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27th June, 2021

**Dear Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills,**

I realise you are extremely busy dealing with issues relating to secondary school education, but hope you can spare a few minutes to answer my enquiry.

In the wake of the OECD Review of *CfE*, the [Times reported](would%20implement%20the%20OECD%20recommendations%20but%20that%20the%20advice%20to%20return%20to%20sample-based%20testing%20did%20not%20amount%20to%20a%20call%20to%20scrap%20standardised%20assessment.%20%E2%80%9CWith%20the%20aspects%20around%20the%20SNSA%2C%20this%20was%20not%20a%20specific%20recommendation%20that%20came%20through%20within%20the%20OECD%20report%20although%20it%20was%20mentioned%2C%E2%80%9D%20she%20said.%20%E2%80%9CThe%20SNSAs%20are%20a%20key%20element%20of%20our%20improvement%20agenda.%E2%80%9D) you as saying that you would implement the OECD recommendations but that the advice to return to sample-based testing did not amount to a call to scrap standardised assessment: “With the aspects around the SNSA, this was not a specific recommendation that came through within the OECD report although it was mentioned…The SNSAs are a key element of our improvement agenda.” However, today the [Sunday Times reported](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/standardised-tests-may-be-abolished-for-all-primaries-70vdpg2j7) that ‘standardised testing for all of Scotland’s primary schoolchildren could be abolished under proposals being considered by ministers’.

It seems there is an ongoing debate about the SNSAs so, as Chair of the Upstart Scotland campaign, which organised the alliance opposed to standardised assessment of literacy and numeracy in Primary 1, my question is: **are you aware of the huge body of evidence that this type of assessment at age five is not only damaging to all children’s long-term health and well-being, but also likely to widen – rather than narrow – the poverty-related attainment gap?**

I am just about to put a copy of this letter in the post, along with two books which detail the evidence – *Upstart* (2015) and the second edition of *Play is the Way* (2021).

A copy of the first edition of *Play is the Way* was posted to you in December 2020 so I hope you had time to look at it. It has been extremely well-received by early years experts and professionals from a wide range of disciplines (see the reviews on [www.upstart.scot/play-is-the-way/](http://www.upstart.scot/play-is-the-way/)) and Chapter 13 may be of particular interest.

Please could you let me know that your eventual decision regarding the P1 SNSA will be informed by this evidence?

With very best wishes,



Sue Palmer

Chair of Upstart Scotland and editor of *Play is the Way*