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Investigating KS2 Assessment- The Relationship between Teacher Assessments and SATs

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Background

The use of standard attainment tests (SATs) as a measure of pupil achievement and educational standards at primary school level is a current topic of debate reflected in coverage in the popular press and discussion by teaching unions and government. The relationship between pupils' attainment as measured by teacher assessments (TA) and SATs has been studied before using KS2 data collected between 1996 and 1998, revealing a high level of consistency between these two measures (Reeves et al., 2001). In addition, a systematic review of research evidence into teacher assessments found that information about the process of how teachers' assessments were carried out was limited (Harlen, 2004).

Research Questions

This paper presents the initial findings of a study into the factors that contribute to differences in pupils' attainment as measured by teacher assessment and SATs with a focus on identifying the processes by which teachers arrive at their KS2 assessments.

The study is structured to answer two key research questions:

What are the factors that contribute to any differences in pupils' attainment as measured by teacher assessment and SATs?

and

What are the processes by which teachers arrive at their KS2 assessments?

Methods

Mixed-methods were employed for this study, with a quantitative element comparing the SATs results in one London primary school with the teacher assessments for the same pupils from 2000 to 2009. Then a second phase of study saw qualitative data collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with the headteacher, class teachers and others involved in the TA process over this period.

Frame

A sequential mixed methods design is used to structure this research, essentially two interlinked studies with the second dependent on the results of the first. A 'method perspective' was followed, considering existing data and conducting an analysis, then looking to explain any significant findings through engaging with the people that produced those results. Grounded theory is employed as the key theoretical framework in this study.

Research findings

Findings demonstrate that there were differences between the levels pupils were awarded in SATs and teacher assessment. This was most notable in English, where pupils achieved significantly higher levels in SATs than teacher assessment over the course of the nine years. The qualitative element identified differences between the processes used to decide upon teacher-assessed levels from year to year. When considered along with previous educational research, the qualitative findings indicate

some principles for effective teacher assessment. This research study has policy implications for the assessment of pupils at the end of primary school and contributes additional evidence to knowledge regarding assessment procedures at the end of KS2.