

Fast Track to Slow Progress

Anastasia de Waal
Lead surveyor: Fatima Vali

The research

Impetus and conclusion

In light of extensive discussion and controversy around the ‘inflation’ of Key Stage 2 Sats English, maths and science results,¹ this research has sought to investigate whether coaching or so-called ‘teaching to the test’ is impacting on pupil performance in secondary school.

To this purpose, the experiences and opinions of secondary school teachers who this last school year taught either English, maths or science in Year 7, the first year of secondary school and therefore the most affected by the transition from primary to secondary school, have been surveyed.²

The findings of the research, which is based on the views of 107 secondary English, maths and science teachers, show that coaching in the final year of primary school is believed to have a significant impact on pupil performance in the Key Stage 2 Sats tests, with highly problematic consequences for secondary schools – and secondary school pupils. In short, a notable proportion of pupils entering secondary school do so with Key Stage 2 levels (determined by their ‘Sats’ results) which are regarded as artificially inflated by test preparation. This conclusion is supported by previous research showing that rises in Key Stage 2 Sats test results do not necessarily show a rise in pupil standards.³

¹ House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee ‘Testing and Assessment’, Volume 1, Third Report of Session 2007-2008

² Key Stage 2 tests are taken by pupils in the last year of primary school, Year 6, and known as Key Stage 2 ‘Sats’

³ For example: **David Jesson, York University**: found that 1 in 6 pupils achieve a higher level in their Key Stage 2 tests than their teachers think they merit. (*Unpublished paper, David Jesson and Anthony Farrell, Cornwall 2006, cited in Warwick Mansell, Education by Numbers, Politicos, London: 2007, p.43*); **The Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre (CEM), Durham University**: in their own tests between 1997 and 2002 they found no evidence of improvement in literacy and only meagre improvement in maths, despite significant rises in Key Stage 2 test scores. (*CEM, Durham University, Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) Project: Standards Over Time 2002 and also the Middle Years Information System (MidYIS)*); **National Foundation for Educational Research**: found no improvement in standards despite rising Key Stage 2 scores. The NFER standardises the test scores for Key Stage 2 tests. If actual standards are rising the tests have to be re-standardised so that all the scores do not shift upwards. However, despite four years of raised Key Stage 2 test scores, by 2002 the NFER found no need to re-standardise. This indicates no genuine change in achievement. (*cited in Peter Tymms, 'Are standards rising in primary schools?' British Educational Research Journal, Vol 30: 4, 2004*); **Michael Shayer, King's College, London University**: found that a backdrop to rising primary test scores is a historic low in children's cognitive abilities. This casts doubt in particular on Key Stage 2 science results. (<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1693061,00.html>)

Method

The research has been carried out in three stages. Firstly, the questions and answer-options were tested through a piloting stage so as to identify any difficulties in comprehension and ensure comprehensive coverage of responses. Then, using the Department for Children, Schools and Families' records of secondary schools in England, a list of every maintained (state-funded) secondary school in this country with a Year 7 (excluding special and consortium schools) was drawn-up. From this list every 20th school was selected, with the aim of generating a nationwide, randomly selected sample of schools. Thirdly, an additional, 'in-depth' sample of local authorities was taken by sampling all maintained secondary schools (again excluding special and consortium schools) with a Year 7 in all the local authorities starting with a randomly selected letter in the alphabet (in this instance, the letter 'b').

The research itself, took the form of a survey with a multiple-choice telephone questionnaire. The questionnaire asked English, maths and science teachers who have taught in Year 7 this last school year whether they have found the Key Stage 2 Sats levels to be consistent with pupils' true abilities on entry into secondary school. In cases where respondents felt that this had not been the case, the questionnaire then went on to explore purported explanations, as well as the impact that a discrepancy between Sats test results and actual abilities is having in secondary schools.

The research was carried out between 8th and 24th July 2008. Each school was contacted by telephone, and put through to the school reception via the main switchboard. We asked to be put through to either the head of science, maths or English, with the order of the subject list alternated so as to achieve a greater balance of subject teachers contacted.

Once a head of English, maths or science was contacted, the research was introduced as 'Year 7 teachers' views on the transition from primary to secondary school.' Teachers were asked to think specifically about the Year 7 group which they had been teaching over the last school year.

365 schools were contacted, which led to a response from 107 schools (29%). Significantly however, only ten schools refused to participate in the survey (3%) – and each of these ten for the reason that the school had a blanket no-survey policy. In every other case, the school receptionist put calls through to either the English, maths or science department, or to the staffroom. Schools were contacted a maximum of five times before a non-response was recorded. Out of those teachers with whom contact was made the response-rate was 100%.

Sample details

In the achieved sample, a higher proportion of responses have been attained from maths teachers (47 out of 107, or 44%). English teachers make up the second highest proportion of responses (32 out of 107, or 30%). The lowest proportion of responses is made up of science teachers (28 out of 107 or 26%). In three cases, the head of subject had not taught Year 7 in the last school year; in each case a ‘replacement’ teacher who did teach Year 7 in that school was either available at that time or at a later time/date.

Number of local authorities represented in the teachers contacted, by region

North East – 2

Yorkshire and Humberside – 8

North West – 5

East Midlands – 3

West Midlands – 4

East of England – 4

London – 16

South West – 12

South East – 5

Local authorities with participating schools

1. Barking and Dagenham
2. Barnet
3. Barnsley
4. Bath and North East Somerset
5. Bexley
6. Birmingham
7. Blackburn with Darwen
8. Bracknell Forest
9. Bradford
10. Brent
11. Brighton and Hove
12. Bristol, City Of
13. Bromley
14. Calderdale
15. Camden
16. Cornwall
17. Cumbria

18. Derby
19. Derbyshire
20. Devon
21. Ealing
22. East Riding of Yorkshire
23. East Sussex
24. Enfield
25. Essex
26. Gateshead
27. Hammersmith and Fulham
28. Hampshire
29. Hertfordshire
30. Hounslow
31. Kent
32. Lancashire
33. Leeds
34. Liverpool
35. Medway
36. Middlesbrough
37. Newham
38. Norfolk
39. North Yorkshire
40. Northamptonshire
41. Oxfordshire
42. Redbridge
43. Rotherham
44. Sheffield
45. St Helens
46. Suffolk
47. Surrey
48. Tower Hamlets
49. Wandsworth
50. Warwickshire
51. West Sussex
52. Wiltshire
53. Windsor and Maidenhead
54. Wokingham
55. Wolverhampton
56. Worcestershire
57. York

Survey findings

Overview

- **Just 10% of teachers think that Year 7 pupil levels this last school year have been consistent with their Key Stage 2 Sats test results**
- **79% of teachers surveyed think that up to a third of Year 7 pupils' abilities this last school year have been either 'often' or 'sometimes' lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats test results**
- **10% of teachers surveyed think that up to 15% of Year 7 pupils' abilities this last school year have been 'sometimes' higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats test results**
- **The most common main reason chosen by Year 7 teachers to explain the discrepancy between pupils' true abilities and their Key Stage 2 Sats test results this last school year is coaching for the Sats in Year 6: chosen by 54%**
- **77% of teachers think that the main or second most important reason for a discrepancy between actual abilities and Key Stage 2 Sats test results this last school year is coaching for the tests in Year 6**
- **The most commonly reported problem created by the discrepancy between pupils' true abilities and their Key Stage 2 Sats test results for secondary schools this last school year is lowered value added: chosen by 54%**
- **The second most commonly reported problem created by the discrepancy between pupils' true abilities and their Key Stage 2 Sats test results this last school year is the need for secondary schools to carry out their own testing of Year 7 pupils: chosen by 39%**

What are secondary school teachers' views on the Key Stage 2 Sats test results?

'The Key Stage 2 tests are not very helpful in identifying true ability.'

Head of English, South East

'I think that the national picture is very skewed at Key Stage 2.'

Head of Science, North West

The survey findings⁴

By subject

Science:

- a) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have been consistent with their Key Stage 2 Sats levels (Key Stage 2 Sats test results):* **1**
- b) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have sometimes been lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **16**
- c) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have often been lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **7**
- d) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have sometimes been higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **4**
- e) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have often been higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **0**
- f) *Don't know:* **0**

Maths:

- a) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have been consistent with their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **10**
- b) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have sometimes been lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **23**
- c) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have often been lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **8**
- d) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have sometimes been higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **5**
- e) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have often been higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels:* **0**
- f) *Don't know:* **1**

⁴ Respondents were asked to select **one** option for this question with reference to their subject

English:

- a) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have been consistent with their Key Stage 2 Sats levels: 0*
- b) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have sometimes been lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels: 19*
- c) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have often been lower than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels: 11*
- d) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have sometimes been higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels: 2*
- e) *Year 7 pupil levels this school year have often been higher than their Key Stage 2 Sats levels: 0*
- f) *Don't know: 0*

In total

- Consistent (**11**) **10%**⁵

- Sometimes lower (**58**) **54%**

- Often lower (**26**) **24%**

Combined 'sometimes' and 'often' lower: **79%**

- Sometimes higher (**11**) **10%**

- Often higher (**0**) **0%**

- Don't know (**1**) **0.9%**

Percentages given for 'sometimes' and 'often', with reference to the percentage of their Year 7 year-group:

- Sometimes lower: median percentage: **25%** (of the Year 7 year-group)

- Often lower: median percentage: **33%** (of the Year 7 year-group)

Sometimes/often lower: **25%-33%** (of the Year 7 year-group)

- Sometimes higher: median percentage: **15%** (of the Year 7 year-group)

Not all teachers were able to identify a percentage/proportion which applied to 'sometimes' or 'often'. Therefore a median percentage has been taken in each case to determine an average from the 66% of respondents who did choose a percentage or proportion.

⁵ Percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number

Percentage of respondents who chose a percentage/proportion, by subject:

English – **20** out of **32** gave percentages (**63%**)

Maths – **22** out of **36** gave percentages (**61%**)

Science – **21** out of **27** gave percentages (**78%**)

What do teachers attribute a discrepancy between the Key Stage 2 Sats tests results and Year 7 pupil levels to?

The survey findings⁶

By subject

Science:

1. *The most common main reason:* Pupils are coached for the Key Stage 2 Sats in Year 6 **(19)**
2. *The second most common reasons:* The Key Stage 2 Sats only test a limited range of knowledge and understanding **(2)**
Assessments carried out in Year 7 test different aspects of learning from the Key stage 2 Sats **(3)**
Key Stage 2 Sats tests are not challenging enough **(2)**
Pupils forget some of what they have learnt at primary school over the summer holidays **(1)**
3. *The most common second-chosen reasons:* The Key Stage 2 Sats only test a limited range of knowledge and understanding **(5)**
Assessments carried out in Year 7 test different aspects of learning from the Key stage 2 Sats **(5)**
Pupils are coached for the Key Stage 2 Sats in Year 6 **(3)**

English:

1. *The most common main reasons:* Pupils are coached for the Key Stage 2 Sats in Year 6 **(16)**
2. *The second most common reasons:* Pupils forget some of what they have learnt at primary school over the summer holidays **(5)**
Assessments carried out in Year 7 test different aspects of learning from the Key stage 2 Sats **(5)**
3. *The most common second-chosen reasons:* The Key Stage 2 Sats only test a limited range of knowledge and understanding **(6)**
Pupils are coached for the Key Stage 2 Sats in Year 6 **(6)**

Maths:

1. *The most common main reason:* Pupils are coached for the Key Stage 2 Sats in Year 6 **(16)**
2. *The second most common reason:* Pupils forget some of what they have learnt at primary school over the summer holidays **(10)**

⁶ Respondents were asked to choose a) the main reason b) the second most applicable

3. *The most common second-chosen reasons:* Pupils are coached for the Key Stage 2 Sats in Year 6 (13)
The Key Stage 2 Sats only test a limited range of knowledge and understanding (6)

In total:

- Main reason: Coaching as main reason: **51 (54%)**
- Coaching as second most important reason: **22 (23%)**
- Combined coaching: **73 (77%)**
- Second most common reason: summer break **16 (17%)**

What secondary teachers are saying

The results of the survey show that the vast majority of Year 7 teachers, 90%, do not think that the Key Stage 2 test results provide a reliable indicator of pupils' abilities. Although 10% of those surveyed felt that pupil levels were sometimes higher than their Key Stage 2 results, the majority of those surveyed felt that actual abilities were sometimes or often lower. The most commonly chosen reason for this discrepancy was the so-called 'inflation' of the Key Stage 2 Sats results through 'coaching' for the tests in Year 6.

'I don't fault primary schools for doing their absolute utmost to boost results, but there is no question that the huge push in Year 6 to boost results distorts them for the next year. Primary schools are only doing what they are told to, but it does make our job in Year 7 very difficult.'

Head of English, West Midlands

'Increasingly rarely primaries don't coach pupils for the Key Stage 2 Sats.'

Head of Maths, North East

'Teaching is to a specific exam in primary schools – with added things like booster classes. So the Key Stage 2 results are often over-inflated, especially in science, where results are generally a level higher.'

Head of science, Yorkshire and Humberside

On the whole secondary teachers were understanding about why primary schools coach their pupils for the tests, feeling that primary teachers had few other options.

'I fully understand that [primary school] teachers feel compelled to teach to the test – there is a massive focus on them.'

Head of Science, South East

'In a culture where league tables are everything this [coaching] is inevitable.'

Head of Science, South East

'I'm a high school teacher who has worked in a primary school and I know that the pressure for primaries to achieve is enormous. High school teachers perhaps do not recognise how significant the Key Stage 2 Sats are compared to GCSEs, for example.'

Head of English, West Midlands

Some teachers surveyed felt that schools went further than coaching in the tests, with references made to cheating:

'I even have pupils coming up to me saying that "the teacher told me the answer".'

Head of English, East Midlands

Connected to coaching for the tests is the general emphasis on teaching for the tests, if not actually *to* them. With fairly extensive detail provided to schools on the content of the Sats tests, together with guidance on the marking scheme, this becomes difficult to avoid. As a result, because only a limited amount is tested in the Sats, in many cases only that limited material is taught, or at least focused on. In other words whilst testing theoretically exists to examine a snapshot of pupils' learning, today, in too many cases, that snapshot is the *sum* of pupils' learning.

'The biggest problem is that the Sats test only a range of skills so that to hit a level 5 is possible without having all the level 5 skills. An important example is paragraphing. This is a level 5 skill, but because in the Sats paragraphing only loses a mark or so, you can get a Key Stage 2 level 5 without being able to paragraph.'

Head of English, East England

The summer holidays also connect to the Sats emphasis in Year 6. Several of those teachers who felt that the summer holidays contributed to a deficit between the Key Stage 2 Sats results and pupils' actual abilities in Year 7, considered this to be compounded by schools doing less teaching and pupils less learning after the Sats in May. There is extensive evidence that the long break over the holidays can cause 'learning loss' particularly amongst pupils from deprived backgrounds. In fact a key contributor to the achievement gap between rich and poor occurs over the summer holidays, when children from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to have opportunities at home to consolidate and extend their learning from the school year, whereas with fewer opportunities at home, those from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to slip behind. Nevertheless, the gap is more likely generated by the more advantaged racing on rather than the disadvantaged forgetting a substantial amount in six weeks. In this respect, lowered levels between the end of primary school (Year 6) and the start of secondary (Year 7) are implausibly connected to the summer holidays alone. One reason that teachers gave was that in effect the summer holiday actually begins sometime in the *middle of May* for many schools – once the all-important tests are over.

'[The discrepancy between the Key Stage 2 Sats test levels and pupils' levels in Year 7 is] [b]ecause of the time lapse: the tests are done in May and then for the next four months pupils don't do much English.'

Head of English, East England

'After the Sats in May many schools don't do any more maths, they do things like run errands – so there is a very long time lapse up to Year 7.'

Head of Maths, East Midlands

The other explanation, of course, also relates to teaching to the test – with crammed memorisation much less likely to be retained in the long-term:

'It's like they've been prepared for a MOT – you can pass on the day but not the day after.'

Head of Science, East England

What are the repercussions for secondary schools?

The survey findings⁷

By subject:

Science:

1. *The most common reported repercussion:* An apparent lack of progress in Year 7 can be a problem for value added measures **(15)**
2. *The second most common repercussion:* Secondary schools are compelled to do their own tests in order to get an accurate picture of pupils' abilities **(13)**
3. *The third most common repercussion:* Secondary teachers have to make up the gap between pupils' Key Stage 2 Sats test levels and their actual levels when they reach Year 7 **(5)**

English:

1. *The most common reported repercussion:* An apparent lack of progress in Year 7 can be a problem for value added measures **(19)**
2. *The second most common repercussion:* Secondary schools are compelled to do their own tests in order to get an accurate picture of pupils' abilities **(13)**
3. *The third most common repercussion:* Secondary teachers have to make up the gap between pupils' Key Stage 2 Sats test levels and their actual levels when they reach Year 7 **(8)**

Maths:

1. *The most common reported repercussion:* An apparent lack of progress in Year 7 can be a problem for value added measures **(17)**
2. *The second most common repercussion:* Secondary schools are compelled to do their own tests in order to get an accurate picture of pupils' abilities **(11)**
3. *The third most common repercussion:* Secondary teachers have to make up the gap between pupils' Key Stage 2 Sats test levels and their actual levels when they reach Year 7 **(7)**

In total:

Most common repercussion: is a problem for secondary school value added **(51) 54%**

Second most common repercussion: need to re-test: **(37) 39%**

⁷ Respondents were asked to choose as many responses as they considered applicable

What secondary teachers are saying

The most common issue reported with level inflation at Key Stage 2, was the way in which it affects secondary schools' value added. Value added has become a central way in which the quality of a school and its teaching are measured. The effect of 'inflated' results when pupils enter secondary school is therefore a serious problem for secondary school teachers. A pupil who comes in with a Sats level above his/her true ability, appears to make less progress than they actually have. The worst case scenario is when ostensibly no progress is made, or as some teachers surveyed mentioned, when it appears that pupils have gone *backwards*.

'The discrepancy [between the Key Stage 2 results and actual levels] lowers value added because the Key Stage 2 levels are often inflated.'

Head of Maths, East Midlands

'The Key Stage 2 results are often artificially high which is difficult for value added. This is particularly so for the level 5s.'

Head of Maths, North East

'We need to make two levels of progress with pupils between Year 7 and GCSE. So if they come in with higher levels than they are then it is a problem for us.'

Head of Maths, East of England

'It's always an issue, for example if you have a pupil who has overachieved. Even with the best will in the world it can be difficult to even get them to that level by the end of the year. (We get around it by doing our own testing).'

Head of Maths, East Midlands

'It has a particular effect on value added in Year 9. There is a difference between what we expect them to be able to do and what they can actually do.'

Head of English, London

'It's [the discrepancy] a huge problem: we spend most of Year 7 trying to get them to where they should be.'

Head of English, East England

'There is a lot of pressure to catch up in order to make up the two new levels of progress required. The progress which needs to be made puts us under an awful lot of pressure.'

Head of English, Yorkshire and Humberside

Secondary schools come under fire for this ostensible lack of progress, or 'value added', from Ofsted, for whom value added is a key measure of school quality, as well as from parents. Whilst at least Ofsted recently acknowledged teaching to the tests in primary schools⁸ (though it appears

⁸ HMCi Christine Gilbert, *Times Education Supplement*, 25th July 2008

unlikely that the inspectorate will be making many concessions in its inspection judgements on this basis) it can be even more difficult to explain the situation to parents.

'You get very concerned parents whose children appear to have made no progress in the first couple of years.'

Head of English, East England

'If test results are inflated it has an effect on Key Stage 3 forecasts. The starkest problem is forecast grades for Key Stage 5 – there the translation is quite extremely problematic.'

Head of Science, South East

'It obviously does affect us because it looks like we've not been doing much. Schools are judged on external assessment, so parents are worried.'

Head of English, East England

'It's not very good for us because parents think that there hasn't been any value added.'

Head of English, East Midlands

'Parental concern is a problem as parents always believe their child's highest level is the right level.'

Head of Maths, East Midlands

As well as being a concern for teachers and parents, an apparent lack of progress on account of inflated Key Stage 2 results can understandably also be a knock to pupils' confidence:

'It can be very demoralising for pupils because they don't seem to be making much progress. Often they are in fact, but where they started was wrong.'

Head of English, East Midlands

'It dampens pupils' enthusiasm – they don't have expectations of reaching another level.'

Head of English, London

How many schools are doing their own testing at the start of secondary school?

The survey findings

The number of secondary schools testing pupils on entry:

By subject:

English: (25) 78%

Maths: (28) 60%

Science: (13) 46%

In total:

Start of secondary school testing: (66) 62%

What secondary teachers are saying

The combination of the crucial importance of value added together with inflated Key Stage 2 results has led to many secondary schools resorting to doing their own testing in Year 7.

'We don't feel that we can rely on the Key Stage 2 results so we have to do our own testing.'

Head of English, Yorkshire and Humberside

'We do baseline testing so that we can show what we have done with them – by using the Key Stage 2 results it would look like we hadn't made any progress.'

Head of Science, South East

'This is one reason that we pay for the tests [in this case, MidYIS testing].'

Head of Science, North West

'The school previously used the Key Stage 2 Sats results but from now on the head has decided to use MidYIS.'

Head of English, East England

'We get around it [the potentially problematic discrepancy between Key Stage 2 results and actual abilities] by doing our own testing.'

Head of Maths, East Midlands

Conclusions and recommendations

Discussion around the issues which primary school testing in this country currently face often lead to the conclusion that the root of the problem is testing *per se*. The evidence on what has gone wrong in testing strongly suggests that this is an erroneous position. Testing itself is not the problem. Testing can be stimulating for pupils and useful in terms of measuring how effective teaching and school policies are; if testing is used effectively, it can indeed be a valuable accountability tool, with no detriment to even comparatively young pupils. The problem here is the way in which testing has become 'appropriated' by the government for its own purpose: demonstrating a rise in standards often by *generating* one artificially through the testing process. The underlying problem is that testing has become the end rather than the means in driving up school standards thereby warping its potential to ensure accountability. This has led to major distortions whereby local authorities and schools are pressurised into implementing *anti-learning* measures in order to boost results. The consequence is that the mechanism for testing school and teacher effectiveness has come to actually undermine educational effectiveness itself. Thus the testing process has led to a scenario in which the outcome is much more important than how it is achieved; as a result higher test scores have, particularly over the last decade in synch with ambitious targets, often represented *less* learning and *worse* educated pupils.

The purpose, theoretically, of the Key Stage 2 Sats tests is to demonstrate a) the quality of the education provided by the primary school, b) the abilities of the pupil and c) indicators of where pupils are at for secondary schools. With inordinate pressure for schools to demonstrate the effectiveness of the national curriculum, in particular the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Key Stage 2 Sats results are in many cases indicators of test preparation rather than learning. That secondary schools are increasingly resorting to doing their own testing when pupils enter Year 7 is indicative of this phenomenon.

This distortion in testing has affected primary schools in particular because the organisation of learning at primary level allows precisely for the phenomenon which the survey has shown to be regarded as so pervasive: coaching, or 'teaching to the test'. Whereas in secondary schools a different teacher per subject means that it is more difficult to depart from official timetabling, in primary schools a single class teacher can spend disproportionate time on particular subjects.

The side-effects of teaching to the test have been widely documented. For example:

- The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has found that there has been shrinkage of both the whole primary curriculum and also within the literacy and numeracy curricula, in order to focus on what is tested. (*QCA Annual Report 2003/2004 Times Educational Supplement 27th April 2007*, <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/update/strat.html#3Rs>)
- Pupils are leaving primary school without basic skills. This has become such an acknowledged problem that the government has resorted to 'freeing up the curriculum' in order to provide 'catch-up' classes in secondary school. (<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/14-19whitepaper/>)
- Children's development is hampered by teaching to the test. (*For example, speaking and thinking development: Hargreaves, L. et al 'How do elementary school teachers define and implement interactive teaching in the national literacy hour in England?' American Educational Research Association Conference, New Orleans, 2002*)

- Teachers are finding themselves compelled to focus disproportionately on borderline level 4 pupils with, for example, government-funded booster classes described by Ofsted as 'late intervention to ratchet up performance'. (www.literacytrust.org.uk/update/strat.html#3Rs)

In short, not only are a significant number of pupils short-changed on what they learn in primary school, many are also short-changed on *teacher-time*. Furthermore, this coaching for the tests is not merely an unofficial side-effect of a misappropriated testing regime; research by the *Times Education Supplement's* Warwick Mansell reveals extensive and open guidance from the government to teach to the test throughout Year 6,⁹ on top of guidance to focus on 'borderline' pupils.

Something which the survey of Year 7 teachers on this issue makes clear is that coaching is contributing to a 'pile-up' of inflated pupil levelling – a cumulative effect which will frequently have started early on in the Key Stage 1 testing and continuously grown through Key Stage 2 and into secondary school. Aside from the difficulties for value-added based evaluations which this presents (both a key flaw and contributor to this currently defective method of quality evaluation) the danger is that pupils complete their school careers with considerable gaps in their learning. This has contributed significantly to a concurrent rise in national test and exam grades and a need for independent testing for higher education and employment.

If testing *per se* is not the problem, however, what is the solution?

The solution is testing which gauges a randomised snapshot of learning, rather than testing which converts learning itself into that snapshot. In order to do so there needs to be a fundamental re-organisation of the logistics in primary testing. This must entail two basic but crucial changes: testing needs to work on the principle of being unseen and carried out at a non-predictable time. Annual unseen testing at any point in upper primary (between Years 3 and 6) would provide a more accurate picture of learning levels and progress in a school. Schools would not be forewarned on either details of the content of the testing, or the timing. (Schools would need to submit school trip/event information via the local authority to avoid clashes.) The marking of the tests should remain independent from the school however it can continue to be administered by class teachers.

⁹ For example, Warwick Mansell in *Education by Numbers: The Tyranny of Testing*, Politicos, London: 2007, pp33-35: evidence of government advice to practice extensively for the tests