

[redacted – exemption 38(1)(b)
applies]

Private and Confidential

First Minister
Mrs Nicola Sturgeon

The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 ISP

Wednesday the 8th of August 2018

Dear Mrs Sturgeon,

Re: Objection to Primary 1 SNSA testing regime

I am concerned about the inclusion of Primary 1 pupils in the new Scottish National Standard Tests (SNSA) testing regime. I agree that teachers need to know the capabilities of pupils to enable them to provide the most appropriate learning opportunities for individual children. However, I believe the inclusion of Primary 1 pupils (aged 4 and 5 years) in the SNSA is a step too far. My understanding is that teachers already undertake ongoing assessments of children in Primary 1 without the need for standardised tests — a position supported by the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS).

I would prefer to see the adoption of a more play-based learning process for children in Primary 1 and Primary 2. With feedback being constructive and easy to understand for the pupil, the teacher and the parent, adopting a more keep doing, do more of and stop doing, feedback system would make the learning process for teachers, parents and pupils a lot more structured, transparent, easier to understand, easier to execute, easier to support and allows for each child's individual learning style to be considered.

I agree that children should have increased access to diverse play experiences and it is good that this is prompted through the Curriculum for Excellence. However, a play-based approach is not consistent with the testing regime for Primary 1 under the SNSA approach. Testing regimes whilst adopting a play based learning experience is a contradiction of what play-based education is.

I further believe that by asking teachers to test Primary 1 pupils will not be productive or encourage children to learn, problem solve, build relationships and play, at this stage learning should be fun. Furthermore, teachers will be concentrating on getting pupils through a test and not truly teaching and pupils not truly learning.

Additionally, the testing will not mean anything to the child, the teacher or the parent at this stage of their learning as they are still developing. It is merely being used to place a statistic on learning and this should not be the case, when we are trying to increase attainment level within education.

I personally do not want my child to be a statistic so early on in [redacted] school life and want [redacted] time in Primary 1 and Primary 2 to be constructive and not based on a mark [redacted] is given, that in all honestly really does not

significantly impact [redacted] at this stage. Testing for the sake of testing is wholly wrong and testing to show a statistic, is not considering the child's learning journey or the best use of teaching hours. I want [redacted] teacher to be able to concentrate on teaching [redacted] and not making sure they are going to get good grades of this test, for fear of further action being taken if pupils do not perform. This is not how learning in early years should be.

Children have enough time in later years of their schooling to be anxious about testing, why start to do this in Primary 1, when are trying to teach them valuable skills that should not be tested but encouraged.

We only get one shot to inspire every Primary 1 pupil that learning is a good experience and that no matter what ability they have, they can flourish. I urge you to reconsider the testing of Primary 1 pupils for the SNSA testing regime and allow these pupils and teachers to learn in a play-based environment, that will allow them to grow.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding the testing.

Kind regards

[redacted - exemption applies]

pp:

First Minister for Scotland Nicola Sturgeon,
Councillor Kenny Stevenson,
Councillor Clare Quigley,
Councillor Martin McCulloch,
Councillor Thomas Cochrane

Buidheann-Stiùiridh an Ionnsachaidh
Learning Directorate

F/T: [redaction – exemption 38(1)(b) applies]
E: [redaction – exemption 38(1)(b) applies]

[redaction – exemption 38(1)(b) applies]

5 October 2018

Dear [redaction – exemption 38(1)(b) applies]

Thank you for your letter to the Deputy First Minister on 8 August 2018. As I have responsibility for this policy area I have been asked to reply.

I have noted your comments and concerns about the P1 assessments which form part of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments. We are taking all feedback into consideration and are grateful for your views on these matters.

Our approach to assessment in Scotland, including P1 assessment was developed after extensive engagement with teachers, parents, children and academics. Assessment allows teachers to understand children's and young people's progress and to plan the next phase of their learning and teaching. Assessment is, therefore, a key tool to inform teachers' professional judgement of the needs of the children and young people they are teaching.

The Scottish National Standardised Assessments should be seen in this context. They are part of everyday learning and teaching and entirely consistent with play-based learning approaches in schools. They are not "high stakes" tests and there is no pass or fail. The assessments have been designed in consultation with Education Scotland and other professionals and are designed to provide teachers with diagnostic information about the children and young people they are teaching which, along with the range of other evidence available to them, will help them to consider the next steps for learning. Teachers have the flexibility to manage the assessments to ensure that they are a positive experience for all children.

Almost all local authorities in Scotland have been making use of some form of standardised assessment for a number of years; the SNSA now provides a tool

which is uniquely aligned to Curriculum for Excellence and ensure that a consistent approach is being taken across Scotland.

You may be interested to read the Scottish Government's User Review of the first year of the SNSAs which was published on 28 August:

<https://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781787811201>.

This review focuses on enhancements that will be made to the SNSAs for 2018/19 to improve the way that children and young people are assessed, to provide a better experience for younger pupils and to provide more advice to teachers. This will help ensure that SNSAs continue to make a positive contribution to learning and teaching in Scotland.

I hope this response provides you with useful information.

[redaction – exemption 38(1)(b) applies]

From: [redacted – exemption applies]
Sent: 11 September 2018 17:32:57
To: Public Engagement Unit
Subject: FW: P1 Testing

Hi

For MACCS from the relevant portfolio please.

Thanks

[redacted – exemption applies]

[redacted – exemption applies]

Office of Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government

The Scottish Government

St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG

Tel. [redacted – exemption applies]

Please see the Ministerial preferences<<http://saltire/my-workplace/ministerialpreferences-and-support/Communities-and-Local-Government/Pages/AileenCampbell.aspx?pageid=b476f873-7411-4d37-aadb-46ffb4b27f8e>> which may be of assistance to you.

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From: [redacted – exemption applies]

Sent: 11 September 2018 17:05

To: Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government

<CabSecCLG@gov.scot>

Subject: Fwd: P1 Testing

Aileen

I have already sent this to your other email. I don't need a reply, I was simply offering my view.

[redacted – exemption applies]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [redacted – exemption applies]

Date: Tue, 11 Sep 2018, 4:22 pm

Subject: P1 Testing To:

<aileen.campbell.msp@parliament.scot<<mailto:aileen.campbell.msp@parliament.scot>>>

Aileen

I was dismayed to read in today's Scotsman about Nicola Sturgeon's defence of the P1 tests. Having spent 15 years as a headteacher in the English system I've witnessed the effects of primary school testing on schools, children and teachers.

Tests have their part to play in the assessment of children's progress and attainment but I have yet to see any tool that betters that of a teacher's knowledge of the children they teach. Tests have a very narrow scope by their nature and paint a equally narrow picture of a child's capabilities. They help to validate a teacher's assessment of each child in the core subjects and as such have value. However I have never been convinced that they have any value in the early stages of a child's education.

"If a child in Primary One is needing just a little bit of extra help with their reading or their numbers, surely it's better that that is known in Primary One rather than waiting until later on in the school when it might be harder to provide that extra help.? (First Minister)

If this is an accurate quote from the First Minister then it demonstrates a deep misunderstanding of how teachers in the early years teach. A good teacher in P1 will plan frequent opportunities for observations and on going assessment. It is part and parcel of what they do on a daily basis. Planning is constantly adjusted in order to cater for a child's developmental needs. Teachers do not need tests for them to know when interventions are necessary.

Such a quote from the FM makes me question not just her understanding of early years education but also the true purpose of these tests. As a headteacher I was under no illusions that primary testing was much more about holding schools to account. I understood and accepted such accountability but disputed the idea that they in themselves helped to close the attainment gap. Quality teaching that is based on good systems of assessment is the key to that. Tests play a part but in my view not when a child has just started school. They are unnecessary and intrusive.

Excuse the rant Aileen but I expected better from the government and from the First Minister. Within the context of the incompetence of the UK government and the mess that is Brexit I see an independent Scotland as a way to a much brighter future, in time. But an imaginative and innovative education system will be at the heart of our future as an independent country and at the moment the government seems not to understand that.

Kind regards

[redacted – exemption applies]

F/T: [redacted – exemption applies]
E: [redacted – exemption applies]

[redacted – exemption applies]
[redacted – exemption applies]

5 October 2018

Dear [redacted – exemption applies]

Thank you for your email to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government on 11 September 2018 about P1 assessments.

I have noted that you were not expecting a response to your email, but as a courtesy I wanted to offer a short reply given my responsibility for this policy area.

I have noted your comments and concerns about P1 assessments. We are taking all feedback into consideration and are grateful for your views on these matters.

Our approach to assessment in Scotland developed after extensive engagement with teachers, parents, children and academics. Assessment allows teachers to understand children's and young people's progress and to plan the next phase of their learning and teaching. Assessment is, therefore, a key tool to inform teachers' professional judgement of the needs of the children and young people they are teaching.

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Almost all local authorities in Scotland have been making use of some form of standardised assessment for a number of years; the SNSA now provides a tool which is uniquely aligned to Curriculum for Excellence and ensure that a consistent approach is being taken across Scotland.

Yours sincerely

[redacted – exemption applies]

[redacted – exemption applies]