

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Better without Baseline Coalition Open Letter calls for review of early assessment

Immediate Release – Monday 11th April, 2016

In response to the government's recent U-turn on baseline assessment, a coalition of teaching unions and leading early years organisations has now issued an open letter calling for a review of assessment and accountability policymaking for the early years. This follows a year of active opposition to the introduction of baseline assessment, as well as the publication of the Better Without Baseline media pack that provided detailed arguments and evidence contesting the DfE's original plans.

The coalition urges retaining the more holistic Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and is offering to work with the DfE to develop more carefully thought-through approaches that have the best interests of the child at their heart.

The letter welcomes the government's recent statement, but highlights concerns that the DfE has made this decision through a preoccupation with data comparability, rather than child development and wellbeing. It also highlights the fact that the DfE has persistently ignored the evidence that commercial baseline schemes represent:

- **a waste of public money in a time of austerity**
- **a waste of teachers' valuable time**
- **disruption to the settling-in period in the reception year**
- **potential damage by attaching simplistic labels to children**
- **a narrowed curriculum focus with potential negative effects on children's early experiences and on parental involvement and confidence**
- **an inability to provide an accurate or useful picture of children's current development or to predict their future attainment.**

The recent study by UCL Institute of Education revealed that schools and children had already been negatively impacted by the introduction. Only 7% of the teachers surveyed felt that Baseline Assessment was an accurate and fair way of assessing children and 85% believed that it was unnecessary and had increased their workload.

In a statement accompanying the release of the letter Wendy Ellyatt, Chief Executive of the Save Childhood Movement, said

"We welcome the government announcement, but are concerned that lessons should be learned when considering the way forward. It is unfortunate that in cancelling the baseline scheme the DfE emphasis has been on the lack of data comparability, rather than the impact on child wellbeing. We also think serious questions should be asked about how much this has cost in terms of time and money, let alone the impact on schools and teachers, when all the evidence and expert advice suggested that it was the wrong thing to do."

Ends –

To see the full letter please use

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 were being 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 opted into the non-statutory system, the DfE required 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 questioned 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 highlighted 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 on-entry commercial Baseline Assessment currently include

Save Childhood Movement (SCM)
TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in Early Years
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)
Reclaiming Schools Network

4.0 Available for press comment

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