

Parents back threatened Sats boycott

Parents' groups support teachers who argue that the tests are not in the interests of children or schools

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The final year of primary school becomes all about the tests, say teachers. Photograph: Graham Turner

Parents today came out in support of a threatened teachers' boycott of primary school tests this summer.

The 300,000 teachers who are members of the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers will vote later this year on whether to boycott Sats

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/sats>> , the English and maths tests in English sat by 600,000 10- and 11-year-olds in May.

The teachers want ministers to abolish the tests because they are used to compile "meaningless" school league tables. The tables unfairly stigmatise schools <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/schools>> with the most challenging pupils, and turn children's last year of primary school into a repetitive drill for the tests, they argue.

A boycott would coincide with the general election and be a major embarrassment for the government. Last year, Gordon Brown made a personal appeal to teachers not to boycott the tests. Pupils would still attend school if a boycott went ahead, but would not be entered for the tests.

Now parents groups have defended the idea of a boycott and said they trusted teachers to know more about education than the government.

Justine Roberts, the managing director of the popular website Mumsnet <<http://www.mumsnet.com/>> , said: "Parents are broadly supportive of a boycott. We very possibly trust that the teachers know more what is best for children than the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) does.

"Sats are generally not overly popular. They are supposed to test schools, but in effect kids know that they are being tested. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that in the weeks running up to the tests, school work becomes one-dimensional and only about the Sats. That is not necessarily the best thing for children."

Margaret Morrissey, of the campaigning group Parents Outloud <<http://www.parentsoutloud.com/>> , said: "I wish every teacher would boycott the tests – that way we wouldn't have league tables and most parents would be happier.

"Sats make the curriculum so rigid and put incredible pressures on pupils and teachers. It stops children getting a broad education in their last year of primary school."

But the DCSF said a poll of 3,000 parents <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2009_0071> in April last year had shown the majority were in favour of Sats.

The schools minister, Vernon Coaker, said: "I am very disappointed that the NAHT and NUT think a boycott is in children's best interests.

"It's time to challenge the myth that children spend their entire primary school career preparing for the tests – the fact is that from this year, children will do just two externally marked tests before they are 14.

"We've made it repeatedly clear that drilling with practice test papers is wrong. The best schools show that excellent teaching <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/teaching>> throughout the year is the best preparation for test."

The schools secretary, Ed Balls, has announced plans to publish teacher assessment scores alongside Sats results.

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