

Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum - Call for Evidence

Response Form

The closing date for responses is: 30 April 2008
Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for
children, schools and families

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The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department. This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically-generated e-mail confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

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If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the review you can contact Colin Seal on:

Telephone: 020 79256777

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Please tick one box that best describes you as a respondent:

<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Governor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professional Association/Professional Body	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Union	<input type="checkbox"/> Early Years Professional
<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	

Please Specify:

National Subject Association

Questions 1a to 1e refer to Aspect 1: Curriculum Design and Content

1 a) In relation to the curriculum what is it reasonable to expect schools to provide and manage within the statutory time requirements of the primary school day?

Comments:

The current curriculum is very full. Although everything included may be considered very worthy by some advocates, it is not possible or appropriate for the school day to provide everything, So therefore either the content or the structure (or both) needs to be simplified to allow schools to make their own decisions about what is most appropriate for their pupils within a context of all-round personal development.

NB. Not all subjects need to be approached in the same way. For example, in music, some aspects need to be ongoing 'themes' – for instance, singing and opportunities for composing – provided on a frequent and regular basis. However, other musical activities, such as workshops provided by external providers, can be one-offs happening at differing intervals. Sometimes there is value in collaboration across the arts to provide new perspectives, experiences and learning opportunities. These different forms of provision not only provide variety, but provide linking support for a subject. This might not be apparent on the superficial level of thematic content, but can occur at deeper levels of cognitive structuring and attitudinal confidence.

1 b) Should primary pupils continue to be introduced to all the subjects of the National Curriculum from Year 1?

Comments:

Yes, as far as breadth across is concerned, but not necessarily in the same subject discrete ways (see 1d below) in Key Stage 1. However, by the end of Key Stage 2 pupils do need to be aware of subject divisions, since they are the basis of the KS3 curriculum. The move from 'areas of learning' to 'subjects' can be a gradual evolution rather than sudden shift.

1 c) What should be the position of science and ICT within the primary curriculum?

Comments:

Part of a broad and balanced curriculum, linked to other areas. ICT should be an embedded area across the curriculum, used in meaningful contexts. However, there is also a need to develop specific ICT knowledge and understanding.

There are many connections between music and science (for example vibrations and how they are changed when pitch and dynamics are varied) and music and ICT (especially in the production, manipulation and storage of sounds and music). Such connections help the child develop and appreciate concepts relevant to all three areas.

1 d) Should some of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning and development, and pedagogy, be extended into the primary curriculum?

Comments:

This could be valuable in a number of ways:

- 1) assisting child's perception and conception of the world in more holistic ways;
- 2) building on the earlier stage, in a manner more logically in tune with the developing child than the current tendency to look backwards from later stages, breaking down and simplifying concepts, structures and processes into what can become less valid and effective forms;
- 3) pedagogical approaches more appropriate for young children than the current over-formal one;
- 4) assisting in an easier transition from FS to KS1.

The EYFS pedagogical approach resonates with the philosophy behind many current Youth Music funded projects that are enhancing the experience of many young children before they come to school. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that, by coming part of the Creative Development area of learning, music does not lose its individual validity and its potential to connect with others of the 6 areas of learning.

Teachers need to be aware of the unique aspects of the component 'subjects' within each Area of Learning, even if the children's experience is more holistic and connected.

1 e) What is case and scope for reducing prescription and content in the programmes of study?

Comments:

There needs to be 'space' in the curriculum to

- give opportunities for such one-off activities mentioned in 1a above;
- acknowledge and allow for the professionalism of the teacher in deciding what best suits the particular children s/he is teaching – and when;
- allow new initiatives and approaches to become thoroughly understood and embedded – the length of time this takes is not always appreciated outside school settings;
- provide potential for flexibility in response when necessary.

A common core is helpful – both concerning subjects and the wider areas of development considered beneficial. However, too much prescription imposes an unnecessary burden and a tendency 'not to see the wood for the trees'. The current music programmes of study give an outline structure that provides scope for the range and depth of good practice. Perhaps this model could be used for other subjects. However, while this is fine – indeed a bonus – for a knowledgeable and confident teacher, there are implications for the support and CPD of those who feel less confident. Such support in turn has implications for the structure and 'space' in the curriculum in, for example, the use of subject leaders to model good practice for colleagues in the classroom context.

Questions 2a and 2b relate to Aspect 2: Reading, writing and numeracy

2 a) How might schools be enabled to strengthen their focus on raising attainment in reading, writing and numeracy?

Comments:

It has been suggested that we have reached a plateau in raising standards by the previous emphasis on reading, writing and numeracy through the discrete literacy and numeracy hours. It is also the case, in many schools, that other subjects have been over-marginalised. So perhaps now is the time to allow, and allow for, greater interaction across the curriculum, so that concepts and skills are developed from a variety of angles and children's particular strengths and interests are given more opportunity to support other areas.

However, it is important that subjects also retain their own specific concepts, skills and understanding and development.

2 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?

Comments:

See 2 a) above.

Less pressure on schools to teach to the test – not least because of being judged in the public arena by results. This is not the same as saying schools shouldn't be accountable.

Structures need to allow for children's own interests and attitudes to be considered so that children can see a need for such subjects as tools for future learning and enjoyment.

Question 3 refers to Aspect 3: Modern Foreign Languages

3 What are the best ways of introducing a modern foreign language as a compulsory requirement of the curriculum at Key Stage 2 as recommended by Lord Dearing's Languages Review?

Comments:

Language is the means by which we communicate within a culture. Therefore language teaching and learning takes place most effectively embedded within a meaningful context (and neuropsychological research would indicate at an earlier stage than KS2).

For example:

- through the use of different 'subject' areas. For example, songs are frequently used in existing foreign language programmes;
- little and often, rather than as specific 'lessons'.

There are, as ever, implications for properly trained and supported teachers.

Questions 4a and 4b refer to Aspect 4: Personal Development

4 a) What are the personal, social and emotional capabilities that children need to develop through their schooling?

Comments:

Those necessary for thriving in the modern, changing world as a responsible citizen. A person needs to feel comfortable and confident in his/her identity as such a citizen. This means, for example, self-knowledge and self-belief as well as an appreciation of difference and the potential for and of change.

If a child feels happy and secure in his/her own identity, then that has a beneficial effect on the child's willingness and capacity for learning.

Although overall guidelines would be helpful, different school and different children need the capability to call on, interpret and construct different ways of supporting such development as appropriate for the school and the individual.

4 b) What is the most appropriate framework for achieving greater integration of these capabilities throughout the curriculum?

Comments:

Explore possibilities of horizontal and vertical planning and structure of the curriculum and the school day.

For example, there are opportunities through music to integrate a school's community vertically across ages and phases.

There is potential in many subjects to develop various aspects of a child's wider development. However, the use of a subject as a 'tool' for this, while valuable, should not overtake the inherent value and processes of a subject *per se*.

Music can support self-esteem, aesthetic and emotional development and expression, social interaction and team-building, concentration, awareness and appreciation of other cultures, pride in one own culture...

Questions 5a and 5b refer to Aspect 5: Transition and progression

5 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?

Comments:

Record keeping and communication between all involved are fundamental to easy and constructive transition.

Record keeping in agreed and intelligible formats is vital. Such records need to include information about curriculum structures and content, as well as information about individual children – personal as well as academic development.

There is also a need for time for personnel involved (staff and pupils) to interact and communicate before, during, after and across such transition points.

The NAME publication *Rites of Passage: Effective transition and curriculum continuity in music education*, ed. Anice Paterson and Leonora Davies, gives subject specific advice and examples.

5 b) What are the options for providing more choice and flexibility in start dates for children entering primary school, especially summer-born children?

Comments:

Extend opportunities for taster days and part-time involvement in the next phase. Allow for more cross-phase movement between teachers. Some schools already have such schemes in place. Secondary music teachers often visit their feeder primary schools – sometimes even help teach the curriculum on a regular basis.

Allow more admission points during the school year. Parents/carers should be able to decide when their child is ready. Children develop at different rates.

It is debatable whether KS1 SATs should exist at all, but, if so, they should take account of the number of terms a child has been in school.

6 Do you have any other comments or contributions to make?

Comments:

See 1 e) above about the necessity for ongoing support and CPD for teachers. This has implications for staffing and staffing ratios since support and CPD takes time and resources (human, financial and commitment). Although such support may be more readily associated with those lacking in skills and confidence in particular areas (not necessarily subject based), continuing professional development should be the accessible right of every teacher. Learning is indeed a lifelong continuum.

Subjects have their own integrity as well as certain aspects and skills that can be shared across subject areas. Music is a unique form of human expression found, in different forms, in all human cultures across the world. As such it is an essential part of a person's development and thus an essential part of the primary curriculum.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

Here at the Department for Children Schools and Families we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes

No

Thank you for taking time to respond to this review.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 30 April 2008

Send by post to: Primary Review Secretariat
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