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PRIMARY REVIEW
RESEARCH BRIEFINGS
OVERVIEW OF
6/2, 6/3, 6/4

PRIMARY TEACHERS: TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT, LEADERSHIP AND WORKFORCE REFORM

This briefing provides an overview of the three Primary Review Research Reports published on 18 April 2008. The reports are surveys of published research bearing on the theme *Settings and Professionals*, the sixth of the ten themes which frame the Primary Review's enquiries.

In drawing attention to issues explored in these reports, we stress that the views they express are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Primary Review, the University of Cambridge or Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The reports have been commissioned as contributions to the wider body of evidence on which the Review's deliberations, conclusions and findings will be based, and judgement on them is reserved pending the Review's assessment of all this material.

The reports examine research on the professional environment of primary schooling in the context of major changes over the past two decades in initial teacher education (ITE), teachers' continuing professional development (CPD), school leadership and workforce reform, all of which have had inevitable and often critical consequences for how teachers see themselves and how they are viewed by the public; indeed changing professional perceptions and status as well as professional practice was an explicit goal of many of the reforms. Taken together, Primary Review Research Reports 6/2 - 6/4 draw on over 600 published sources and cover a wide range of issues. However, like several other reports in this series they return repeatedly to one key area of concern and indeed controversy: the balance of cost and benefit, judged in both educational and professional terms, of recent government interventions in the work of primary schools.

Inevitably, the picture conveyed by the vast range of evidence surveyed for these three reports is mixed, as during any period of transition it is bound to be. Thus, on the basis of its inspections, Ofsted records greatly improved standards of initial teacher training, especially in relation to government priorities, and talks of 'the best trained generation of teachers ever'; but other studies find that vital aspects of the primary teacher's work have been squeezed out. The streamlining of CPD has effectively focused professional attention on the requirements of the national literacy and numeracy strategies; but it has not always served the needs of teachers with different skill levels and at different stages of their careers. Workforce reform initiatives are generally welcomed, though there are concerns about sustainability. Some studies report primary teachers feeling de-professionalised and de-skilled; others view this as an oversimplification when younger teachers are positive and enthusiastic and many of their more experienced colleagues successfully resist attempts to make them fit a particular professional mould.

***Primary Schools: the professional environment*, by Liz Jones, Andy Pickard and Ian Stronach (Primary Review Research Report 6/2)** reviews research on the nature and changing character of professionalism in English primary schools, concentrating on the role of the primary teacher, and on developments in primary school leadership and management, placing these in the context of policy since 1988. The survey uncovers evidence of tensions between primary teachers' professional aspirations and beliefs and the assumptions and imperatives of policy over the past two decades, with a consequent perceived loss of professional autonomy and creativity; but it also detects considerable variation in teachers' responses to these, and signs of a return to a more open professional culture. Covering a period of rapid and substantial change as it does, the survey suggests that the period from 1988-2008 offers important lessons for both policy-makers and teachers in the handling of reform.

Primary Teachers: initial teacher education, continuing professional development and school leadership development, by Olwen McNamara, Rosemary Webb and Mark Brundrett (Primary Review Research Report 6/3) moves from professional roles and identities to professional learning, training and development. The survey tracks initial teacher education (ITE) reforms since 1984, the point at which government sought to systemise provision and increase central regulation, control and monitoring with the establishment of CATE, TTA and, currently, TDA. It charts a shift in the focus of continuing professional development (CPD) from the needs and aspirations of individual teachers to the addressing of government priorities, noting problems posed by the new arrangements both logistically and in the way they may neglect broader and no less significant aspects of professional learning. Centralisation of ideas and provision is also the theme of research in the third area, school leadership. Overall, however, the report notes evidence of significant and innovative practice in the three areas surveyed, and improvements in professional quality as judged by Ofsted.

Primary Workforce Management and Reform, by Hilary Burgess (Primary Review Research Report 6/4). The last twenty years have seen a profound change in the way primary schools have been managed and organised, alongside a fundamental restructuring of the professional school workforce. These changes have created both controversy and debate among policy makers, teachers and educational researchers. This report provides an overview of the impact of policies upon professional workforce management, reform and support and assesses recent developments in England and Wales and elsewhere in the UK. A brief comparison with the USA provides a global context for understanding key issues that impact upon teachers and other professionals in primary schools.

A selection of extracts from the separate report briefings follows.

From Primary Review Research Briefing 6/4: ‘Overall, the view from headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants on workforce reform in schools is supportive, although there are concerns about sustainability ... Teachers have been positive about the introduction of Planning and Preparation Time (PPA) and the increased deployment of teaching assistants in schools ... Teachers now view teaching assistants as crucial to their effective teaching [and] assistants [are] on the whole broadly satisfied with their role ... Evaluation of the Primary Leadership Programme found [that] pupil attainment at Key Stage 2 was improving, there were improvements in data analysis ... changes in teaching style ... [and] a stronger sense of team work ... Problems have been created through the speed at which the reform of the workforce agenda has been pushed out to schools. There are still issues to resolve such as the impact upon pupil learning, the impact upon school management and the linking with a wide range of external services.’

From Primary Review Research Briefing 6/3: ‘The last 25 years have seen a period of sustained and increasingly radical reforms to ITE as successive governments have progressively increased prescription and control through the regulation of courses, curriculum content and the assessment of standards ... The result has been to improve standards and increase the quality and preparedness of newly qualified teachers, as measured by the Ofsted inspection framework... but leave little time for previously key aspects of curricular and professional learning such as non-core subjects [and] render peripheral many important debates about ITE ... In the “new professionalism” ... participation in CPD is recognised as important, albeit with the predominant purpose of equipping teachers to implement government reforms ... Teachers’ access to CPD is constrained by lack of time, heavy workload, cost and distance from training opportunities [and] overemphasis on meeting system needs to the detriment of the career and development needs of individual teachers ... Leadership development activity has moved through phases of ad hoc provision under the aegis of LEAs ... to the development of national programmes for head teachers ... and the formation of a National College of School Leadership ... This has been a significant achievement but has raised concerns that ... the leadership development framework has too great an emphasis on standards-based approaches ... [and that] the structure is too detailed, prescriptive and detailed and is subject to manipulation by central government.’

From Primary Review Research Briefing 6/2: ‘Commitment, morale and status all feed into perceptions of [professional] autonomy ... Across the research literature there is a preponderance of studies that point to the de-skilling of the primary teacher ... The National Curriculum decreased teacher autonomy in relation to content, the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy likewise in relation to pedagogy. Teachers were reported to be “proletarianised”, de-

professionalised, de-skilled and sometimes demoralised. But this bleak picture had exceptions. Younger teachers were much more likely to be positive about the job; levels of enthusiasm were generally high amongst newly-qualified teachers, although teacher retention rates in urban areas remained a concern. In addition, not all teachers succumbed to government micro-management of their work ... On balance, we find that the claimed de-professionalisation of teachers is an oversimplification ... There needs to be a slower, more deliberative and consultative context of policy development ... The relation of research to policy and practice needs to be linked more systematically and enduringly to deep issues concerning learning and motivation, rather than tied to the evaluation of ephemeral initiatives in a naïve kind of “what works” rationale. Innovation is too often a matter of ill-considered policy borrowing. Research needs to consider not just outcomes within a rubric of effectiveness and efficiency but also the slower and deeper emergence of enduring excellence in classrooms and schools.’

Now that most of the Primary Review’s 30 commissioned surveys of published research have been published, it is pertinent to draw attention to those other reports in the series which attend to the professional and organisational contexts of primary education. For example:

- the relationship between children’s lives outside and inside school (report 8/1);
- the relationship of teachers to parents and carers (report 7/1);
- the relationship of schools to other agencies, especially in relation to *Every Child Matters* (report 8/2) and children with special educational needs (report 5/2);
- the relationship between the work of schools and the frameworks of national legislation, policy and strategy in which that work is set (reports 9/1, 9/2 and 1/1 on statutory requirements for ages, stages, aims and the curriculum); reports 4/1, 4/2 and 4/3 on standards and testing; reports 10/1, 10/2 and 4/3 on governance, funding and inspection; reports 3/2, 4/1 and 4/2 on the impact of recent government educational reforms).

We note also that the professional focus will be sustained with the next group of research reports (2/4, 6/1 and 9/2), which look not so much at teachers as at the act of teaching itself, at what recent research tells us about how it can most effectively be undertaken, and at the physical and organisational contexts of the schools in which it takes place.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The reports on which this briefing is based:

Jones, E., Pickard, A. and Stronach, I. (2008) *Primary Schools: the professional environment* (Primary Review Research Survey 6/2), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-25-4.

McNamara, O., Webb, R. and Brundrett, M. (2008) *Primary Teachers: initial teacher education, continuing professional development and school leadership development* (Primary Review Research Survey 6/3), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-26-1.

Burgess, H. (2008) *Primary Workforce Management and Reform* (Primary Review Research Survey 6/4), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. ISBN 978-1-906478-27-8.

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 to Theme 6 **Settings and Professionals**.

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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.