

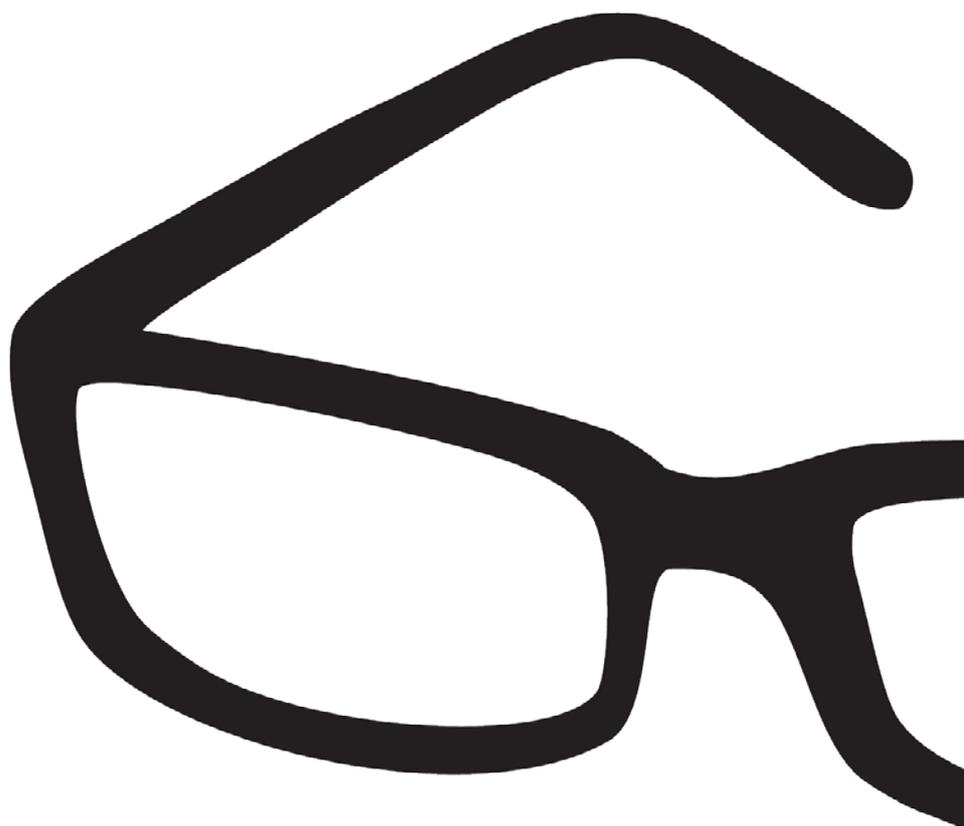


Primary Assessment and Accountability Reform

Feedback from Primary Senior Leaders

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Executive Summary

Some aspects of new primary assessment and accountability measures are very welcome, such as the use of progress in accountability and the use of detailed performance descriptors.

Less welcome changes are the elevated floor standards: senior leaders say their schools are already aspirational, but the new standards simply risk disadvantaging lower attaining pupils.

Furthermore, the option for schools to use attainment or progress to demonstrate that they are doing well seems unfair and could create a two tier system, since schools could make more (in their marketing) of whichever they do better in. This could result in schools which publicise progress being seen as inferior because they aren't able to make so much of attainment. Senior leaders would prefer all primary schools to be held to account on the basis of progress – as is to be the case at secondary level.

However, most schools expect that they will 'hedge their bets' by using the baseline testing - initially, at least, so that they can choose whether to be judged on attainment or progress.

The proposals still leave a lot of unanswered questions, the most significant being created by the lack of assessment criteria descriptors. Schools want to keep these for continuous, formative assessment and it seems likely that they will modify the end of key stage descriptors to their own needs, or even carry on using a modified NC level system – in the short term at least. Some will even use scaled scores throughout as they offer the possibility of greater clarity and predictability.

The current lack of clarity on the form the baseline assessment will take, what scaled SAT scores will mean for internal assessment and how moderation will work makes it difficult for schools to begin to think in detail about revising their assessment practices.

DfE suggestions for moderation of teacher assessments are for Ofsted and/or local secondary school teachers to be more involved. While neither is particularly unattractive to primary leaders, they don't see any need to change the way moderation works now. This is not the same message we hear from secondary schools though: KS2 data is widely mistrusted by Y7 teachers¹.

This lack of clarity may also be impacting on the introduction of the new national curriculum, because the descriptors are needed for schools to know exactly what is expected of them, especially at primary level. Teachers' reluctance is partly fuelled by the misapprehension that there will be descriptors other than at the end of the key stage.

Schools with high levels of pupil mobility and SEN or EAL students are concerned about their performance in progress and attainment, since they expect it to be difficult to perform well in either measure.

Current assessment systems being used in schools seem to be up to the job of handling the new progress requirements, teachers say. However, teachers generally show a low level of engagement with the impact of the reforms and may not have fully appreciated the implications for their assessment strategies.

A shortened version of this report is available online at

http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/articles/primary_assessment_response.asp

¹ See http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/articles/Accountability_and_GCSE_reform.asp

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Introduction

Schoolzone monitors updates to education reforms by consulting directly with teachers as soon as changes or consultations are announced. We use a range of research tools, including focus groups, surveys, research forums and telephone interviews.

We asked a group of 14 senior leaders (via online focus group) for their response to the new assessment accountability measures.

In this report we have:

- summarised responses briefly
- *allowed teachers to speak for themselves by reporting responses verbatim*
- included poll data gathered via focus group
- **emphasised** key terms in teachers' responses.

Other reports in this series:

- *The new GCSE grades and accountability measures* (April 2014)
18 subject leaders and deputy heads told us, via online focus group what they thought of the new GCSE performance standards and the combined impact of these and the new Progress 8 accountability measure.
- *Teachers' response to curriculum reforms: Primary* (January, revised April 2014)
16 primary teachers told us, via linked research forums, what they thought about the forthcoming reforms, to curriculum, assessment and accountability.
- *Teachers' response to curriculum reforms: Secondary* (March 2014)
37 secondary teachers told us, via linked research forums, what they thought about the forthcoming reforms to curriculum and assessment and the likely impact on resource and CPD needs.
- *Primary assessment and accountability* (July 2013)
30 primary teachers told us, via a series of online focus groups, what they thought would be the impact of the suggested changes to the primary assessment and accountability measures.
- *Secondary curriculum reform* (Sept 2013)
30 secondary teachers told us, via a series of online focus groups, what they thought the changes at KS3 to the curriculum and assessment would mean in schools.

Reports:

A full index of reports currently available to download free of charge is maintained at http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/research_papers.asp

Articles:

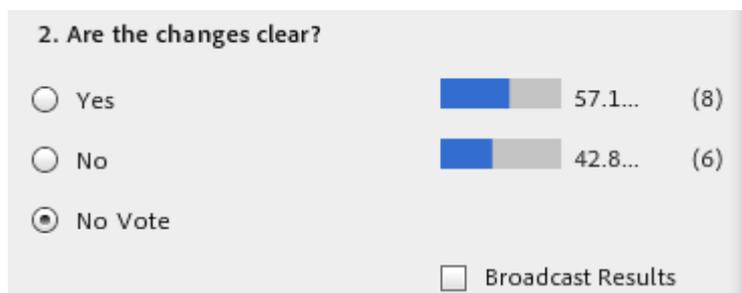
Our series of articles, keeping teachers up to date and sharing responses to curriculum reforms is at: <http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/NewCurriculum.asp>

Response to key aspects

The DfE consultation response document

Awareness and clarity

All participants had read the DfE document on Reforming Assessment and Accountability² for primary schools, although just under half felt that the changes outlined were not entirely clear.



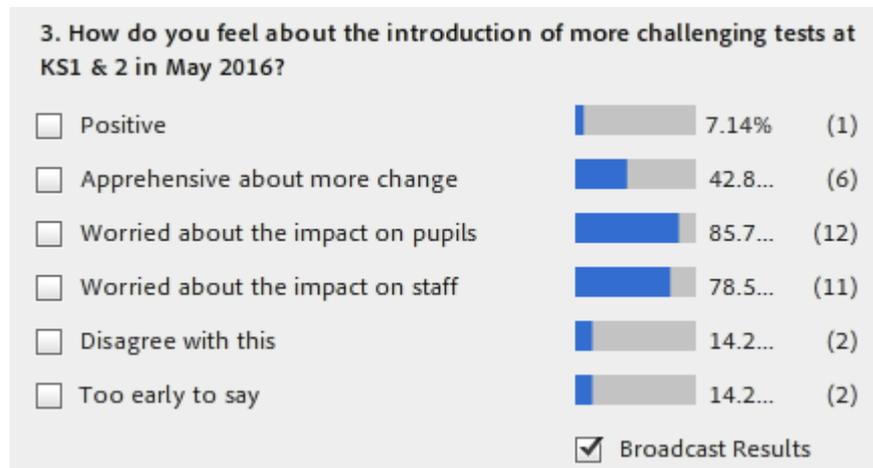
Participants flagged up the lack of detail as a main area of concern. They were anxious to find out how progress would be measured, and what procedures would be put in place. One teacher clearly misunderstood the basis of a dual 'floor standard' which enables schools to choose the measure most favourable to their school.

- *The baseline seems pretty clear but after that it's **a bit woolly***
- *How end of KS tests will be **graded/levelled/reported***
- *The changes to **actual assessment** procedures aren't clear*
- *The benchmark that is **open to misinterpretation***
- ***How progress will be measured** across years. How progress will be measured from KS1-2, Year R-KS1. What baseline assessments in Year R will look like. How will progress be measured in Year R?*
- *It's not that clear about how the end of key stage SATs will **link into school's own assessment systems** which we are being 'encouraged' to develop*
- *More detail is needed about how to measure progress throughout the primary years. Baseline does seem clear, but the **detail of moderation** isn't*
- *I agree with what lots of you are saying - it's the **detail about how progress will actually be measured** etc. that is unclear*
- *I am also concerned that different **assessments are being developed and marketed** ready for 2014 onwards, despite the fact that **baselines have not been finalised***
- *When the **performance descriptors** come out it will be clearer*
- *I agree about the moderation but the rest seemed **fairly straightforward** to me*
- ***The floor standards are a bit disconcerting for schools with a low baseline***
- *Something to **replace levels** has not been agreed - very vague and open to misunderstanding*

² as at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/297595/Primary_Accountability_and_Assessment_Consultation_Response.pdf

More challenging KS1 and KS2 tests



Participants were concerned about the impact on children and staff of increasing the difficulty of KS1 & 2 tests. Unsurprisingly, the greatest concern was for lower performing pupils who currently struggled to achieve the required levels of performance. Implicit in the comments is that by putting greater pressure on children, there's a risk that the emphasis will shift from enjoyment to performance.

Their concerns were exacerbated by a general fear of change.

- *At present, everyone knows where the bar is and we can work towards it. Right now, **where is the bar?***
- *We will have to **push them even harder** than we do now and even KS1 children pick up on the pressure on teachers feel to deliver*
- *Many of my children already find **QCA type tests very difficult to access**. They do not give a true reflection of their ability*
- *Children with **low baselines will have to work even harder** now, some of the things previously taught in year 6 are now in year 4*
- *The children work hard to achieve the levels they do now - if the bar is raised **how are the children supposed to achieve?***
- *Pressure is on jumping through hoops so **if the hoops are getting higher it's even more difficult**.*

There was some debate over whether Y6 teachers would bear the brunt of the harder SATs:

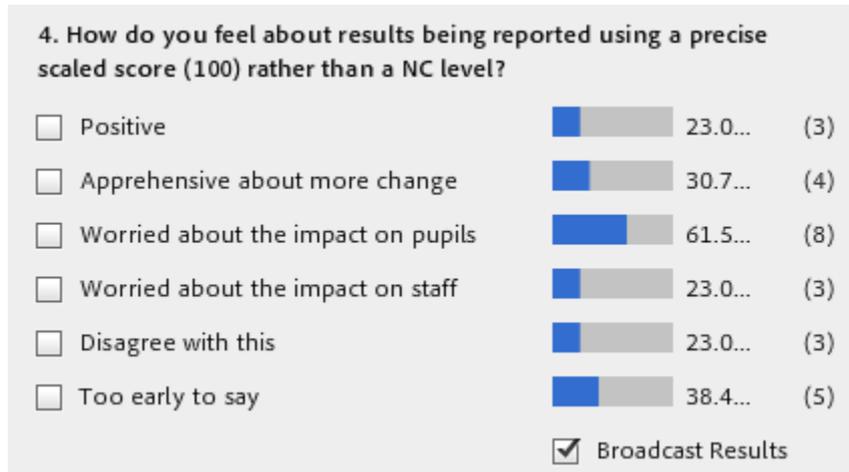
- *There is an **added stress for Year 6 teachers** and just because you keep measuring the children - doesn't mean they are going to grow faster!*
- *But the point is that **results should not just be the responsibility of Y6!***
- *I teach Year 6 and sometimes **other teachers don't see the bigger picture**, i.e. Ofsted in sooner [if floor standards not reached]*

When asked how they planned to alleviate this pressure, and support staff, suggestions were as follows:

- *We have additional teachers who provide small group support in Y6 - **Y6 teachers are the 'gap fillers'***
- ***Precision and accuracy is needed** - too much is left to chance and 'best fit'*
- *I can only really talk about mathematics but I feel that rigorous **CPD and a change in pedagogy can allow all children to reach the new standards***
- *It's important with staff to make this a **whole school issue** and support them as much as possible as a school e.g. through use of school resources*

Teachers were asked whether children working at a low level would be exempt from SATs. Although some pupils, e.g. those working below Level 3, or EAL children who had been in the country for fewer than three years, could be discounted, participants agreed it was very difficult to discount the results of low performing children.

Results reported using a precise scaled score



A scaled score is more transparent, it will 'lay everything bare'. For children achieving below the expected standard, this means a far starker depiction of their ability; effectively it labels scores below 100 as 'fail'. This could have a significant impact on children's self-esteem.

- *Pupils are already under a **lot of stress** in the present system. These changes will raise the bar further- more stress! Some pupils will feel **worried about receiving a more detailed result**, with a mark*
- ***Impact on the self esteem** etc. of pupils if, in reality, more will be significantly below the 'expected standard' which will be more stark using scaled scores. Also tests only represent a **snapshot** and not a true reflection.*

The group agreed that EAL children would be particularly disadvantaged under the proposed scaling system.

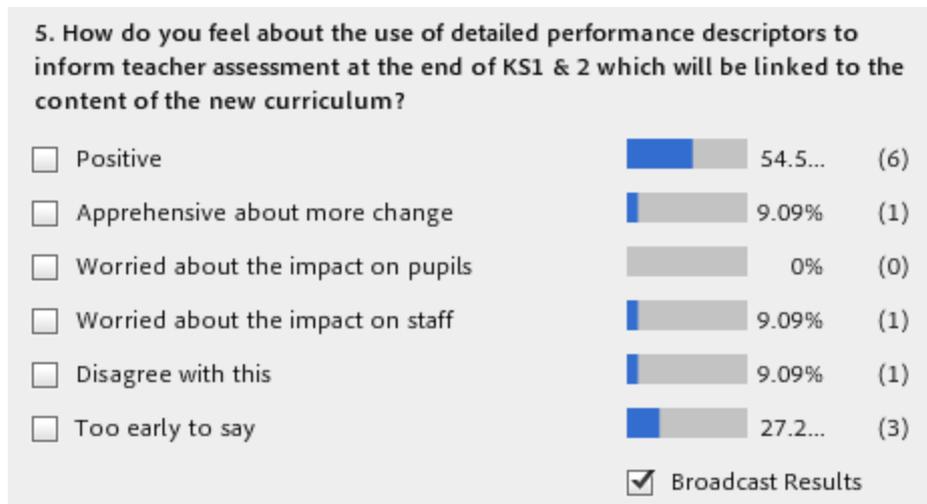
Teachers agreed that significant efforts would need to be made to educate parents on understanding the new system. For schools, the ease with which parents could compare the results of different schools wasn't necessarily a benefit. They wouldn't understand the impact of one pupil's low score if the cohort was small. They were also unlikely to look at progress alongside performance. Parents might also be confused by the score of 100 representing the target grade, rather than 100%.

- They will think a child who scores 80 has 80% and is doing well!!!!
- The scaled score will mean that **pupils - and parents - will compare**
- The reason this change is to be introduced was that parents allegedly couldn't get to grips with levels- that's just a matter of **educating parents** to understand the system. Likewise, they'll now have to be educated on the new system
- I also have concerns about **small schools** - last year one child in Y6 counted for 14% as our cohort was so small.

While schools will have to report both progress and attainment on their school websites, they will presumably make a bigger announcement about whichever they do best in – and use as the basis for their accountability measure. Parents may see an emphasis on progress rather than attainment as a sign that the school has a low attaining cohort and judge it poorly.

- *Parents don't always look at progress they **tend to look at the achievement** and compare against others*

Introduction of detailed performance descriptors



Overall, teachers were positive about this change, although only 12 of the 14 participants voted on this, suggesting that some were uncertain about the implications.

The use of descriptors to communicate and describe pupils' attainment is well embedded in nearly all schools. There was some speculation over the format of the new descriptors (draft version due in Autumn 2014 and final versions in December 2014), with several agreeing that that it was likely that they would use a formulation along the lines of 'working at/ below/ above' curriculum targets. One said that this would enable them to replace APP.

- *It sounds like we are being encouraged to use a 'working at/below/above' for other years in the guidance*
- *We were thinking of reporting to parents **along the lines of EYFS**, e.g. working toward the expected level for Y4 children, exceeding the expected level etc.*
- *That would then be **in line with secondary schools** who use the working at/below/above method*
- *Performance descriptors link to the curriculum which means they can **replace APP***

The proposals are for the descriptors to be used only at the end of the key stage, with a scaled score at the end of KS2 as well. Some schools will want to use this approach throughout to ensure that children were on track, though overall the group was divided over whether they would want descriptors to sit alongside a scaled score at the end of each year:

- ***Too early to say** what we do, but we will need to make sure the scaled score is not a surprise for parents and pupils so **may want to introduce it earlier***
- *At the moment children are very aware of the levels they are working in ... so SATs are not usually a great surprise ... but **how will they know where they are, under the new system?***
- *(We) would be looking to introduce **a scaled score at the end of every year***
- *My role means I am working with the bottom 20% and we find that **knowing exactly where they are can be a really useful and positive tool** (so would be in favour of measuring progress against a scaled score)*
- *You would need to have some sort of 'scaled score' at the end of year to achieve **some sort of consistency throughout KS2** and to prepare children but **still feels very 'airy fairy'**.*

However, others resisted the idea of measuring children's performance year on year against a scaled score.

- *No, we **will not introduce scaled scores** in other years. **We will continue to use levels** in other years*
- *Not at the moment. I **prefer descriptors**.*
- *No - **does not seem like a good idea!***

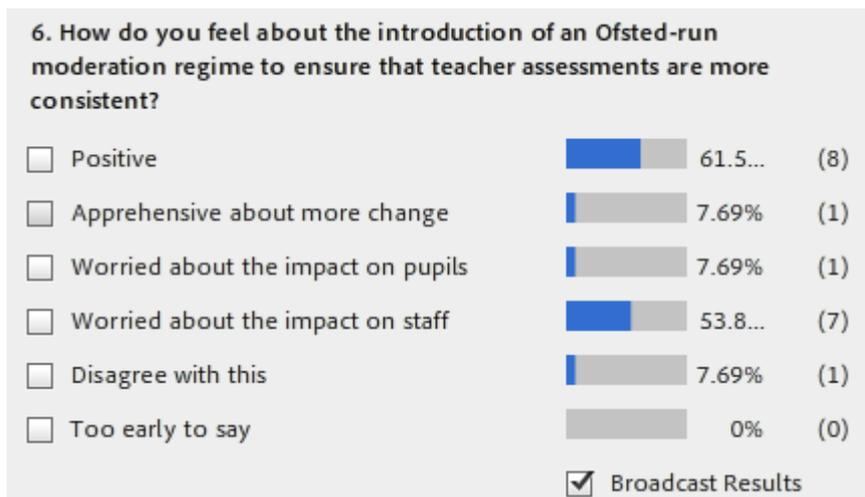
Some felt that there was too much uncertainty to comment, or said that they would follow the guidance of other schools:

- *I'm really **holding fire** until there is more detail about what is happening and what it will look like in practice - and **what other schools will do***
- *I'm too new to my school to know the decision but we are in **a consortium that will advise us***
- *I am wondering how it all will **relate to secondary school***

Teachers are clearly reluctant to let go of the levels or some other form of descriptors to be used in continuous assessment. They do not envisage an assessment regime based on simply assessing how much children have understood at the end of the key stage with no benchmarked comparative data en route.

While the DfE has suggested that teaching schools might take the lead in developing localised assessment strategies, only three participants said that they were looking at assessment within their alliance; a couple were working within other clusters. However, the majority do not seem to be collaborating yet about assessment practice or process, if they have taken any action at all.

Involvement of Ofsted in the moderation of teachers' assessment



Although many teachers are positive about Ofsted being involved in moderation of teacher assessment, of all the changes, there was a degree of approbation from the group, partly because the process of moderation is already well established. A number of participants pointed out that their authority already moderates teacher assessments, so this was a familiar process (although not all authorities do this), and many schools already take part in frequent internal and external moderation.

- **Moderation, if run well and is clear is mostly a positive experience**
- *Agree that moderation, if well run is normally positive*
- *It would be good to know that our judgements are in line with national criteria*
- *Yes, very helpful and supportive especially for us as a one form entry*
- *I'd like to see a more robust approach to moderation so we can be more confident in the levels given particularly at the end of KS1*
- **Making sure in school assessments are sound is a really big issue** - *When it is not sound, progress data is nonsensical and teachers can sometimes use it as an excuse for poor progress in their classes.*

A few pointed out that poorly executed moderation could be very dispiriting.

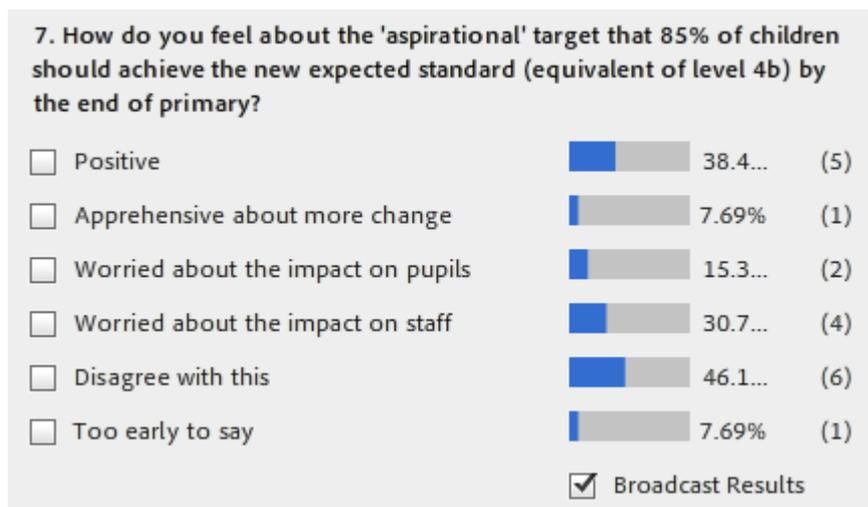
While a supportive approach to moderation is a positive experience, and is part of staff self-improvement, some teachers were wary of this role being taken over by Ofsted who can sometime be seen as punitive, rather than supportive:

- *Different schools should have the freedom to moderate by using LA support, consultant support or support from other schools. **Not Ofsted!***
- *We are lucky to **have happy relationships** with the schools we moderate with and the staff usually find it less stressful as a result*

Although the group was not opposed to more rigorous moderation, they felt that the assessment criteria needed to be far more precise than those currently set out under APP, and noted that staff faced challenges in getting to grips with the new system.

- *As a former KS2 writing marker, **discrepancies between levels are huge**. Experienced markers are making serious errors in judgements of level 6 work. I think **serious CPD needs to be put in***
- ***Difficulty I think will be getting used to new system**. My main experience is in literacy and can generally look at a piece of writing and say if its a level 4, 5 etc.*

Aspirational target of 85%



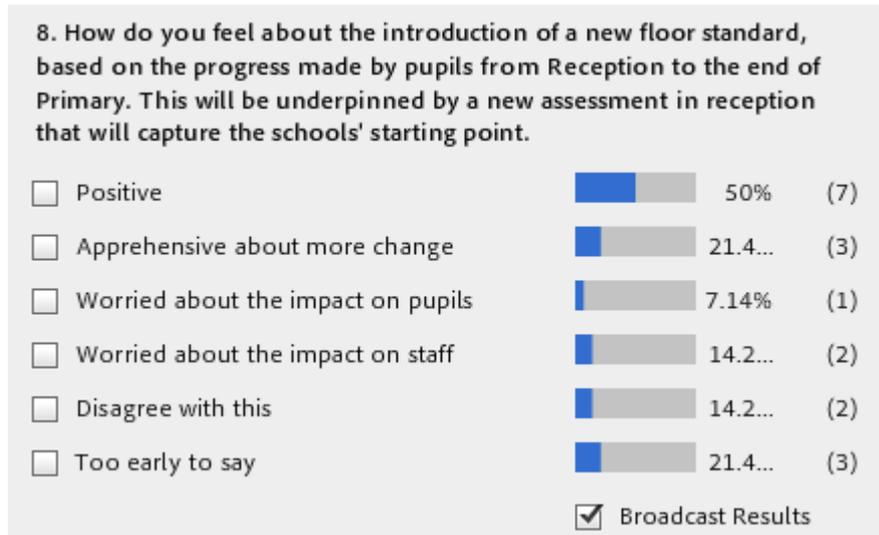
Of all the reforms, this is the one that received the greatest level of disapproval. Teachers felt that raising the bar to 85% would mean more children being left behind. Those most likely to be affected are SEN pupils:

- *I think it is impossible for some schools, especially those, like ours, with **many SEN pupils***
- *I really feel passionately about no child left behind etc., but the truth is that **there are children who will not meet the expected level***
- *The new floor target is a **huge challenge** for schools with a large proportion of SEN and a unit - unfair. Not all schools can be measured using the same floor standards. Schools could be grouped and different floor standards. **Tricky for schools to meet it in all 3 subjects***
- ***Unrealistic**. Not all cohorts are the same, all sorts of things impact i.e. EAL, gender, FSM, pupil premium etc.*

Teachers agreed that progress should be the only target for schools, as this was fairer. They find it difficult to reconcile the notion of an aspirational floor standard with a second option (reporting progress instead) which circumvents it. Schools reporting on progress will be those who have failed on attainment, teachers say. This leaves independent schools (who will presumably be able to opt into SATs as they do now), and maintained schools in affluent areas able to present themselves as "attainment" schools.

Teachers are generally in favour of the progress measures and see them as a fairer way to hold schools to account, but they see the attainment option as an unfair alternative that appears to undermine it.

New floor standard and accountability measures



In spite of the earlier comments that a progress measure was fairer, teachers nonetheless had concerns over how this would work, particularly for schools with high levels of pupil mobility, where a low percentage of children stayed from Reception to Y6:

- **Mobility will definitely be an issue**
- *For schools with high mobility - you **will often not have the children's baseline** or KS1 targets to measure against. We are using matched data this year for Year 6 as a number of L3 children at KS1 have left!*
- *Mobility is a big issue and **should be factored in.***
- *Yes - mobility is a massive issue!*
- *In our area of London we have had a lot of **families moved out by the benefit cuts...**the problem will only get worse*
- *The worry I have about the progress measure is that Reception **baseline is not yet standardised** and KS1 - 2 figures are particularly difficult for us to measure with high mobility.*

One school, with high levels of pupil mobility, currently tracked the performance of two separate cohorts: one for those who stayed at the school throughout, and the second which comprised those who arrived later. This was provided to Ofsted as part of the evidence to explain variable progress rates. Participants agreed that the progress floor standard should report on two sets of progress data.

- *If a reception floor standard is generated then **two sets of progress data should be reported:** home grown EYFS-Y6 and with motilities.*
- *That is a good recommendation to make someone please!*

There were some questions over the timing of the baseline assessment, although these teachers were reassured that the policy document indicated that assessment would take place at the start of Reception.

- *Will the test be on entry to reception or at the end? Our children usually come in low, but our progress through school is good or better.*

One teacher, in a more affluent area, was worried about the impact of children doing well in the initial assessment, and then plateauing.

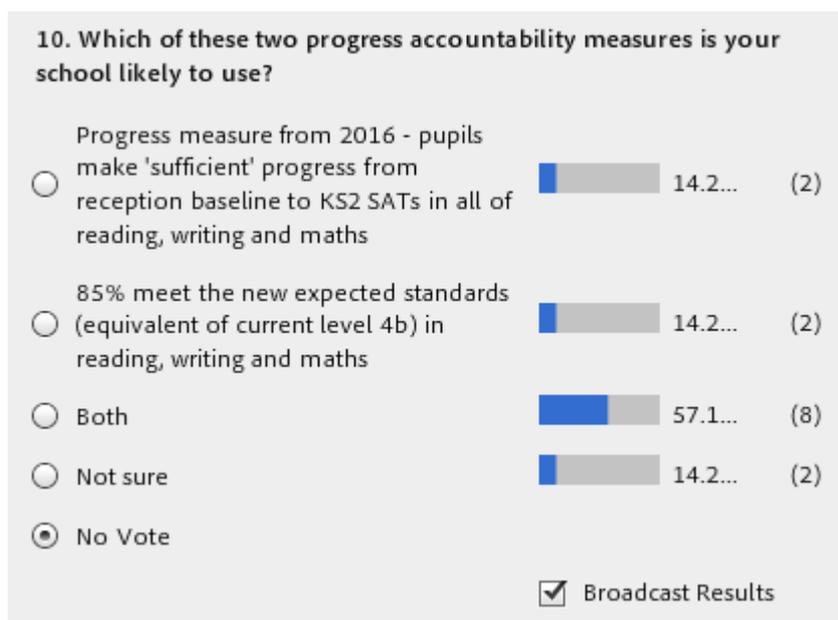
- *Being in a largely middle class area, I often have children who seem to come in 'high' as they can count etc., but then they **plateau by Y2 - I am worried about our progress!!!***

Teachers flagged up the need for the baseline tests to be standardised, and moderated, to avoid teachers making them as low as possible to maximise progress:

- *I can see the **worst set of children coming into every reception class across the land***
- *Will **need moderation for baselines** in Year R as well.*
- *There is already a **pressure** in through primaries (and even more so now we are a multi-academy trust with our high school) **to be more 'careful' about KS1 levels.***

At this point teachers were polled on whether they had been aware, prior to this research discussion, that schools only had to meet one of the two floor standards, and that the baseline reception test was not compulsory. Eight said that they had been aware of this, six were not.

One head said that he had just submitted a bid to the Assessment Innovation Fund on behalf of his teaching school alliance, to express interest in developing a new baseline assessment.



Most participants thought it unlikely that their school would opt out of the baseline assessment:

- ***Won't we all do the baseline test anyway, just in case that cohort doesn't reach the floor by Y6!!***
- ***Surely Ofsted will expect baseline as a measure for progress!***
- ***I think we stand more chance of achieving the sufficient progress method, 85% is tough for us***
- ***It will depend on cohorts***
- ***By going for both, we are "hedging our bets"***
- ***Progress is a fairer measure, but going for both does allow us a choice***
- ***Both - as we will be expected to know and be able to explain both in inspections etc. Also **important to track both attainment and achievement*****
- ***I would go for progress measure as that is where we always do very well!! With small cohorts - this is our best measure of progress.***

Teachers wondered whether they could change their preferred progress measure from one year to the next, as performance could vary from cohort to cohort:

- **Varies by cohort** - sometimes we will hit 85%, sometimes not!
- *I agree, it depends largely on cohorts - groups of children*
- **This year our cohort will make better progress than attainment, last year it was the other way**
- *I have two very high achieving cohorts heading through the systems so we'll easily meet the 85%. Then it'll be about progress as children not high flying.*

Overall, the 85% target was seen as unachievable for most schools:

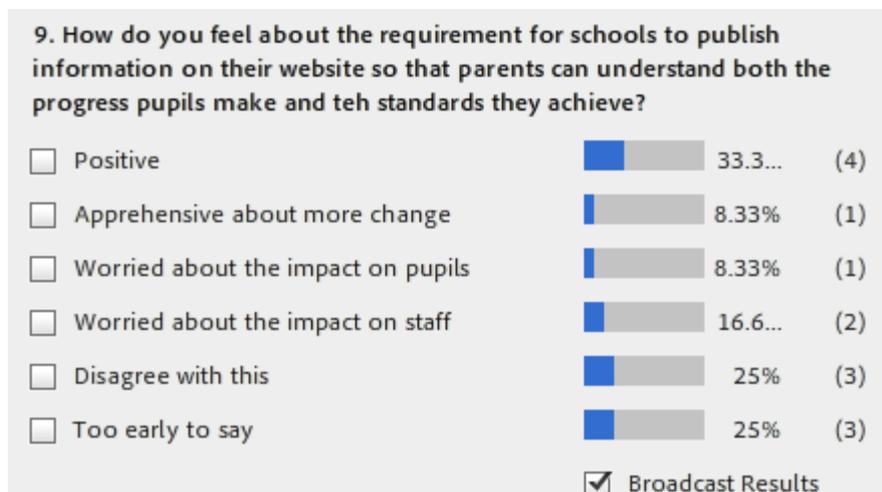
- *I think the 85% across the board measure would currently mean that 70% of primaries in Birmingham are not good enough! **That would lead to a very busy OFSTED, without the progress measure***

The few participants in this group who thought it might, sometimes, be doable, felt that none the less it was important to show progress:

- *Schools are about progress. My school will achieve 85%+ by nature of the demographics of the school. But **schools are about ensuring progress for pupils.***

Overall, it seems likely that most schools will use both measures, partly out of an ideological belief that progress is the most important measures, but also, more pragmatically, because this leaves their options open until they have seen each year's SATs results.

Requirement to publish progress and performance data



Feedback on the requirement to publish results on the school website was largely negative, and focused particularly on the skewing impact of very small cohorts. There was some debate over the minimum cohort size on which schools were required to report, with widespread agreement that a Y6 cohort of six children was simply not a true reflection of the school's overall performance.

- *With publishing, again is **ridiculous with cohorts of 8!!***
- *Publishing data on the website - ridiculous with small cohorts*
- *I think **the need to publish data on your website could be extremely damaging.***

This, coupled with earlier concerns over parents' ability to understand the new scoring system, and interpret both progress and attainment results, meant that teachers were very sceptical over the benefits this apparent transparency really offered schools – or parents.

Support for preparing for the new Key Stage 2 SATs

The final discussion topic relating to the impact of the proposed changes focused on whether participants thought it likely that they would turn to publishers for support on preparing pupils for the new SATs tests.

Of those who had a view, six thought it likely that they would allocate some budget for this; three thought it unlikely, as they were over stretched already supporting the new curriculum.

Participants agreed that publishers should not rush to provide resources until it was clear what the new SATS would look like.

Current practice for tracking pupil progress

11. Does your school currently track 'value-added' progress made by pupils, based on an initial assessment of their skills and/ or cognitive capability at the start of school?



Most participants described an apparently well-established system of tracking both individual and cohort progress, using the data to identify gaps in learning and to make sure that all children were achieving in line with expectations.

The data would be shared with governors, discussed at pupil progress meetings. Some authorities also required schools to submit data.

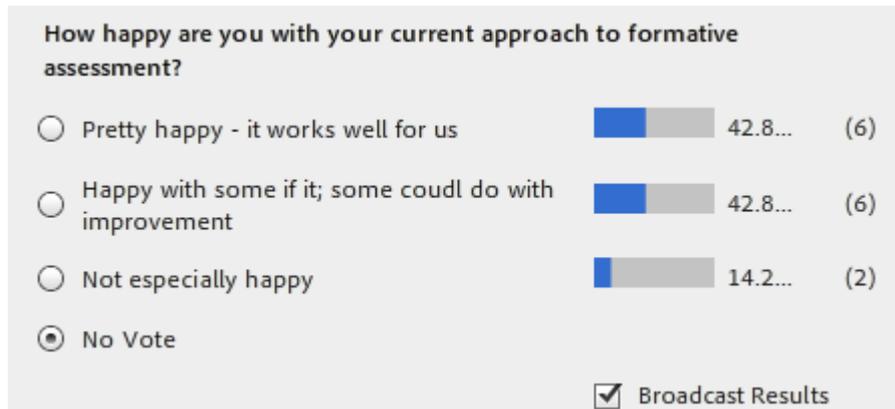
Systems used included:

- Otrack (used by two)
- SIMS (used by two)
- Target Tracker
- APS (Average Points Score) (used by four)
- Fischer Family Trust (2)
- Synott Tracker (2)
- LATs
- Pupil Asset (widely used in Norfolk)
- Classroom Monitor

Most said that the number crunching would be carried out by a designated member of staff (the assessment manager or other SLT member) and then shared with teachers.

Schools are reluctant to leave their existing assessment systems, which are largely based on NC levels because they take some time to become familiar with and teachers understand the tools they currently use and feel confident that they can predict the final outcomes at KS2 with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

Formative assessment



Ten participants said that they used APP at their school, although views on it were mixed, and some had modified it to suit their needs.

Concerns were expressed about the accuracy, relevance and ease of use of APP.

- *We use APP but don't like it. Too laborious.*
- *We use APP but my feeling is it is outdated. Some Birmingham schools no longer using it*
- *We use APP for levelling - doesn't work as well as some of the past systems!!*
- *I'm getting increasingly concerned about the accuracy of APP...*
- *APP was too complicated and labour intensive.*

More positive comments included:

- *I love APP. At both of my previous schools our assessment software was based on it.*
- *We use APP closely to identify gaps on an individual basis, we give teachers additional time to do this as it is labour intensive*

Other systems used included:

- Chris Quigley level descriptors (used by several)
- Grove Targets
- Ros Wilson Criterion for Writing (others said that they had stopped using Ros Wilson)
- Schools own system based on 'child speak descriptors'
- New progressive system based upon new maths curriculum developed within the Teaching School Alliance.
- (as system which) essentially tracks progress in 'low', 'middle' or 'high' against 5 banded 'levels' based on the content of the new curriculum.

Most said that targets, formulated in 'child speak' were shared with children, particularly those in upper KS2.

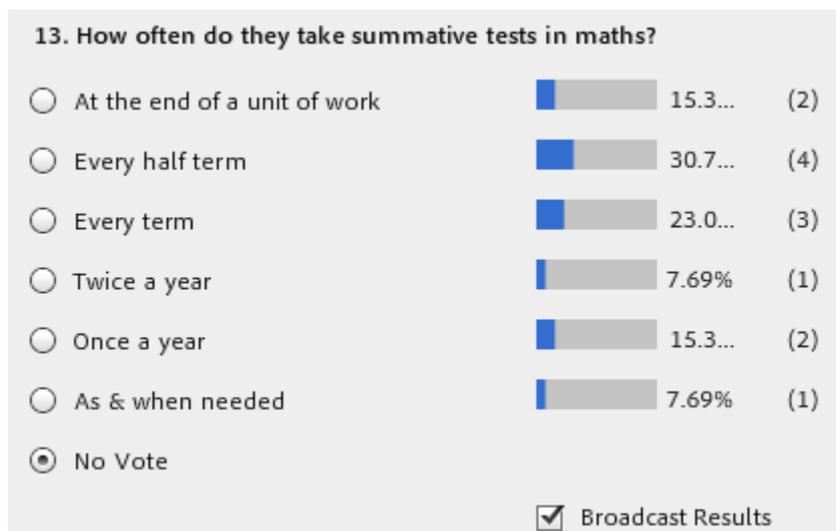
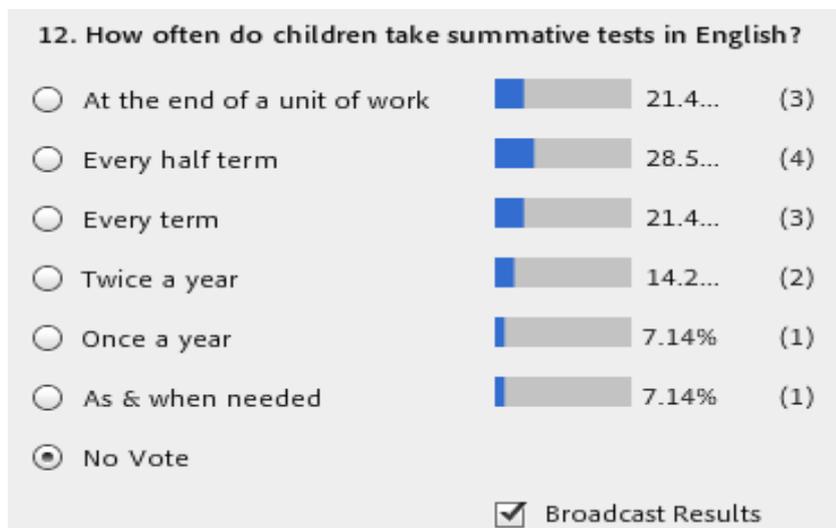
- ***Children are aware of their Literacy and Numeracy targets - these are aligned to levels.***
- *Every child has an A5 file with all subjects in it and all descriptors relevant to them in it*
- *Their targets are in child speak but reflect levels*
- *We have target bookmarks*
- *The children have reading and writing level sheets to help them in class.*

Teachers commented on the diverse range of approaches used, and called for greater guidance from the DfE.

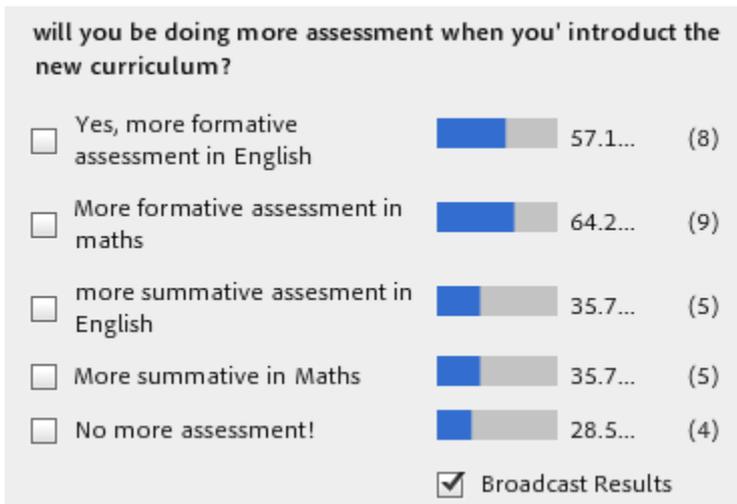
- *It is worrying that **so many different tracking systems are in place** and that some schools/authorities have abandoned some systems, but others are being endorsed.*

Clearly there is an opportunity to rationalise the various assessment tools in use in schools, but the removal of NC levels and no prospect of DfE formative assessment descriptors, militates against this. The Assessment Innovation Fund may even make matters worse as it effectively endorses additional assessment systems but again, without embedding a new system of level descriptors.

Summative assessment



The general anticipation is that schools will carry out more frequent summative assessments, although one head said that his school had been advised to move to regular termly tests. One said that they already did a lot of summative assessment, and would continue to do what the staff felt was right.



- *I think what is important is how assessment data is used - assessments should, as much as possible, be used formatively.*

Tests used included:

- Past SATS papers
- Testbase tests (used by 4)
- NFER optional SATs tests (used by 7)
- Rising Stars (used by 3)

Most said that they moderated tests both within their cluster or alliance, and within the school, with writing identified as a particular challenge to mark accurately and objectively. Some also paid an external moderator.

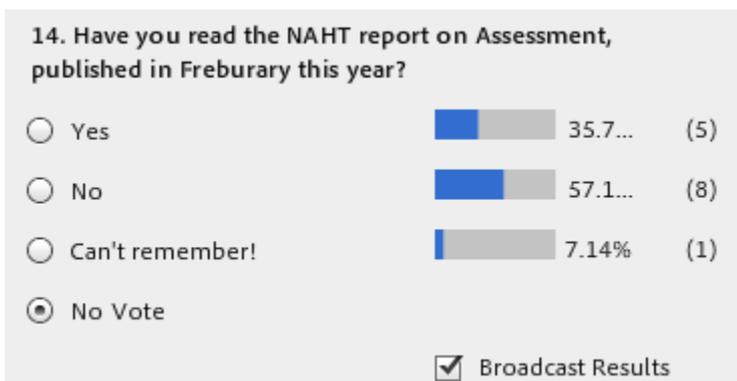
Likelihood of using published tests

Six of those who had a view said that they would buy in a summative test, but 'only after serious scrutiny'. One said that any published materials would need to give both a scaled score, and should support formative assessment.

One said that they would try to develop their own, working within their cluster of schools.

The reality is that with the greater importance attached to progress and achievement, schools will need standardised, summative assessments which give an accurate indication of the score at which children are working throughout primary, so that any that are lagging behind expectations can be identified and supported through remedial interventions.

Feedback on the NAHT report on Assessment



Amongst those who had read the report, the general consensus was that it contained little that was new or ground-breaking:

- *It seems obvious to me - **nothing new**. We do that now.*
- *It was a general document, **we'd got most of what they suggested already**, we'd have liked more of the detail on how to do it*

Similarly, when teachers were asked to comment on a specific recommendation from the report (listed below) they felt that it simply reiterated their existing practice.

For example, the report states: *Assessment should be part of all school development plans and should be reviewed regularly. This review process should involve every school identifying its own learning and development needs for assessment. Schools should allocate specific time and resources for professional development in this area and should monitor how the identified needs are being met.*

- *Surely assessment is **part of most schools development plans anyway?***
- *Good assessment is **absolutely key to good teaching and learning***
- *I'm looking at the statement and can't see how this is any different to what we do already*
- *Exactly - we should be doing it already*
- ***Common sense** and a rewording of what is general practise*

Ensuring accuracy and consistency between individual teacher's assessment practice was mentioned by five teachers as the aspect of assessment that they and their colleagues find most challenging.

Designated Assessment Leader



All participants' schools have a designated assessment leader in place in their school and it seemed typical for the appointed person to be a deputy or assistant head, or another member of the SLT in school. In one school the role of assessment leader was shared between the staff members responsible for maths and English.

Most teachers reported that they do currently collaborate with other schools in their cluster, and the professional responsibility to share good practice was recognised

- *Think most schools are **very supportive** and willing to share what works well*

However; teachers expressed a number of concerns about the difficulties of doing this in a productive and efficient way. Varying performance and competition amongst schools in the cluster can cause difficulties for some.

- There is an element of **competition**, especially as some schools are over-subscribed, but others are struggling to gain pupils.
- The **outstanding schools sometimes believe they are better than others and don't want to support** as they think they are superior
- We are outstanding but we work with lots of schools and I would hate to think they thought we were better than anyone else. They want to work with us so hope not!!
- We have **lots of schools** where I am (7 in a mile radius) which **does put pressure on**
- **Competition isn't really an issue for us** as geographically spread out in a rural area

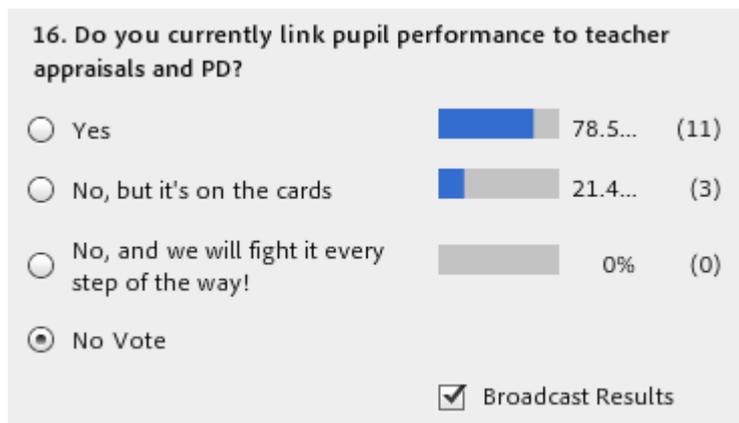
In addition, the group dynamics of cluster meetings, and the avoidance of anyone taking an overall lead can be difficult to manage.

- Cluster moderation is important, but can be a bit 'cosy' at time - **difficult to challenge sometimes!!**
- I agree on that, it can be very cosy
- I've found cluster meetings need careful leadership to **avoid the cosy approach** (and the overly critical)
- Trouble is sometimes what one school does well would not work in another school! **I value support with levelling by LA.**

Inconsistencies in the approach clusters take to moderation, could perhaps be overcome by regional or national training, or by the inclusion of secondary school(s), as one teacher reported had been helpful.

- Yes, we work in clusters, but this is **a national issue and requires national training**
- It's **important that it's consistent beyond clusters too!**
- I think because we have **secondary school** in our consortium and they need us to be consistent so **they promote collaboration**

Linking pupil performance to teacher pay



In spite of resistance from teaching unions, and the generally negative media coverage over teachers' response to the requirement for schools to introduce performance related pay from September 2014, most in this group had already implemented it at their school, and were generally positive about it.

Some thought it was already mandatory for schools:

- staff understand it is **part of national policy**
- I thought we **HAD** to link pupil performance to PD

It is difficult to know whether the views of this group are a true reflection of the attitude of senior managers, although it is likely that they had less to fear from the policy than peers in less successful schools.

- *It is part of the **LA Pay Policy***
- *It is part of our **PM and pay policy!!** We worked with a cluster of schools to write the policy based on the National requirements*
- *Have very clear pay and appraisal policies that were fully consulted on*

One head teacher who described a situation in a previous school where he had made teacher recruitment and retention decisions based on this approach, which he felt had worked successfully.

- *Easy. I went into a very challenging school for my second headship. Had to have a clear out so this helped my hand. The good and outstanding teachers stayed, the rest shipped out. The school improved rapidly as a result.*

Various other positive reactions and justifications for this approach were given, including

- *It's **ok if you are a good teacher and you are honest with assessment***
- *Yes as they want the children to do well but we **don't want them fudging results** to achieve it and we are realistic*
- *It has always been the case that the **teachers are accountable for the progress of their pupils***
- ***PPM and staff appraisals work together** ... teachers see it as a **positive** move - very hard working staff who just want the best for children. However, targets set are realistic and the HT or Appraiser has a good understanding of the cohort and teacher's needs*

Others acknowledged the additional pressure that this issue was causing some teachers:

- *I feel that it will **bring division among my staff**. It has a clear conflict of interests when PRP is linked to Teacher assessed scores.*
 - *Teachers understood that this needed to be done, but are feeling under pressure. It also has made the issue of **accuracy even more important***
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