Next year I am due to take Key Stage 2 SATs tests but I hope the government sees sense before then and abolishes them, like they did in secondary schools. If SATs are bad for 14 year olds, why is it OK to force seven and 11 year olds to do them?

Benthal is a very good school but every year our teachers are under pressure to drop everything else to prepare Year 6 pupils for SATs. They are frightened our school will drop down the league table and be seen as failing. But schools are not like football teams or supermarkets and children should not be weighed and measured like vegetables.

My big brother Danny told me he didn’t do any history or geography at all when he was in Year 6. I don’t want this to happen to me or my friends.

I heard on the news recently that children in the UK are among the unhappiest in the world. They are also among the most tested in the world. Is this a coincidence? I don’t think so.

SATs don’t tell teachers anything they don’t know and they don’t tell parents anything teachers can’t tell them much better. Assessment should be about helping pupils to learn, not helping the government to produce league tables which force schools to compete with one another like businesses.

I am always hearing politicians going on about bad behaviour in schools. Have they ever thought what causes it? Could it have anything to do with children being labelled as failures by SATs tests? Why bother working hard and behaving well if you are told you are dumb when you are 11 years old?

Have they ever thought how boring lessons can be because of SATs and how this can lead to children messing about? Reading stories and poems and using your imagination can be fun. Having to answer endless questions about little bits of them does my head in.

I’m lucky because my mum and dad have both been to university and know how to help me with my learning. They encourage me and tell me not to worry about SATs because I don’t need them to know how well I’m doing. There are also quiet places in my house for me to read and do my homework.

Lots of kids don’t have the advantages I’ve got. They’re the ones who often don’t do so well in SATs. They usually get put in bottom sets in secondary school and give up on education.

SATs are stressful and unfair. All they are good for is league tables with schools in better-off areas at the top. I’m glad that teachers and headteachers have decided to boycott SATs next year if the government doesn’t get real and get rid of them.

No more useless SATs!
A message to teachers from NUT general secretary
Christine Blower

Our joint lobby of Parliament with the NAHT in April was another example of the strength of feeling among children, teachers, parents and governors against SATs and the damage they cause to our country’s children.

At a packed pre-lobby meeting, NAHT general secretary Mick Brookes asked the question that will be crucial for all teachers in England over the coming year: “Do we allow something that’s poor practice to continue or do we stand up and be counted?”

The unanimous vote to boycott SATs at NUT conference, together with the justifiable anger felt by the many teachers I’ve spoken to since, is a clear indication that teachers believe enough is enough and are more than ready to stand up and be counted in the battle for a quality education for our children.

We don’t accept our sensible position on assessment being stereotyped by the Secretary of State and some Labour MPs. We will continue to get the message across to the majority of the public who support us that we want an end of SATs because they are bad for children, bad for teachers and bad for the education service.

We are not against assessment. What we want is assessment that is meaningful, that is more accurate and that focuses on what children can do, rather than stigmatising them as failures for the things they can’t do.

In the House of Commons on 28 April, education experts joined with parents, governors and teachers to put our case to MPs. Writer and academic Warwick Mansell spoke for all when he said: “Children deserve better, and teachers are to be applauded if they feel the need to take a stand…”

The most moving speech of the day came from Conor Muller (see opposite), who reminded everyone that children in the UK (and particularly in England) are among the most tested in the world and the unhappiest in the world.

Conor told us all his classmates were behind his decision to speak out on SATs. The message is clear. The government should be listening to children and their parents and teachers. It’s time to give children the education they deserve.

Christine Blower and Mick Brookes addressed a packed pre-lobby briefing.

‘Do we allow something that’s poor practice to continue or do we stand up and be counted?’

Why are the NUT and NAHT campaigning against SATs?

Because:
• They are stressful for children, parents and teachers.
• They are an unreliable way of assessing pupils’ progress.
• There is an unacceptably high level of inaccuracy in test results – teacher assessment has been proved to be more reliable.
• They can narrow what is taught at primary school, squeezing out time for creative subjects and sports.
• They encourage ‘teaching to the test’.
• They undermine the morale of too many children.
• Unreliable data is used to unfairly judge school performance, putting colleagues’ jobs at risk.
• The rest of the UK does not have SATs. We don’t believe that England needs them.
Why does the government want to keep SATs and why do the NAHT and NUT want to end them?

The government says we need SATs to give parents, teachers and the public the information they need about the progress of children and primary schools.

The NUT and NAHT believe parents can get much better information from their child's teacher, as SATs do not assess children's achievement across the whole curriculum.

Secondary schools also know this, which is why they do not trust the Key Stage 2 test results and often retest children when they enter Year 7.

Key Stage 2 tests are used to produce league tables of schools. The NUT and NAHT believe these league tables of test data are misleading. Many good schools are in the bottom half of these tables because, for example, they are serving disadvantaged communities.

What damage do SATs do to schools, teachers and school leaders?

Research has shown that up to 25 per cent of pupils' results may be incorrect by one level. The current system is therefore demonstrably inaccurate. It also imposes increased workload in the relentless preparation for the tests, and the subsequent checking and re-marking.

So what's the alternative to SATs?

The NUT and NAHT believe that assessment at Key Stages 1 and 2 should be based on teacher assessment, moderated to make sure standards of assessment are the same within and between schools. There should also be a national sampling test system, as at Key Stage 3, to provide information about national standards in English, mathematics and science so that trends in performance can be monitored over time.

Is it true that the NUT and NAHT are going on strike over SATs?

No! The NUT and NAHT are going to ask their members if they wish to boycott SATs in 2010. This would mean that NUT and NAHT members would refuse to prepare pupils for and administer Key Stage 1 and 2 National Curriculum tests, leaving them free to teach a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the real learning needs of children.

Is boycotting SATs illegal?

If the NUT and NAHT ballot to take action, it will be on the basis of a lawful trade dispute, and therefore definitely not illegal.

Will abolishing SATs increase my workload?

Both the NUT and NAHT are committed to reducing workload for teachers and headteachers, not increasing it. Replacing SATs by Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) would not be acceptable. APP is voluntary, not statutory (see page 8). Neither union will sanction an alternative form of assessment that would increase workload.

What can I do?

You can help the campaign by:

- Voting “yes” if we are forced to ballot.
- Raising the profile of the campaign with everyone in your staffroom.
- Asking your NUT and NAHT school representatives to organise a joint meeting in school to explain why the two unions are campaigning against SATs, and inviting all teachers in your school to attend.
- Asking parents and staff to sign our petition against SATs, which you can get from your school representative or download from the NUT and NAHT websites.
- Visiting or writing to your MP asking them to support the campaign and sign Early Day Motion 685 entitled ‘Assessment and Testing in Schools’. The NUT and NAHT websites have materials to help you do this.

For more information go to www.teachers.org.uk.