

## **Submission on SNSAs by Connect**

**December 2018**

### **Connect background**

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' group and a registered charity which provides support to parents and carers all over Scotland. We provide membership services to individual Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents who have concerns about any aspect of the education of their child, or the wider education system. We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community.

### **Connect position**

Connect has consistently opposed the introduction of standardised assessments for P1 – S3 in our schools.

We are not opposed to assessment in schools: it is a normal and necessary part of the teacher's range of techniques which should inform decisions about teaching and learning, additional support and lead to quality conversations between teachers, children and families.

Our objection to SNSAs is based on the following key issues:

1. The decision to introduce standardised assessments into the Scottish system is directly linked to the local authorities' refusal to share data from their assessments with national Government: Government wants this data to gauge the health of the education system. In Scotland, SNSA data is subsumed into

Teacher Judgement scores, which means that Government remains without the data it wanted at the outset.

2. There is widespread concern about basing assessment of the health of the system around what is often misleading and spurious information provided by standardised test data, instead of looking at the more complex factors that are constantly at play, eg poverty, adverse childhood experiences and parental education. (See [www.reclaimingschools.org](http://www.reclaimingschools.org) for perspectives on this and associated issues).
3. A standardised test, or assessment, is one that is administered and scored in a consistent manner. They are designed so that questions, conditions for administration, scoring and interpretations are consistent. However, the scheme as it has been introduced into Scotland is not standardised in any way. Indeed, Government has declared that tests should be administered when the teacher feels the time is right, though we know that in many local authority areas the approach has been 'standardised' so that all the cohort are tested in a specific time window. The assessment also adapts to the aptitude of the learner, which on one hand means the child is not left to struggle against a task beyond their ability, however it also means the assessment cannot be described as standardised.
4. The Scottish scheme has nothing to do with providing individual teachers and families with high quality data to inform decision making. Assessment should inform quality conversations between teachers, children and families, however parents tell us they often do not know about the tests, nor are they given any feedback on the outcomes. Yet the message from Government is that this is the

purpose of the SNSAs. Some parents believe the SNSAs to be diagnostic (eg for identifying a learning difficulty) but this is not the case either.

5. The scheme tests some elements of literacy and numeracy: they do not tell the whole story of the child, nor can they. Indeed, the P1 tests are administered in a stage where learning through play is the declared focus of our education system: to introduce tests at this stage is to act completely counter to the purpose of this approach and will inevitably lead to schools focussing on the tests as an end in themselves, moving away from the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. In short, the tests do not reflect the taught curriculum.
6. Narrowing of the curriculum and a focus on teaching to the test is something that is of widespread concern, particularly in a system where curriculum choices for young people are already being narrowed because of budget cuts and staff shortages. Curriculum for Excellence sets out the objectives of our children's education: a young person's educational experience should help the development of the whole individual.
7. Many of the Scottish Government's own panel of educational advisors have pointed out the dangers of a narrow focus on standardised assessment data, as a measure of system performance. The evidence across the globe is that when they are used to measure or assess teachers, schools or systems, their impact is highly negative to the system, but most importantly to learners.
8. China and Singapore along with Finland are all high performing education systems and have smaller equity gaps than Scotland, yet these countries have committed to test-free, play-based, early years education and childcare. This is a radical change in approach for China and Singapore - becoming more like Scotland's system at a time when we are reversing our direction.

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