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Head Teacher : Mrs EB Davies

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Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
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Dear Nicky Morgan

Assessment and Testing

We are writing with grave concern regarding the current testing and assessment agenda. We are a group of head teachers who work together within a local network of schools in north London. We all lead good and outstanding primary schools, including a local teaching school, and between us have a wealth of experience in primary education. Not only have many of us been head teachers for many years, some of us have worked as OFSTED inspectors and supported other schools in their development. During our time in headship we have seen very significant changes to the world of primary education, many of which have been positive, appropriate and enhanced our provision. However these latest changes to the testing and assessment regime leave us feeling very concerned about the long term impact these will have on both children's learning and well being, and that of teachers in schools.

The increasing expectations of the SATs and teacher assessment in both Y2 and Y6 are putting very noticeable pressure on children and teachers, forcing them into teaching a narrowly focused curriculum which is, increasingly, inappropriately prescriptive and stifling. The emphasis is now on reducing what should be inspiring stories and texts into monotonous and complex deconstructions. We would defy most adults to read and write to the current Y6 expectations. It is worth asking the question about how many of us could confidently incorporate the extensive range of language and grammar devices expected within our own reading and writing?

The consequential loss of the breadth and balance in the curriculum, loss of creativity and inspiration in teaching and learning and loss of spontaneity and flow in the reading and writing process, coupled with the enormous pressure placed upon pupils and staff will, we believe, have unfavourable and damaging future outcomes.

Recruitment and retention of teachers and Head Teachers is at an all time low. There is also an increase in the numbers of children suffering from mental ill health issues, requiring greater support from National Health services and expenditure of public funds as never before. With

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this backdrop it becomes difficult to see the positive consequences of ever more demanding standards. Will this mean that GCSEs, 'A' Levels and university degrees will become more and more challenging? And if so, to what end? How will all of this benefit humanity in the long run?

Surely our education system is there to enable each individual child to become a capable, healthy and well balanced person, able to contribute in the most positive of ways to our society? Schools must ensure breadth and balance so that pupils can discover and develop their talents, and feel confident and positive about themselves.

Britain cannot and should not be compared to cultures and societies on the other side of the globe. We should retain and develop the wonderful, amazing creative talent we are renowned for, in a wide field of disciplines, if our lives are to be fulfilled, enriched and effective.

Yes, standards in reading, writing and mathematics should be high so that all children are equipped for secondary education and a positive future, but not so high and delivered in such oppressive detailed prescription that teaching and learning becomes a stressful, monotonous straight jacket, disabling the richness and enjoyment an outstanding education should bring.

Testing and assessment has become the "tail wagging the dog." Teaching is a vocation and we want our teachers in our schools to teach with a passion which will inspire our pupils, for only then they will learn beyond all measure.

Please put a halt to this tide of excessive pressure on our children before it is too late.

We look forward to hearing your response,

Yours sincerely



Evelyn Davies
Head Teacher

Angela McNicholas
Head Teacher, Our Lady of Muswell Catholic Primary School

William Dean
Head Teacher, Highgate Primary School

Carol O'Brien
Head Teacher, St James Primary School

Irene Tyrell
Head Teacher, St Martin of Porres Primary School

Geraldine Gallagher
Head Teacher, St Michael's N6

Tony Woodward
Head Teacher, Tetherdown Primary School

Jo Sassienie
Head Teacher, Eden Primary

Hugh Vivian
Head Teacher, Hollickwood School

cc: Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools