



... children, their world, their education

NEWS RELEASE

Embargo: 00.01 HOURS, FRIDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2008

GOVERNING, FUNDING AND REFORMING PRIMARY EDUCATION: FOUR MORE RESEARCH REPORTS FROM THE PRIMARY REVIEW

What should be the balance of national and local in the running of England's system of primary education? How adequately is the system funded? How effective are the mechanisms of quality assurance? What has been the impact on schools, teaching and learning of two decades of reform?

Eleven years on from 'Education, education, education' and the launch of an impressive and costly programme of reform aimed at raising standards and tackling underachievement, it is inevitable that the role of government and the national agencies should loom large in evidence received by the Primary Review, the biggest enquiry into English primary education for forty years.

The four reports published today, which have been commissioned from members of the Primary Review's team of 70 academic consultants, assess over 200 published sources of evidence on these matters, both official and independent. **Report 10/1** sets out the financial framework and funding trends for English primary schooling, comparing primary with secondary and England with other OECD countries. **Report 10/2** charts the evolution and impact of the current mix of increased school autonomy and closer central direction. **Report 4/3** takes a long historical look at school inspection from HMI to Ofsted. **Report 3/2** outlines major reforms since 1988 bearing on curriculum, assessment and teaching, and uses both official and independent evidence to assess their impact. Between them, these reports raise important questions about accountability, culpability and justice in the apportioning of responsibility for what goes on in the nation's primary schools.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR SOME KEY FINDINGS 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:

- *The Funding of English Primary Education*, by Philip Noden and Anne West, London School of Economics and Political Science (Primary Review Research Survey 10/1), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-21-6.
- *The Governance and Administration of English Primary Education*, by Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder, University of Bath (Primary Review Research Survey 10/2), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-20-9.
- *Quality Assurance in English Primary Education*, by Peter Cunningham and Philip Raymont, University of Cambridge (Primary Review Research Survey 4/3), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-23-0.
- *The Trajectory and Impact of National Reform: curriculum and assessment in English primary schools*, by Dominic Wyse, University of Cambridge, Elaine McCreery and Harry Torrance, Manchester Metropolitan University (Primary Review Research Survey 3/2), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-22-3.

FOR BRIEFINGS/SUMMARIES AND COPIES OF THE FULL REPORTS: email richard@margrave.co.uk or cd372@cam.ac.uk (before 29 February 2008) or download at www.primaryreview.org.uk (from 9 am on 29 February).

ENDS

SOME KEY FINDINGS AND ISSUES FROM THE FOUR REPORTS

- **Funding primary education: should there be parity between primary and secondary?** Report 10/1 records a marked increase in expenditure on primary education from 1998 onwards, yet 'when expenditure is expressed relative to per capita GDP the UK comes 18th out of 29 OECD countries on expenditure on primary education' and the per pupil primary/secondary funding differential is greater than in some other OECD countries. This differential was first criticised in the 1931 Hadow Report and has been the subject of several enquiries since then. Yet it persists, and Report 10/1 argues that because children's 'later progress and achievement are highly dependent on earlier attainment ... it is by no means self-evident ... that primary schools should be less generously funded than secondary.' The differential reflects in part the continuing Victorian legacy of large classes taught by generalists at the primary stage (as opposed to smaller secondary classes taught by subject specialists) and makes it difficult for primary schools to deploy staff in other ways.
- **Is there now a 'state theory of learning'?** Report 10/2 shows how since 1997 'central control in key areas of educational action has been strengthened within a framework of administrative and fiscal devolution ... Government has strengthened its hand through what may be called a "state theory of learning" ... based on the idea that the repeated high stakes testing of pupils, a national curriculum, and in primary schools mandated pedagogy in numeracy and literacy, will raise standards ... There is little doubt that the machinery of surveillance and accountability makes it difficult for schools to deviate from focusing on test performance' Report 3/2 makes a similar point and both surveys raise obvious questions not just about whether the 'state theory of learning' is educationally sound, but whether it is right or sensible for governments to intervene to this extent in the fine detail of professional practice.
- **The impact of two decades of 'reform'.** Reports 10/2 and 3/2 track change and reform in the primary sector under both Conservative and New Labour administrations. Report 10/2 warns that 'tracing causation between particular reforms and children's learning is extremely difficult', though that has been no bar to confident claims both for and against the various reform initiatives. Report 3/2 notes differences on this issue between official and independent sources, and some disagreement among the latter too. Yet 'all studies shows clearly that change has occurred, and that in 2007 primary classrooms are very different places from the way they were in 1988, or even 1997.' It records greater system coherence and improvements in the standards achieved by many pupils, 'but a decrease in the overall quality of primary education ... because of the narrowing of the curriculum and the intensity of test preparation.' Moreover, while one major study reported significant changes in teachers' practice, a much larger number showed that 'the quality of teacher-pupil interaction on which much learning depends has shown little sign of improvement and there is some evidence of decline ... At the same time, the range of teaching methods employed is probably narrower now than hitherto.' **[Note:** Report 3/2 concentrates on government initiatives on curriculum, teaching methods and assessment. Other Primary Review reports, notably *Community Soundings* (12 October 2007) refer to a wider array of initiatives and record a general welcome for some of them, especially the Every Child Matters agenda].
- **School inspection: stability, trust and relevance.** Report 4/3 notes that 'constant change in quality assurance procedures has proved a great burden and cause for complaint by schools and teachers. While some change is inevitable to meet cultural and political expectations, the degree and pace of change have been exceptionally great in the last fifteen years ... The need to address poor provision and poor teaching is undisputed, but empirical studies have revealed flaws in the [Ofsted] inspection processes and possibilities for improvement ... It is important that policy on quality assurance should inspire the maximum possible trust between politicians, parents and professionals.' Report 4/3 also warns that 'many research studies point to the tendency of narrowly-focused inspection to distort the curriculum. Inspection should therefore continue to cover the full range of provision and/or be alive to this danger where inspection is selective.'

FURTHER NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Primary Review interim reports

These four research surveys have been commissioned as expert evidence to the Primary Review. Together with others in an interim report series which will eventually number 32, 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.

So far, 23 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); and on the structure and content of primary education, using comparisons between England and other countries (8 February 2008). All 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 is focusing 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

MEDIA ENQUIRIES ONLY: Richard Margrave, Primary Review Director of Communications:
T: 01277 214 219 or 07789 692 360 E: richard@margrave.co.uk