do you think that that is important parental information as to where their child is at in terms of national standards and across the school? Do you think that is a helpful measure for parents in terms of education input and output for the children?

Alex Gingell: It is if they understand what it means, and the issue is that they don't really know what it means. Much more effective, in terms of them understanding the learning of their child, are the conversations that we have with them in parent consultations on a daily basis, when we are taking them into school in the mornings and sending them off in the afternoons. That dialogue of learning is way more beneficial in terms of developing parents' understanding than a scale score at the end of year 6.

Q10 **Catherine McKinnell:** That is if that parental communication is taking place. As Juliet said earlier, it is very hit and miss from one school to another as to how that may be approached, and a SAT result may be the only real information that a parent ever gets about how their child is doing in some situations.

Michael Tidd: It would be hugely incomprehensible to a good many of them. That is the thing, if the only information you are getting about your child's progress is their key stage 1 and key stage 2 results, you have no hope of knowing how well your child is doing. There is a massive gap between them for a start. They are very complex to understand because it has significantly changed. It is very hard—and I know this from working with teachers and head teachers—trying to get people to understand how the scale score works, what the significance of being a 99 rather than a 100 really is, and whether an 80 is the end of the world for their child, whereas actually they are just a bit short of the expected standard. It is



an incredibly blunt instrument and, if schools are not doing the other parental communication bits, they are probably not doing the things that you need to communicate around those results either and nor is the DfE doing that very well, I would say.

Juliet Nickels: In terms of having a pass/fail level, that is probably not very conducive to good relationships with the parents. In fact, that pass mark it is fairly meaningless. It did not really mean anything in the first trial of these SATs. The conversation with parents would be much more useful if you could look at things like scores and actual aspects of learning.

Chair: Ian, you are going to be talking about life after levels. That is our theme, anyway.

Ian Mearns: Life after levels, yes. I must admit, Alex, I was a little surprised at your answer to the last question from Catherine because I thought, being a deputy head in a London school, you would be met on a daily basis by really, really pushy parents, according to the Children's Commissioner anyway, so I am surprised at the answer that you gave. Your parents sound like they don't fulfil the stereotype that the Children's Commissioner placed on London parents last week by comparing kids in the north and kids in the south.

Chair: Anyway, let's get on with the question. We are going to run out of time.

Ian Mearns: I was making a point about something that was —

Chair: Yes, you have made it. Let's get on with the questions.

Q11 **Ian Mearns:** Right. Following the removal of levels, do you think that schools were sufficiently supported to implement new assessment systems, or were they largely left to their own devices?

Alex Gingell: No would be the answer that I would give. They were largely left to their own devices. Life without levels was an exciting opportunity to do something different and that is something that really came through from Tim Oates in the national curriculum review; that we had an amazing opportunity to innovate in terms of learning and in terms of assessment. What did not happen is I don't think there was enough support given from above, from DfE, and it was up to schools to go and identify what they wanted to do. Those schools who were engaged with innovative thinking and thinking differently, who wanted to change things actually did and they achieved assessment for a purpose. A lot of schools were thinking about compliance, and they ended up buying into some assessment systems because they had to have something. It took a very brave school, and it still does take very brave schools, very brave head teachers, to step away from that and say, "We are going to do this because this is how we feel and this is why we think it is important." I would say, no, I don't think there was enough support.



Juliet Nickels: No, the man-hours that must have been lost in all of the schools around the country trying to develop systems in fear or panic, and the amount of confusion, people clinging on to their old systems or replicating levels, not quite knowing what they were supposed to do. There was a vast amount of time wasted when we could have had clearer directives about exactly what it was we were expected to do.

Michael Tidd: There was no vision about what getting rid of levels was meant to achieve. It was a very easy, "Strike these out, this isn't working." I feel even now—and I have spent a lot of time thinking about this—I am still clarifying my understanding of, what should this world look like? I presume that those behind the original decision, or at least those who advised it, probably had some clearer idea of that, and that has not been shared with schools at all. It was very much a case of, "We don't think this is working. Good luck." You are right, there has been a lot of hours wasted on replicating a system that we decided was not working.

- Q12 **Ian Mearns:** I absolutely appreciate your view on this, Alex, and how it is an opportunity, but schools are at different phases of their development. If a school has a lot going on anyway, they might be preparing for an Ofsted inspection, or they have just come out of an Ofsted inspection that was not so good, the opportunities to innovate would not necessarily be replicated across the whole school of state. Would you accept that?

Alex Gingell: The whole school system, no, exactly. It could not be because it was left to schools to do things themselves. Where schools work together, and they have engaged other schools in that dialogue around assessment and life without levels, there might be a bit more consistency. What we have now is this completely uneven playing field across the country, where children going to one school are going to get a completely different experience from a child going to another one. In a lot of ways that is not fair.

- Q13 **Ian Mearns:** You had an opportunity to innovate. Did you use that opportunity, from your perspective?

Alex Gingell: I am in an interesting position. I joined my current school in September as deputy and at my previous school I was the year 6 teacher and the head of teaching and learning. I came from a school where I was leading on a lot of the philosophical "why we assess", that kind of thing, but I did not have the power to make the decisions. In the end, we ended up getting something that did not necessarily fit with that vision that we were developing. I have moved to a school that developed a clear vision and created their own assessment system based on that vision, so I am in a quite fortunate place now.

Michael Tidd: I don't know Alex's school and I don't know the system. I suspect what has happened in the vast majority of cases is, we have a range of replacements for levels and very few of them achieve what was



originally intended by that scrapping of levels goal. I think that was to completely replace this idea of tracking progress all the time with a formative assessment that will help teaching and learning, and we are a bit focused on the tracking progress towards the end of key stage tests. There has been lots of innovation of varying degrees, including people buying in things from private systems. The proportion of innovation that has achieved the goal that was originally set out is tiny. I include my own work in that. I got things wrong more than I got them right for a long while.

Juliet Nickels: Yes, that is absolutely my experience. That carrot and stick at the end of key stage 2 is a massive driver, so schools are driven to know where their pupils are in relation to that and they need to track progress. I have also been in the position of trying to implement the changes in the way that they were probably originally conceived but also not having that authority, and against a very, very strong drive to track the progress of pupils. Even given that, it cannot be done reliably.

Q14 **Ian Mearns:** Could one of you—Alex, probably—briefly explain what method of assessment was implemented in your new school?

Alex Gingell: My school, when I was not there, developed a system that is called STEAM, and it is the strategy for teaching, embedding and assessing mastery. They spent more time thinking about what mastery looked like in terms of learning, and adapting that side of things at the school, and the curriculum at the school, than they did thinking about how they were going to track. If we think about learning rather than tracking, hopefully the data will show improvements because we have focused on developing the learning. Our system basically looks at key skills and statements from the curriculum, and we say whether a child can do it or if they cannot yet do it. We then use that information to inform our planning and our teaching so that we can support those children in being able to do the things they cannot yet do.

Michael Tidd: I have a very similar system in my school, and I still think it is falling short. A good example is from my work this week assessing children's work in maths. One of the questions that came up in the assessment was—I have year 5s, so they are mostly about nine—to express 32 as a product of primes. A vast majority of my children could not do that, and I expected that. I could easily say, "I have tracked and yet they cannot do it and I know I need to teach that." What that assessment did not tell me and what most of those systems don't tell me is, why can't they do that? Is that because they don't understand what a product is? Is it because they don't understand what a prime is? Is it because they don't understand how to factorise into primes? In terms of good, formative assessment, it was the wrong question to ask. I needed smaller questions to identify: exactly what do I need to teach? I think that is still the case. Lots of schools are essentially highlighting bits of the national curriculum. Yes, they can do this and they cannot do that. I think that is better than giving them a level 3 and saying, "They are about



there.” I still think assessment largely falls short on that really diagnostic questioning where you are asking exactly the right questions to work out, what does that mean for my teaching and learning right now and in the next few sessions?

Alex Gingell: If I can pick up on that as well. That takes time and it takes professional development, because teachers need to understand what that looks like in each subject. Sadly, more time was spent on trying to understand standardised scores, value-added measures, and all of this kind of thing, rather than spending time looking at learning and what that is.

Q15 **Ian Mearns:** That begs one of the questions I was going to ask. Universally, how well do you think teachers understand the new standards?

Juliet Nickels: In my experience in the groups that I have been to, there is widespread confusion, a lack of understanding, and different understandings about it.

Alex Gingell: I second that.

Ian Mearns: It sounds a bit chaotic.

Michael Tidd: Oh, but it is, yes.

Alex Gingell: That is a very good word for it.

Q16 **Ian Mearns:** Right. What training and support would have helped your school design an effective internal assessment system, do you think?

Michael Tidd: It comes back to that vision. Because nobody knew quite what the DfE intended—I am not even sure they did, to be honest—when they got rid of levels and left this to schools, nobody knew what the direction of travel was meant to be. Without that, it was very hard to do everything. I think you are right; collaboration of schools could be really powerful. It is not so much an issue of a Government document giving you the answers, although I have to say the Commission on Assessment Without Levels did some very good work that seems to have achieved nothing, in terms of its recommendations don’t seem to have been acted on and I think there was good stuff there.

That clarity about what the vision was, what we are trying to achieve, would have helped. Organisations like teaching schools, and all those things having to say, “Okay, if the big focus is exactly that thing we are saying, the CPD element of: what does good, item-level assessment look like?” there could have been some useful stuff from that. Without the “big vision” schools would not have bought into it because they are still focused on, what does Ofsted look for and what do the SATs look for?

Q17 **Ian Mearns:** When the Government announced that they were scrapping levels, was that met with any surprise among the profession from your experience?



Michael Tidd: I would say horror from most of them, yes.

Chair: Suella, we are going to probe assessment a bit further with you.

- Q18 **Suella Fernandes:** Thank you for coming to the panel and the Committee today. In terms of methods of assessment and teacher assessment, what are your views on the role that teacher assessment should play in SATs? I know there is a divergence of views.

Michael Tidd: First, it is important to come back to the thing we said at the very beginning. When we talk about assessment it is what happens in classrooms, absolutely; that is the role of the teacher all the time. When it comes to statutory accountability, it is bonkers. It is absolutely nonsensical. I say that as somebody who is now teaching year 6, who is planning a unit of work for the next half term, knows exactly what I would have done up until two years ago, which I think would have helped to produce better quality writers. I know that the tick lists that I have to go through to give my school's daily curriculum is how our school will be judged and is massively influencing the way I teach. I will teach to that tick list because what else is it for? Obviously, the DfE thinks these are the most important things. I must get semicolons into my year 6s' work, whether or not they understand the purpose of their writing. The negative impacts are particularly significant on teacher assessment.

- Q19 **Suella Fernandes:** I know you have advocated comparative judgment as an alternative, but could we look at what you think are the problems with teacher assessment? What do you think are the shortcomings?

Michael Tidd: The biggest problem as a year 6 class teacher is the impact it has on me, in that—and there are hundreds or thousands of year 6 teachers who are in that same situation, and it will be the same for year 2—it effects what I teach and it effects the way I teach things in a negative way. It makes me teach the wrong things, because—

- Q20 **Suella Fernandes:** Are you saying it makes you teach to the test?

Michael Tidd: Absolutely, yes. That is it. Teaching to the test sometimes has a worse name than it deserves. If the multiplication check exists, teaching to the test is probably not the worst thing in the world. For kids are learning their multiplication tables it is fine. Kids learning to cram semicolons into their work or exclamatory sentences, which nobody uses any more, is crazy. Because of the accountability system, the pressure is then particularly on head teachers to raise standards and the way we show we are raising standards is by ticking the 16 boxes. Inevitably, head teachers, particularly in schools in challenging circumstances, schools in areas where Ofsted are breathing down their neck, or the RSC is coming to look at them, will say, "We have our principles of what education should look like, and we know what good writing looks like, but here are the things we have to do." It does affect the teaching and learning, and I would say in a very negative way.



Also, it affects the integrity of teachers. It is really hard. If you are a year 6 teacher in a school with a concerned head teacher who is worried about losing their job because the RSC is on the front door, the pressure then is incredible. I don't think it is a sensible way of holding anybody to account to say, "Here are the hurdles you have to meet. Now you tell me whether you have done it or not." You would not have that in any other context. Like I say, I want to stress—because I know now there will teachers who are horrified I am saying it—teachers doing assessment is exactly what teaching and learning should be about: teachers judging themselves, giving their own marks and, worse, giving their school marks on their head teacher's job. There is a big issue with head teachers being wholly accountable for one year's results on very short notice. I think that is where the negative impacts come from.

Q21 Suella Fernandes: What are your views on teacher assessment?

Juliet Nickels: Teacher assessment for accountability, or in any high-stakes, or for any reliability purposes, is impossible. I don't think that works at all. I don't understand how it has ever been thought to be a workable system because you are basically judging yourself. Even with the best will in the world, you cannot have reliability in that system. That is simply not fair to anybody, to the teachers or to the pupils. I would say, no, teacher assessment as an ongoing process is obviously what we do, and that is not fraught with the same sorts of issues as teacher assessment for results. I would agree absolutely with Michael on that one.

Alex Gingell: Yes. It is quite contentious to say it, but I agree that the high-stakes accountability link to teacher assessment is a big barrier, in my opinion, to honest assessment practice. It is a huge barrier. There are lots of schools—I would say maybe the majority of schools—that still link performance management targets to teacher assessment percentages at the end of the year. That is a huge barrier to looking at assessment honestly.

Michael Tidd: Also a barrier to teacher performance.

Alex Gingell: Yes.

Michael Tidd: It damages both purposes. It also gives the Government nonsense data. You only have to look at this year's writing to see that writing has always been the weaker of the subjects at key stage 2, and suddenly this year writing results have flown compared to the other subjects, even though I would say we are all saying, almost to a man in the profession, "This framework is too challenging. It expects too much." We can all crowbar those things in. We can all jump those hoops, and if that persuades Government that things are going well in writing in schools, they might want to go and look at some books. They might be surprised. Or they might want to talk to some secondary English teachers and see if they agree that standards have suddenly jumped in one year, because I suspect they might disagree.



Alex Gingell: Teacher assessment is another one of those things that requires professional development, time and money spent on looking at learning. It all goes back to learning again and, until teachers are confident at what learning looks like in that subject, and until the barrier of that accountability is removed, we will not necessarily see an improvement in standards, in my opinion.

Q22 **Suella Fernandes:** What are the alternatives and what do you think might work better?

Michael Tidd: In subjects where it works, tests are a perfectly reasonable way of doing it. Again, the barrier is the accountability and how you use the data that comes from it. I am generally coming to the view that the simpler the data we have and, frankly, the less of it we give to the DfE the better, because it is about the interpretation of that data. At the moment we make some crazy inferences from small amounts of data, particularly in some primary schools—and you probably have them in your constituencies—where there are six children in a year 6 cohort, or maybe none in some areas, because you have tiny village schools who are being judged on this tiny proportion of children's SATs. It is the interpretation of that.

Tests work perfectly well in some cases, sometimes children don't do as well as they might on the day and sometimes they do better. As long as you take that into account when you are doing the accountability, it is fine. For some subjects, like writing, I think a test did not work. Lord Bew clearly said that when he did his review. Like you say, I have looked at comparative judgment. I am quite interested in the potential that has purely for that accountability purpose. There are some ways it can be used in other ways. If what you are looking for at the end of primary school is essentially a way of ranking schools and pupils—we want to know who are the better writers and who are the weaker ones—comparative judgment seems to me like a very powerful way of doing that, without narrowing teaching in the same ways by ticking lists and things like that.

Alex Gingell: That is certainly something that we have also looked at, and we are part of the trial this year. What is the trial called? I cannot remember.

Michael Tidd: Sharing standards.

Alex Gingell: That is the one, yes. It will be interesting to see the outcomes of that trial. But I agree: I think that there has to be a more effective way of holding schools to account.

Juliet Nickels: I also agree with Michael. I am a fan of testing because it serves a useful purpose and it also improves learning, but I think we need finer-grade testing. I would have quite liked the multiplication test had it been given to us for use throughout the year, because that would have enhanced their understanding of multiplication. We are not using



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electronic systems as much as we could online, but I also think that data that we give to the Government is the issue, if it is the only thing that is used. I would like more, but for us.

Alex Gingell: Yes, that is a good point. Tests are great, because it gives you information about what children can do and what they cannot do. They are only great and they are only useful if you use that information to adapt what you do. The issue is: at the end of year 6 we don't use that information because we run out of time. Do secondary schools use the information? Probably not. They will do their own tests again in year 7. How can we get to a point where we are using that information and the data that it produces in a positive way?

Q23 **Suella Fernandes:** Isn't there more value in regular testing? There is a lot of research out there that shows that regular low-stakes testing is a great mechanism for encouraging learning and retention, and it has a cumulative effect.

Michael Tidd: That is it. This is the case with both parents and teachers. There is a slight reticence or fear about using tests, because we associate them with those high-stakes measures. For teachers, they associate tests at any age with being preparation for the end of year 6. You are absolutely right, I agree. If the multiplication check were available to schools to use, but not as an accountability measure, it could be powerful. It would be great to have more things like that and it would be great to have tools. I mentioned the Commission on Assessment Without Levels. One of the things they recommended was putting together an item bank so that schools can do that. That is a useful thing, and the DfE seems to have done nothing with it.

That is it, absolutely. We need to be encouraging schools to use tests formatively, low-stakes, internally. At the moment, the focus is too much on the accountability so that is the association. I think that is the same for parents. For lots of parents who are concerned about testing it is particularly because they feel like it is having a negative impact on learning, where in fact it could be positive.

Juliet Nickels: I don't think that there would be a problem, for example, with standardised tests or even measurements against national averages. I think that is useful information for schools. I don't think that that is a thing that should be used as a bludgeon for schools. Michael did a little system on the sample test last year that I found incredibly useful. That allowed us to look at results against an average. It is useful information.

Q24 **Catherine McKinnell:** Can I ask one question to clarify? Would you prefer no data to be given to the Department for Education in terms of school assessments? Would that be the ideal outcome for you?

Michael Tidd: I would love it, but I would not suggest it.

Q25 **Catherine McKinnell:** Do you think that would be a good system?



Michael Tidd: No.

- Q26 **Catherine McKinnell:** So, in terms of national data to be given to the Department for Education, do you think there should be more regular low-stakes information given to the Department for Education?

Michael Tidd: No, because as soon as you give it to the Department it ceases to be low-stakes. I think that is the issue. I am quite happy to see key stage 1 testing and SATs removed completely. I don't think there is much use for them and they corrupt the pathway through primary schools. I am not against a base line; there is some work to be done about how that might work. I would be quite happy if the DfE collected a very small amount of data at the beginning and the end of primary school, as an indicator for which schools they need to look at further. I am also generally of the view that if Ofsted can be intelligent about its use of data, then making that available to Ofsted and encouraging Ofsted to do its risk assessments to look at schools, but it needs to be not punitive. Yes, I think more low-stake assessment in school that is not shared centrally; fewer things shared centrally but I would not argue for none.

- Q27 **Catherine McKinnell:** That does not sound terribly different from what is currently happening.

Michael Tidd: It comes back to the accountability thing. The problem is what happens with the numbers that are passed to the DfE.

- Q28 **Catherine McKinnell:** It is how they are used, rather than the information itself?

Juliet Nickels: It is the inferences that they draw. One of my criticisms is those inferences are drawn year on year. A school appears to be doing well one year and then all of a sudden they are not doing very well, and it is the same school and the same teachers. The variables that are involved in that data are not looked at. There are only two variables that are looked at when we look at end-of-year data. That is the school and/or the teacher. Everything else is ignored. In my mind, looking at data in that way is very flawed. You never do that when you look at data. When you try to see correlations you just don't look at one aspect. We have no idea what it shows us. It is the inferences they draw. They need to look at data in a way that might alert them if there was an issue over time, rather than something that—

- Q29 **Chair:** Can you look at the data, though, and extrapolate from it?

Michael Tidd: Yes. The DfE are starting to move in the right direction on that. I do feel like they are recognising the flaws in that system. At the moment, certainly—and historically, certainly—yes, I could absolutely look at last year's data and say, "There are reasons for this." If that happens to be the year that my Ofsted inspection is due, then I am very much dependent on the inspection team and their understanding of data. I think that is the big issue for head teachers.



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Suella Fernandes: This is not quite on the topic but it is related, none the less.

Chair: It has to be fairly close to it.

Q30 **Suella Fernandes:** It is in the ballpark area, on phonics and the phonics test. In terms of its method of assessment, do you think it is hitting the nail on the head? Do you think there is more that can be tested?

Michael Tidd: The big line at the pass mark would suggest it is not serving its purpose.

Juliet Nickels: I know of gaming of the system. That is another thing that I have encountered with regards to the phonics test that it is quite widespread. Gaming, for example—detecting which aspects of the phonics test would allow pupils to pass and drilling them in those aspects.

Michael Tidd: It only needs a pass mark if that is for some sort of accountability thing. It ceases to be useful to teachers because there is a pass mark and there is an accountability background to it. The idea of a check in itself is not a problem, but it comes back to that same thing: the accountability is the issue.

Q31 **Chair:** Right. Before we move on to curriculum with William, it does not seem that you are opposed to testing or systems to test, providing those tests are for you rather than the Department. Somewhere along the line I think two of you have said that it is quite useful to have tests in terms of helping teaching and learning. Am I correct?

Alex Gingell: I think we are all in agreement.

Q32 **Chair:** Yes. I am trying to pull together what has been a fairly expansive exchange. You have not yet told us how any testing might be used in a school assessment system that would meet your criteria. We would like an answer. Does anyone have a thought on that?

Michael Tidd: In terms of how we would use it internally?

Q33 **Chair:** No, externally. You have admitted, conceded, said or indicated that you are happy with testing for school use. But we don't yet have a link between outcomes from tests and accountability of schools, which you are happy with.

Michael Tidd: I think I did say, in terms of end of key stage accountability, I have no issue with a maths test, and even to a certain extent a reading test being used for that external thing. I think we need to recognise, like Alex said, the tests that happen at the end of key stage 2 are of no use to me as a teacher. It is too late by then. But they are a perfectly reasonable way of assessing —

Q34 **Chair:** What would be of use to you as a teacher at key stage 2?

Michael Tidd: Probably very little in terms of the things that are collected centrally. I suppose, as a school leader, having that national comparison is quite useful, to see how our school is doing and to pick out



any broad strands we can. In terms of classroom teaching, the accountability thing is necessarily separate from the formative thing.

Juliet Nickels: What was useful, as an aside to that, was once the system was in play before, pre the change, the past papers were incredibly useful as part of the system. I know they are not the accountability themselves, but they were very consistent. They did give us information. Something that involves giving us that earlier in the year, for example, might help. I suggest, though, that it might be done earlier on in the year so that we can do something with the results. But I know that you need an end-of-year test.

Chair: We are going to move on to curriculum now.

Q35 **William Wragg:** Good morning, everybody. I have a question now that I think you were all tempted to answer in the Chairman's opening question, which is, how has the assessment system, if you want to call it a system, impacted on your school's curriculum, including science, arts and humanities? I will go to Juliet first, because I know you are a science lead in your school.

Juliet Nickels: Yes. It has been a struggle, and it is known nationally that, post-2009, science lost status in primary schools and science-subject leaders lost status too. I almost became a non-core subject. I had to fight back against that. It is a struggle. Even with the best of intentions, the other subjects are sidelined. When you are timetabling things, which are the subjects that you are going to drop when you are squeezed for the timetable? You are going to drop art, you are going to drop music, and you are going to drop D&T. It is almost a non-subject in primary schools now. It used to have a high profile, because it is what children do. Yes, it has had a dramatic impact, even with schools trying their best, and even with quite strong advocates for the other subjects.

Alex Gingell: Yes, I would agree. If you think about the time you have in the week to do everything that you have to do, you are going to focus on English and maths as your priority subjects, which—like Michael said—is not necessarily a bad thing but it is a negative if it takes away from that broader view of learning that children are getting in our schools. I would agree, it has definitely taken away from science, it has taken away from history and geography, and those were quite big elements of the national curriculum. In my opinion, it is sad that it has taken away from those, because if you speak to children they will say that those subjects are the things that they enjoy the most. They are the subjects that they want to learn about and that they want to know about. They want knowledge. They love it. It is a bit of a shame that we don't feel like we are able to spend as much time on those areas. It is that feeling that you are not able to.

Q36 **William Wragg:** I will come back to that point further in a moment. Michael?



Michael Tidd: I would echo those things; it has had a massive impact. Like I said at the beginning, it is perfectly reasonable for primary schools to focus on English and maths and quite significantly so. The fact that key stages were set up the way they are has had an odd impact. I would say that, up until the age of perhaps year 3 or 4, I would quite happily not have any national curriculum subjects set out, other than English and maths, and expect that to broaden as it goes on. What actually happens is probably the other way around, because the key accountability point is year 6. Again, it comes back to that same thing. It is not the assessment system; it is the accountability and the use of the assessments.

Schools in areas where you are struggling from a low start point feel like they have to focus on English and maths, because if they don't they are the things they will be held accountable for. Schools that start from quite a nice point therefore have to do even better, particularly if you become an outstanding school. HTs in outstanding schools are constantly worried that they might get inspected and lose that status. They also focus heavily on English and maths, to make sure that they are even better than everybody else. It is the accountability thing that drives that, really.

Q37 **William Wragg:** Yes. In such a high-stakes accountability system, I am interested to know if it is possible to teach a broad and balanced curriculum. It was interesting what Alex said. You ended there by saying it is whether you feel you are able to do that. I put this to you. Is it not possible to do that if you have a cross-curricular approach to the curriculum rather than solely discrete teaching of English and maths? Is that a potential way forward? Tell me if I am wrong.

Alex Gingell: Yes, looking at that cross-curricular approach is a good thing to do. My experience of last year, when I was teaching year 6, is that the problem was that I still felt in that year group that I had to be showing that my children can write in a certain way. We would end up doing lots of writing in history and my focus in history would be more on what they were including in their writing than the historical learning that we were doing. It all comes back to that accountability issue. A cross-curricular approach is great and there are schools doing amazing things. What would be helpful for all schools is to share that practice in those schools more widely.

Juliet Nickels: We do take a cross-curricular approach in my school, but if you think about a subject like art, there is a limit to the emphasis you are going to place on maths and English in art. In fact, our most recent project did involve maths and art, but the amount of maths that you are going to focus on in that is not going to be as much as the amount of art or music. You still are going to sideline those subjects because they use up time.

Michael Tidd: That is true. You risk losing some of the coherence of those other subjects. If what you are doing is finding ways to fit history in, you lose lots of that good knowledge and understanding of those things. You need to focus on that skill at that time. There is only a certain



amount of thinking a child can do about one topic. What Alex said is right: if you are teaching a piece of writing based on history, what do you want the children to be focused on thinking about and, therefore, securing their understanding of the history or the writing? To do both is quite tricky.

- Q38 Catherine McKinnell:** I am going to ask about assessment and wellbeing. Do you feel that the assessment system has affected the wellbeing of pupils? If so, do you feel that has changed in recent years? I will give some context. SCHOOLS NorthEast ran a consultation across 12 local authority areas in the north-east and they reported their findings that it has increased stress among pupils and teachers. What is your impression?

Juliet Nickels: It has. We should not think that stress is necessarily a bad thing throughout life because we do have to prepare ourselves for certain levels of stress. A little straw poll in my class reinforced that in a negative way, in a way that is bad. My pupils were quite unanimous about that. Yes, it is very, very stressful for them. Yes, we should prepare them for small amounts of stress, but they may be taking it as a very, very serious and sensitive issue.

Alex Gingell: It depends on how the school talks about SATs and talks about the end of key stage assessments. It is about how you spread the message that you want to spread throughout your school. In my experience, we heard in the newspapers of children crying and bursting into tears during these SATs last year. I did not experience any of that, but on Twitter I did hear of those kinds of things happening. I spoke to some children yesterday, and I want to share this quote one girl said. She said, "Sometimes you feel pushed to get good results, which can lead to stress, and then you kind of don't concentrate and don't apply your knowledge." The issue around wellbeing is an important one to think about because it can impact the outcomes at the end of the day.

Michael Tidd: Like I said before, there is a risk of the accountability system on head teachers and on teachers. It does have an impact. On occasions, I have heard head teachers and teachers say things and thought, "Do I ever say things like that? The impression you have given by that is that the all-important thing here is the number at the end of the day, not the child." That happens. You are right, different schools have a different impact on that. Parents have an impact on that. Like you say, with some parents their understanding is that the key thing here is what you do at the end of key stage 2. I have had conversations with parents where I have had to say, "You don't need to worry about this so much and your child certainly doesn't. It is not that important." It is definitely a factor. You will never get rid of it, though, of course.

- Q39 Catherine McKinnell:** It is interesting that you raise parents. There are two different ways that parents have reacted to what I would say is the higher prevalence, understanding and awareness of the SATs in the last couple of years. You are nodding so I assume you agree. Some see it as



a measure and a tool, not necessarily to punish the child but to see who requires more support at school because the school is not doing enough. It is sort of a punishment for the school or an awareness that the school is not up to standard. Other parents have reacted quite vehemently. They don't want their children assessed and put under pressure in this way. I know in Newcastle a number of parents went on strike over the SATs and kept their children off during SATs week. Is that something you have experienced? How do we get around this? How do we build a more constructive approach?

Michael Tidd: A lot of this comes back to how schools work with parents. In parents' meetings at the start of the year, when we talk about SATs, one of the things I often say is, "Come and see me if your child is worried about the SATs and I will reassure you that they don't need to be. Equally, if you feel like your child is not doing enough, come and see me and I will also tell them that they need to pull their finger out." That is part of it. Teachers, particularly in primary schools, know their children. They can do that, but we get it wrong. I say that to parents as well. "Sometimes I will tell them they need to be working harder and your children might be the one in the room who has been working hard and now feels like that is a personal attack on them. Sometimes I will get that wrong. Come and tell me if I do because I have 30 in the room and I cannot get it right for every child all the time." A lot of that comes down to schools working with parents.

When you talk about the parent strike in the spring, I am quite pleased—I don't want to sound boastful—that we did not have anything like that at our school. That is partly because we have built those good relationships with parents. We have put those things in context. We make clear how important we think they are—or not, as the case may be—and we try to support parents with that. I am not saying that other schools haven't. In some schools you have a more difficult challenge with some parents and all those sorts of thing. A lot of it comes down to how schools can work with parents to try to allay those fears.

Q40 **Catherine McKinnell:** Juliet, would you agree with that? Do you have anything you want to add? I want to also ask about how you feel the new SATs have impacted on children with special educational needs. Is that something that you are conscious of?

Juliet Nickels: Yes, very conscious of it. One of the benefits of the previous system was that children with special needs had a measure of what they were attaining that they could relate to. In the new system it is a pass/fail system. If you are likely to fail and you are a year 6 pupil who is not naive—many of them are not naive—you will know. That is very demotivating. In fact, I have a case from the previous year where a particular child had a very, very high standard of English, very well-written, but could not spell and basically gave up on the understanding that they would not meet the spelling criteria. It was very difficult to motivate that pupil. It is quite demotivating, having that pass/fail system.



Alex Gingell: That is where you will find the highest levels of negative thoughts in terms of wellbeing and the highest levels of stress, in those children who feel that. They will know that they are not necessarily going to do as well as their peers and that is not the best way for those in year 6 to end primary school, with that feeling.

Q41 **Catherine McKinnell:** I am assuming that applies across the board, whether they have special educational needs or not. It can be demotivating in the same way.

Michael Tidd: Yes. The new tests have not helped it, either. We have had this idea of raising expectations, which seems to consist of, "Make the tests harder and magically we will solve things." Actually, it means we have a bigger group of children now who are not horrendously far behind but who struggle to access a lot of those tests. The reading test, particularly, this year was virtually inaccessible for a good chunk of children who are not perhaps designated as having special needs but who are also not yet at the new expected standard. Narrowing the tests to only having one, to try to cover a wider range, did not work. You can see by the delay in things like the Rochford review happening that SEN at the moment feels like a bit of an afterthought on all those things.

Q42 **Suella Fernandes:** I take the concerns about wellbeing into account but we must not forget the big picture, which is that children are leaving primary school with a very high rate, still, of functional illiteracy or innumeracy.

Michael Tidd: That is not true. If you look at the old—

Suella Fernandes: Can I finish?

Michael Tidd: It is difficult, though, when people keep saying that and it is not true. That is not helpful.

Q43 **Suella Fernandes:** I have to challenge that because I founded a free school, a secondary school, and we admit our children at year 7 and there is a worrying high level of children who are arriving at secondary school with a reading age of seven or eight. That is a very significant challenge for secondary schools to inherit. When we talk about not wanting to put primary school children through the stress of testing, we still need to remember that there is an issue with expectations and standards that still has not quite been solved.

Michael Tidd: The new tests have made that worse.

Alex Gingell: Yes.

Michael Tidd: Those children who were struggling are now on the radar of, "They are never going to make it. They are not going to count for my school accountability." That has made that problem worse.

Under the old level system—it annoys me, this thing of "functional illiteracy"—the level 3 marker, which officially was below the expected



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standard and I understand that, was not illiterate. It is important to point that out. People have this idea, and it is encouraged by the DfE sometimes and by some parts of the press, that level 4 was a minimum and that, if you are below that, you are illiterate. Level 3 children could quite comfortably read a number of newspapers.

This has not helped to solve that problem. If anything, it has made it worse. I agree absolutely and I am concerned about the long tail of underachievement. That is a big issue. This has not helped. It has made it considerably worse because we now undervalue those children at that end of the scale, particularly because of the way the tests are—

Q44 **Chair:** To be absolutely clear about that, you are accepting Suella's point that there may well be children not—

Michael Tidd: Not achieving as well as we would like. I am happy to go with that, yes.

Q45 **Chair:** But you are contesting the assumption made by many that the testing system is going to help?

Michael Tidd: Certainly the current system. I am contesting particularly the word "illiteracy", which I don't appreciate. That is the issue. It can be easily misused, and it is too often.

Chair: Thank you.

Q46 **Marion Fellows:** You partly answered this question in relation to the curriculum. How did implementation of the new assessment system affect teaching at your school?

Alex Gingell: If I go with my experience when I was teaching last year, in the last couple of years, when it started coming in, more time was spent thinking about assessment than teaching and learning. That did impact the teaching and learning in my classroom.

Q47 **Marion Fellows:** The same, Juliet?

Juliet Nickels: It is absolutely driven by the assessment, yes.

Michael Tidd: In terms of the implementation, the piecemeal way in which information was provided to schools made that very difficult. We were waiting for information too long, too often.

Q48 **Marion Fellows:** How much time would you recommend the Government gives schools to implement major changes like this in the future?

Michael Tidd: Can I be nice to the DfE for a moment? It is not my normal area, but they have made the right decision to say that they will not change things in the next couple of years. We are stuck with a pretty awful system for a couple of years, but even that is preferable.

Chair: That is damning praise.



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Michael Tidd: It is the right call. "Things are not quite right here and it will take a longer time than we have had previously to get that right." There was the protocol on workload that said a year to implement things. That has not happened in practice, but even a year is a very short time. We know teachers are working very long hours and have high workloads. Any new thing on top of that is very hard to implement.

Ian Mearns: Do you have that in writing, by the way?

Q49 **Marion Fellows:** Were the individual tests themselves well designed?

Juliet Nickels: We were quite happy with the maths one. It felt to me like they had not been designed. It felt to me like they had been put together—the reading one particularly—the night before. I am sure that is not true, but they did not have the ring of a professionally designed assessment. Do you agree?

Alex Gingell: I agree, yes, down to the content of the reading paper. The reading paper is the one that has caused the most argument across the country with teachers. The content of that was completely culturally irrelevant for everyone. For children in schools, the content of those texts, the language and the references were not helpful for the children instantly. Yes, there are some issues around the design.

Juliet Nickels: Children have had tests for 30 years now on the same sorts of thing at the end of key stage 2, and many of the test papers that they have had in the past have been nice for them to read. It always makes a difference if they are enjoying what they read. It did feel like they had not been shown to any children before they were put out.

Q50 **Marion Fellows:** Do you think the most recent Government proposals go far enough in terms of what they have brought forward now?

Michael Tidd: I will say again that I would like to see the key stage 1 assessment removed from the statutory programme. I don't think it is particularly helpful. I understand there is a concern about infant schools, but having come from a three-tier sector, first, middle and junior schools have long had that problem. That is not insurmountable. It comes back to intelligent use of accountability. I would like to see that changed.

Q51 **Ian Mearns:** In the three-tier system, the whole thing about assessment and about SATs being used in the accountability measure does not work for those for that system, does it?

Michael Tidd: No. It comes back to that too often it has been used in that way regardless. There are ways around that. My point is that the argument that we need key stage 1 scores for infant schools does not hold water if we don't also need year 4 tests, year 5 tests and year 7 tests for middle schools and first schools. There are more intelligent ways to do things. That would be my big area.

The teacher assessment has to go. It is unfair and it does not work.



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Juliet Nickels: I totally agree with that. I don't think we can base anything on teacher assessment. I would happily have something that goes through all the years, but it would have to be useful for us.

Alex Gingell: Yes, I agree. The big thing that needs to be looked at is the structure of accountability.

Chair: Thank you, Marion, and thank you, all three of you, for coming today. I found that interesting, certainly.

Q52 **William Wragg:** Can I ask one final question of you and your experience in the classroom? Is the issue around assessment, higher accountability stakes, the implementation of it, and all the difficulties you have encountered the single greatest driver to the problem of recruitment and retention in your profession? A very short answer.

Alex Gingell: Not the single greatest driver, in my opinion.

Q53 **William Wragg:** No. Is it a substantial driver?

Alex Gingell: I would say it is part of it, yes.

Michael Tidd: Definitely. It is often linked to the workload, which is possibly the highest.

William Wragg: Thank you.

Chair: We are also looking at recruitment and retention, as you may know. You gave us a tantalising glimpse of how you might like to use tests in the classroom for your own purposes, improving teaching and learning. I don't think we have quite heard yet what kind of accountability system of schools might be derived from testing. That is something we do need to hear about because, while it is certainly true that schools need to think about how they are assessing pupils and so forth, the Government and the Department, regional schools commissioners, and even local authorities, do need to have some way of measuring performance and progress. If you have any thoughts that you would like to pass on to us by letter on that question that would be helpful. Thank you very much.

Examination of witnesses

John Coe, Russell Hobby and Binks Neate-Evans.

Q54 **Chair:** Welcome to panel 2 and thanks for joining us. I think you were all listening to what was happening in the last hour, except possibly John because you arrived a little bit later. Russell and Binks were here. Welcome. I am not going to repeat what I said at the very beginning because you obviously know where we are heading on this. Would you like to introduce yourselves and where you hail from, for the purposes of those watching? Binks?



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Binks Neate-Evans: My name is Binks Neate-Evans and I am a head teacher in a Norwich primary school. I am here representing the Headteachers Roundtable.

John Coe: I am an information officer for the National Association for Primary Education and the Voluntary Association of Parents and Teachers.

Russell Hobby: I am Russell Hobby. I am General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers.

Q55 **Chair:** Right. The core question is the high-stakes nature of the accountability system. Has that worsened with the introduction of the new assessment system? That is what I would like to know. Russell?

Russell Hobby: Yes, because the data that we are using to form these quite momentous judgments of the school is becoming less reliable. It is certainly the case that, in some instances, we are rewarding lower quality work in writing than we were before, due to the method of secure fit assessment. The consequences associated with the data going badly—on what are very small sample sizes—are very severe. It is distorting the practice of teaching and learning inside the schools, as you heard from the initial panel. It is not the design of the assessments, although there were serious flaws in reading and in secure fit; it is what you do with the data that comes out of it and how you form decisions about the school.

Q56 **Chair:** Implicit in that answer is that you believe is that we do need to have data to properly interrogate the performance of schools and assess those schools.

Russell Hobby: Data is one of the inputs to judging a school's performance. I would echo what Michael said, that you have a simple start and end measure at primary school. You would have a wide variety of tests available for teachers to use to inform their own judgment, but you would collect accountability data at a limited number of headings. You would never use one year's worth of data to plan an intervention in a school; you would look at a rolling average across three years or so, particularly when you are talking about 10 or 12 pupils in a sample. That is meaningful.

Nor would you ever trigger intervention solely on the data itself. That would always be a reason to go in and investigate a school. Ofsted has that role to play. It would look at the data and then you would connect any interventions or action upon a school to the inspection judgment, not to a raw league table statistic.

Q57 **Chair:** You have mentioned Ofsted. Of course, we can probably tie in the "long tail underachievement" theme. If you are going to say, "There are too many primary schools still in that long tail," is the system that we now have in place likely to help or hinder progress?

Russell Hobby: Again, building on the earlier point, simply making the test harder does not do anything to raise the performance of



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underachieving children. The data that Ofsted has says that there are very few underperforming primary schools. We are now close to 90% of good and outstanding. Of course, we want it to be 100% and I am all for achieving that. The PISA data was also clear that the variation of performance within schools is more serious than having particular schools where all the children are underperforming. That is quite a small group. It is the variation across there. Simply trying to use this to target individual schools is using a blunt hammer to address the problem we face.

Chair: A heavy-handed hammer?

Russell Hobby: Yes. Hammers should be blunt, shouldn't they? That is generally their task.

Chair: Unless you are possibly doing something specialist, like geology.

Ian Mearns: Stop digging.

Q58 **Chair:** I am not digging. I would be using a spade for that, surely.

Binks, Russell has made an interesting point about what happens in school rather than of the school, so to speak. This did crop up in the last session when we were talking about the use of data and the use of tests to improve what is happening in schools. Do you have any comments on Russell's central point when he raised that?

Binks Neate-Evans: In principle, I agree with Russell's point. The worry around accountability, and how this assessment has fed into accountability, is that it remains very high-stakes. The attainment aspect of it and the use of floor targets is absolutely damaging to improvement in schools. I don't see that the attainment aspect in floor targets is enabling schools to demonstrate how they are successful and, therefore, we are not identifying where schools are being effective. We are not using the right measures.

Q59 **Chair:** What measures would you like to see in the context of floor targets and improvement in schools?

Binks Neate-Evans: It is interesting you use the word "context" because I would use context. What we are not seeing is any contextual value added. We are not taking into account the many different factors that affect attainment and we should be able to do that. What we are doing is penalising schools that are working in very challenging circumstances, because we are not taking into account the factors that are affecting attainment for those children. For instance, if you are a head teacher in a deprived school and your attainment is poor, that does not mean that you are ineffective as a school. You could be highly effective as a school, but your attainment is not the same as someone in a leafy suburb where the children have had very different experiences and don't have the same levels of deprivation. I would argue that contextual value added—as Russell said, over a three-year period—is a far better measure of how effective a school is. That is what accountability measures should do. They should be saying, "Is this school



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doing a good enough job for these children? If not, why not?" Then the system should be working to improve schools, not to penalise them.

Q60 **Chair:** That takes us to the progression issue from, say, key stage 1 to key stage 2. Do you think that key stage 1 is well enough done and bombproof in terms of its contribution to that process?

Binks Neate-Evans: No, not particularly. I would echo the points that Michael Tidd made. I am the head of an infant school and I have not quite got my head around what the accountability would be for an infant school, because we are not going to have a massive overhaul of the structures in the same time period that we would be looking at assessment. I don't think there is enough consistency between the different stages, going from baseline, going from key stage 1 and going from key stage 2. I don't think they are granular and there isn't enough comparison that gives you meaningful data to say, "What is this school doing well?"

Attainment is very useful in terms of looking at individual children. We are not saying, in any way, that we should not be considering attainment because we all want children to do very well. I have yet to meet the head teacher who has gone into a career of leading schools so that they can ruin education for children. I have not met them. They are talked about an awful lot but I still have not met them. Attainment is really important, but it looks very different depending on the context in which you are working and that has to be taken into consideration. We need to make sure that we are looking very carefully at where we start the children from, where we are gathering that information and what that will look like for them at the end of key stage 2.

Q61 **Chair:** You don't see many arsonists becoming fire-fighters, either. That is a very good point. John, what are your thoughts?

John Coe: I see a flaw in the system at the moment, a serious flaw, in that a single measure—that of children's performance in a major test in year 6—is used not only as a measure of children's performance but also as a measure of the school's performance. We are doing two jobs with the one measuring instrument and it is not doing a good job for either of them.

Q62 **Chair:** Funnily enough, you have answered the question I was going to ask next. What do you think, Russell, about the effectiveness of key stage 2?

Russell Hobby: The tests at the end of it?

Chair: Yes.

Russell Hobby: You have to pick and choose among those tests. The reading test this year was badly designed and poorly sequenced in the order of questions, which did create unnecessary unhappiness and stress for the children sitting it. A well-designed test is not an unpleasant



experience for children. If it is delivered in a low-stakes environment it can be very enjoyable. Again, it is the weight that is attached to it. We do have to remember that the Government have now been describing the primary SATs as end of primary exams, which I think alters the weight that is attached to that and puts the pressure on to the pupil rather than the school.

Probably the biggest flaw in the key stage 2 assessment is the writing teacher assessment, where I think we have rehearsed quite a significant number of the problems with that. By using a tick-box approach to the assessment, the danger is that focuses on the mechanics of the writing. We are not looking at the overall quality of the piece of work and saying, "Does this work as a piece of composition?" We are looking at, "Does it have enough semicolons, exclamation marks and hyphens within it?" That rewards quite mediocre and pedestrian pieces of writing, at the expense of those that any rational observer looking at it would say, "That is a better, more creative piece of writing." We have lost the wood for the trees on that one.

You cannot introduce a viable test of writing that will capture that overall product, but I do think there is a lot of mileage in the comparative judgment approach, which does look at the overall piece of work and it is an interesting mixture of teacher professional judgment and formalised structure at the same time. We have never tried it at scale, but I think we should move and try to pilot that and see what it would look like.

Q63 Chair: The question is, should schools be held to account and resourced for external tests at key stage 2? Do you think it is right or wrong?

Binks Neate-Evans: There are aspects of a school's performance. You can look at the effectiveness of a school, overall, but it is not the only way that you measure the effectiveness of a school.

John Coe: The problem with the testing is not the tests themselves, although they could be vastly improved and this year they got out of scale, creating too much failure on the part of the children and their parents knowing fully about that. It is the weight that is attached to the examination result, to the test result: the social weight, the weight of the local community, the weight of the reports of the school that are placed on the web and so on. It is a serious matter. It has got out of scale. Testing is well and good when it is used for the benefit of the child. We must find another way of assessing the value-added of our primary schools. There are other ways. Other countries use them; we should adopt them.

Q64 Chair: Binks was talking about contextual added value. How would you incorporate that into the system that you have sketched out roughly? That is the question, I suppose.

John Coe: If you place less weight on the exam results and if you say they are there, they can be discussed by the head, the teachers, the



parents, they are valuable, they give us an insight—an imperfect one but an insight—into the progress of the child and it can be produced productively. If we look beyond for another way of assessing the school, there is nothing else for it. We have to begin trusting the teachers. Many teachers these days feel that they are not trusted.

Chair: That is certainly a key point that we have been thinking about in the context of education in, let's say, Finland or South Korea, and we have been looking at the PISA results and discussing that. We will consider that matter in the context of this discussion as well. I am now going to ask Ian to intervene with some questions on alternatives.

Q65 **Ian Mearns:** The first is to Russell and Binks. There is disagreement in the sector over the use of teacher assessment. What are your views on the use of teacher assessment for school accountability? We have touched on it, but if you can flesh it out, please.

Russell Hobby: Under the current regime, there is the risk that teacher assessment, within the statutory framework, starts to put some perverse incentives on to teachers and creates workload as well, but teacher assessment has a critical role to play in the school's own systems. I would look at a modified way of using teacher assessment for writing because I don't think there is a good test that can deliver that, and we have rehearsed possible alternatives there. I would abandon statutory teacher assessment at key stage 1 and move to a well-designed reception baseline to provide that. There is a lot of work that would have to be done on the design of what that might look like. The reception baseline should be used as a measure for the challenge of the cohorts that the school faced, rather than an individual prediction for a pupil that would stamp them at the age of four or five and live with them for the rest of their lives.

At the moment, taking that start measure at key stage 1 is a bit of a perverse incentive because we miss out on the three most important years of a child's education and we impose a lot of workload on there. By taking that out at key stage 1, I think you have reduced the burden of high-stakes testing but you still have your start and end measure on there. Again, it comes down to: we are using more test data, but let's not make this so we come out with a hard number at the end of it, which is somehow true, without being checked and validated by some sort of inspection or judgment going on there. The danger with tests is that because they come out with a precise number they give a false impression of accuracy. If you are measuring the wrong things in the wrong way, a test is as inaccurate as teacher assessment, so move away from that one number being the sole and defining feature of a school's performance.

Binks Neate-Evans: My concern about using test data to measure school effectiveness is it is narrowing down what we are valuing as the role of primary schools. Primary schools have a very fundamental role in equipping our children in the here and now of learning, of being children



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and being successful learners in the here and now. It is very important that we remember that we are talking about children, and that we should be remembering the key components that go into child education that make them successful learners. Primary schools can be very good at doing that but my worry about it, if we are having this accountability measure around tests, is you are ignoring probably 75% of the other stuff that schools have to do to get children in the right place to be able to access those tests. Those bits of work are very important because they are about child development. Moving towards a system where we place greater value on the work we do on personal development would be a much more humane approach to developing our education system.

John Coe: We must not assume that a teacher assessment, an assessment of a child made in partnership with a parent—that is very important—is validated by an examination result. The examination result is something. It has a somewhat spurious accuracy because it expresses a figure. It reduces a child to a cipher and that is what most parents are very alarmed about today. Of course, if we trust teachers, if we begin to trust them more—and we would keep more of them in the profession if we did—then we have to see that they will require records of progress in their children that start when the children are very young, a learning log.

I am friendly with several schools that are using this process already. They put into the portfolio examples of the children's work, good and bad and hopeful and not hopeful, but as you look at the end of a year, at the end of two years, at the end of four or five years, you begin to see progress in front of you. You can see the early marks of the child on paper trying to hold the pencil correctly between thumb and forefinger. You can see how that has been translated into a smooth, flowing cursive style. You can see progress in the results of the children in their learning logs and then, of course, teachers and parents must get together to review progress.

All of this is very demanding of teachers' time. You have to agree about that. We are all worried about the workload of teachers but we must try to cut down unnecessary box-ticking, data collecting workload and substitute for it a workload that is focused upon each child and the progress of each child. Then, of course, because of the views of parents loving their children and the views of teachers who are not so emotionally involved with the children but, none the less, have human feelings about them—it is part of the strengths of primary education—you need an objective check on those very subjective assessments. Therefore, peer review is very important, so that the evidence is laid down internally in the school with teachers not directly involved with those children who can review the evidence, discuss it and harden up their opinions.

Overall, I would ask the Committee to seriously consider the role of parents in this. Chairman, the whole situation changed last May. You will know that several thousand parents voluntarily withdrew their children from their schools and took them into the parks to play and spend time



with them. That was not engineered by a teacher union or a head teacher union. It was not engineered by any professional, whatsoever. It was entirely a spontaneous move by parents using social media. It is one of the most impressive uses of social media I have so far experienced in my life. That has led to more and more parents joining teachers in campaigning to change and reform the system. Their campaign is called More Than a Score.

- Q66 **Ian Mearns:** Could I ask Russell and Binks, in particular, about other methods of assessment that have been suggested as alternatives, such as sampling from the pupil population? Would this be better and what risks are there with changing the current assessment system?

Russell Hobby: I think sampling has a lot to say for it. It strikes that right balance between having a reasonable volume of assessment going on inside schools but not each of those assessments being high-stakes from the individual assessments made. It generates a lot of valuable data for the system, as a whole, to judge whether we are making progress from the initiatives that we are doing. A lot of schools would support making available useful item banks and question banks of assessment, from which samples could be drawn to say, "How well is our system going? Do we have the right resources being put into science or art or something like that by comparison?"

It should be explored, particularly where you have new assessments that are designed in some ways by the Government to try to nudge teacher behaviour, like the phonic screening check was or the proposed multiplication check that has been put on hold for a while. If those become high-stakes assessments that is very problematic, but if they are being given as tools for teachers to use then the teachers will value them. If you are sampling that, you have some idea as to whether or not we are making progress in the fundamental skills.

Binks Neate-Evans: Yes, I would echo that answer. What you are doing is putting resources into the system and you are upskilling teachers. If it is a useful tool for teaching, learning and assessment, then it has value. If it is linked to high accountability measures, high-stakes, then it loses its value because it becomes too intrinsically linked with performance and that is far too complex a relationship for a teacher to manage.

- Q67 **Ian Mearns:** There is a lot of disquiet about the accountability measures and schools as institutions becoming more focused on the overall result of the school, as a whole, as opposed to the results of the individual children and the assessment of individual children. Do you think there is a real danger in the way in which we are going?

Binks Neate-Evans: It is important that we keep our eye on individual assessments, because it is very important that schools are doing their best for every single child. The link between individual attainment—they should be separated. That is why we are saying that attainment should not be part of floor targets. I think Catherine has a particular interest in



family views. It is important that families have a meaningful way of understanding how well their children are doing and what else they need to do. That individual information is absolutely crucial, but judging a whole school by it—if you are using attainment what you are doing is judging a school's intake—you are not judging how effective that school is.

John Coe: My association is wholly in support of sampling as a way of measuring the health and the value of the primary system as a whole. We have a good example in front of us. The Assessment of Performance Unit of the 1970s—I am sorry to look back; we try to look forward always—worked well and it gave a good, accurate measure of how the primary sector was performing nationally without putting any undue pressures—which is what the present system does—on each individual school. It is a way forward for us, an alternative, so that no longer will we try to do the two jobs of assessment, school and child, with the same single instrument. It doesn't do either as well as it should. Sampling is the way to assess the schools.

Russell Hobby: It seems to be some sort of fact of educational life that the higher the consequences you attach to any assessment, the less value the data actually provides you because it becomes less accurate. It is gamed, and we cease to learn from it. Again, back to that fundamental point that you started with: what is this data for and what do we hope to get from it? Do we want better schools with greater achievement for children? We have to make sure that a very large sample of the data is low-stakes data, because it will be true and then schools can adapt and learn from it. Then we need to carefully select the bare minimum we need to derive a national picture to which we can hold individual schools accountable as well. If we strike that balance right, I think it gets the outcomes you are looking for.

Binks Neate-Evans: Yes. Further to that, Russell, in order to do that, and to do that effectively, there must be time because, in order to get that right, the sampling has to be done appropriately. It has to be evaluated appropriately and, if we rush into another system, you are just putting another load of freight on cargo ships that are already carrying lots and lots of weight already. So my caveat around that is, use this as an opportunity to design something that is meaningful for children and then, if it is effective for children, schools will be effective and then we can think about how we are measuring that afterwards. We should not be driven by data. We should be driven about what schools should be delivering for children. I think we have the design the wrong way round.

Chair: Thank you. Marion, you are going to be asking about special education needs.

Q68 **Marion Fellows:** Yes. How do you think the new national curriculum assessments have affected pupils with special educational needs?



John Coe: Schools do all that they can to make sure they are not adversely affected. Unfortunately, the climate that surrounds schools, too many, there are exceptions to this—the glorious exceptions—that deal with the tests in their stride and still run a very productive school that can serve children with special needs as they should be served. But my great worry, and the worry of my association, is that such children with very special needs should be casualties in the rat race to get examination success; too much for the exam, not enough for the child. That is our worry.

Russell Hobby: Unfortunately, the assessment of children with special educational needs has been an afterthought in the design process, with the Rochford review very delayed in its publication. It is out and we need to respond to that. Particularly for pupils working below national curriculum, we need to develop that.

One of the features of many children with special educational needs is that their profile has strengths and weaknesses in quite unique ways. They are not all good at one thing or bad at others, and they may have very great strengths in particular domains of that. Boiling it down to a single statistic at the end of it obscures all that and—as was said in the first panel—is very demotivating when you know you cannot win as one of those pupils. Particularly, the use of secure fit in writing does that. Whereas you can be outstanding in your composition and creativity of the work, if spelling or handwriting, for example, are not effective you are forever barred from doing that. We won't trade off between the two sets of skills.

I can understand why you want people to get to a certain level at primary. That is important, but I think we have muddled up the idea of mastery in the curriculum with mastery in an assessment mode. I don't know of any other examination or test that requires 100% for the pass mark, which we have in writing at the moment. It has really damaged the engagement of pupils with some specific needs in writing.

Binks Neate-Evans: I don't think it has added to the system, has it? What it has not enabled us to do is identify what that child is achieving. Children with additional needs do make progress. They make it in different ways. It does not necessarily follow the same trajectory as it does for other children. It is more granular, and the system that we have at the moment is not fit for purpose for children with special educational needs.

Q69 **Marion Fellows:** Following on from that, Binks, how could pupils with special educational needs be better assessed?

Binks Neate-Evans: That is a very big question and it is not a specialist area of mine. We would look at something like the Rochford review and, again, go out for consultation with schools where they are being very, very successful, and make sure that we identify what the primary need of that child is. What is it that we can do for that child that is going to make



them most successful? That is how I would approach learning with any child. Then, if you get it right for those children with special educational needs or additional needs, you will get it right for lots of other children.

I would prioritise their primary need and find a way of being able to demonstrate that they are progressing with that. I would also be making sure that we are aspirational for those children. That we are not putting a glass ceiling on around specific needs, around, for instance, a child who has dyslexia and, therefore, cannot write. We know some of our most brilliant figures have been dyslexic and in our school system, at the moment, they would not be recognised because the writing assessment is not fit for purpose.

John Coe: The assessment of children with special needs would be immeasurably improved if we could strengthen the partnership between teachers and parents. At the moment, our system—I am not making a party political point here by any means; it is what the modern world, the modern society in this country, has done—has converted parents into consumers, as if they are choosing a school as they would their local supermarket, Morrisons or Tesco.

Parents are much more powerful than that in education terms. They know their children better than anyone, better than even the most brilliant teacher. They know their children best. They need the professional input, of course they do, and they readily acknowledge that. But they are not regarded as partners in education. As a Committee, part of the problem you are examining—assessment—is related to this. We have to start recasting primary schools as a way of strengthening the partnership between families and professionals in the schools. Together, they can do immeasurably better than we are doing at the moment.

Binks Neate-Evans: Yes. That is of particular importance in deprived communities. Our current assessment system, the accountability, the SATs testing, has hit those communities very hard where, if they don't understand it they don't necessarily value education. When you don't have something that is particularly easy to articulate—because, as a system, we can hear in this room that we are all grappling with it—then to try to articulate that in a meaningful way to people that don't value education is very, very challenging.

Marion Fellows: Russell, do you have anything?

Russell Hobby: That is correct.

Q70 **Marion Fellows:** Yes Do you think that pupil wellbeing has suffered as a result of the new system? Is it just down to change, or is it a symptom of the system itself?

Binks Neate-Evans: I am a little bit cautious about wellbeing because schools can be held responsible for everything that a child lives and breathes, eats and does, and we are a very significant part of it but we are not everything. There are lots of other things that have impacted on



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children's wellbeing. We are in a perfect storm at the moment. We have huge cuts to social care. We have massive cuts to health and we have cuts to education, which I believe we are going to hear about at 12 o'clock today. Those things are starting to have a strong impact because they are impacting on the wellbeing of their parents, and if their parents are not okay then they won't be okay.

The other thing that links in with wellbeing of children is the wellbeing of a teacher. Children know when teachers are stressed. They do. Teachers know when head teachers are stressed. It is a bit like dogs can do it. We can all do it. It has been something that we have developed over thousands and thousands of years. I am just cautious about schools being held to account for wellbeing. I think Governments should be held to account for the wellbeing of our children. They should support us to create a system that redresses that in a meaningful way, and give us time to do it in an intelligent way that is based on what is best for children. In order to do that, you need to engage with experts.

Russell Hobby: You heard from the first panel of the work that schools do to try to minimise the impact of the tests on children, and to reassure them that it is not the end of the world and all these sorts of thing. You do have to reflect and step back. When we have designed a system where school leaders have to work actively to minimise the damage of it, it may be getting in our way rather than helping with that. It is vital to emphasise the complexity of the causes of unhappiness and low wellbeing, and it is far more complicated than a single assessment system.

The interaction of that with the many other changes going on in schools at the moment, and particularly the feeling of rushing headlong into the unknown with a new curriculum that has not been trialled, with new tests that you do not know what the criteria are going to be while you are preparing for it, raises the stress of heads, teachers, pupils and parents in relation to that.

The reading test, in particular, was so poorly designed that the experience of it was deeply unpleasant for a large number of children that were sitting it. Tests should not necessarily be a delight to sit, but you can come out of them feeling satisfied with what you have done and proud that you have had a chance to show what you can do. Too much of the design of that test seemed to be looking to trip up very young children, and many of them bounced off it very early on and gave up. Given the importance of loving reading as an outcome of primary school, to have that summed up with a test of reading, which you feel like a failure of, does more harm than all the value of the data that we could collect from that.

Binks Neate-Evans: The other bit of that is because of, again, the high-stakes accountability around it—as we heard from our colleagues very eloquently beforehand—and what it has done to the curriculum. Actually,



it is the curriculum that is very, very heavily weighted around accountability, around core subjects. Is that what a child needs? I work in a school in a highly deprived area and I will hammer away at every single child. We will get them reading. By hook or by crook we will get them reading, because that is the most important thing that you can do for future success.

There are lots and lots of other experiences that our children must have and don't get because—whether you are in deprived circumstances or other—there are a lot of pressures on families now and children's development is being affected by that. That is something that we do need to address and we have to be very careful about the narrowing of the curriculum. I agree wholeheartedly with the idea that children love learning about history. They want to learn about heads being cut off. That is cool. They want to learn about why rivers magically create a road, and we have to make sure that we have enough time in our curriculum. If you are using the arts, if you listen to Sir Robert Winston talk about music, the arts and the effect that that has on the brain, we have to make sure that there is room for those within the curriculum. I am not in any way devaluing basic skills. I think they are very, very important, because I see on a daily basis what happens when families cannot read and they cannot write. I see the impact of that, so I am not devaluing it, but we must not oversimplify it by thinking, "If we have a test and we are measuring schools by that test that is enough." It isn't enough. It is an oversimplification.

John Coe: Could I add a word about the wellbeing of children? They are spending the early years of their life in their families, with their friends, with their father and mother and partly in their school. It is a time of their life called childhood. Of course people, like my colleague on my right, are preparing those children for the future. Of course we are. It is very important. It is a future we cannot wholly predict as once we used to be able to, but it is a time of life, the time of being a child. So when we get in our car or on our bicycle at the end of the day and think, "What did that child learn for the future?" we should ask ourselves another important question, which I hope this Committee will ask itself: was today for that child good enough to be part of someone's life? They will never have it again.

Q71 **Chair:** Thank you very much. It is a very good point, John. Could I ask—it is something off beam but it is relevant to some of the points you have been making, Binks—what is your view about PSHE?

Binks Neate-Evans: It should be statutory, but I think we should implement it carefully. There is lots of evidence—and we have made reference to it in our paper—from the OECD, and the CBI has published information about cognitive and non-cognitive skills, that there is a high correlation between non-cognitive skills and children's access to what they call top jobs. Top jobs in the future will probably be completely different from what they are now. I think that is why there is a very, very



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strong argument that we are putting in place building blocks to enable children to be resilient, to be adaptable, and to make sure that they can internalise. It is called a locus of control. I don't know whether people are familiar with that. It is where they believe that they can influence what happens to them, as opposed to externalising it.

I would welcome a well thought out PHSE being statutory in school, but I am cautious about how we do that. I would not recommend testing it until we have a better understanding of the very, very good psycho-social testing.

Q72 **Chair:** I did not think that you would be thinking about testing it, but that is—

Binks Neate-Evans: Oh, believe me, yes.

Chair: Thank you for that comment. You did say a few things that I thought were related to that question.

Binks Neate-Evans: Yes.

Q73 **Catherine McKinnell:** Going back to but also ahead to implementation of the change we have seen, there are some important lessons, certainly from the feedback I have had from local teachers and families in my area, about any change to come. We can almost guarantee there will be some additional change on the horizon. One teacher in my local area said to me, "The reforms that we have recently gone through created an entirely unmanageable set of workload demands for already overburdened teachers." We have heard some suggestions from each of you about how it could have been done better. It would be helpful to understand clearly what you think were the main causes of the difficulties with the implementation that we have just seen.

Binks Neate-Evans: It is twofold in that we had two very, very big things going on for schools. We had the change in the curriculum as well as the change to assessment. Communication is everything and I think the communication was diabolical. If schools communicated in that way, we would have RSCs breathing down our neck. It was unacceptable. It created an incredible workload on head teachers. The best head teachers tried to contain it on behalf of their teachers. It is linked in again with accountability. Teachers tried to work the system. I think the workload issue was absolutely huge and it was around the communications. It was around the timing of that, so we got the goalpost in February. Children have gone through their entire primary career and then we have the goalposts in February to say, "That is what you are shooting for." It wasn't manageable.

John Coe: I have been working with primary teachers for a long time and I was a head teacher. They are remarkable people who come into their work because they care for children, not in an emotional way but they have children at the forefront of their minds. They do not need goading to work. At the moment they are working—forgive me—many of



them in spite of the system, creating fine schools in spite of the system. I can only hope that your Committee's recommendations will come behind those teachers, so that they feel valued and able to deploy all their skills. They want to do better. You don't have to goad them at all. At the moment, it is almost as if at times they are regarded as enemies. They know they are not. They are our strongest allies.

Chair: Thank you, John.

Q74 **Catherine McKinnell:** Do you have anything you want to add? The other aspect here, as well as what caused the issues, is what can be done better next time to ensure we have smooth implementation of any change in the future.

Russell Hobby: The implementation of the reforms this time was the worst I have ever seen—and there has been some strong competition for that—in terms of the impact that it has had. As Binks said, to be receiving clarifications on the clarifications in February in the year that you are sitting those tests is an appalling distraction from what we need, which is just to focus on teaching the children rather than to try to second-guess what is coming our way. To have tests leaked online in advance of it, twice within the same year, and to have a reading test that does not appear to have been used in front of any children at any point before it went live, although I am sure it must have been piloted in some way—all those added to it and this is where we can learn the lesson from it.

It is right from time to time to change the system, and sometimes that change needs to be radical, but to change that system while seeking to hold people to account for the results produced from it, in exactly the same way when you don't even know what those results are going to be, is going to add to the burden.

If we had walked into this saying, "Well, 2015, we don't really know what is going to happen. Let's pilot it. Let's learn from it. Let's adapt and 2017 will be better," I think you would have had every school leader in the country rolling up their sleeves and ready to get on with that one. But to say, "We will sack you or force your school to convert into an academy status on the basis of tests we haven't yet finished designing for you," is a bad way to manage the system. So my simple recommendation would be not to do that again.

Q75 **Catherine McKinnell:** That is very helpful. The final question I have is a very practical one, and John mentioned one suggestion on this earlier. The current oversight of the design and implementation of SATs by the Standards and Testing Agency and Ofqual, does the system work?

Russell Hobby: It is a confused set up at the moment and the responsibilities between STA and Ofqual I don't believe are clear. When you compare it to the way that secondary qualifications are designed and managed, it is not done in a clear and rigorous fashion for primaries. In many ways the STA is too close to ministerial interference in what goes



on and not established enough to be able to fight back against that, nor do they have the capacity to work at the pace of change required. It would be a sensible recommendation to look at whether, for example, Ofqual should be given more powers to oversee audit and regulate what is going on or whether the design and oversight should be split up in some way at the moment, because certainly it has not worked this time round.

Chair: Suella, you have a couple of questions.

Q76 Suella Fernandes: Just pertaining to the recommendations to the Government consultation. John, first of all, you wrote in your submission, “We must learn to assess what we value, not value what is easy to assess”. How do you think that can be achieved?

John Coe: You have to turn back to the teachers who know the children, working, I have to say, much more in partnership with parents than hitherto, except in a few schools. Not parents as consumers, but parents as partners: valuing their opinions, sharing time with them, devoting time to them. That is the only way I think to begin to value the many aspects of life and learning that are not covered in the slightest respect, despite the importance of the subjects. English and mathematics, they are of vital importance, but you don’t cover every moment, the whole fabric of a child’s being. It is not enough to know sufficiently to answer a question in a test. You have to know when to deploy that knowledge and skill. It is a human skill. For that we need to turn back to humans and away from the test instruments and data.

Q77 Suella Fernandes: If I can I follow up on this point that you are making about parents and that schools and teachers should be collaborating more with parents, which I agree with. How do you think parents can step up in a way? Because in many instances teachers that I speak to say that they would like more buy-in from parents, more responsibility from parents, to cultivate a home of learning, to encourage their children to read. Sadly, not all parents care about the education of those children when they get home.

John Coe: I absolutely agree with you. What I am arguing for this morning is not something that can be achieved over just a year or a few years. It will have to grow in the system and it will have to be the result of teachers showing explicitly that they value parents more. I don’t blame the successful head teacher for sometimes regarding parents as a group who must be kept happy—not only involved but kept happy. It is more than that. They have to create opportunities.

For example, in the last school that I led you did not have to make an appointment to see a teacher. You could drop in any time. That placed an enormous managerial responsibility on the school. It could interrupt the work of the school, but the offer was always there and sometimes it was taken up. If that child has been crying at night over long division or something, the next morning the parent wants to talk to the teacher



about it then. We have to demonstrate much better availability from the schools' point of view. Head teachers, like the one on my right, will be willing to do that, totally willing. At the moment, though, their attention and their professional objectives have to be focused on the testing. The attention on testing, let's lessen that and turn it back to attention on the family. That will bring higher standards for everyone.

Q78 Suella Fernandes: To the rest of the panel: how do you think we can incentivise parents to engage in a more supportive way with teachers, which places a bit more responsibility on their side as well?

Russell Hobby: Yes, that is partly the danger or the downside of a choice-based system, where we see ourselves as buying a service from the school and transferring the responsibility wholly on to the school to do that and, as we have heard, convincingly, it is a partnership between the two sides. Very often we hear parents feeling like, "That is your job not my job and if I don't like it I will complain, or if you make a decision that, say, involves a detention that inconveniences me, then I will hold you to account for that." Of course, schools should be accountable to parents, but it should run the other way too, and if we expect schools to do the entire job of parents, except in those circumstances where parents are unable or prevented or not there, then obviously schools have to step in. As a society we need to be clear that, "You cannot transfer all of your responsibility on to the school," and schools need to be equipped and supported by everybody around them to say, "No, they are right to make those choices and they are right to hold you to account."

Binks Neate-Evans: There are going to be many ways to solve that or address that, and there are lots and lots of different issues around successful work with families. It is highly complex now because of the way society is. You can have a very disengaged community or you can try to engage with families that are holding five or six jobs. We haven't mentioned the "just about managing" families, and we have to be very careful about that.

It would be useful to look at small-scale success rather than blanket ideas and reforms. I am a big believer in rights and responsibilities. We have moved to a society that is becoming increasingly litigious, where many families are very clear about their rights. They are clear about their entitlements. They are not as clear about their responsibilities, and I think we need to be braver about communicating that. Where you can constantly assert that what you are doing is right for the child, I think heads have to be brave about that, but I don't think there is one solution that will fit all the different contexts because society is increasingly complex. But there are some small pilots that, if we evaluate effectively, would be a good step forward.

Chair: Suella, you will have to be really quick because we are running out of time.

Q79 Suella Fernandes: Yes. Would you agree, just yes or no, that there is a



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direct connection between the level of parental engagement and the progress and achievement of a child?

John Coe: I would.

Q80 **Chair:** I think there is general agreement there. Now, Binks, your cargo ship fully laden, has just set off.

Suella Fernandes: There are some holes in it as well.

Chair: We are not developing the metaphor too far. But the Government has given it two years to get to its next port. Do you think that is long enough? I am really referring to the bedding-in period of the changes that have just been made.

Binks Neate-Evans: Two years is better than next September. When you have this huge change, it is a cultural change and anyone who knows anything about system change—I do wonder sometimes whether people in the DfE have done any theoretical reading about system change—we do know that cultural change takes about five years, so I think two years is better than next September. I don't think you will have a fully embedded system, because I think it is highly complex and we are dealing with lots of people in the system at very different stages of their career.

Q81 **Chair:** Yes. One last comment from Russell on that subject.

Russell Hobby: These things have to be changed cautiously and with the right warning and we must not have in-year changes to the system again. Sticking with a bad stable system is better than an unknown, unstable system. We probably need a few changes to the existing framework before the two-year horizon lifting things off. Particularly, I don't think we can sustain the writing teacher assessment model for two years up to that. I don't want a change in mid-year again, but more quickly than the results of the Government's formal consultation. We should have a look at whether we can adjust that to make it more manageable.

Chair: Right. We have had some great metaphors today and also some useful comments and a good debate in both sessions. Thank you all very much indeed.