

Children have had only two years to prepare for the new exams when they probably needed four



Level-headed advice for these testing KS2 times

BY LORRAE JADERBERG AND KATIE KRAIS

CONTROVERSY HAS surrounded this year's SATs testing, with some parents taking their children out of school in protest at the reintroduction of examinations for seven-year-olds, the leak of a highly confidential SATs paper and finally the Key Stage 2 SATs pass rate of just 53 per cent among the 10- and 11-year-old candidates, compared with 80 per cent in last year's analysis under the previous system.

ON THE LEVEL

It has been a confusing time for primary school parents and their children – the reorganised curriculum has been challenging and the KS2 national curriculum test outcomes have been reported in a new way.

One reason cited by the Government for changing the system is concern about the validity and reliability of levels and sub-levels, identified by a consultation on reforming assessment and accountability.

It was considered that levels had an impact on pupils' learning and were a driver of undue pace through the curriculum, leading to gaps in pupils' knowledge.

"Scaled scores" are now awarded instead of levels. The Government says that these are used all over the world and that the intention is to provide consistent reporting of test results from one year to the next.

Two pupils achieving the same scaled score on two different tests will have demonstrated the same attain-

ment and 100 will always represent the "national standard".

The structures for the new assessments were in place for this year but there will be no data to compare like with like until next year's cohort sit the SATs. Nicky Morga, the former Education Secretary, says that there should be no direct comparison made with previous years for this reason.

Schools have tried to report this year's results in a meaningful way, relating them to "national expectations" but obviously they lack both prior experience with scaled scores and historical data with which to make comparisons. Ms Morgan also says that



Failing the tests does not mean a child is inadequate

lower pass rates should not be interpreted as a decline in performance by pupils, as it is more honest to accept a dip when the bar is raised than to sit back and watch numbers climb like an ever-upward tick.

Teachers and parents have reported that the increased pressure surrounding SATs caused many children considerable anxiety.

When the KS2 SATs results were released, Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said: "We are appalled by... the total chaos the Government has made of this year's SATs. We are worried that many children will have lost their confidence as readers because of this test."

She added: "Even the Government must be worried about the impact of the low scores because it has felt the need to explain the results to schools so they know that all schools will have similarly low results."

RESULTS IN CONTEXT

Many parents are still at a loss when trying to evaluate their own child's grades, as there are so many external factors to consider.

First of all, it is important that these results are put into context and that they are not compared with all previous years' results.

Another key factor is that teachers have had only two years to prepare the children for these exams, when they probably needed four.

With a changed and more challenging curriculum, the teaching needed to start earlier than year five, which was not possible.

A phased introduction over a period of four years would have made these exams fairer for children and rendered the challenge more reasonable.

While teachers bear great responsibility for children's achievement in these exams, it is important that we consider the enormity of the task that they were given and the extremely difficult circumstances in which they had to work.

A child's failure in these tests does not necessarily mean that they are inadequate in reading, writing, grammar or maths but indicates that they have been unable to digest and apply the new curriculum in the time available.

What is important is that children are encouraged, supported and taught well, so that they can move on from this and keep learning with confidence and achieve their potential.

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