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Convener Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament
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Dear Convener

SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS

Please find attached a joint letter from the Scottish Government and the Association of Directors of Education on the Scottish National Standardised Assessments which was issued yesterday.

Committee members may wish to be aware of this joint letter in advance of the statement I will be making to Parliament on this issue tomorrow afternoon.

JOHN SWINNEY





Directors of Education

We thought it would be useful to issue a joint letter confirming the shared position of the Scottish Government and the Association of Directors of Education on the Scottish National Standardised Assessments.

A key principle of Scotland's education system is that assessment is for learning. Assessment allows teachers to understand children and young people's progress and to plan the next phase of their learning and teaching. Assessment is, therefore, a key tool to inform teachers' professional judgment of the needs of the children and young people they are teaching.

The SNSAs should be seen in this context. They provide teachers with information about the children and young people they are teaching which, along with the range of other evidence available to them, will help them to consider the next steps for learning. Almost all local authorities in Scotland have been making use of some form of standardised assessment for a number of years; the SNSA now ensure that a consistent approach is being taken across Scotland.

The Scottish Government and the Association of Directors of Education, therefore, see the assessments as an integral part of everyday learning for children and young people in P1, P4, P7 and S3, delivered as part of the education authority's duty to provide education.

However, the SNSAs, in common with virtually all aspects of the Scottish curriculum and its delivery, are not provided for in legislation. This means that they cannot be seen as compulsory, but also that there cannot be a legal right for parents to withdraw their children from the assessments, or indeed any other part of the school curriculum (with the exception of some parts of religious observance and instruction).

In practice, however, should any parents or carers have any particular concerns about their child's participation in the SNSAs, they should discuss this with their school with a view to reaching agreement on whether the child will undertake the assessments.

The Scottish Government published its User Review of the first year of the SNSAs on 28 August: <https://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781787811201>. Following that Review, enhancements will be made to the SNSAs for 2018/19 to improve the way that children and young people are assessed, to provide a better experience for younger pupils and to provide more advice to teachers. This will help ensure that SNSAs continue to make a positive contribution to learning and teaching in Scotland.

We hope this letter is useful in informing your discussions with Headteachers in relation to SNSAs.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Bruce'.

ANDY BRUCE
Deputy Director, Learning Directorate
Scottish Government

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maureen McKenna'.

MAUREEN MCKENNA
President, ADES