



... children, their world, their education

PRIMARY REVIEW
RESEARCH BRIEFINGS
OVERVIEW OF
5/3, 7/1, 8/1, 8/2

CHILDREN'S LIVES AND VOICES

Research on children at home and school

On 12 October 2007 the Primary Review published its first interim report, *Community Soundings*, an account of evidence collected by the Review team between January and March 2007 at 87 regional meetings with teachers, heads, children, parents, school governors and a wide range of community representatives.

The community soundings, along with the national soundings and submissions, elicited professional and public opinion. Complementing this, the Review's research survey and official data search strands investigate evidence from national and international published research and from government departments and statutory educational agencies. Whereas the soundings and submissions register what people think now, the published sources add a historical dimension, charting change in educational thinking, policy and practice over time, and revealing the way evidence on particular questions has accumulated.

On 2 November 2007, the Review published the first three of its thirty research surveys, on the theme of standards, testing and assessment. Next in line (23 November 2007), and the subject of this overview briefing, are four reports which survey published research on children's lives outside school, on parenting, caring and relations between home, school and other agencies, and on the voices and views of children themselves. Like all the interim reports in this series their purpose is both to inform and to encourage discussion and debate.

Children's lives and voices: research on children at home and school

This group of interim reports includes the following four surveys of published research, specially commissioned for the Primary Review:

- *Children's Lives Outside School and their Educational Impact*, by Berry Mayall (Primary Review Research Survey 8/1).
- *Parenting, Caring and Educating*, by Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin (Primary Review Research Survey 7/1).
- *Primary Schools and Other Agencies*, by Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and Katherine Runswick-Cole (Primary Review Research Survey 8/2).
- *Children and their Primary Schools: pupils' voices*, by Carol Robinson and Michael Fielding (Primary Review Research Survey 5/3).

The reports and their accompanying briefings may be downloaded at www.primaryreview.org.uk. Between them they draw on over 450 published evidential sources, both official and independent.

Children's Lives Outside School and their Educational Impact focuses on children's out-of-school lives before and during the primary school years and the impacts on their school activities and education more generally. The report is framed by changing perceptions of children's development and learning, and by the current emphasis on children's rights. It examines the relationship between what children know and do out of school and what takes place in school, and assesses the implications of the increasing 'scholarisation' of their home life as a result of recent government policy.

Parenting, Caring and Educating takes a specific and central aspect of children's out-of-school lives and reviews research on changes in patterns of parenting and caring in the pre-adolescent years and their impact on children's primary education. It examines changes in family structure and parenting practice, the complex and often demanding consequences of these for both parents/carers and schools, and the way home-school relations have featured in recent educational thinking and policy. It shows how poverty severely compromises children's health, well-being and capacity to engage with their schooling.

Primary Schools and Other Agencies moves further out from school and home to the wider society. With *Every Child Matters* as its current backdrop, it examines the shifting relationships over the past four decades between education and the various agencies with which primary school children may come into contact, especially in the areas of health, social care and the law. It pays particular attention to changing provision for children deemed to be in need of support or intervention from agencies other than the school. Like *Children's Lives Outside School*, it tracks changes in the way children and their needs have been perceived since the last big enquiry into primary education (Plowden, in 1967) and shows how these perceptions have shaped the policy of the day.

Finally, ***Children and their Primary Schools: pupils' voices*** examines research in an area of recent but rapidly increasing interest to practitioners and policy-makers as well as researchers, that of children's voice. It surveys representative research on what primary pupils and former pupils think of the purposes of primary schooling, the culture and organisation of primary schools, learning, teaching, assessment and the curriculum, and the transition to secondary education. The consistent sub-text is that children's voices matter, and in this the survey leads back to the emphasis in *Children's Lives Outside School* on children's rights and the need to acknowledge and build on children's active role in their learning. In this respect, the survey also looks forward to the next group of reports to be published by the Primary Review, which will be on children's development, learning and educational needs.

Each of these research surveys was independently conceived and undertaken, and readers should refer to the more detailed briefing for each survey, and of course to the reports themselves for detailed presentation and assessment of the evidence. Yet, by taking the four reports together we find that a number of themes emerge with some consistency and are thereby reinforced. Several of these also resonate with the Community Soundings. For example:

- Changing conceptions of children, childhood and children's needs (5/3, 8/1 and 8/2), and the more pervasive tendency for views of children to become polarised; for example, children as victims vs children as threats (8/1); children as innocent and suffering vs children as unsocialised and deficient (8/2).
- Changing conceptions and practices of parenting and family life; changes in the way that the needs of children from problematic home circumstances are defined; but the challenges these changes pose for schools and statutory agencies (7/1 and 8/2).
- The considerable impact, for better or worse, of children's lives outside school on their learning within school (7/1, 8/1).
- The need to respect and build upon children's views, non-school lives and experiential learning and to respect and safeguard their rights (5/3 and 8/1); yet the challenges such recognition may pose to traditional power relations in school and long-established assumptions about the relationship of teacher and learner (5/3), especially if the UNCRC is taken to require genuine democratisation of school ethos and practices (8/1).
- The need for intervention to support vulnerable children and families, especially in the context of poverty (7/1); but the tensions and possible policy contradictions which such support can generate (8/2) and the dangers of an all-embracing 0-11 'scholarisation' of children's home lives which may belittle or crowd out those activities which are entirely independent of school yet are no less productive than school 'work' (8/1).
- The pressures and constraints on both children's learning and the primary curriculum of the government's national testing policy at the primary stage, and the risk that such demands will

subvert the development of the broader life skills which are the goals of other policies, including *Every Child Matters* (5/3).

- The overwhelming impact of inequality, and especially poverty, on many children's educational prospects (7/1), and the risk that in some cases an otherwise laudable emphasis on parental involvement in schooling may aggravate rather than ameliorate such inequalities (8/1), or stigmatise particular children and families (8/2).
-

FURTHER INFORMATION

The reports on which this briefing is based:

Children's Lives Outside School and their Educational Impact, by Berry Mayall (Primary Review Research Survey 8/1), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-05-6.

Parenting, Caring and Educating, by Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin (Primary Review Research Survey 7/1), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-06-3.

Primary Schools and Other Agencies, by Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and Katherine Runswick-Cole (Primary Review Research Survey 8/2), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-07-0.

Children and their Primary Schools: pupils' voices, by Carol Robinson and Michael Fielding (Primary Review Research Survey 5/3), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-04-9.

These reports are available at www.primaryreview.org.uk/Publications/Interimreports and form part of the Primary Review's series of interim reports. Two of the 32 interim reports deal with the opinion-gathering strands of the Review's evidence base. The remainder report on the thirty surveys of published research which the Review has commissioned from its 70 academic consultants. The reports are being published now both to increase public understanding of primary education and to stimulate debate during the period leading up to the publication of the Review's final report in late 2008. Separate briefings are available for each report in addition to this briefing overview.

The Primary Review was launched in October 2006 as a wide-ranging independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. Supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, it is based at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and directed by Professor Robin Alexander.

The Review has ten themes and four strands of evidence (submissions, community and national soundings, surveys of published research, and searches of official data). The reports summarised in this briefing relate to the **Research Survey** strand and the themes **Diversity and Inclusion** (5/2), **Parenting, Caring and Educating** (7/1) and **Beyond the School** (8/1 and 8/2).

Enquiries: The Administrator, The Primary Review, Faculty of Education, 184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ. Phone: 01223 767523.

Email: enquiries@primaryreview.org.uk . Website: www.primaryreview.org.uk.

Press enquiries: richard@margrave.co.uk (Richard Margrave, Communications Director).

Note: the views expressed in the Primary Review Research Reports are those of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Primary Review, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation or the University of Cambridge.