



... children, their world, their education

NATIONAL CURRICULUM REVIEW, 2010-12

NOTES ON THE DfE CONSULTATION AT THE WROXHAM SCHOOL, POTTERS BAR, ON 29 JUNE 2012

This was one of two sessions organised by CPR at the request of DfE to consider the Secretary of State's proposals of 11 June 2012. Participants were invited from various parts of the country. DfE was represented by Keith Hill and Stefano Pozzi. In what follows, Q = statement or question from members of the group, A = statement or response from DfE representatives.

Note: while this event was facilitated by CPR, CPR does not necessarily endorse the views expressed.

Aim of this session

A To give a background to the National Curriculum Review and discuss progress to date. Planned implementation is September 2014.

Secretary of State's response to expert panel report

Q Why have members of the Expert Panel now distanced themselves from the process?

A The government have accepted some of the EP recommendations but have also rejected some. The EP looked at structural issues such as attainment targets at the end of Year 4 and a split KS2. This recommendation has not been accepted by the Secretary of State. It was felt that the EP proposals are over-engineered in respect of attainment targets and that we need to concentrate instead on what is to be taught. Schools should have both accountability and autonomy. They are required to publish their curriculum online from September 2012.

Key Stages

These stay as they are.

Foreign language

Subjects remain the same with the addition of foreign language for KS2. This is a statutory change and formal consultation will take place.

Q The previous government required modern foreign languages to be taught so this is not new. When the government changed many schools continued with this.

A It is important that schools build on current good practice.

Q Many teachers have not taken a foreign language even to GCSE level – this is hugely problematic

A Funding is needed and specialist knowledge required, not just for foreign languages but other subjects too.

Removal of levels and descriptors but inclusion of some form of grading to measure achievement

Q What evidence of pupil progress/attainment is required?

A It is important that teachers ensure that the children are secure in their understanding before moving on. Assessment at the end of years 2, 4 and 6 will show if children have met standards. We don't want a 'threshold'. Assessment should be about relative achievement and relative progress.

Q Is this assessment for learning or assessment for accountability?

A In accountability terms, this is where the government is coming from. Assessment for learning is up to teachers.

Q If an assessment system is based on what can be measured there will be an inevitable focus on technical problems.

A There will be no testing at the end of Year 4 and no statutory spilt in KS2. The assessment framework will be informed fully by the programmes of study.

Q What about non-testable subjects?

A There is no stock answer to this.

Q The expert panel looked at evidence internationally, including evidence from those countries that move all children together and keep back those who do not achieve the level required. Is this why the EP was ignored?

A Keeping children back does not work.

Q The removal of grades and levels is welcome. What viable option is there to demonstrate progress?

A Whatever takes the place of grades and levels must be beneficial to the children.

The draft English programme of study

Q Why can't we have teacher assessment of writing rather than a published test? Because of pressure from Ofsted, schools tend to teach to the test and there is concern that levels will drop.

A Writing standards will rise because children are not learning just to pass a test. More teacher development is needed so that teachers assess over a year's work rather than just look at test results. Outstanding schools can work with failing schools. We can't remove high stakes accountability from primary schools.

Q It seems the draft PoS is designed for testing.

A The current national curriculum is an imponderable list and we need to think about how to go from this to get the balance right. We need to tie in assessments and reflect good learning.

Q It is a huge mistake to remove speaking and listening from the curriculum.

Q In reading and writing, we like the term 'love of reading' but there is a lot about phonics. There is an emphasis on aspects of grammar which are not really necessary. Conceptually the proposals are confused and old fashioned.

Q The proposals do not accommodate the many different ways that children learn. Not all children learn reading most effectively through phonics.

A Some children, especially those with specific learning difficulties will be known by their teachers and appropriately taught by other methods.

Q The emphasis on reading aloud and discussions is good but the proposed curriculum is retrograde. It dumbs down rather than raises the bar.

Q The proposals include no reference to what it is to be literate in the 21st century eg digital/keyboard skills. What is proposed will not prepare children for world as it now is.

Q Another serious omission is the development of critical literacy.

The draft mathematics programme of study

Q Although there is a brief statement on spoken language at the head of the draft programme of study for maths, it is not followed up. Oral capacity, vocabulary and fluency are essential to mathematical problem solving

Q The draft includes misinformation in the Aims in relation eg to statement 23. Some elements have been misquoted (eg in relation to Singapore). Greater care should be taken with the language of the programmes of study.

Q The pace of the proposed maths curriculum is too quick and will cause problems, especially in relation to. There is no obvious understanding of the kind of mathematical learning and teaching that

take place before children's reading and writing are secure. In this and other respects the authors of the proposals do not understand teaching and learning.

Q Is all the content truly essential? For example, who needs to learn about binary numbers and Roman numerals?

A These may seem arbitrary but could be useful. Binary numbers might feature in computer/ICT lessons. Roman numerals and the history of numbers help in the teaching of place value.

Q How do we know if these are statutory or non-statutory?

A The notes and guidance will be non-statutory.

Q The proposals advise using column methods for addition etc and fail to mention other methods which support children's mental calculations.

A Teachers will be able to use a range of methods.

Q There are implications for teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge. Professional development is required to take subject knowledge forward. This includes raising questions: eg in English why do we need to teach grammar when research does not show that emphasis on grammar has had a beneficial impact?

The draft science programme of study

Q As with maths there is an encouraging statement at the beginning of the draft PoS about the importance of spoken language, but in the rest of the document there are significant constraints. Children are not encouraged to ask questions and teachers are not advised to explain. Children should be encouraged to predict results and discuss outcomes.

Q DfE says that spoken language is to be embedded across the curriculum as a whole. How would you like to see spoken language included?

A Spoken language transcends all subjects in particular history and geography. There is a problem around the generic learning of speaking skills. The mechanisms for advancing spoken language are in place but we need to look wider and allow schools to implement this.

Q We should be careful about what we wish for. Do we want prescription on pedagogy?

General questions

A Any questions, comments or views can be emailed to: NationalCurriculumReview.FEEDBACK@education.gsi.gov.uk. Timetable: formal consultations will take place in the Spring term 2013 with final versions available from September 2013.

Q Who wrote the proposals?

A A list of those consulted by DfE has now been published.

Q Subject expertise for some aspects of the new curriculum will be a problem: will more training be available?

A Training will be available for new and current teachers. The problem will be managing the scale and pace of change.

Q The problem for the DfE is that with Teaching Schools and more freedom in the system there is freedom for mediocrity as well as success. We need to make the curriculum work in schools in the best possible way in order to get the best outcomes for our children.

A Academies have more flexibility but all schools are subject to the same accountability. Although Academies are not obliged to follow the National Curriculum they should take a good look at it.

Q There is concern that teachers in the maintained sector won't be prepared to take risks and do things differently.

Q There is a challenge for Heads in appointing new members of staff as the required level of expertise in all subjects is now much greater. There is a huge responsibility on teachers to cover all the National Curriculum.

Q Schools have had the freedom to be creative but the new National Curriculum will move them back to textbook teaching.

A Schools will need to look at best practice and build on that.