Primary school overview

This paper provides an overview of some of the important changes currently taking place to primary education performance data, self evaluation and target setting in schools and LAs. It also outlines the value and relevance of Fischer Family Trust data in a changing environment.

Contextual Value-Added

Contextual value-added analyses (FFT SX model) were developed by FFT in 2003. The SX model was designed to support detailed self-evaluation with an important principle being accuracy and consistency across a wide range of indicators and pupil characteristics.

Following the decision by DfE to discontinue the publication of CVA (introduced in 2004 with many similarities but some important differences from FFT SX), we have been asked, on a number of occasions, whether this means that FFT will remove analyses based upon the SX model. The answer to that is no. There are three reasons for this:

- We believe that different types of analysis (attainment, value-added and contextual value-added) all have their place as each type of measure seeks to answer different questions about performance
 - Contextual value-added analyses provide, in the views of many schools and researchers, accurate insights to support
 the evaluation of school effectiveness. Having CVA removes the risks that these evaluations are incomplete because no
 other progress measure accounts for the characteristics of similar pupils and similar schools in one measure. It would be
 misleading for example to conclude that an intervention with a particular pupil group resulted in below average results
 without also accounting for the fact that they were all boys born early in the year. The intervention may have been
 effective and be worth developing further in the future, the CVA measure may indicate this.
 - What CVA measures do not do is to address questions of whether pupils are attaining sufficiently well to prepare them for the next stage of their education or whether they are making sufficient progress irrespective of their background and other characteristics. For this reason we argue that analyses of attainment must be set alongside analyses of pupil progress.
- Feedback from schools, professional organisations and LAs indicates a wish to continue to receive contextual value-added data.
- Contextual value-added models are NOT used to calculate forward-looking estimates. Despite some requests to do this we
 have always refused on the grounds that the inappropriate use of such estimates could lead to a lowering of expectation for
 some groups of pupils.

Three Year Summaries and Trends

We were pleased to see that Lord Bew's review of Key Stage 2 recommended the use of 3 year summaries. This is something which FFT analyses have always included. This has been a feature of FFT analyses because pupil numbers in the vast majority of primary schools are small and results can change so much from one year group to the next.

An important feature of FFT's approach to both value-added and contextual value-added is that the models are applied consistently over all years. If we do make any improvements to the models they are applied to all previous years – this is quite a task, so we don't do it too often! Why is this important? Trends, over a 3 year period, are an important part of FFT's approach and it is only valid to calculate trends if models are consistent over all years.

Estimates, Target Setting and Raising Expectations

Analyses to support the process of target setting have been a key element of FFT's approach to improvement. Whilst recent changes to legislation have removed the requirement for schools to provide targets to the DfE, target setting itself is still at the heart of good planning to support continuous school improvement and is intended to challenge expectations for both pupils and schools.

The FFT approach has always been to:

- Use national census and prior attainment data to calculate pupil, school and LA level estimates
- Provide a range of estimates (both contextualised and non-contextualised) in order to inform and, where necessary, challenge expectations

We will continue to provide estimates as part a wide range of analyses to support improvement. Future estimates illustrate the trajectory of possible performance over the coming years and can be used to identify where intervention may be necessary, particularly where schools may at risk of being close to or below floor standards.

We believe that the removal of a statutory requirement to provide targets to DfE may actually be an opportunity to move away from the 'you must use type D only' approach (which has never been FFT's view) into more considered and effective approaches which are both challenging and realistic. Perhaps schools can now set their plans for further improvement around ranges (60% to 65%) rather than single numbers (we will attain 63%).

Expected Progress

Indicators looking at expected progress (2 levels from KS1 to KS2) in English and Mathematics are receiving increasing attention. They are published in performance tables and also used in the assessment of floor standards for schools. These indicators are included in both the value-added and estimates sections of FFT Live. There are some significant differences in the methodology used by FFT when compared to that used by DfE:

- DfE use whole levels and a 'subject to subject' approach.
- FFT use sublevels and fine grades where available and take into account attainment in all core subjects.

Why do we take this approach? Here are some illustrations:

- 84% of pupils with Level 2 in mathematics at KS1 attained level 4 or higher in mathematics at KS2.
- If we split those pupils into three bands (2C, 2B, 2A) we find that the percentage making expected progress varies from 58% (for 2C) to 98% (for 2A).
- If we look at prior-attainment in English we find for pupils who attained level 2B in mathematics at KS1 that the percentage making expected progress varies from 78% (level 1 in English) to 93% (level 3 in English).

Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 Estimates

Following initial research and consultation with LA project contacts we piloted, in 2009, analyses which provide estimates for KS1 attainment by using data from Foundation Stage Profile assessments. Feedback from schools was very positive and we have now made the analyses available to all schools and LAs. The approach taken and format of analyses is consistent with existing reports for KS2 outcomes.

Overall, we believe that the range of analyses and data available through the FFT Data Analysis Project provide a comprehensive range of information which can support schools, local authorities and others in the process of school improvement.