



10 June 2016

Dear Nicky Morgan

I am writing on behalf of MMSA¹ to express concerns about the proposed Year 7 progress check 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.

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 facilitate a deep-seated peer-comparable progression in mathematical competence over three months in a new school; when primary schools, who 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 would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with you.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sue Pope
MMSA Hon Sec

cc. Education Guardian, Times Educational Supplement, Telegraph, Times

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).