

Association Survey Into League Tables and SATs Testing

During the second half of the Summer Term 2009 a questionnaire to investigate Governing Body reactions to League Tables and to SATs testing was sent out to the DAGB Representative and to the Chair of Governors at every member school.

The responses to this questionnaire included both individual governors' views as well as full Governing Body views but with a response rate of some 30%, which is very high for a postal survey, it is possible to give a significant degree of credibility to the views expressed and summarized here as being representative of the full membership.

Question 1: "League Tables: Do they serve any useful purpose or should they be scrapped?"

Some 85% of respondents stated unequivocally that League Tables should be scrapped. Of the remaining 15%, views were mixed – some felt that there *was* a need for some form of comparative measure but that League Tables, in their present form, did not represent the best form of that measure. Of the negative comments about Tables, frequent references were made to the effect that they were the result of "teaching to the tests" rather than providing a good all-round education and that they promoted a very "blinker view of a school's success". Furthermore many respondents saw the League Tables as being divisive and that they reflected more the socio-economic background of the children taking the tests than the quality of the teaching at the school.

There was a stated recognition that Contextual Value-Added would be a more useful "measure" than raw SATs and GCSE results alone but, at the same time it was felt that CVA was not a sufficiently well-developed tool to be used at this point in time.

Further comments referred to "soft" factors involved in parents making choices (or, more correctly, preferences) of schools such as, for example, the ethos of the school, its attitudes to bullying, its provision of out-of-hours facilities etc which could not easily (if at all) be incorporated into League Tables. Whilst it was suggested that some parents might find the single measure of a school as evidenced in League Tables a particularly convenient, if "blunt" instrument for making choices and that visiting a school should provide the answers to the rest of such "soft" questions, this was countered by the view that visits do not always provide all the answers and that some parents did not really know the right questions to ask in order to get the fullest picture of a school.

Question 2: "The use of school record cards has been suggested as a means of providing a measure of accountability to the local community about the quality of education provided at a school, but at this point in time their content has not as yet been defined. What do *you* think they should contain?"

Predictably the responses to this were quite diverse and some respondents felt that there was already sufficient information in the Public Domain to satisfy individuals, such as Ofsted Reports, reports to parents and parents' consultation and Open Evenings (clearly some respondents did not really comprehend the purpose of the record cards). The (potential) overlap with the current SEF was also mentioned. Other, more specific, contributions suggested:-

- What contributions the school made to the local community
- The level of pastoral care and other "soft", more qualitative, measures

- The use of the five headings of the Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda
- The strengths of different departments within the school
- Behaviour (and disciplinary measures in use)
- The extent to which the school provided an all-round education
- Opportunities for *all* pupils
- The provision of sport(s) and PE
- The provision of music and the arts (both in- and out-of-school)
- The overall ethos of the school
- The provision for the less academically able, including SEN
- SATs and GCSE results (since they do form a part – *only* – of the schools profile)
- Value-Added measures
- The breadth of the curriculum

One comment about the record card was to the effect that it enabled a school to jump through several hoops simultaneously rather than the (very one-dimensional) view provided by SATs or GCSE results alone.

Question 3: “Do you think that Key Stage 2 SATs, in their present form, should remain?”

Views here illustrated a more balanced position than those expressed in respect of League Tables. Respondents indicated in many cases that they recognised that testing was required within the system whether or not they agreed with the (current) way it is carried out.

In favour	37%
Against	63%

Question 4: “If Key Stage 2 SATs were to remain, do you think that they should be changed in some way, and, if so, how?”

The most common reference here was to the use of Teacher Assessment, 60% wanting to see it used instead of tests and 30% wanting to see an element of teacher assessment built in to the overall result awarded. The other 10% of respondents included suggestions such as:-

- Reduce the tests to just numeracy and literacy
- Replace them by a series of simple tests but used at frequent intervals during a child’s time at school.

Summary: There are clear calls for the scrapping of League Tables from members of this Association and, perhaps for, at least, a modification to Key Stage 2 SATs.



Following the completion of this survey, copies were sent to all four local MPs, to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, to the two shadow spokesmen for Children, Schools and Families and to the leaders of each of the three main political parties. Most of these have been at the least acknowledged and in one or two cases comments returned have indicated sympathy with the views expressed by our members.