

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Call for views: Scottish National Standardised Assessments

SUBMISSION FROM Alison Taylor

As a Support for Learning Teacher across two partner primary schools, I was asked to organise and manage the P1, P4 and P7 pupils to complete their SNSAs.

I completed 2 sessions of training before I did this task. My authority instructed schools to complete the SNSAs in May last year (2017).

Due to time constraints and other duties to perform I had to get the pupils to complete their assessments in groups out of class. They were all given a school notebook to work on. These devices have touch pads and no mouse. They are also quite small screen sizes. Headsets were available if they needed them.

In my experience the P1s found the mechanics of navigating around and through the SNSAs was quite tricky. This was due to:

- poor or underdeveloped fine motor control to use a tracker pad (no mouse available)
- the whole page could not be seen on the screen at one time, so they needed to remember and succeed in scrolling up and down to get to the NEXT button
- complications working through a text/book. They had to remember to click on the SPEAK button to listen to instructions and then select to listen to chapters/paragraphs of the text before answering questions at the end.

I found that the P4s and P7s managed to navigate through their SNSAs despite it still being a bit cumbersome due to some of the above.

In my role as a SfLT I value and use assessments of pupils' skills and knowledge to plan interventions and next steps in their teaching & learning. I am not in agreement with some of the CfE benchmarks and the Levels that some are allocated to, so this is reflected in my opinion of the content of the SNSAs. The SNSAs are based on the benchmarks which do not always tell me details about the core skills and knowledge of pupils that I need to know about with regard to learning to decode or encode. The science and evidence behind learning to read is not solely reflected in the benchmarks. In my opinion some benchmarks which are included are misguided as they are based on whole language/balanced literacy ideas.

In my experience the SNSAs were completed in our schools because we were instructed to do them by our authority and Scottish Government. Each authority could decide when they were to be completed so data cannot be compared across Scotland. At the training we were told that the data was for our schools and authority only and the SG would not use it for league tables etc.

We were not asked to provide the results from our P7s to their secondary schools. As they were done in May as primary schools we did not have time to evaluate the results so they were not used for anything. This would seem a waste of time and effort.

We have only just had time to look at last year's P1 and P4 results. We do our own assessments in literacy and numeracy as we work through the session to help us plan interventions and next steps in teaching & learning. We have not felt that we need to go to the SNSAs to give us extra details.

I am not against assessments in fact quite the opposite. However I am not sure that the content on the SNSAs as they stand provide us with relevant and required information to support the teaching of the pupils. Snap shots at P1, P4 and P7 do not help us in the other years. Teachers need to assess pupils all through their years at school. It is part of the teaching and learning cycle. Only doing SNSAs at 4 year levels suggests to me that it will eventually be used by Scottish Government for other purposes.

I do not see how assessments done at different times in the session can be standardised. You cannot compare if they could be completed up to 11 months apart.

I do not agree with the Upstart Campaign that P1s should only play at school and not participate in any planned and explicit teaching and learning. I believe there is a place for both. None of the P1s in my experience were upset by completing the SNSAs. They enjoy being on a computer but that does not mean that due to mechanical issues that they performed to their best. I would never manage any assessment in a pressurised way or allow pupils to get anxious. They all tried their best.

4/12/18