

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-891
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/07571/19

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
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12 December 2019

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 20 November following the Petitions Committee meeting on 5 November regarding the petition for national tests to be discontinued for children as young as age 6. I note that committee members are seeking feedback on the justification for using personalised online assessments with learners in the Foundation Phase.

In my letter of 18 October, I outlined the phased move from paper-based tests to personalised online assessments. I confirmed that 2020 would be the last year of paper-based tests in schools, and only one test would remain in that year: Numeracy (reasoning). This means that paper-based national testing is being discontinued in favour of an innovative, adaptive approach to assessment for reading and numeracy.

I remain wholly committed to the Foundation Phase ethos and its approach to teaching and learning. The Foundation Phase in Wales is about making learning relevant and enjoyable while at the same time ensuring that children develop the vital skills that underpin future learning.

The Committee may be aware that an independent Stocktake of the Foundation Phase was carried out by Professor Iram Siraj in 2014, and the published findings noted that tests at the end of the phase would not unduly interfere with the pedagogy and practice within the Foundation Phase providing clear guidance was given and the Foundation Phase was being implemented successfully.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The purpose of the online personalised assessments is to provide information on learners' skills so that teachers can support their learners to make progress. Developing skills in reading and numeracy helps to open the doors to learning across the curriculum. Therefore it is important that assessment of these skills starts early so that teachers have information on individual learners in order to support them to make good progress.

The new assessments have been developed to reflect the skills set out in the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, starting with skills statements for Year 2. Children have access to questions within a large question bank, allowing children of all ages to respond to questions that match and challenge their level of learning and ability. The move to online assessment will ensure that each learner will receive a tailored and personalised assessment based on their level of learning and needs.

These assessments are much more flexible to use and far less formal than the paper-based tests. Teachers can use them when they feel they will acquire the best formative information from them.

The assessments can be administered in small groups if required and there is no set time limit for each assessment. Teachers can use their professional judgement to pause and stop any assessment to allow younger children a break if required.

These assessments are not 'high stakes' and are not to be used to measure school performance. I have been very clear that the purpose of the assessments is to provide teachers with useful, timely feedback on their learners' skills, and that they can form part of an overall suite of information available to each teacher to inform their teaching and classroom planning.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

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