

Executive summary and recommendations





From interim to final report

1 Since the interim report was published on 8 December 2008 the review team has continued to build the evidence base for the recommendations in this final report. The recommendations are based on substantial evidence drawn from a wide range of research and through direct engagement with stakeholders over the past 12 months. Full details are set out in Annex B.

2 On behalf of the review, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) held nine regional consultation events, attended by nearly 2,000 headteachers and local authority advisers. The Primary Curriculum Review Advisory Group has met on a further two occasions since the interim report was published. The review team received around 1,000 emails and letters in response to its own consultations.

3 A helpful response to the interim report was provided by the Cambridge Primary Review, led by Professor Robin

Alexander.¹ The Children, Schools and Families Committee published its report on the National Curriculum on 2 April 2009, just as this report was being finalised.²

4 In light of all this evidence, the provisional recommendations of the interim report have been developed with changes made where there was a convincing case for so doing.

Primary education in its own right

5 The appetite and zest for learning of children in their primary years is unrivalled. It is this which makes primary teaching truly rewarding and primary education so important in its own right and for what follows. Throughout, the review has tried to capture the distinctiveness of the primary phase and to ensure it is recognised as more than a postscript to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and a prelude to secondary education.



6 The curriculum that primary children are offered must enable them to enjoy this unique stage of childhood, inspire learning and develop the essential knowledge, skills and understanding which are the building blocks for secondary education and later life.

7 To achieve this, the new curriculum must be underpinned by an understanding of the distinct but interlocking ways in which children learn and develop – physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, culturally, morally and spiritually – between the ages of 5 and 11. Among other things, a well-planned, vibrant curriculum recognises that primary children relish learning independently and co-operatively; they love to be challenged and engaged in practical activities; they delight in the wealth of opportunities for understanding more about the world; and they readily empathise with others through working together and through experiences in the arts, literature, religious education and much else.

8 The touchstone of an excellent curriculum is that it instils in children a love of learning for its own sake. This means that primary children must not only learn **what** to study, they must also learn **how** to study, and thus become confident, self-disciplined individuals capable of engaging in a lifelong process of learning.

9 High-quality teaching in the primary years, as elsewhere, is crucial to children's success. McKinsey and Company in its 2007 report *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top* said that 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'.³ This is echoed by the Cambridge Primary Review, which states that 'A curriculum is only as good as those who teach it'. Pedagogy intersects with curriculum content to such an extent that the review, at times, has to consider both.

Design for a better primary curriculum

10 Many teachers have told the review that because the existing curriculum has so much prescribed content they do not have time to teach it in depth, or for children to consolidate their learning. The Cambridge Primary Review and the Children, Schools and Families Committee also take the view that the curriculum is overloaded. This issue gave rise to a central requirement of this review: to reduce prescription and overload by reviewing the current programmes of study so that schools have greater flexibility to meet pupils' individual needs and build on their prior learning.

Key features of a new primary curriculum

11 Making the primary curriculum more manageable without loss of challenge will bring important benefits for children. The key features of the primary curriculum put forward by this review:

- **recognise the continuing importance of subjects and the essential knowledge, skills and understanding they represent.** As indicated in the interim report, the essential knowledge and skills all children should be taught, particularly in the middle and later phases of primary education, can be organised through clearly visible subject disciplines, such as history, geography and physical education. Subjects will be complemented by worthwhile and challenging cross-curricular studies



that provide ample opportunities for children to use and apply their subject knowledge and skills to deepen understanding (see Chapter 2).

- **provide a stronger focus on curriculum progression.** The review sets great store on securing children's unbroken progress throughout the primary years. The revisions will strengthen considerably the continuity and progress in learning between the EYFS and Key Stage 1 and from primary to secondary education (see Chapter 4). In the draft programmes of learning the statutory content that all children should be taught is set out in three phases. The three phases show explicitly how the curriculum broadens and deepens to reflect children's different but developing abilities between the ages of 5 and 11. Setting out curricular progression in three phases will help schools to match curriculum content with the progress

expected of children as set out in the National Curriculum attainment targets and level descriptors (Chapter 2);

- **strengthen the focus on ensuring, that by the age of 7, children have a secure grasp of the literacy and numeracy skills they need to make good progress thereafter.** The revised primary curriculum increases opportunities for teachers to teach thoroughly and enrich all four strands of language – speaking; listening; reading; and writing – and equally valuable aspects of numeracy (Chapter 3);
- **strengthen the teaching and learning of information and communication technology (ICT) to enable children to be independent and confident users of technology by the end of primary education.** Used well, technology strongly develops the study and learning skills children need now and in the future, including the fundamentals of ‘e-safety’. Embedding ICT throughout the primary curriculum and giving it greater prominence within the core of ‘Essentials for Learning and Life’ will provide children with more opportunities to harness the potential of technology to enhance learning. Specific requirements for ICT are set out in each area of learning where it directly contributes to the essential knowledge, key skills and understanding within that area (Chapter 3);
- **provide a greater emphasis on personal development through a more integrated and simpler framework for schools.** Each child’s wellbeing is underpinned by the

acquisition of a range of personal skills and dispositions that support their learning and development.

The review proposes an overarching framework through which to develop these key skills as well as acquire essential knowledge, for example of nutrition, food preparation and healthy living. The new framework will allow schools to use programmes such as the popular Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) but cover important elements not within that programme (Chapter 3);

- **build stronger links between the EYFS and Key Stage 1, and between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.** In the early primary stage the proposed curriculum dovetails easily with the six broad areas of learning and development in the EYFS. This allows more opportunities for extending and building upon active, play-based learning across the transition to primary education, particularly for ‘summer-born’ children and those still working towards the early learning goals. In the middle and later primary years, the curriculum content can easily be increasingly configured as subjects to help transition into Key Stage 3 (Chapter 4); and
- **offer exciting opportunities for learning languages for 7–11-year-olds.** During Key Stage 2 children will have every opportunity to learn one or more languages at an appropriate pace and depth. Language teaching will recognise the importance of supporting opportunities and celebrating the languages of the school community (Chapter 5).



Towards recommendations

12 The review puts forward to the Secretary of State recommendations for what children should be taught in a curriculum, as an entitlement of knowledge, skills and understanding that is as good as we can make it for primary children over the six years of their education from 5 to 11.

13 Two key questions the review seeks to answer are:

- What should a broad and balanced curriculum contain to ensure that children receive a well-rounded education?
- How should the curriculum change to meet children's different but developing abilities as they progress through the primary years?

Best practice

14 The recommendations take full account of what reliable and valid research has to offer on these questions. Considered judgements have been taken where research is conflicting or inconclusive. The recommendations are also based on much carefully observed

practice and what we know about how children's progress is advanced in our best schools.

15 To a greater or lesser degree every effective primary school visited by the review carefully planned and managed its curriculum to provide children with both systematic specialist subject teaching and rich cross-curricular studies. Ofsted and the OCA report that some of the most effective learning occurs when connections are made between subjects. The proposed curriculum framework will make these connections more explicit and make planning for them more manageable.

16 This approach to the curriculum is also increasingly used by independent schools. In response to the interim report, the Independent Schools Council wrote:

'Overall the recommendations reflect current thinking and practice in our schools. In general terms much of what is proposed is already happening in the sector.'

17 The review makes no apology for modelling its recommendations on best practice. This is despite comments on



the interim report from those who say that what is proposed is by no means 'new' – as if to invalidate its findings. The pursuit of novelty without quality and benefit to children has no place in primary education. It would certainly be 'new' if many more of our schools were as good as the best.

18 The curriculum content which it is recommended all primary children should be taught has been developed with, and validated by, subject experts and subject communities. Universal agreement on curricular content is impossible to achieve, even among experts from the same subject community. If the review had accepted all the claims it received for what 'must be in the primary curriculum' we would be looking at a curriculum that is much larger and far more prescriptive, not to say harder to manage, than the one we have now.

19 Other recent reviews of the curriculum have not had to put forward the detailed content of what the primary curriculum should contain. Difficult decisions have had to be taken by this review about what constitutes the **essential** knowledge, skills and understanding that all children aged 5–11 should be taught as part of a national entitlement, as opposed to what is **desirable**.

20 What is set out in the draft programmes of learning represents a national entitlement with full scope for teachers to shape how it is taught and to supplement it. For example, many schools will want to offer more than one modern language, more opportunities for learning outside the classroom and opportunities for children to take part in a wider range of physical and cultural activities.



Subjects are essential but not sufficient

21 The proposal in the interim report to organise the primary curriculum into broad areas of learning was reported as ‘abolishing subjects’ such as history and geography. This was never the case, as can be seen in the draft programmes of learning. Subjects remain as recognisable, powerful organisers of worthwhile curriculum content in the areas of learning. Subject ‘labels’ are clearly visible within the areas of learning in the middle and later phases of the curriculum. As the interim report said, schools can ‘increasingly configure content as subjects to deepen understanding and ease transition into Key Stage 3’.

22 The history children should learn at different stages of their education is always subject to intense debate. Last month it was reported in some sections of the press that the review was proposing that learning about the Victorians and the Second World War

would be made optional. The fact is that the Victorians are already optional in the primary curriculum and the Second World War is covered at Key Stage 3. But this is less important than the wider point made to the review by the Historical Association in response to the interim report:

‘The Historical Association has always maintained that the National Curriculum as it stands is overprescribed, and this is detrimental to teaching and learning. We fully support a modified framework that supports the development of a less prescriptive and a more flexible National Curriculum that draws upon subjects like history as tools for learning, as indicated in the interim report.’

23 In line with the views of the Historical Association, which has been directly involved in drafting the programme of learning, children will be taught the broad chronology of British and world history from ancient to modern times. Children will also have to study a minimum of two periods of history in depth.



Cross-curricular studies strengthen subjects

24 Direct teaching of essential subject content is vital but not sufficient. As pointed out in the Cambridge Primary Review (a point similarly made in the interim report):

‘Subjects offer one way, though again not the only way, of translating what is to be learned and taught into a curriculum which is manageable on a day-to-day basis.’

25 There are times when it is right to marshal content from different subjects into well-planned, cross-curricular studies. This is not only because it helps children to better understand ideas about such important matters as citizenship, sustainable development, financial capability and health and wellbeing, but also because it provides opportunities across the curriculum for them to use and apply what they have learned from the discrete teaching of subjects.

26 While it is usual for primary schools to think of mathematics, English and ICT in this way, virtually all subjects serve more than one purpose: they are valuable as disciplines in their own right and add value to cross-curricular studies.

27 Drama is a case in point. It is a powerful arts subject which also enhances children’s language development through role play in the early years and more theatrical work later, which can greatly enrich, say, historical and religious studies as well as personal development by exploring concepts such as empathy. Similarly, dance is a performing art which is equally at home in physical education, and both are enriched by music.

28 This approach respects the integrity of subjects but lessens the rigidity of their boundaries. Among other things it encourages children and teachers to think creatively ‘outside subject boxes’. Recent examples of successful work that illustrate this approach are set out in Chapter 2.



Six areas of learning

29 The interim report proposed that the curriculum should be organised around six broad areas of learning. 92% of the respondents to the interim report who commented on the proposal supported a move to a primary curriculum based around broad areas of learning. Organising the primary curriculum around areas of learning also has the overwhelming support of primary heads and those teachers the review has spoken with and who sent written submissions.

30 There has been much debate over the proposed headings for the areas of learning. Discussion with parents and others showed that particular areas, as originally described in the interim report, needed to be more straightforward in making clear what content they cover. In consequence, the headings of three areas of learning have been simplified while retaining the content that they are intended to cover. The six areas dovetail well with

the EYFS framework, and map on to the subject-based curriculum at Key Stage 3 in secondary education.

31 The review recommends therefore that the primary curriculum is organised into the following six areas of learning:

- Understanding English, communication and languages
- Mathematical understanding
- Scientific and technological understanding
- Historical, geographical and social understanding
- Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing
- Understanding the arts.

32 What is proposed builds on the EYFS, provides a smooth introduction to the principal subject disciplines and prepares children for further specialist study at secondary school. The subject disciplines are grouped into six areas of learning that have at their heart the essential knowledge, understanding and skills that all primary-aged children need in order to make progress and fulfil their potential throughout statutory education and beyond.

International comparisons

33 Internationally, many countries choose to set out much of the primary curriculum as areas of learning and there is broad consensus around what should constitute these areas. An overview of recent surveys of international curricula and pupil performance data (set out in Chapter 6) explores commonalities and differences in primary curricula. While there are significant differences and cautionary notes that need to be heeded in comparing data, there is considerable convergence. For example, most countries tend to structure the primary curriculum so as to facilitate a blend of subject teaching and cross-curricular studies. The analysis shows that it is possible to discern six widely accepted areas of learning.

34 Both at home and abroad there is little dispute that a primary curriculum must develop young people's language and communications skills; mathematical understanding; scientific and technological understanding; understanding of human and social sciences; artistic and creative development; and physical and personal development. A curriculum composed

of these six areas of learning is seen to provide children with a balanced and well-rounded education.

35 Securing children's progress that builds on their prior learning is a central curricular objective. Because progress is goal related, the goals of learning must be explicit in order to guide planning and teaching, whether cross curricular or focused on discrete subject content. The existing National Curriculum level descriptors have been reviewed to make sure that they are in step with the progress expected of primary children of all abilities.

Parents

36 Children thrive best when parenting, the curriculum and pedagogy are all of high quality. In other words, children benefit most when their home lives and school lives establish similar values and expectations for their learning, behaviour and wellbeing. Much has been achieved in recent years to ensure that parents are fully informed about and seriously involved in many aspects of school life.

37 Parents are much more likely to be in contact with teachers informally as they accompany young children to and from nursery settings and primary schools than at any other stage of education. The review has observed numerous examples of parents and teachers engaging in informal dialogue about children at these times, which no doubt makes it easier for parents to engage in meetings planned by the school to discuss children's progress in greater detail.



38 Views of parents have been sought during visits to schools and through commissioned surveys. These views are reported upon in Chapter 7. It is apparent that a guide to the primary curriculum, in plain language, would be of considerable help to parents and enable them to give more support at home for their children's learning at school.

Next steps

39 Ministers will decide which of the recommendations in this report they wish to take forward. Those they accept will be subject to a 12-week public consultation period, which will allow further opportunities for interested parties to comment and further consideration to be given to improving what is put forward.

40 How schools choose to organise their curriculum and timetable will remain a matter for them.

41 However, between now and the introduction of a new primary curriculum in September 2011, schools will need a significant amount of guidance and support to aid planning. On top of the recommended additional teacher training, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the QCA should put together a comprehensive support package, beginning no later than January 2010. Suggestions for what this guidance and support might encompass are set out in Chapter 8.



Recommendations

The National Curriculum and curriculum review

Recommendation 1

A National Curriculum should be retained as a statutory entitlement for all children.

Recommendation 2

Consideration should be given to making the historically reactive response to curriculum review a proactive strategy whereby the EYFS and the statutory curriculum for primary and secondary schools are reviewed at agreed intervals as a whole, rather than as separate phases reviewed out of sequence. This would impose a discipline on the process of review such that schools could be assured of a period of stability in which to achieve agreed curricular goals.

Recommendation 3

The aims for a revised primary curriculum derived from the 2002 Education Act, the Children's Plan and Every Child Matters should be underpinned by a unified statement of values that is fit for all stages of statutory education. The aims and values established as part of the recent secondary curriculum review should be extended to the primary curriculum.

Managing curriculum change

Recommendation 4

In preparing for a revised curriculum in 2011, the OCA should provide examples of how successful schools manage time in order to achieve a broad and balanced curriculum.



Curriculum design and content

Recommendation 5

The content of the primary curriculum should be organised as it is now under knowledge, skills and understanding but structured as six areas of learning to enable children to benefit fully from high-quality subject teaching and equally challenging cross-curricular studies, and to improve the continuity of learning from the EYFS to Key Stage 3.

Recommendation 6

- (i) To help primary schools sustain curricular continuity and secure pupils' progress from reception class to Year 7, the QCA should work closely with the National Strategies to assist schools to plan the new curriculum.
- (ii) Web-based guidance should be made available drawing upon the experience of that for the secondary curriculum. This should include refreshing the primary literacy and numeracy frameworks.

- (iii) In line with arrangements for implementing the new secondary curriculum, the DCSF should provide primary schools with one extra training day in 2010 to enable the workforce in each school to understand the new primary curriculum and start planning how it will work in their school.

Recommendation 7

The DCSF should commission a plain-language guide to the curriculum for parents to help them understand how it will change to match children's developing abilities and how they can best support their children's learning at school.

Literacy, numeracy and ICT

Recommendation 8

- (i) Literacy, numeracy and ICT should form the new core of the primary curriculum.
- (ii) Schools should continue to prioritise literacy, numeracy and ICT as the foundational knowledge, skills and understanding of the primary curriculum, the content of which should be clearly defined, taught discretely, and used and applied extensively in each area of learning.
- (iii) The DCSF expert group on assessment should give consideration to how the new core of literacy, numeracy and ICT should be assessed and these aspects of children's performance reported to parents.

Recommendation 9

Primary schools should make sure that children's spoken communication is developed intensively within all subjects and for learning across the curriculum. In so doing, schools should capitalise on the powerful contributions of the performing and visual arts, especially role play and drama.

Recommendation 10

- (i) Primary schools should continue to build on the commendable progress many have made in teaching decoding and encoding skills for reading and spelling through high-quality, systematic phonic work as advocated by the 2006 reading review⁴ as the prime approach for teaching beginner readers.



- (ii) Similar priorities and principles should apply to numeracy in keeping with the recommendations of the Williams Review.

Recommendation 11

- (i) The two early learning goals for writing should be retained as valid, aspirational goals for the end of the EYFS.
- (ii) The DCSF should consider producing additional guidance for practitioners on supporting children's early writing and should offer practical examples of how this can work.

Recommendation 12

The DCSF, working with the QCA and Becta,⁵ should consider what additional support teachers will need to meet the raised expectations of children's ICT capabilities and use of technology to enrich learning across the curriculum and set in train adequate support.



Personal development

Recommendation 13

- (i) The QCA, in consultation with representative groups, should exemplify and promote the range of learning envisioned in the new framework for personal development with the firm intention of helping schools to plan for balanced coverage and avoid piecemeal treatment of this central aspect of the curriculum.
- (ii) Personal development together with literacy, numeracy and ICT constitute the essentials for learning and life. The DCSF should work with the QCA to find appropriate and innovative ways of assessing pupils' progress in this area.

Transition and progression

Recommendation 14

- (i) The preferred pattern of entry to reception classes should be the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday. However, this should be subject to well-informed discussion with parents, taking into account their views of a child's maturity and readiness to enter reception class. Arrangements should be such as to make entry to reception class an exciting and enjoyable experience for all children, with opportunities for flexible arrangements such as a period of part-time attendance if judged appropriate.
- (ii) The DCSF should provide information to parents and local authorities about the optimum conditions, flexibilities and benefits to children of entering reception class in the September immediately after their fourth birthday.



Recommendation 15

The QCA should make sure that guidance on the revised primary curriculum includes clear advice on how best to support those children who need to continue to work towards the early learning goals and build on the learning that has taken place in the EYFS.

Recommendation 16

What constitutes high-quality, play-based learning and how this benefits young children, especially those entering the early primary stage, should be made explicit in QCA guidance. Because parents, too, need to understand the importance of play, this guidance should be routed through schools to parents.

Recommendation 17

Key Stage 1 teachers should be involved in the moderation of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) assessments within schools, to increase their understanding of the EYFSP and their confidence in the judgements of reception class teachers.

Recommendation 18

Major central initiatives, such as Assessment for Learning and Assessing Pupils' Progress, have huge potential for strengthening the transition of children from primary to secondary schools. The DCSF should develop these initiatives to keep pace with the fast-growing appetite in primary schools to take them on board.

Recommendation 19

With their local authorities, primary and secondary schools should agree a joint policy for bridging children's transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Five interdependent transition bridges are suggested for this purpose: administrative; social and personal; curriculum; pedagogy; and autonomy and managing learning. This should involve extended studies across Year 6 and Year 7, and draw upon the support of personal tutors.

Recommendation 20

When the National Strategies next review their materials they should look to further strengthen curricular continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.



Languages

Recommendation 21

The knowledge, skills and understanding that children need to acquire in languages should be situated within the area of learning entitled 'Understanding English, communication and languages'. This will enable teachers and pupils to exploit the links between English and the chosen language(s).

Recommendation 22

Schools should focus on teaching only one or two languages. This should not preclude providing pupils with experiences in other languages as opportunities arise in cross-curricular studies, as long as sustained learning is secured in one or two languages to ensure that children are able to achieve progression over four years in line with the expectations of the Key Stage 2 framework for languages.

Recommendation 23

Primary schools should be free to choose the language(s) that they wish to teach; however, as far as possible the languages offered should be those which children will be taught in Key Stage 3.

Recommendation 24

The commendable work that is taking place to support the delivery of language teaching through workforce development programmes should continue at current levels of funding.

Recommendation 25

A survey by Ofsted of how well primary schools are managing the introduction of languages as a compulsory subject should take place no later than 2014.