

From:
To: Authority Enquiries@ONS,
Date: 18/05/2015 16:21
Subject: Registering an issue to investigate

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm a freelance education journalist and I wondered if it would be possible to register concern about the use of statistics by ministers in relation to the test results of primary schools which are academies.

I have concerns that an improvement in results in these schools is being presented as caused by academy status, when a brief investigation of the data would at least raise some questions as to whether it was, in fact, the product of these schools generally having low statistical starting points, rather than anything to do with their governance status.

I am surprised that an official Statistical First Release (referenced below) produced by the DfE, labelled "National Statistics", did not investigate this seemingly very plausible alternative explanation. Instead, it simply presented comparison data for different types of schools, inviting the public to think that one type was improving faster than the other because of its type, rather than because that was what schools of all types, when starting from the low statistical base of these sponsored academies, tend to do.

The statement that sponsored primary academies are improving faster than other schools was made by the minister Nick Gibb on BBC Radio 4's Today programme on February 2nd, 2015, (a news story with the reference to his comments is here: <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-requiring-improvement-face-academisation/>) and by the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, to the House of Commons on March 2nd, 2015: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150302/debtext/150302-0001.htm>

Both these statements seem to be based on the Statistical First Release SFR 50/2014: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/384958/SFR50_2014_Text.pdf .

I blogged about this here: <http://cprtrust.org.uk/cprt-blog/how-well-are-academies-doing-and-how-well-is-dfe-doing-with-the-evidence/> and here: <http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/blogs/warwick-mansell/sponsored-academy-vs-non-academy-improvements-a-statistical-illusion/>

With the issue of academy performance being raised again by Nicky Morgan on the BBC's Andrew Marr show yesterday, and questions about what the data tell us seemingly underpinning some dramatic changes to schools' governance, which were also discussed by Ms Morgan on that programme, I hope that this is something that the authority can look into.

Please let me know if there is anything else I need to do to raise this with the authority.

Yours faithfully,

Warwick Mansell