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NEWS RELEASE

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CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING TEACHERS: THE PRIMARY REVIEW REPORTS ON A PROFESSION IN TRANSITION

Are newly-qualified primary teachers better trained now than previously? Have serving primary teachers been energised by initiatives designed to raise educational standards and reform the workforce? Are primary schools better led? After two decades of change how does the primary teaching profession see itself?

These questions are addressed in the three Primary Review research reports published today. Covering the period 1988-2008 they are based on an assessment of over 600 published sources of evidence and have been commissioned from members of the Primary Review's team of 70 academic consultants. **Report 6/3** tracks reforms in initial teacher education (ITE), continuing professional development (CPD) and school leadership. **Report 6/4** considers the government's ambitious programme of primary workforce reform. **Report 6/2** looks more broadly at how primary teachers have responded to the changing character of their professional roles and lives, especially in relation to curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and management.

Inevitably, the picture conveyed by the vast range of evidence surveyed for these three reports is mixed, as during any period of transition it is bound to be. Thus, on the basis of its inspections, Ofsted records greatly improved standards of ITE, especially in relation to government priorities, and talks of 'the best trained generation of teachers ever'; but other studies find that vital aspects of the primary teacher's work have been squeezed out. The streamlining of CPD has effectively focused professional attention on the requirements of the national literacy and numeracy strategies; but it has not always served the needs of teachers with different skill levels and at different stages of their careers. Workforce reform initiatives are generally welcomed, though there are concerns about sustainability. Some studies report primary teachers feeling de-professionalised and de-skilled; others view this as an oversimplification when younger teachers are positive and enthusiastic and many of their more experienced colleagues successfully resist attempts to make them fit a particular professional mould.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR EXTRACTS FROM THESE REPORTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRIMARY REVIEW

Today's reports have been commissioned as evidence to the Primary Review, which however reserves judgement on their findings pending its assessment of the full range of evidence. They are:

Primary Schools: the professional environment (Primary Review Research Survey 6/2) by Liz Jones, Andy Pickard and Ian Stronach, Manchester Metropolitan University. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-25-4.

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

Primary Workforce Management and Reform (Primary Review Research Survey 6/4) by Hilary Burgess, The Open University. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-27-8.

FOR BRIEFINGS/SUMMARIES AND COPIES OF THE FULL REPORTS: email richard@margrave.co.uk or cd372@cam.ac.uk (before 18 April 2008) or download at www.primaryreview.org.uk (from 9 am on 18 April).

ENDS

Extracts from Research Report 6/4:

‘Overall, the view from headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants on workforce reform in schools is supportive, although there are concerns about sustainability ... Teachers have been positive about the introduction of Planning and Preparation Time (PPA) and the increased deployment of teaching assistants in schools ... Teachers now view teaching assistants as crucial to their effective teaching [and] assistants [are] on the whole broadly satisfied with their role ... Evaluation of the Primary Leadership Programme found [that] pupil attainment at Key Stage 2 was improving, there were improvements in data analysis ... changes in teaching style ... [and] a stronger sense of team work ... Problems have been created through the speed at which the reform of the workforce agenda has been pushed out to schools. There are still issues to resolve such as the impact upon pupil learning, the impact upon school management and the linking with a wide range of external services.’

Extracts from Research Report 6/3:

‘The last 25 years have seen a period of sustained and increasingly radical reforms to ITE as successive governments have increased prescription and control through the regulation of courses, curriculum content and the assessment of standards. The result of these changes, and the rigorous inspection regime which has been mobilised to ensure compliance with them, has been to improve standards and increase the quality and preparedness of newly qualified teachers, as measured by the Ofsted inspection framework ... and target course content on the core [primary] curriculum, particularly English and mathematics ... but leave little time for previously key aspects of curricular and professional learning such as non-core subjects, especially on postgraduate routes ... render peripheral many important debates about ITE ... [and] create a schism between research active staff and teacher educators which, exacerbated by the drive for increased research selectivity ... has meant that most teachers are trained in departments with no core research funding.’

‘Leadership development activity has moved through phases of ad hoc provision under the aegis of LEAs ... to the development of national programmes for head teachers ... and the formation of a National College of School Leadership ... This has been a significant achievement but has raised concerns that ... the leadership development framework has too great an emphasis on standards-based approaches ... [and that] the structure is too detailed, prescriptive and bureaucratic.’

Extracts from Research Report 6/2:

‘On balance we find that the claimed de-professionalisation of teachers is an over-simplification ... The National Curriculum decreased teacher autonomy in relation to content, the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy likewise in relation to pedagogy. Teachers were reported to be “proletarianised”, de-professionalised, de-skilled and sometimes demoralised ... But this bleak picture had exceptions. Younger teachers were much more likely to be positive about the job; levels of enthusiasm were generally high amongst newly-qualified teachers ... In addition, not all teachers succumbed to government micro-management of their work ... ‘

‘There needs to be a slower, more deliberative and consultative context of policy development ... The relation of research to policy and practice needs to be linked more systematically and enduringly to deep issues concerning learning and motivation, rather than tied to the evaluation of ephemeral initiatives ... Innovation is too often a matter of ill-considered policy borrowing. Research needs to consider not just outcomes within a rubric of effectiveness and efficiency but also the slower and deeper emergence of enduring excellence in classrooms and schools.’

FURTHER NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Primary Review interim reports

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

So far, 26 interim reports have been published: on the Review's regional community soundings (12 October 2007); on educational standards, testing and assessment (2 November 2007); on children's lives outside school, and on parenting, caring, educating and the work of schools and other agencies (23 November 2007); on children's development, learning and special educational needs (14 December 2007); on aims, values and the national and international context of future provision (18 January 2008); on the structure and content of primary education, using comparisons between England and other countries (8 February 2008); and on the frameworks of policy, governance and funding within which primary schools work and the impact of recent reforms in curriculum and assessment (29 February 2008). All these reports, and accompanying briefings and press releases, are available at www.primaryreview.org.uk.

The Primary Review

Based at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 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 government primary education initiatives of the past 20 years.

Focus and evidence

The Review focuses on ten broad themes: (i) educational 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) children's lives beyond the school, (ix) school structures and phases, (x) educational funding and governance.

The Review draws on four kinds of evidence: (i) written submissions, of which a large number have been received; (ii) oral soundings taken from schools and communities locally (the 'Community Soundings' reported on 12 October 2007), from teachers 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 and international experts.

Direction and consultation

The Review's director, Professor Robin Alexander, is Fellow of Wolfson College at the University of Cambridge, Professor of Education Emeritus at the University of Warwick, and past member of the QCA and the 1991-2 'three wise men' government enquiry into primary education. 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 in autumn 2006 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 financially, politically and professionally independent, but it is committed to constructive engagement with government, opposition, national agencies and the teaching unions.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS: www.primaryreview.org.uk

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