4.11 The 1988 Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary and, where asked, short full sentences. The extended evaluation question at the end requires a developed conclusion.

1 Explain one criticism, from an interactionist perspective, of standardised testing such as SATs introduced after the 1988 Act.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Explain two reasons the New Right gave for introducing both a compulsory National Curriculum and standardised testing in the 1988 Act.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Evaluate the claim that the National Curriculum and SATs raised educational standards, using sociological perspectives to support and challenge the claim. Give a judgement.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

4 Identify one element of assessment that the 1988 Act introduced at Key Stages in maintained schools.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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5 Explain two purposes of the attainment targets set out in the National Curriculum by the 1988 Education Reform Act.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Define the New Right rationale, in the context of the 1988 Act justifying a National Curriculum and standardised testing.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.11 The 1988 Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies criticism, e.g. tests label pupils and can lead to teacher expectations shaping pupil performance	**B1**
development, e.g. labelling can create self-fulfilling prophecies and affect pupils identity and future achievement	**B1**

Answer: Interactionists criticise SATs because tests can label pupils and create teacher expectations that shape performance, producing self-fulfilling prophecies that affect pupil identity and future achievement.

Question 2

identifies one reason, e.g. to raise standards by ensuring a clear, central expectation for schools	**B1**
development, e.g. central prescription reduces variation in quality and makes schools accountable for delivering core knowledge	**B1**
identifies second reason, e.g. to make schools comparable through measurable outcomes	**B1**
development, e.g. comparability enables parents and the state to judge school performance and pressures schools to improve	**B1**

Answer: The New Right argued a central National Curriculum would raise standards by giving clear expectations and reducing variation, and that standardised testing would make schools comparable through measurable outcomes so parents and the state could judge and pressure schools to improve.

Question 3

Level 1 Basic statements about the National Curriculum and testing with limited use of sociological ideas. Little or no argument and no clear conclusion.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some relevant sociological points made, for example simple New Right support and one criticism. Some development but limited use of evidence. A simple judgement may be given.	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear use of at least two sociological perspectives, such as New Right support and interactionist or Marxist/feminist criticisms, with developed reasoning and some evidence. A balanced argument is presented with a tentative conclusion.	**7-9**
Level 4 Thorough evaluation using multiple perspectives. Arguments for the claim, for example New Right ideas about raising standards and comparability, are linked to evidence such as measured improvements in basic attainment. Strong counter-arguments are given, for example that testing narrows the curriculum, produces teaching to the test, or reflects social class differences in achievement, with clear analysis of strengths and limits. A well-supported, reasoned judgement is reached.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- New Right view: support for the claim because a compulsory National Curriculum and SATs set clear expectations, created comparability, and held schools to account, which should raise standards.
- Evidence supporting improvement: points about measured rises in basic attainment in core subjects in some periods after introduction, and clearer benchmarks for progress.
- Interactionist criticism: testing creates labels and raises teacher expectations, which may distort outcomes rather than reflect genuine rises in learning.
- Marxist/feminist criticisms: centralised tests and curriculum may reproduce social class or gender inequalities, since pupils from advantaged backgrounds are better prepared to meet standardised measures.
- Curriculum narrowing: argument that teaching to the test reduces time for broader skills, creativity and non-tested subjects, which may limit genuine educational development.
- Validity and reliability issues: standardised tests measure narrow skills and may not capture wider educational aims; changes in test design over time affect comparability.
- Policy limitations: improvements may result from other factors such as resource changes, teacher training or broader social shifts, not only the Act itself.
- Balanced conclusion: on balance, some standards in basic measurable skills may have risen, but sociologists would caution that rises are uneven, may mask narrowed curricula, and that inequalities remain.

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Question 4

identifies one element, e.g. Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and later Key Stage 3 **B1**

brief development, e.g. used to measure attainment against National Curriculum standards **B1**

Answer: Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at Key Stages to measure pupil attainment against National Curriculum expectations.

Question 5

identifies one purpose, e.g. to give clear expectations of what pupils should learn at each Key Stage **B1**

development of that purpose, e.g. helping teachers plan lessons and ensure consistency across schools **B1**

identifies a second purpose, e.g. to provide a basis for assessing pupils and comparing attainment **B1**

development of that purpose, e.g. attainment targets linked to SATs allowed measurement of progress and school performance **B1**

Answer: Attainment targets set out clear expectations of what pupils should learn at each Key Stage, helping teachers plan and ensuring consistency; they also provided a basis for assessment, linking to SATs so pupil progress and school performance could be measured.

Question 6

identifies New Right rationale, e.g. belief that central prescription and standard measures raise educational standards and drive improvement **B1**

development, e.g. emphasis on the state setting clear requirements so schools are held accountable and comparable **B1**

Answer: The New Right rationale is the belief that central prescription and standard measures, such as a National Curriculum and SATs, raise standards by making schools accountable and comparable.

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