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Boycott of school tests moves closer with union ballot

A boycott of SATs tests will move a step closer on Monday as the biggest teacher union in the country launches a ballot of members.

By Julie Henry, Education Correspondent
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The move signals chaos for next year's national curriculum tests in English and maths, due to be taken by more than half a million 11 year olds, and reopens hostilities between the Government and the teaching profession.

At a meeting on Monday the National Union of Teachers will announce an indicative ballot on the boycott to run during November, before a full-scale vote early next year. The National Association of Head Teachers has commissioned an independent consultation of members before it ballots on a boycott.



Gordon Brown, the prime minister, has defended the tests. Photo: GETTY

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John Bangs, the head of education at the NUT, said last night that it was the Government's last chance to avoid industrial action by scrapping the tests.

Ministers remain unmoved, despite the publication of the Cambridge Primary Review, the biggest investigation into primary education in a generation, which said the tests narrowed the curriculum and should be scrapped in their current form.

Days before the unions step up their joint campaign, Gordon Brown, the prime minister, launched a staunch defence of tests.

"Progress relies on the need to retain clear accountability through testing," he said. "This means at the end of primary school as much as at the end of secondary."

Union leaders want the tests to be replaced by teacher assessment and have insisted they would abandon boycott plans if the Government signalled that it was prepared to overhaul SATs.

Ministers have already scrapped the tests for 14-year-olds and the science paper for 11-year-olds in the wake of the marking

scandal that saw the whole testing process collapse in 2008.

Schools are also piloting single level tests, which allow children to sit a bank of tests at different times of the year, but their development has been plagued by problems.

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