

As the findings of Pollard *et al.*'s (1994) research reveal: "In requiring teachers to implement externally derived tests, and in imposing on them externally determined requirements for recording and reporting children's progress and achievement, standardised national assessment represented what was arguably the most novel, the most coercive and the most difficult part of the 1988 Act's provisions to implement" (p.207). During the final stage of writing up the first research report on the impact of the national curriculum at KS2 in the 50 schools (Webb, 1993), industrial action by the three main teachers' unions against the unreasonable workload generated by national curriculum assessment and testing meant that the piloting of the KS2 SATs largely collapsed. While the subsequent Dearing Review (1993) led to a review of all the national curriculum subjects and their assessment (SCAA, 1994), followed by a major slimming down of the national curriculum, in 1995 the implementation of statutory KS2 testing in the core subjects went ahead as planned. This chapter documents how, in the decade since then, national testing has had an increasingly deleterious effect on the primary curriculum, primary school pupils and their teachers. It is argued on the basis of the data presented that this has been greatly exacerbated by New Labour's commitment to target setting and performance tables based on test results.

### Targets

In May 1997, two weeks after the New Labour government took office, it set English and maths targets for the country to achieve by 2002. Targets were thus created for LEAs which in turn negotiated targets for the schools within their boundaries. In 2002, 75% of Year 6 children achieved level 4 in English for the third year running and in maths 73% achieved level 4 after a slight drop the previous year. While more children achieved the required standards, the test results fell short of the government's 2002 targets. This shortfall may have contributed to the resignation at the end of October 2002 of Estelle Morris, the then education secretary, since she had pledged to resign if the targets were not met. However, the new Year 6 targets requiring 85% of pupils to reach level 4 in English and maths in 2004 had already been set. Notwithstanding the criticisms of these targets as too demanding and putting unreasonable pressure on pupils, teachers and schools, Charles Clarke, the newly appointed education secretary, claimed, "the targets at 7, 11 and 16 are absolutely critical to everything we are about" and was unable to "imagine a situation where we would be about either removing or weakening those targets" (Ward *et al.*, 2002). The timescale for the 2004 targets was extended to 2006.

In the *Five year strategy for children and learners* the government predicts that, by 2008, "we will have reached and sustained our literacy and numeracy targets of 85 per cent of children reaching the expected level at the age of eleven; and the proportion of schools in which fewer than 65 per cent of children reach this level reduced by 40 per cent" (DfES, 2004, p.43). Furthermore it claims that "standards for pupils who have traditionally been failed by the system will be rising fastest, helping to close the social class gap". Results of the 2005 national tests showed a small increase with 79% of children reaching level 4 in English

and 75% in maths and in science. More pupils reached level 5 but there was no improvement in the proportion reaching level 4, suggesting that the 2006 targets are likely to remain unattainable. While in England the government seems inextricably wedded to summative national testing, it is going against the trend in the rest of the UK. Wales is currently phasing out their end of KS2 tests. Scotland will also be ending national testing before the age of 14 years and Northern Ireland will abolish its controversial 11-plus examination in 2008.

The pressure on schools exerted directly by the LEA and indirectly through government pronouncements not only to meet their targets but also to achieve year-on-year improvement has become unremitting. Headteachers described how they exerted pressure on teachers to improve pupil attainment in their classes, particularly in schools with lower than average test results, and teachers passed this pressure on to pupils. Most schools were found to operate one or more types of booster classes for pupils with SEN and those on the borderline of reaching level 4. However, other specific groups of pupils were also targeted for additional support in order to raise a school's attainment profile and performance table position:

*There's not a high percentage of EAL children but we are still aware that we cannot get them to level 5, even though they are second and third generation. In literacy they are getting 4s but they still have so much missing because we only have the EAL support in one day a week, which we have to pay for ourselves because we don't meet the requirement for LEA support and she has to try and work with everybody during that one day. And it's not ideal but it's better than nothing.*  
(Deputy head, 220, Oct 2004)

In response to complaints by headteachers about the adverse effects on schools and the curriculum of the unrealistic targets set for them by LEAs, in 2003 ministers told schools that they could set their own KS2 targets. Once the schools had set their targets, the LEAs were supposed to take these into account when setting their own targets. Headteachers in the 50 schools generally complained that in reality this was not happening, since they were still being pressurised into setting targets to fit in with LEA predictions. This perspective was supported by 2005 figures from the DfES revealing that more than one in four authorities in England had set targets for English, which were between 5 and 13 percentage points higher than their schools believed possible (Ward, 2004).

### Performance tables

The government decision to publish school test results as tables of school performance was an immensely contentious one and has been the subject of continual controversy. It was the one area of our research that received uniform condemnation from headteachers, even those who admitted that their school's high position in the tables had given the school prestige within the local community, increased the number of pupils and afforded them a degree of "protection" from criticism during Ofsted inspections. When, for whatever reason, a school's results went down (common reasons cited were: absenteeism, as performance tables count pupils absent from the tests as if

they were present; the arrival of several children from abroad; and a continually changing cohort from one year to the next, for example owing to parents' seasonal employment), explanations were given to parents to try to offset the resultant negative effects:

*SATs are clearly important in this school and we have quite a good track record. Last year our results were down, but we sent a letter to the parents explaining what had happened and said: "If you allow for the absentees then our SAT results are actually quite good comparable to the previous year." However, when you have got nine children away from a single subject that immediately puts a big hole in the percentages and if you allow for that big absenteeism then the results are fine. (IT coordinator, 470, Oct 2003)*

The measures introduced to determine value added between KS1 and KS2 and its effect on a school's position in the tables came in for particularly heavy criticism by headteachers. Junior school headteachers regarded the flexibility in national assessment at KS1 in infant schools as leading to Year 2 children achieving totally unrealistic levels because "there's no accountability as somebody else picks up the heartache at the end of Key Stage 2 and you have got to try and take the value added on from there". However, primary school headteachers felt that they were similarly penalised if they had a strong infant department:

*Their [the government] value-added thing in comparisons of Year 2 and Year 6 is a nonsense. It ignores the fact that you could have a very poor Key Stage 1 department and have a very strong Key Stage 2 – in which case the whole school rejoices about this wonderful value added but it doesn't tell you the story. Our problem of course is that we get children to high levels at Key Stage 1 and if they get a level 3 at Key Stage 1, which is the best they could do, and get a level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2, which is all they could do, they will get a value added of nought! So you have to get a level 2 "b" at Key Stage 1 and then a level 5 in Key Stage 2 to get a value added! So all my high fliers scored a value added of nought which is satisfactory. It doesn't make sense. (Headteacher, 391, Oct 2004)*

Headteachers were critical of the withdrawal in 2003 of the test whereby primary pupils could achieve level 6 and its replacement by extension papers for gifted and talented children that did not assign levels to their work. This had made it impossible for able children to achieve beyond level 5 and therefore constrained schools' value-added scores. One assessment coordinator described how the previous year, despite getting high test scores, the school value-added score was only average. She reported that when they questioned a DfES official about the issue:

*...the answer was, "you're making a rod for your own back, you are getting too many children with level 3 at Key Stage 1", but that's the level they are at. What do you do, depress the levels so you can get more at Key Stage 2? And we got a letter back from the DfES explaining how many marks we had to get an A [high value-added score] but it's a physical impossibility... the only way we're going to improve is if we can get those children who struggle up to a 5. (Assessment coordinator, 526, May 2005)*

While headteachers of high-attaining schools felt that they had been unfairly penalised by the use of value-added scores to adjust their performance table position, they tended to assume that, justifiably, colleagues in schools in disadvantaged areas would benefit. However, teachers in areas of social and economic deprivation with large numbers of children with SEN also considered that the value-added measures failed to recognise the pupils' achievements, and made a minimal contribution to the school's performance table position:

*The SATs results came back this week and there's so much individual achievement in there. We've got children who've got level 3s and for them to get level 3s is absolutely brilliant and there are some children that have got level 5s – fantastic – but it all gets swallowed up in the statistics and it just doesn't look as if anyone's really done anything. Even the value added doesn't always work with them because a lot of our special needs children don't make that much progress and it's the little bits of progress they make that are the great achievements but that don't show up as half a level in the statistics. I have one child who got a level 3 in science, which is just amazing for him, and I don't think anyone does the value added for science, so he's just lost in the overall picture. (Year 6 teacher, 320, July 2005)*

An examination of the tables based upon performance data in one northern LEA substantiated teachers' criticisms (Easen and Bolden, 2005). They concluded that the tables not only present "a simplistic, even potentially misleading, picture of primary schools" but also "their construction and use consume far more energy and attention than would seem warranted" (p.54). Unsurprisingly they found that the position of a school in the tables of unadjusted scores tended to reflect the background characteristics, in particular the socio-economic status. However, they also found that, while the value-added measures assisted understanding of the differences between schools, these took insufficient account of the background factors influencing pupil performance. Schools' rankings were altered only marginally by the value-added system. Reflecting the complaints by the headteachers in our sample, they found that "the value-added rankings of those schools with low unadjusted rankings are slightly increased whereas the value-added rankings of those schools with high unadjusted rankings are slightly decreased" (p.52). Interestingly, they found that only the school with the highest unadjusted score showed a dramatic change in rank – down the tables – when using the value-added system.

There are further technical problems associated with the value-added tables, such as the manner in which pupil mobility between schools within KS2 (evident in some of the 50 schools in our sample) distorts the value-added score for such schools (Goldstein, 2001). Another difficulty with tables raised by Easen and Bolden (2005) is the assumption that "the assessments are based on centrally controlled tests that are 'objective' and also reliable enough to provide acceptable criteria for comparisons" (p.53). As they point out, such an assumption is questionable given the evidence from sociological and psychological research on testing that aspects of the tests themselves are biased against those children from lower socio-economic groups whose

culture clashes with aspects of middle class culture and “school knowledge”. This point also resonated with some of our teachers’ criticisms of testing and of the use of performance tables based upon such testing:

*Some of our potential level 5s in writing didn't come up very well because the paper that they were faced with didn't bring out the best in them. It didn't tune into their values which is an important part of our teaching and learning policy. We spend all this time trying to educate the children by looking at what they are interested in and tailor making our lessons to suit them, but then all of a sudden they are faced with a paper that was about cowboys or something that they didn't know anything about. (Headteacher, 190, June 2005)*

### **The impact of national testing**

Data from the PACE project revealed that “the effect of national testing on classroom practice is profound.... The pressure from a restricted but overloaded national curriculum, combined with ‘high-stakes’ national testing, appears to be diminishing the opportunities for teachers to work in a way that enables them to ‘develop the whole child’ and address the social concerns of the wider society” (Osborn *et al.*, 2000, p.160). Likewise, teachers in our 50 schools complained of how “testing has gone far too far” resulting in primary schools being “over tested, scrutinised and squeezed” with “no allowance for your professional judgement”.

As shown by Osborn *et al.* (2000) and Galton *et al.* (2002), the standards agenda focused teachers’ attention on curriculum coverage in literacy, numeracy and science to the detriment of the rest of the primary curriculum, especially art, music and PE. This was still the situation during the fieldwork period for this project:

*It certainly focuses your teaching and it makes certain that people are covering the curriculum in English, maths and science. It's like I was saying at lunch time to Pat [the Year 5 teacher], “Please make sure you cover all that sound”, because I know it's going to crop up next year probably in the SATs paper. I don't touch it in science because it's not one of my areas – so, in that sense, it certainly has narrowed the curriculum as well. There is absolutely no doubt about that. I mean in Year 6, I do feel a great pressure – this “I cannot afford to miss a day of English or maths before the SATs are coming up”. You have to be very focused. (Deputy head, 212, June 2004)*

Preparation for the tests, which completely distorted the curriculum, was an established necessity in all 50 schools. In their final year a minority of schools began revision classes and practice tests with Year 6 in the second half of the autumn term, although the majority began coaching in the spring term prior to the tests, which take place in May:

*At that stage of this term you teach towards the tests. It is like teaching to a syllabus, the topics have to sort of cease for a while and so that is one great, massive change that has been imposed.... Basically I haven't covered everything in maths and English by the time the tests come around, so what I have to do is sit down over the Easter holidays and list the concepts that I need to do revision on before the kiddies get to the test. Throughout the rest of the year the curriculum has also changed because a lot of it is factual based. I think that it has gone that way more than ever really, just skimming across the facts that they are going to have to know. (Year 6 teacher, 144, June 2003)*

In addition to booster classes, schools made use of standardised tests and QCA optional tests for Years 3, 4 and 5 (James, 2000, estimates that 80% of schools use the latter) and offered other school-specific initiatives to support children's test preparation, such as the science homework programme set up in one small school and the after-school SATs club set up by another. Also, before the national tests, Year 6 children were unlikely to engage in activities, such as residential fieldtrips or class productions, which might disrupt their work on the core curriculum.

As one headteacher described it, in the current educational context breaking out of the "performativity" culture (Jeffrey, 2002) was almost impossible:

*At the moment anything that we are trying to do at the top end of the school is dominated by the fact that this school is going to be doing something on which it will be judged.... It frightens me because it is a huge barrier to what we want to do and everything that we are doing with the curriculum I am getting the question back: "But that is the term that we do SATs revision, that is the term we do booster classes." ...come next October the file is going to land on your desk and if you are an E or D school it reflects upon the whole school. Now whether you like it or not ... that is where the staff are coming from, and now I want to try and change that culture because it doesn't actually preach good teaching; it just preaches good SATs results. Our Year 6 teacher is an excellent teacher, a first-class practitioner, who does a marvellous job, but I know that she is totally stressed out and I want her to be fully focused on giving the children the best curriculum that she can. (Headteacher, 117, Feb 2004)*

Pressure for schools to meet their targets and demonstrate improved pupil attainment in the national tests was viewed as having a considerable negative impact on the school experience of children. The evaluation report on the 2002 tests by the QCA (Ward, 2002) gives voice to teachers' growing concern over the stress the tests cause to pupils. It also reveals how sick children were being taken to school to sit the tests because of the importance attached to Year 6 test performance by the children themselves and their parents, plus the impact of performance tables that count pupils absent from the tests as if they were present. Year 6 teachers explained that the concentration on tests was against "their better judgement" but deemed necessary to reduce the children's stress by thorough preparation, enabling them to do as well as possible for their own benefit and that of the school. Teachers said that they tried to achieve a balance between getting pupils to realise the importance of doing their best but without making them over anxious:

*My own view is that SATs are given far more prominence than they should be. I feel sorry for the children with the amount of pressure that is put on them. We are very open to them in saying that it is important to the school and the school's results are reported, but it is important to you to feel that you have done your best and you haven't let yourself down. Some parents are very pushy and so it is a case of striking the balance through saying, "this is important and you have got to work hard and do the best that you can", but not pushing so far that they are nervous wrecks by the time SATs come along. (IT coordinator, 470, Oct 2003)*

After interviewing 103 children across 9 schools about their experience of taking the tests, Pollard *et al.* (2000) concluded that while the children's comments reflected both the reassurances of teachers and parents and the pressures of their expectations, "overall, the children seemed only too aware that whilst 'trying' was worthy, 'achieving' was actually the required outcome" (p.238). This perception was reflected in our teachers' accounts of the responses of individual pupils to their test results:

*I just said to the children, "If you'd like to know your SATs results I will whisper them to you" and I told them they weren't to ask anybody else unless that person had said to them "I got such and such". So I whispered in each child's ear the results – outside the classroom so nobody else could hear – and when I came back in the classroom one lad, who had actually achieved a level 4, which was what I expected him to achieve, was crying. Nobody else had said anything to him but he just felt that level 4 wasn't good enough.... For him, that level 4 was a good result and, although I'd said so to him, his own self image couldn't let him see that. So, for children like that, and for children who do, plod on, and who still can't achieve a level 4, I do feel very sorry. (Deputy head, 212, June 2004)*

As found by Pollard *et al.* (2000) some confident, competitive, high-attaining children found the challenge of tests exhilarating but for many others, particularly lower achievers, the tests were demotivating, stressful and alienating. Teachers in the 50 schools also often commented on the inequitable nature and demotivating effect of SATs, which rewarded ability largely irrespective of effort:

*Last year we had one boy who had a statement of special educational needs for behaviour, took up an inordinate amount of time and he got three level 4s. He was bright enough to get three level 4s and it was probably a true indication of his ability, but it certainly wasn't a true indication of what he deserved to get, or his attitude or application to work whereas we had other children who worked their socks off and only got three level 3s and I think it is demoralising, you know. (Headteacher, 180, Dec 2004)*

Class teachers held an overwhelmingly negative view of SATs and would like to see them abolished. Headteachers, however, were rather more ambivalent about the desirability of SATs *per se* as opposed to their use in performance tables. As one head put it: "If we got rid of the league tables, I could live with the SATs." Most headteachers would welcome a greater role for teacher assessment, although only if supported by adequate training and moderation: "I would prefer not to have the SATs because I do think that teacher

assessment, if it was moderated, and I think that it needs to be moderated for the same reasons that I gave when talking about people cheating on SATs, I think that it would be more accurate. It would give a wider picture, and a deeper picture of what the child is actually able to do.”

Headteachers acknowledged that whatever their perspectives on the problems created by SATs, the latter had played a crucial role in driving up pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy. For this reason a few heads viewed them very positively:

*I'm not the person who thinks that SATs is a complete disaster because I think that SATs have actually achieved something. I think that whatever politicians and the general public say and feel, the standard of literacy and numeracy of children nowadays is way higher than it certainly was in my day. If a member of the general public came and sat through a literacy lesson, they would suddenly realise how much more their children know than they do, aged 11. So I think that SATs are a very positive thing because they have forced teachers to raise standards, forced teachers to be more analytical about their teaching and forced teachers to keep on track. (Headteacher, 249, June 2004)*

Government claims that rising standards in primary schools are one of its biggest educational success stories are used to justify performance measures, especially national testing. However, these claims are increasingly being challenged by research. Richards's (2005) review of the evidence “suggests that there was some rise in performance in the core subjects between 1995 and 2001 as ‘measured’ by test results but not as great as national test data (and the government) have suggested” (p.25). Tymms (2004) has examined the appropriateness of statutory national test scores as a basis for monitoring standards at the end of English primary education. He has convincingly demonstrated that they are wholly inappropriate by identifying a range of crucial flaws (eg the changing form of the national tests; that while the results refer to English and maths, the data suggest that standards have changed differently within sub-areas of these; and the likely effect of teaching to the test).

Claims that improvements in performance at KS2 will benefit youngsters' attainment at secondary school are also questionable. For example, in 1999 the proportion of children achieving the benchmark level 4 in English, maths and science rose by an average of 9 percentage points, but in 2004 the improvement in their GCSE results was much more modest. The proportion of grade C or better rose 0.3 points in English, 1.8 in maths and 1 point in science (Mansell, 2004).

### **Tracking pupil achievement**

Under the Labour government the collection and analysis of increasing amounts of assessment data, particularly performance data, by schools has been viewed as crucial to monitoring and promoting pupil achievement and in progressing towards government attainment targets. For example, the headteacher of one school of 185 pupils explained that the school had a

“fairly comprehensive regime of testing” consisting of an annual battery of performance indicators in primary schools (PIPS) tests to track children’s progress in relation to their attainment the previous year, their ability and their future potential. The school had developed a programme of formative assessment in literacy and numeracy with half-termly reading assessments, termly writing assessments and weekly mental maths assessments. These were recorded in an assessment file for each year group and “all those different issues are in different sections of the booklet, so it’s a pretty hefty booklet”. The booklet had a front section for analyses based on the data within it “to identify children who have made a lot of progress, plateaued out, etc”, in order to tailor teaching to their needs. This regime was supplemented by levelled samples of children’s work every term and teachers’ individual pupil records of objectives reached and those requiring further attention across the curriculum. These data were used for reporting to parents and setting targets for individual children, a process in which parents were encouraged to be involved:

*We have something after half term [in the autumn term] when we come back where parents and children and teachers work as trios and set targets for children which are then reported back on at the end of the year – fairly simple targets to do with reading or spelling or sometimes it is about personal development. It’s generally about just giving parents an idea of where the children are and we share that with them at that meeting. Something that PIPS does is actually give each child a percentage chance of reaching the national standard at the next stage of the SATs so we share that sort of hard data with them as well. But then later on in the year we do the formal reporting to parents with a full report against the whole national curriculum. So we have two sets of parents’ evenings or days across each year. (Headteacher, 185, Oct 2004)*

Increasingly schools are required to make comparisons between:

- the school’s results and those of other schools in the locality and nationwide
- current and past cohorts of pupils
- test results and teacher assessment or other assessment data
- pupils’ results with their own previous results.

Many schools used QCA’s optional SATs as the basis for such analyses – often administering them at the same time as the Year 6 tests in order to instil quiet throughout the school, accustom all KS2 children to test conditions and emphasise to parents the importance of their child’s attendance during “test week”. The marking of QCA tests in general was considered a very time-consuming and demanding process, requiring concentration and reflection for it to fulfil a formative as well as a summative process:

*I’ve worked it out with my class on Friday when they were saying, “Oh we’ve had tests all week”. I said, “Just a minute – work out how many answers I’ve had to mark” and in one week of testing, not counting the writing, two pieces of writing, I had 6518 answers to mark. And I said that doesn’t count adding up time and levelling – that is only physically marking that number of questions. Marking is a technique in itself that you have to teach teachers, the younger members of staff*

*how to do it. You do it your own way, but I try to encourage them to try different ways. If you've got a paper to mark, some teachers like to have the overview of one child and will mark the whole papers.... I do a page at a time and you get the ideas and you get the exemplars fixed in your mind and it's easier for me to do it that way. I note particular questions that are causing problems – the children obviously don't understand this question, I haven't taught it well. A lot of people have adapted to that method because it gives them an understanding of what they are marking and what their teaching has been like. You obviously add it up for each child and can look at individuals, but more often than not that's what works. For multiple choice questions it also helps to have all the ideas in your mind and it's easier to get that focused. (Assessment coordinator, 526, May 2005)*

School information and communications technology has now developed to the point where schools can manage and interrogate the huge amounts of performance data they have collected as a vehicle for school improvement. For example, a headteacher described how she had all the pupil records on a view-only database from the day she joined the school. Previously she had used the QCA software for analysing test data but in 2004 the school changed over to using the pupil achievement tracker – introduced by the DfES in autumn 2003 to facilitate a variety of analyses of assessment data, including value-added data. All the data had to be entered afresh by an administrative assistant but, as the head explained, once the data were entered then she could begin the process of asking questions of it:

*If I'm looking through at where the weaknesses are in particular tests, then I'll go through all the questions and sit and code them up and see how many children got a particular question wrong, what sort of question that was and whether that particular year group needs to focus next year on that sort of work. Then I look from the other point of view where all the children are listed down. I'll do them in age order for a class and see if the youngest children in a class are struggling with a particular area, whether the ethnic minority children in that class are struggling and also whether the special needs children are holding their own or whether I need to be looking at those children being educated in maybe a different year group. (Headteacher, 220, Oct 2004)*

In common with other headteachers, she considered the database and software to be very beneficial for the school. It enabled an in-depth profile of pupil performance to be built up and teachers' judgements about aspects of literacy and numeracy learning to be confirmed or challenged. It also provided evidence to substantiate information and advice given to parents. Generally headteachers carried out or led such data analysis. In larger schools the process was shared with members of the senior management team and in a minority of schools delegated to a small team led by the deputy head.

While the focus of performance data analysis was the attainment and progress of individuals and groups of pupils, and curriculum strengths and weaknesses, issues were necessarily raised about the quality of teaching. Where weaknesses were revealed, headteachers stressed that these needed to be handled sensitively and teaching support provided by subject coordinators. If

issues persisted they felt that these could be addressed through performance management. Increasingly teachers' performance was judged according to their ability to enable pupils to meet their attainment targets. For example, one headteacher explained that:

*From last years' QCA to next years' QCA, we are hoping that a child will make two thirds of a level and so they would go from a 2c to a 2a or a 3c to a 3a. We are going to try and link that to performance management by saying that teachers should therefore achieve 80% of their pupil targets in a year. (Headteacher, 440, June 2004)*

However, the head emphasised it was crucial that the pupil targets should be realistic. They would be arrived at by each teacher in cooperation with colleagues on the basis, not only of performance data, but also on the views of those teachers who previously taught the children.

### Teacher assessment

Those teachers in our sample who had been teaching since before the Education Reform Act 1988 introduced curriculum and assessment reform were in agreement that the greater knowledge of individual children's attainment derived from more formal and focused teacher assessment contributed to better planning, improved provision for children's learning and raised expectations. However, enormous amounts of teacher time and effort were expended on assessment, especially on marking work and in recording pupils' progress against lesson objectives and towards meeting their individual achievement targets.

The move from national curriculum statements of attainment (SoAs) to level descriptions (SCAA, 1994) made redundant the vast and unmanageable pupil records based on SoAs that we saw being used a decade ago. The response to this waste of teacher effort and school funds led to a rejection of the checklist approach to recording progress by the mid-90s. However, the current focus on lesson objectives, and setting and achieving individual pupil targets, has led to its widespread rebirth:

*My personal thing is with my mark book... I do a tick system where there's a tick: yes they got it; question mark: needs a little more help next time we visit it; cross: no, they didn't get it at all, needs a lot of work on that. So I have that as my daily running record of, yes, I've noticed that this group needs a bit more help and so on. (Year 5 teacher, 249, June 2004)*

Galton *et al.* (2002) found that "on average teachers are spending a day per week, in total, on some form of assessment and some of this activity occupies classtime" (p.5). They suggest that this increase in time spent on assessment from the three hours a week reported in Campbell and Neill's (1994) study is likely to be a major factor in explaining "the increase in overall workload from around 44 hours a week, prior to the introduction of the national curriculum, and the present estimate of around 55 hours (p.31). Galton *et al.* conclude that not only do assessment activities generate considerable amounts of paperwork

but “more importantly, they call into question the teacher’s professional competence in managing their pupils learning” and “not feeling in control is a major cause of stress” (p.7). Notwithstanding the amount of time spent on it, forms of teacher assessment backed up by records provided information on the levels at which children were working in the core subjects and justification for pupil targets, and were thus regarded by many teachers as a form of security if questioned about their practice by headteachers, LEA inspectors or Ofsted.

The work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam of King’s College, London and the Assessment Reform Group (eg ARG, 2002) has been hugely influential in convincing policymakers of the value of formative assessment in improving pupil performance. For example in February 2005 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published its own study of formative assessment in eight countries. In England, through its primary strategy and focus on personalised learning, the DfES (2003a) is encouraging formative assessment or assessment for learning (AfL), which promotes the use of assessment evidence to tailor teaching to the needs of individual pupils and to engage pupils in evaluating and developing their own learning.

Headteachers stressed that regular class tests in literacy and numeracy were being used together with the interrogation of performance data from QCA or other tests to diagnose and support the needs of individual pupils. Staff meetings on determining and moderating the allocation of levels to pupils’ work and reviews of marking policies had also provided opportunities to discuss the quality and impact of teacher oral and written feedback on pupils’ work. While, as shown in chapters 2 and 7, primary teachers now routinely share learning objectives with pupils and often involve pupils in discussion about the criteria that will be used to assess their work, they generally do not call such processes AfL or view them as formative assessment.

AfL is only one of the plethora of current government initiatives which all compete with one another for schools’ attention. This is probably the reason why, when asked about their assessment practices, teachers in only six schools mentioned AfL. For example, one small school, as a result of the LEA promoting AfL, cooperated with schools in the cluster to which it belonged to fund training and materials from a private consultant. As a result, the children in the school were set specific targets to help raise their attainment and each piece of work was marked in relation to progress on those targets. The children also evaluated their progress by ticking statements relating to “how do I know if I am meeting my target”. However, the contribution to children’s learning from such an approach appeared limited by the fact that the use of language in the children’s records was taken straight from the NLS, NNS and QCA documentation. Teachers in one school were in the process of producing individual “pupil friendly” learner diaries where objectives and targets had been rewritten. Teachers were also concerned that there was insufficient time for them to discuss progress on their targets with individual pupils, to write more than minimal comments on the work and to discuss work marked at home.

Using AfL to increase pupil involvement in working towards targets and enabling pupils to recognise the steps in their learning leading towards the achievement of those targets, was regarded as a new dimension in teacher assessment. However, AfL was viewed essentially as formalising past practice in relation to differentiating work for individuals and groups by having it all written down:

*I mean to my mind, that's the job of the teacher to do that [differentiate tasks] and we have always done it I think, but not on the formalised level of "this is your individual learning plan for this individual child" ... it helps to see where they've achieved targets – to have a target book or something like that is probably going to be essential and it will mean more work because you are having to write it down for every child. Formally writing it makes a record of it, but you've still got to talk to the child and make sure they understand, whereas in the past we've tended to talk to the children without putting it down, so it is more work. (Assessment coordinator, 526, May, 2005)*

Those teachers engaging with AfL viewed it as likely to “focus teachers more on the level descriptors, what level children are working at and make them realise exactly where to move children onto next”. However, one headteacher, who had allocated two school training days to AfL, viewed it as an opportunity to broaden children’s experiences and consider the wider aspects of the curriculum in addition to the intellectual:

*...things like how they are teaching the whole child rather than just the academic side of the child. How are we building success for everybody? How are we creating the right environment for learning? It is about the broad spectrum rather than just looking at individual subjects and SAT results which I think is so much more important. Really we aim here for our children to leave with self-confidence and the ability to think that they can succeed in what they do. (Headteacher, 190, June 2005)*

## Conclusion

KS2 teachers, particularly those teaching Year 6 children, strongly resented the dominance of the national testing system and associated target-setting culture. It was felt that it unbalanced the curriculum, created stress and anxiety for pupils and generated enormous amounts of additional work for teachers. Headteachers, while more ambivalent about the national testing regime because of its perceived impact on raising standards of pupil attainment, were highly critical of performance tables and of the technical problems associated with the value-added version of these tables. They argued that such tables had a negative effect on the school curriculum and pupils’ experience of school. The tables were also perceived as being profoundly de-motivating for teachers: firstly, a good prior performance at KS1 resulted in even the highest performance at KS2 meaning that a better than average value-added score was not possible; and, secondly, the achievements and progress of special needs children were not adequately recognised.