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Primary review could spark rise in specialist staff

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Study of schools' capacity to teach new curriculum may transform workforce

A new review of the primary school curriculum could open the doors to more teaching by specialists, it has emerged.

Primary school staffing will be the focus of the study, which will run in parallel to the curriculum review announced last month and be carried out at the Department for Education.

It will investigate primary schools' capacity to teach the new curriculum, taking in the role of initial teacher training (ITT), continuing professional development (CPD) inspection and school leadership.

The staffing review could signal the beginning of the transformation of England's primary workforce.

The DfE said the study will "explore the capacity of the primary school workforce to develop and teach a

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broad curriculum effectively in light of the Government's planned educational reforms".

A full national primary staffing review was a key recommendation of the independent, high-profile Cambridge Primary Review (CPR), which reported last year.

It called for an urgent review of the relationship between the requirements of the curriculum, the number - and roles - of teachers and other staff needed.

It also argued for a move beyond a simple opposition of generalists and specialists and suggested that while generalist primary teachers were valuable, specialists could strengthen Years 5 and 6.

Professor Robin Alexander, who led the CPR, has said his review will influence the DfE's study.

"If children are entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum, which educationally and in law they are, then every aspect of that curriculum should be taught to the highest possible standard, regardless of how much or little time is allocated to it," he said.

Tim Oates, of Cambridge Assessment, who is leading the Government's curriculum review, was asked at a press conference last week whether the Government's interest in rigour could mean specialist teachers would be needed in primaries.

He said the nature of CPD in other countries was related to success in maintaining high standards, adding: "In Finland teachers are trained at MA level in parallel tracks in pedagogy and a specialism. The subject specialism is enshrined in the primary phase.

"We will be making recommendations about that which makes realising the benefits of the reframed national curriculum possible."

But NUT general secretary Christine Blower said: "Primary teachers are specialists in teaching at their relevant key stage. The Cambridge Review came to the conclusion that it might be helpful to have some teachers with more specialist subject knowledge.

"Schools certainly need more staffing. Where Ofsted comments are less than positive, problems can often be traced back to a combination of a lack of CPD and shortages of time in ITT in terms of subject-specific knowledge."

A DfE spokesman said: "The project aims to establish what the key capacity issues are for the primary workforce and the scale of any concerns. It will include discussions with key stakeholders, such as the Cambridge Primary Review."

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I am currently training to be a primary teacher. I think that having specialist science teachers would be a great idea. Some teachers are not as confident in teaching science as others and are scared to take risks with scientific inquiry due to their lack of subject knowledge. Having specialists would also help children overcome common misconceptions that even some adults have.



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