



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0870 0012345 ministers@education.gsi.gov.uk

Mr Russell Hobby
General Secretary
National Association of Head Teachers
1 Heath Square
Boltro Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1BL

21st Sept 2010

Dear Russell,

Thank you for a very helpful meeting on 16 September.

At our meeting I signalled my intention to conduct a review of the current National Curriculum tests at Key stage 2. It is important that we make sure these tests command the maximum level of confidence amongst the public and the profession. Your members have reflected and articulated many of the most significant criticisms of how the current tests operate, and I would like to see if we can reform our system of assessment and accountability to take account of those concerns that have been raised by committed professionals.

You highlighted that your members and others feel the current system of assessment and accountability leads too many schools to drill children for tests, spending too much time on test preparation in Year 6 at the expense of the productive teaching and learning that they would wish to focus on. This is clearly undesirable.

Raising standards and narrowing gaps are the central goals of the Government's education policy. The Government is determined to ensure that all children have the opportunity to succeed and knows that passionate teachers and heads share that determination.

The Government believes that its goals are best achieved through ensuring that schools and teachers are free to set their own direction, trusted to exercise their professional discretion and accountable for the progress of the children in their care. Mindful that the OECD concludes that external accountability is a key driver of improvement in education and particularly important for the least advantaged, the Government continues to view a system of objectively measuring pupil progress and holding schools to account as vital.


It is not our intention that the accountability system should be punitive or unfair to schools working in difficult circumstances, but it must be able to identify and tackle cases of sustained under-performance. If parents and the public are to have confidence that schools will be held to account for the contribution they make to pupils' progress and for the public money they receive, it is essential that there are robust and objective measures of performance.

I therefore intend to commission an external review which will look broadly at the testing and accountability system for primary schools. It will consider a number of key issues, including:

- How best to ensure that schools are properly accountable to pupils, parents and the taxpayer for the achievement and progress of every child, on the basis of objective and accurate assessments.
- How to avoid, as far as possible, the risk of perverse incentives, over-rehearsal and reduced focus on productive learning.
- How to ensure that tests are as valid and reliable as possible, within an overall system of assessment (including teacher assessment) which provides the best possible picture of every child's progress.
- How to ensure that performance information is used and interpreted appropriately within the accountability system by other agencies, increasing transparency and preserving accountability to parents, pupils and the taxpayer, while avoiding the risk of crude and narrow judgements being made.

I hope that NAHT will be fully involved in this review and would look forward to working closely with you to bring about real improvements to the testing and accountability system. It is clear that your members have strong views on this subject and professional buy-in is important in the success of any accountability system.

We would only be able to achieve this if NAHT is wholeheartedly committed to the review and participates in the current system in the short term in order to improve the system in the long run. As we discussed, it will not be possible to introduce changes in time for the 2011 tests. I would therefore seek your assurance that, given such a wide-ranging and fundamental review, NAHT would support the 2011 test cycle proceeding in its current form, ahead of the implementation of any recommendations made by the review.

With every good wish,


MICHAEL GOVE