

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Early Years alliance ramps up the opposition to Baseline Assessment

Friday 12th February - For immediate release

As evidence grows showing commercial baseline assessments as children start school to be unnecessary, unreliable and wasteful, an alliance of major early years organisations is gearing up to focus attention on why the policy should be scrapped. The Better Without Baseline campaign today publishes a pack detailing arguments and evidence in opposition to the government's plans.

The campaign pack describes four core reasons to oppose the baseline assessments, saying they are an invalid way to hold primary schools to account, are detrimental to children, are an unjustifiable waste of time and money at a time of austerity, and that the approach has been tried and abandoned in the past.

'Baseline assessment which reduces each child to a single number score is an insult to the complexity of learning and development, to the growing relationships in the early days of school experience, and to the professionalism of teachers,' says Professor Sacha Powell, Chair of TACTYC, the Association for the Professional Development in Early Years (), *'It is good for neither children nor teachers. Since it cannot predict what children will learn in the next six years, it has no use for schools' accountability and is a costly waste of time and resources. It should be abandoned.'*

A number of research studies are examining the impact of Baseline Assessment on children and schools during the current pilot year, and a joint seminar exploring the findings will take place at Newman University in Birmingham on the 24th February.

The first published study by the ATL and NUT has revealed that schools and children have already been negatively impacted. Over 90% of the teachers surveyed felt that Baseline Assessment was not an accurate and fair way of assessing children and 85% believed that it was unnecessary and had increased their workload.

The Better Without Baseline campaign is calling for the support of education professionals, parents and teachers in challenging government policymaking that fails to respond to the recommendations of democratic consultation, and that prioritises school accountability over the best interests of the child.

Ends –

For more information please email contact@betterwithoutbaseline.org.uk

Website: www.betterwithoutbaseline.org.uk

Notes to Editors

1. Despite considerable expert opposition, and against the recommendations of the government's own consultation process, commercial baseline assessment schemes have now been introduced as an accountability measure to 'help school effectiveness' by scoring each pupil at the start of reception. This has come at a time when the mental health and wellbeing of young people has become an area of increasing concern, and where excessive testing has been significantly implicated. (1) (2)

(1) Top schools face mental Health Crisis, The Guardian, 4th Oct, 2015

(2) True scale of child mental health crisis uncovered. The Times, March 12th, 2015

For those schools that opt into the non-statutory system, the DfE requires that the assessments be carried out for all children within six weeks of starting Reception, on a "pass/fail" basis for each scoring item, and with a narrow set of results being condensed to a single score. The Better Without Baseline alliance questions the statistical validity and predictive value of the results, the amount of teacher time that is being diverted away from the care of the children during a crucially important period of transition, the likelihood of early labelling and the significant additional cost to the taxpayers. It also highlights the fact that baseline testing has been tried – and failed, before.

2.0 The National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) jointly commissioned independent research on the impact of Baseline Assessment on schools, following its introduction in September 2015. Researchers conducted a survey of more than 1200 teachers, who between them had experience of all three providers of Baseline Assessment – Early Excellence, CEM and NFER. The research was undertaken by Dr Alice Bradbury and Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes of the Institute of Education, University College London.

The findings of their research clearly demonstrate that:

- **Baseline Assessment is inaccurate and therefore problematic as the basis for school accountability**

Over 90% of teachers surveyed think that Baseline Assessment is NOT a good way to assess how schools perform.

- **Baseline Assessment has potentially damaging effects on children - relating to low expectations and labelling**

Over 90% of teachers think that Baseline Assessment is NOT an accurate and fair way of assessing children.

71% think baseline assessment does not help to identify children who may have special educational needs

68% think baseline assessment does not help to identify the needs of children who speak English as an additional language

- **Baseline Assessment increases teachers' workloads without providing useful information**

Nearly 85% of teachers thought baseline assessment increased their work load, inside and outside the classroom.

92% of teachers underlined that their school already had assessment systems in place to support children's development and learning when they started school.

- **Baseline Assessment has cost and resource implications for schools**

"It would be relatively simple to provide accurate teacher judgements after the children have been in school for a full half term [...] This would not require paying companies monies that could go directly into schools to benefit children in need of extra support." (Comment from a teacher)

"It has cost my school additional money at a time when budgets are getting tight!" (Comment from a teacher)

The full report is available for download at www.teachers.org.uk/baseline or <https://www.atl.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/campaigns/baseline-assessment.asp>

3.0 Organisations opposing Baseline Assessment currently include

TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in Early Years
Save Childhood Movement (SCM)
Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT)
British Association for Early Childhood Education (Early Education)
National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)
Pre-school Learning Alliance
The Primary Charter
Early Childhood Forum (ECF)
The National Union of Teachers (NUT)
Association of Teacher and Lecturers (ATL)
Professional Association for Childcare and the Early Years (PACEY)
National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
London Early Years Foundation (LEYF)
Unison Education and Children's Services
The Government's own Assessment Reform Group
The Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM)
The Mathematical Association (MA)
The British Educational Research Association (BERA)
Mothers at Home Matter (MAHM)
What About The Children? (WATCH)

4.0 Available for press comment

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