



House of Commons

Children, Schools and Families  
Committee

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**Testing and Assessment:  
Government and Ofsted  
Responses to the  
Committee's Third  
Report of Session  
2007–08**

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**Fifth Special Report of Session  
2007–08**

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## The Children, Schools and Families Committee

The Children, Schools and Families Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Children, Schools and Families and its associated public bodies.

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### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Lloyd (Clerk), Sarah Thatcher, (Second Clerk), Emma Wisby (Committee Specialist), Judith Boyce (Committee Specialist), Katie Phelan (Committee Assistant), Susan Ramsay (Committee Secretary), and John Kittle (Senior Office Clerk).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Children, Schools and Families Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6181; the Committee's e-mail address is [csfcom@parliament.uk](mailto:csfcom@parliament.uk)

# Fifth Special Report

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On 13 May 2008 the Children, Schools and Families Committee published its Third Report of Session 2007–08, *Testing and Assessment* (HC 169-I).<sup>1</sup> The Government’s response was received on 15 July 2008 and Ofsted’s response was received on 8 July 2008, and are published as Appendices 1 and 2 to this Report. The Committee’s Conclusions and Recommendations are reproduced on page 18.

## Appendix 1

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### Government’s response to the Third Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2007–08

#### Introduction

1. The Children, Schools and Families Committee published the report of its inquiry into Testing and Assessment on 13 May 2008. This is the Government’s response. Paragraph numbers relate to the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the report.

2. The Government strongly agrees with the Committee’s conclusions on the importance of national testing, to help teachers to focus on ensuring that every pupil can achieve their full potential. The Committee highlights the importance of teacher assessment. The Government published its Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategy in May, supported by £150 million over the next three years. This makes an offer of professional development for every school, and will help to strengthen teacher assessment and ultimately ensure that all teachers have the very best understanding of where their pupils are in their learning, to allow them to tailor their teaching appropriately. Support for AfL is also at the heart of the Making Good Progress pilots, alongside piloting a new approach to testing through single level tests and additional, one-to-one support for pupils who need it. The Government also welcomes the Committee’s endorsement of the assessment approach to the vocational and general element of Diplomas.

3. The Committee’s report is clear about the importance of accountability to ensure that all pupils are being properly supported; and welcomes the creation of Ofqual to ensure rigorous standards are maintained. The Government is not persuaded that there are inherent problems in using National Curriculum testing for the three purposes of measuring pupil attainment, school and teaching accountability, and national monitoring. Decoupling these individual uses of the National Curriculum tests could confuse accountabilities and add to the burden on schools.

4. The Committee raised an important issue about “teaching to the test”. The Government has never encouraged “teaching to the test”, nor do we accept that increases in national test results are the result of “teaching to the test”. We will consider providing guidance to schools to reinforce good practice and to re-emphasise our position that excessive time spent on test preparation would be unacceptable. As there is little information on parents’

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<sup>1</sup> Third Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2007–08, *Testing and Assessment*, HC 169-I.

and pupils' views of testing and assessment, we are currently considering how we could gather better evidence.

5. The Committee's Report also highlights the importance of ensuring that schools' performance is not judged narrowly against national test data only. The Government agrees, and will be consulting on school-level indicators of wellbeing, as set out in the Children's Plan. We will also look at how the presentation of the Assessment and Attainment Tables can be improved to make them more accessible, as suggested by the Committee.

### **The need for national testing (Recommendation 1)**

6. We welcome the Committee's recognition that national testing has a valuable role and its endorsement of the principle of accountability at every level of the education system. National tests provide objective, reliable and consistent information about the attainment and progress of every child in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, enabling valid comparisons to be made between the performance of pupils and groups of pupils, schools and local authorities. Parents and pupils are key stakeholders and the Children's Plan sets out our commitment to establish their views on our key policies, of which assessment is one.

7. We welcome the Committee's judgment that there is excellent teaching in our schools. Evidence from inspections has shown that the quality of teaching has improved alongside improvements in test and examination results.

### **The purposes of national testing (Recommendations 2, 4, 21 and 22)**

8. The central purpose of National Curriculum tests is to provide pupils, parents, schools, the Government and the public with an accurate measure of attainment for every pupil in the core subjects at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3. The Government does not believe that there is any necessary or pre-determined limit on the number of uses that can be made of this information; indeed imposing such a limit would not be sensible, and likely to impose new burdens on schools. Rather than setting an arbitrary limit to the uses made of test data, what is required is that an informed judgment is made in each case about the fitness for purpose of test results data in the specific context, and about other possible sources of information.

9. The Committee identifies three broad uses of test result data: measuring pupil attainment; school and teacher accountability; and national monitoring. It is the Government's clear view that test result data is fit to support each of these three important uses:

- National tests provide objective, comparable information about every child. This data complements teachers' own assessments about how each child is progressing based on evidence gathered day-to-day. In the round, assessment data supports schools and teachers to help children to progress and to achieve their best. This is the most important use of national test information: the other two uses exist to support this vital work;

- National test results also provide reliable, comparable information on schools' performance and, together with evidence from Ofsted and schools' self-evaluation, form the basis of school accountability to parents and to the taxpayer. National testing results are the basis for calculating progression measures, value added and Contextual Value Added (CVA) scores. In this respect, they are also a key tool for headteachers and Governing Bodies to use in comparing the performance of their school against others;
- The third use is one in which test data has a unique function; it provides information on national standards and measures attainment against national Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets.

In his evidence to the Committee, Ken Boston confirmed that the tests are fit for purpose.

10. The Government agrees with the Committee that test results do not, and cannot, provide a complete picture of a pupil's or a school's performance. Testing focuses on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, as those subjects underpin the rest of the curriculum and so hold the key to children's future success in study and in the world of work beyond. That is why these subjects are also the main focus of the target-setting process. High standards in the core subjects must be a key objective for every school. But the Government is clear that other areas of the curriculum, and other sources of information on a pupil's progress and development, are also very important.

### **Targets, and the consequences of high-stakes uses of testing (Recommendations 3, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 17 and 20)**

11. The Government welcomes the Committee's endorsement of the importance of effective assistance for children who struggle to meet expected standards, but it does not accept that the current system of targets puts the system out of balance. The accountability system for schools, including the setting of targets as well as the tests themselves, the Achievement and Attainment Tables and Ofsted inspections, has contributed to the highest standards ever achieved at primary and secondary levels. The Government agrees that the pursuit of higher standards is not about numerical targets. Targets, and their use in the accountability system, are just a means by which we move towards the objective of equipping pupils with the skills and knowledge they need.

12. The Committee raises "teaching to the test" as a key concern. The Government does not accept that increases in national test results are the result of "teaching to the test". The term is used to cover a broad range of possible practice in different schools, from recapitulating on skills that children need to internalise and hone, after initial learning, to repeated practise of test questions and learning test technique. A better understanding of school practice would be helpful, and we are therefore considering how best we can gather further evidence in this area with a view to providing guidance to schools to reinforce good practice and to re-emphasise our position that excessive time spent on test preparation would be unacceptable.

13. The Committee also noted that some of its witnesses believed that testing was stressful for children, but it did not reach any specific conclusion. As the Minister of State for Schools and Learners said in his evidence session with the Committee, the Government is

keen to understand more about parental and pupil views of testing and assessment, and we are currently considering how best to collect better evidence than is currently available.

14. As noted above, the Government believes it is right that national testing should focus on core subjects. Nonetheless, schools are statutorily required to provide a balanced and broadly based curriculum which:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and society; and
- prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

15. There is no reason for testing to result in an unbalanced, narrow curriculum or uninspiring teaching. The breadth of the curriculum and the quality of teaching are both entirely within the control of the school and the teacher. There is no evidence that good test results need be obtained at the expense of the broader curriculum or of engaging teaching. Successful schools combine both high attainment and a rich, varied curriculum and each contributes to the other. Literacy and numeracy can be taught in and through other subjects; teaching the core subjects in the context of a broad and rich curriculum is what we want for every child. If children are taught the curriculum well, then they will do well in the tests.

16. Evidence from Ofsted also demonstrates this. The majority of Ofsted inspection reports about schools judged to be outstanding describe schools which have a broad and balanced curriculum and good or outstanding achievement and attainment. Ofsted's report on *The curriculum in successful primary schools* (October 2002) identified schools

“which achieve what many others claim is not possible. They have high standards in English, mathematics and science, while also giving a strong emphasis to the humanities, physical education and the arts.”

17. The Government supports schools in the provision of a broad and rich curriculum in a number of ways. For example:

- the new secondary curriculum offers schools exciting opportunities to increase engagement and motivation by providing a wider range of relevant learning experiences for young people. Schools are expected to offer additional curriculum opportunities outside the classroom, designed to enhance teaching, learning and engagement with the subject areas;
- in the Children's Plan we announced our intention that, no matter where they live, or what their background, all children and young people should be able to get involved in top quality cultural opportunities in and out of school;
- £332 million will be invested in music education during 2007-11 and, by 2011, all primary children will have had an opportunity to learn a musical instrument; and
- the PE & Sport Strategy is aiming to offer five hours of PE and sport a week, during and after the school day, to all 5-16 year olds, supported by £783 million over the next three years.

18. In order to encourage a more equitable focus on improving outcomes for pupils performing below national expectations (and stretching those who are most able), as indicated in the Education White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All* (October 2005), we now have a pupil progress measure. The interaction between this new progression target and the attainment targets measuring the percentage of pupils who have passed a particular threshold is important. For some pupils, often because they have started a Key Stage behind their peers, reaching nationally expected levels is particularly challenging. By introducing a progression target alongside the traditional end of Key Stage attainment targets, we are helping schools to focus on outcomes for all pupils, regardless of their prior attainment, while continuing to recognise the importance of children reaching the expected levels, where they can do so. This, alongside personalised teaching and learning approaches, will help to ensure that we have the right incentives in the system to increase attainment and narrow gaps at the same time.

### **Use of data by Ofsted (Recommendation 11)**

19. We think it is right that standards in national tests and examinations should continue to be prominently reported in inspections, because educational attainment and success in examinations is fundamental to the future life chances of young learners. For the same reasons, it is right that national test data should help inspectors to form their judgements on standards and progress, without being crudely used to pre-decide inspection outcomes. As well as absolute attainment, inspectors look to CVA data in order to take account of schools' specific circumstances and intakes. Inspection grades can reflect excellent progress by pupils who enter a school significantly below national expectations; or inadequate progress by pupils from more privileged backgrounds with high attainment on entry. CVA data, alongside absolute attainment data, is therefore relevant in reaching inspection judgements, as is the direct evidence seen during the inspection itself, on assessment systems, the quality of teaching, lesson observations, discussions with learners and the views expressed by parents.

20. RAISEonline, and other data packages, provide inspectors with robust data about the standards achieved by pupils, and the progress they are able to make during each Key Stage. Data of a similar quality is not currently available in other areas of schools' work, to reflect the full range of the *Every Child Matters* agenda. The Department is working with Ofsted to address these gaps in time for the next inspections cycle, starting in 2009.

### **The burden of assessment (Recommendation 16)**

21. Some preparation is necessary to enable pupils to display what they know and what they can do in the context of a time-limited test. Teaching the curriculum well and teaching pupils how to display what they know is good practice, but the Government does not support excessive time spent on test preparation, and will ensure that this issue is explored in gathering evidence about "teaching to the test", and in any future guidance.

22. Single level tests, currently being trialled in the Making Good Progress pilot, could reduce the need for other tests to monitor progress within the Key Stage or for diagnostic purposes. Our investment in developing teachers' assessment skills and the provision of AfL and Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) materials will enable teachers to track progress and plan the next stage of learning through their own ongoing assessments. They would

enter pupils for a single level test when they judged them to be ready, rather than wait until the end of the Key Stage.

### Sample testing (Recommendations 5 and 23)

23. The Committee has proposed that we consider a move to multiple test instruments, each serving fewer purposes, as an alternative to National Curriculum tests. As set out elsewhere in this Response, we do not accept the argument that the current National Curriculum tests serve too many purposes. The development and implementation of additional tests implies extra costs and increased workload for teachers and others, and we are not persuaded of the benefits it would bring. It also seems likely that we would have a number of sets of incompatible performance data, which would result in confusion for schools and parents, and would be a less transparent way of holding the education system to account.

24. We recognise that sample testing is one way of measuring performance and progress at national level. However, a system of sample testing could achieve only that single purpose and a whole cohort system of assessment would continue to be needed to provide information about the performance of every pupil and every school. We believe that high quality annual tests that reflect the evolution of the curriculum provide a more accurate measurement of performance. In developing tests, the NAA uses a standard test against which to equate the standards of each annual test. We do not see merit in imposing the additional burden of participating in sample tests on some schools.

25. There is evidence to suggest that, internationally, there is a trend to move away from the use of sample testing to national testing of the full cohort. Recent examples include:

- Australia, where national assessments have been introduced for the first time in May 2008 in literacy and numeracy for years 3, 5, 7 and 9;
- Japan, where new national standardised tests in Japanese and mathematics were introduced for all 12- and 15-year olds in April 2007 and will take place annually; and
- Germany, where national tests to assess children in lower secondary against recently introduced national standards in a range of subjects are being introduced from 2009.

The recent OECD review of Scotland's school system, where testing is currently carried out on a sample basis, recommended that the Scottish Survey of Achievement be extended to all children throughout Scotland as a basis for negotiating resource and outcome agreements with local authorities and to enable improvements to be measured at an individual and sub-group level.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 3, *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*, OECD, December 2007.

## Teacher assessment and Assessment for Learning (Recommendations 3 and 26)

26. We welcome the Committee's recommendation which supports action we are already taking to improve AfL practice, to promote personalised teaching and learning, and reflects the way in which single level tests and AfL have been designed to work together in the Making Good Progress pilot. Rigorous assessment and tracking of pupil performance in order to inform classroom practice is the most common feature of schools where pupils make good progress and attainment gaps are closed. AfL is therefore a key element of personalised learning. While some schools are already using AfL very effectively, the evidence of inspections is that, for one school in four, ongoing assessment is a key area for improvement.

27. In the Children's Plan, we set out our aim "to make the use of tracking and AfL tools and techniques truly universal across all schools - extending them beyond the core subjects of English and mathematics." We are investing £150 million over the next three years in the continuing professional development of school staff in AfL. The AfL Strategy, which has been jointly developed by the DCSF, the National Strategies and the QCA, together with the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors, is designed to support schools in using assessment information to improve and plan provision, as well as improving the quality of the assessment process itself. Among the Strategy's aims is that every teacher is equipped to make well-founded judgements about pupils' attainment, understands the concepts and principles of progression, and knows how to use their assessment judgements to forward plan, particularly for pupils who are not fulfilling their potential. With the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors, we are working towards having a trained assessment specialist in every school.

28. To improve the quality and consistency of teacher assessment, the QCA and the National Strategies have been developing Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP). APP is a structured approach to teacher assessment, providing clear criteria against which judgements can be made about levels and sub-levels, helping teachers to track pupils' progress throughout a Key Stage and to plan for the next steps of learning. APP materials for English (reading and writing) and mathematics are available for Key Stages 2 and 3 and should be universally used in schools. English (reading and writing) and mathematics materials for Key Stage 1 will be available in January 2009. Over the next two years, APP materials will be developed for English (speaking and listening), ICT and science, and work will begin on materials for other foundation subjects.

29. We agree with the Committee that teacher assessment has an important place in assessment, alongside test results. The approach being trialled in the Making Good Progress pilot gives teacher assessment a pivotal role. Pupil entries for the new single level tests are being trialled in the pilot dependent on teacher judgements about when pupils are ready. As with test results, the uses made of teacher assessment data should be determined on the basis of fitness for purpose in a specific context. For example, since 2005, moderated teacher assessment, informed by national tasks and tests, has replaced test results as the principal performance measure for Key Stage 1. It is important to be aware, however, that a moderated teacher assessment process also brings certain demands, including on teacher workload, if it is to provide robust, reliable and comparable data.

30. At Key Stage 4, given the applied nature of the Diploma, it is important that the assessment method reflects the type of learning. We are confident that we have got the balance right between the level of controlled internal assessment and external testing. Units that involve controlled internal assessment will typically be those that focus on practical or applied learning (the application of knowledge and skills through tasks, problems and situations that relate to work in that sector) whilst those with a more theoretical focus will be externally assessed.

31. It is for Awarding Bodies to determine the assessment methods that best suit the knowledge, skills and understanding required for each unit. The NAA has developed arrangements to support the management of internal assessment of the Principal Learning and Project elements of the Diploma to ensure rigour and high standards. It is currently running a series of training events for senior managers in consortia who are involved in internal assessment to support delivery of the Diploma from this September.

### **Making Good Progress (Recommendations 24, 25 and 27–30)**

32. We welcome the Committee's acknowledgement that single level tests may be useful, and their endorsement of a more personalised approach to assessment. The Making Good Progress pilot, of which single level tests are one strand, brings a number of elements together designed to do just this. At its heart is strengthening teachers' assessment skills and using AfL and tracking children's progress to move them on in their learning, alongside the new tests, one-to-one tuition in English and mathematics for pupils who need it, new progression targets and incentives for schools that are successful in supporting pupils who enter Key Stages behind expected standards.

33. The Making Good Progress pilot is taking place over two years in over 450 schools in ten local authorities. It is being rigorously monitored, and is subject to an independent evaluation. As part of that monitoring and evaluation process we will be looking carefully at the issues the Committee has raised in relation to single level tests, such as the impact on the wider curriculum, and whether they encourage teaching to the test. The validity of single level tests is subject to NAA's own evaluation as they develop the tests, and the assessment model will be subject to Ofqual scrutiny and approval. We agree with the Committee about the importance of using the pilot to understand how single level tests work in schools before deciding whether to implement them on a national basis. The Children's Plan makes clear that we will only make a decision to do this on the basis of positive evidence from the pilot, and endorsement of the approach from the regulator.

34. It may be helpful to clarify how single level tests are intended to work in relation to AfL. Entry for single level tests will be triggered by teachers when they judge a child is working securely at the next level. If teachers are making accurate judgements about the level at which pupils are working, the test will confirm their judgement. Testing in this way becomes responsive and designed to occur when the child is ready, rather than at a fixed point in their education. The emphasis on AfL within the pilot and through our wider AfL strategy for all schools should also ensure that teachers have a better and sharper understanding about how each pupil is progressing against National Curriculum criteria, where they need to go next in their learning, and what support they need to progress. Single level tests have been designed to work together with our approach to AfL, and in

developing both, we and NAA are, as the Committee suggests, looking at the purposes which each should serve.

35. We do not agree that either single level tests or the current National Curriculum tests disadvantage pupils who may be struggling with the core subjects, or are in any way incompatible with a personalised approach to learning. Within the Making Good Progress pilot we are also trialling the use of one to one tuition in English and mathematics for precisely those children who need and will benefit from this additional support in order to progress. Whilst it is too early at this stage in the pilot to make judgements about the impact of tuition on rates of progress, the anecdotal evidence from pupils and parents about the impact on children's motivation and confidence is very strong.

36. Progress targets, which measure the percentage of pupils moving two National Curriculum levels through a Key Stage, are not linked specifically to single level tests, as they are part of the national target-setting regime for 2009–10. The focus on progression within the Making Good Progress pilot does, however, enable us to look in more detail at how these targets operate at school level, and their effectiveness as a means of encouraging schools to focus on securing good progress for all pupils, whatever their starting point.

### **Measuring standards across the curriculum (Recommendation 18)**

37. There are strong reasons for the National Curriculum tests to focus on the core subjects and these are set out elsewhere in this Response. At the end of Key Stage 2, the tests are also backed by statutory teacher assessment in those subjects. In secondary schools, teacher assessments for core and foundation subjects at the end of Key Stage 3 and results from GCSE and other examinations provide measures of performance across the curriculum. For all schools, inspection reports provide an evaluation of standards across the full National Curriculum.

38. It is a fact that 72% of children who achieve at or above the expected level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 progress to achieve five or more good GCSEs, compared to 15% of those who did not achieve level 4. This is compelling evidence that the skills gained in achieving the expected level in the core subjects are not illusory; nor come at the expense of development in other curriculum areas.

### **Grade inflation (Recommendation 19)**

39. We acknowledge that the technical issues relating to grade inflation are complex, but it is not right to say that Government has not engaged with them. The decision to create Ofqual as an independent regulator of examinations and tests for England shows our determination to ensure that the best possible systems are in place to assure standards, and that those systems operate transparently—the regulator will report directly to Parliament—and thereby improve public confidence. The QCA has an established programme of work that Ofqual will continue. This comprises regular reviews of standards in A level and GCSE subjects, the results of which are published. Furthermore, Ofqual announced on 16 May that it had decided to set in hand a study of the reliability of results of external assessments—national tests and examinations—and teacher assessments. This will inform the development of Ofqual's thinking on how it can develop its regulatory approach and ensure the delivery of a high quality assessment system. Ofqual intends to structure a

public debate around those issues in parallel with the technical work, engaging a wide range of stakeholders. The Government welcomes Ofqual’s decision to conduct this study.

### **Contextualised Value Added (Recommendation 9)**

40. Contextual Value Added (CVA) scores are constructed to act as a means of measuring the relative successes of schools, taking account of the various starting positions of their pupils, and the challenges they face. The factors that go up to calculating schools’ CVA scores are derived each year from a statistical analysis of the academic progress of different groups of pupils, and are used to demonstrate which schools performed better or less well than other schools that year, taking account of the characteristics of their pupils. As such, CVA is a “backward looking” measure, comparing past performance; it should not be used to set future targets, and the Government fully endorses the Committee’s view that CVA must not be used to justify or excuse lower performance by some pupil groups. Narrowing attainment gaps is a key priority for the Government, and is underpinned by the new PSA targets. The Achievement and Attainment tables include a substantial discussion of the uses of CVA, and make clear that CVA should not be used to set lower expectations for any pupil or group of pupils.<sup>3</sup>

### **Presentation of data (Recommendations 5, 8, 10 and 12)**

41. The Committee expresses concerns about how accessible the information published in the Assessment and Attainment tables is, in particular in respect of CVA scores. We have already taken many steps to ensure that users of the National Curriculum test results can interpret the data in an informed manner. We have added text to the front page of the published statistics to make it clear what the tests measure. We have also included confidence intervals around school CVA scores published in the Achievement and Attainment Tables. We will continue to ensure that information required to make informed judgements about the published statistics is made available.

42. We are constantly looking for better ways of depicting school performance in the Achievement and Attainment Tables, and they have evolved over the years, reflecting the dialogue we have with our stakeholders. The content and format of the tables is reviewed each year, as are other sources of public information on the performance of schools. We accept that the presentation of CVA could be improved and are considering changes that might be introduced. However, there is a difficult balance to be struck between providing data that is readily understandable by the general public and ensuring that data is presented in a way which is statistically robust.

43. In the Children’s Plan, we set out our desire to ensure that schools are measured and rewarded for their contribution to children’s overall wellbeing—that is, their contribution to the five Every Child Matters outcomes (which encompass achievement). We are developing school-level indicators of wellbeing on which we plan to consult. We are considering carefully how information on these indicators and existing measures can best be presented to parents.

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<sup>3</sup> Guide to CVA, at [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/schools\\_07/2007GuidetoCVA.pdf](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/schools_07/2007GuidetoCVA.pdf)

## Diplomas (Recommendations 31–34)

44. The Government welcomes the Committee’s support for Diploma assessment methods which reflect both the applied and theoretical learning elements of the Diploma. We are confident that the Diploma is a high quality and credible qualification but it is right that it is properly evaluated. The 14–19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan set out our commitment to evaluate the Diploma over the first three years of each qualification to ensure that both the design of the Diploma and how it is working are effective.

45. 14–19 Partnerships will be made up of autonomous institutions working together. The fact that a school has a clear identity and sense of purpose does not prevent collaboration. Our Pathfinder work has shown that it is sometimes the most autonomous institutions that make the strongest Partnerships because each institution is clear about what it wants to achieve and what it can contribute.

46. We believe that the Achievement and Attainment Tables and other measures do not hinder collaboration, but promote higher attainment. Collaboration actively supports the higher achievement of individual institutions through sending students from the home school to a partner school where that partner school specialises in and does particularly well in certain subjects. Where students attend more than one institution, it is right that their performance will be recorded at the home institution where they are registered. The home institution is (and must continue to be) responsible for ensuring its students receive high-quality education wherever it takes place. Holding individual institutions accountable for their students wherever they learn will encourage them to make effective collaboration arrangements and help drive up quality of provision. Successful partnership working should see an improvement in the chances for all pupils and better results for all participating institutions.

47. The Government is committed to ensuring that the Diploma is of the highest quality in terms of both content and delivery and it is therefore essential that we have an active feedback loop to enable us to learn lessons from early delivery and make any necessary refinements which improve young people’s experiences of the Diploma and help to establish them as valued and valuable qualifications. We are not clear from this recommendation what role the committee believes Ofqual should have, but we are convinced that the role intended for it—accrediting and monitoring the qualifications to ensure delivery and maintenance of standards—is the right one.

48. We set out clear plans for Diplomas and other 14–19 qualifications at the end of March 2008 in “Promoting achievement, valuing success: a strategy for 14–19 qualifications”. It set out that there will be four national qualification options: GCSEs and A levels; Diplomas; Apprenticeships; and the Foundation Learning Tier to support students at lower levels. These will offer a range of choices from the general and theoretical to the job-specific. A consultation on aspects of that document has recently closed and we are currently considering the responses. We will review in 2013 how in practice Diplomas, GCSEs, A levels and other general qualifications are combining to meet the needs of young people, employers and universities. This gives time for Diplomas and changes to existing qualifications to bed in, as called for by the Committee. We do not believe it is right to prejudge before young people and parents have had a chance to decide what they think of the new Diplomas.

## Regulation and development: the new arrangements (Recommendations 35 and 36)

49. We welcome the Committee's comments about the creation of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency and the independent Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual). These reforms will make still stronger the arrangements for safeguarding the standards of qualifications and assessments, and maintain confidence in the system. As mentioned above, Ofqual has already announced a new in-depth programme of work which will look at the reliability of assessment.

50. As set out above, we do not accept that sample testing is necessary or desirable. In any case, Ofqual's role is not to monitor education standards as a whole; it is to regulate the qualifications and assessments which are one of the means by which those standards are measured. The work that QCA has done on regulation, engaging with awarding bodies and academics, gives Ofqual a strong and internationally-renowned set of regulatory tools, which can mean that its regulation will be as effective as it can be. Thanks to that regulatory scrutiny, we have every confidence that standards are being maintained and that tests are a true measure of learners' attainment.

## Appendix 2

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### Ofsted's response to the Third Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2007–08

Your Committee published its report on Testing and Assessment on Tuesday 13 May, which was followed by Ofsted's oral evidence session on Wednesday 14 May. As promised, I now provide some relevant evidence on this issue together with a written response to those recommendations from the Report which make reference to Ofsted.

#### Summary

Solid evidence of performance through test and exam results, particularly in English and maths, is essential to learners' future access to employment. Proficiency in these subjects is also vital for access to a wider curriculum. Inspection evidence shows that the most successful schools focus on national testing and assessment without reducing creativity in the curriculum.

My Annual Report for 2006/07 states that the overall quality of the primary curriculum has improved, although specific weaknesses are cited in relation to both the primary and the secondary curriculum.

However, in some schools an emphasis on tests in English, mathematics and science limits the range of work in these subjects in particular year groups (often Years 6 and 9), as well as more broadly across the curriculum in some primary schools. For example, in Year 6 mathematics there are sometimes fewer opportunities than in other years for practical work because of the emphasis given to practising skills and techniques in preparation for national Key Stage 2 tests. Similar issues arise with older learners: my Annual Report for 2006/07 comments that skills for life training offered by colleges, learndirect and other

providers, “was often too narrowly focused on simply passing a test, rather than on the value of the learning process.”

### Evidence from survey work

As stated above, the best schools can focus on tests and exams without narrowing the curriculum. However this is not always the case. My Annual Report for 2005/06 said that, “For some pupils, however, the experience of English had become narrower in certain years as teachers focused on tests and examinations; this affected pupils’ achievement in speaking and listening in particular,” and that, “Weaker teaching (in mathematics) was too narrowly focused on proficiency in examination techniques at the expense of building understanding of concepts and their relationships.”

More recent evidence suggests the continuance of these trends. For example, in Year 6 mathematics there are fewer opportunities than in other years for practical work because of the emphasis given to practising skills and techniques in preparation for national Key Stage 2 tests. Similarly, in some secondary schools, routine exercises and preparation for tests impair the development of understanding as well as enjoyment of mathematics particularly but not exclusively in year 9. The recently published poetry report also discusses the significant impact of tests on the teaching of poetry in English, particularly in year 9. However the best schools found ways to continue to teach poetry.

A ‘teaching to the test’ effect can be observed in some schools at GCSE and A level as well. The report “Evaluating mathematics provision for 14–19 year olds” (HMI 2611) published in May 2006 reported that factors which acted against effective achievement, motivation and participation included:

“A narrow focus on meeting examination requirements by ‘teaching to the test’, so that although students are able to pass the examinations they are not able to apply their knowledge independently to new contexts and they are not well prepared for further study.”

Similar issues arise with older learners, my Annual Report for 2006/07 comments that learning for skills for life training offered by colleges, learndirect and other providers, “was often too narrowly focused on simply passing a test, rather than on the value of the learning process. Providers still offered insufficiently individualised learning packages. These concentrated on dealing with the gaps in learners’ skills, rather than laying the secure foundations needed to support them effectively in employment and their personal lives.”

The following are direct references to teaching to the test in survey reports published since April 2007. There are more oblique references in some other reports, for example to a narrowing of the curriculum; however, these are examples of the most direct references.

*Poetry in schools: A survey of practice, 2006/07*  
(070034, December 2007)

The end-of-key-stage national tests and examinations have had a significant impact on poetry in schools. Poetry featured less in the English curriculum in Years 6 and 9 in the schools visited because too many teachers focused on preparing pupils for the tests.

*The Key Stage 4 curriculum: Increased flexibility and work-related learning*  
(070113, May 2007)

The Key Stage 4 curriculum was good in well over half of the schools surveyed in the second year of the survey, a more positive picture than in the previous year. Across the two years of the survey, curriculum development in a small minority of the schools visited was constrained by a perception that change would not maximise success in public examinations. They offered a narrow curriculum with little or no access to vocational qualifications.

*History in the balance: History in English schools 2003–07*  
(070043, July 2007)

History currently has a limited place in the curriculum. In primary schools, this has been because of the necessary focus on literacy and numeracy.

*Geography in schools: changing practice*  
(070044, January 2008)

Achievement was slightly better in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. Achievement in Year 6 is often very limited and pupils in many schools study little geography until the statutory tests have finished.

## Evidence from school inspection reports

The issue has not been raised frequently in individual school inspection reports. One of the most regular adverse references has been to the squeezing out of activities such as problem-solving and a small proportion of letters to learners make direct reference to learners' concerns about a lack of interest and variety in the curriculum. This occurs more commonly in primary than in secondary schools.

## Responses to recommendations directly relating to the work of Ofsted

### **Recommendation 2**

*The evidence we have received strongly favours the view that national tests do not serve all of the purposes for which they are, in fact used. The fact that the results of these tests are used for so many purposes, with high-stakes attached to the outcomes, creates tensions in the system leading to undesirable consequences, including distortion of the education experience of many children. In addition, the data derived from the testing system do not necessarily provide an accurate or complete picture of the performance of schools and teachers, yet they are relied upon by the Government, the QCA and Ofsted to make important decisions affecting the education system in general and individual schools, teachers and pupils in particular. In short, we consider that the current national testing system is being applied to serve too many purposes.*

Ofsted does not rely on published test data alone to provide a complete picture of the performance of pupils, teachers and schools. When considering learners' achievement, inspectors consider the attainment (or standards) of the learners, and in doing so they make use of published test data. Inspectors also form a view about the progress learners are

making. This judgement is based on a wide range of evidence including contextual value added (CVA) data.

The evidence taken into account during an inspection includes the school's self assessment, covering a wide range of judgements about the quality of provision and information about the tracking of pupils' progress. In addition, first-hand observations of pupils' current progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding will always be a key part of the inspection process. Inspectors will talk to learners about their experiences, observe them at work and draw on the views expressed in the parents' questionnaire.

The inspector's evaluation of the school is summarised in the Overall Effectiveness judgement; this is most closely related to the inspection judgement on learners' progress, rather than the judgement on standards. Although the greatest focus in inspection is on whether the school is helping young people to make good progress, the system is sufficiently flexible to allow for special schools, where standards are invariably very low in comparison to those found nationally, to be graded as outstanding where appropriate because of the very good provision they make for their pupils. In order to make a judgement about the overall effectiveness of a school, inspectors will also consider factors other than achievement and standards, such as the personal development and well-being of pupils, the quality of teaching and learning, how well the curriculum meets individual needs, and the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school.

We therefore believe that Ofsted makes appropriate use of the national testing system in its evaluation of schools. Data are sufficiently accurate for the school-level purposes for which we use them but greatest emphasis is placed upon the most reliable indicators, such as progress across Key Stage 2 to 4 rather than Key Stage 2 to 3.

We believe that using national test and exam data for several purposes is a strength. One of the core principles for efficient use of data in government should be 'collect once, use more than once', and this is the case. We believe that the use of test and exam data in inspection is appropriate. Set within the context of the inspection methodology described above, we believe the data are extremely helpful in evaluating schools' effectiveness.

### **Recommendation 9**

*We are concerned about the underlying assumptions on which Contextualised Value Added scores are based. Whilst it may be true that the sub-groups adjusted for in the Contextualised Value Added measure may statistically perform less well than other sub-groups, we do not consider that it should be accepted that they will always perform less well than others.*

The Contextualised Value Added (CVA) data are a key aspect of the RAISEonline data package, which is jointly managed by Ofsted and the DCSF and provided to all maintained schools for the purpose of self-evaluation. It is also used by Ofsted inspectors in inspection. The weightings (coefficients) used in the CVA model are recalculated each year to use the actual performance data of the latest cohort of pupils. In this way they reflect trends in performance of cohorts. The data should not be used to predict the future performance of any particular group of learners or to set pupils' targets. The CVA score of a pupil tells us how s/he has performed compared to other pupils with similar characteristics across the country. This serves to highlight where pupils have performed much better, or much

worse, than other similar pupils. When aggregated up to the school level, this indicates where overall performance is better, or worse, than in other schools with similar intakes of pupils.

It is a statistical fact that groups of pupils achieve, on average, different standards. For example, the latest performance data shows that, on average, girls outperformed boys last year. However, it cannot be used to predict that girls will again outperform boys next year and it should not be used to justify setting lower targets for particular groups of pupils.

Therefore we agree with the Select Committee that they should not be used by schools to determine expectations of particular sub-groups. CVA scores give an historic picture of how pupils have performed, taking their prior attainment and circumstances into account, in order to inform an evaluation of the school's performance. CVA is a very powerful tool for this purpose and allows us to compare the work of schools in similar contexts, but it should not be used to set targets or expectations for individual learners or groups into the future.

### **Recommendation 10**

*In addition to these specific recommendations about Contextual Value Added scores, we recommend that the Government rethinks the way it publishes the information presented in the Achievement and Attainment Tables generally. We believe that this information should be presented in a more accessible manner so that parents and others can make a holistic evaluation of a school more easily. In addition, there should be a statement with the Achievement and Attainment Tables that they should not be read in isolation, but in conjunction with the relevant Ofsted report in order to get a more rounded view of a school's performance and a link to the Ofsted site should be provided.*

The Achievement and Attainment Tables now contain a wealth of detailed information and we have become aware that—on occasions—the information in them has been misunderstood by local newspapers. A link to the Ofsted report would be helpful.

A balance needs to be found between providing enough information to be useful and not so much detail that it becomes confusing.

### **Recommendation 11**

*The scope of this inquiry does not extend to a thorough examination of the way Ofsted uses data from the performance tables under the new, lighter touch, inspection regime. However, we would be concerned if Ofsted were, in fact, using test result data as primary inspection evidence in a disproportionate manner because of our view that national test data are evidence only of a very limited amount of the important and wide-ranging work that schools do.*

National test data contribute to judgements on standards, and progress and on how effectively schools are using targets to raise attainment for all learners. The use of CVA data means that it is perfectly possible for a school operating in challenging circumstances, with attainment on entry much below average, to achieve a good inspection report because there is clear evidence that learners are making better progress than is typical. Although the

CVA data provide an important piece of evidence for this judgement, inspectors are asked to verify by looking at the school's own assessment systems, the impact of teaching on progress, actual progress in lessons, and by discussions with learners. Data help to inform the agenda for the inspection, and to set some parameters, but they do not determine the final inspection grade.

Schools with low standards may therefore be graded good or, on rare occasions, even outstanding if the provision had enabled pupils to make good or outstanding progress compared with their starting points on entry. This is the case in those special schools, for example, where learners have attainment well below the national expectations but who nonetheless are making very good progress due to the quality of education and care provided. Conversely, schools in advantaged areas with high attainment on entry may be judged inadequate if inspectors judge that pupils make insufficient progress.

Nonetheless, we think it is right that standards in national tests and examinations should continue to be prominently reported in inspections. This is because success in tests and exams is fundamental to the future life chances of young learners and this is especially true of areas where low standards in education have prevailed for a number of years.

Currently, very good data are available to inspectors about standards and progress through RAISEonline and also other data packages. We are aware, though, that the same is not true of all the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. That is why we are working to improve the range of data available for the next round of inspections in 2009.

The proportion of complaints about school inspections which are about the way inspectors use data have fallen steadily over the last two years and now account for fewer than 1 in 10 complaints. This is in the context of about 4% of school inspections giving rise to a complaint.

### **Recommendation 12**

*We consider that schools are being held accountable for only a very narrow part of their essential activities and we recommend that the Government reforms the performance tables to include a wider range of measures, including those from the recent Ofsted report.*

Performance tables, by their nature, reflect a narrow if very important part of school's work. Inspection judgements are made across a wide range of a school's provision (including teaching, curriculum, care, guidance and support) and the outcomes for its pupils (including their standards and achievement, personal development and well-being, and the *Every Child Matters* outcomes). Certainly, including the school's overall effectiveness grade from its last inspection report would help to provide a wider perspective. However, inclusion of this information could be misleading if the most recent inspection is several years out of date. This risk would be lessened if the date of the inspection were included.

I hope that this response is useful and would be happy to discuss the subject further. Please be in touch if you have specific concerns, or if you would like to meet to discuss this issue further.

*Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills*

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## The need for national testing

1. We consider that the weight of evidence in favour of the need for a system of national testing is persuasive and we are content that the principle of national testing is sound. Appropriate testing can help to ensure that teachers focus on achievement and often that has meant excellent teaching, which is very welcome. (Paragraph 25)

## The purposes of national testing

2. The evidence we have received strongly favours the view that national tests do not serve all of the purposes for which they are, in fact used. The fact that the results of these tests are used for so many purposes, with high-stakes attached to the outcomes, creates tensions in the system leading to undesirable consequences, including distortion of the education experience of many children. In addition, the data derived from the testing system do not necessarily provide an accurate or complete picture of the performance of schools and teachers, yet they are relied upon by the Government, the QCA and Ofsted to make important decisions affecting the education system in general and individual schools, teachers and pupils in particular. In short, we consider that the current national testing system is being applied to serve too many purposes. (Paragraph 44)
3. We consider that the over-emphasis on the importance of national tests, which address only a limited part of the National Curriculum and a limited range of children's skills and knowledge has resulted in teachers narrowing their focus. Teachers who feel compelled to focus on that part of the curriculum which is likely to be tested may feel less able to use the full range of their creative abilities in the classroom and find it more difficult to explore the curriculum in an interesting and motivational way. We are concerned that the professional abilities of teachers are, therefore, under-used and that some children may suffer as a result of a limited educational diet focussed on testing. We feel that teacher assessment should form a significant part of a national assessment regime. As the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors states, "A system of external testing alone is not ideal and government's recent policy initiatives in progress checks and diplomas have made some move towards addressing an imbalance between external testing and internal judgements made by those closest to the students, i.e. the teachers, in line with other European countries". (Paragraph 58)
4. We are concerned about the Government's stance on the merits of the current testing system. We remain unconvinced by the Government's assumption that one set of national tests can serve a range of purposes at the national, local, institutional and individual levels. We recommend that the Government sets out clearly the purposes of national testing in order of priority and, for each purpose, gives an accurate assessment of the fitness of the relevant test instrument for that purpose, taking into account the issues of validity and reliability. (Paragraph 61)

5. We recommend further that estimates of statistical measurement error be published alongside test data and statistics derived from those data to allow users of that information to interpret it in a more informed manner. We urge the Government to consider further the evidence of Dr Ken Boston, that multiple test instruments, each serving fewer purposes, would be a more valid approach to national testing. (Paragraph 62)

## Performance targets and tables

6. We endorse the Government's view that much can and should be done to assist children who struggle to meet expected standards. However, we are concerned that the Government's target-based system may actually be contributing to the problems of some children. (Paragraph 81)
7. We believe that the system is now out of balance in the sense that the drive to meet government-set targets has too often become the goal rather than the means to the end of providing the best possible education for all children. This is demonstrated in phenomena such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and focussing disproportionate resources on borderline pupils. We urge the Government to reconsider its approach in order to create incentives to schools to teach the whole curriculum and acknowledge children's achievements in the full range of the curriculum. The priority should be a system which gives teachers, parents and children accurate information about children's progress. (Paragraph 82)
8. Whilst we consider that Contextualised Value Added scores are potentially a valuable addition to the range of information available to parents and the public at large when making judgments about particular schools, we recommend that the information be presented in a more accessible form, for example graphically, so that it can more easily be interpreted. (Paragraph 98)
9. We are concerned about the underlying assumptions on which Contextualised Value Added scores are based. Whilst it may be true that the sub-groups adjusted for in the Contextualised Value Added measure may statistically perform less well than other sub-groups, we do not consider that it should be accepted that they will always perform less well than others. (Paragraph 99)
10. In addition to these specific recommendations about Contextual Value Added scores, we recommend that the Government rethinks the way it publishes the information presented in the Achievement and Attainment Tables generally. We believe that this information should be presented in a more accessible manner so that parents and others can make a holistic evaluation of a school more easily. In addition, there should be a statement with the Achievement and Attainment Tables that they should not be read in isolation, but in conjunction with the relevant Ofsted report in order to get a more rounded view of a school's performance and a link to the Ofsted site should be provided. (Paragraph 100)
11. The scope of this inquiry does not extend to a thorough examination of the way Ofsted uses data from the performance tables under the new, lighter touch, inspection regime. However, we would be concerned if Ofsted were, in fact, using

test result data as primary inspection evidence in a disproportionate manner because of our view that national test data are evidence only of a very limited amount of the important and wide-ranging work that schools do. (Paragraph 102)

12. We consider that schools are being held accountable for only a very narrow part of their essential activities and we recommend that the Government reforms the performance tables to include a wider range of measures, including those from the recent Ofsted report. (Paragraph 106)

### The consequences of high-stakes uses of testing

13. We received substantial evidence that teaching to the test, to an extent which narrows the curriculum and puts sustained learning at risk, is widespread. Whilst the Government has allocated resources to tackle this phenomenon and improve practice they fail to accept the extent to which teaching to the test exists and the damage it can do to a child's learning. We have no doubt that teachers generally have the very best intentions in terms of providing the best education they can for their pupils. However, the way that many teachers have responded to the Government's approach to accountability has meant that test results are pursued at the expense of a rounded education for children. (Paragraph 130)
14. We believe that teaching to the test and this inappropriate focus on test results may leave young people unprepared for higher education and employment. We recommend that the Government reconsiders the evidence on teaching to the test and that it commissions systematic and wide-ranging research to discover the nature and full extent of the problem. (Paragraph 131)
15. A creative, linked curriculum which addresses the interests, needs and talents of all pupils is the casualty of the narrow focus of teaching which we have identified. Narrowing of the curriculum is problematic in two ways: core subjects are emphasised to the detriment of other, important elements of the broader curriculum; and, for those subjects which are tested in public examinations, the scope and creativity of what is taught is compromised by a focus on the requirements of the test. We are concerned that any efforts the Government makes to introduce more breadth into the school curriculum are likely to be undermined by the enduring imperative for schools, created by the accountability measures, to ensure that their pupils perform well in national tests. (Paragraph 140)
16. We acknowledge the reforms the Government has made to GCSE and A-level examinations. However, the Government must address the concerns expressed by witnesses, among them Dr Ken Boston of the QCA, who see the burden of assessment more in terms of the amount of time and effort spent in preparation for high-stakes tests than in the time taken to sit the tests themselves. This could be achieved by discouraging some of the most inappropriate forms of preparation and reducing the number of occasions on which a child is tested. (Paragraph 149)
17. We are persuaded by the evidence that it is entirely possible to improve test scores through mechanisms such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and concentrating effort and resources on borderline students. It follows that this

apparent improvement may not always be evidence of an underlying enhancement of learning and understanding in pupils. (Paragraph 161)

18. We consider that the measurement of standards across the full curriculum is virtually impossible under the current testing regime because national tests measure only a small sample of pupils' achievements; and because teaching to the test means that pupils may not retain, or may not even possess in the first place, the skills which are supposedly evidenced by their test results. (Paragraph 162)
19. It is not possible for us to come to a definitive view on grade inflation in the context of such a wide-ranging inquiry. However, it seems clear to us from the evidence that we have received that the Government has not engaged with the complexity of the technical arguments about grade inflation and standards over time. We recommend that the Government addresses these issues head-on, starting with a mandate to the QCA or the proposed new regulator to undertake a full review of assessment standards. (Paragraph 171)
20. Whilst we do not doubt the Government's intentions when it states that "The National Curriculum sets out a clear, full and statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils, irrespective of background or ability", we are persuaded that in practice many children have not received their entitlement and many witnesses believe that this is due to the demands of national testing. (Paragraph 183)
21. We are persuaded that the current system of national tests should be reformed in order to decouple the multiple purposes of measuring pupil attainment, school and teacher accountability and national monitoring. The negative impacts of national testing arise more from the targets that schools are expected to achieve and schools' responses to them than from the tests themselves. (Paragraph 184)
22. School accountability should be separated from this system of pupil testing, and we recommend that the Government consult widely on methods of assuring school accountability which do not impact on the right of children to a balanced education. (Paragraph 185)
23. We recommend that the purpose of national monitoring of the education system, particularly for policy formation, is best served by sample testing to measure standards over time and that cohort testing is neither appropriate nor, in our view, desirable for this purpose. We recommend further that, in the interests of public confidence, such sample testing should be carried out by a body at arms length from the Government and suggest that it is a task either for the new regulator or a body answerable to it. (Paragraph 186)

### Single-level tests

24. Our predecessors warned the Government about bringing in new tests with undue haste. We recommend that the Government allows sufficient time for a full pilot of the new single-level tests and ensures that any issues and problems arising out of that pilot are fully addressed before any formal roll-out of the new regime to schools. (Paragraph 198)

25. *Making Good Progress* characterises single-level tests as integral to personalised learning and Assessment for Learning yet also the means by which to generate summative data. We agree with the National Foundation for Educational Research that this single assessment instrument cannot validly perform these functions simultaneously and, if it is attempted, there is a danger that the single-level tests will work for neither purpose. The single-level tests may be useful, however, if their purpose is carefully defined and the tests are developed to ensure they are valid and reliable specifically for those purposes. (Paragraph 210)
26. We recommend that, if single-level tests are introduced, they are used for summative purposes only and that Assessment for Learning and personalised learning are supported separately by enhanced professional development for teachers, backed up with a centralised bank of formative and diagnostic assessment materials on which teachers can draw as necessary on a regular basis. (Paragraph 211)
27. Single-level tests may have some positive effects and we certainly approve of the Government's new emphasis on the personalised approach. However, the Government has structured the single-level testing system in such a way as to risk a transposition of existing, systemic problems into the new arrangements. Without structural modification, we foresee that the existing problems—including teaching to the test, narrowing of the taught curriculum and the focus on borderline candidates to the detriment of others—will continue under the single-level test regime. (Paragraph 215)
28. We believe that true personalised learning is incompatible with a high-stakes single-level test which focuses on academic learning and does not assess a range of other skills which children might possess. Children who struggle with the core subjects may receive more targeted assistance in those subjects. However, if this means that children who are struggling with core subjects get less opportunity to access the wider curriculum, they risk being put off learning at an early age. We call upon the Government to invest in ways to help and, if necessary, train teachers to improve the basic skills of struggling pupils while enhancing their enjoyment of learning and guaranteeing their access to a broad curriculum. (Paragraph 216)
29. We are concerned about the “one-way ratchet” on the attainment of test levels under the single-level testing regime and we find persuasive the evidence that this may lead to an apparent, but artificial, improvement in performance standards. We recommend that the Government consider further whether it is in children's best interests that they may be certified to have achieved a level of knowledge and understanding which they do not, in truth, possess. We suspect that this may lead to further disillusionment and children perceiving themselves as ‘failures’. (Paragraph 217)
30. We recommend that the Government urgently rethinks its decision to use progression targets, based on pupils' achievement in single-level tests, for the purposes of school accountability. If such high-stakes accountability measures are combined with more frequent testing of children, the negative effect on children's education experiences promises to be greater than it is at present. We urge the Government to listen to the QCA, which has already warned of the dangers of

saddling the single-level tests with the same range of purposes which the Key Stage tests demonstrably cannot bear. (Paragraph 218)

## Diplomas

31. We welcome the Government's stated intentions that both the vocational and the general elements of Diplomas should be reflected in the methods of assessment used. We caution the Government against any haste in shifting this delicate balance in future until the full implications of such a shift have been understood. (Paragraph 225)
32. Schools and colleges, who are required to work in collaboration with each other to provide a rounded education for Diploma students, cannot be expected to do so effectively when the accountability regime places them in direct competition with each other. We welcome the introduction of the Diploma and recognise the determination of all concerned to make it work, but we have some concerns about how it will work in a competitive environment. (Paragraph 233)
33. Given its complexity, the Diploma must, in our view, be given an opportunity to settle into its operational phase without undue intervention from the Government. We consider that this is an area best left to the proposed new regulator who we hope will approach Diplomas with a light touch and at a strategic level in the first few years as the initial problems are ironed out over time. (Paragraph 234)
34. The whole education sector would welcome greater clarity on the future direction of Diplomas. We urge the Government to make clear what its intentions are for the future of Diplomas and other 14–19 qualifications and whether it is, in fact, heading towards one, overarching framework for all 14–19 qualifications as Mike Tomlinson's Working Group on 14–19 Reform proposed in 2004. (Paragraph 235)

## Regulation and development: the new arrangements

35. We welcome the creation of a development agency and separate, independent regulator on the logical grounds that it is right that development and regulation should be the responsibility of two separate organisations. That assessment standards will now be overseen by a regulator demonstrably free from government control and responsible to Parliament through the Children, Schools and Families Committee is a positive step. (Paragraph 249)
36. However, the Government has failed to address the issue of the standards themselves. In the context of the current testing system, with its ever-changing curriculum and endless test reforms, no regulator, however independent, can assure assessment standards as they are not capable of accurate measurement using the data available. Until the Government allows for standardised sample testing for monitoring purposes, the regulator will be left without the tools required to fulfil its primary function. (Paragraph 250)