

## Defining progress

### Data

Formal testing is now a regular part of school life which commences almost as soon as a child starts school. Data is compiled throughout a child's school life in order to check that sufficient progress is being made each year. Tests are nothing new, but the way data is now used has a new significance for schools because it determines league table positions. Schools are given targets which have to be achieved and data that shows insufficient progress or missed targets can trigger an inspection. The stakes are high – progress data not only tells you, the parent, how your child is progressing, it also tells everyone else how the school is progressing, albeit against one narrow set of criteria. Data can also be used to determine salaries.

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This significantly changes the relationship of teachers with students and school leaders with staff. However unrealistic, targets have to be met, and teachers increasingly have to teach to the test, whether or not this is in the best interests of each individual child. The outcome is that our schools are often seen as exam factories which pressurise students into achieving a level in a test without actually measuring genuine learning. It is described as a culture of measurement; the question is whether we are measuring what really matters.

### Definitions

Although you want to know that your child is making progress, you will also, as a parent, have aspirations that have nothing to do with academic success. You will want to know that your child is happy; able to sustain friendships; gets along with others, and shows kindness and respect. In other words, you want to know if your child is flourishing as a whole person, not just as a test performer.

Don't be afraid to ask these questions at parents' evenings and explain to teachers that holistic nurture and joy in learning are more important to you than progress data. Students who are happy, safe, valued and respected as people rather than viewed as test fodder will achieve their potential far more successfully than those who are pressurised into passing a test to tick a particular box. You will find that most teachers not only agree with you but that they do what they can to minimise the effects of the system.

## Christian perspective

One of the problems in the current system, with such a heavy emphasis on test results, is that pupils can lose any sense of individual worth beyond their test score. The values underpinning the testing regime are even more concerning because the government sees education as the engine of the economy. This reduces each child to nothing more than a unit of potential economic output. What difference would it make if each child was nurtured

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as a unique human made in the image of, and loved by, God?

Another of the purposes of data collection is to advise students on future routes in life.

Tax data has been analysed to determine which GCSE and A level subjects lead to the

most lucrative careers. The underlying message says that the more you earn, the more worth you have; the more academically successful you are, the higher your personal value.

The Westminster Catechism says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. What difference would it make if young people thought about how their lives might bring glory to God, rather than the economy? Or if careers advice encouraged students to think about who God would have them be and what God would have them do, rather than scrabbling to get to the top of the financial pile?