

NEWS RELEASE**Embargo: 00.01 HOURS, FRIDAY 16 OCTOBER 2009****FINAL REPORT FROM THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW****Today, following its three-year enquiry and 31 interim reports, the Cambridge Primary Review publishes its final report on the condition and future of English primary education**

Report facts and figures. The report draws on more than 4000 published sources, both national and international, together with: 28 specially-commissioned research surveys; 1052 written submissions from leading organisations and individuals, ranging from 1 to 300 pages in length; nearly 250 soundings, seminars, conferences and other meetings in different parts of the country; thousands of e-mails; and an extensive trawl of official data. The report has been written by a team of 14 authors, supported by 66 research consultants and a 20-strong advisory committee, under the editorship of the Review's director, Professor Robin Alexander of Cambridge University. Its 608 pages and 24 chapters end with 78 formal conclusions and 75 recommendations for future policy and practice, all endorsed by the report's authors and the Review's advisory committee.

The bottom line: how well are we doing? The report finds England's primary schools under intense pressure but in good heart and in general doing a good job. Since 1997, investment in primary education has risen dramatically and many policies have had a positive impact. Highly valued by children and parents, primary schools provide stability and positive values in a world of change and uncertainty. Contrary to myth, schools are not in constant danger of subversion by 1970s ideologues and they do not neglect the 3Rs. The real problems are rather different, and in relation to these there is certainly room for improvement.

Three recurrent concerns. Three broad concerns were repeatedly voiced by the Review's witnesses: the condition of childhood today, the state of the society and world in which children are growing up, and the focus and impact of government policy. On the first of these, the report questions the conventional wisdom that childhood is in crisis, noting that children were the Review's most upbeat witnesses, and emphasising the research evidence on how much young children know, understand and can do, given teaching that challenges their thinking, stimulates their interests, heeds their ideas and empowers them as both learners and citizens. The real childhood crisis concerns the fate of those children whose lives are blighted by poverty, disadvantage, risk and discrimination, and here governments are right to intervene.

The policy balance sheet. While the government's childhood agenda is applauded, its standards agenda is viewed less favourably – not from opposition to standards and accountability but because of the educational damage the apparatus of targets, testing, performance tables, national strategies and inspection is perceived to have caused for questionable returns. The prevailing definition of 'standards' is too narrow and although the evidence on what has happened to standards in recent years is neither as rosy nor as bleak as opposing camps tend to claim, the picture and agenda are compromised by methodological problems. Not surprisingly, the report calls for both a more rigorous concept of standards and different approaches to assessment and inspection. Assessment at the end of the primary stage should continue, but it should be done differently. The issue is not *whether* schools should be accountable or children should be assessed (they should) but *how*.

In brief: pointers to specific recommendations (see chapter 24 for details; abbreviations explained below)

- **New aims.** Adopt the Review's proposed 12 aims and 13 principles for primary education. Using existing QCDA secondary aims is not an adequate response to the historic muddle about purposes.
- **New structures.** Strengthen early years provision; extend foundation stage to age six; replace KS 1 and 2 by a single primary phase; examine feasibility of raising school starting age to six in line with these changes and international research and practice.
- **Narrow the gaps.** Continue to give priority (a) to narrowing the gap between vulnerable children and the rest, and (b) to reducing England's long tail of underachievement.
- **Undertake full review of special educational needs,** covering definitions, procedures and provision.
- **Redefine standards** as excellence in all aspects of the curriculum to which children are entitled, not just the 3Rs. This definition should inform curriculum, assessment, teaching, inspection and accountability.

- **Tackle unfinished curriculum business.** Put implementation of government's Rose review on hold pending consideration of the Cambridge Review's more comprehensive analysis of the problems to be fixed and its proposals for a national framework of eight domains of knowledge, skill and enquiry combined with a locally-responsive 'community curriculum', all driven by the proposed 12 aims.
- **Reform assessment.** Retain formal assessment at the end of primary, but stop current SATs, separate assessment for learning from assessment for accountability and broaden the scope and methods of both.
- **End the 'state theory of learning'** embodied in post-1997 strategies and policies. Support teaching grounded in repertoire, evidence and principle rather than recipe. Strengthen what separates expert teachers from the rest: their depth of engagement with what is to be taught, quality of classroom interaction and skill in assessing and providing feedback on pupils' learning.
- **Undertake full review of primary school staffing** so as to ensure that every school has access to the expertise that a modern primary education requires, and can deliver both the Review's broader account of educational entitlement and its more rigorous concept of standards. Extend teaching roles to include specialists and semi-specialists as well as generalist class teachers, especially for older children.
- **Reform initial teacher training.** Diversify ITT routes in line with the staffing review and new teaching roles. Replace training for compliance by evidence-based teaching skills, curriculum expertise and proper analysis of educational issues. Promote a more informed discourse on subjects, knowledge and skills.
- **Replace current TDA professional standards** by a framework properly validated by research on expertise, professional development and pupil learning. Reform CPD so that it balances support for less secure teachers with freedom for the experienced and talented.
- **Extend school and professional partnership.** Strengthen both curriculum provision and community engagement through school clustering, federation, all-through schools and the exchange of expertise.
- **Protect rural schools and middle schools** against cost-cutting closure. Achieve a better fit between school design and function, with more specialist and outdoor space. **Protect/expand school libraries.** ICT and books are not alternatives: books remain fundamental to children's lives and education.
- **Reverse tide of centralisation.** Radically re-balance responsibilities of DCSF, NDPBs, LAs and schools.
- **End primary/secondary funding differential and redirect funds from national bodies to schools.** Set increased costs of school staffing reforms against big savings from ending the national strategies and reducing national infrastructure.
- **Towards a new discourse.** As important as the specifics is the need for a more mature and informed way of talking about primary education, free from the polarisation, myth-making and mud-slinging of recent years. The debate should exemplify, not negate, what education is about. As the country approaches a general election, this is a particular challenge for political leaders.

[CPD: continuing professional development. DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families. ITT: initial teacher training. KS: Key Stage. LAs: local authorities. NDPBs: non-departmental public bodies (TDA, QCDA etc). QCDA: Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (successor to QCA). SATs: Standard Attainment Tests. TDA: Training and Development Agency for Schools].

What next?

Following launch events in Cambridge and London on 19 October (<http://www.thersa.org/events/our-events/the-condition-and-future-of-primary-education>), there are 14 regional conferences for professional leaders from schools, teacher training and research. For details: <http://www.teachersfirst.org.uk/cpr/>.

The report, briefing, conclusions and recommendations

Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review, 608pp, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, ISBN 978-0-415-54871-7. FOR ADVANCE COPIES OF THE REPORT: subject to numbers, copies will be available for those attending the media briefing on **Thursday 15 October at 11.30 am** at Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, King's Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG. Copies of the report will be available **from 9 am** on that day for study at the venue.

Cambridge Primary Review Briefing: the final report, 4 pp. A briefing paper summarising key themes from the final report may be obtained before 15 October from richard@margrave.co.uk, or at the media briefing on 15 October, or from 16 October it may be downloaded at www.primaryreview.org.uk.

The conclusions and recommendations. The publishers have released the pdf of chapter 24 (the 78 conclusions and 75 recommendations) to support media coverage. This may be obtained from Richard Margrave or Gemma Hopkins (contact details below).

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FURTHER NOTES FOR EDITORS

Advance copies of the report

As noted, hard copies will be available at the venue from 9 am on the day of the media briefing but a pdf of the conclusions and recommendations will be available a few days earlier, at the same time as this media release. For copyright and security reasons, electronic copies of the full report cannot be supplied.

The Cambridge Primary Review

Based at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and directed by Professor Robin Alexander, the Cambridge Primary Review was launched in October 2006 and is funded until June 2010. It has aimed 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 most comprehensive such enquiry since the Plowden Report of 1967, the Review has examined 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 has assessed the impact of government primary education initiatives of the past 20 years.

Focus and evidence

The Review has focused 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 has drawn on four kinds of evidence: (a) written submissions; (b) regional and national soundings; (c) surveys of relevant published research; (d) systematic searches of official data. To these it has added the thousands of informal expressions of opinion sent by email.

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 CATE, the QCA and the 1991-2 'three wise men' government enquiry into primary education. The work of the Review's Cambridge-based central team has been supported by nearly 70 research consultants from universities across the UK and a 20-strong Advisory Committee chaired by Dame Gillian Pugh. The Review's launch in autumn 2006 followed nearly three years of planning and consultation which showed strong support for the Review and helped shape the way it was 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.

The interim reports

Between October 2007 and February 2009 the Review published 31 interim reports. These provoked considerable media interest and public controversy, especially in relation to the condition of childhood today, assessment and testing, the curriculum, and the impact of recent reforms. Those interim reports which have not been revised for inclusion in the companion research volume may be downloaded from the Review website, as may the briefings and overview briefings for all 31 reports: www.primaryreview.org.uk

FOR FURTHER DETAILS: www.primaryreview.org.uk

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