

Nicky Morgan
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

24 October 2014

Re: Baseline assessment

Dear Secretary of State,

ACME responded to the Department for Education consultation on primary assessment and accountability in October 2013. In that response ACME outlined key principles that underpin its advice on assessment in primary schools. These included national standards being monitored over time, schools being held to account for learner progress and school reliability being based on a rounded view of pupil progress using a wide range of indicators.

As ACME outlined in its October 2013 response, the usefulness of a baseline assessment in mathematics is questionable, whether at Key Stage 1 or reception. Other responses to the consultation set out issues with a baseline at reception and a majority of respondents were against allowing schools to choose from a range of commercially available assessments. Therefore, the imminent implementation of baseline assessments for reception children, to be announced in January 2015, is concerning and a range of issues surrounding baseline assessments for reception need to be considered before options are funded and schools make their choices.

There are several issues with these proposals:

- Very young children will be assessed but scores will not take account of whether children are born in the summer.
- Children will have varied pre-school backgrounds, in terms of cultures, experience of settings and knowledge of English.
- Schools will have an undesirable incentive to depress scores in order to increase measured progress, especially if this means attaining extra funding.
- What is considered key or informative in testing may also vary across schools.

For accountability, it would be adequate to compare the outcomes of primary schools with similar intakes of children. This would be the most cost-effective and arguably the fairest system for schools. There are also issues around overtesting children. Giving children mathematics scores which stay with them throughout their primary schooling has the potential to create fixed mindsets about mathematics ability for teachers, children and parents, rather than fostering high expectations and positive attitudes.*

ACME advises that to ensure that the future system is fair and transparent, schools should be advised that commercially produced baseline assessments are optional. They should be advised that there is a choice between reception baseline assessments for primary schools, a

Key Stage 1 baseline for junior schools and no baseline at all for schools who opt out.
Baseline assessments must also be uncoupled from school funding arrangements.

Members of ACME are very willing to meet with you or your ministers to discuss this issue in more detail. Your officials can get in touch with the ACME Secretariat at acme@royalsociety.org.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Steve Sparks FRS
Chair of the Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME)

* Boaler, J., (2013) "Ability and Mathematics: The mindset revolution that is reshaping education", *Forum*, 55 (1).