

National Reference Test

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,000 heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL has members in more than 90 per cent of secondary schools and colleges of all types, responsible for the education of more than four million young people. This places the association in a unique position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of secondary schools and of colleges
- 2 ASCL welcomes the commitment to gather evidence to show that performance at Key stage 4 has genuinely improved (or declined) across the cohort. ASCL members are understandably concerned that their efforts to raise standards, year by year, may not be fully reflected in the awards made at GCSE. ASCL supports a mechanism to address this.
- 3 ASCL recognises that there needs to be a nationally representative sample for the test to be fully effective and ASCL agrees that schools, if selected, will need to allow a sample of pupils to take part in the test in order to achieve a fully representative sample.
- 4 ASCL agrees that the head teacher should be able to withdraw a pupil that has been selected to take part in the test, having regards to the guidance that the test supplier provides. However ASCL supports the notion that the vast majority of pupils should sit the test and be encouraged to do so.
- 5 ASCL believes that the following constitutes an exceptional circumstance in which it may be appropriate for a head to withdraw a pupil from taking a test:

Where sitting the test would place undue stress on an individual given a particular set of personal circumstances and risks damaging the health and welfare of the pupil.
- 6 ASCL believes sitting the test will have no disproportionate impact on most young people and that the interests of the test will best be served by gaining the results from as fully a representative group as possible.
- 7 ASCL understands that DFE approval of the proposed legislation is required in order to ensure that the administrative burden on schools is kept to a minimum.

With reference to your specific questions

1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that it should be mandatory, if selected, for a school and the sample of pupils to take part in the National Reference Test?

Agree (see paragraph 3 above).

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the head teacher should be able to withdraw a pupil that has been selected to take the test, having regard to the guidance that the test supplier will provide?

Agree (see paragraph 4 above).

3. What circumstances do you consider would justify a head withdrawing a pupil from taking a test, taking into account the need to achieve a nationally representative sample of students and that pupils do not receive individual results or awards from taking the National Reference Test? Please provide comments.

See paragraph 5 above.

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the test administrator's guidance should be subject to the approval of the Secretary of State?

Agree (see paragraph 7 above).

5. Do you think that the proposed secondary legislation has a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific pupils, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'?

The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

See paragraph 6 above.

8 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Martin Ward
Public Affairs Director
Association of School and College Leaders
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