

Without Levels: The Assessment of Pupil Progress

This association wholeheartedly supports the intention of the Government that schools should develop their own assessment systems. Such systems should include the results of summative and formative testing, teacher assessments and a portfolio of children's work. Parents and carers should be fully involved in assessments.

The prevailing political view of pupil progress consists of a comparison between the results of a baseline assessment made very early in the child's school life with the results of the national testing of English and mathematics towards the end of the primary stage. Clearly this is an inadequate view of a child's growth in maturity, knowledge and skill over the primary years. The two measured aspects of learning are important but they are very far from being a summation of progress in education. Our consideration of progress must include how the child functions in life. It is not enough to show potential for learning at the age of four and to pass a test at the age of eleven. The possession of knowledge and skill is only a beginning, it is what a child **does** with that knowledge and skill that matters more. Progress must be related to the child as a whole.

It should be stressed that teacher assessments are not merely attempts to predict the results of national testing. The two forms of assessment are distinctively different. A test is a snapshot of performance on a particular occasion and as such is vulnerable to all the well documented inaccuracies of testing. It is evidence which has to be validated by the knowledge of that child by those who know and share experience with him or her. The assessment of children by teachers looks beyond testing and considers the whole child and every aspect of growth and development. Unlike testing which is susceptible to coaching and which attaches disproportionate importance to immediate recall of rote learning rather than to understanding, assessments made by adults who know the child well are more productive of good teaching, because the assessments are carried out in the stride of the child and there is no backwash into the curriculum.

The association recommends immediate government action in one particular respect. Currently the results of the testing of pupils is also used as a measure of the efficiency of schools and teaching. It is this dual purpose which has had such ill effects upon the quality of children's learning. Increasingly the high stakes now attached to national testing have led to teaching to the test. The curriculum is narrowed unhelpfully and the coached performance of children on the day of the test is far from imbedded learning and hence is forgotten all too quickly in the weeks following the test. This is why the results of national testing are such poor predictors of later educational performance. It is vitally important that the schools' assessment

of pupil progress should be separated from the national assessment of school performance. The current duality of purpose is harmful both to the assessment of children and to the assessment of school efficiency.

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