



St Julian's C of E Primary School

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To All Year 6 Parents and Carers

Dear Parents/Carers,

Many of you will have been following the press and media coverage of the National Association of Head Teachers' ballot and subsequent decision to boycott the 2010 End of Key Stage 2 Statutory Assessments (or, as we know them, SATs).

In accordance with this majority ballot, I will not be conducting the 2010 SATs this year at St Julian's. However, I am keen to assure you that your children will be tested next week and the results will be used alongside Teacher Assessment to make a fair and accurate judgement of your child's progress. Although the papers for 2010 will not be administered, I have decided that the children have prepared for the tests and it would be wrong for them not to have that experience. My colleagues and I are not in any way against testing per se, indeed I consider it to be a vital life skill to learn to manage examinations. Therefore, the children will sit all the papers at the appropriate time and under similar conditions as they would have done if the SATs had gone ahead as "normal". The difference is only that they will not be using the 2010 papers and will be sitting a set of past papers that we have not used in their preparations this year.

The results of this examination process for your child/children will be combined with the Teacher Assessments, which give a more sophisticated and accurate result, and will be reported to both your child/children and to you. Teacher Assessments and test results will be reported separately. The data will also be used with governors and staff in the rigorous processes of tracking and monitoring, as normal.

The big difference is that no data will go off to the government to contribute to the construction of league tables.

I am taking this action solely in the interests of the children. Please be reassured that this action is not being taken in pursuit of conditions of service or pay or any similar issue. This boycott is in defence of children or I would not be taking the action I am.

My colleagues and I, have been dismayed by the inappropriate use of submitted data for many years and the way that it serves to whip up levels of emotion and places pressures on children that are very unhelpful and which generates data (not particularly accurate data incidentally) that can serve to mislead parents and confuse and potentially distress and de-motivate children. Years of promises and negotiations have all served to make only minimal changes and this year this action has been taken as a reluctant last step to try to change a long-standing state of affairs which many professionals and educationists agree is wrong.

I repeat (hopefully not to bore you but because I feel so strongly about this) I am not against testing or assessment or exams; I consider these to be vital tools in our professional toolbox and key experiences for children. I am against the construction of comparative league tables and the resulting pressure that this exerts on children, schools and families.

I sending this additional information to Year 6 parents/carers only as I do not want to bombard everyone with masses of print, but please come and see me if you wish to discuss this matter further and be assured it is and will always be the children's best interests that are central to the decisions I take.

How will the tests this year be marked?

“Normally” the papers are collected and taken away for external marking. This will not happen this year. The papers will be internally marked and moderated with at least one other school to ensure robust and fair marking takes place. We are fortunate in having experienced staff on our team and I assure you that the marking will be at least as accurate as external marking, which is often flawed with some research citing high percentages of error in typical marking processes. It is these moderated results that will be shared with you.

Will this affect secondary transfer?

A wide range of information will be passed to secondary schools this year to assist our colleagues in making as smooth a transition as possible for the children to their next school.

We will hold the usual meetings with representatives from the vast majority of the secondary schools to which our children are transferring. These conversations “place” the children in a far more holistic and accurate way than a simple number ever can.

The data from the tests, as well as the teacher assessments, will be passed on to secondary schools. The local secondary schools have a group called BASCL (this is important in making sense of the quote below). As there are so few secondary schools in B&NES, it is usual for all secondary headteachers to be present. At the meeting on 18th March all but one secondary headteacher colleague was present when the issues were presented surrounding the possible (at that stage) boycott and I am quoting from the minutes below. It was not requested that a motion be taken, however, it was the response of secondary colleagues to do so.

“BASCL supports primary colleagues in the action they are taking regarding KS2 SATs; BASCL supports the credibility and reliability of KS2 teacher assessments, and BASCL supports the principle of taking action against the misuse of assessment data. The motion was passed unanimously.”

How will my children learn about this?

I have already spoken to the children about the tests this year. It may well be that you want to discuss this with them in what ever way you wish, which is, of course, a matter for you.

I will be explaining to the children that it is my decision not to sit this year’s papers because I feel that it is not helpful to use the numbers to compare with other schools. I will make it clear to the children that they will experience exactly the same tests as they would have done and that they really should not notice any difference.

I will also explain to them that the tests are still important and an opportunity to show what wonderful things you can do and that they (the children) and you (their parents) will be told exactly how they got on. I will also explain that the secondary schools will receive all the information they need to help them to be ready to welcome new children in September.

Thank you for reading this necessarily long and detailed letter and I repeat that, should you wish to speak with me about this matter, I will do all I can to make myself available to you; simply call the office or drop in to make an appointment. From your children’s point of view, the only difference this year will be that they will sit a different paper than that which the government intended, and they will not be part of national data.

Yours faithfully,

Jane Gascoigne
Headteacher

