

## Scrapping KS3 SATs

**Key Stage 3(KS3) SATs are to be scrapped, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families has announced, but what does it mean for schools in practice? Is it a welcome change or are there potential downsides which have yet to be addressed?**

The topic attracted much debate when it was the subject of a talk2learn Open Forum discussion with more than 70 contributions from school leaders.

Key points raised were:

- is teacher assessment the best replacement for tests?
- dropping SATs opens up scope for personalised learning
- impact on student motivation

Steven Rubin, an assistant headteacher in the West Midlands, was one of several unconvinced that the move was in students' best interests.

*"Surely five years is too long to go without some kind of formal, accurate, consistent and fair check on the progress of students. For me it was only the style of the tests that was wrong. If the style was different, maybe similar to GCSE papers, what is wrong with having a formal assessment at the end of KS3 in the core subjects?"*

Barry Runham, an assistant headteacher in the South West, was sceptical that teacher assessment could be a sufficiently reliable replacement.

"How accurate are they and where is the quality assurance and external moderation? *What if you are in a school where the teacher assessment is poor?*"

There were wider implications in terms of target setting for GCSE subjects, he added.

*"Most models make use of the KS3 scores as a baseline for KS4 targets.* Although there was disagreement regarding the usefulness of SATs, they did provide everyone with a common



baseline because all students in the country took the same paper."

However, Susan Dench, an English facility co-ordinator in the East Midlands, took a more positive view of teacher assessment and the benefits it offers. Her school has been using Assessing Pupils' Progress, the national framework which helps teachers to fine-tune their assessment skills, since last year.

"We have found that it can provide a much more personalised approach to teaching and learning. *A specific assessment focus target can enable progression in a student much more quickly than a blanket summative assessment.*"

But as students themselves, Louise Stewart, head of English at a middle school in East Anglia, said scrapping SATs was a blow.

*"Dropping the tests frees me up to teach Shakespeare in an exciting and stimulating way. However, some of my students are worried that they don't have a goal to work towards. I find it sad that we have created a culture where children feel they are only working towards tests."*

Amy Sillitoe, a Year 9 head in the South East, also feared the impact abandoning tests will have on students' enthusiasm.

"We have problems with pupils becoming disaffected with subjects and they all tend to generally work better when they have a goal and a little pressure. *Now that SATs have been scrapped, the pupils are relieved but think nothing matters until the end of KS4. It will be hard for the teaching staff to re-engage these pupils with some motivation to do well.*"

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