



Advisory
Committee on
Mathematics
Education

Rt. Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
Department for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

20th January 2010

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Meeting to Discuss End of Key Stage 2 Tests in Mathematics

I wanted to express our gratitude to you for spending so much time discussing the future of the testing regime in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2. This is a critical area, and we are conscious of the difficulties of balancing the needs of accountability with the need to improve the mathematical education of young people.

I must reiterate our starting point on this – we wholeheartedly accept the need to hold schools to account and that assessing pupil progress and achievement is important for pupils, parents and stakeholders. Our concern, however, is that the use of a single tool of assessment (i.e. End of Key Stage 2 tests) does not satisfy the different purposes of assessment. Moreover, it is our belief that the high-stakes nature of the data extracted from the tests has resulted in too much ‘teaching to the test’ (as reported by the 2008 Ofsted report, *Understanding the Score*) and a narrowing of the curriculum (in order to increase preparation time for the tests). Moreover, written tests do not effectively assess using and applying mathematics (a key area on which the Williams Review calls for a renewed focus), which are better assessed through teacher observations of how pupils engage in mathematical problem solving on a day-to-day basis.

I welcome your openness to the idea of teacher assessment forming the basis of the accountability measures at the end of Key Stage 2 and the publication of teacher assessment data side-by-side with the written external test results is a step in the right direction towards improving confidence. However, we believe that more is needed for all stakeholders to have confidence in teacher led assessment. This will not simply happen on its own accord¹, nor will it happen overnight. If there is a serious belief in teacher led assessment, a programme of dedicated CPD will be required to equip teachers with the skills and confidence to undertake the assessment, and initial teacher training courses will need to be similarly re-orientated in order to provide the necessary training. And the system will need to be backed up by moderation procedures. This will need to be a phased

¹ It may well be that the continued demand for KS3 test papers from QCDA by teachers is a consequence of the abolition of KS3 SATS without a dedicated programme of CPD to support the transition.

transition, over a period of time which allows the workforce to reach the right level of competency to support such a change. In short, we see no reason why the work being undertaken to create an alternative, teacher-led assessment regime for science at the end of Key Stage 2 cannot similarly be repeated for mathematics.

The Report Card offers an interesting alternative mechanism for school accountability and ACME looks forward to being able to engage with officials in its development. It is difficult to argue against providing a greater range of data in a way that makes it more accessible and understandable for all parents. However the issue will be around the potential use of a single overall grade and how the individual components of data are weighted to lead to its calculation. It will not surprise you to hear we are slightly apprehensive that a system which places a substantial weighting only on the results of Key Stage 2 tests in mathematics runs the risk of leading to the same problems of the narrowing of the curriculum and teaching to the test as we outlined earlier. However, ACME will reconvene its group of experts on mathematics assessment to consider the issue of the Report Card, and we will feed in our views to your officials.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dame Julia Higgins FRS
Chair, ACME