Dear ……

According to the Times Educational Supplement, the Scottish government is about to spend £17 million on ‘phase two’ of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments in literacy and numeracy (<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/scottish-standardised-tests-cost-ps17m-over-5-years>)

When the SNSA was first suggested, many national organisations (including the EIS, Children in Scotland, Upstart Scotland and the parent-teacher organisation Connect) campaigned against using these assessments in Primary 1 (see <https://upstart.scot/play-not-tests-p1-document/>) and in a parliamentary debate on the P1 tests, the opposition parties provided many cogent reasons why they should be scrapped. The Scottish government’s main argument was that the OECD had advised they collect more data and, even though they lost the debate, they went ahead with the SNSA. Since then, OECD representatives have questioned the usefulness of the SNSA (especially in P1) and suggested Scotland return to its previous assessment method.

In the circumstances, there seems no good reason to continue spending money on these highly dubious assessments. But, especially in the case of Primary 1, there are now even more reasons to scrap the SNSA. Even before COVID, Scotland was struggling to deal with a mental health crisis among children and young people. Research shows that the social/emotional effects of COVID restrictions have exacerbated this, and there is evidence that it’s been particularly harmful for our youngest children (<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/nicola-sturgeons-advisers-warn-damage-25833488> ).

P1 children have lived almost half their lives under pandemic restrictions – they've missed out on so much. It's therefore urgent that teachers and practitioners working with the 3-7 age range concentrate on children's overall healthy development and well-being, not on coaching them for literacy and numeracy tests. Yet senior management teams (urged on by LA officials) insist on formal group teaching of the three Rs in P1, based on the age-related benchmarks that came out with the SNSA.

It seems that policy-makers at all levels simply don't understand about early child development and the damage a too-early focus on the 3Rs can do to many children's social/emotional development and disposition to learn. In fact, it is actually driving the attainment gap the Scottish government claim to be trying to address with the SNSA.

Please do all you can to urge the Scottish government to scrap the P1 SNSA. Five-year-old children need to learn through PLAY, NOT TESTS.

Yours sincerely