



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**New Scholastic UK report highlights confusion and lack of consistency in secondary schools' response to 'life after levels'**

London 6<sup>th</sup> September 2016 – Scholastic UK, part of the global children's publishing, education and media company, today released a new report which provides fresh insight into how schools are measuring attainment and progress in Years 7-9 following the end of well-established attainment levels in 2014.

*Life after levels – what next?*, which is based on in-depth interviews with multi-academy trust and school leaders and a survey of 122 secondary schools, investigates how the teaching profession has responded to the requirement to develop its own methods for assessment and tracking pupil progress at Key Stage 3.

The report's key findings are that:

- Schools are generally united in their view that 'levels' had evolved into an assessment framework that was not fit for purpose and that change was needed.
- There has been a lack of guidance for schools in identifying alternatives to levels and on what they report to pupils, parents and regulators.
- There is currently no one definitive approach that schools are taking in response – some have developed their own systems, many are continuing with levels under other names, whilst others are still unsure of their plan.
- The lack of a standard system within schools and between schools is expected to create problems around national benchmarking and for pupils and teachers moving between schools operating different systems.
- The issues of effective entry baseline assessment into Year 7 and lack of clarity around new GCSE grades are cited as major related concerns for secondary schools.

In launching the report, Catherine Bell, Co-Group Managing Director of Scholastic UK, said: "The value of this report is that it draws attention to the issues that schools have faced, and in many cases are still facing, in the transition from levels to a new framework. By highlighting the response from a representative group of multi-academy trusts and schools, we can provide clear guidance on where schools need support in delivering on this agenda going forward. Our



objective is to shine light on where the teaching profession is now and where we need to go next to help deliver the best possible outcome for pupils.”

Scholastic offers a standard assessment and progress monitoring, tracking and reporting programme called STEPS (Strategic Targets for Educational Progress and Success in Key Stage 3). Developed in partnership with Darrick Wood School in Orpington, the cornerstone of STEPS is a simple grid and a progressive set of attainment targets that present challenge at all levels of ability throughout Key Stage 3. The grids are broken down into subject ‘Strands’ and then ‘Steps’ which means pupils can make fine levels of progress and teachers can create incremental, personalised targets based on assessment throughout Key Stage 3. It also provides crucial baseline assessment tests.

“What schools are looking for is confidence that any new system will not disappear overnight,” said Martin Smith, Assistant Headteacher at Darrick Wood School and creator and developer of STEPS. “As teachers, we don’t want to be changing systems again in five years’ time – we are looking for security, and STEPS provides that. We have shown that our system is effective – it measures progress and assessment simultaneously, and creates easily understandable data and a structure for teaching. It is also completely flexible and adaptable, so schools can adapt STEPS for their own purposes.”

*Life after levels – what next?* can be downloaded at [www.scholastic.co.uk/ks3](http://www.scholastic.co.uk/ks3).

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**Selected quotes from *Life after levels – what next?***

**The issue:**



“Levels effectively became a control tool – and that’s not what they were meant for. In the worst-case scenario levels were used to illustrate pupil progress that wasn’t there” **John Henrys, Executive Principal, Brooke Weston Trust**

“The obvious challenge, and opportunity, is how can we measure progress through Key Stage 3 with proper integrity?” **Stephen Munday, Chief Executive, Cam Academy Trust**

“The main challenge we were faced with was comparing like for like, and across all subjects. We also lost something which says clearly to parents where their child is and where they are aiming for” **Bethanie Goodliff, Leadership Coach, Ridgewood School**

“We have a situation where our feeder schools use a weird and wonderful array of systems that all work for them individually, but cannot be used to provide an effective entry baseline” **Dawn Morton, Executive Headteacher, The Duke's Middle School and Lindisfarne Middle School**

“It has become a habit to set a module of work, teach it and test it. There needs to be more concentration on whether the child is learning the best way they can” **Steve Colledge, former Secondary Director, The White Horse Federation**

#### **The response:**

“Schools have found it a challenge, at a time of considerable change in the system, to move away from levels and still be able to track pupil progress effectively” **Suzanne O’Farrell, Curriculum and Assessment Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders**

“For those who entered the teaching profession from 1988 this change is almost as traumatic as Britain leaving the EU. A different mindset is needed – and now we are seeing different approaches” **Steve Colledge, former Secondary Director, The White Horse Federation**

“A key success factor is whether children understand how they are progressing. Whatever system that is put in place must be able to measure progress for the child as well as the school” **Neil Maslen, Area Advisor, Plymouth CAST**

“There is surely a major national piece of work that should be done around why this system changed without investment in its replacement. It’s been an unnecessary distraction – with

thousands of schools and staff all working on the same issue” **Mark Woods, Chief Executive, Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust**

“The key problem is pupils moving between schools mid-key stage as so many different systems are used. Another problem relates to the amount of time needed to develop staff confidence” **Dawn Morton, Executive Headteacher, The Duke's Middle School and Lindisfarne Middle School**

“Ofsted will want to know how assessment is being used to support pupils’ progress and how assessment is aligned to the curriculum” **Suzanne O’Farrell, Curriculum and Assessment Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders**

#### **The future:**

“In the interest of fairness, it is only right that all schools have standard baseline tests in each subject to support the transition between primary and secondary” **Bethanie Goodliff, Leadership Coach, Ridgewood School**

“There are still gaps, and secondary schools generally are massively inconsistent in benchmarking new pupils in Year 7” **Sarah-Jayne Whyand, Assistant Headteacher – Data and Assessment, King Edward VI School**

“For us, we are always keen to benchmark against other schools outside the Trust, but if everybody is doing their own thing it’s hard to get an accurate reading” **John Henrys, Executive Principal, Brooke Weston Trust**

#### **About Scholastic**

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