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NEWS RELEASE

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TEACHING MATTERS: THE LAST THREE INTERIM REPORTS FROM THE PRIMARY REVIEW START THE COUNTDOWN TO THE FINAL REPORT

What does recent research tell us about the conditions for effective teaching in the primary school and the principles on which it should be based? What difference do grouping arrangements and class sizes make? How can children's transition between the stages of schooling be made as seamless as possible? With a major Government-funded programme of school building and refurbishment now under way, what physical classroom conditions are most conducive to the work of primary pupils and their teachers?

These questions are addressed in the three Primary Review research reports published today. They are the last in a major series of 30 detailed surveys of published research relating to primary education in all its aspects which the Primary Review has published in groups over the past seven months. They form just one of the strands of evidence in the most comprehensive and genuinely independent enquiry into English primary education for 40 years. The Review now turns to the preparation of its final report.

Today's three reports consider the all-important issue of the processes and contexts of teaching in the primary school. **Report 9/2** examines evidence on how pupils are grouped for learning, including setting and within-class grouping. It considers pupil transitions not just between primary and secondary but also from pre-school to Reception and between Key Stages. It revisits the debate about the impact of class size on children's learning. **Report 6/1** surveys research and technical evidence on the ways the physical properties of schools and classrooms affect children's learning and the work of their teachers. It concentrates on noise and acoustics, temperature and air quality, natural and artificial lighting. **Report 2/4**, a special synoptic report by the Director and Associate Director of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), the UK's biggest-ever programme of research on learning and teaching, turns from the contexts of teaching to classroom processes. The report extracts relevant findings from 19 major projects within the TLRP portfolio and it extrapolates from the wider TLRP programme ten 'principles for effective teaching'.

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:

Classes, Groups and Transitions: structures for teaching and learning (Primary Review Research Survey 9/2) by Peter Blatchford, Susan Hallam, Judith Ireson and Peter Kutnick, with Andrea Creech, Institute of Education and King's College, University of London. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-29-2.

Primary Schools: the built environment (Primary Review Research Survey 6/1) by Karl Wall, Julie Dockrell and Nick Peacey, Institute of Education, University of London. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-24-7.

Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools: insights from TLRP (Primary Review Research Survey 2/4) by Mary James and Andrew Pollard, Institute of Education, University of London. ISBN 978-1-906478-30-8.

FOR BRIEFINGS/SUMMARIES AND COPIES OF THE FULL REPORTS: email richard@margrave.co.uk or cd372@cam.ac.uk (before 16 May 2008) or download at www.primaryreview.org.uk (from 9 am on 16 May).

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Extracts from Primary Review Research Report 9/2: ‘There has been a tendency to respond to poor pupil attainment, lack of pro-school attitudes and exclusion by calls for more pupil differentiation (usually by ability/attainment). But this has not generally been associated with positive learning outcomes and it may restrict some pupils’ access to significant areas of knowledge and enforce divisions between them ... Much more effort now needs to be directed to the development of classroom-based social pedagogy, including the effective use of pupil grouping ... Directing research at the earliest primary transitions could have longer term implications for pupils’ successful negotiation of transition at subsequent stages ... The age of the pupil is important when considering class size effects. There is a clear case for small classes in the reception year, but research also shows where resources could be further targeted: that is, on achieving classes smaller than 25 for those children with most ground to make up in literacy.’

Extracts from Primary Review Research Report 6/1: ‘The school environment and the organisation of classrooms and offices have perceived and identifiable effects, both positive and negative, on pupils and staff and on the quality of pupil learning ... Poor classroom acoustics can create a negative learning environment for many students, especially those with hearing impairments, learning difficulties or for whom English is an additional language ... Excessive noise has a direct effect on test performance and reduces performance in SATs ... Poorly controlled classroom ventilation may lead to raised carbon dioxide levels which in turn are associated with a reduction in concentration and the ability to focus on mental tasks ... Greater exposure to natural light is positively associated with enhanced pupil performance.’

Extracts from Primary Review Research Report 2/4: ‘Teaching and learning should engage with the big ideas, key processes, modes of discourse and narratives of subjects so that [pupils] understand what constitutes quality and standards in particular domains ... Learners should be encouraged and helped to build relationships and communication with others for learning purposes, in order to assist the mutual construction of knowledge and enhance the achievements of individuals and groups. Consulting pupils about their learning and giving them a voice is both an expectation and a right ... Informal learning, such as learning out of school, should be recognised as at least as significant as formal learning ... Assessment for learning helps teachers promote learning how to learn by providing ideas for practical strategies that enable pupils to become autonomous learners. However, it is difficult to shift teaching from reliance on specific techniques (the letter of AfL) to practices based on deep principles integrated into the flow of lessons (the spirit of AfL) ... Effective group work in both primary and secondary schools, and across the curriculum, has a positive effect ... provided that teachers take the trouble to train pupils in the skills of group working.’

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 31, 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.

To date, 29 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); 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); on the training, development and leadership of primary teachers, and on workforce reform (18 April 2008); and on the contexts and processes of teaching itself (16 May 2008). All these reports, and their 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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