

## **A system of monitoring and supporting schools which is not punitive and genuinely promotes improvement**

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This paper does not focus on a critique of current policies; it concentrates on two questions:  
1) to whom, and (in each case) for what, should schools be accountable  
2) possible alternatives to current arrangements.

### Overview

*The following is the abstract of an unpublished ATL research paper on international trends in school accountability.*

England was a pioneer in autonomy with high-stakes accountability mechanisms and this led to the international trend for the state to assume the major responsibility for accountability, using inspection and pupil tests. Self-evaluation, student assessment, and teacher appraisal should form aspects of a single system – but self-evaluation is not candid when linked to high-stakes external inspection. The international trend is for inspections to result in reports which are the outcome of dialogue between inspector and school, and which include recommendations for improvement. Commonly schools are required to produce an action plan in response to the recommendations, and there may be sanctions for non-compliance. Good inspection recognises the complexity of teaching and learning.

Pupil test data is always found to be related to the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of pupils, so raw data provides no useful information about the effectiveness of a school. Data which controls for this is difficult to design and shows that few schools differ from mean effectiveness within standard error. The OECD fails to give sufficient emphasis to the impact of external factors on school performance and this is associated with inappropriate 'policy borrowing' by states from apparently successful systems.

Testing, particularly when associated with high stakes, is widely considered to be liable to negative outcomes, such as a narrow curriculum as taught, instrumental attitudes to learning, lack of learner independence. It tends to privilege more easily tested learning outcomes over other desirable but non-measurable outcomes of education. Some states use sample testing which provides national or regional data to inform policy, with school improvement dependent on other measures. The policy dilemma is to promote self-evaluation which does not carry high stakes but is rigorous.

*Most of the literature concerns accountability of schools to the national state and little to other stakeholders such as older students, parents, and the local community. Parents (as 'consumers') are seen as important in marketised and privatised systems, but there is little interrogation of their needs for information about schools.*

### School inspection

See here for some pros and cons of inspection: <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/mar/06/scrap-ofsted-pros-cons-alternatives>

How they do it in Scotland:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/about/principles/futureapproaches/tryouts.asp>

For one alternative, the following are extracts from a Demos 2013 publication: (see pp85-89)  
[https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Detoxifying\\_School\\_Accountability\\_-\\_web.pdf?1367602207](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Detoxifying_School_Accountability_-_web.pdf?1367602207)

The logic of our proposal is that [Ofsted] gives up arguing for the value of 'objective' external judgement over 'subjective' internal judgement, and starts defining a new role for itself as an improvement agency... Our proposal for multi-perspective inspection would direct [Ofsted]'s focus away from making judgements about schools to collecting data on innovative and inspiring work that is going on, and providing guidance on what works in particular contexts... The responsibility for producing reports about schools, making judgements about their qualities and defects, and providing an account of these to wider stakeholders would be transferred from Ofsted to the parents, teachers, other staff and students of a particular school, working with an external partner chosen by them from a list of accredited organisations. They would be required to produce such a report once a year, and to do so by gathering data about everyone's experience of school; working together to develop an agreed understanding of what that data was saying; and pooling their creativity to come up with a strategy for making the school an even better place in which to learn, where everybody has the best possible opportunity to learn, grow and achieve.

The validity of this sort of multi-perspective inspection would largely derive from the requirement to reconcile the perspectives of multiple participants. One group of parents experiences the leadership of the school in this way, so what is happening that leads to another group feeling differently? This is what one group of students feel about their experience of learning. What is different about this other group that sees things differently?... Ofsted (or a renamed and remodelled agency) would analyse these reports before engaging in a dialogue with schools about how the plan it has come up with might be further improved... It could help schools that seemed to be at similar stages in the development of an interesting approach to work together, or suggest a learning visit to a school that was further down the line in implementing a particular set of ideas. It might occasionally have to blow the whistle on a school that appeared not to have involved all stakeholders in the production of its report, or not to have come up with a convincing explanation of its data or plan for improvement. It could investigate if a group of teachers, students or parents were to report online that their views had been misrepresented. In some cases, there might be the need to intervene on behalf of the school community against a stubborn leader. The overall objective, however, would be to position the agency as one that was learning from and with schools, enabling them to be even more successful at what they do, rather than judging them as it does at present.

### Questions to consider

1. To whom should individual schools be accountable, and for what?
2. Do we need school inspections? If so, why? If not, how else can we achieve its benefits?
3. What role should attainment data play in inspection?
4. How should inspection be linked to school improvement?
5. Can a national agency monitor effectively over 20,000 schools, what are the alternatives?

### Pupil Test Data

NAHT: 'Sample testing at a national level would enable schools to moderate the low-stakes summative assessment, by comparing school results with the national sample results. It would also enable government to monitor national standards over a reasonable time-frame, rather than on an annual basis which is more prone to fluctuation. It could be developed across all subjects, and be administered as part of a planned cycle.'

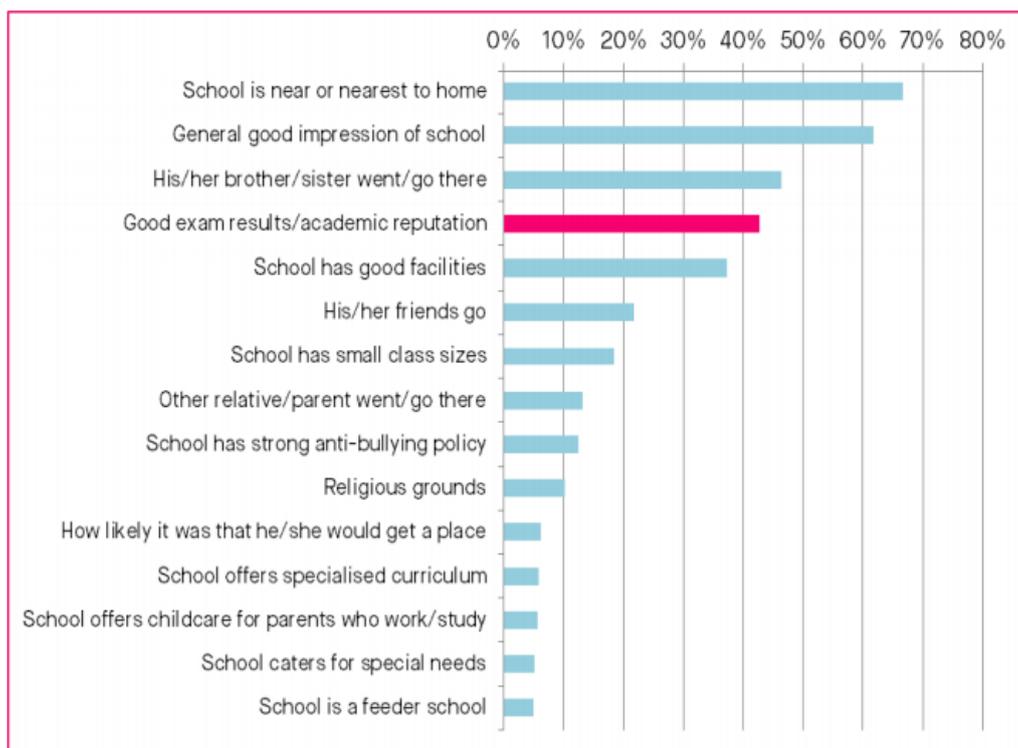
NAHT, NUT, ATL joint view:

p5, <file:///C:/Users/ATL/Desktop/Common%20Ground%20pp%20-%207103.pdf>

...teacher assessment will not be free of error. For example, research has shown that teacher assessment can produce results which are biased along ethnic lines. They must be given access to continuing professional development in teacher assessment, on an ongoing basis to address such issues. Teachers, though able to assess the national curriculum levels achieved by their pupils, are not always consistent in their own assessments or in comparison to other teachers. Moderation by other teachers, both within the school and in other schools, is therefore essential. There is a need to develop a cohort of teachers who are experts in assessment. This must be teacher-led and locally organised, but accompanied by a resource which supports national standardisation: a national bank of assessment materials from which teachers can choose to draw to check their assessments. Building teachers' expertise is vital. Teachers' growing mastery of assessment could be recognised formally through the development of a chartership or assessment champions.

DfE: The first National Reference Test (NRT), which will be taken by about 18,000 students, will be held in February and March 2017. Each year a sample of students will take the same test so it will show, over time, if there is any change in how students perform at a national level. Exam boards currently have limited evidence of how performance can change from year to year, so the test has the potential to provide valuable additional information to inform their awarding of GCSEs. The test was developed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Figure 11: Percentage of parents who consider exam results and academic reputation as one of the important factors in choosing a primary school



[http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Social-Market-FoundationPublication\\_SMF-Briefing\\_Choosing-to-succeed\\_Do-parents-pick-the-right-schools\\_160114WEB.pdf](http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Social-Market-FoundationPublication_SMF-Briefing_Choosing-to-succeed_Do-parents-pick-the-right-schools_160114WEB.pdf)

Questions to consider

1. What's the difference between measurement and assessment?
2. Do school performance tables improve schools?
3. Could teacher assessment be as accurate as tests?
4. How can schools be monitored to reflect the needs of the communities they serve?