
Director General for Regulation

Warwick Mansell
By email: warwickmansell@googlemail.com

6 July 2015

Dear Mr Mansell,

Thank you for your email registering your concern about the use of statistics by ministers in the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to the test results of primary schools which are academies.

The Authority has investigated the two specific instances of Ministers' use of statistics that you were concerned about:

1. An interview by the Minister for Schools, Nick Gibb MP on BBC Radio 4's Today programme on 2 February 2015 as reported in Schools Week
<http://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-requiring-improvement-face-academisation/>
2. Comments made by the Secretary of State for Education, Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP, to the House of Commons on 2 March 2015 in response to oral questions
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150302/debtext/150302-0001.htm#1503023000004>.

The Authority has reviewed these uses of the statistics and concluded that the comments made by Ministers on the Today programme and in the House of Commons did not misrepresent the statistics.

In the interview on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme - and based on the quote reported in Schools Week rather than the original transcript - the Minister for Schools was not specific about exactly which statistics were being compared over what time period. However, the statement is consistent with the statistics that are published in DfE's Statistical First Release (SFR) that presents Key Stage 2 statistics for primary schools for 2014¹.

As reported in Hansard, the Secretary of State made a very similar statement – using the phrase 'double the rate of improvement' - to the one the Minister for Schools made on the Today programme. She was more specific about what was being compared and quoted a percentage point increase in performance for primary sponsor academies that was consistent with the published statistics in the SFR.

You also commented on DfE's presentation of the statistics in the Key Stage 2 SFR, that has National Statistics status. In it, DfE presented comparisons of improvement in performance

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-2-2014-revised>

by school type with no comment on limitations, supporting narrative or analysis. We conclude that this presentation did not make it clear that the differences in the rates of improvement in performance were not necessarily caused by school type.

I have written to the Statistical Head of Profession in the DfE about the outcome of our review of these matters and have provided some constructive suggestions that might minimise the possibility of misinterpretation in future reports. This correspondence has been published on the Authority's website <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html>.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson