

New study indicates children and parents want science assessment for 11-year-olds

September 21 2010

At a time when new transfer arrangements mean children in Northern Ireland will no longer be formally assessed in science at age 11, researchers at Queen's University have found overwhelming support for science assessment in primary schools in England and Wales.

The study, which was conducted by researchers at Queen's School of Education on behalf of the Wellcome Trust, is the first study to look at the attitudes and concerns of children and parents on the way science is assessed in primary schools in England and Wales.

It is hoped the findings will be used to inform the debate about the best way to conduct assessments in science and around statutory national curriculum testing, or SATs, in other subjects. SATs in England and Wales have been shrouded in controversy, and have been accused of driving a 'teach to test' culture in schools to the detriment of pupils' enjoyment. In 2009, it was announced that science SATs in primary schools in England and Wales were to be scrapped.

Dr Colette Murphy, who led the study, believes it has clear implications for the ongoing transfer debate in Northern Ireland. Under the new transfer arrangements, 11 year olds here will no longer be formally assessed in science.

Dr Murphy said: "This report couldn't have come at a better time. Adults may have the responsibility of making the decisions, but it is the children who live with the consequences.

"As the debate continues as to the best way to assess 11 year olds in Northern Ireland, it is vital that we give children the opportunity to express their views and listen to their responses. We have to make sure that children's voices are taken into consideration by the policy makers who decide their future. By including the children's perspective, we can make better decisions regarding the way children are assessed.

"In relation to [Northern Ireland](#), the study suggests that formal assessment of science in [primary school](#), although not purely by pen-and-paper tests in which children recall facts, should be an important part of primary children's education so that children can be better prepared to become active and informed citizens."

Around 1000 school children in England and Wales took part in the survey, which was designed with the involvement of children themselves in collaboration with researchers from Queen's. Groups of children also helped analyse and interpret the results, helping the researchers to get to grips with the issues surrounding this subject from the child's perspective.

According to the findings, the vast majority of children surveyed found science assessment useful and liked to know how well they were performing. Most preferred the use of end-of-topic testing, however, and investigations to assess their performance, rather than SATs testing.

When asked how assessment could be improved in schools, the children suggested that more variety in the way they are tested, with a greater emphasis on investigative work, would put the fun back into the subject and help them to learn more. Some also suggested that children should be given choice in the type and timing of their science assessment.

Professor Derek Bell, Head of Education at the Wellcome Trust, emphasised: "What is striking about this report is not that younger

children like science, but that they value assessment and the importance of feedback in helping them with their learning. We need to respect these views and find ways to nurture their natural curiosity whilst helping them, and their parents, to understand how well they are performing. As we have seen from other reports, an undue focus on testing and grades too often kills off children's enthusiasm for the subject."

The research was carried out by Dr Colette Murphy, Professor Laura Lundy, Ms Lesley McEvoy and Dr Karen Kerr. All four are members of the Queen's University interdisciplinary Research Forum for the Child, which aims to promote high quality, interdisciplinary research that provides a better understanding of the issues that affect [children](#) and young people, in order to improve their life chances and experiences.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

Citation: New study indicates children and parents want science assessment for 11-year-olds (2010, September 21) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-children-parents-science-year-olds.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.