

19 July 2016

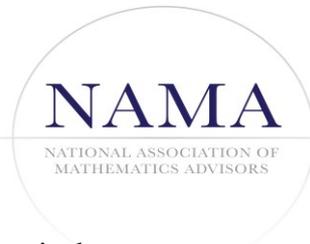
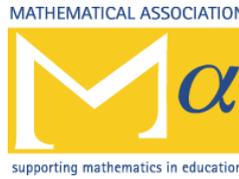
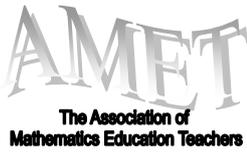
Dear Justine Greening

I am writing on behalf of MMSA¹ to welcome you to your new role and to alert you to an ongoing serious concern about the proposed Year 7 progress check in mathematics to be taken by all learners who fail to achieve the ‘expected standard’ at the end of Key Stage 2, early in their secondary education. We appreciate the concern for progress that underlies this proposal, but feel there are unintended and likely highly significant associated costs to both learning and attitudes. We are particularly alarmed that the new ‘expected’ standard has been set so that this year 30% of children entering secondary school this September are labelled as failures. This is an increase of 130% (17 percentage points) compared with 2015. We were told that the new standard would be consistent with level 4b and in 2015 77% achieved that standard. It is remarkable that a further 7% of the population have been deemed failures this year. We note that government has put in place guarantees that the new grading of GCSEs in summer 2017 will ensure that the proportions achieving grade 4 and above, and grade 7 and above, will be the same as those who currently get grade C and grade A respectively.

The transition to secondary education is challenging for young people as they move to new, larger schools with significant organisational differences. The early months of secondary school should be a time when all learners experience a renewed confidence, inclination and ability to engage with mathematics. Those who have failed to meet the expected standard in Key Stage 2 need expert teaching that helps to build their confidence and mathematical understanding, something that takes time to achieve. Many such young people feel that they have ‘failed’ in mathematics and this proposal risks them ‘failing’ yet again.

A Year 7 ‘progress check’ will distort learners’ early secondary mathematics experience, as teachers will feel pressured, as Year 6 teachers do, to ‘teach to the test’. Ofsted (2012) is clear that such teaching leads to superficial learning rather than building deep foundations that secure future progress. If learners are to make significant progress with the fundamentals of mathematics and begin to access the Key Stage 3 curriculum, they should not be subject to external tests at this stage. It is not realistic to expect a new secondary school to be able to

¹ MMSA (the Meeting of Mathematics Subject Associations) is a collaboration of the classroom-facing professional associations focused on mathematics education in this country: Association of Mathematics Education Teachers (AMET), Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM), National Association of Mathematics Advisers (NAMA), National Association for Numeracy and Mathematics in Colleges (NANAMIC) and The Mathematical Association (MA).



facilitate a deep-seated peer-comparable progression in mathematical competence over three months in a new school, when primary schools that know the children well have been unable to achieve that in six years.

Teachers are in the best position to design a curriculum that can secure positive dispositions and engagement with mathematics from all learners as they enter secondary school. Through high expectations and monitoring progress, they can optimise long-term learning. We urge reconsideration of the proposed Year 7 'progress check'. We raised this concern with your predecessor and were led to believe there would be a consultation about the proposed check, but we have heard nothing about this. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with you.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sue Pope
MMSA Hon Sec