

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-569
Ein cvf/Our ref HL/01723/14

William Powell AM

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

1 September 2014

Dear William

Thank you for your letter dated 14 August asking for my views on the petition to stop national tests for primary school children (P-04-569).

The petitioners appear to assume that these tests are the only, or critical, measurement tool for literacy and numeracy skills. I can assure them that they aren't. They also appear to assume that outcomes of these tests are to reward success and punish failure. That doesn't chime with how I've seen them used. Also, the petition notes that they are widely condemned by the profession. I haven't seen that criticism, but I have seen how they are being used to inform and improve teaching practice. Let me expand further.

The National Reading and Numeracy Tests were introduced to help schools across Wales assess their learners' reading and numeracy skills and track learner progress to gain a clearer insight into each learner's development. Schools are now beginning to use data from the tests to inform target setting for all learners to ensure they are appropriately challenged. Test data also helps schools to diagnose any difficulties with the development of reading or numeracy skills at the earliest possible opportunity so that additional support can be directed to those in need.

The tests are aligned to the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and are trialled extensively in Wales, by the National Foundation for Educational Research, before they are finalised. This process ensures that the questions are set at the appropriate level and that the majority of learners taking the tests are able to complete them within the set timeframe.

Tests are one of the tools traditionally used by both primary and secondary schools to assess learners' progress, yet studies into reading and numeracy testing in schools in Wales prior to the introduction of the national tests showed that the frequency, quality and relevance of these tests were highly variable – not to mention expensive. The implementation of national, annual tests, funded by us and developed by an organisation respected internationally, gives schools much better information on how to support their learners. I've also seen them used by schools to identify professional development needs for their staff.

In terms of primary school learners taking the test, there is absolutely no reason for learners to feel anxious or stressed. The [2014 Administration Handbook](#) was issued to schools and practitioners advising how the tests may be conducted and how particular provisions, such as rest breaks for year 2 and 3 children, can help learners who have difficulty concentrating or who tire easily. We are clear about minimising anxiety in our younger learners.

Furthermore, our guide to parents [Reading and Numeracy Tests in Wales - Information for Parents/Carers Years 2-9](#) makes it clear that parents should not prepare their children for the tests other than by ensuring that they are not worried or anxious. To overinflate the significance of the tests to learners as being the only measure of their progress is unfair and could indeed cause distress and feelings of negativity. We communicate this as broadly and clearly as we can.

I would also like to make the point that there is no stipulation that learners have to sit the tests under examination conditions as a year group in the hall or gym and that many primary teachers administered the tests to their own classes, in their own classrooms. There is also no need for schools to remove or cover all wall displays; the Welsh Government asks that schools ensure that learners do not have access to materials that could give them an unfair advantage which may mean, in some cases, taking down posters with numerical or spelling rules.

Improving the literacy and numeracy skills of children and young people are two of my main priorities. In school, an inability to read well or to work confidently with numbers will stop learners from effectively accessing the areas of the school curriculum that have their roots in literacy or numeracy. Outside of school those learners whose needs have not been identified and addressed at the earliest possible opportunity, and who go on to leave school without an acceptable degree of competency in reading and numeracy skills, are likely to face a lifetime of social and economic disadvantage.

I am committed to ensuring that no child falls through the net and that no child leaves compulsory education without the necessary reading and numeracy skills that will enable them to progress into further education or employment.

Yours sincerely



Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills