



the National Parent Forum of Scotland

Dear Clare,

We welcome the Scottish Parliament's inquiry into the Scottish National Standardised Assessments and would like to outline some points that, while being outside the focus of the inquiry, we feel it would be useful for the committee to hear.

As an independent volunteer body of parents, the members of the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) do our best to voice the wide range of parent views to Government and have reflected both the concerned and the supportive voices on SNSAs. NPFS were represented on the National Improvement Framework (NIF) Board which discussed all aspects of the assessments before their introduction. At these national policy discussions, we continually raised our concerns that parents were not being provided with information about the assessments. Parents were not receiving the clear, balanced information they needed to understand why the new assessments were being introduced, why the national aspect was important, whether assessment was right for their child and why the information gathered was helpful to the class teacher.

We acknowledge, but still dispute, Scottish Government's reason for not highlighting the SNSA rollout to parents: they believed it would result in unnecessary profile raising; but, as NPFS made clear at the time and we then saw earlier this year, when there is a vacuum of information it allows 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. We are now in a situation with SNSAs that is entirely unacceptable: our children's education is being used to score political points.

A relatively small number of parents contacted us with concerns and the majority of these were not parents of P1s, they were parents of older children. The issues were down to schools not adhering to the guidance on how the tests should be administered. 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.

We are concerned that since the restructure of groups at the Scottish Government level, the Scottish Education Council now oversees the SNSAs. While on paper it is right that this highest policy level oversees everything, what we are finding in practice is that they are rarely discussed as there is a wealth of other items to be covered. We feel that the NIF Board is missed as an opportunity to discuss these issues in depth.

The information available to teachers from the SNSAs 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 we are disappointed that somewhere in the education chain, this thorough summary and the teacher's wide knowledge of each child is diluted to report cards that parents frequently tell us are almost meaningless. Report cards don't inform parents of these strengths, or the areas needing work, or how they can support their child at home. But the SNSA report does and this makes it a valuable tool to reinforce the class teacher's judgement.

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. We would be happy to discuss this further with the Committee at any opportunity.

Best Wishes,
Joanna Murphy