

INTRODUCING  
THE CAMBRIDGE  
PRIMARY REVIEW



Children, their world,  
their education



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### What the Review investigated

#### The 3 overarching perspectives

- Children and childhood today
- The society and world in which children are growing up
- The condition and future of primary education

#### The 10 educational themes

- Purposes and values
- Learning and teaching
- Curriculum and assessment
- Quality and standards
- Diversity and inclusion
- Settings and professionals
- Parenting, caring and educating
- Children's lives beyond the school
- Structures and phases
- Funding, governance and policy

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### Vital statistics

#### The balance of evidence

- Submissions (written): 1,052 (shortest 1 page, longest 300 pages)
- Soundings (regional): 87 meetings in 9 regional locations
- Soundings (national): 150 meetings and other events
- Surveys of published research: 28, evaluating over 3,000 published sources
- Searches of official data: not quantifiable
- Emails received: thousands
- Sources cited in the reports: 4,000+

#### Spreading the word

- Interim reports: 31
- Briefing papers: 39
- Media releases: 14
- Media articles by the Review: 10
- Media articles about the Review: hundreds
- Final report: 1
- Final report companion volume: 1
- Final report booklet: 1

The Cambridge Primary Review is an independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It is based at the University of Cambridge, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and directed by Professor Robin Alexander. After nearly three years of planning and consultation the Review was launched in October 2006. Between October 2007 and February 2009 the Review published 31 interim reports: an account of its regional community soundings, 28 specially-commissioned surveys of relevant research and a two-volume report on the primary curriculum. In October 2009, Routledge published the Review's final report and recommendations (see back cover for order details) and the Review entered its phase of dissemination and implementation.

The Review was required by its remit to 'identify the purposes which the primary phase of education should serve, the values which it should espouse, the curriculum and learning environment which it should provide, and the conditions which are necessary in order to ensure both that these are of the highest and most consistent quality possible, and that they address the needs of children and society over the coming decades'; to 'pay close regard to national and international evidence from research, inspection and other sources ... to seek the advice of expert advisers and witnesses, and invite submissions and take soundings from a wide range of interested agencies and individuals, both statutory and non-statutory'; and finally to 'publish both interim findings and a final report combining

evidence, analysis and conclusions together with recommendations for both national policy and the work of schools and other relevant agencies.'

The Review has stuck closely to this remit. Its scope is exceptionally broad, and is defined in terms of 10 themes and three overarching perspectives (see box). In relation to each of these, evidence is combined with vision. That is to say, the Review has investigated how and how well the system currently works and how it should change in order to meet the needs of children and society during the coming decades.

The mix of evidence and methods has been carefully judged: invited opinion is balanced by published research; data has been collected from both official and independent sources; formal written submissions from national organisations are contrasted with open-ended discussions with those at the front line, including children, teachers, parents and a wide range of community representatives.

One way or another, many thousands of people have been involved, but the final report is due primarily to the efforts of 'the Cambridge Primary Review 100' – the core team at Cambridge led by Robin Alexander, the advisory committee chaired by Gillian Pugh, the management group chaired on behalf of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation by Hilary Hodgson, the 66 academic consultants from more than 20 university departments who prepared the research surveys, and of course the final report's 14 authors.

# What is and what could be



**Robin Alexander**  
Director of the  
Cambridge Primary  
Review

This booklet, now in its second edition, introduces *Children, their World, their Education, the final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. The Review is the most comprehensive investigation of English primary education in over 40 years and the booklet provides a glimpse of its findings and insights. We hope you will read it, enjoy it and become sufficiently intrigued to want to find out more (see back cover).

## Why the Cambridge Primary Review?

When we started on our journey in 2004 we summarised the case for an independent enquiry into the condition and future of English primary education thus:

- England's primary schools have experienced two decades of continuous yet piecemeal reform about which considerable claims have been made, especially in relation to educational standards. However, the claims are not universally accepted and, when it is properly assessed, the evidence may tell another story. In any event, the benefits and costs of all this activity need to be evaluated.
- Our system of primary education was created to reflect a particular view of society and the place within it of the distinctly unprivileged masses who were to fill its schools. But today's Britain is diverse, divided and unsure of itself. Some argue the virtues of multiculturalism. Others deplore the loss of social cohesion, collective identity and common values. Meanwhile, the gaps in wealth, well-being and educational attainment are far wider than in many other countries, and a significant minority of children remain at the margins. It's time to revisit the vital debate about the relationship between education and social progress.
- Globalisation brings unprecedented opportunities, but there are darker visions. Many are daily denied their basic human rights and suffer extreme poverty, violence and oppression. As if that were not enough, global warming may well make this the make-or-break

century for humanity as a whole. What, in such a world, and in the context of the UN Millennium Development Goal of universalising primary education by 2015, is primary education for?

- England's primary schools are now part of a complex structure linking education with health, welfare and childcare, and children's primary schooling with what precedes and follows it. Or, at least, that's the intention: but how coherent is the system really?
- Primary education suffers more than its fair share of scaremongering and hyperbole, not to mention deliberate myth-making. Standards are rising / standards are plummeting ... Today's teachers are the best ever / teachers merely follow the latest gimmick ... Schools neglect the 3Rs / schools concentrate on the 3Rs to the detriment of everything else ... Children's behaviour is deteriorating / children are better behaved than ever... Today's problems are all the fault of the 1970s progressive ideologues / the 1970s were the golden age of primary education ... And so on. Wherein lies the truth? And isn't it time to move on from the populism, polarisation and name-calling which for too long have supplanted real educational debate and progress? Children deserve better than this from the nation's leaders and opinion-shapers.
- Despite all this, and considerable advances in research, there has been no comprehensive investigation of English primary education since the Plowden report of 1967. The deficiency must be made good, and the necessary questions must be asked without fear or favour.

## What is in the final report?

Others will judge whether the Review has succeeded in tackling the tasks and meeting the aspirations above. It has certainly done its best. The 602-page final report contains 24 chapters. The first two set the scene, reminding us how in certain key respects contemporary primary education remains tied to its Victorian roots, belying the sheen of modernisation. Chapters 4-10 examine research evidence, policy and witness views on children's development and learning, their upbringing and lives outside school, their needs and their aspirations in a fast-changing world. Chapters 11-18 explore what goes on in schools, from the formative early years to aims, values, curriculum,

## INTRODUCTION

pedagogy, assessment, standards and school organisation in the primary phase itself. Chapters 19-23 deal with the system as a whole: its ages, stages and transitions; the relationship between schools and other agencies; teachers, training, leadership and workforce reform; funding, governance and policy. Chapter 24 pulls everything together with 78 formal conclusions and 75 recommendations for policy and practice.

### What has happened since its publication?

The final report was published on 16 October 2009, and launched at a packed RSA event the following week. It was greeted by media headlines of the kind with which the Review had become all too familiar when its successive interim reports were published between 2007 and 2009: sensationalist, highlighting problems rather than achievements, and sometimes misrepresenting what the reports actually said. Regrettably, the government tended to react to the headlines rather than the reports themselves: not a sound basis for 'evidence-based' policy.

Next, mirroring the regional 'community soundings' with which the Review started, the report's local and professional implications were explored at nine regional conferences attended by leaders in schools, local authorities and teacher training. Alongside these were dozens of events which others organised and at which we were invited to speak. This stage ended in April 2010 with a national seminar at which representatives from leading organisations pondered both the report and the issues highlighted during its dissemination and agreed a list of 11 policy priorities. These were published as a briefing paper and commended to the country's political leaders just before the May 2010 general election. Here they are, briefly summarised.

- Accelerate the drive to reduce England's gross and overlapping inequalities in wealth, wellbeing and educational attainment.
- Make children's agency and rights a reality in schools, classrooms and policy.
- Consolidate the Early Years Foundation Stage, understanding that the quality of early childhood provision matters more than the school starting age.
- Address the perennially neglected question of what primary education is for, making aims drive educational practice rather than merely embellish it.
- Replace curriculum tinkering by genuine curriculum renewal, attending to the challenges and problems

which the Rose review's remit excluded.

- Abandon the discredited dogma that there is no alternative to SATs and undertake radical reform to ensure that assessment does its job validly, reliably and without collateral damage.
- Replace the pedagogy of official recipe by pedagogies of repertoire, evidence and principle.
- Rethink the government's professional standards for teachers, retaining guidance and support for those who need it but liberating the nation's most talented teachers - and hence the learning of their pupils - from bureaucratic prescription.
- Initiate a full primary staffing review, facilitating the more flexible use of generalist and specialist expertise so as to secure high standards not only in 'the basics' but in every aspect of the curriculum to which children are entitled.
- Help schools to work in partnership with each other rather than in competition, sharing ideas, expertise and resources and together tackling local needs.
- Re-balance the relationship between government, local authorities and schools, ending micro-management by DCSF/DfE and policy policing by the national agencies.

To these we added this proviso: 'We commend these not just to the next Prime Minister and Secretary of State, but also to schools. If schools assume that reform is the task of government alone, then compliance will not give way to empowerment, and dependence on unargued prescription will continue to override the marshalling and scrutiny of evidence.'

### A national primary network

For something else had emerged from the dissemination conferences, expressed by many teachers thus: 'We're impressed by the Cambridge Review's evidence and findings. We want to take them forward. But we daren't do so without permission from our Ofsted inspectors and local authority school improvement partners.' Thus it was that the report's dissemination programme led, in large part in response to pressure from teachers themselves, to a further extension of the Review. There would now be a phase dedicated to the building of professional networks (2010-12) which would energise, support and disseminate the work of those teachers and teacher educators keen to take forward the Review's thinking and proposals – without permission. Once again, funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation would enable this to happen. In parallel, a programme of high-level discussions between

*This report is not just for the architects and agents of policy. It is for all who invest daily, deeply and for life in this vital phase of education*

Review staff and DfE officials began in June 2010, with a view to exploring the report's possibilities within a policy context very different from the one into which it had been launched the previous autumn. Meanwhile, some of the Cambridge Review's policy recommendations were being implemented or promised (for example, the end of the national strategies, a full SEN review, greater autonomy and flexibility for schools) and inherited policies like the Rose curriculum framework were abandoned.

Professional re-empowerment is not just about recovering the right to make decisions which were previously made or imposed by others. It is also, and more critically, about capacity, and perhaps the most damaging long-term consequence of the era of prescription is that it created a culture of dependence as well as dutiful compliance. As the final report notes: 'We need now to move to a position where research-grounded teaching repertoires and principles are introduced through initial training and refined and extended through experience and CPD, and teachers acquire as much command of the evidence and principles which underpin the repertoires as they do of the skills needed in their use.'

### **Evidence, principles and vision**

Evidence, principles – and something else too. Many of the Review's more experienced headteacher witnesses claimed that the post-1997 standards regime had given their younger colleagues a surface technical facility while depriving them of that wider framework of educational understanding on which informed and discriminating professional judgement depends. It is therefore not surprising that the Cambridge report's chapters on childhood, aims, pedagogy and the curriculum have evoked a particularly warm response, for they appear to offer a

vision for primary education which is rigorous in its pursuit of standards and quality yet is also more rounded and humane than what was on official offer during the new century's first decade.

It is the breadth of interest that the Review has provoked, as well as its warmth, that gives us hope. We said at the time of publication, and we repeat now with a real sense of opportunity: as an exercise in democratic engagement as well as empirical enquiry and visionary effort, this report is not just for the transient architects and agents of policy. It is for all who invest daily, deeply and for life in this vital phase of education, especially children, parents and teachers.

With the generous support of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation we sent this booklet to every school, local authority and teacher-training provider in the UK, to every MP and member of the House of Lords, to members of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies, and to the many organisations and individuals whose evidence has been so essential to the Review's investigations.

Self-evidently, the booklet can offer no more than a taste of the more solid fare contained in the final report's 602 pages. Yet we trust that it conveys a sufficient sense of the important issues treated by the Review to impel readers to get hold of the report and reflect on its arguments, findings and implications. Read it, talk about it to colleagues, write to ministers or your MP, email us, download further information from [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk) and - especially - join the fast-expanding network of professionals who want to jolt the primary education debate out of the rut of tired sloganising and cartoon knockabout in which for too long it has been stuck and who are committed to providing all the nation's children with a primary education of the highest possible quality. Join us on the next stage of this important journey.

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# A glimpse of the future...

So what has the most wide-ranging review of primary education in 40 years proposed?

The Review began its work against a backdrop of public anxiety about the state of childhood, education and society. It quickly became clear, though, that while primary schools are under intense pressure, they are in good heart. Highly valued by children and parents, for some they are the one point of stability and positive values in a world where everything else is uncertain.

There are still important debates to be had and changes which could make a big difference to many children's life chances. Too often, as the Review's evidence has shown, policy has been introduced without proper evaluation of previous initiatives or on the basis of faulty diagnosis of the problem being tackled.

The Review's final report contains 75 recommendations, drawn from detailed analysis of the evidence and based on a comprehensive set of conclusions. The list below provides signposts to the main recommendations, but not the detail. For the full set of conclusions and recommendations see the final report, chapter 24

## Respect and support childhood

(pages 12-13)

- Respect children's experiences, voices and rights, and adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the framework for policy.
- Build on new research on children's development, learning, needs and capabilities.
- Ensure that teacher education is fully informed by these perspectives.

## Narrow the gap

(pages 14-15)

- Maintain the focus of policy on reducing underachievement.
- Intervene quickly and effectively to help disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
- Give the highest priority to eliminating child poverty.

## Review special needs

(page 15)

- Institute a full review of special educational needs which re-assesses its definitions, structures, procedures and provision.

## New structures for early years and primary education

(pages 16-17)

- Strengthen and extend early learning provision.
- Extend the foundation stage to age six.
- Replace key stages 1 and 2 by a single primary phase from six to 11.
- Examine feasibility of raising school starting age to six.

## Start with aims

(pages 18-21)

- Establish a new and coherent set of aims, values and principles for 21st-century primary education, in addition to any wider aims for the system as a whole.
- Make the aims drive rather than follow curriculum, teaching, assessment, schools and policy.

## Towards a new curriculum

(pages 22-27)

- Introduce a new primary curriculum which: is firmly aligned with the Review's aims, values and principles; guarantees children's entitlement to breadth, depth and balance, and to high standards in all the proposed domains, not just some of them; ensures that language, literacy and oracy are paramount; combines a national framework with a locally-devised community curriculum;
- Wind up the primary national strategy and re-integrate literacy and numeracy with the rest of the curriculum.

## A pedagogy of evidence and principle

(pages 28-29)

- Work towards a pedagogy of repertoire rather than recipe, and of principle rather than prescription.
- Ensure that teaching and learning are properly informed by research.
- Uphold the principle that it is not for government, government agencies or local authorities to tell teachers how to teach.
- Avoid pedagogical fads and fashions and act instead on those aspects of learning and teaching, notably spoken language, where research evidence converges.

## Reform assessment

(pages 30-31)

- Retain summative pupil assessment at the end of the primary phase, but uncouple assessment for accountability from assessment for learning.

- Replace current KS2 literacy/ numeracy Sats by a system which assesses and reports on children's achievement in all areas of their learning, with minimum of disruption.
- Monitor school and system performance through sample testing.
- Make greater use of teacher assessment.

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### Strengthen accountability, redefine standards

(pages 32-33)

- Move forward from debating *whether* schools and teachers should be accountable (they should) and concentrate instead on *how*.
- Redefine primary education standards as the quality of learning in all curriculum domains, knowledge and skills to which children are entitled, not just some of them.
- Develop a model of school inspection which is in line with the proposed aims and principles.

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### Reform teacher education

(pages 34-35)

- Align teacher education with the Review's aims, curriculum and approaches to pedagogy.
- Refocus initial training on childhood, learning, teaching, curriculum and subject knowledge.
- Examine alternative ITT routes for different primary teaching roles.
- Replace the current TDA professional standards by a framework validated by professional development research and pupil learning outcomes.
- Balance support for inexperienced and less able teachers with freedom and respect for the experienced and talented.

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### Review staffing

(pages 36-37)

- Undertake a full review of current and projected primary school staffing.
- Ensure that schools have the teacher numbers, expertise and flexibility to deliver high standards across the full curriculum.
- Develop and deploy alternative primary teaching roles to the generalist class teacher without losing its benefits.
- Clarify and properly support the role of teaching assistant.

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### Leadership for learning

(page 37)

- Share leadership in order to nurture the capacities of teachers and emphasise schools' core tasks and relationship with their communities.
- Provide time and support for heads to do the job for which they are most needed – leading learning.

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### Schools for the future

(pages 38-39)

- Take an innovative approach to school design and timetabling which marries design and function and properly reflects the proposed aims.

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### Schools for the community

(page 38)

- Build on recent initiatives encouraging multi-agency working, and increase support for schools to help them ensure the growing range of children's services professionals work in partnership with each other and with parents.

- Strengthen mutual professional support through clustering, federation, all-through schools and the pooling of expertise.

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### Reform the policy process

(pages 40-41)

- Re-balance the responsibilities of the Department for Children, Schools and Families, local authorities and schools.
- Replace top-down control and prescription by professional empowerment, mutual accountability and respect for research evidence and professional experience.
- Make good the wider democratic deficit.

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### A new educational discourse

(pages 40-41)

- Abandon the discourses of derision, false dichotomy and myth and strive to ensure that the education debate exemplifies rather than negates what education should be about.

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### Reform school funding

(page 42)

- Eliminate the primary/secondary funding differential.
- Ensure that primary school funding is determined by educational and curricular needs.
- Devise and cost alternative models of curriculum/needs led primary school staffing.
- Set increased costs against savings from terminating the primary national strategy (PNS), transferring its budget to schools' control and infrastructure.

*The Review's final report contains 75 recommendations drawn from detailed analysis of the evidence*

# Plus ça change?

What has shaped primary education? How did the system we have today come to be? Was it inevitable?

**W**e take for granted the primacy of the 3Rs, the range of subjects and the class-teacher system, but these are the legacy of the Victorian elementary school, devised to prepare the poor for their 'station' in life.

In many ways, today's primary schools would not look unfamiliar to the Victorians. Even some of the anxieties are similar. As Matthew Arnold, the eminent poet and schools inspector, reported in 1867: 'The mode of teaching in the primary schools has certainly fallen off in intelligence, spirit and inventiveness. It could not well be otherwise...in a country where everyone is prone to rely too much on mechanical processes and too little on intelligence.'

In other ways, change has been profound and swift, especially since the days of this Review's predecessor, the 1967 Plowden Report.

Plowden advocated more experiential learning, increased parental involvement, universal pre-school education and social priority zones to boost opportunities for the less privileged.

Despite Plowden's recommendations, and later reports such as 1994's Start Right, early childhood education received little attention or funding from central government until the late 1990s. In the dying days of the last Conservative

government, the nursery voucher scheme to guarantee a place for every four-year-old lasted only a year. Labour increased guidance, regulations and targets for the under-fives, and extended the guarantee to age three.

The commonly held belief that after 1967 primary schools were swept by a tide of progressivism is untrue. In its 1978 primary survey, HMI reported that only 5 per cent of classrooms were fully 'exploratory' and three-quarters still

used what HMI called 'didactic' methods. Nevertheless, the progressive myth persisted, in part because of well-publicised extreme cases such as William Tyndale junior school in Islington (see opposite).

Prime Minister James Callaghan's 1967 Ruskin College speech marked politicians' first hesitant steps into the 'secret garden' of the primary curriculum. Callaghan argued that not just teachers and parents but also government and industry 'have an important part to play in formulating and expressing the purpose of education and the standards that we need'.

The 1978 HMI report shows why politicians came to see a need for a national curriculum, national assessment and a uniform inspection system. While all primary schools taught English and mathematics, there was considerable inconsistency from school to school when it came to what are now the other foundation subjects. Strikingly, HMI reported a strong association between a broad curriculum and high standards in the 'basics' – a message repeated many times since.

From then on, moves to intervene in matters previously accepted as the professional preserve of teachers increased in speed and quantity. In 1987 there was a sudden shift in the government's approach to education policy-making; political caution was replaced by assertion, and guidance by prescription.

The centrepiece of Kenneth Baker's Education Reform Bill was a highly detailed national curriculum. The 1988 Education Reform Act massively increased the Secretary of State's powers. This centralisation became even more marked with the introduction of mandatory testing in

Years 2 and 6, and the publication of test results; and more marked still when New Labour was elected in 1997.

Though the ERA proscribed the Secretary of State from prescribing teaching methods, the national literacy (1998) and numeracy (1999) strategies did this by stealth, pressuring schools to use favoured approaches through government direction, local authority pressure and Ofsted inspection. Meanwhile, the demands of the national curriculum



Victorian day: 21st-century schools are still influenced by some elements of 19th-century education structure

## English primary education: some policy milestones 1944–2009

- 1944** ‘Butler’ Education Act establishes primary education in law.
- 1965** First BEd courses introduced: beginning of drive to make teaching a graduate profession.
- 1967** Plowden Report recommends: full parental participation and parental choice of schools; educational priority areas to combat social disadvantage; co-operation between educational, health and social services; universal nursery education for three- to five-year-olds; end of 11-plus; teaching to use a combination of individual, group and whole-class work; phasing out streaming; introduction of teachers’ aides and training for classroom assistants.
- 1974** Establishment of Assessment of Performance Unit marks first attempt systematically to monitor national standards (in languages, English, maths, science, aesthetic development, personal and social development) at 11 and 14.
- 1975** Bullock Report into the teaching of English undermines claims that schools are concentrating on ‘creativity’ at the expense of ‘basics’ and argues for whole language approach to literacy.
- 1976** Rumours of anarchy at William Tyndale junior school fuel right-wing claims about rampant progressivism and lead to the 1976 Auld inquiry.
- 1978** Primary Education in England, a major HMI survey, identifies serious inconsistencies in curriculum breadth, balance, quality and management across schools.
- 1988** Warnock Report, Special Educational Needs: the education of handicapped children, encourages integration.
- 1988** Education Reform Act introduces national curriculum and heralds national tests at 7, 11 and 14. New finance arrangements give schools new freedoms.
- 1991** First full run of key stage 1 Sats. Results published in LEA league tables.
- 1992** ‘Three wise men’ report on 7-11 education refocusses attention on the character and quality of primary school pedagogy. Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) replaces HMI.
- 1993** NUT and NASUWT boycott the national curriculum tests.
- 1997** Excellence in Schools White Paper sets out New Labour’s main education policies, including national literacy and numeracy strategies and 2002 targets.
- 1998** General Teaching Council (GTC) for England and Wales is established. Qualifications for headteachers introduced. Sure Start established to support parents of under-threes in areas of high need.
- 1999** Early learning goals published to guide under-fives practitioners.
- 2000** National curriculum is slimmed down but otherwise fundamentally unchanged. Foundation stage for three- to five-year olds is introduced with a curriculum organised into six areas of learning.
- 2003** Every Child Matters marks significant change to services to secure the well-being of all children from birth to 19, but especially those at risk of abuse. Local authorities to provide ‘joined-up’ education and care with multi-agency co-ordination and extended schools. Excellence and Enjoyment, the new primary strategy manifesto, claims to encourage creativity and fun while securing standards. It consolidates the literacy and numeracy strategies.
- 2006** Review of the teaching of early reading, a government-commissioned report from Jim Rose, seeks to resolve debate about the place of phonics in the teaching of reading.
- 2007** Children’s Plan outlines a 10-year strategy ‘to make England the best place in the world for children and young people’. Sets new targets and softens government line on testing.
- 2008** Early years foundation stage brings together guidance and standards for education and daycare for children from birth to five.
- 2009** The government’s Rose review of the curriculum proposes that traditional subjects are combined within six areas of learning. To be implemented in 2011.

and the pressure of tests and tables had led to growing uniformity in classrooms across the country. More time than ever was devoted to reading, writing and number (especially the elements tested), with less emphasis on other subjects.

Within a few days of the 1997 election, the new government set ambitious targets for 2002 (not reached till 2008): that in literacy 80 per cent and in numeracy 75 per cent of 11-year-olds should achieve at least level 4 in the national tests.

This meant most children were now expected to attain a level originally set as an average.

In contrast to the pre-1988 era, when government intervention in classroom life was minimal, policies are now imposed on teachers at a rate which has made their assimilation and implementation nearly impossible. By one count, between 1996 and 2004 government and national agencies issued 459 documents just on literacy teaching.

That’s more than one every week for eight years.

# Age of empowerment

Listen to children, not what the media say about them

Children today are portrayed as vulnerable innocents – and as celebrity-obsessed couch-potatoes. Their teachers are reported as struggling with hazards they cannot contain, standards they cannot uphold and pupils they cannot control.

For most children – and teachers – neither perception is accurate. A minority of young people do endure blighted lives but the cause is not the celebrity culture so much as poverty and prejudice (see page 14). For the rest, the sense of a ‘crisis’ of modern childhood has been overstated. In terms of health, living standards, public services, educational opportunity, and access to information and entertainment the majority have never had it so good. Despite the media’s erroneous insistence that schools neglect the 3Rs, children in England are perfectly capable of counting their blessings. They were the most upbeat contributors to the Review, their optimism in marked contrast to the pessimism expressed by parents – a perennial tendency of the older generation. Among their assets are their primary schools, shown to be largely happy places that unflinchingly seek to celebrate the positive.

Of course, valid concerns remain – about family breakdown, obesity, poor mental health, and lack of space to play. But with so much bleak reporting of childhood, it is important to stress the positive. A recent gain is the growing respect for children as agents, valuable people and citizens in their own right. Children who feel empowered are more likely to be better and happier learners. In recognition of this, the power relations in many schools are beginning to shift, but the picture is still mixed and children are far from uniformly regarded as young citizens with important and insightful things to say about their education. The Review says that the ‘children’s voice’ movement is not a fad, but a trend that needs to become the way of school life (see box).

Many contributors to the



On the up: childhood is a time to be relished for its own sake

Review drew on the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, expressing concern that schools could do more to foster children’s competence, sense of responsibility and self-respect. The UN convention should shape all policies relating to young people, says the Review. The government has correctly put children at the centre of its policies though the temptation to try to control the nature of childhood must be resisted. Childhood is a valuable time in its own right. It is a time to be relished, where the priority must be to strike the right balance between the child’s current needs and building the foundations for future education and employment.

At home, as at school, young people do not want to be over-protected, preferring some independence and choice in relation to their family life. Home is valued as a private place, one where school does not encroach. Yet children spend longer in school and school-related settings than they did 10 years ago, and when they get home they face what is called homework, but is in fact

more school work. Many adults worry about the effect of this creeping ‘scholarisation’ on children’s well-being. Some say simply that children have other worthwhile things to do. The desire to keep family and academic life separate leads many children to regard parental

## Key points

- Respect children’s experience, voices and rights. Engage them actively and directly in decisions that affect their learning.
- Build on new research on children’s development, learning, needs and capabilities.
- Ensure that teacher education is fully informed by these perspectives.

involvement in school with unease. Some are wary of a double dose of control; others worry that their parents will not meet with teachers' approval.

However, while children do not want school to have an open door into home, most are keen that bridges between the two are maintained. And it is vital, says the Review, that the traffic along these bridges flows both ways. Children take valuable understanding and skill into school as well as away from it. Many help out at home and are proud of what they can do in terms of looking after themselves and others. Home is where they first play with toys and friends, and where they first learn about relationships, moral codes and how to be healthy. Schools will benefit greatly from building on the fact that even their youngest children are not blank slates.

## Children's voice: what a headteacher says

Our whole approach to teaching and learning is about shared dialogue, decision making and collaboration. Our children are actively involved right from foundation in planning lessons, they contribute to assessment and review what they are doing, and they choose the tasks they do in lessons. So in terms of teaching and learning we are aiming to develop dialogue – genuine listening and responding – between children and adults every step of the way.

For teachers too it's about building a culture of participation, about them feeling valued for who they are. Sometimes leadership teams say "right, yeah, now we've got to listen to the kids ..." and then the adults say "well, hang on a moment, it would be quite nice if someone listened to me once in a while". This is much more about a shared responsibility for making learning irresistible. There is a very exciting atmosphere around the place that says anything is possible and everybody feels they can

contribute. And because of that you don't get power conflicts.

Instead of having a school council, we have a weekly democratic meeting which takes place with all of our children from Year 1 upwards in mixed-age groups with adults as equal members of the groups. These meetings happen every week so there is a regular reliable space where you can formally bring things up that you think might be important ... and that applies to everyone. Through this structure they can get to know each other – and then you get a shared empathy and a shared understanding.

When I first came here the children were described by Ofsted as unteachable. Now their behaviour is officially outstanding. A lot of that is to do with tolerance and understanding. We talk about community cohesion, well it needs to begin in the school and there are plenty of schools where it doesn't.

**Alison Peacock** is head of the Wroxham School, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire

# Cognitive developments

Forget the idea that children's development advances in fixed stages. Forget right-brain versus left-brain functions. Forget all those learning 'styles'. Our understanding of children's cognitive development and learning has grown hugely in recent years and schools can build on this research.

Consider these key findings. First, babies and young children learn, think and reason in all the same ways as adults – what they lack is the experience to make sense of what they find. Second, their learning depends on the development of multi-sensory networks of neurons distributed across the whole brain. In other words, watching an ice cube melt may stimulate neurons in networks concerned with seeing, deducing, remembering and moving. Third, children learn from every experience, their brains distributing the information across these networks, with stronger 'representations' of what the experiences have in common. Fourth, the biological, social, emotional and intellectual aspects of learning are inextricably interwoven. Fifth, even the most basic learning relies on effective linguistic and social interaction with parents, teachers and other children. And finally, children, like most humans, tend to interpret the world in line with their own explanations as to why things happen.

Teachers who want to exploit these developments enhance children's learning with collaboration, challenge and purposeful talk. The ways in which teachers talk to children, ideally amplifying and elaborating their comments, can enhance learning, memory, understanding and motivation. Providing a diversity of experiences strengthens children's multi-sensory neural networks and also helps them modify their understanding of the world and become better at reflecting on their observations.

Creative activities, the decline of which concerned many witnesses to the Review, raise the quality and capacity of children's thinking, perseverance and problem-solving abilities, as well as fuelling their imaginations. Children are very competent and capable learners – given the right linguistic and social environment. We are now better informed than ever as to what that environment should contain.

*Teachers who want to exploit these developments enhance children's learning with collaboration, challenge and purposeful talk*

# Divided England

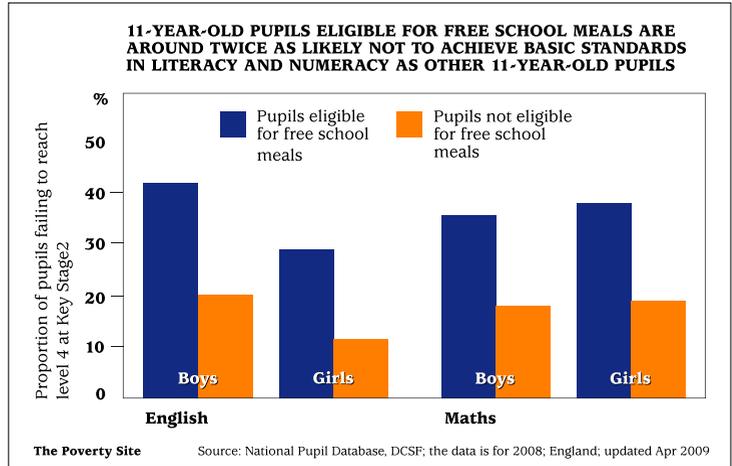
Schools can do more to help the millions of children growing up poor in a land of plenty

The nation's children have much to contend with – at least in the opinion of adults. Family breakdown, an overly materialistic society and unhealthy lifestyles all threaten their well-being. Yet for roughly three-quarters of children the perceived risks are greater than the real ones. This is not the case for the rest. More than three million children face the gravest threat – poverty. And their numbers are increasing.

Eliminating child poverty has been commendably high on the government agenda. But it must become the highest priority if there is to be an end to the shameful situation in which a greater proportion of children are growing up poor in this country than in many other wealthy nations. This scandal of divided England was an acute concern to the Review's witnesses. The feeling distilled from the 87 community consultations held round the country, was that: 'The contrasts in children's lives were thought to be massive and widening. Those born into familial stability and economic comfort fare well, many exceptionally so. For others, deprivation is profound and multifaceted: economic, emotional, linguistic, cultural. Our community witnesses believed that the accident of birth profoundly and often cruelly divides the nation's children.'

The many far-reaching effects of this 'accident of birth' are well known. Poverty shortens and diminishes lives. A deprived child is more likely to suffer from a chronic or mental illness, to become obese, to die in an accident. Poverty puts families under great strain. Parents, if they have jobs, are likely to be under great pressure, working long and anti-social hours. If their relationship crumbles, the effect of poverty combined with family breakdown can be profound.

The bleak statistics on England's 'long tail of underachievement' are evidence of poverty's impact on learning. Neuroscience is beginning to reveal just how deprivation can stunt a child's cognitive development. Growing up in a stressful,



unstimulating, linguistically barren environment has been shown to affect children's pre-frontal cortex, an area of the brain associated with problem-solving. Deprived three-year-olds can be up to a year behind their luckier peers. Deprived 16-year-olds are a third less likely than those from comfortable homes to get five A\*-C grade GCSEs. With social mobility declining in England, the chances of these children escaping poverty and breaking the chain that transmits disadvantage down the generations are reducing.

Poverty creates terrible gaps, ones that open early and get harder to close as the years go by. Often these gaps are compounded by other factors including prejudice. Children in England can be marginalised by their religion, race, disability, even their gender. 'Deficit thinking' on the part of some teachers plays a part in the underachievement of black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani children, white working-class boys, and Travellers. Similarly, too many families are still regarded as 'hard to reach'. Discriminated against within education as well as within society, the negative label can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Well-intentioned attempts to

categorise difference in what is now a very diverse country can perpetuate division, just as services targeted at specific groups risk creating stigma. While there is a need for data – and a lack of it hampers attempts to cater

## Key points

- Keep policy focus on reducing underachievement.
- Intervene quickly and effectively to help disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
- Give highest priority to eliminating child poverty.
- Initiate review of SEN definitions, procedures and provision.

adequately for migrant children – statistics that focus on crude aspects of difference can fuel stereotypes.

Schools have a key role in bridging divides and seeing beyond stereotypes. Evidence gathered by the two-year Narrowing the Gap project, funded by local and central government, highlighted their ‘capacity to act as an accessible, non-stigmatising resource for children and families’ and a positive impact on children’s attainment when they do so.

Many are increasingly embracing this role despite an understandable reluctance to be seen as an auxiliary social service, as well as some resentment of the contradictions between policies of inclusion, such as Every Child Matters, and the standards agenda of choice and competition.

The Narrowing the Gap project underlined the importance of a strong and consistent focus on the needs of all pupils, but particularly the most vulnerable. The Review supports its call for speedy and effective interventions to help disadvantaged children. Good relations between early years settings and primary schools are essential, as are effective leadership and access to a wide range of staff and programmes. Also fundamental is the need for better home-school communication – crucially going out and talking to parents, rather than waiting for them to ask for help. Parents do need to understand and support their child’s development, but such messages must be communicated with sensitivity in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect. Clumsy interventions only marginalise families further.

Schools can and do make a difference in alleviating social and educational inequality. Fundamentally, they need to model the trust, encouragement, respect and optimism that we would wish all parents to transmit to their children, says the Review.

## Travellers: what a headteacher says

“The attitude of the leadership is crucial. I don’t treat Traveller children as different. The local authority support team asked if I would like them to do a special assembly about Travellers, but I said no. I said I’ll only do a special assembly about them when I do a special assembly about my Arabic children or my Polish children or my children from South America. We are an inclusive school and we treat all our children as equally as we can.

Travellers are such a visible community anyway I don’t think you are doing them a service by making them very visible in school. Many people will disagree with this, but it is my experience of what works.

Most of our success hinges on respect. If you show respect and liking and treat them exactly the same way as you treat everyone else then they know that.

We’ve also worked very hard to earn the Travellers’

trust – another pivotal issue. When I started here in 2006 the parents were very feisty. I used to say to them: “Come in, sit down, don’t get cross and tell me what the problem is and we will sort it out.” I went up to their site, talked to them, had cups of tea and so on.

They are now very supportive of the school and send their children to our nursery which they didn’t before. The children now wear uniform and last year three transferred full-time to high school – up till then transition had not been successful.

There have always been Traveller children at this school so we put them on our logo. There’s a strip with a tree, a block of flats, a house and a caravan. One of the Traveller mums saw this, went up to it, touched it, and said “You really do care don’t you.”

**Von Smith** is head of John Perryn school, Ealing, London. About 10 per cent of the school’s pupils are Travellers.

# Review special needs – now

Many of England’s 800,000 pupils with special educational needs are still being offered patchy and inadequate services, according to parents, teachers and some local authorities. They told the Review of their deep anxiety and frustration at the postcode lottery of funding and support for these vulnerable children.

It is more than 10 years since the government announced its support for the United Nations’ statement that children with special needs can ‘achieve the fullest educational progress and social integration’ by attending mainstream schools. It is clear that while the principle of inclusion has been largely accepted, the ‘concerted effort’ the UN warned would be required to make it successful is still lacking in many respects.

The Review also revealed concerns that pupils are being labelled and segregated unnecessarily both by the type of school they attend and what they are offered when they get there. There are fears that they are vulnerable to the same stereotyping and discrimination experienced by some minority ethnic groups and ‘hard-to-reach’ families. As is well known, many more boys than girls are classified as having SEN, but there are serious questions as to whether this is a reflection of their needs or rather of the failings of the education system.

In the light of these limitations and constraints the Review says there is an urgent need for a full review of the SEN system. Current efforts to create a genuinely personalised approach to learning for all children makes the case for a rigorous reappraisal even stronger.

# All to play for

Extend the foundation stage to age six to build children's skills and confidence

**F**ive is too tender an age for compulsory attendance.' These words, spoken by an MP in 1870, resonate today. Nearly 150 years after the school starting age was set at five the consequences of that decision remain hugely contentious.

Anxiety focuses on the fact that at age five – against the grain of evidence, expert opinion and international practice – children in England leave behind their active play-based learning and embark on a formal, subject-based curriculum. For many this process begins at four. Teachers and parents told the Review that, essentially, five is too tender an age for subject-based learning. Indeed, the government recently conceded this

point, proposing to create more opportunities for active, play-based learning in key stage 1. However, the Review recommends a built-in rather than a bolted-on solution.

We know, thanks to research, what children need to flourish in their early years. They need the opportunity to build their social skills, their language and their confidence. They do this best through structured play and talk, interacting with each other and with interested and stimulating adults. The evidence is overwhelming that all children, but particularly those from disadvantaged homes, benefit from high-quality pre-school experiences. While challenges remain in terms of staffing quality and funding, the Review commends the government's huge investment in the early years. It welcomes the introduction of the early years foundation stage, and applauds the aim of establishing a children's centre in every community.



Draw the line: protect the distinctive nature of childhood

Yet the applause dies away in relation to primary schools. Here early years policies and principles collide with what has become known as the government's 'standards agenda'. Four-year-olds in reception classes feel the impact. Research reveals that the holistic and balanced early years foundation stage is often distorted by the downward pressure of key stages 1 and 2. Many teachers feel obliged to prioritise literacy and numeracy as well as to drill four-year-olds in the routines of lining up and sitting still and listening. Goals are set that not all pupils can meet, undermining their confidence.

The laudable aim is to narrow England's appallingly large

attainment gap, but this is a lamentable way to proceed. There is no evidence that a child who spends more time learning through lessons – as opposed to learning through play – will 'do better' in the long run. In fact, research suggests the opposite; that too formal too soon can be dangerously counterproductive. In 14 of the 15 countries that scored higher than England in a major study of reading and literacy in 2006, children did not enter school until they were six or seven. And more children read for pleasure in most of those countries than do so in England.

Many Review witnesses called for England to fall into line with international practice. On average only 16 per cent of European Union five-year-olds are in school. The majority attend nursery schools, pre-schools or kindergartens until they are six or seven, settings in which they follow a

## Key points

- Strengthen and extend early learning provision.
- Extend the foundation stage to age six.
- Replace KS1/2 with single primary phase from six to 11.
- Examine feasibility of raising school starting age to six.
- Have unified early years workforce strategy to raise quality of provision.

## Should the school starting age be raised to six?

The Review recommends a full and open debate on whether the age at which children have to start school should be raised to six in line with many other countries. Logically the ages and stages of schooling should align, so the statutory starting age would become six, the point at which children leave the foundation stage and enter the primary stage.

But perhaps this an unnecessary and, arguably, risky change. Unnecessary because the priority is not when children start school but what they do when they get there. With sufficient resources, there is no reason why good quality play-based learning up to age six cannot be provided in primary schools (see case study right). And perhaps it is a risky

change because some fear that children with most to gain from early education will miss out through being kept at home until they are six.

However, that seems unlikely given that the vast majority of parents have been happy to take up the early education on offer for three to four-year-olds. So raising the school starting age would perhaps be largely symbolic. But it would be a potent symbol.

It would confirm that England has finally accepted the need to protect and preserve the distinctive nature of early childhood.

Easing the way for the youngest four-year-olds to start school, as the Rose report recently proposed, sends a rather different signal.

## Too formal too soon: what a headteacher says

When the children moved into Year 1 we found they were regressing educationally and in their social and emotional development. They worried about their learning and this stopped them being effective learners any more. The transition from the foundation stage was such a drastic change. They were used to initiating their own learning and suddenly we were restricting them with literacy and numeracy hours, prescribing what and when they should learn.

So in 2006, we extended the foundation stage principles and practice through to Year 1, and now to Year 2 as well. We really value its experiential, investigative and hands-on learning which suits boys as well girls. It cost us quite a lot. We had to change the furniture, buy new equipment and retrain the staff because we were changing their practice completely. But it worked fantastically. The children are happier and standards have gone up, particularly for boys.

We still have a discrete introduction to literacy and maths, but then the activities are taken forward into the foundation stage's areas of learning. So for literacy there's a story corner where children can act out their stories with puppets and then write them down. There's a phonics area as well as role play with lots of prompts for developing language.

Other schools are coming to look at our practice—including the local junior school.

**Lynn Wilson** is headteacher of Northfield infants school, Driffield, East Yorkshire.

developmentally-appropriate curriculum. In Finland, for example, they concentrate on social, physical and moral development until they are six and then spend a year preparing for transfer to school at seven.

So what should be done? The consensus of evidence and opinion garnered by the Review is that the formalities of the key stage 1 curriculum risk denting five-year-olds' confidence and causing long-term damage to their learning – and the youngest children in a class and those with special needs are particularly vulnerable. Hence the Review's recommendation that the foundation stage be extended to age six.

This would give children enough time to establish positive attitudes to learning and to begin to develop the language and study skills essential to their later progress. Crucially, though, this has to be coupled with the Review's recommended changes to the curriculum and to assessment in order

to remove the distorting pressure of the standards agenda. But establishing the principle does not secure the practice. Quality is crucial. The progress of many reception pupils is hampered by a lack of space, equipment, qualified early-years staff and opportunities for active play. Valuable work is being done to ensure that all children in England's fragmented early-years sector experience good early learning. Such work must continue and eventually be extended to encompass two-year-olds with special needs and those in deprived areas.

Establishing such a foundation stage means key stage 1 becomes redundant. Under Review proposals, a new single primary stage would replace it and key stage 2, taking children through to 11. This would be constructed as a careful and coherent progression from the foundation stage, ensuring that more children glide, rather than trip, over the threshold into mainstream primary education.

*A new single primary stage would be constructed as a careful and coherent progression from the foundation stage*



# The 12 aims

There needs to be a new set of aims that drive the curriculum, teaching, assessment, schools and policy. The aims and principles proposed by the Review unashamedly reflect values and moral purposes, for that is what education is about. They are designed to empower children to manage life and find meaning in the 21st century. They reflect a coherent view of what it takes to become an educated person.

These aims are interdependent. For instance, empowerment and autonomy are achieved in part through exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense, through the development of skill and freeing of imagination, and through the power of dialogue.

Should such a set of aims be statutory? The Review leaves this question open for debate.



Jilli Abdil, Brenside primary school

## The individual

**Well-being:** prepare children for a fulfilling future as well as attend to their present needs, hopes, interests and anxieties and promote their mental, emotional and physical welfare. Help them to develop a strong sense of self, a positive outlook and maximise their ability to learn through good, evidence-informed teaching.

**Engagement:** secure children's active and enthusiastic engagement in their learning.

**Empowerment:** excite, promote and sustain children's agency, empowering them through knowledge, understanding, skill and personal qualities to profit from their learning, to discover and lead rewarding lives, and to manage life and find new meaning in a changing world.

**Autonomy:** enable children to establish who they are and to what they might aspire.

Encourage their independence of thought and discrimination in the choices they make. Help them to see beyond fashion to what is of value.

## Self, others and the wider world

**Encouraging respect and reciprocity:** promote respect for self, for peers and adults, for other generations, for diversity and difference, for ideas and values, and for common courtesy. Respect between child and adult should be mutual, and for learning and human relations are built upon reciprocity.

**Promoting interdependence and sustainability:** develop children's understanding of humanity's dependence for well-being and survival on equitable relationships between individuals, groups, communities and nations, and on a sustainable relationship with the natural world and help children to move from understanding to positive action.

**Empowering local, national and global citizenship:** enable children to become active citizens by encouraging their full participation in decision-making within the classroom and school, and advancing their understanding of human rights, conflict resolution and social justice. They should develop a sense that human interdependence and the fragility of the world order require a concept of citizenship which is global as well as local and national.

**Celebrating culture and community:** every school should aim to become a centre of community life, culture and thought to help counter the loss of community outside the school. 'Education is a major embodiment of a culture's way of life, not just a preparation for it,' as Jerome Bruner said.

## Learning, knowing and doing

**Exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense:** give children the opportunity to encounter, explore and engage with the wealth of human experience and the different ways through which humans make sense of the world and act upon it.

**Fostering skill:** foster skill in those domains on which learning, employment and a rewarding life depend: in oracy and literacy, in mathematics, science, IT, the creative and performing arts and financial management; but also communication, creativity, invention, problem-solving, critical practice and human relations.

**Exciting imagination:** excite children's imagination so they can advance their understanding, extend the boundaries of their lives, contemplate worlds possible as well as actual, understand cause and consequence, develop the capacity for empathy, think about and regulate their behaviour, and explore language, ideas and arguments.

**Enacting dialogue:** help children grasp that understanding builds through collaboration between teacher and pupil and among pupils. Enable them to recognise that knowledge is not only transmitted but also negotiated and re-created; and that each of us in the end makes our own sense out of that knowledge. Dialogue is central to pedagogy: between self and others, between personal and collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of thinking.

# Principled approach

In the 1960s, when no self-respecting school or education authority was without its list of 'aims and objectives' (the two were rarely differentiated), Richard Peters and Lawrence Stenhouse argued for 'principles of procedure': that is, standards of individual or collective conduct. Rather than encouraging vague statements of intent, these would 'spell out, clearly and simply, the values and principles by which our everyday conduct will be guided and against which it may be judged.' Principles should guide the work of everyone who works in education, from school hall to Whitehall, says the Review. The ones it proposes are drawn from the evidence it gathered.

**Entitlement.** Government should specify in broad terms the character of the education and scope of the curriculum to which all children in England are entitled.

**Equity.** Government, local authorities and schools should work to ensure that every family and child, regardless of circumstance or income, has equality of access to the best possible primary education. They should also seek to narrow the gap in outcomes between vulnerable

and excluded children and the rest.

**Quality, standards and accountability.** Government should define in broad terms the quality of the primary education which local authorities and schools should provide and the standards which should be achieved. However 'quality' and 'standards' should no longer be treated as synonymous.

**Responsiveness to national need.** Government should balance its proper concern for economic and workplace needs with attention to broader social and cultural imperatives.

**Balancing national, local and individual needs.** Local authorities and schools are well placed to identify local needs and educational opportunities, in consultation with the local community. The same principle applies at school level. Teachers have special knowledge of individual children, but parents, carers and children themselves are also highly knowledgeable.

**Balancing preparation and development.** Pupils are children now, not just future students and employees or trainee adults.

**Guidance, not prescription.** National and local bodies should move away from prescription towards guidance, and not always even that, unless schools request it.

**Continuity and consistency.** Government should ensure that its policies for each sector are in harmony.

**Respect for human rights.** Government commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should be maintained.

**Sustainability.** Government, local authorities and schools should strive to act in ecologically sustainable ways.

**Democratic engagement.** Government should seek to engender a climate and discourse for education which is open and responsive, and schools should reflect this.

**Respect for evidence.** Government's approach to evidence should be open and responsive, rather than politically selective.

**Resources and support.** Every new education policy should be funded to secure its implementation.

*Continued from page 18*

- confident individuals, who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;
- responsible citizens, who make a positive contribution to society.

However, the Review believes we can do better. The QCDA aims say too little about content and are minimal expectations rather than high aspirations.

Matthew Arnold's assertion that education should convey 'the best that has been thought and

said' is out of favour with cultural relativists. But it makes little sense to define educational aims without explicit reference to the culture, society and world that children inhabit – the way these currently are, the way they may become, the way they ought to be, and what they offer that is most worthy of exploration in schools and

classrooms.

Denis Lawton, the curriculum scholar, was surely right, says the Review, when he argued in 1983 that however it is conceptualised and structured a curriculum remains in the end a

## Parents want well-rounded pupils

I do not relish being looked after in my older years by a generation, all of whom have level 5 in their Sats, five A\* GCSEs, but who will not be nice to me or each other and who will not value or seek to invest in relationships which hold communities and ultimately society in place. *Submission from a parent*



Salad days: pupils are very aware of climate change

# Grow your own green knights

Teachers, parents and the wider public offered a generous vision of what primary education is about. Not surprisingly, they are profoundly aware of the social and global conditions which need to be addressed if children are to have a future worth looking forward to. By the time today's primary children are in their forties, unchecked global warming could tip the world beyond the point of no return, according to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

It is not surprising that many witnesses were pessimistic about the state of childhood today. However, as the Review's community soundings report noted:

'Pessimism turned to hope when witnesses felt they had the power to act. Thus, the children who were most confident that climate change need not overwhelm them were those whose schools had decided to replace unfocussed fear by factual information and practical strategies for energy reduction and sustainability.

'Similarly, the teachers who were least worried by national initiatives were those who responded to them with robust and knowledgeable criticism rather than resentful compliance, and asserted their professional right to go their own way.'

## Case study: children relish a down-to-earth approach

Hannah is a Springwatch fanatic and fascinated by nature in all its manifestations. Her school takes special care to encourage children's individual talents (aims 1-4) and relationship with the wider world (aim 7) so it was a thrilling day when she identified an endangered species in the grounds of Ponteland middle school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Northumberland Wildlife Trust came out, and spent several hours with Hannah, tracking the beast, finding its eggs, and confirming that it was indeed a great crested newt.

As a result of Hannah's

work, Ponteland's wildlife pond could become an area of special scientific interest.

Children at Ponteland are very much aware of the world around them, both immediate and distant. A 'green flag' school, the pupils recycle paper, metals, plastic and old phones. An eco team grows vegetables in one of the two quads, and plants such as lavender abound so that

butterflies and bees will be attracted. Pupils here are doing their bit to combat global worries about declining bee populations (aim 6).

The school has a partnership with Wanga primary in Mbita, Kenya, and has raised money for a computer, a building and new latrines. Pupils have compared their carbon footprint with that of Wanga, and they

understand what the difference signifies (aims 5 and 10).

Children at Ponteland feel empowered by their knowledge and the contribution they make, the skills they gain and the confidence they build undertaking their eco activities, says headteacher Caroline Pryer. 'We spend a lot of time considering the future,' she says. 'They are very much aware of how lucky they are, and that we have to respect resources.'

The school has also adopted a red kite, which the children have named Soar, 'because that's what we feel we do in our school,' says the headteacher (aim 11).



# The breadth of life

A framework underpinned by aims will support innovation and rigour

‘At the heart of the educational process lies the child,’ announced the Plowden Report in 1967. ‘The school curriculum is at the heart of education,’ retorted the government in 1981, during the countdown to England’s national curriculum.

Both were right of course, says the Review, and there are other contenders for this coveted place at the ‘heart’ of primary education – pedagogy, for instance. A tendency towards polarisation has always besieged primary education. Current ostensible opponents, such as skills versus knowledge or standards versus breadth are just as untenable as the subject/child dichotomy of the 1960s, which survives today.

How do we give all these elements the right weight and importance? It requires a fundamental re-thinking of the primary curriculum.

The Review found widespread agreement that there should be some kind of national curriculum, and that the early years foundation stage (EYFS) areas of learning provide a good platform. However, as children move through the primary phase, their statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced education is increasingly but needlessly compromised by a ‘standards’ agenda which combines high stakes testing and the national strategies’ exclusive focus on literacy and numeracy.

The most conspicuous casualties are the arts, the humanities and the kinds of learning in all subjects which require time for talking, problem-solving and the extended exploration of ideas. A policy-led belief that curriculum breadth is incompatible with the pursuit of standards in ‘the basics’ has fuelled this loss of entitlement, says the Review. This split is

exacerbated by the relative neglect of the non-core curriculum in initial teacher training, school inspection and professional development. The result is a primary curriculum which, as Ofsted has confirmed, is often two-tier in terms of quality as well as time.

The separation of the basics and the rest at national level – the former has been managed within the DCSF and the latter by

the QCA – has widened the gap. Excessive micro-management from the centre is widely seen to have made this problem worse.

The government-commissioned curriculum review conducted by Jim Rose addresses some of these issues, but its assumption that the main challenge is helping ‘primary class teachers solve the quarts-into-pint-pots problem’ is misplaced, says the Review (see page 36).

Any national curriculum should only set out children’s minimum curriculum entitlement. The question is, what should children learn? This is not straightforward, and provoked much discussion and many submissions. It is widely agreed that how children learn is as important as what they learn. Yet the Review rejects arguments that ‘process’ is all that matters, and that knowledge is ephemeral and easily downloaded after a Google search. Knowledge matters because culture matters, it says. In fact, culture is what defines us.

But what knowledge and which culture? The Review has devised a curriculum framework, built on the interplay between its 12 aims and eight curriculum domains (see chart opposite). The Review’s final report, and much of the evidence underpinning it, has argued that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ national curriculum is not appropriate to Britain’s diverse culture nor the different circumstances of England’s 17,300 schools.

That is why it is proposing that each of its eight domains should have national and local components, with 30 per cent of the yearly total available for the local curriculum. This would give schools more flexibility, greater opportunity to tailor learning to local needs and characteristics and would encourage innovation.

The curriculum framework needs to ensure a smooth progression from the foundation stage up. While there cannot be a straight correspondence between the domains and the foundation stage areas of experience, or to the 14 secondary subjects, the path through schooling can be easily traced.

The Review clarifies that domains are not named slots in the weekly time-

## Key points

- Introduce a new primary curriculum which: is firmly aligned with the Review’s proposed aims, values and principles; guarantees children’s entitlement to breadth, depth and balance, and to high standards in all areas of learning, not just the 3Rs; combines a national framework with protected local elements; ensures that language, literacy and oracy are paramount.
- Wind up the primary national strategy – as the government has now agreed to do – and re-integrate literacy and numeracy with the rest of the curriculum.
- Re-balance the curriculum roles of government, local authorities and schools.
- Build capacity to ensure that entitlement as re-defined becomes a reality.

## ELEMENTS IN A NEW PRIMARY CURRICULUM

As proposed by the Cambridge Primary Review

### The National Curriculum

#### 70% of teaching time

- overall framework nationally determined, *statutory*
- programmes of study nationally proposed, *non-statutory*

### The Community Curriculum

#### 30% of teaching time

- overall framework and programmes of study locally proposed, *non-statutory*

### Aims

- well-being
  - engagement
  - empowerment
  - autonomy
- 
- encouraging respect and reciprocity
  - promoting interdependence and sustainability
  - empowering local, national and global citizenship
  - celebrating culture and community
- 
- exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense
  - fostering skill
  - exciting the imagination
  - enacting dialogue

### Domains

- arts and creativity
- citizenship and ethics
- faith and belief
- language, oracy and literacy
- mathematics
- physical and emotional health
- place and time
- science and technology

- Addresses the problems of present and past arrangements, especially: overload, micro-management from the centre, the distorting impact of testing and the national strategies, the dislocation of English and literacy, the imbalance in quality between 'the basics' and the rest, the marginalisation of the arts and humanities, and the muddled discussion about subjects, knowledge and skills.
- Should be planned and implemented in ways that enable curriculum entitlement, quality, breadth, balance of attention to present and future needs, rights, equity, guidance not prescription, local responsiveness, and the pursuit of explicit aims and values.
- Starts from aims.
- Builds on the early years foundation stage curriculum.
- Is conceived as a matrix of 12 educational aims and eight domains of knowledge, skill, enquiry and disposition, with the aims locked into the framework from the outset.
- Places all eight domains on a non-hierarchical basis, on the principle that although time will be differentially allocated, all domains are essential and must be protected.
- Acknowledges and celebrates the centrality of language, oracy and literacy.
- Incorporates a significant and protected local component.
- Differentiates curriculum from timetabling, to encourage thinking about which aspects might be taught separately and which combined.
- Requires a radical re-think of most

table. They are professional curriculum categories for schools to interpret and a starting point for curriculum planning. The Review also believes that all domains must be taught to the highest standard. There should be no hierarchy of subjects. While not every domain will receive as much time as others ('language, oracy and literacy' is bound to take a hefty chunk of the timetable), each deserves to be taught with skill and depth. Schools and advisers will want to consider which domains might be taught discretely and which in combination; what type of pedagogy suits each and how they fit into the life of the school as a whole.

The Review says the proposed new curriculum:

- of the domains, especially language, oracy and literacy.
- Divides the national curriculum and the community curriculum into three segments for planning purposes: a nationally-determined description and rationale for each domain (statutory); nationally-determined programmes of study (non-statutory); a locally-determined community curriculum (non-statutory), which also identifies particular local needs which the curriculum should address and the distinctive educational opportunities which the local community and environment provide.
- Should be implemented flexibly and creatively by each school.

# The eight domains

## Arts and creativity



The renaissance of this domain, which takes in all the arts, creativity and the imagination, is long overdue. A vigorous campaign should be established to advance public understanding of the arts in education, human development, culture and national life. There should also be a much more rigorous approach to arts teaching in schools. However, creativity is not confined to the arts. Creativity and imaginative activity must inform teaching and learning across the curriculum.

## Citizenship and ethics

This domain has both global and national components and includes the values, moral codes, customs and procedures by which people act, co-exist and regulate their affairs. It stems in part from widespread concern about growing selfishness and material greed. It intersects clearly with a number of the aims: 'encouraging respect and reciprocity'; 'promoting

interdependence and sustainability', 'celebrating culture and community' and 'exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense'.

In relation to the aim of 'enacting dialogue', work in schools on dialogic teaching and philosophy for children are examples of this domain in action.

## Faith and belief

Religion is so fundamental to this country's history, culture and language, as well as to the daily lives of many of its inhabitants, that it must remain within the curriculum, even though some Review witnesses argued that it should be removed on the grounds that England is a predominantly secular society or that religious belief is a matter for the family. Non-denominational schools should teach about religion with respect and understanding, but they should also explore other beliefs, including those questioning the validity of religion itself. The place of the daily act of worship, required by the 1944 Education Act and now seen by many as anomalous, deserves proper debate.

## Language, oracy and literacy

This domain includes spoken language, reading, writing, literature, wider aspects of language and communication, a modern foreign language, ICT and other non-print



media. It is at the heart of the new curriculum, and needs to be rethought.

Literacy empowers children, excites their imaginations and widens their worlds. Oracy must have its proper place in the language curriculum. Spoken language is central to learning, culture and life, and is much more prominent in the curricula of many other countries.

It no longer makes sense to pay attention to text but ignore txt. While ICT reaches across the whole curriculum, it needs a particular place in the language component. It is important to beware of the perils of unsavoury content and long hours spent staring at screens, but the more fundamental task is to help children develop the capacity to approach electronic media (including television and film) with the same degree of discrimination and critical awareness as for reading and writing. Therefore it demands as much rigour as the written and spoken word. The Review disagrees with the Rose report's decision to establish ICT as a separate core 'skill for learning and life,' especially in the light of some neuroscientists' concerns about the

*Spoken language is central to learning, culture and life, and is much more prominent in the curricula of many other countries*

possible adverse effects of over-exposure to screen technologies. Placing it in the language component enables schools to balance and explore relationships between new and established forms of communication, and to maintain the developmental and educational primacy of talk.

Every school should have a policy for language across the curriculum. If language unlocks thought, then thought is enhanced and challenged when language in all its aspects is pursued with purpose and rigour in every educational context. Language should have a key place in all eight domains and children should learn about the uses of language in different disciplines.

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## Mathematics

This includes both numeracy and the wider aspects of maths, as well as financial literacy. The question of what aspects of maths are truly essential in primary education should be re-opened.

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## Physical and emotional health

This deals with emotions and relationships and with the development and health of the human body, along with the skills of agility, co-ordination and teamwork acquired through sport and PE. The Review believes it makes medical and educational sense to group physical and emotional health together, and for health to become a mandatory component of the primary curriculum for the first time. Well-being is about educational engagement, raising aspirations and maximising potential as well as physical and emotional welfare.

This domain should be reconceptualised to explore the interface between emotional and physical development and health and their contribution to well-being



and educational attainment. The Review is ambivalent about placing the education of the emotions in any one domain, but this is necessary if it is to be treated as part of the statutory curriculum. However, concern for children's emotional health and wider well-being needs to pervade the entire curriculum.

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## Place and time

This includes how history shapes culture, events, consciousness and identity and its contribution to our understanding of present and future. It includes the geographical study of location, other people, other places



and human interdependence, locally, nationally and globally. Like the arts, the humanities need proper public and political recognition of their importance to children's understanding of who they are, of change and continuity, cause and consequence, of why society is arranged as it is, and of the interaction of mankind and the physical environment. This domain may include anthropology and other human sciences. It is central to the aims of respect and reciprocity, interdependence and sustainability, local, national and global citizenship, and culture and community.

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## Science and technology

This includes the exploration and understanding of science and the workings of the physical world, together with human action on the physical world and its consequences. Although science is currently a core subject, Review evidence shows that it has been increasingly squeezed out by testing and the national strategies. The educational case for primary science, as for the arts and humanities, needs to be strongly re-asserted.

# Next steps

A statutory description and rationale for each domain, and non-statutory programmes of study taking up to 70 per cent of time, would be planned nationally by independent expert panels. The descriptions would specify in broad terms the knowledge, skills, dispositions and kinds of enquiry to be taught, and the standards of achievement and quality of learning to be secured.

A whole-curriculum panel would vet each domain and guard against curriculum overload.

A non-statutory 'community curriculum' taking up to 30 per cent of time would be planned by community partnerships convened by local authorities. It would pay close attention to the handling of faith and the teaching of language, and in rural areas could ease resource sharing. The community curriculum would include elements from all eight domains agreed collectively by schools and each school's response to respecting and building upon the lives of the children themselves. Children would be involved in consultations.

## The community curriculum: what a director of children's services says

I like the feel of the community curriculum. When I think of the nature and shape of our community it has such particular characteristics. Tower Hamlets is one of the most economically disadvantaged boroughs in the country, so we are very interested in raising aspirations and promoting social mobility.

In some families, unemployment has been a problem for generations. Therefore links with the local economy and City businesses are crucial. We try to look at people's relationship with work in our schools' curriculum, whether it's doing chores or, for older children, helping out in family businesses. We want children to understand what sort of paths you have to

follow in order to enter different careers. For instance, this is the journey you need to go on to work in a bank, or to go into law.

We also want them to learn about decision-making, and how decisions are made that affect their lives. There is a continuum that starts in the children's centres and we have the biggest turnout for Young Mayor elections.

Our community is rich in its diversity including many families from the long standing Bangladeshi community, a significant Somali community as well as working-class white families. Our curriculum needs to respond to a broad range of needs and values. You have to talk about understanding different viewpoints and ways of resolving difference. If you begin in the early years, building from 'myself' to 'my family' to 'my neighbourhood', issues of community cohesion can be built in. You have to be sensitive, working with the grain of the community.

The community curriculum fits with a number of domains. It's about connecting children to their community and building on its history and where they fit in. We work with many local arts and cultural centres such as the Half Moon Theatre, the National Theatre and the Whitechapel Gallery. We have a programme called 'find your talent' and try to connect with children's authentic cultural experiences.

We teach 17 community languages free of charge, including Bengali, Sylheti, Arabic and French.

The question is, how do you root everything you do in a meaningful experience for children, especially when so much of their life is increasingly virtual? They need things you can touch, feel and taste, and you can see these things better if they're around you and in your world.

**Kevan Collins** is director of children's services, Tower Hamlets

Capital idea: the community curriculum would help Tower Hamlets children connect with their area



## Enacting dialogue: what a teacher says

Our school has been part of the dialogic teaching project in North Yorkshire, Talk for Learning. As a teacher you can encourage powerful, purposeful talk about any topic. When my Year 6 class was studying World War II, we began the term by building a big shelter



because the children had to hide from air raids. Working together to solve the problems of construction and camouflage brings out incredible talk among the children.

I encourage them by telling the class: 'I've got this massive problem. What do you think? How can you help me? Is there a better way? How can you make it stronger?' Dialogic teaching is about asking open-ended questions and respecting

everyone's opinion. The five principles are that dialogue should be collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful.

It helped to make WWII seem real for the children. They wrote poetry about hiding from German soldiers and letters to Anne Frank. They danced to dramatic music. 'Can you hear the bombers coming?' I asked, and a child said, 'I really believed I was there because I know what it feels like.' Children develop higher levels of talk and higher levels of thinking.

Dialogue underpins good practice, and becomes embedded in what you do. In maths, for instance, the easiest way is to say, is there an alternative method of doing it? Can you see patterns? What sort of information is relevant? What's the relationship between ...? Can you sort or categorise? Can you suggest a better way to get there?

In geography, we were studying rivers, and held a public inquiry about where to put a bypass through a community near the estuary. The children took on roles and became quite energised. They researched the issues, and came up with all sorts of arguments. There were sizzling rows and children really got into their roles – 'Excuse me, but it's my my livelihood you're talking about here!' declared one child. 'It's my home!' retorted another.

'Enacting dialogue' means making your school a community of enquiry. ,

**Lesley Dennon** is Year 6 teacher at South Milford community school, Leeds

## The Review's proposed aims: what a head says

These are powerful aims and I would adopt them in my school. They are going to determine the ethics behind the curriculum and how things are taught. For instance, will citizenship be superficial or really give children an understanding of what it means to participate in a democracy? Will it help them imagine what life is like for people in other parts of the world?

What I would do in my school is get teachers to figure out what the aims and domains mean in relation to their practice.

Going back to values is really important for me. I have to have a reason for doing things, and children are the same. As Sir Alan Steer's report on behaviour says, children need to realise that boundaries are set for a reason, rather than just being told they mustn't do something.

What we want our children to be in 2009 is different than in 1999. People don't want

children just stuffed full of knowledge that doesn't mean anything to them. Children need to experience a concept; they can't just be told. The primary strategy has treated the child as the recipient. This new curriculum is about interacting with knowledge.

The aims for 'the individual' will be very important across many domains. 'Place and time' can engage and empower children through telling their own stories. I would like to see our Somalian and Polish children examining their own backgrounds through history and geography as well as art and music.

Because religion is central to so many children's lives, pupils lead RE lessons, presenting their faiths to classmates through artefacts and stories.

Subject knowledge will be very important when teaching this aims-led curriculum. As a musician, I understand the learning journey a child has to take, I know the destination they should reach, and how to help them get there. ,

**Melody Moran** is head of Brentside primary school, Ealing, London



Constructive approach: children need to experience concepts

# Free to talk

Teachers should use their promised pedagogical liberty to focus on classroom interaction

**G**ood teaching makes a difference. Excellent teaching can transform lives. The Review's aims for primary education place teachers at the forefront of the quest to enliven young minds, build knowledge and understanding, explore ideas, develop skill and excite the imagination. Its framework for the curriculum rejects any suggestion that 'standards' are about the 3Rs alone and insists that if curriculum entitlement means anything, it is about excellence across the board, in every aspect of learning.

In all this, the teacher's expertise and commitment are crucial. Teaching is a skill, or a complex combination of skills, but it is much more than that, and a teacher's knowledge, dispositions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills are no less important. It is no longer acceptable to assert, as Britain's political leaders did during the 1990s (and some still do), that teaching is just a matter of common sense and that everything else is 'barmy theory'. What teachers know and how they think shapes, for better or worse, how they teach – and how their pupils learn.

And so we arrive at pedagogy – a word that has had to fight for a hearing in England, despite being taken for granted in many other countries. Broadly speaking, pedagogy is the why, what and how of teaching. It is the knowledge and skills teachers need in order to make and justify the many decisions that each lesson requires. Pedagogy is the heart of the enterprise. It gives life to educational aims and values, lifts the curriculum from the printed page, mediates learning and knowing, engages, inspires and empowers learners – or sadly does not.

For more than a decade teachers effectively lost control of pedagogy. The arrival of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy in 1998-9 signalled government determination to dictate teaching methods, something all previous governments had refused to do. These highly structured lessons with the same daily format were supported by centrally-produced texts and other resources and enforced by teacher training and inspection. While many younger teachers found the strategies helpful, more experienced staff

were angered by the erosion of professional freedom and creativity perhaps even to the detriment of the very standards the strategies were supposed to advance (see pages 34-35). One of the Review's research surveys warned that prescribed pedagogy combined with high stakes testing and the national curriculum amounted to a 'state theory of learning'. Prepackaged, government-approved lessons are not good for a democracy, nor for children's education, says the Review. Pupils do not learn to think for themselves if their teachers are expected to do as they are told.

Now, in a change of heart which the Review has welcomed, the national strategies are to go. Teachers are to be trusted to use their professional judgement. So how can they best take advantage of their pedagogical freedom? In attempting to answer this question, the Review asked teachers and children what constitutes good teaching and juxtaposed their comments with evidence from research such as the TLRP's 10 principles of effective teaching and learning. The Review's judgement is that good teaching is not, as the strategies held, the repetition of a simple formula. It demands reflection, judgement and creativity. It comes, as international research has indicated, from principles of effective learning and teaching grounded in evidence, together with a firm grasp of what is to be taught and a broad repertoire of skills and techniques.

Further indications as to what constitutes good teaching can be gleaned from what the national strategies failed to achieve. Leaving aside concerns about democratic and professional freedom, and the debate about their impact on standards (see pages 32-33), the strategies could also be challenged in respect of the quality of their ideas. Much of the vast amount of material produced was bland and generalised and of doubtful provenance, while unacknowledged ideas were

frequently distorted to fit the policy agenda. Perhaps this partly explains why, although the strategies certainly influenced lesson structure, content, classroom layout and organisation, achieving deep pedagogical change was more elusive.

Research has shown that such change happens very slowly, particularly in the

## Key points

- Work towards a pedagogy of repertoire rather than recipe, and of principle rather than prescription.
- Ensure that teaching and learning are properly informed by research.
- Make a concerted effort to ensure that language, particularly spoken language, achieves its full potential as a key to cognitive development, learning and successful teaching.
- Uphold the principle that it is not for government or government agencies to tell teachers how to teach.



**Taking wing: talk – at home and at school – is education at its most elemental and potent**

vital realm of classroom interaction that shapes or frustrates children's understanding. The strategies embraced the concept of interactive whole-class teaching with the 'horseshoe' classroom layout that enables all the children to see each other and the teacher. But the focus

### Good teachers: what they have in common ...

- Secure *knowledge* of what is to be taught and learned.
- Command of a broad *repertoire* of teaching strategies and skills.
- Understanding of the *evidence* in which the repertoire is grounded.
- Broad *principles* of effective learning and teaching derived from the above.
- *Judgement* to weigh up needs and situations, apply the principles and deploy the repertoire appropriately.
- A framework of educational *aims and values* to steer and sustain the whole.

### ... and what children say

Children, as revealed by the Review's 87 regional consultations, are interested in pedagogy. They said that good teachers are those who:

- 'Really know their stuff' (what researchers refer to as pedagogical content knowledge).
- 'Explain things in advance so you know what a lesson is about' (advance cognitive organisation).
- 'Make sure it's not in too big steps' (graduated instruction).
- 'Give us records of what we learn' (formative feedback).

was more on the order and discipline inherent in the arrangement than on what really matters – the quality of the talk that teachers are able to model and promote.

No classroom layout can, of itself, raise the quality of interaction and research shows that in many classrooms traditional exchanges have survived the many organisational changes. Pupils compete for the attention of teachers who ask 'closed' questions. Answers are brief, usually only proving a child can recall what they have just been told and feedback is minimal. Cognitive challenge is low and talk remains a vehicle for the transmission of facts rather than the simulation of thought. Yet talk – at home, in school, among peers – is education at its most elemental and potent. It is the aspect of teaching which has arguably the greatest influence on learning. Hence the Review has nominated classroom interaction as the aspect of pedagogy which most repays investment by teachers and those who support them.

An increasing number of local authorities and schools are exploring the true potential of talk. Certainly teaching which is 'dialogic' – where classrooms are full of debate and discussion that is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, critical and purposeful – can only be seen as the antithesis of any 'state theory of learning' and indeed as its antidote. In promoting its value the Review builds on a vast body of research.

As the old assumptions about where authority should lie in a school are being challenged and knowledge has been democratised by the internet, there is a recognition that transmission teaching, top-down school organisation and government micro-management of the classroom are simply no longer appropriate.

# Summary justice

How can we find fair and accurate ways to assess pupils, schools and national trends?



**On your marks: it is not testing which raises standards in schools but good teaching**

If there is one thing the Review's witnesses, submissions and research evidence are agreed on it is that national tests and tables are narrowing the curriculum, limiting children's learning and failing to provide sufficiently broad and reliable information about individual children, schools or the primary sector as a whole. They are too limited in scope to tell us much about a particular child's progress, and no single instrument can fulfill all the tasks expected of the Sats.

It is often claimed that national tests raise standards. At best their impact is oblique, says the Review. High stakes testing leads to 'teaching to the test' and even parents concentrate their attention on the areas being tested. It is this intensity of focus, and anxiety about the results and their consequences, which make the initial difference to test scores. But it does not last; for it is not testing which raises standards but good teaching. Conversely, if testing distorts teaching and the curriculum, as evidence from the Review and elsewhere shows, it may actually depress standards.

Children in England are among the most tested in

the world, and there is a widespread assumption that 'assessment' and 'testing' are synonymous. This is far from true.

Assessment has two kinds of purpose: helping learning and teaching (formative) and reporting on what has been learned (summative). Assessment for learning fits modern views of how learning takes place, particularly in building on children's initial ideas and strengthening their engagement with and responsibility for learning. The Assessment Reform Group of expert academics defines it as 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning'. It is essential to effective teaching and helps shrink the gap between the lower attainers and the rest.

The government is now promoting its own version of assessment for learning, but this development is undermined by high stakes testing and league tables and the official interpretation of AfL has come in for much criticism.

The Review says England's assessment system needs to be

## Key points

- Retain summative pupil assessment at the end of the primary phase, but uncouple assessment for accountability from assessment for learning.
- Replace current KS2 English and maths Sats with a system which assesses and reports on children's achievement in all areas of their learning, with minimum disruption.
- Monitor the performance of individual schools and the system as a whole through sample testing.
- Make greater use of teacher assessment.

## Case study: assessment for learning woven into a science lesson

The nine and 10-year-olds were learning about changes in materials. The teacher's goal was to enable them to recognise the origin of some everyday materials and the ways they have been changed to reach their familiar form. She began with fabrics.

The teacher asked the children to think about what the clothing they were wearing was made of, but she did not want answers just yet. What they would be doing in this and the next lesson, she told them, was to find out more about the different materials used in making their clothes and shoes.

She wanted to explore the children's initial ideas about one of these materials and at the same time show them a way in which they could report their work. Holding up a silk scarf, she asked the pupils to produce four sequenced drawings of what the scarf was like before it was a scarf, what it was like

before that, and again before that, and before that (as suggested in Nuffield Primary Science materials).

The children worked in pairs, discussing their ideas and working on their drawings for about 20 minutes. Then the teacher asked them to pin their drawings on a large board she had prepared for this purpose. The children looked at each other's drawings and thought up plenty of questions to ask in the ensuing class discussion.

Meanwhile, the collage of drawings gave the teacher an immediate overview of the children's way of tackling this work as well as of their ideas about the origin and changes in this particular material. She noticed that most recognised that the material had been woven from a thread and had been dyed before or after weaving, but few had an idea of the origin of the thread from a living thing, a silk worm.

Since the children's drawings were not self explanatory, she discussed with them how they could make them clearer; for instance, she showed them other drawings which had labels that clarified what was being represented. Groups of four then worked with a different material, using equipment such as magnifying lenses and information books and other sources.

The teacher listened in to their discussions, at times asking questions to help them advance their ideas. If necessary, she reminded them of the aim of their work and to record it in a way that would best help others understand it when they came to report to the class.

Adapted from **Making Progress in Primary Science** (Harlen, W., Macro C., Reed, K. and Schilling, M.2003 London RoutledgeFalmer).

thoroughly reformed – and assessment to help learning must be at its heart. This should be supported by a system for summarising, reporting and accrediting children's performance that provides information about all aspects of learning. Meanwhile, separate systems are needed for the external evaluation of schools and for monitoring national standards.

The current testing regime produces results which are less reliable (Are the tests accurate?) and valid (Are they fit for purpose? Do they measure what is important?) than is generally assumed. One reason the Sats are not sufficiently reliable is that the proportion of the curriculum being assessed is small. The Review's authors wonder why the rationale behind ministers' decision to abolish Sats at key stage 3 and establish a system of sample testing (asking a sample of children different questions from a large selection) to monitor standards would not also

apply at key stage 2. Government plans for school report cards to underpin school accountability would make such a move even more logical.

The Review fully accepts the need for summative assessment at the end of primary school – but says it must be broader, more innovative, and conducted under entirely different conditions than the current system. Developing a comprehensive and coherent framework that can be administered unobtrusively and with

minimum disruption will require careful research and deliberation. It will be necessary to enhance teacher assessment. This would require staff development, well-written criteria and thorough moderation.

The practice of teachers meeting to discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from studying pupils' work has been described as 'the most powerful means of developing professional competence in assessment'.



Sound approach: data are needed on all learning

# See the whole picture

The quality of a school should be judged in relation to all it does, not just its test scores

'Standards' is one of the most commonly-used and emotive words in the education debate.

Politicians pledge to raise them and newspaper columnists bewail their decline. The word came up repeatedly in evidence to the Review. But what do people mean by 'standards'?

It is worth pointing out that the term 'standards' tends to be used in two ways – standards attained and standards to aim for. Quality can be defined as how what we get compares with what we expected to get.

In *Education by Numbers*, Warwick Mansell comments that in political discourse the idea of raising standards 'is implied to stand for improving the overall quality of education in our schools. That, in the public mind, I would venture, is what the phrase means,' he says. However, the reality in schools is that it means raising test scores 'as measured by a set of relatively narrow indicators laid down more or less unilaterally by ministers'.

The Review shows that the pursuit of a very limited concept of 'standards' has compromised children's legal entitlement to a broad and balanced education.

Unfortunately, any assertion that standards are rising or falling in English primary schools is hard to substantiate. The evidence is not clear cut and the measures have been so variable over time, and so limited, that conclusions must be drawn with great care, says the Review.

With that caveat, international data show English children to be above the international average in English and to have made much progress in science.

However, gains in reading skills may have come at the expense of enjoyment, and the 'long tail of under-achievement' in the three core subjects persists.

When it comes to Ofsted inspections, the criteria and methodology have also changed frequently,



Finding the right note: how can we measure what we value? Should we?

and the expertise, training and approaches of the inspection teams themselves are highly variable, according to Review witnesses. The government needs an inspection system which assesses standards and quality in a way which retains the confidence of parents and teachers. The Ofsted model does not do this.

The Review argues that current notions of 'standards' and 'quality' should be replaced by a more comprehensive framework which relates to the entirety of what a school does and how it performs. What is clearly needed is a better match between the standards we aim for and the ones we actually measure (measuring what we value, not valuing what we measure). And it is important to recognise that value judgements are unavoidable in setting standards based on 'what ought to be' rather than 'what is', the Review says.

Just as criticising Sats does not equate with opposition to high standards, criticism of the current school inspection system does not imply a refusal to be held accountable. The issue is not whether schools should be accountable, but for what and by what means. By insisting on a

## Key points

- Explore a new model for school inspection, with more focus on classroom practice, pupil learning and the whole curriculum.
- A new framework of accountability should directly reinforce school improvement.
- Standards must be redefined so as to cover all that schools do, not just test scores in the 'basics'.
- The issue is not *whether* schools should be accountable (they should) but *how*.

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## A possible model for school inspection

Inspections would be longer than the current 'light-touch' model.

- The focus would be on the classroom, not on documentation, looking at (a) the performance of children in the work actually observed over the range of the curriculum; and (b) the quality of teaching and of other provision.
- Inspections would also report on the effectiveness of the school's procedures for self-evaluation and improvement.
- A summary would be reported publicly to parents,

along with a summary of the school's reactions.

- A very adverse report might trigger a full inspection or bring forward the timing of the next inspection.
- Findings would be seen as independent and professional, though subjective, assessments of schools' strengths and weaknesses at a specific point in time.
- Time between inspections might stretch from three to five years.
- Governors, parents, local authorities or schools would have the right to request an

inspection, and this request would be considered by HM Inspectorate.

- Inspection teams would include the school's improvement partner as an adviser. The SIP, head and governors would take responsibility for any follow-up work.
- The system would be administered by a reconstituted HM Inspectorate; a stand-alone independent, publicly funded body who would report regularly to MPs and whose work would be periodically reviewed by a commission

including representatives of all relevant stake-holders and drawing on the expertise of inspectors, researchers and educationists.

- School inspections would be carried out by an expanded body of HMI, who would also have their own 'patch' of schools, liaise with local authorities and carry out their own programme of survey inspections. They might inspect an individual school at the request of ministers.

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**Colin Richards** is a former HM inspector

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## Standards: what teachers and parents say

Teachers and parents who sent submissions to the Review were concerned about what they saw as an excessive emphasis on targets and box-ticking.

**One teacher** wrote: 'Our Ofsted reports have generally been good, but the pressure on staff beforehand detracted from their normal work with our children, and some of the

comments have seriously upset staff members - so much so that we have had excellent teachers considering resigning. It has required much effort to calm the troubled waters. What a waste of time.'

**And a parent** had this to say: 'We owe our children more than a metaphorical tick in the target box which at best gratifies adults rather more

than it does children and at worst requires us to stifle natural creativity and emotional intelligence in the adults of tomorrow.'

**Local authority advisers** and officials leaned in a similar direction, but were a little more divided. 'We believe that government initiatives and Ofsted have made schools more accountable and have set

benchmarks for children and parents. There is greater awareness of what good practice looks like,' said one LA submission. But another said: 'Without losing accountability, a culture is required that continues to raise teachers' status, minimising explicit and implied criticism through over-reporting of unrefined data.'

concept of standards which extends across the full curriculum rather than part of it, the Review is strengthening rather than weakening school accountability. Central and local government should also be held accountable for their part in the process, it says.

A new model for school inspection should be explored, with a greater focus on classroom practice, pupil learning and the curriculum as a whole, and within a framework of accountability which reinforces processes of school improvement.

Review evidence shows that people believe it would be more just if schools were held

accountable for the quality of their work; test results are not always under their control, depending as they do on pupil intake and out-of-school influences as well. An overarching theme from the evidence is that teachers should have a greater role in pupil assessment and in the evaluation of their provision for learning. There is a strong case for moderated school self-evaluation across a wide range of provision. Such evaluation should help the school's own improvement agenda and not just be instituted to satisfy the inspectors.

*The Review acknowledges the considerable use it made of Ofsted data about the system as a whole.*

*What is needed is a better match between the standards we aim for and the ones we measure*

# In defiance of compliance

Training should encourage teachers to explore the big questions of educational purpose and value as well as develop their skills

Someone keen to become a primary teacher can now choose between more than 30 routes into the profession. They can train in four years or one, at a university or at a school, 'on the job' or through conventional study. But while courses have proliferated, control has been increasingly centralised to ensure that teacher training is in line with the wider reform agenda.

The Review's research survey on teacher education concluded that 'the last 25 years have seen a period of sustained and radical reforms ... as successive governments have progressively increased prescription and control through the regulation of courses, curriculum content and the assessment of standards.'

The result of all this activity, according to Ofsted, has been improvements in the quality and preparedness of new teachers. In fact in 2003, the inspectors were moved to declare that today's teachers were the 'best-trained ever'. Yet this claim, in danger of becoming a mantra, is empirically unsound. Ofsted only started inspecting newly-qualified teachers in 1998 and, more importantly, quality is judged merely on the basis of compliance with Training and Development Agency (TDA) standards.

There are other problems with this claim, the Review argues. As the research survey pointed out, students, especially those on postgraduate courses, spend little time on the non-core subjects – subjects that they are nevertheless obliged to teach. Certainly teacher trainers told the Review that the constraints of time, especially on the one-year PGCE course, made inadequate training almost inevitable.

The Review's examination of the TDA's standards makes it clear that trainees are not expected to explore questions of educational purpose and value. Training to 'deliver' the national strategies has taken precedence over subject knowledge, independent judgement and broader understanding. While new

teachers feel secure operating within the constraints of the national strategies, the seeds of open enquiry, scepticism and concern about the larger questions should also be sown, says the Review.

Headteacher witnesses, while applauding the dedication and quality of their staff, worried that younger teachers were trained merely to comply with government prescription and lacked the skill or will to improvise.

It is beyond question, says the Review, that teachers need a deep understanding of what is to be taught and why – precisely the areas where many trainees are most vulnerable. Initial training needs to develop their expertise in all aspects of the curriculum they will teach. Prominence should also be given to pedagogy (as defined by the Review) and to recent research on the social, emotional and developmental aspects of learning, teaching and assessment.

The Review's national soundings heard many calls for teachers to have more time to reflect, research and study. As the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) said: 'There has been a tendency to represent teaching as a matter of mastering a restricted repertoire of practical techniques and the teacher as a mere technician with little responsibility for exercising professional discretion. Such representations fail to

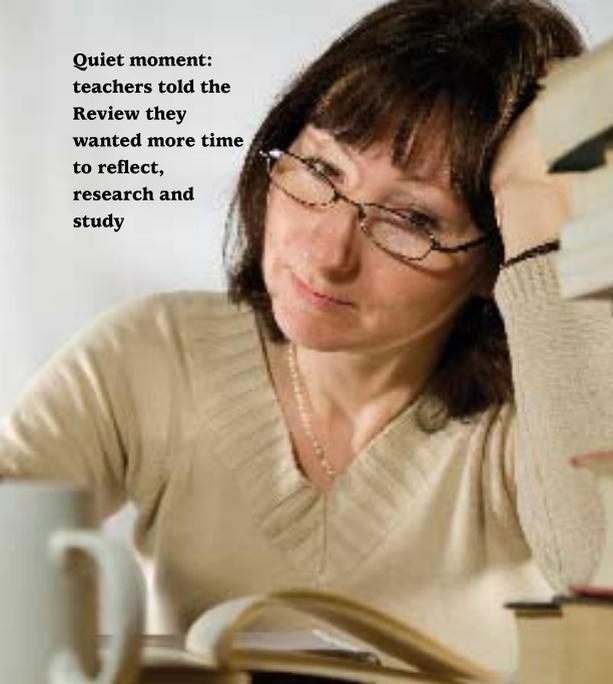
acknowledge that there is a great deal of knowledge that teachers need to acquire if they are to be effective mediators of learning. That knowledge is neither inert nor a mere intellectual embellishment, but represents the kind of cognitive capacity that issues in intelligent action.'

## Key points

- Refocus initial training on childhood, pedagogy, curriculum knowledge and wider questions of value and purpose.
- Train for critical engagement, not mere compliance.
- Investigate different ITT routes for different primary teaching roles and reopen debate on a longer PGCE.
- Replace current TDA professional standards by a framework validated by research and pupil learning outcomes.
- Balance clear frameworks for inexperienced and less able teachers with freedom for the experienced and respect for the idiosyncrasy of the truly talented.



Quiet moment:  
teachers told the  
Review they  
wanted more time  
to reflect,  
research and  
study



## Contrasting views of expertise

### TDA (2007)

Excellent and advanced skills teachers should have a critical understanding of the most effective teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies, including how to select and use approaches that personalise learning to provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential.

### David Berliner (1994 and 2004)

If the novice is deliberate, the advanced beginner insightful, the competent performer rational and the proficient performer intuitive, we might categorise the expert as being arational. Expert teachers appear to act effortlessly, fluidly and instinctively, apparently without calculation, drawing on deep reserves of tacit knowledge rather than explicit rules and maxims.

# The journey from novice to expert

Most people are lucky enough to encounter at least one outstanding teacher in their lifetime. The teacher whose lessons and personality resonate in the memories of their pupils for decades after they have left school. So influential are they that the temptation to analyse, quantify, codify and thus share their expertise is irresistible. But can it be done?

Once qualified, teachers' expertise grows and develops. Experience shapes them differently as people and as professionals, but nevertheless by the time they retire, many will have what has been described as 'richly elaborated knowledge about curriculum, classroom routines and students that allows them to apply with dispatch what they know to particular cases'.

American research has identified the greatest gulfs between novice and expert teachers in relation to the degree of curricular challenge they offer, their ability to make 'deep representations' of subject matter and their skill in monitoring pupils and providing feedback.

A teacher's journey towards excellence is intended to be tracked – and encouraged – by the professional development standards announced by the TDA in 2007. Standards are set at five career points, from newly qualified, through core, post-threshold and excellent to advanced skills.

Teachers' attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills are assessed. While it is essential to differentiate stages of development, the Review argues that this framework is not very helpful in pinpointing

*Excellence includes much artistry, flexibility and originality*

where differences between teachers actually lie. The possibility that expert teachers might not demonstrate their expertise in identical ways is not entertained.

A similar point was made by teachers in one of their most prominent complaints to the Review. Continuing professional development, they said, was characterised by a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, despite the profession's vast range of age and experience.

There are other ways of tracking the development of teaching expertise – ways that are shaped by evidence, rather than government policy. American researchers have mapped teachers' progress as a transition from dependence to autonomy. Rather than career stages, development is seen as the progress of a novice through competence to expertise. This model recognises that excellence includes much artistry, flexibility and originality – hard to pin down, but instantly recognisable. The researchers also found that novice teachers need a relatively restricted repertoire to be successful. But excellent teachers not only act very differently from novices, but also think differently. They need liberating from rules in order to be effective.

By contrast, warns the Review, the TDA standards imply that teachers use the same basic repertoire at every stage of their career. The danger is that in the attempt to raise standards of learning, the TDA's professional

development model may actually depress them by constraining all those wonderfully idiosyncratic teachers who live on in their pupils' memories.

# Call in the specialists?

Despite its many strengths, the class teacher system is not the only way

In primary schools generally, one teacher teaches one class for one year. This model is entrenched in national consciousness, regarded as the right and inevitable way of organising primary education. Few pause to ask how it came into existence or why it is so different from the secondary model. Even fewer ask if it should change. Many teachers defend it on the basis that it allows them to teach a 'whole curriculum' to the 'whole child', building up a detailed and rounded picture of each pupil in their class.

Yet the generalist class teacher system is a legacy of the Victorian age when classes were huge, the curriculum was basic, and teachers were there to drill children in facts and skills. Its great strength was not educational, but financial – it was cheap. But schools have moved on in the past 150 years. Millions have rightly been spent expanding and diversifying the workforce. Classes are smaller and the curriculum has grown and become more complex and professionally demanding. Yet class teachers remain the linchpins. The question must be asked – though governments have proved reluctant to do so – just how well does the class teacher system continue to serve children's needs?

Adults told the Review, simply and clearly, that teachers need to be qualified, knowledgeable and caring. Children told the Review that teachers should be fair and empathetic. Significantly, however, they also wanted them to be experts, rating subject expertise more highly than did teachers. Children appreciate that when a teacher knows a subject inside out, lessons are more stimulating, informative and engaging.

Primary teachers' subject knowledge is their greatest vulnerability, according to research and inspection evidence going back decades. Many attempts have been made to plug the gaps by using subject 'co-ordinators', 'consultants' and 'leaders'. But in 1998, with the



Children and researchers agree: subject expertise really matters

arrival of the national strategies and the sidelining of non-core subjects, the government made clear it had lost confidence in teachers' ability to deliver both high standards in the 'basics' and a broad and balanced curriculum.

Looming behind all this, of course, was the national curriculum itself. Since its introduction in 1989 it had been labelled 'unmanageable' and 'overcrowded'. Coverage of subjects was inconsistent because, the

argument went, the quarts would just not squeeze into the pint pots. The Rose report's curriculum with its six areas of learning persists in viewing the problem as one of manageability.

Yet many schools do provide the full range of subjects, teach them well and achieve good results in

## Key points

- Undertake a full review of current and projected primary school staffing.
- Ensure that schools have the teacher numbers, expertise and flexibility to deliver high standards across the full curriculum.
- Develop and deploy alternative primary teaching roles to the generalist class teacher without losing its benefits.
- Clarify and properly support the role of teaching assistants.

## Case study: entrepreneurship enriches teaching

The 'financial genius' of headteacher Sylvia Libson has allowed Oakington Manor primary school to extend and enrich its teaching. Courtesy of her entrepreneurial skills, the large primary near Wembley Stadium generates substantial sums from letting. The building is almost always open and no corner is left unused, says Simrita Singh, the senior deputy head.

As a result the 720-pupil primary is able to employ support teachers for each of the year groups, essentially meaning one additional teacher for every three

classes. Sometimes they work with groups of children outside the classroom, sometimes they team teach inside – it depends on what the children need. With two teachers knowing each class inside out, continuity and progression are guaranteed, says Simrita Singh.

There is the flexibility for staff to move between being class teachers and support teachers. And some teachers have moved from the classroom to become specialists.

Oakington Manor employs four specialists – in PE, modern languages, ICT and music. Three of the four were

grown in-house. The ICT specialist is a former class teacher as is the PE specialist who now also runs courses for the local authority. The languages specialist is a recent development. 'Two years ago a class teacher said he was keen to learn Spanish. We supported him and he is now absolutely brilliant at teaching the language right through from reception through to Year 6,' says Simrita Singh. 'While we do have subject leaders to support class teachers where they need it, we would love to have specialists in all subjects. The children get a much richer experience.'

the key stage 2 tests. So the real problem is not manageability, but the mismatch between what schools are expected to do and the resources they have to do it. Nevertheless, as in 1998, the government again is preparing to trim the education rather than increase the resources. By contrast, the Review argues that every school must have access to the expertise needed in order to plan and teach to a high standard every aspect of the broad curriculum to which children are entitled.

How is this to be achieved? First, it is important to stress that the Review is not calling for an end to generalist class teachers. Rather the strengths of that holistic approach can be extended through training more teachers as, for example, specialists and semi-specialists. Then schools would have the option of staffing the early primary years with generalists, moving to a generalist/specialist mix in the upper primary classes. Another option is to employ an extra teacher for a given number of classes (see case study) allowing staff the chance to build up real curricular expertise – an approach already adopted by some

schools in England. Such changes would encourage genuine curriculum renewal, particularly when combined with schools getting together in partnerships to share expertise.

The Review recognises that such changes require the staffing assumptions that underpin primary school funding (see page 42) to be reassessed and options, including employing more teachers,

### Leadership for learning

In the past 20 years there has been a radical transformation in the working environment of primary schools. Yet still the solitary occupant of the headteacher's office bears the burden of a proliferating range of responsibilities and accountabilities. Too often headteachers' mental and physical health suffers under the pressure. It is no longer tenable for one person to assume such a complex portfolio of tasks. Hence the Review recommends that heads are given time and support to do what is their most important job – leading learning. Leadership should also be shared in order to develop other teachers' talents and allow schools to focus on their core tasks and their relationship to their community.



Time line: specialist music teaching is a tradition

need to be costed. Teacher training would also have to evolve to accommodate the broader range of roles. While specialist music teaching has long been a feature of primary school life, and sports and language specialists are on the increase, the real breakthrough will come when specialists are used to enhance the teaching of all subjects or domains, not just one or two of them.

Subject expertise is so crucial to educational quality that it challenges primary teachers' professional identity as generalists. If that challenge is ignored, the Review's definition of curriculum entitlement as the highest possible standards of teaching in all domains, regardless of time allocated, will remain a pipe dream.

# Communal sense

21st-century schools should aim to become thriving cultural and community centres

A primary school is many things to many people. It's a place of learning, play and work. It's a place that evokes memories – both good and bad – in adults, as well as anxiety and delight in those who are also parents. It's a community in its own right and a focus for the wider community outside its gates.

Many gloomy views were expressed to the Review about the state of England's social fabric. Schools can be a wonderful source of social cohesion and the Review says their role both in and as communities should be enhanced. Government has paid little attention to the cultural and communal significance of primary schools and their pupils, except perhaps belatedly in relation to rural school closures. This is a grave omission, according to the Review. Every school should aim to establish itself as a thriving cultural and community site.

Hence this Review's proposal for a community curriculum and its support for children's voice. In a healthy community everyone's voice should be heard and everyone should feel able to make a difference. The increasing number of pupils interested in sustainable development is proof of their eagerness to play a part.

Reforms such as Every Child Matters have also encouraged schools to look outwards, to strengthen their partnerships with parents and with other children's services – a slow and sometimes painful process. Extended schools with their clubs and activities, childcare, parental support, access to specialist services and community use are lengthening school hours and broadening their roles.

The Review recommends, in the light of these evolving roles and changing emphases, a full discussion of what exactly a 21st-century primary school should be. This should be tied in with the government's plan to renew at least half of all primary school buildings by 2022-23. The aim of the Primary Capital Programme (PCP), assuming it survives the recession, is to create schools equipped for 21st-century teaching and learning, at the heart of their communities and offering children's services to every family.

While the Review has no argument with those aims, it finds their achievement is not straightforward. In terms of joining up children's services, many witnesses said they agreed in principle, but in practice the process is complex, progress is slow and quality still very variable. Some headteachers reported that services may be linked, but not yet in any meaningful sense. Others worried that local authority educational expertise had been lost in the creation of children's services departments. And others perceived a clash between the competitive standards agenda and the inclusive drive of Every Child Matters. The message that integrating services needs time and stability came through strongly in the Review's evidence.

In terms of services reaching every family, it remains the case that those families in greatest need are still those most likely to slip through the net. Schools need to be more proactive in going out and contacting marginalised families – and there is now greater clarity about how best to do this. Extended schools are vulnerable to the same criticisms, as those in deprived areas can be short of cash to provide the clubs and activities available to children in wealthier areas. Generally, extended schools provoked a mixed response with concern that a longer day at school encroaches too much on children's genuinely free time. A close eye needs to be kept on their operation and viability.

Other questions are raised by the PCP's aim to create schools equipped for 21st-century teaching and learning – not least what it is or should be. However, the Review is clear that something needs to be done. Teachers, heads and parents expressed concern about the state of school buildings. They complained about a lack of 'fit' between design and function, about a lack of flexibility, and, particularly, that external space for play, sport and study had been lost. Many said school buildings were too

cramped. One headteacher said forcefully: 'Schools don't need gimmicks. They need spacious classrooms, big halls for indoor sports, an all-weather sports pitch, good toilets and spacious cloakrooms, a library, low maintenance and energy costs, an IT suite with 30 computers, not one between two. We need space!'

Witnesses also complained about the

## Key points

- Build on recent initiatives encouraging multi-agency working, and increase support for schools to help them ensure the growing range of children's service professionals work in partnership with each other and with parents.
- Strengthen mutual professional support through clustering, federation, all-through schools and the pooling of expertise.
- Take an innovative approach to school design and timetabling which marries design and function and properly reflects the proposed aims.
- Respect the vital community role of small rural schools and protect them against closure.



# Decentralisation nation

Government should return power to schools for the sake of education and democracy

Over the past 20 years, primary schools have been weighed down, even overwhelmed, by the quantity of government initiatives. Some policies have been positively welcomed, others have eventually found acceptance. As is clear from the 'policy balance sheet,' the case for a national curriculum is generally no longer disputed, the government's childhood agenda is applauded and its obligation to step in to protect vulnerable children is understood. But the Review witnesses' hostility to other policies – broadly those within the standards agenda – remains deep. Of course unpopularity does not make a policy wrong (or vice versa). The government insists that national tests, for example, have delivered improvements despite opposition from teachers, parents and the House of Commons select committee. So, for the sake of education quality in the long term, the Review went beyond gathering opinion to considering evidence. What has the standards agenda actually achieved?

It finds the evidence is mixed. Claims about improvements in reading, science and numeracy are, up to a point, reasonably secure – though they are based on Year 6 test scores which represent a very narrow concept of standards. Against this positive it sets evidence of the loss of a broad and balanced curriculum; the stress that testing inflicts on teachers, parents and children; the limited impact of the expensive literacy strategy; and the failure to close the achievement gap. Given these problems, might

## The policy balance sheet

### Review witnesses' reactions to key government policies

#### Broadly welcomed

Every Child Matters; the Children's Plan; Sure Start; Narrowing the Gap; expansion of early childhood care and education.

#### Ambivalent

Special educational needs; local authority re-organisation.

#### Sharply divided

Workforce reform.

#### Sound in principle but unsatisfactory in practice

Early years foundation stage; the national curriculum.

#### More negative than positive

Numeracy strategy (more favourably received than the literacy strategy); literacy strategy; the primary strategy.

#### Widely opposed

National targets and testing; performance tables and the naming and shaming of schools; Ofsted inspection procedures (though not the principle of external inspection).

standards have risen, and indeed risen further and faster, if government had not persisted in the imposition of unpopular policies?

Imposition is an emotive word, but the Review encountered widespread and growing disenchantment with the extent to which government and its agencies have tightened their grip on what goes on in local authorities and schools since 1989, and particularly since 1997. Centralisation was the key complaint. The shifting balance of educational power between national, local and school levels began as just one theme

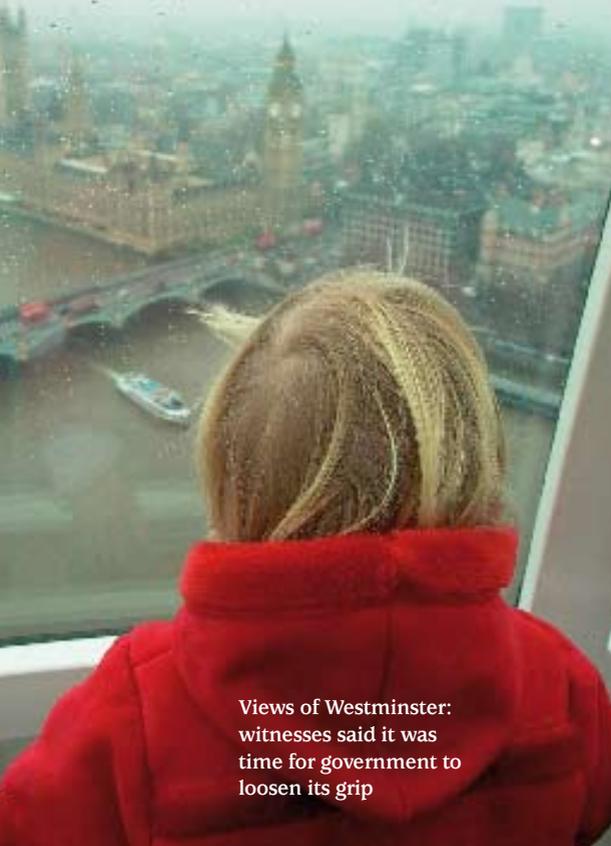
among the Review's original 10, but the issue surfaced time and time again.

While centralised reform has produced important changes in relation to children and children's services, in relation to the curriculum and to pedagogy there was general agreement that it has gone too far. The government needs to step back, says the Review. It should provide frameworks to support the work of schools, clarify the scope and goals of the national curriculum, and define standards in terms of what children are entitled to rather than just what they score in a test at age 11. Attempts to control professional action and thought are not good for schools nor for democracy.

Review witnesses said that one effect of what has been called 'centralised decentralisation' – where day-to-day decisions have been devolved to schools, but major ones are controlled by central bodies – has been to leave local authorities with insufficient power to carry out their responsibilities.

## Key points

- Rebalance the responsibilities of the government, local authorities and schools.
- Replace top-down prescription and micro-management by professional empowerment, mutual accountability and respect for evidence from all sources.
- Abandon the discourses of derision and myth and strive to ensure that the debate exemplifies rather than negates what education should be about.



Views of Westminster: witnesses said it was time for government to loosen its grip

## Destructive discourses

The Review warns that the quality of the national debate about education in England has been undermined by three destructive 'discourses' – of dichotomy, derision and myth. Catchphrases, some dating back to the 1960s, force key concepts into unnatural opposition. The result is to create, at best, a sense of choice, at worst, a sense of conflict, where neither is warranted. The most pernicious recent example is

the dichotomy between standards in the 'basics' and a broad and balanced curriculum. There are others:

- Standards not structures
- Standards not curriculum
- We teach children not subjects
- Subject-centred versus child-centred
- Traditional versus progressive

There is an easy way to eliminate these facile, but dangerous, dichotomies. Simply substitute 'and' for 'not' and 'versus'.

For example, how can they ensure the best provision for children with special needs without more control over admissions? The time has come for a more grown-up relationship between the different levels of governance and a much more equal balance of power.

But surely there are now grounds for optimism as the government is to wind down the national strategies and promises schools more autonomy? Sadly, as Robin Alexander notes in his introduction, such promises have been made before – but little changed.

Witnesses to the Review took issue not only with some policies, but also with the process that produces them. Apart from centralisation, it is characterised by secrecy and the 'quiet authoritarianism' of the new centres of power; the disenfranchising of local voice; the rise of unelected and unaccountable groups taking key decisions behind closed doors; the 'empty rituals' of consultation; the loss of professional dialogue; the politicisation of the entire educational enterprise so that it becomes impossible to debate ideas or evidence which are not 'on message', or which were 'not invented here' ('here' being the DCSF or Downing Street).

In addition, the Review and its witnesses have highlighted variations on this larger theme of democratic deficit, many of them centering on the nature and quality of the information on which both

*It is time to advance a debate which exemplifies rather than negates what education should be about*

sound decision-making and effective education depend: the less than complete reliability of official information, particularly in relation to standards; its lack of independence; the creation and/or perpetuation of educational myths in order to underwrite an exaggerated account of political progress; the key role of the media in shaping information flowing to and from government; and the reluctance of decision-makers to come to grips with alternative information on which better policies could be founded.

And inseparable from the information is the language through which it is communicated. For too long, says the Review, the national debate about primary schools has – sometimes deliberately, sometimes not – obscured, misinformed and confused. The past from which we could learn has sometimes been sacrificed to political point-scoring. The 1967 Plowden report, for example, was lambasted for unleashing a wave of child-centred progressivism. Yet the report was a more cautious and conservative document than its detractors claimed, and in many schools the wave never much more than a ripple. The Review has attracted its share of controversial headlines that sensationalise subtle messages and oversimplify complex research findings. Its leaders have even been accused of leading a stampede back to the derided and mythical 1970s. However, the Review hopes

that the vital questions should be conceived of and discussed in nuanced and inclusive ways. It is time to advance a debate which exemplifies rather than negates what education should be about.

# A plea for fairer funding

Needs-led finance which guarantees children's entitlement? Priceless

One government policy which was widely welcomed by witnesses to the Review is the massive increase in funding for primary education since 1997. The Review argues that it is now time to take the next step and eliminate the primary/secondary funding differential. This disparity was criticised as early as the Hadow Report of 1931 and featured prominently in Plowden (which went on to observe that 'a good deal of money spent on older children will be wasted if more is not spent on them during their primary school years.')

The plea was repeated in the 'three wise men' report of 1992 and by the House of Commons education select committee in 1994.

Fairness and consistency were twin themes in submissions and evidence on funding from schools and local authorities. They complained that funding for initiatives was often piecemeal and short-term, making innovations hard to sustain. Concern about special needs funding was particularly common. Schools said they

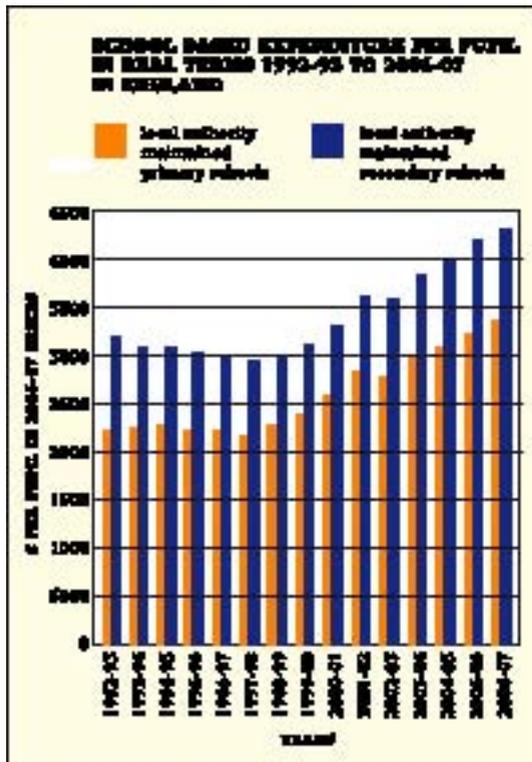
lacked money to support children with profound and multiple needs, and several said funding for special needs was too short term and geographically variable.

Other areas mentioned included equal opportunities, ICT, music, professional development, PPA time and mentoring. LAs were aware that the 'pot' was limited, but said the sustainability of funding was often more important than the actual amount. Some organisations argued that the creation of children's services departments had further complicated funding, but children had yet to experience the benefits.

The Association of School and College Leaders, for example, suggested that funding should reward schools 'that take on children with the greatest need rather than... the easiest children'. The Review's evidence demonstrated the challenges of attempting to balance stability of funding with providing for changing needs. Funding based primarily on pupil numbers, said witnesses, worked against those schools which were already in difficulty, disadvantaging their pupils further.

The Review says assumptions and formulae for funding primary education should be fully reviewed. Staffing should be curriculum and needs led and funding should enable schools to teach the full curriculum to the highest standards, as well as to carry out their many other tasks. At the same time, excessive funding variation between local authorities and key stages should be eliminated.

Funding reform will not come cheap, but some of the proposals allow for considerable savings – for example winding up the primary national strategy (which, with its predecessors, has cost £2 billion to date), more extensive use of school partnership and clustering, and the reduction of the role and infrastructure of central government and its agencies. Longer term, the benefits of task-led staffing which delivers high standards, guarantees curriculum entitlement and reduces the attainment gap are incalculable, it concludes.



## Key points

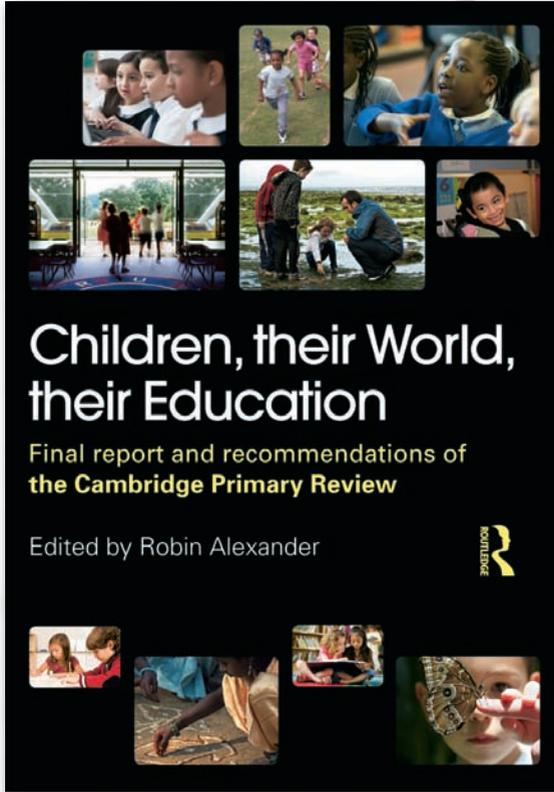
- Eliminate the primary/secondary funding differential.
- Ensure that primary school funding is determined by educational and curricular needs.
- Devise and cost alternative models of curriculum/needs led primary school staffing.
- Set increased costs against savings from terminating the primary national strategy, transferring its budget to schools and reducing national infrastructure.



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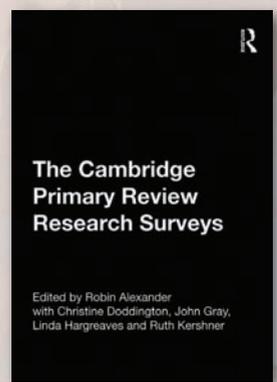
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