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Secretary of State

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Rt Hon George Howarth MP
By email: kate.brady@parliament.uk

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Dear George

Thank you for your email of 24 February, enclosing correspondence from your constituents, about primary assessment arrangements.

I appreciate that concerns have been raised, however, we are not downplaying the scale of change brought by the new primary assessment and accountability system; to do so would be to belittle the importance it holds in raising educational standards. It has been designed to reflect a new national curriculum which sets expectations to match those in the highest performing international jurisdictions and encourages every child in this country to succeed in secondary school and beyond. The new, more challenging expected standard for statutory assessments reflects this approach and aligns with these expectations. We make no apology for setting high aspirations for all children – previously these were too low and too many primary school pupils who met them did not go on to achieve at least five good GCSEs.

The new statutory assessments do, however, measure attainment across the range of ability in assessing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the national curriculum. Furthermore, while it is important for parents and teachers to understand how children are performing in relation to national expectations, statutory tests only form part of the broader assessments that schools make on an ongoing basis.

The Government's reforms have been designed to put arrangements for the majority of classroom assessment back into the hands of the school and to reduce the tracking burdens that national curriculum levels encouraged. We believe schools are best placed to decide how to assess pupils in line with their curriculum and that over time this should lead to a reduction in teacher workload.

Significant reforms like these will always take time to embed, as teachers adjust to the new approach. It was in recognition of this, as well as in response to teachers' concerns, that we have agreed to introduce a revised deadline of 30 June for teacher assessment submission this year. Throughout the introduction of these reforms we have worked closely with teachers and headteachers, and we will continue to do so moving forward.

I have also written to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, to ask that his inspectors take into consideration the fact that teachers will be working with new assessment materials this year when reaching their judgements. I have also instructed Regional School Commissioners to account for the fact that schools are working to new, more rigorous standards this year when considering school performance. Individual teachers and pupils should not be disadvantaged, as they will be administering and sitting the same assessments as their peers. I would recommend that the best way to prepare pupils is to focus on teaching the new national curriculum, which schools have been doing since September 2014.

With regard to the notice given to schools, changes to the national curriculum tests were first announced in March 2014. Since then, my department, as well as the Standards and Testing Agency, have provided schools with further information to help them adapt to the assessment arrangements. In addition to sample questions published in summer 2014, complete sample tests were published in summer 2015 to give primary schools nearly a year of lead-in time to ensure that their pupils are adequately prepared.

We have been clear that the new teacher assessment frameworks are temporary, so that we can give the views of teachers' proper consideration before confirming any future arrangements. The interim frameworks were provided at the start of the academic year, in time for use this summer. The exemplification materials published in January and February did not announce any change to assessment arrangements and are only intended to support teachers in making their judgements. I do acknowledge that schools benefit from the earliest possible publication of such materials and we will endeavour to do so in future years when arrangements are more established.

I would also like to be clear about some inaccuracies that have been reported in relation to teacher assessment this year. It is worth noting that the exemplification materials were developed in consultation with a number of teacher panels and are real examples of work by pupils currently in year 2 or year 6. The writing materials for key stage 2 show two examples of pupils assessed as working at the expected standard: *Morgan*, who has met the expected standard, and *Leigh* who is at the higher end of the expected standard. We have published these two different examples to show the breadth of competence covered by "meeting the expected standard". When assessing pupils who are on the borderline for meeting or not meeting the standard, *Morgan's* work, which is broadly equivalent to an old level 4b, is most appropriate for teachers to consider.

Despite claims to the contrary, teachers should not use the interim teacher assessment frameworks to assess individual pieces of work. They simply have to find examples of evidence from the pupil's written work throughout the year to demonstrate that the statement has been achieved. Teachers do not have to evidence every statement for each pupil, only those that the pupil is capable of reaching. I asked the Standards and Testing Agency to issue further guidance to schools to clarify the assessment arrangements and eliminate any remaining misunderstandings, this is now available on the GOV.UK website at: <http://tinyurl.com/zzzltfm>.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Morgan
Nicky

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