

Summary of survey of parents' views of the nature and source of assessment they value, based of responses from 20 parents from Tower Hamlets, Plymouth and Devon

From notes supplied by Jean de Rijke

External assessment or more teacher input to content of curriculum and testing?

Parents value summative assessment that gives them an overview of their children's school performance. Parents particularly want to know where there are gaps and how to support their children.

Most parents appeared to favour some testing but not at the expense of learning and many see SATs and other tests as getting in the way of learning (eg by teaching to the test). 17 of the 20 parents thought that teacher assessment would be more useful than test results. 12 of the 20 said teachers should have more input into the content of learning. There were concerns that this would only work for some teachers and four parents thought that teachers need guidelines such as the National Curriculum. There were concerns that additional pressure on teachers to design curricula or more involvement with testing would be counter productive.

Out of school activities

Parents felt that children's out of school activities were important areas to be recognised. Reasons given for this included that schools are dirty stressful places and there are more pleasant environments beneficial to learning, that children engaged in voluntary learning activities learn at their own pace and that they are less bored. Most comments were concerned with the ability of outside activities to raise self-esteem, promote citizenship and broaden children's activity base.

What does testing do to help children?

Parents responded that children find out about their performance through external testing (SATs). Although 14 thought this was overall a good thing, seven of 20 expressed reservations relating to the demotivation of low achievers and the limited view of the whole child. There were concerns that testing and training for it takes up too much learning time. More than three-quarters of parents thought that teacher assessment would help more than external testing with promoting learning, and would help children's motivation and self-esteem.

Sources of information and judgements of teachers

Parents seemed to have confidence in teachers' ability to contribute not only to testing and assessment but also to the content of the curriculum. Parents generally want more time with teachers but not necessarily more testing. They do, however, want some testing, as this small survey shows, but they want it to be less focused on government aims and more customised to suit their children's need. The overall impression was that they trust and value teachers' judgment and gain most of their information from teachers, when they are available.