

NEWS RELEASE
FRIDAY 13 OCTOBER 2006

SPOTLIGHT ON PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND IN BIGGEST INDEPENDENT REVIEW FOR 40 YEARS

The biggest independent enquiry into primary education in England for almost 40 years is launched today (Friday 13 October 2006).

Based at the University of Cambridge and supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Primary Review will run for two years. It aims to gather evidence from a wide range of sources, sift facts from rhetoric, and stimulate debate about the future of this vital phase of education. The Review will culminate in a report containing recommendations for future policy and practice.

The most comprehensive such enquiry since the Plowden Report of 1967, the Primary Review will examine how well the current system of primary education is doing and how it can be improved, and it will consider how primary schools should respond to the national and global challenges which lie ahead. Along the way, the Review will assess the impact of the many government primary education initiatives of the past 20 years.

The Review will draw on four kinds of evidence:

- written submissions, which will be open to all who wish to contribute;
- oral soundings taken from leading national figures both inside and outside education, and locally from parents, children and teachers;
- systematic searches of official national and international data;
- surveys of relevant published research, commissioned from leading national experts.

The Review will be directed by Professor Robin Alexander, Fellow of Wolfson College, University of Cambridge and Professor of Education Emeritus at the University of Warwick. The work of the Review's Cambridge-based central team will be supported by over 60 research consultants from universities across the UK and a 20-strong Advisory Committee, chaired by Dame Gillian Pugh, whose members come from both inside and outside education.

The Primary Review's launch follows nearly three years of planning and consultation involving the government, opposition parties, statutory national educational agencies, teaching unions, and representatives from local authorities, schools, educational research, parents' groups, business and religious communities. The consultations showed strong support for the Review and helped shape the way it will be undertaken.

Review Director Robin Alexander said:

"40 years on from the last major enquiry into primary education and with two decades of government initiatives behind us, it's time to take stock. How well are we doing? Where are we heading? What kind of education should young children receive? This is an independent review and it will ask the questions that need to be asked, without fear or favour. We urge all who are concerned about the education which young children receive and the world in which they are growing up to take advantage of the opportunity which the Review provides. Send in your comments on current provision and your ideas about the future. Log onto the Review website to find out more and tell us what you think." (More quotes below).

ENDS

FOR FURTHER DETAILS: www.primaryreview.org.uk

MEDIA ENQUIRIES ONLY: Richard Margrave, Primary Review Director of Communications:
T: 01277 214 219 or 07789 692 360 **E:** richard@margrave.co.uk

FURTHER NOTES FOR EDITORS

Background: policy. England's primary schools have experienced many government initiatives since the introduction of the National Curriculum and national testing in 1988 signalled a shift towards much greater centralisation of educational provision. Since 1997, the government has introduced national literacy and numeracy strategies, the foundation stage, a national primary strategy, pupil performance targets, teacher performance management, school workforce reform, new inspection procedures and a raft of other initiatives. Opinion is divided on the impact of some of these, and on the vital question of what has happened to the quality of primary education.

Background: primary schools. England has over 17,500 primary schools catering for more than 4 million children aged between 5 and 11 years and staffed by about 198,000 qualified teachers and a large and expanding number of support staff. Most schools are local authority maintained but about one quarter have denominational links.

Background: other enquiries. The 1960s Plowden enquiry into English primary education remains the largest such investigation to date, but its social and educational contexts were very different from those obtaining today, as were the values by which it was informed. Since then there have been several smaller studies, for example by HMI, Ofsted and the Commons Education Committee. At the same time, primary education has become a major focus for academic research, especially in the areas of learning and teaching. A substantial body of published evidence, both official and independent, now awaits this Review's re-assessment.

People. The Primary Review's Director, Professor Robin Alexander, is Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, Professor Emeritus at Warwick University and former Professor of Education at Leeds University. A past education adviser to both Labour and Conservative administrations and member of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, he served on the 1991-2 'three wise men' enquiry into primary teaching. He has researched and written extensively about primary education and in 2002 his book *Culture and Pedagogy*, a comparative study of primary education in England, France, India, Russia and the United States, won top academic book prizes in both the USA and Britain. His recent work on transforming learning through improved classroom dialogue is proving very influential. (Further information at www.robinalexander.org.uk).

The Chair of the Primary Review Advisory Committee, Dame Gillian Pugh, was formerly Director of the Early Childhood Unit at the National Children's Bureau and Chief Executive of Coram Family. She is now Visiting Professor at the University of London Institute of Education.

Support. The Primary Review is supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, one of the largest independent grantmaking foundations in the UK. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation makes grants in four programme areas: Arts & Heritage, Education, Environment, and Social Change: Enterprise and Independence. The Foundation also takes initiatives itself where it believes important opportunities remain unexplored. (Further information at www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk).

Location. The Review is based at Cambridge University's Faculty of Education, one of Britain's leading centres of educational research and teacher training. The Cambridge team includes, alongside Robin Alexander, Christine Doddington, Dr Linda Hargreaves, Dr David Harrison, Ruth Kershner and, as Administrator, Catrin Darsley. (Further information on the Review team, the Advisory Committee and the Review's 60 research consultants at www.primaryreview.org.uk).

Focus. The Primary Review will focus on ten broad themes: (i) purposes and values, (ii) learning and teaching, (iii) curriculum and assessment, (iv) quality and standards, (v) diversity and inclusion, (vi) settings and professionals, (vii) parenting, caring and educating, (viii) beyond the school, (ix) structures and phases, (x) funding and governance. The Review is particularly concerned to assess not only how well the system is performing, but also where it should be heading, given the rapid rate of social and economic change and growing concern about the condition of the world in which today's children are growing up.

Evidence. The Primary Review has four strands of evidence: submissions, soundings, official data searches, and research surveys. The research survey strand has already been initiated, and some 60 leading researchers have been commissioned to assess published research on 30 topics relating to the Review's ten themes. Their reports will be published in spring 2007. The other three strands will be initiated shortly, and it is intended that all the evidence will be assembled well before the end of the Review's first year.

Participation. The Review seeks the widest possible involvement from individuals and organisations both inside and outside education. The Review's website provides information and suggestions on how to become involved, whether in providing evidence or in debating the issues.

Communication. Reports and digests from the Review will be published as they emerge, not just to provide information but also to stimulate debate. The final report will be published in 2008.

FURTHER QUOTES.

Professor Robin Alexander, Director of the Primary Review. "This, most emphatically, isn't just another education initiative. For a start, it's independent of government and the public purse, and though it will pay close attention to national policy it will also ask, without fear or favour, the much bigger questions about how well the system is doing and where it should be heading. It's 40 years since the last comprehensive enquiry into England's system of primary education. Since then, much has changed, not just in education and in our understanding of human development and learning, but also in our country and the wider world. In many quarters optimism about the opportunities created by recent social and educational advances is tempered by deep anxiety about what lies ahead for today's children, and indeed for humanity as a whole. We urge all who are concerned about the education which young children receive and the world in which they are growing up to take advantage of the opportunity which the Review provides. Log onto the Review website. See how comprehensive the Review will be and the breadth of evidence on which it will draw. Submit your own evidence in the form of comments on current provision and ideas for the future. Join in the debate. We want the Primary Review to make a positive and lasting impact."

Dawn Austwick, Director of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation: "The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation aims to nurture a strong civic society. Ensuring that our children experience the best possible education in the twenty first century is a key to achieving a healthy and vibrant society. This review will open up profound questions about what primary education is for and how we can best deliver it for future generations. We are delighted to be supporting it."

Dame Gillian Pugh, Chair of the Primary Review Advisory Committee: "I am delighted to have been asked to chair the Advisory Committee for this important review. There has been little national debate about primary education in recent years – the spotlight has been on secondary, post 16 and the early years – and the experience that members of the Advisory Committee bring will help us to focus on the important educational issues, both in the classroom and beyond."