





# **TOWARDS A NEW PRIMARY CURRICULUM**

A report from the Cambridge Primary Review

## **Part 1: Past and Present**

February 2009

This is one of a series of interim reports from the Cambridge Primary Review, an independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. The Review was launched in October 2006 and will publish its final report in spring 2009.

The Cambridge Primary Review, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, is based at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and directed by Robin Alexander.

The present report is in two separately-published parts. This is Part 1.

A briefing which summarises key issues from the report has also been published. The briefing and both parts of the report are available electronically from the Cambridge Primary Review website: [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk). The website also contains information about the 29 other reports published so far, all of which may be downloaded, and about the Review as a whole.

The report is the result of the collective efforts of the team of the Cambridge Review, the authors of its final report, those who commented on report drafts, and the many witnesses – professional, academic, official and lay – who in different ways provided evidence for the Review.

Suggested citation: Alexander, R.J. and Flutter, J. (2009) *Towards a New Primary Curriculum: a report from the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 1: Past and Present*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

Published February 2009 by the Cambridge Primary Review,  
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education,  
184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK.

Copyright © 2009 The University of Cambridge.

All rights reserved.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:  
A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 - 906478 - 31 - 5

## CONTENTS – PART 1

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Curriculum questions</b>	<b>3</b>
A golden opportunity?	3
Different sorts of questions	4
<b>3. The present primary curriculum</b>	<b>8</b>
The National Curriculum in 2009	8
Non-statutory but obligatory? The national strategies	10
Completing the jigsaw: the EYFS	11
Unmanageability guaranteed?	11
Historical and international continuities	12
<b>4. What the Review's witnesses said</b>	<b>16</b>
The National Curriculum: a vote of confidence, up to a point?	16
The overcrowded curriculum	16
The micro-managed curriculum	18
National and local: who should decide?	19
Subjects, skills, themes, areas of learning?	20
Specific aspects of the curriculum	22
<i>English</i>	22
<i>Mathematics</i>	26
<i>Science</i>	28
<i>ICT</i>	30
<i>Creativity and the arts</i>	30
<i>The humanities</i>	32
<i>Citizenship</i>	34
<i>Health and physical education</i>	35
<i>Other 'literacies': financial and emotional</i>	35
<i>Modern foreign languages</i>	37
<i>Religious education</i>	37
Conclusion	40
<b>5. Appendices</b>	<b>41</b>



# TOWARDS A NEW PRIMARY CURRICULUM

## PART 1: PAST AND PRESENT

### 1 - INTRODUCTION

In this report, whose two parts are published separately, we present the Cambridge Primary Review's findings and proposals on the curriculum. The curriculum is one of the Cambridge Review's main themes. It is also the subject of a government enquiry led by Sir Jim Rose, whose interim report was published in December 2008 with a consultation deadline of 28 February 2009. Although the final report of the Cambridge Primary Review is not due to be published until later in 2009, we have brought forward its material on the curriculum in order to contribute to the debate about the Rose report.

Part 1 – this publication – starts by identifying the curriculum questions which need to be addressed. It then describes England's national primary curriculum as this stands in 2009, tracing its origins and comparing it with its equivalent in other countries. The rest of the report is taken up with considering what the Review's witnesses, through the submissions, soundings and research surveys, told us about the strengths and weaknesses of existing arrangements and how they would like the curriculum to change. The account of this evidence is lengthy, for the curriculum attracted more witness comment than any other Primary Review theme and the comments are diverse and often controversial.

Part 2 summarises the main themes from this evidence, highlights other problems in need of attention, and considers what a new primary curriculum should look like. It sets out proposals on the scope of the curriculum, the aims which it should pursue, and the way it should be implemented.

Some readers may become impatient with the history, the account of witnesses' concerns and our apparent preoccupation with the problematic. For them, solutions are more important. They are of course welcome to turn straight to Part 2. Yet it is only by understanding the history, recognising the deeply-rooted and often cyclic nature of the problems, and by accepting the inadequacy of some of the surrounding discourse, that we can make progress. That is why the grounding provided by Part 1 is essential. Without it, we shall simply repeat past mistakes.

The Cambridge Primary Review does not pluck a curriculum out of the air. Nor does it tinker with existing arrangements while ignoring the fundamentals. Nor does it treat some parts of the curriculum as sacrosanct or beyond debate. Instead, it strives to arrive at a framework for a future primary curriculum which is grounded in aims, evidence and argument. Yet it provides a framework only. The detail is for others to provide, mindful that one of most consistent themes to emerge from our evidence is that there must be less national prescription and more scope for local variation and flexibility. We go further, and argue for an explicit and protected local component to the curriculum.

As well as official documents and other publications which are readily accessible, this report draws on the following evidence marshalled specifically for the Cambridge Primary Review:

- Written submissions from 820 individuals and organisations, a large proportion of which referred to the curriculum.
- Reports on 87 sessions with teachers, heads, children, parents, school governors, local authority officials and members and a wide range of community representatives which

made up our regional ‘community soundings’. These sessions took place during 2007 and all of them discussed, among other matters, the curriculum.

- Reports on 9 ‘national soundings’ with representatives of major national organisations, held in 2008.
- Reports on 28 specially-commissioned surveys of published research, seven of which dealt directly with the curriculum.
- Notes on 138 meetings with representatives of DCSF, QCA, teaching unions, professional organisations and other bodies which took place between 2006 and 2008.

The community soundings report and the research surveys were published as Cambridge Primary Review interim reports review during 2007-8. All are available at [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk). The interim reports particularly relevant to our curriculum deliberations are listed in the bibliography at the end of this publication.

Witness evidence to the Review is sourced in the report’s text. For other references, see the footnotes and bibliography. Organisational sources of submissions are named except when permission to do so has been withheld. Submission evidence from individual witnesses remains anonymous except where it is already in the public domain (for example, when a witness has sent an article or book with his/her submission).

### **Authorship and acknowledgements**

The final report of the Cambridge Primary Review, from which these two special reports on the curriculum have been extracted and adapted, is edited by Robin Alexander, the Review’s director, and written collaboratively by a team of nineteen authors, of which he is one. Part 1 of this curriculum report has been compiled by Robin Alexander and Julia Flutter, Part 2 by Robin Alexander, with valuable editorial support for both parts from Stephanie Northen and Colin Richards. Part 1 also drew on some preliminary work by Victoria Neumark. The Review’s data were collected and analysed by the Review’s 70 research consultants and the Cambridge team: principally Robin Alexander, Catrin Darsley, Christine Doddington, Julia Flutter, David Harrison, Linda Hargreaves and Ruth Kershner; but with additional support with the submissions and soundings data from Alex James, Qais Almeqdad, Chang Yan-Shing, Calvin Dorion, Boris Jokić, Lin Hsing-Chiung and Sharlene Swartz.

Helpful comments on report drafts were provided by Michael Armstrong, John Bangs, Sheila Dainton, Kate Frod, David Hargreaves, Wynne Harlen, Anna House, Pat Jefferson, Roger Luxton, Melody Moran, Gillian Pugh, David Reedy, Colin Richards, David Rosenthal, Sue Tite, Norman Thomas and John White. We also benefited from discussions on the penultimate draft with Jim Rose, DCSF officials, members of all three main political parties, and, in private session, the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee. Needless to say, none of these people bears any responsibility for the report as published.

Finally, we are grateful to the many individual and organisational witnesses who submitted evidence to the Review and whose perspectives are abundantly illustrated in Part 1.

### **References**

References to both parts of this report appear at the end of Part 2.

### **Executive summary**

**It is customary for reports such as this to include an executive summary. This is published separately as the four-page Cambridge Primary Review Briefing *Towards a New Primary Curriculum*. It may be downloaded at [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk) .**

## 2 - CURRICULUM QUESTIONS

### A golden opportunity?

'At the heart of the educational process lies the child,' announced the Plowden Report in 1967.<sup>1</sup> 'The school curriculum is at the heart of education,' retorted the government in 1981, during the countdown to England's national curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

Both were right of course, and indeed there are other contenders for a place at or near the 'heart' of primary education – pedagogy, for example. But whether one harks back to this 1960s opposition of child and curriculum, or registers the current polarisation – no less untenable – of knowledge and skills, we need to warn readers that the curriculum is not just a political and professional battleground; it is also a conceptual minefield.

Treading a path through the obstacles, and – with any luck – removing some of them, is one of the tasks of this report, for the curriculum, and the debate about the curriculum, are of profound importance to children and to the contexts in which their learning is applied. Yet in recent years curriculum debate has gone largely by default. There was no real debate about the 1987 proposals for a national curriculum, in the sense of an open and mutually-respectful conversation in which the different points of view were heard and heeded. Instead, in the teeth of professional opposition the version of the national curriculum which in its essentials remains in force in 2009 was imposed by the Education Reform Act. There was no real debate when the national curriculum came up for formal review in 1997-8, at least as far as the primary curriculum was concerned, because the newly-established QCA was instructed by another government to make minor adjustments at the margins, if it wished, but to do nothing which might compromise the newly-introduced national literacy and numeracy strategies.

So we come to 2009, and a third national curriculum review. Following the QCA's secondary review,<sup>3</sup> the government invited Sir Jim Rose to undertake 'an independent review of the primary curriculum' with a view to making 'final recommendations to the Secretary of State by March 2009 so that the new primary curriculum can be introduced from September 2011.'<sup>4</sup>

This, then, looks like a moment of rare opportunity, for in 2009 we have not one primary curriculum review but two, and comparing what they independently propose offers a chance to right the consultative wrongs of 1987-8 and 1997-8.

However, the Rose Review interim report ends with a section which somewhat dampens our optimism. Having issued its interim report on 8 December 2008 for 'consultation', the Rose Review announces that QCA will produce draft programmes of study for the six specified 'areas of learning' and have them ready by 31 December 2008, just two working weeks after the consultation period opens<sup>5</sup> and two months before it closes on 28 February 2009.<sup>6</sup> QCA

---

<sup>1</sup> CACE (1967), para 9

<sup>2</sup> DES (1981)

<sup>3</sup> QCA (2007b)

<sup>4</sup> DCSF (2008b)

<sup>5</sup> That is, discounting the period between Christmas and the new year.

will then consult 'informally' on these drafts in order to have final versions ready for the full Rose report a month later. This arrangement appears to make redundant all consultation responses on the Rose areas of learning which are received during January and February 2009. Thus, though the later statutory consultation will allow discussion of the detail, this will be within an apparently non-negotiable framework of three secondary curriculum aims, four 'skills for learning and life' and six 'areas of learning', and of the contestable educational, social and operational assumptions that these embody.

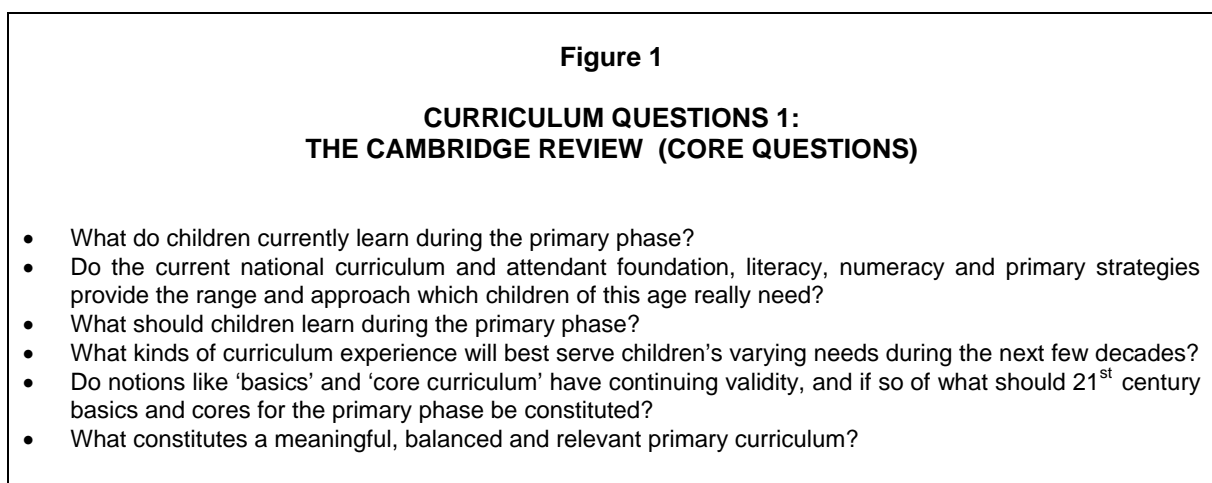
### Different sorts of questions

We can but hope, though, and in doing so we urge readers to heed Archbishop Rowan Williams' reminder that there are

... different ways of making sense, different sorts of questions to ask about the world we're in, and insofar as those questions are pursued with integrity and seriousness they should be heard seriously and charitably.<sup>7</sup>

What, in the domain of curriculum, are the 'different sorts of questions' which should be asked? Although we wish to concentrate in this report on our own line of enquiry, it is instructive to address this meta-question by comparing the remits of the two reviews.

The Cambridge Primary Review's third theme (*curriculum and assessment*) invited us to start with just six questions. They remain here as posed in 2005-6, though their order has been changed so as to convey their logic more clearly (figure 1):



In our view, these are the basic questions about the curriculum which any independent enquiry must address. However the remit for the government's Rose Review provides a rather different list (figure 2).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Rose (2008), para 2.130: 'The QCA will continue to develop the new areas of learning in order to produce draft programmes of learning by 31 December. QCA will carry out informal consultations on the draft programmes of learning early in 2009 in order that final versions for statutory consultation can be included as part of the final report and recommendations next spring.'

<sup>7</sup> Williams (2008)

<sup>8</sup> DCSF (2008a)

**Figure 2**

**CURRICULUM QUESTIONS 2:  
THE ROSE REVIEW**

1. *Curriculum design and content*
  - a. In relation to the curriculum what is it reasonable to expect schools to provide and manage within the statutory requirements of the primary school day?
  - b. Should primary pupils continue to be introduced to all the subjects of the National Curriculum from Year 1?
  - c. What should be the position of science and ICT within the primary curriculum?
  - d. Should some of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning and development, and pedagogy, be extended into the primary curriculum?
  - e. What is case [sic] and scope for reducing prescription and content in the programmes of study?
2. *Reading, writing and numeracy*
  - a. How might schools be enabled to strengthen their focus on raising attainment in reading, writing and numeracy?
  - b. What can be done to ensure that these vital subjects are taught thoroughly and systematically, and fully integrated within all areas of the curriculum?
3. *Modern foreign languages*
  - a. What are the best ways of introducing a modern foreign language as a compulsory requirement at Key Stage 2 as recommended by Lord Dearing's Languages review?
4. *Personal development*
  - a. What are the personal, social and emotional capabilities that children need to develop through their schooling?
  - b. What is the most appropriate framework for achieving greater integration of these capabilities throughout the curriculum?
5. *Transition and progression*
  - a. How might schools make best use of the information available about prior learning, and information from parents and other professionals working with children, to secure optimum continuity and progression for all children from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, paying particular attention to the key transition points?
  - b. What are the options for providing more choice and flexibility in start dates for children entering primary school, especially summer-born children.
6. *Other*
  - a. Do you have any other comments or contributions to make?<sup>9</sup>

To the 'core aspects' in figure 2 were later added:

- consideration of two of the more controversial 'milestones' in the Early Years Foundation Stage (children's use, by the age of five, of the phonic knowledge to write simple words, and their ability to write their names and labels, captions and the beginning of simple sentences).
- provision for children with dyslexia.

The two sets of questions are so strikingly different that they lend support to the hope that the resulting curriculum proposals might be seen as complementary rather than in opposition. At the same time, there is a sense in which the very focused remit of Rose, and the number of matters which are apparently to be taken as given, may encourage the view that the two enquiries are incompatible – though we hope not. For while the Cambridge Primary Review asks what children should learn and of what the curriculum should be constituted, with the Rose Review the government itself answers that question – reading,

---

<sup>9</sup> DCSF (2008a)

writing, numeracy, science, ICT, a modern foreign language and ‘personal development’ – and invites respondents to consider only how these might more effectively be planned and taught. The Secretary of State’s remit letter does mention other curriculum areas (‘the creative arts, the humanities, PE and sport’), but these are justified ‘as preparation for further learning at the secondary stage’<sup>10</sup> rather than by their intrinsic value.

Arguing from its total corpus of evidence, as opposed to that dealing with the curriculum alone, the Cambridge Primary Review has come to regard it as axiomatic that primary education must be regarded as *development* as well as the *preparation* to which the Rose review remit points. With seven, eight or nine decades of life stretching ahead it seem proper to think mainly about the child’s future; yet, if we take the pre-adolescent years as a whole, there is probably no phase of human development where attending to the individual’s *present* needs and capabilities pays greater future dividends. This necessary balance is reflected in our proposed aims for primary education.

Let us then return to the ‘different sorts of questions’ which might be asked. In fact, the six basic questions (above) from the third theme of the Cambridge Primary Review’s remit were not the only questions we asked which bear directly on this matter. Under the other nine Review thematic headings there were also the contingent questions in figure 3.

**Figure 3**

**CURRICULUM QUESTIONS 3:  
THE CAMBRIDGE REVIEW (CONTINGENT QUESTIONS)**

- What aims, values and principles should the primary curriculum pursue and enact? (Theme 1).
- What are the implications of recent research on children’s development and learning on what, as well as how, they should be taught? (theme 2).
- What is the place of ICT and other new technologies in learning, teaching and the curriculum? (Theme 2).
- How can children’s engagement in their learning best be secured? (Theme 2)
- How should children’s learning and curricular needs be diagnosed? (Theme 3).
- How should their progress and attainment be assessed? (Theme 3).
- How should standards and quality in education be defined and assessed? (Theme 4).
- How should the curriculum reflect and/or respond to children’s different learning needs and different cultural backgrounds? (Theme 5).
- How should the curriculum and teaching address children’s special educational needs and the circumstances of the nation’s most disadvantaged and marginalised children (Theme 5).
- What kinds of professional expertise does a modern primary curriculum require? (Theme 6)
- How can it best be acquired and refined through initial training and continuing professional development? (Theme 6)
- How should schools deploy staff so as to meet their curriculum obligations (Theme 6)?
- What is the role of parents and carers in shaping the curriculum and supporting children’s learning? (Theme 7).
- How can the school curriculum respect and build on what children learn and do outside school? (Theme 8).
- How can coherence and progression in children’s educational experiences be secured as they move from pre-school to primary, through the primary phase and on to secondary school? (Theme 9).
- What is the proper balance of control and responsibility in curriculum and related matters between national government, the relevant public bodies (QCA, TDA, Ofsted), local authorities and schools? (Theme 10)
- What has been the impact of two decades of curriculum reform and what can be learned from the experience? (Theme 10).

The two groups of questions from the Cambridge Primary Review remit add up to a formidable list which is also of greater breadth than those which the Rose Review is charged with addressing. Thus, apart from the relative independence of the two enquires, the Primary Review sees the curriculum, and questions about the curriculum, as necessarily grounded in a much wider array of contingent concerns than can be accommodated by the narrower remit of Rose. Sir Jim Rose has always acknowledged this. Yet these contingent questions are, in their way, no less fundamental than the six with which we started.

### 3 - THE PRESENT PRIMARY CURRICULUM

#### The national curriculum in 2009

What at the time of the 1967 Plowden Report was a variable curriculum determined by LEAs and schools is now a national curriculum which applies to all pupils of compulsory school age in community and foundation schools, including special schools, and in schools which are voluntary aided or controlled. At key stages 1 and 2 it consists of 10 'foundation subjects', three of which carried the additional designation of 'core subjects'. (The tendency to use the word 'foundation' only for the non-core subjects is in fact incorrect, as *all* the specified subjects have 'foundation' status. Those outside the core are 'other foundation' subjects).

In addition – a legacy of the 1944 Act, which differentiated the 'secular' and 'religious' curriculum – religious education (RE) is handled separately. Under current legislation (the 1996 Education Act):

Schools must provide RE for all pupils, though parents can choose to withdraw their children. Schools, other than voluntary aided schools and those of a religious character, must teach religious education according to the locally agreed syllabus. Each agreed syllabus should reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 4**

#### **ENGLAND'S PRIMARY NATIONAL CURRICULUM IN 2009: SUBJECTS**

*Core subjects*

- English
- Mathematics
- Science

*Other foundation subjects*

- Art and design
- Citizenship (non-statutory at KS1 and 2)
- Design and technology
- Geography
- History
- Information and communications technology (ICT)
- Modern foreign languages (non-statutory in 2009, statutory at KS2 from 2010)
- Music
- Physical education
- Personal, social and health education (PSHE) (non-statutory at KS1 and 2)

*Also statutory*

- Religious education (statutory at KS1 and 2, but with non-statutory programme of study)

*Also required*

- Sex education

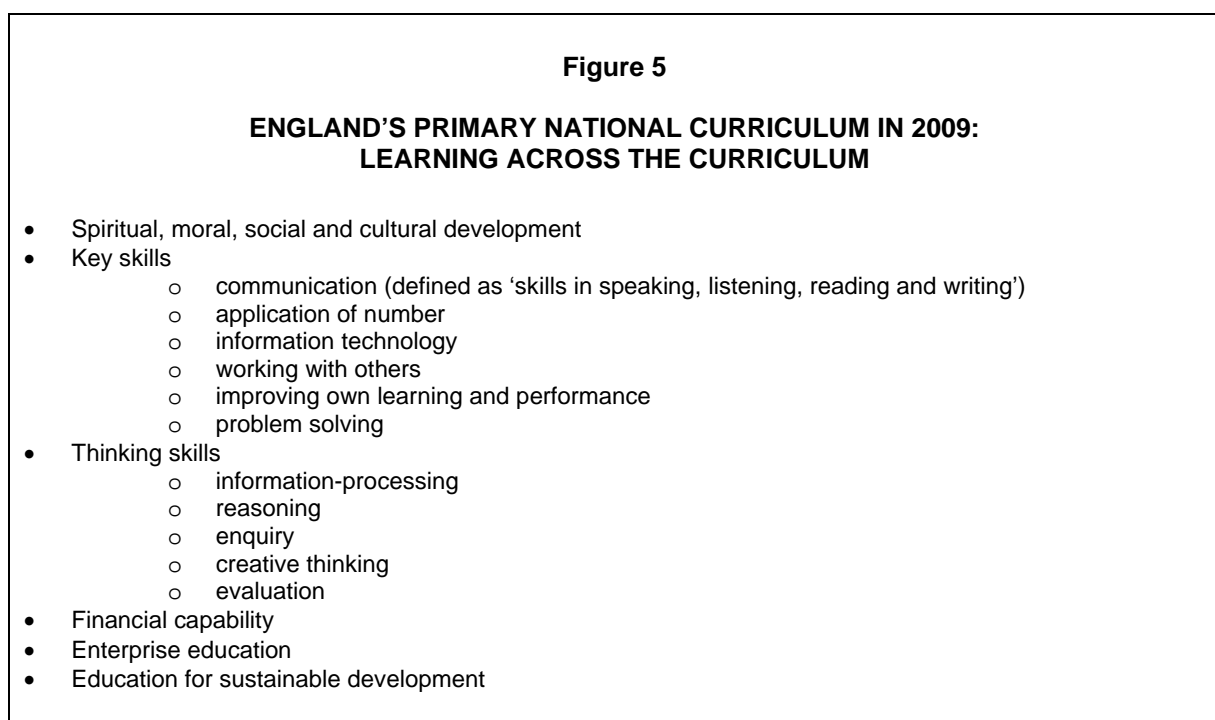
Not all subjects are statutory. At key stages 1 and 2, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship are encouraged but not required by law, as is the case for a modern foreign language at key stage 2, at least until 2010. Further, schools are required to have a

<sup>11</sup> QCA (2008a)

policy on sex education, from which, like religious education, parents have the right to withdraw their children. Thus, the complete specification, which according to the remit for the Rose Review remains in force until autumn 2011, is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4 shows the bare bones of England's national curriculum in 2009. For each key stage, 'programmes of study' specify in detail what pupils should be taught for the foundation subjects, while 'attainment targets' set out 'the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage.'<sup>12</sup> Except for those subjects whose programmes of study are non-statutory, attainment targets 'consist of eight level descriptions of increasing difficulty, plus a description for exceptional performance above level 8.'<sup>13</sup>

Providing a vertical axis to what is in effect a conceptual grid, schools are also encouraged to 'promote learning across the national curriculum' (figure 5).



The approach illustrated by combining figures 4 and 5 – subjects on one axis, cross-curricular elements on the other – has a long pedigree, was commended by HMI in their *Curriculum from 5 to 16* paper of 1985,<sup>14</sup> and is in use in other countries. In France, for example, the current equivalent of the list above is a set of *domaines transversaux*.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes there is even a third axis: principles to guide curriculum planning. Thus *Curriculum from 5 to 16* nominated *breadth, balance, relevance, differentiation* and *progression and continuity*, while Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*, clearly influenced by this earlier work, has *challenge and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence, and relevance*.<sup>16</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> Education Act 1996, section 353a

<sup>13</sup> QCA/DfEE (1999), 17

<sup>14</sup> DES (1985a)

<sup>15</sup> Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale (2008)

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2008)

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/whatisfce/principles.asp>

drawback of the more complex frameworks is that the laudable desire to ensure that they cover every eventuality makes them difficult to implement.

The Rose Review's remit explicitly excluded any consideration of assessment, but the levels and level descriptions are the point at which the national curriculum and the statutory arrangements for assessing children at the end of each key stage become inseparable. The majority of pupils are expected to work within the range of levels 1-3 at KS1 and levels 2-5 at KS2. The expected level to be attained by the majority of pupils by the *end* of each key stage is level 2 at KS1 and level 4 at KS2. These 'expected' levels have changed from what, in the 1989 version of the national curriculum, were defined as averages into national targets which, from 1997, 'the majority' of pupils have been expected to achieve. Further, over the past decade the precise proportion of the nation's pupils defined as 'the majority' has changed: the initial targets were 80 per cent of 11 year olds at level 4 in literacy and 75 per cent in numeracy by 2002; the 2007 *Children's Plan* revised that to at least 90 per cent in both English and mathematics by 2020.<sup>17</sup> The target-setting procedure has changed too and it now involves greater participation by schools and local authorities. Schools set their own targets for the proportion of their pupils expected to reach the national targets. The latter, however, remain paramount.<sup>18</sup>

Given that, for the primary phase as a whole, what it is proper for pupils to learn is defined by what they are expected to know and understand by the time they take the KS2 tests in Year 6, and that the content of the curriculum is calibrated back from that point through the five levels applicable to the phase, it is not an overstatement to suggest, as many do, that in England the assessment tail wags the curriculum dog, quite apart from the extent to which this Review's evidence shows that the KS2 tests distort the curriculum in Years 5 and 6.

### **Non-statutory but obligatory? The national strategies**

Since 1997, the arrangements summarised above have no longer started and ended with the subjects, programmes of study, attainment targets and level descriptions specified in the framework which came into force in September 2000. With the government's introduction of national strategies for literacy and numeracy in 1998 and 1999, England's already cumbersome primary National Curriculum became an even more complex affair.

The 1998 national literacy strategy (NLS) specified the content, structure and teaching processes of a daily 'literacy hour' which was expected to be taught in every primary school in England. The 1999 national numeracy strategy (NNS) did the same for numeracy, except that the daily lesson was not one hour for all pupils but 45 minutes in KS1 rising to 50-60 minutes in KS2.<sup>19</sup> Both were then incorporated into the government's primary framework for literacy and mathematics, part of the 2003 primary national strategy. The strategies have been developed separately from the rest of the curriculum and are directly controlled by the DCSF as part of its 'standards' drive. The rest of the curriculum is overseen by QCA/QCDA. This separation of power and purpose, as we shall see, has created difficulties.

The strategies and framework have been non-statutory, but from the outset it has been expected that all schools would abide by them, and this quasi-statutory requirement has been reinforced through ministerial rhetoric, Ofsted inspections, the TDA initial teacher

---

<sup>17</sup> DCSF (2007b), para 3.11

<sup>18</sup> DCSF (2008c)

<sup>19</sup> DfEE (1998a, 1999a)

training requirements, targeted CPD and, at local authority level, by the appointment of primary strategy managers. The message has been clear, and has been confirmed as such by our witnesses: though the strategies are not statutory, they are almost universally viewed as obligatory. Further, with the arrival of the EYFS (below), statutory and non-statutory have been intertwined in a way which makes the exercise of professional autonomy exceedingly difficult. In its FAQ (frequently asked questions) for teachers the DCSF website says:

*What about the primary framework for literacy and mathematics? Will Reception teachers have to teach to that as well as getting their heads around the EYFS?* The EYFS is statutory from September 2008; the framework remains guidance. The early learning goals remain the outcomes that children in Reception classes are working towards. In order to minimise confusion and help Reception teachers make links between the EYFS and the frameworks, the early learning goals are highlighted in the literacy and mathematics frameworks. For guidance on effective practice, practitioners are referred to the EYFS.<sup>20</sup>

### **Completing the jigsaw: the EYFS**

This description of the 2009 primary national curriculum is incomplete without reference to the requirements for pre-fives. The revised national curriculum introduced in 2000 replaced the earlier 'desirable learning outcomes' by 69 early learning goals, and from September 2008 the EYFS became statutory for all children under five, whether in schools or other settings. The EYFS curriculum includes six 'areas of learning and development', three of them subdivided as shown:

- personal, social and emotional development (dispositions and attitudes, social development, emotional development)
- communication, language and literacy (language for communication and thinking, linking sounds and letters, reading, writing)
- problem solving, reasoning and numeracy (numbers as labels and for counting, calculating, shape, space and measures) [formerly 'mathematical development']
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development

It is on these six areas of learning and development that the primary curriculum must build. How it might do so is a matter of some controversy: advocates of play-based learning and a developmentally-appropriate curriculum seek to protect the hard-won distinctiveness of the EYFS, ideally extending it to age six or even seven, while others urge the earliest possible start on formal learning, especially in literacy. This matter is explored in Part 2.

### **Unmanageability guaranteed?**

In 2009, then, England has a statutory national curriculum for the primary phase with non-statutory or quasi non-statutory elements, which combines the following:

- three core subjects, two of which (literacy and mathematics) are subject to separate arrangements in pursuit of the 'standards' agenda and between them are expected to take half of the available teaching time in specifically structured and focused lessons;
- seven other statutory foundation subjects;

---

<sup>20</sup> DCSF (2008d)

- three non-statutory foundation subjects, one of which (a modern foreign language) becomes statutory in 2010;
- two subjects (religious education and sex education) which are, respectively, statutory and required, but which fall outside the National Curriculum framework;
- six areas of learning across the curriculum, some of which are identical to named foundation subjects.

Thus, once literacy and mathematics are attended to, the remaining half of the available teaching time must accommodate a further core subject (science) and no fewer than 12 statutory or recommended subjects. This complex and logistically challenging curriculum is expected to build in a coherent way on an early years curriculum comprising just six areas of learning, inevitably making reception and Year 1 hugely demanding for teachers. It thus hardly surprising that the manageability of the national curriculum has been a major cause for professional complaint since its inception, or that for the children in our primary schools – as our evidence shows – entitlement has been so seriously eroded.

What is perhaps more than merely surprising is that throughout this period the national curriculum has been co-ordinated by well-resourced public bodies – NCC, SCAA, QCA – whose responsibility, by any reasonable or even barely minimal definition of that word, should have been to ensure that what they were imposing on schools could be put into practice. However, we shall see that until 1997 it was possible to show, by reference to successful schools, that the primary national curriculum was not *inherently* unmanageable. With the introduction of the national strategies in 1998 and 1999 matters became rather more difficult.

At the same time it is important, in the interests of both fact and equity, to recognise the extent of variation which occurs even under such a tightly-prescribed regime. Schools implement the requirements of the national curriculum in different ways, and manageability is more of a challenge for some than for others. Their own agency in such matters cannot be ignored.

### **Historical and international continuities**

Historian Richard Aldrich has shown how at one level – that of subjects specified – the 1988 National Curriculum was little different from its 1904 Board of Education predecessor.<sup>21</sup> In figure 6, to underline his point, we include the 1904 regulations, the curriculum as specified in the 1967 Plowden report – which in these and other matters was not nearly as revolutionary as it was later portrayed – and the National Curriculum as it stands in 2009.

We stress that we are not arguing that such remarkable similarity between the three specifications makes the current national curriculum redundant on the grounds of age. We do not agree with those who believe that a changing world makes everything inherited from the past irrelevant, or that a curriculum justifies its claim to modernity by bearing no resemblance to anything that has gone before. The comparison is made, instead, to prompt the contrasting claims of continuity and change:

- If the current national curriculum is a variant of a framework which has served for over a century, is this not an argument for retaining it in its essentials? Yet –

---

<sup>21</sup> Aldrich, cited in Chitty (2008)

- If the framework has survived for so long, might this demonstrate not that it is right but that we are incapable of thinking of alternatives, regardless of its relevance to a changing world?

**Figure 6**

**THE 1904 BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULATIONS, THE 1967 PLOWDEN REPORT AND THE 2009 NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

<b>1904</b>	<b>1967</b>	<b>2009</b>
English	English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
Science	Science	Science
History	History	History
Geography	Geography	Geography
Foreign language	Modern languages	Modern foreign language (from 2010)
Drawing	Art and Craft	Art
Physical exercise	Physical education	Physical education
Music	Music	Music
Manual work / Housewifery	(Craft, from Art and Craft)	Design and technology
	Religious education	Religious education (SNS)
		ICT
		PSHE (NS)
		Citizenship (NS)
	Sex education	Sex education (P)

NS: non-statutory programme of study  
P: school policy required, no centrally-determined programme of study  
SNS: statutory subject, non-statutory programme of study

By and large, people are either for continuity or they are for radical change, and they see these as mutually exclusive. This is yet another unhelpful dichotomy to add to our growing list: we commend continuity, cumulation – learning from and building on past thinking and practice – *and* change.

In fact, the continuities reach across space as well as time. UNESCO policy analyst Aaron Benavot and his colleagues have shown how, worldwide, national primary curricula exhibit remarkable similarity at the level of subject labels and priorities,<sup>22</sup> and this is confirmed in the comparative analysis of arrangements in England and 21 other countries which the Primary Review commissioned from Kathy Hall and Kamil Øzerk. Their survey concluded:

There is strong convergence in officially-stated curriculum provision across all the countries surveyed. England is in line with international trends in its provision of the following: first language, mathematics, science, information technology, history, geography, art and craft, music, physical education and sport and religious education. All of these areas of study are now standard in the primary curriculum of the vast majority of the countries in the survey.<sup>23</sup>

But, Hall and Øzerk added:

<sup>22</sup> Benavot and Braslavsky (2007); Meyer, Kamens and Benavot (1992)

<sup>23</sup> Hall and Øzerk (2008), 17

England differs from many other countries in not (as yet) making PSHE, citizenship and a modern foreign language compulsory at the primary stage. There is also a grey area where matters like global awareness are concerned. They are increasingly encouraged though not obligatory.<sup>24</sup>

The Rose Review commissioned its own comparative studies from the INCA database at the National Foundation for Educational Research (on which the Cambridge Primary Review has also drawn).<sup>25</sup> Their conclusions were in line with ours. One of the studies, involving just 10 countries, noted a move away from 'subjects' towards 'learning areas'.<sup>26</sup> We comment below on nomenclature and ponder whether this adjustment means anything. We are not sure that it does.

Another and more interesting extrapolation from the INCA database looked for similarities and differences in the way what England defines as literacy, mathematics and science are conceived in 19 countries.<sup>27</sup> Actually, the number was smaller, because the NFER study defined as 'countries' two Canadian provinces and one Chinese special administrative region, and overall it gave disproportionate emphasis to small countries and city states. The NFER study found general similarities in the structure of the mathematics curriculum, with data handling broader and more demanding than elsewhere *but the curriculum for number narrower and less demanding*. Given the scale of the government's investment in its national numeracy strategy since 1997, and the claims that have been made for it, such a finding might well merit the epithet 'astonishing'. That is why we place it in italics: the finding should not be ignored.

There was much greater variation in primary science curricula, while for literacy the structures were more variable still. However, what we judge to be particularly significant about the findings for literacy was this statement:

The literacy curricula in the comparator countries are much more likely to include an elaboration of their underlying philosophy and rationale than England, where this is extremely brief.<sup>28</sup>

The NFER comparative study looked at literacy in isolation. Had it investigated the nature of the first language curriculum as a whole, it would have found, as have other international studies, that a very clear feature emerges. It is that England is strikingly different from many other countries in the way it treats the relationship between literacy and oracy, and between both of these and the rest of the language curriculum.<sup>29</sup> In England, leading researchers, including several members of the Cambridge Primary Review team and/or consultants' group,<sup>30</sup> have combined with professional organisations like the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) and the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) to press for a proper reconceptualisation of this critically important domain of learning and classroom activity. That reconceptualisation, most of these individuals and organisations argue, must go a lot further than increasing the number of mentions in official documents of what the current national curriculum calls 'speaking and listening'.

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> INCA: International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks [www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)

<sup>26</sup> QCA (2008b)

<sup>27</sup> Ruddock and Sainsbury (2008)

<sup>28</sup> Ruddock and Sainsbury (2008), 2

<sup>29</sup> Alexander (2008a)

<sup>30</sup> For example, Robin Alexander, Harry Daniels, Maurice Galton, Usha Goswami, Linda Hargreaves, Christine Howe and Neil Mercer.

As a result of such efforts, which reach back many years via the National Oracy Project and the Bullock Report<sup>31</sup> to pioneers like Douglas Barnes<sup>32</sup> and tap into a substantial international research literature, the balance in this matter has slowly begun to shift. Yet there remains a historically-rooted tendency in England to detach talk from reading and writing and indeed make it subservient – so much so, that the 2003 launch document of the primary national strategy mentioned talk just once in 79 pages<sup>33</sup> – and we are not convinced that some of those who nowadays tell teachers to give greater attention to ‘speaking and listening’ fully understand the fundamental nature of what is required. In many other countries, in contrast, oracy and literacy are not just inseparable but are also integrated within a more generous conception of language education. Bearing in mind the evidence about the importance of talk in the development of the brain and the child’s cognitive powers,<sup>34</sup> and about the character of talk in English primary classrooms,<sup>35</sup> this is a matter of considerable importance.

It is clear from this example that international comparison of subject labels takes us only so far: it is what the labels denote which matter. That reservation applies as much to our historical comparisons. Though the mantra ‘read, write and add up’ has survived unscathed, what is indicated by most of the various subject labels in figure 6 is without doubt different in 2009 from 1904. That is another reason to resist the claim that subjects are no longer relevant or that there should now be a wholesale shift to ‘areas of learning’ or ‘skills’, for subjects change of themselves.

---

<sup>31</sup> DES (1975)

<sup>32</sup> Norman (1992); DES (1975); Barnes, Britton and Rosen (1969)

<sup>33</sup> DfES (2003a), 28

<sup>34</sup> Goswami and Bryant (2007); Howe and Mercer (2007)

<sup>35</sup> Alexander (2008a, 2008b); Galton (2007); Moyles *et al* (2003)

## 4 - WHAT THE REVIEW'S WITNESSES SAID

### **The national curriculum: a vote of confidence, up to a point?**

When it was first introduced the national curriculum was viewed with both scepticism and alarm in the teaching profession. Twenty years on, criticism is moderated by recognition of its advantages. Our submissions and soundings evidence indicates that the principle of having a national curriculum is now generally accepted as beneficial, particularly if it succeeds in establishing a clear, basic entitlement for children's learning across the country's 17,000 or so primary schools.

In their evidence to the Review several local authorities confirmed that the national curriculum had brought essential consistency to their schools. Some educational organisations felt that the curriculum had now reached an appropriate balance of breadth and depth to ensure that children have a wide range of learning experiences. New developments were welcomed: the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) felt that the introduction of foreign languages would enliven the curriculum and generate a more positive mood in schools: the Commission for Racial Equality was among several organisations which applauded what it saw as the increased emphasis on values; the Wellcome Trust, among many others, was pleased that science now has a secure place in primary education (though other witnesses were less sanguine on this score).

Children's submissions were also largely positive, with science, geography, history, sports and the arts singled out for particular mention because they were enjoyable and offered children opportunities to be active and involved in what they are learning. Many children said that they liked subjects where they could use their imagination – art, music, creative writing and drama were all mentioned – and they also valued those subjects that sparked their curiosity and encouraged them to explore. (It is perhaps worth noting that children themselves seem to be confirming, notwithstanding the claimed intentions of the Primary National Strategy, that the 'enjoyment' in *Excellence and Enjoyment* is confined to subjects other than literacy and numeracy).

Beyond this initial consensus, views of what has happened since 1988 became more critical and divided.

### **The overcrowded curriculum**

The most frequent of all charges laid by our witnesses against the current National Curriculum was that it is overcrowded, leaving teachers with insufficient time to enable children to engage adequately with every subject required by law. One submission wryly observed 'The curriculum that has evolved over the past twenty years needs thinning in order to remove the eccentricities of a long line of secretaries of state and prime ministers'. One local authority commented simply: 'We need to do less, but better'. Many teachers called for the curriculum to be slimmed down. The report on the Review's national soundings notes that teachers attending them concluded:

The current national curriculum is overcrowded and subject to considerable pressures from testing and inspection and from a series of 'bolted-on' additions which have made it logistically non-viable. It has also been diminished by the pressure of testing and the

requirements of the National Strategies. The 1988 ERA vision of ‘entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum’ is no longer a reality.

The ‘bolt-on’ problem, which has been a significant theme in the curriculum literature of the past two decades, is clearly illustrated in figure 6 (above). The list of subjects has simply become longer and longer, and nothing has been removed to accommodate the newcomers. In practice, ‘the basics’ have been protected but aspects of the wider curriculum have been squeezed almost out of existence. Many organisations expressed deep concern about the plight of the arts in the present primary national curriculum, and called for music and drama to be rescued before they disappeared altogether. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) showed how Ofsted’s inspection procedures have exacerbated the problem:

The publication of ‘Excellence and Enjoyment’ in 2004 stressed the importance of the broad curriculum that was once the defining quality of most English primary schools. Despite this, and government statements on flexibility, primary schools still feel pressured; they recognise the value to children’s learning of music, drama, poetry and creative subjects, while the inspection system still focuses on standards in maths and English.

With so much ground to cover, the curriculum was also seen as placing a strain on resources. The Music Education Council, for example, condemned the government for ‘telling us that creativity should be at the heart of the curriculum’ whilst not providing enough resources for instrumental and vocal tuition. The council complained that many schools were still ‘shackled’ by league tables and performance statistics and were therefore reluctant to divert resources into music. The constant, yet again, is the distortion of the child’s entitlement to breadth and balance by a powerful combination of high stakes testing, national strategies and selective inspection. Together these make it not only difficult or impossible to timetable the low stakes subjects with any seriousness, but also – as the council’s submission suggests – risky in terms of schools’ decisions about resources. There was much support in our evidence for the post-1988 budgetary delegation to schools, but the submission from the Music Education Council hints that there are other and subtler ways that government can control the distribution of resources at school level than by holding the purse strings.

The matter of resources also exercised those who otherwise welcomed the introduction of a modern foreign language in the primary phase. Many observed that there was an acute shortage of teachers trained to teach other languages, and the Parker Association for Language Learning argued that ‘robust systems must be put in place to ensure confidence and competence on the part of [those] primary teachers’ who would be undertaking this work.

While witnesses generally deplored the way recent policies and initiatives had compromised the 1988 Act’s welcome insistence on breadth and balance as a statutory entitlement, few mentioned the HMI and Ofsted evidence, consistent over several decades, that far from being a threat to achieved standards in ‘the basics’, a broad, rich, balanced and well-managed curriculum is actually the prerequisite for those standards, and this has been demonstrated consistently in school inspection. It is perhaps worth recalling this finding, confirmed in 1978, 1985, 1997 and 2002,<sup>36</sup> in case there be any who wish to defuse the chorus of complaint from our witnesses by arguing that the loss of curriculum breadth and balance since 1997 has been a necessary sacrifice in the cause of improved standards in literacy and numeracy. The evidence could not be clearer. *If breadth is attained, so are standards. If breadth is sacrificed, so are standards.*

---

<sup>36</sup> DES (1978a, 1985b); Ofsted (1997, 2002)

Overcrowding drastically reduces the room for manoeuvre. This, according to our witnesses, affects not just teachers but, more fundamentally, the quality of children's learning. The heavy emphasis on coverage and pace reduces curriculum to content to be checked off, and curtails exploration. It places a premium on the retention and recall of facts, and downgrades other than superficial understanding. It denies children opportunities to plan for themselves how to approach their learning tasks – a vital ingredient in engagement, cognitive advance and the development of the capacity to learn how to learn. It forces teachers into transmission mode even though they would like, and children need, opportunities for ideas to be properly discussed and explored. It reduces, for both teachers and children, time for reflection and evaluation.

Having said all this, we are left with a paradox: the primary curriculum is widely believed to be overcrowded; but in terms of its range many want most that it currently contains to be retained, and others even wish to extend it.

### **The micro-managed curriculum**

Many witnesses, in both the submissions and soundings, told us that the curriculum as specified by the DCSF and QCA was excessively prescriptive and needlessly detailed, and that this had undermined teachers' professionalism. Moreover, many added, it had failed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Those schools wishing to adopt a more adventurous approach felt unable to do so, despite the opportunities which were supposedly available.

The NUT contrasted the legal position with the perceived reality:

Disapplication under Section 90 of the Education Act 2002 allows a school or a local authority to submit to the Secretary of State an application to disapply all or part of the National Curriculum in order to meet their aims through innovative curriculum development. It is a power unused since the passing of the 1988 Education and Reform Act. It allows schools to develop their curricula beyond that which is facilitated by the general flexibility available within the National Curriculum. Unless the disapplication direction includes statutory assessment arrangements, key stage 2 statutory tests and teacher assessments in all subjects except those disapplied must continue and school performance continues to be included in the annual national performance tables. To date, this has proved to be a powerful influence on the willingness of schools to experiment with curriculum provision which might better meet pupils' needs.

The NUT continued:

Although the national agencies such as QCA exhort schools to become more creative in their curriculum provision, unless schools feel able to undertake some level of experimentation without punitive high stakes consequences if the experiment fails, there will be little development from the current curriculum offer.

With anxieties like these in mind, some submissions argued that the curriculum should not be in the hands of politicians, policymakers or government-appointed bodies at all.

Criticism was also levelled at specific aspects of the curriculum and the national strategies which were felt to be ill-conceived. For example, the Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM) roundly condemned both the revised EYFS and NNS as being hastily conceived, oversimplified and over-reliant on a limited range of teaching methods. The ATM provided

a detailed critique of the strategies and listed several serious weaknesses. In similar vein, the Geographical Association (GA) believed that the national curriculum offered an essentially secondary-orientated view of geography which could profitably be revised in line with its Action Plan for Geography<sup>37</sup> which offered a more appropriate primary-level approach. These are just two examples: we report further on specific subjects below.

### **National and local: who should decide?**

We have seen that the degree and intensity of the control of the curriculum exercised by national agencies, notably DCSF, QCA/QCDA and the national strategies, were widely seen as excessive. Teachers attending our national soundings went further: they believed that successive governments since 1988 had proved themselves incompetent to manage the curriculum and that henceforth the role of the DCSF and the national agencies should be confined to providing a loose curriculum framework, leaving local authorities and schools to work out the detail.

The idea that schools should be able to adapt the curriculum in response to the local community's needs and circumstances was proposed in submissions from a wide range of individuals and organisations. One local authority's submission to the Review summed up the views of many thus:

A national system cannot accurately reflect the wide diversity of values and aspirations in society but should give scope for schools to develop an understanding and appreciation of their local community and its relationship to others, including tolerance and respect. This enables pupils to understand their place within their society and the inter-relationships it brings, as well as fostering opportunities for them to make a positive contribution.

We came across interesting examples of local curriculum adaptations in our community soundings: in one area, the local authority's new religious education syllabus was warmly welcomed by representatives from the highly diverse local community. In law, the content of the religious education curriculum is, uniquely, a local matter. Beyond RE, however, teachers attending the community soundings felt that the National Curriculum was markedly unresponsive to the interests and needs of local communities, and to the considerable opportunities for learning which the community and its environment present.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), quoting from its 2007 publication *Subject to Change*,<sup>38</sup> said:

According to a recent survey under 4 per cent of teachers believe that the national curriculum meets the needs of all their pupils. Almost 90 per cent of them wanted the school to have greater freedom to develop the curriculum.

However, it is important to note that local decision-making does not necessarily result in local responsiveness. It may merely produce an off-the-peg national curriculum from the websites of QCA or DCSF. Local responsiveness needs to be established as a principle, and indeed as a conscious strategy, rather than merely a hope. By the same token, though giving schools 'greater freedom to develop the curriculum' might seem the best way to ensure that 'the national curriculum meets the needs of all ... pupils', this does not necessarily follow. We

---

<sup>37</sup> The Action Plan for Geography (APG) is a two year programme funded by DCSF and led by the GA, the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and the Institute of British Geographers (IBG)

<sup>38</sup> Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2007)

know as much from inspection evidence during the long era of curriculum localism before 1988. We know it also from several decades of classroom research. The critical issue here is how, and with what competence, freedom at local, school and classroom levels is exercised. The same of course goes for government and its agencies, who currently hold the prerogative of freedom in curriculum matters, and about whose exercise of that freedom the Primary Review's witnesses were so deeply concerned. It is a matter of capacity and expertise as well as right. We take these arguments further in our proposals for a new primary curriculum in Part 2.

Children themselves should have their say in curriculum design and planning, according to some witnesses. Lambeth Children and Young People's Services, for example, suggested that, 'the curriculum needs to move from mere coverage to a deeper, more meaningful and relevant curriculum, incorporating our understanding of how children learn, and seeking out their perspective and input on its design'. (Again, we have to say, there is an apparent connection between the two parts of this sentence, but not a necessary one).

Optimum Education argued the case for involving children thus:

The methodological expectation is that teachers find ways to transfer curriculum understandings to children. Therefore, the fundamental element which generates learning in almost all areas of life outside of school – identifying for oneself what needs to be learned – is denied to children ... The school curriculum is highly selective and narrow, presenting carefully identified aspects of a world that children might eventually enter ... and derives from experts and legislators, not from the consumers or parents. It therefore seems to imply a lack of confidence as if to democratise the curriculum would be to devalue it in some way. The curriculum offers up strange knowledge, not knowledge that would extend or interact with children's everyday experience. Indeed, if school knowledge drifts towards children's everyday understandings then children's power is increased, [which is] not something organisations interested in control and induction are looking for ... The school curriculum in effect paints a picture of a supposed reality but it is abstract painting. Selecting (sometimes tasty) morsels for children's consumption cannot overcome their general feelings of puzzlement – why this, now?

### **Subjects, skills, themes, areas of learning?**

We turn now from witnesses' preoccupation with the downside of a centralised national curriculum to the response to the Review's very open question 'What should children learn?' Proposals ranged from small amendments to the existing national curriculum framework to fundamental re-structuring. Some argued that primary education needs new aims and that these should either specify desirable skills and dispositions or use broader conceptualisations of knowledge than at present to guide the specification of content. However, many witnesses responded to this question not in its own terms but by repeating the pleas for greater flexibility, less prescription and more local control.

In our national and community soundings, and in the submissions, there was extensive debate about the way the curriculum should be structured. It was at this point that subjects, notwithstanding our earlier warning, became immediately contentious. Some submissions challenged the subject-based curriculum and argued for a shift to skills and dispositions. The National Union of Teachers (NUT), for example, argued that

There is increasing agreement amongst politicians, economists and the business and academic communities that current approaches to learning are not equipping children and young

people with the skills and dispositions necessary for Great Britain to compete in a global society.

Some submissions did attempt to define the kinds of skills and aptitudes that the curriculum should seek to develop. One local authority, for example, spoke of the need for children to learn how to 'find, sort, assimilate, manipulate, synthesise and interpret information'. The importance for the workplace and the country's economic future of both generic skills like these and those more familiarly packaged as literacy, numeracy and ICT was emphasised in submissions from employers and the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

'Skills' were not the only mooted alternatives to subjects. During our community soundings, some teachers and head teachers suggested replacing the current national curriculum subjects by the six EYFS 'areas of learning and development'. Local authorities, teacher trainers and some children's organisations also welcomed the foundation stage's more open approach and saw it as a model which could be applied to the primary phase, and especially to key stage 1. 'Areas of learning' were commended in the 2008 Rose review interim report as providing the best means of securing continuity from the EYFS to primary and from primary to secondary.<sup>39</sup>

For many practitioners and organisations the restructuring issue was less about subjects *vs* skills *vs* areas of learning than restoring the balance which had been lost following the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy strategies, and in particular the need to give greater emphasis to the humanities, the arts and PSHE. The Citizenship Foundation's submission, for example, observed:

We believe that primary education should try to achieve 'Excellence and Enjoyment' across all subjects. Currently there is a tendency to focus on 'excellence' in the core subjects while restricting 'enjoyment' to the foundation subjects in the wider curriculum.

With similar concern for mood and dynamics rather than structure, others argued that the standards drive had turned children off school learning and that 'fun', 'challenge' and 'excitement' should be injected into the curriculum to ward off disengagement. It was important, they argued, that the curriculum allowed for 'hands-on' learning experiences, opportunities for speaking and listening and using exciting texts. On the other hand, many submissions welcomed the predominant concern with literacy and numeracy. In its assessment of what should be retained in a slimmed-down curriculum, Lambeth Children and Young People's Service said:

Well worth preserving is the developmental process undertaken by schools and institutions that has brought the primary curriculum to where it is today. The core skills of literacy, mathematics and information technology need to remain high profile, as these are the skills that are essential for day-to-day life (and indeed for further study). Also to be preserved and developed are the principles and key elements of *Excellence and Enjoyment* in the primary years.

When the Humanities Education Centre invited children to answer the question, 'What kinds of things should children learn in school?', the responses were almost universally given in terms of subjects, although children often qualified their responses with reasons why these subjects were important. Two Y6 children, for example, wrote in their submission:

---

<sup>39</sup> Rose (2008), para 2.13

Maths for our everyday life, science for how things work in the world, English to learn standard English so we can talk properly, RE to learn about other cultures and countries, ICT to learn the world's technology, history to learn the world's history and geography to learn where places are and how our world is.

This succinct set of justifications is perhaps more utilitarian than those who value education for its own sake would prefer, though its internationalism is notable: 'the world ... other cultures and countries ... global ... the world.'

### **Specific aspects of the curriculum**

#### *English*

The central place of English in the curriculum was underlined by the English Association:

In an English-speaking country a wide and exciting curriculum must have English at its heart – whatever the subject matter, children must listen to learn; must speak to articulate their understanding; must read to find out more; must write to consolidate what they've learned and thoughtfully consider the best ways of expressing it.

We record below how the standards drive initiated in 1997 detached literacy from national curriculum English and confirmed that detachment politically and structurally by transferring control of literacy from QCA to the DfES/DCSF. However, for UKLA neither 'English' nor 'literacy' is adequate. In its submission UKLA recommended 'the use of the label *communication, language and literacy* in line with the EYFS and to signal that literacy in a new media age is multimodal in nature'.

Also concerned with labels and categories but making a rather different point about the historic neglect of oracy to which we referred earlier, the National Association for Teachers of English (NATE) asked:

Why do we divide English into *reading, writing* and, almost as an afterthought, *speaking and listening*? Would it not make more sense to think in terms of *reading and listening* and *writing and speaking*?

Submissions from many teachers and head teachers argued that the status of 'speaking and listening' should be elevated and/or that oracy should be given a much more prominent place in the curriculum. In this matter it is important to note that the scope of oracy, at least as explored by the National Oracy Project<sup>40</sup> and by those working in the fields of language and classroom interaction, is considerably broader than 'speaking and listening' as defined in the current national curriculum. 'Speaking and Listening' is a component of national curriculum English. Oracy encompasses talk in all areas and contexts of learning. Even at level 5 of the attainment target for speaking and listening, what is expected of the highest-attaining 11-year-old seems relatively basic:

Pupils talk and listen confidently in a wide range of contexts, including some which are of a formal nature. Their talk engages the interest of the learner as they begin to vary their expression and vocabulary. In discussion, they pay close attention to what others say, ask

---

<sup>40</sup> Norman (1992)

questions to develop ideas and make contributions that take account of others' views. They begin to use standard English in formal situations.<sup>41</sup>

This is some way from the view of oracy and classroom interaction being advanced by those in the current Anglo-American talk reform movement, and it is behind it in terms of aspiration. We mention this now by way of warning that the problem of curriculum labels raised by UKLA and NATE is but the tip of a curricular and pedagogical iceberg.

Beginning to probe this problem, the Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE) called for a daily oracy session which would aim not just to develop fluency and confidence in speaking and listening but also help children advance their thinking and understanding. In this the society pointed to the success of programmes like Philosophy for Children (P4C).

UKLA drew attention to the impact of modern communication technologies on literacy and was among the organisations which recommended that media studies should be included in the primary curriculum. Developing this line, the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE) proposed that

... much more scope and account needs to be given to ways in which children could be encouraged to be more critical and analytical of film and DVD adaptations of book texts in order to learn and understand how they differ from and compare with [the actual] texts.

Also attempting to extend the received view of literacy, NATE argued:

As Margaret Meek memorably remarked, 'confident literates know what they need not read'. What is important is the ability to select, prioritise and comprehend – regardless of the manner (or medium) in which data is presented.

English, for those children whose first language it is not, has added challenges and dimensions. UKLA was critical of the way in which bi- and multi-lingualism are regarded as 'a minor or background consideration, often resulting in a tokenistic or ill-informed attitudes in school'. UKLA pointed out that the different learning needs of all children, including those with other languages, disabilities, and of different social class and gender, meant that a single model of the curriculum for English will not cover all children and eventualities and that the government should encourage teachers to 'respond creatively, plan holistically and make good use of talk, drama and film in their literacy curriculum provision'.

*The National Literacy Strategy (NLS)*

The Hamilton Trust's submission characterised the first version of the NLS thus:

In 1997, with the National Literacy Strategy (1998) teachers were effectively told:

- To teach to given objectives, 1024 of them, with not a single one prioritised;
- Not to do individual reading since only 'shared' or 'guided' reading was advised;
- To eschew structured phonics and to adopt the half-way house approach of 'rime and analogy' and to teach blends such as /tr/ rather than individual phonemes;
- To believe that 'speaking and listening' was no longer considered important as not one of those 1024 objectives prioritised it.

---

<sup>41</sup> QCA/DfEE (1999), 45. 2009 source: <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-1-and-2/subjects/english/attainmenttargets/index.aspx>

ASPE concurred with this line of criticism:

Since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 teachers have been directed to teach a literacy curriculum with an overriding emphasis on reading, writing and grammatical awareness. Not only has the content been centrally managed and directed but so too have the methods and teaching strategies.

The ATL's submission remarked:

Although the structure of the Literacy Hour has helped some teachers to improve their practice and has given more pace to lessons, for others the structure has been applied too rigidly and has hampered development and innovation.

ASPE pointed to a slackening of this pressure with the arrival of the Primary Strategy and *Excellence and Enjoyment* but the ATL called the twin aims of excellence and enjoyment an 'irresolvable contradiction.'

Updating its critical comments on the 1998 version of the NLS in light of the 2007 primary framework,<sup>42</sup> the Hamilton Trust remained sceptical:

Now, in 2007, we are informed that:

- structured phonics is now obligatory;
- speaking and listening is flavour of the month (implied question: why have we irresponsible teachers not been doing enough of it?);
- most of the 1024 objectives were not important and we often prioritised the wrong ones;
- it is bad to mix text types and therefore that teaching some poetry about dogs which then leads on to discussing how to look after a dog is now considered bad teaching.

UKLA regarded the NLS as excessively reductive, especially in its neglect of oracy and dialogue. The association criticised the Rose Report on early literacy<sup>43</sup> (whose recommendations on phonics have now become mandatory) for being unbalanced in its advocacy of synthetic phonics, pointing out that while phonics may develop the skills of reading, children may be disinclined to use them unless their reading experiences encourage autonomy, enthusiasm, achievement and a sense of enjoyment. UKLA identified a 'simple' view of reading in official discourse that appears to decouple decoding from comprehension.

The submission from ASPE was scathing about 'the extracts' culture which it said characterised the NLS/PNS, and continued:

How can we continue to design an English curriculum which marginalises the role that reading and telling stories has to play in children's cognitive, social and emotional development? Whilst this will clearly not be the experience for all children or for all teachers, the fact that it occurs in *any* primary school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a scandal and needs to be a priority for review.

One witness, citing her experience as an English teacher, primary head and English examiner, condemned the 'abject state of affairs' where reading for pleasure has disappeared under the pressure to pass tests.

---

<sup>42</sup> DCSF (2006)

<sup>43</sup> Rose (2006)

This is strong stuff, but we confirm that it is a fair sample of the many comments on the NLS which the Cambridge Primary Review received. We might also note that if the literacy requirements of the 2007 Primary Framework contradict those of the 1998 NLS as dramatically as the Hamilton Trust claim, it is hard to see how teachers can have confidence in them.

The Cambridge Review commissioned a survey of research, evaluation and inspection evidence on the impact of recent curriculum and assessment reforms, including the NLS, which we shall consider in our final report.<sup>44</sup> That survey also summarises changes to the NLS since its incorporation into the Primary National Strategy framework from 2007. Drawing on the work of Wyse and Jones<sup>45</sup> our survey authors comment:

The number of objectives in the new framework was drastically reduced in comparison with the old framework. The tendency to encourage one-off lessons was replaced with longer units of work. The division of objectives into word-level, sentence-level and text-level was abolished. In spite of the overall reduction in objectives, the framework as a whole, which includes many guidance documents and hyperlinks to other government resources, may prove to be unwieldy and prescriptive. The types of books children will study is prescribed, the types of writing they will carry out is prescribed. The way this is to be taught has been specified in greater detail than the NLS. It appears that a dominant teaching model, rather than encouragement to use a range of approaches, is still being applied ... The emphasis on grammar through reference to the old objectives is still encouraged ... The method of teaching reading has been subject to increased control by government ... Teachers are required to adopt the 'synthetic phonics' approach to the teaching of reading, a recommendation which continues to be contentious and some argue is not supported by sufficient research evidence.<sup>46</sup>

There is much more that could be said about the NLS and its current manifestation within the PNS framework, both from our evidence and from research and inspection. For the moment we confine ourselves to this selection of witness views on the NLS as a somewhat semi-detached aspect of the curriculum for English. In this report on the curriculum, it is the concept of literacy which matters, not the strategy's impact on literacy standards, teachers and teaching. The latter aspects are discussed in our final report.

Equally, we must stress that the NLS has its supporters too, and not just in the arena of policy.<sup>47</sup> Many younger teachers involved in the community soundings welcomed the provision of a clear conceptual and organisational framework to support their work in an aspect of teaching which they knew was both important and contentious. By and large, it was their elders in the schools, and the national organisations which represent the professional communities of teachers, advisers and researchers, who were most sceptical. This tendency for reactions to be age-related has been noted in other studies, though the 2006 teacher survey of Rosemary Webb and Graham Vulliamy found it less marked than in the early years of the NLS.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps more significant is the very sharp difference in reactions to the literacy and numeracy strategies, with the latter generating a markedly more favourable professional response.

---

<sup>44</sup> Wyse, McCreery and Torrance (2008)

<sup>45</sup> Wyse and Jones (2008)

<sup>46</sup> Wyse, McCreery and Torrance (2008), 16-17; Wyse and Styles (2007)

<sup>47</sup> For an extended justification of the NLS, see Stannard and Huxford (2007). John Stannard was director of the NLS from 1997 to 2000 and Laura Huxford was training director from 1997 to 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Day (2002); Osborn *et al* (2000); Webb and Vulliamy (2006)

## *Mathematics*

Mathematics was a subject that children identified as particularly important for their adult lives and with this in mind some suggested that it should attend more to financial understanding and skill. Submissions from practitioners and curriculum organisations focused more how maths should be taught. The Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM) pressed for ‘a consistent focus on children understanding the mathematics they are doing rather than just regurgitating rote-learnt rules’ and applauded the spiral model where modules of learning build from one to the next. The ATM submission objected to the prescribing of particular calculation procedures without checking on the understanding – or misunderstanding – they produce:

Teach a child a procedure without understanding and they may remember it for a day. Teach a child to think mathematically and understand what they are doing and they can apply it for life.

On the whole, less concern was expressed about mathematics than about English, and the main reason for this appeared to be that the national numeracy strategy (NNS) was considerably more popular among teachers than its literacy counterpart. In the Webb and Vulliamy study referred to above, 50 per cent of experienced teachers ‘strongly liked’ the NNS, but only 17 per cent said the same of the NLS. The sample sizes, though, were small: 82 teachers (NLS) and 78 (NNS).<sup>49</sup>

The Hamilton Trust went further, claiming that the NNS was greeted with almost universal enthusiasm amongst classroom teachers and head teachers alike:

It is rare to hear sustained critiques of it – certainly from those ‘at the chalk face’. As a consequence, we have enjoyed a period in which:

- maths teaching in primary schools has generally improved;
- the focus on mental methods of calculation has been accepted as useful and is generally being applied to an increasing degree each year;
- mental-oral practice as a short daily activity has without doubt improved children’s numerical fluency by keeping previously taught strategies as well as number facts ‘simmering’ as children progress through primary education;
- a structured spiral curriculum has enabled both effective teaching, with ‘revisiting’ a mathematical idea or topic built in, and active learning as children come back to things to reinforce their conceptual understanding.

The ATM was less convinced, identifying a list of fundamental flaws in the way the NNS had been conceived and was expected, through the tripartite daily maths lesson, to be taught. Its submission was particularly concerned that the same basic pedagogical model had been applied to the youngest primary pupils as well as the oldest:

It has never been the case that foundation stage maths teaching has been based in learning through practice ... We are aware of no evidence that under-7s learn best by having whole class objective-led maths lessons, led by adults, every day ... The message that mathematics is a linear process of lots of small objectives is not one that ATM supports.

---

<sup>49</sup> Webb and Vulliamy (2006), 19

The association also took issue – at a level of detail which we cannot repeat here – with the way the NNS/PNS conceived the teaching of particular aspects of mathematics. For example:

The notion of multiplication as repeated addition, and division as repeated subtraction, doesn't tell the whole story and needs further consideration ... The whole issue of ratio and proportion and the definitions needs to be considered. At present it is a bit like saying 'you always take the smaller number from the larger' – the definitions are setting up later problems in understanding the structure. The notion that fractions are always part to whole does not sit comfortably with the type comparisons that children frequently make ... Consideration needs to be given to teaching the division aspect of fractions. Perhaps this should be left until KS3 and the notion of counting and multiplying ... could be used in KS2. This might well prevent later misconceptions when adding fractions.

Several submissions warned that the government's preoccupation with numeracy risked a similar kind of reductionism in mathematics as has happened to English. As one witness reminded us:

A joint Royal Society and Joint Mathematical Council reported in July 2000 that the teaching of mathematics was increasingly being reduced to nothing but numbers, and that the death of geometry and the study of shape and space in mathematics teaching could only be to the detriment of visual and spatial intelligence. It takes little to see in this entirely quantitative approach a verification of René Guénon's vision of 'The Reign of Quantity.'

However, the ATM did celebrate the rise, since 1999, of

the number of pupils achieving level 4 and above. These gains have been achieved using a consistent focus on children understanding the mathematics they are doing rather than just regurgitating rote-learnt rules.

This may well be true, but it may not allow us to be sanguine on the matter of standards, for we noted earlier the NFER finding that the curriculum for number is narrower and less demanding in England than in many other countries.<sup>50</sup>

There is one much more controversial perspective on primary mathematics. Such is the historical dominance of the '3Rs' in first elementary and then primary education that it has become almost heretical to ask whether that dominance continues to be justified. A few witnesses were prepared to so. One questioned the assumption implicit in the national strategies (though not in the national curriculum as originally specified in 1988) that literacy and numeracy, or English and mathematics, should have parity of esteem, arguing that literacy and the wider study of language are considerably more 'basic' to the child's education than mathematics, in that the former enable and underpin everything else and remain critical to the individual's future education, employment and life to an extent which cannot be argued for mathematics. A second believed that the 3Rs was a Victorian throwback and in 2009 science could make a much stronger claim than mathematics to the status of 'basic'; in any event it needed to be reinstated in the curriculum core. A third witness saw the matter in somewhat more political terms, as a dominance secured less by argument than by effective lobbying. The witness was happy to be provocative:

The delusional grandeur of the maths lobby needs challenging – it's held unthinking sway for far too long!

---

<sup>50</sup> Ruddock and Sainsbury (2008)

A more measured challenge came from Professor Guy Claxton:

Beyond the obvious usefulness of basic arithmetic, mathematics has the status it has not because it is intrinsically important, but because it seems to fit the methods and assumptions of Zumbac's school so well. Mathematical knowledge is timeless. It can be easily segmented into topics. It can be clearly explained. Graded exercise can be constructed to guide practice. The steps of reasoning can be set out so errors are easily spotted. There are unambiguously right answers, which make for rigorous and objective assessment.<sup>51</sup>

'Zumbac's school', Claxton explains, perpetuates the classical and mediaeval primacy of logical or quasi-logical systems of thought, and values above all knowledge which is reliable, timeless and readily parcelled up and transmitted, regardless of its relevance. Mathematics, he believes, fits this bill perfectly and thereby escapes challenge on the grounds of relevance to which other subjects must submit. Claxton adds, though, that 'the real way mathematicians actually solve problems and make discoveries is ... a million miles away from this clinical kind of learning.'<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, there is scope for debate here: to date there has been a somewhat deferential silence. In a 'root and branch' review of the curriculum no element or subject should be exempt.

### *Science*

Science was generally recognised as an important aspect of the curriculum. Children viewed it as one of the keys to their understanding of the world around them. Some adults, however, expressed concern about the handling of science in the national curriculum, arguing that it valued content over scientific understanding and investigation. The submission from the National Inspectors and Advisers Group for Science (NAIGS) felt that science teaching had been skewed by the demands of formal assessment:

The science education community faces a dilemma. The status of science as a core subject is key for the country in terms of future economic development and it needs to be maintained ... There is a wide perception that [this status] is reinforced ... by having an external national SAT at the end of KS2 ... [Yet] the KS2 science SAT has changed the way that science is taught in KS2 classrooms (and viewed by Senior Managers), to the detriment of the children's learning experience and love of science.

The National Network of Science Learning Centres shared this concern and claimed that

Children and teachers are increasingly turned off science as it becomes a content-led, vocabulary-heavy subject where personal curiosity is thwarted and opportunities for children to develop investigative, questioning and thinking skills are limited ... Primary science should offer children the opportunity to engage with big ideas about how the world works through first hand practical activity. It is the fundamental right of every individual child to explore, to investigate, and to gain scientific skills and knowledge.

Prominent among the submissions dealing with primary science was a substantial and detailed document from the Association for Science Education (ASE), which also drew on contributions from NAIGS (see above) and the Association of Tutors in Science Education (ATSE). Space does not allow us to do it full justice to the ASE submission here, but we believe that the following key points should be noted:

---

<sup>51</sup> Claxton (2008), 83, submitted as evidence to the Review.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

- Science is currently a core subject but does not have parity with literacy and numeracy in terms of status, time, support, CD and funding; it should have.
- Science teaching at the primary stage must involve enquiry and 'hands-on' activity.
- Teaching to the KS2 test reduces both the extent and quality of primary science at the top end of the primary school.
- Primary science requires a constructivist pedagogy in which pupils' existing ideas and understandings are respected, elicited, explored and built upon.
- Science teaching should be relevant to pupils' lives in order to provide the basis for that public understanding of science which in a scientific and technological age is essential to a functioning democracy. This also means engaging with major global issues such as sustainability.

The emphasis on public understanding for an active and informed citizenry was taken up by the Wellcome Trust, who also called for a full review of the content of the primary science curriculum:

Primary science education should not just be concerned with knowledge but also with the acquisition of scientific concepts and the development of scientific and thinking skills. It should aim ... to develop ... perseverance, independence, co-operation and curiosity.

Also from the Wellcome Trust came a persuasive statement on the importance of primary science in education and life which is worth quoting in full:

- Primary school science enables children to develop ideas about the world around, laying a foundation for scientific literacy, the general grasp of key ideas of and about science that are necessary for effective operation in the modern world.
- Children's experience of undertaking scientific inquiry can develop appreciation of how science works, of the power and the limitations of science, as well as the enjoyment of finding out through scientific activity.
- Science can help understanding of scientific aspects of their daily lives that affect their health and safety during the primary years and have wider implications for their and others' future through longer-term effects on the environment.
- Scientific activity and learning about the people and history of science support appreciation of science as an important human endeavour in which reliable knowledge is built up through the systematic collection and use of evidence.
- Involvement in scientific activity leads to the recognition of the importance of reasoning about evidence, which is needed for future learning in science and beyond.<sup>53</sup>

The extent to which the post-1997 literacy and numeracy strategies had marginalised what, in the late 1980s and early 1990s was regarded as one of the National Curriculum's success stories, was quantified in the NAIGS submission. In contrast to daily literacy and mathematics lessons taking half of the available teaching time or more, NAIGS reckoned that time devoted to discernibly scientific study now equated to 'around 1.5 hours [a week] at KS1 and 2 hours at KS2 ... frequently limited to afternoon slots with little if any teaching assistant (TA) support.' (For those unfamiliar with the professional folk-wisdom of primary education we should point out that there is a long-held belief that mornings should be reserved for the most important subjects 'when the children are fresh', that afternoons are for the 'soft' subjects, and Friday afternoon is the curriculum graveyard. Independent-minded headteachers sometimes invert the timetabling in order to subvert the belief.)

## *ICT*

Few witnesses doubted the importance of ICT in the lives of today's children and tomorrow's adults. ASPE and the TDA were among those arguing for ICT on the basis of future need: 'Primary education, particularly the latter stages, should offer pupils the support they may need for them to live successfully in an age dominated by rapidly expanding technology' (ASPE). 'Emerging technologies will continue to develop and will be a central, integrative and interactive part of the learning cycle' (TDA).

Similar arguments were frequently presented at the community soundings. There, however, they were often tempered by anxiety about the downside of children's unlimited access to an unmonitored web, by the adverse consequences to children's physical health and social development of spending long solitary hours at the computer screen and by the addictive nature of computer games. The National Association for Advisers for Computers in Education (NAACE), inevitably a staunch advocate of ICT in schools, also warned in its submission that:

ICT is critical to developing more complex thought and creative thinking. To do this its use must be taught systematically and intelligently, with sufficient recognition of its limitations. It is a principal task of teachers to educate children to be critical readers and users of all information material, especially the World Wide Web.

Despite its ubiquity in the lives of children inside and outside school, there was some concern about whether its importance was properly reflected in the curriculum. Several submissions argued that the 'C' in ICT (communications) was neglected and that its prominence in our lives now demanded that it should take its place within an expanded concept of literacy. In any event, they argued, to restrict 'communication skills' to speaking and listening was no longer adequate.

NAACE argued that ICT was of sufficient importance and complexity to be handled as a stand-alone subject, like mathematics. Many teachers and teacher trainers, on the other hand, viewed it more as a resource, for example for children's writing. NAACE was unhappy about this, and believed that it represented a sidelining of ICT which would have damaging longer-term consequences. The division between those who regarded ICT as a cross-curricular tool or skill and those who believed should be timetabled as a subject in its own right was very marked.

### *Creativity and the arts*

The words 'creative' and 'creativity' appeared in the submissions more frequently than almost any others. They were applied both to children's learning and the conditions for teaching, and invariably were regarded positively. The words were also used somewhat loosely, and it was therefore helpful to receive this warning from Professor Anna Craft:

The very nature of creativity in education remains ambiguous. To what extent creativity in primary education is conceived of as involving creative partnerships, as opposed simply to valuing and nourishing children's ideas in multiple contexts, is not clear. To what extent collective or collaborative creativity is valued as against individualised models, is also unclear; similarly there are still slippages in language between 'creative teaching', 'teaching for creativity' and 'creative learning'.

In the submissions, creativity referred variously to the child's creativity, teacher creativity, and 'creative' subjects like art, music or drama. It was also used to refer to individual qualities, aims, processes or outcomes. Sometimes 'creative' appeared to mean taking risks or just doing things differently. Like 'skills', 'creativity' has become something of cliché, and an important idea has thereby been devalued. We say more on the problem of the language of curriculum in Part 2.

Many submissions argued that teachers' and children's opportunities for creative activities had been undermined by curriculum prescription and high stakes assessment. The case for creativity was often made with reference to the skills needed by tomorrow's adults, as in this individual submission to the Review:

Since the introduction of the National Curriculum in England, central policy in education has restricted learning by focusing too much on prescribed knowledge and the assessment of this. Schooling has primarily focused in recent years on the transmission of knowledge and skills. There is a growing concern that this has been accompanied by a narrowing of the curriculum, with the result that many of our young people are launching into adult life lacking the flexible creative thinking required for negotiating a complex world.

Here, 'creativity' is defined a way of thinking. Some submissions, however, argued that recent initiatives were moving in the right direction. One curriculum organisation commented:

We are now coming almost full circle with Every Child Matters and personalised learning at the centre of the debate and with government telling us that creativity should be at the heart of the curriculum. It would indeed be a transformation of the curriculum if these agendas were followed through and we could achieve a really creative environment for all our children's learning.<sup>54</sup>

Both children and teachers said that they would welcome more time for the visual and performing arts. One local authority suggested that the creative arts should be integrated with other areas of the curriculum to support 'key aspects of learning'. Teachers at our national soundings also highlighted the important role of the arts in increasing children's engagement with learning. One head teacher described how her school's links with local theatres and artists had helped to create a more positive learning culture within the school, inspiring children, parents and teachers alike.

The extensive and fully-documented submission from Creative Partnerships included case studies of schools where the creative arts had been used as a focus for re-structuring schools' approaches to the curriculum. One school worked with Creative Partnerships to rationalise both the structure of the curriculum and the timetable to create the much needed space and time for creativity and the arts. Mornings were devoted to the national curriculum core subjects (mathematics, English/literacy and science) while in the afternoons remaining subjects were taught through the themes stimulated by works of art and in collaboration with professional actors, dancers and a local artist. According to Creative Partnerships the impact of this initiative was 'profound': teachers felt that children had gained in confidence and 'children now approach their work with greater attention to detail and a more sustained

---

<sup>54</sup> All organisations submitting evidence were asked if they could be named if quoted in this report. This organisation did not reply to that question, and therefore remains anonymous.

interest'<sup>55</sup>. Interestingly, though, the approach did not challenge the long-held assumption that the 'basics' belong to the morning prime time and the arts to the afternoon.

However, some felt that, generally speaking, art was not well handled in the primary curriculum. The submission from the National Association for Primary Education (NAPE) included an article by Peter Dixon, who voiced concern that children's imaginative and expressive artwork was being constrained:

Sadly in recent years the unique and precious quality of children's drawing and painting has been lost in many schools where the focus has been on the work of adult artists. Visits to galleries and school visits by practising artists are to be encouraged. But rows of six-year-olds copying rather obscure paintings by Kandinsky, for no other reason than they have been told to do, so defeats me.<sup>56</sup>

Deep concern was also expressed about the state of music in primary schools. Teachers believed that its foundation status guaranteed nothing. Teacher trainers argued that music had become so marginalised that it could disappear from the curriculum altogether. Yet children themselves said that they wanted more opportunities to learn about and to enjoy music in school. The Music Education Council (MEC) reminded us of the benefits of music, from reflecting and embracing cultural, ethnic, religious, regional and local aspirations to the 'sense of social awareness, linguistic development, level of concentration, self discipline and sense of both individual and corporate pride' to be found in the members of young choirs.

Curiously, that list says nothing about the unique and irreplaceable aural, imaginative, emotional, intellectual and kinaesthetic power of music as music, and over the past decade there has been an increasing tendency to seek to justify the arts by reference to outcome measures of social or economic utility which have little to do with how the arts are experienced. Even arts organisations have felt obliged to accede to creeping utilitarianism. This has been unhelpful to the cause of the arts in schools, and we might suggest that the preference for labels like 'creativity' or 'visual skills' also reflects this unseemly capitulation. We return to this matter later.

Support for the arts was not universal. One parental submission, for example, objected that school plays took away time from the 3Rs. And in an important reminder that educational values may be problematic, the Muslim Council of Britain asked us to note that certain kinds of music and dance are unacceptable under the tenets of Islam and urged schools to be sensitive to the beliefs and practices of Muslim families:

Some Muslims may hold a very conservative attitude towards music and may seek to avoid it altogether, not wishing their children to participate in school music lessons. In such cases the school can show great understanding by providing alternative musical learning opportunities.

### *The humanities*

Geography and history were widely regarded as being undervalued in primary education and under-represented in the curriculum. Many submissions called for a greater emphasis on the humanities. Some, possibly following the same line of reasoning which reduced art to 'visual skills', suggested that the humanities were a good way to teach 'key skills'.

---

<sup>55</sup> Creative Partnerships (2007), 13

<sup>56</sup> Dixon (2007), 15

A slightly different take was provided by the submission from the teacher training institution which argued that

literacy and numeracy skills should be taught in the context of learning through other subjects, especially the humanities, retaining the focus on using the learning process and thinking skills, but through these methods allowing children to gain some knowledge of the past, the world today and an understanding of their own and other cultures.

It is not wholly clear what is being argued for here: possibly the familiar contention that unless literacy and numeracy are applied they are meaningless; or perhaps that if the content of literacy and numeracy can be somehow be made 'historical' or 'geographical', then that satisfies those who are worried about the decline in school humanities. There is a worryingly reductionist trend here, quite marked in submissions about the arts and humanities, on which we shall need to comment later.

The same cannot be said about the submissions from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and the Geographical Association (GA). The RGS deplored the way the restriction of testing to literacy, numeracy and science had created a hierarchy of subjects in which the contribution of the humanities has been devalued. It too commended geography as a relevant and easily understandable context within which to teach both literacy and numeracy, but also underscored the necessity of geographical understanding in its own right, and on its own ground. With high-quality geography lessons, and real-world experiences in the field, geography, said the RGS, can help prepare primary pupils to understand their neighbourhoods, their nation and the world. Their world can span their locality, their nation and connections beyond.

The GA wanted the primary geography curriculum to be re-designed to ensure that children, 'develop a sound understanding of the world from the local perspective to the global context'. Starting geography in the child's locality has long been a popular approach, and it chimed with the more general concern for localism in the curriculum which we consider later in this report.

Submissions on the place and teaching of history also criticised the growing marginalisation at the primary stage of a perspective on the world which witnesses believed was of central importance in both education and life. But there were other concerns: the controversial question of the relationship between history teaching and identity, for one. Here, parents at one community sounding, in common with some politicians, argued that 'Britishness' arises from a knowledge of a particular kind of British history. Others took a very different view, believing that a condition of cultural plurality may demand if not as many histories as there are cultures, then certainly an approach to history which highlights diversity and the very different tales that can be told about the past, depending on where in the cultural mix one happens to find oneself. The ATL's submission warned:

Some ... argue that the national curriculum must transmit the British heritage, but this cannot be done by national prescription because the concept of Britishness becomes ever more problematic in an age of mass migration and global communication.

Focusing on the link between the humanities and values, ASPE said:

Primary education is also about the eventual growth of pupils into full human society with an understanding of values. The [non-core] foundation subjects are needed to secure this. Why is this? Historical and social thinking are not the same as other kinds of thinking.

Roy Hughes, quoting his own work on behalf of NAPE, added:

History can help our children to make meaning. Conceptual thinking is a vital part of children's developing work in history. Children's classroom activities would be framed by cause, consequence, interpretation and evidence.<sup>57</sup>

### *Citizenship*

Citizenship education, a recent and currently non-statutory addition to the national curriculum, was highlighted in our submissions and soundings evidence. Some organisations argued that England lags behind other countries in the seriousness with which it treats citizenship education and called for it to be made mandatory at the primary stage. However, some questioned whether it was necessary to introduce primary-aged children to citizenship education.

Opinion was similarly divided on the matter of cultural identity. Some witnesses felt that schools should place a clear emphasis on celebrating diversity and plurality, whilst others wanted schools to promote a common set of values. Organisations which took part in our national soundings cautioned that terms like 'Britishness' were unhelpful and may accentuate division. The Citizenship Foundation called for a more holistic, coherent approach to citizenship education, with children's personal experiences as a key focus. As well as classroom debate on social and environmental issues, the foundation recommended classroom approaches based on dialogue, active learning and emotional literacy as tools which future citizens would need. It wanted citizenship to become statutory, with a clear pathway of progression through key stages. The Foundation was concerned that bullying, theft, respect for law, and community cohesion issues are commonly addressed in primary schools but not always from a citizenship perspective or in a consistent manner. AREIAC also felt that citizenship education required further support and suggested that a cross-curricular approach should be developed to establish links with other areas, such as religious education and PHSE.

Concerns stretched beyond national boundaries. The curriculum, many argued, should embrace an international perspective, developing children's awareness and understanding of climate change, sustainability and global economics. It was widely acknowledged that Britain and the wider world were changing rapidly and it was imperative that the curriculum should have a clear global and international orientation. While educating children for economic understanding schools should make them aware of the dilemmas of balancing prosperity and sustainability, competitiveness and interdependence. The submission from the UK One World Linking Organisation (UKOWLA) drew attention to the potential of communication technology in supporting the development of global education:

With the growing emphasis on global interdependence, internationalism and the IT revolution enabling easier access to all kinds of communication and distance learning and with the movement of people across the globe, there has recently been an increasing interest in global education allowing young people to put their lives in the context of the world in which they are being brought up and enabling them to become active global citizens. IT has made this joint curriculum work much more accessible to all.

Many witnesses insisted that sustainability was no abstract aspiration but required teachers to involve children directly in projects to protect the environment, conserve wildlife and

---

<sup>57</sup> Hughes (2007), 17

reduce carbon emissions. The RSPCA said that children should be taught to have 'respect for all animals and the environments within which they live'. During the community soundings we saw some of these projects in action, including a Forest School in Devon and a community sustainability project in Northumberland, and impressive and heartening they were too, especially in the way they combined enthusiasm, hard knowledge and practical action.

### *Health and physical education*

There has been growing concern in recent years about children's physical health and the rise in childhood obesity, and this concern is reflected in the Review's own evidence as well as in government policy. Many organisations and practitioners urged that more time, resources and emphasis should be given to physical education and outdoor play. Several parent submissions lamented the loss of competitive sports in many primary schools, one commenting that 'Our school has particular problems with a lack of playing space which the governors are trying to address but competitive sport and matches between schools seem to have all but disappeared'. One submission felt that the 2012 Olympic Games in London could be used to help raise the profile of sports in schools.

Many believed that PE is inadequately resourced. The ATL said that, '...a comprehensive curriculum recognises humanity as physical beings'. It called for greater recognition of the importance of physical skills such as co-ordination, control, manipulation and movement and for schools to provide more opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. Some groups at our community soundings wanted more time to be allocated to physical education.

Children often talked or wrote to us about (and some drew) their favourite school sports. In thinking about what resources they would like to see in their schools, children prioritised pitches, gymnasias and indoor swimming pools. The submission from Swim 2000 called for the introduction of its method to teach children how to swim using efficient strokes, enabling them to swim greater distances.

### *Other 'literacies': financial and emotional*

Children were concerned that they should enter the adult world properly prepared, not just by the well-trodden routes of literacy and numeracy but also with a grasp of financial and life skills. This was a strong theme in the witness sessions with children which formed part of each set of community soundings:

Children's views of educational priorities highlighted the development of generic capacities for managing life in a changing world: learning how to learn, preparing for life, developing relationships, handling responsibility, citizenship, life skills, financial management and generally 'thinking about the future'.<sup>58</sup>

Some adult submissions also commented on the importance of teaching children about financial management, though generally children's priorities for their learning differed quite markedly from those of adults. Children valued a curriculum which combined relevance with enjoyment; adults wished to foster the development of the rounded personality. Teaching children how to manage their emotions and cope with the stresses of everyday life was also regarded as extremely important. Many organisations commended the Social and

---

<sup>58</sup> Alexander and Hargreaves (2007), 13

Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) curriculum and suggested that it should be more widely adopted in schools. The Child Bereavement Network's submission called for discussion of death and bereavement with children:

Given the numbers of children who will experience bereavement during childhood, there is a strong case for them to learn ways of managing feelings associated with loss. The general provision of education about loss and bereavement can help to dispel myths and taboos.... By including death and loss in the wider curriculum (for example, in science, English and geography), schools can help to normalise these topics.

The British Humanist Association argued that sex and relationship education should become statutory at primary level, a view that was endorsed by several children's organisations and faith groups. However, some of the latter were concerned that teaching about relationships should not run counter to the tenets of their religion.

Some readers may find it odd that we have bracketed together goals as disparate as 'financial literacy' and 'emotional literacy'. We do so partly because this is how these matters were often presented to the Review and partly to make a critical point. It does perhaps overstretch the concept of 'literacy' when it is used, as in many submissions it was, to define the ability to read and write, the ability to operate with confidence and discrimination in the ever-changing world of ICT, the capacity to manage money and make sound financial decisions, and the complex combination of attributes which make up the way a person expresses and handles emotions and responds affectively to people and experiences.

In any event, 'emotional literacy' may be a popular concept but among psychologists it is also a contested one and should therefore be used with caution. What is beyond dispute is that children's emotional development matters and that many of the Review's witnesses were deeply concerned both about the impact of current patterns of life on children's emotional condition and the need to see the education of the emotions as no less fundamental to primary education than the historical 'basics.'

In their survey of curriculum alternatives commissioned by the Review, Jim Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter of Glasgow University note that many ideas in this area have been imported into mainstream schooling from outside the state system, for example, from Steiner-Waldorf schools, pre-schools in Britain and other countries influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach from Italy, and the home-school movement. But with reference to the emotional literacy movement more generally, they warn:

There are significant questions ... about the efficacy and purposes of what has come to be regarded as 'therapeutic pedagogy'; that is, a pedagogy which aims to 'empower' less confident learner to overcome (self-imposed) barriers to the achievement of learning goals. Some commentators warn of the commodification of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) as a newly constructed 'competence' to be traded by trainers and teachers. Moreover, it is not always clear that the positive relationship that is often assumed between self-esteem and academic attainment is always or inevitably justified. Indeed, others suggest that therapeutic approaches to tackle the self esteem deficit are little more than 'snake oil' remedies.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Conroy, Hulme and Menter (2008), 8

### *Modern foreign languages*

Although modern foreign languages at key stage 2 will become statutory from 2010, there were many who wished to remind us of their importance – perhaps aware that having foundation subject status guarantees little, as the recent fate of primary arts and humanities shows. The Association for Language Learning (ALL) made an important case for the relationship between foreign language learning and mother tongue literacy (though others argued that for children experiencing difficulties in literacy the addition of a second language is a hindrance rather than a help. The submission from CILT (Centre for Language Teaching) made the broader case that teaching a foreign language at primary level can help produce not only literate and numerate children but also those with:

a sense of their own self-worth and a joy in knowing and getting to know, an appreciation of the contributions they can make in the economic, social and emotional development of their own communities and beyond and the desire to contribute to these; children who are tolerant, interested in and with some understanding of the commonalities and differences between people both next door and on the other side of the world.

The TDA was an enthusiastic supporter of foreign language teaching. Its submission reported research showing that language teaching helps to create a more creative curriculum and a more positive mood in schools. No less enthusiastic were many witnesses at the community soundings, including children.

ALL admitted that much of the evidence for the benefits of teaching languages is anecdotal but highlighted the usefulness of languages in linking curricular areas and promoting diversity. CILT claimed that, ‘...all primary schools are “language schools” since all of their activity is concerned with language and how to use it appropriately’. ALL wanted schools to develop a more inclusive approach to language teaching, saying that pupils of all abilities can be included in primary language lessons, given appropriate extension activities.

### *Religious education*

In the 1944 Education Act religious education (RE) was the only named compulsory subject. 65 years later, opinion is sharply and sometimes bitterly divided about whether it should be in the curriculum at all.

We received submissions from organisations representing some of Britain’s prominent faiths: nationally from the Catholic Education Service, the Church of England Education Division, the United Synagogue Agency for Jewish Education, the office of the Chief Rabbi and the Muslim Council of Britain; locally from several Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs), the organisations which are responsible in law for advising local authorities on religious education and acts of worship in schools, and from individual diocesan boards of education. All of them argued eloquently that religion is as essential to education as it is to life well-lived, though their perspectives on how it might be fostered in schools were not identical. We also received submissions from professional organisations concerned with RE – the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC).

The case for religious education within faith schools was clearly put by the Church of England Education Division, quoting the words of its former Chief Education Officer, the Very Reverend John Hall:

Religious education in any faith-based school is not simply a subject making up a proportion of the taught curriculum. It pervades the whole life of the school. The religious character of the school and the belief on which it is founded will be discernible in the attitudes and values of the school, the priorities the school sets and what it prizes most highly, the quality of relationships throughout and beyond the school community, the place and nature of worship in the school, the whole taught curriculum and curriculum enrichment, the use of and attitude towards the school premises and what surrounds the school day.

In the context of non-denominational schools, one SACRE pressed a wider argument:

Religious education is often seen only in relation to its contribution to community cohesion. While the value of this should not be underestimated, it is also important to note that RE contributes significantly to pupils' cognitive and conceptual development. It deals with some of the world's most significant and ancient teachings and literatures and is, at its best, a very challenging subject area.

In contrast, we received submissions from individuals and organisations, headed by the British Humanist Association, which were strongly opposed to the teaching of religion and religious education in schools. The British Humanist Association argued that England should follow the route taken by some other countries and make the curriculum of non-denominational schools explicitly secular, pursuing instead a framework of common values and emphasising by other means the importance of moral and spiritual development. Several pointed out that the words 'spiritual' and 'religious' are wrongly treated as synonymous, and that the visual and performing arts can make as powerful a claim as organised religion to provide the sense of transcendence to which religious believers attest.

It is also worth recalling that even the United States, in which faith and indeed God are invoked in public and political life with a frequency and zeal which would be unthinkable in England, insist that schools should be secular institutions, and in France the principle of *laïcité* is strongly defended. In both cases, secularism is bound up with republican ideals, and the examples remind us that the mandatory status of RE within the English state school curriculum arises ultimately from those events over 450 years ago which made Anglicanism the state religion and the monarch its head.

But, as one parent wrote:

The UK is *de facto* a secular state. I would suggest that now is the time for the education system to reflect this and change [school] assemblies to give less time to outmoded and divisive constructs which are threatening the cohesiveness of our society. RE should be re-named and re-focused as a subject to look critically at philosophies (including, but not limited to, religious ones), their history, contribution and relevance. Above all, children should be given the tools to question and challenge, in order to equip them to reach their own conclusions.

Another wrote:

Knowledge of religious beliefs, specifically Christian, is necessary of course for an understanding of history, in the same way that knowledge of Greek, Roman and Norse gods is a useful aid for an understanding of their people's history and behaviour. However, no one now teaches the ancient pantheons as if they are still valid beliefs and in the same way 'modern' religion should not be taught as fact, although I am not arguing that it shouldn't be mentioned that some people choose to believe in a god. At such a young age children are

willing and encouraged to believe whatever an adult tells them but school should be where they are taught facts and ideas, not beliefs misrepresented as facts.

AREIAC emphasised its support for the system of SACREs, as locally accountable and responsive. It was vital, they argued, that children should understand the nature of a multi-faith society and learn how to live within it. The Muslim Council of Britain also welcomed efforts to increase inter-faith understanding but called for a balanced approach:

Most Muslims have no objection to learning about other religions and their beliefs and practices. A serious study of the Qur'an, for example, leads us naturally to a study of the 'People of the Book' (Jews and Christians). A balance needs to be kept between giving Muslims a good grounding in and detailed study of their own faith and learning about other major faiths practised within society.

In several of the community soundings it was noted that many Muslim children are attending both regular schools and madrasahs. The issue here was felt to be not so much the possibility of diverging values as excessive demands on children's time and energies, especially when they also have to do homework.

We cannot report the content of all the many submissions we received on these matters. They covered a broad spectrum: RE as the inculcation of a particular faith; RE as an exercise in multi-faith awareness; RE as teaching about religion as an inescapable historical and cultural phenomenon; religion as a value system to be placed alongside others, both religious and non-religious; secularism on the grounds that except for denominational schools faith is for individuals and their families, not for schools. But from not one single organisation or individual did we receive any suggestion of the kind which has polarised discussion of this matter in several American states, that schools should teach 'creationism' or 'intelligent design' as a no less valid alternative to science. RE may be contentious, but the discussion remains, in comparison with some countries, moderate.

The Cambridge Primary Review, clearly, has to take a defensible position on this matter, and we attempt to do so in our proposals on the future primary curriculum in Part 2. But it is as well to accept that the extreme positions, even in relatively moderate England, cannot readily be reconciled. Meanwhile, we record that at a particularly illuminating community sounding session attended by an imam, a rabbi, a representative of one of the local Christian churches and several non-believers, the parties agreed on the following:

- Faith can and should be respected from the outside, regardless of personal belief. The issue is not religious education but a recognition that faith of one kind or another is intrinsic to culture and that it needs to be respected, whatever form it takes.
- The major faiths, and certainly the monotheistic ones, have a great deal in common, and this common ground should be emphasised as core values to which schools and children can subscribe.
- Yet faith is not just about theistic belief. With faith goes a world-view which can encompass everything from custom to morality, from how relationships should be conducted to how knowledge should be conceived.
- The common bonds of faith tend to make parents happier to send their children, in the absence of their own faith school, to a school of another religious denomination.
- Sex education is problematic for some faiths because (a) it places in the public arena what they prefer to treat as private, and (b) it may run counter to their moral codes.

**Conclusion**

The sheer extent and diversity of the witness views we have reported makes them difficult to summarise, and since much of what we have reported has already been extracted or reduced from longer statements we cannot really justify further compression. Yet there are recurrent concerns of a general kind, and Part 2 summarises and discusses these before moving on to propose, on the basis of all that has gone before, the framework for a new primary curriculum.

## Appendix 1

### THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

The Cambridge Primary Review is a wide-ranging independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It was supported from 2006-9 by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and is based at the University of Cambridge. The Review was launched in October 2006 and will publish its final report in spring 2009. Between October 2007 and May 2008 it published as interim reports 28 research surveys and an account of the 2007 regional community soundings. In January 2009 it published a two-volume special report on the primary curriculum.

The launch of the Cambridge Primary Review was preceded by nearly three years of planning and by consultation with government, opposition parties, DfES/DCSF officials, the all-party Commons Education and Skills (now Children, Schools and Families) Committee, public bodies involved in the primary phase of education, the teaching unions and a range of other interested organisations.

The Review is directed by Professor Robin Alexander, Fellow of Wolfson College at the University of Cambridge and Professor of Education Emeritus at the University of Warwick. Its Advisory Committee is chaired by Dame Gillian Pugh, Visiting Professor at the University of London Institute of Education, Chair of the National Children's Bureau and formerly Chief Executive of Coram Family.

#### REMIT

The remit for the Cambridge Primary Review, as agreed between Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the University of Cambridge in 2005-6, is as follows:

1. *With respect to public provision in England, the Review will seek 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.*
2. *The Review will pay close regard to national and international evidence from research, inspection and other sources on the character and adequacy of current provision in respect of the above, on the prospects for recent initiatives, and on other available options. It will seek the advice of expert advisers and witnesses, and it will invite submissions and take soundings from a wide range of interested agencies and individuals, both statutory and non-statutory.*
3. *The Review will publish both interim findings and a final report. The latter will combine evidence, analysis and conclusions together with recommendations for both national policy and the work of schools and other relevant agencies.*

#### PERSPECTIVES AND THEMES

The Cambridge Primary Review is conceived as a matrix of ten themes and four strands of evidence, overarched by three **perspectives**:

- The lives and needs of children and the condition of childhood today
- The condition of the society and world in which today's children are growing up
- The present condition and future prospects of England's system of primary education.

The **ten themes** to be addressed by the Review are:

1. Purposes and values
2. Learning and teaching
3. Curriculum and assessment
4. Quality and standards
5. Diversity and inclusion
6. Settings and professionals

7. Parenting, caring and educating
8. Beyond the school
9. Structures and phases
10. Funding and governance.

In respect of these themes, each of which has been elaborated as the sub-themes and contributory questions, the Review has aimed to address two fundamental questions:

- *Evidence*: how well is England's system of primary education doing?
- *Vision*: how can it best meet the needs of children and society over the coming decades?

## EVIDENCE

The Primary Review has four main strands of evidence:

**Submissions.** Following the convention in enquiries of this kind, submissions were invited from all who wished to contribute. By October 2008, 818 submissions had been received. They ranged from brief single-issue expressions of opinion to substantial documents of up to 300 pages covering several or all of the themes and comprising both detailed evidence and recommendations for the future. The majority of the submissions were from national organisations, but a significant number came from individuals. The Review's final report explains how this material was analysed.

**Soundings.** This strand had two parts. The *Community Soundings* were a series of nine regionally-based one to two day events, each comprising a sequence of meetings with representatives from schools and the communities they serve. The Community Soundings took place between January and March 2007, and entailed 87 witness sessions with groups of pupils, parents, governors, teachers, teaching assistants and heads, and with educational and community representatives from the areas in which the soundings took place. The *National Soundings* were a programme of more formal meetings with national organisations both inside and outside education. Some of these, with government, statutory agencies, public bodies and unions, took the form of regular consultations throughout the Review's duration. Others, which included three seminars with specially-convened groups of teachers and two sessions with representatives of major non-statutory organisations, took place between January and March 2008 and explored issues arising from the Review's by then considerable body of evidence. The National Soundings helped the team to clarify matters which were particularly problematic or contested, in preparation for the writing of the final report.

**Surveys.** Several months before the launch of the Review, 28 surveys of published research relating to the Review's ten themes were commissioned, on the basis of competitive bidding and peer review, from 70 academic consultants in leading university departments of education and allied fields. The resulting research reports and their accompanying briefings and media releases were published in cross-thematic groups over several months, starting in autumn 2007. They provoked considerable media, public and political interest, and provided the top UK news story on several occasions.

**Searches and policy mapping.** With the co-operation of DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted and TDA, the Review tracked recent policy and examined official data bearing on the primary phase. This provided the necessary legal, demographic, financial and statistical background to the Review and an important resource for its consideration of policy options.

**The balance of evidence.** The four evidential strands sought to balance opinion-seeking with empirical data; non-interactive expressions of opinion with face-to-face discussion; official data with independent research; and material from England with that from other parts of the UK and from international sources. This enquiry, unlike some of its predecessors, looked outwards from primary schools to the wider society, and made full but judicious use of international data and ideas from other countries.

**Other meetings.** In addition to the formal evidence-gathering procedures, the Review's director and other team members met national and regional bodies for the exchange of information and ideas. At the time of going to press (January 2009) 140 such meetings had taken place or were scheduled, in addition to the 94 community and national soundings, making a total of 234 sessions.

## REPORTS

The Primary Review has published both interim and final reports. The main series of 29 interim reports, which included 28 of the commissioned research surveys and the report on the community soundings, served a formative function, seeking to provoke further debate which then fed back into the Review. The Review has an active and still-expanding website – [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk) – on which the interim reports were published together with a record of their extensive media coverage. Electronic and print versions of the reports and briefings were widely circulated.

The two special reports on the primary curriculum were published in January 2009 as a contribution to debate about the interim report of the government's Rose Review of the primary curriculum.

The Cambridge Primary Review final report (Volume 1) draws on the various strands of evidence outlined above to address the ten listed themes and attendant questions. It combines findings, analysis, reflection and conclusions, together with recommendations for both policy and practice. Volume 2 contains most of the commissioned surveys of published research, updated in light of the most recent research and policy. Taken together, it is hoped that all this material will both provoke immediate responses from stakeholders and provide a significant empirical and reflective resource for the longer term.

## OUTLINE TIMETABLE

- Phase 1:       **Preparation** (January 2004 – October 2006)
- Phase 2:       **Implementation** (October 2006 – summer 2008)
- Submissions (October 2006 – April 2007)
  - Community Soundings (January – March 2007)
  - Research Surveys (July 2006 – January 2008)
  - Searches (November 2006 – summer 2008)
  - National Soundings (January – March 2008)
  - Other meetings (October 2006 – October 2008)
- Phase 3:       **Dissemination** (October 2007 – late 2009)
- Interim reports and briefings (October 2007 – May 2008)
  - Special report on the primary curriculum (January 2009)
  - Final report (spring 2009)
  - Other dissemination events and activities (from spring 2009)
- Phase 4:       **Longer term evaluation and follow-up** (from late 2009)
- Programme to be agreed.

## FUNDING

The Cambridge Primary Review has been undertaken with the generous support of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. To date, the Foundation's Trustees have awarded the Review three grants: (i) the main Review implementation grant (Phase 2 and the first part of Phase 3 above), from 1 October 2006 to 30 September 2008; (ii) a supplementary implementation grant, from 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2008; (iii) a dissemination grant (the second part of Phase 3), from 1 October 2008 to 30 September 2009.

**PERSONNEL** (for full list see website and the Review's final report)

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

**Chair of the Cambridge Primary Review Advisory Committee:** Dame Gillian Pugh

**Chair of the Cambridge Primary Review Management Group:** Hilary Hodgson, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

**Director of Communications:** Dr Richard Margrave

**Dissemination Co-ordinator:** Julia Flutter

**Administrator:** Catrin Darsley

**CONTACT**

**Address:** The Cambridge Primary Review, Faculty of Education, 184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK.

**Phone:** 01223 767523

**Email:** [enquiries@primaryreview.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@primaryreview.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)

## Appendix 2

### REPORTS FROM THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

#### THE INTERIM REPORTS

The 31 interim reports, 28 of them specially-commissioned surveys of published research, were released in nine groups between October 2007 and May 2008, with a further two special reports published in January 2009. On each occasion, several types of document were issued: (i) the reports in full; (ii) 3-4 page briefings on each report; (iii) 3-4 page overview briefings on each group of reports published together; (iv) a press release. These give readers the choice of accessing the reports at any level from the short summary to the full report, with a fuller summary in between.

All the reports, briefings, overview briefings and press releases may be downloaded from the Cambridge Primary Review website: [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk).

The reports are listed below in order of publication.

#### **12 October 2007                      The community soundings**

*Community Soundings: the Primary Review regional witness sessions*, Robin Alexander and Linda Hargreaves. ISBN 978-1-906478-00-1.

#### **2 November 2007              How well are we doing? Research on standards, quality and assessment in English primary education**

*Standards and quality in English primary schools over time: the national evidence* (Research Survey 4/1) Peter Tymms and Christine Merrell, University of Durham. ISBN 978-1-906478-01-8.

*Standards in English primary education: the international evidence* (Research Survey 4/2) Chris Whetton, Graham Ruddock and Liz Twist, National Foundation for Educational Research. ISBN 978-1-906478-02-5.

*The quality of learning: assessment alternatives for primary education* (Research Survey 3/4) Wynne Harlen, University of Bristol. ISBN 978-1-906478-03-2.

#### **23 November 2007              Children's lives and voices: research on children at home and school**

*Children's lives outside school and their educational impact* (Research Survey 8/1) Berry Mayall, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-05-6.

*Parenting, caring and educating*. (Research Survey 7/1) Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin, University of Bath. ISBN 978-1-906478-06-3.

*Primary schools and other agencies* (Research Survey 8/2) Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Katherine Runswick-Cole, University of Sheffield. ISBN 978-1-906478-07-0.

*Children and Their Primary Schools: pupils' voices* (Research Survey 5/3) Carol Robinson, University of Sussex, and Michael Fielding, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-04-9.

#### **14 December 2007              Children in primary schools: research on development, learning, diversity and educational needs**

*Children's cognitive development and learning* (Research Survey 2/1a) Usha Goswami, University of Cambridge, and Peter Bryant, University of Oxford. ISBN 978-1-906478-08-7.

*Children's social development, peer interaction and classroom learning* (Research Survey 2/1b) Christine Howe and Neil Mercer, University of Cambridge. ISBN 978-1-906478-09-4.

*Children in primary education: demography, culture, diversity and inclusion* (Research Survey 5/1) Mel Ainscow, Alan Dyson, and Frances Gallannaugh, University of Manchester, and Jean Conteh, University of Leeds. ISBN 978-1-906478-10-0.

*Learning needs and difficulties among children of primary school age: definition, identification, provision and issues* (Research Survey 5/2) Harry Daniels and Jill Porter, University of Bath. ISBN 978-1-906478-11-7

**18 January 2008      Aims and values in primary education: national and international perspectives**

*Aims as policy in English primary education* (Research Survey 1/1) John White, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-12-4.

*Aims and values in primary education: England and other countries* (Research Survey 1/2) Maha Shuayb and Sharon O'Donnell, National Foundation for Educational Research. ISBN 978-1-906478-13-1.

*Aims for primary education: the changing national context* (Research Survey 1/3) Stephen Machin and Sandra McNally, London School of Economics and Political Science. ISBN 978-1-906478-14-8.

*Aims for primary education: changing global contexts* (Research Survey 1/4) Rita Chawla-Duggan and John Lowe, University of Bath. ISBN 978-1-906478-15-5.

**8 February 2008      The structure and content of English primary education: international perspectives**

*The structure of primary education: England and other countries* (Research Survey 9/1) Anna Riggall and Caroline Sharp, National Foundation for Educational Research. ISBN 978-1-906478-17-9.

*Curriculum and assessment policy: England and other countries* (Research Survey 3/1) Kathy Hall, National University of Ireland, and Kamil Øzerk, University of Oslo. ISBN 978-1-906478-18-6.

*Primary curriculum futures* (Research Survey 3/3) James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter, University of Glasgow. ISBN 978-1-906478-19-3.

**29 February 2008      Governance, funding, reform and quality assurance: policy frameworks for English primary education**

*The governance and administration of English primary education* (Research Survey 10/2) Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder, University of Bath. ISBN 978-1-906478-20-9.

*The funding of English primary education* (Research Survey 10/1) Philip Noden and Anne West, London School of Economics and Political Science. ISBN 978-1-906478-21-6.

*The trajectory and impact of national reform: curriculum and assessment in English primary schools* (Research Survey 3/2) Dominic Wyse, University of Cambridge, Elaine McCreery and Harry Torrance, Manchester Metropolitan University. ISBN 978-1-906478-22-3.

*Quality assurance in English primary education* (Research Survey 4/3) Peter Cunningham and Philip Raymont, University of Cambridge. ISBN 978-1-906478-23-0.

**18 April 2008      Primary teachers: training, development, leadership and workforce reform**

*Primary schools: the professional environment* (Research Survey 6/2) Ian Stronach, Andy Pickard and Liz Jones, Manchester Metropolitan University. ISBN 978-1-906478-25-4.

*Primary teachers: initial teacher education, continuing professional development and school leadership development* (Research Survey 6/3) Olwen McNamara and Rosemary Webb, University of Manchester, and Mark Brundrett, Liverpool John Moores University. ISBN 978-1-906478-26-1.

*Primary workforce management and reform* (Research Survey 6/4) Hilary Burgess, Open University. ISBN 978-1-906478-27-8.

**16 May 2008                      Learning and teaching in primary schools: processes and contexts**

*Learning and teaching in primary schools: insights from TLRP* (Research Survey 2/4) Mary James and Andrew Pollard, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-30-8.

*Classes, groups and transitions: structures for learning and teaching* (Research Survey 9/2) Peter Blatchford, Susan Hallam and Judith Ireson, Institute of Education, University of London, Peter Kutnick, King's College, University of London, with Andrea Creech, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-29-2.

*Primary schools: the built environment* (Research Survey 6/1) Karl Wall, Julie Dockrell and Nick Peacey, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-24-7.

**13 February 2009              The primary curriculum: contributions to the debate about the Rose Review interim report**

*Towards a New Primary Curriculum, a report from the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 1: Past and Present*, by Robin Alexander and Julia Flutter, University of Cambridge. ISBN 978-1-906478-31-5.

*Towards a New Primary Curriculum, a report from the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 2: The Future*, by Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge. ISBN 978-1-906478-32-2.

**THE FINAL REPORT**

The final report of the Cambridge Primary Review will be published by Routledge in spring 2009. It will be in two volumes (the titles are provisional):

***Primary Education in England: what is and what could be* (final report of the Cambridge Primary Review, Volume 1).**

This will contain the report proper, presenting evidence and analysis together with conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice.

***Understanding Primary Education: research surveys commissioned by the Cambridge Primary Review* (final report of the Cambridge Primary Review, Volume 2).**

This will contain revised and updated versions of the 28 research surveys listed above, together with introductions to the volume and to each of its sections.

Related publications: final report briefings and digests, downloadable from the Primary Review website, will be published alongside the main report.