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**Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP**  
Secretary of State

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Dear All

Thank you for your letter of 23 May about primary assessment.

I know that the reforms to primary assessment have represented a significant change for schools this year. I acknowledge that this has not been an easy change, but I strongly believe it to be a necessary one. Our reforms have seen standards rise sharply over the past five years, but the fact remains that too many pupils leave primary schools not having reached a standard which enables them to go on to succeed in secondary school. We share an ambition to give every child in this country the chance to benefit from an excellent education. This means making sure they start secondary school with strong literacy and numeracy skills and, ultimately, I believe the new primary assessment system will help achieve exactly that.

We have worked closely with the profession in introducing these reforms and supporting teachers to adjust to the new system. We have provided appropriate support and guidance in advance of and throughout the changes this year. Where concerns have been raised, we have responded with clarification to guide teachers through the new arrangements.

We recognise that schools are adjusting to a new national curriculum and more challenging standards. It is important to note that the focus remains on teaching the core knowledge set out in the national curriculum, which was published in 2013 and which maintained schools have been teaching since 2014. The new assessments have been designed, in consultation with teachers and curriculum experts, to produce nationally comparable attainment data with increased reliability in place of levels.

Publishing data for 2016 is essential to make school performance clear to parents. In addition to this, when a school falls below the floor standard, this transparency allows Ofsted to intervene swiftly by inspecting that school earlier.

As you know, we have been clear that those who work with schools need to understand the transitional nature of primary assessment this year. The Minister of State for Schools wrote recently to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector asking that he ensures all his inspectors are aware of the changes to primary assessment. Ofsted inspectors will consider the 2016 national averages when considering individual schools' data. Regional Schools Commissioners are also aware of the changes this year. The Schools Causing Concern guidance clarifies the range of factors they should consider in determining action to take when a school is in scope for intervention.

We have also been clear that the more challenging expected standard will not result in significantly more schools falling below the floor standard overall this year. Schools will be judged on their pupils' progress as well as their attainment, and a school that meets the progress standard is above the floor standard. Last year only 5 per cent of schools were beneath the floor, I have committed that in 2016 no more than 6 per cent of primary schools will be below the floor standard.

Turning to your second point regarding the 'secure fit' approach to teacher assessment, we have been clear that the new frameworks are interim so that we can evaluate them and give proper consideration to teachers' views before confirming arrangements for the future.

The interim frameworks were designed, through discussion with teachers, to measure the extent to which pupils have a secure grounding in the core knowledge of the national curriculum. This encourages consolidation over pace and avoids children moving on with potentially significant gaps in their education, as could be the case under the 'best fit' levels system. It also helps teachers identify those who need more support, which benefits all pupils because teachers can better respond to their needs if they know accurately what they can and cannot do. It should be noted that teacher assessments in primary school are not the same as examinations; their purpose is to establish what stage a pupil is at in their education based on classroom work and, along with tests, to understand performance at school level.

Thank you, once again, for writing on this important matter. I would like to restate my continued commitment to listen to and work closely with teachers, head teachers and their union representatives to create stability for future years. I look forward to continuing to work with you to that end.

Yours sincerely  
Nicky

RT HON NICKY MORGAN MP