



... children, their world, their education

NEWS RELEASE

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STRIKING THE BALANCE: SUPPORT VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND TACKLE CHILDHOOD POVERTY, BUT LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND DON'T TAKE OVER THEIR LIVES.

FURTHER RESEARCH EVIDENCE FROM THE PRIMARY REVIEW

Following widespread interest in its *Community Soundings* report (12 October) and in its commissioned reviews of the published evidence on standards, testing and assessment (2 November), the Primary Review today publishes four further interim reports from its research survey strand.

Commissioned from academic specialists and grounded in some 450 published research sources, both official and independent, today's four reports raise important questions about childhood today for teachers, children's services and the government, as well as for the Primary Review. The reports concentrate especially on children's lives outside school, the relationship between school and home, the impact of poverty and other kinds of inequality, and intervention policies to support the wellbeing and education of vulnerable children.

The reports argue that those involved in young children's education should respect childhood, listen carefully to children's views, understand children's lives outside school and the way that parenting and family life have changed, and give children and families time and space to pursue activities other than school work. The reports confirm evidence received by both the Primary Review and other enquiries that primary pupils are, and must be regarded as, active participants in their learning whose voices need to be heard. And as noted in the Review's *Community Soundings* report, they mostly enjoy their primary education.

What has not changed is the high incidence of childhood poverty. It continues to have a significant impact on the health, wellbeing and education of large numbers of children, and tackling it remains a priority. Yet the reports also warn against stereotyping and stigmatising those children and families viewed as being in need of support.

The reports are:

- ***Children's Lives Outside School and their Educational Impact*, by Berry Mayall (Primary Review Research Survey 8/1).**
- ***Parenting, Caring and Educating*, by Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin (Primary Review Research Survey 7/1).**
- ***Primary Schools and Other Agencies*, by Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and Katherine Runswick-Cole (Primary Review Research Survey 8/2).**
- ***Children and their Primary Schools: pupils' voices*, by Carol Robinson and Michael Fielding (Primary Review Research Survey 5/3).**

See overpage for selected quotations from these reports and notes on the Primary Review

FOR BRIEFINGS/SUMMARIES AND COPIES OF THE FULL REPORTS: email richard@margrave.co.uk or cd372@cam.ac.uk (before 23 November) or download at www.primaryreview.org.uk (from 9 am on 23 November)

ENDS

FURTHER NOTES FOR EDITORS

Selected quotations from the four research reports published today:

- ‘Social class remains a key influencing factor in parent-school relationships. Parents and children need to understand “the rules of the game” that operate in schools if the partnership is to be successful.’ (Report briefing 7/1)
- ‘The concept of the “insufficient child” and her/his family continues to drive encounters between primary schools and other agencies. The selective targeting of “insufficient” children and families as recipients of services perpetuates a climate of stigma and censure that fails to mesh with the diversity of contemporary family practices, and may impede uptake and effectiveness.’ (Report briefing 8/2)
- ‘The most challenging home circumstance, which cannot be viewed optimistically, is the increasing number of children living in relative poverty. Poverty remains a significant factor in the lives of many children, with the inevitable impact on children’s health and wellbeing and on their capacity to engage fully in school activities, both financially and emotionally.’ (Report briefing 7/1)
- ‘Children say that they are normally very happy at primary school ... They would like more control over their learning, though towards the top of the primary school the pressure of SATs often prevents this. Where pupils are listened to on teaching and learning issues, teachers can gain insights into what motivates, helps and hinders their learning.’ (Report briefing 5/3)
- ‘As children’s lives become increasingly “scholarised”, they may wish to defend the home as their private space. Children and parents may also resist current moves to increase “parental involvement” by turning the home into an educational environment. Parents will have to consider how far to protect their children against scholarisation and how far to help them engage with it. Free time for young children is an important issue here. So too is the need for the education service to accept that many children contribute to the family division of labour and that school work is not the only educationally productive activity in which they engage.’ (Report briefing 8/1)
- ‘The *Every Child Matters* (ECM) ideal of equipping learners for life in its broadest sense appears to be at odds with the current emphasis at the primary stage on target setting and academic achievement in a narrow range of subjects.’ (Report briefing 5/3)

The Primary Review interim reports

These four reports have been commissioned as expert evidence to the Review. Together with others in a series which will eventually number 32, they are being published now in order to encourage discussion and debate. However, the Review’s final judgement on the matters with which the interim reports deal will await the Review team’s assessment of the full range of evidence (see ‘focus and evidence’ below). Once published, each report is available on the Review website both in full and in the form of a 3-4 page briefing. The reports are being published in thematic groups, with a single press release covering each group.

The Primary Review

Based at the University of Cambridge, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and directed by Professor Robin Alexander, the Primary Review was launched in October 2006 and 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 is examining how well the current English system of primary education is doing, how it can be improved and how primary schools should respond to the national and global challenges which lie ahead. Along the way, the Review is assessing the impact of the many government primary education initiatives of the past 20 years.

Focus and evidence

The Review is focusing 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 draws on four kinds of evidence: (i) written submissions, of which a large number have been received, and on which a report will be issued later this year; (ii) oral soundings taken from schools and communities locally (the ‘Community Soundings’ reported on 12 October) and from national groups and

organisations; (iii) systematic searches of official national and international data; (iv) surveys of relevant published research - as in the present case - commissioned from leading national experts.

Direction and consultation

The Review is 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 is supported by 70 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 last autumn followed 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 is being undertaken. The Review is fully independent, but it is committed to constructive engagement with government, opposition, national agencies and the teaching unions, and it has already had the first of several planned sessions with the House of Commons Education Committee.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS: www.primaryreview.org.uk

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