



the National Parent Forum of Scotland

National Parent Forum of Scotland
Rosebery House
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Dear Sir,

I read with interest your recent coverage of P1 assessments. As an independent volunteer body of parents, we at the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) do our best to voice the wide range of parent views to Government. Parents have a wealth of opinions, so it would be wrong for us to announce that P1 assessments should be boycotted, or equally that we support them. What is of most concern to NPFS, is that parents are not getting the clear, balanced information they need to be able to decide whether assessment is right for their child.

What definitely won't help parents are exaggerated articles in our national press; political point scoring; or the lack of direct communication from Scottish Government, local authorities and schools. I acknowledge Scottish Government's reason for not highlighting the Scottish National Standardised Assessments to parents: they believed it would result in unnecessary profile raising; but, as NPFS made clear and we are now seeing, when there is a vacuum of information it allows for fear and anxiety to spread.

This issue is wider than the standardised assessments, it is about a repeated lack of good direct communication from schools, local authorities and Scottish Government to parents. Major initiatives, both local and national, are undermined; entire policies tarnished, often before they have the opportunity to get off the ground.

Now, as our schools return for a new academic year, parents' concerns about standardised assessments must be addressed at every level. Unfortunately, this will be no easy task in the face of a tide of negativity. Every parent should understand: why the results will not be sent home in an envelope; how the teachers will use the data gathered in the classroom context; how it will impact on reporting; that if the child is withdrawn from assessment, progress can still be reported; how these assessments differ from the high stakes English SATs; and, how parents can withdraw their child if they choose.

Parents should also be clear on how their school is administering the assessments according to the guidance. Parents have told us of very negative experiences that could have been

avoided. This included parents: worrying about an entire primary one class having to walk to their nearest high school to use IT equipment; saddened that their primary seven child was mistakenly accused of cheating; and, upset that their child was terrified they would fail an assessment that cannot be failed. Action is required to ensure these experiences are not repeated.

Those who have studied the Freedom of Information (FOI) will know we have raised these concerns at a national level; we will continue to do so. At the moment, I trust these concerns will be considered in the review of the first year and in the forthcoming enhanced guidance.

However, there is a fundamental issue in Scotland that must be addressed long term: there are many parents who have little understanding of the current curriculum and how it differs from their own school experience. A YouGov survey we commissioned earlier this year found that less than half of parents understand how their child's learning fits into the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), and only just over half understand what the levels in CfE mean. How can we expect parents to engage with their child's education, and make informed decisions on issues such as assessments, if there are such fundamental gaps in their knowledge of Scottish schooling?

Current reporting structures in many schools do little to combat this. I have seen sample results from standardised assessment and the information available to teachers is exceptional. It provides details of a child's specific skills, knowledge and understanding, which enhances the teacher's judgement when identifying strengths, as well as areas that might require more focus. Yet somewhere in the education chain, this thorough summary and the teacher's huge knowledge of the child is diluted to report cards that parents frequently tell us are meaningless. Report cards don't inform parents of these strengths, or the areas needing work, or how they can support their child at home. Those with the power to keep Scottish parents informed and truly engaged need to work harder, not only in providing information on assessments but in terms of helping parents understand the entire CfE journey.

When parents are involved in their children's learning, it benefits children, families and schools: children do better. We need to keep parents at the heart of their child's learning. The NPFS will continue to strive for a political and legislative environment which champions the voice of parents.

Yours faithfully,

Joanna Murphy.

Joanna Murphy
Chair, National Parent Forum of Scotland