



Department
for Education

Consultation Response Form

Consultation closing date: 16 April 2013
Your comments must reach us by that date.

Reform of the National Curriculum in England

Consultation Response Form

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Reason for confidentiality:

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Please tick one category that best describes you as a respondent

<input type="checkbox"/> Primary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Special School
<input type="checkbox"/> Organisation representing school teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> Subject Association	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent
<input type="checkbox"/> Young Person	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Further Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Academy	<input type="checkbox"/> Employer/Business Sector	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please Specify:

The Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT) is a not-for-profit company committed to advancing the cause of high quality primary education for all children in accordance with the aims, principles and evidence of the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) and such other evidence, both national and international, as can be shown to be rigorous and equitable. CPR remains the most comprehensive enquiry into English primary education, in terms of both scope and evidence, since the 1960s.

Are you answering this consultation in response to particular subjects? Please tick all those that apply.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> English	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> mathematics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> science
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art & design	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> citizenship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> computing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> design & technology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> geography	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> history
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> languages	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical education
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable		

1 Do you have any comments on the proposed aims for the National Curriculum as a whole as set out in the framework document?

Comments:

Framework Document (FD) 3.1/3.2. The 'aims' here are not aims at all, but vague claims about what the proposed national curriculum will do. They convey little sense of what education is for and will have no impact on teachers' planning and practice. The aims proposed by the Expert Panel (EP) were helpful as far as they went, those proposed by the Cambridge Primary Review (which are generic and cross-phase rather than for KS1/2 only) much more so. They seek carefully to balance the needs of the individual and those of society, they define both individual and societal needs much more broadly than either the EP or DfE, and they reflect common ground across a remarkably wide range of constituencies in UK society. For, unlike those of the Expert Panel the CPR aims were grounded in extensive research and consultation. The latter included regional and national meetings with all relevant stakeholders – parents, teachers, researchers, professional and subject associations, government, opposition, local authorities, faith groups, police, voluntary agencies and a host of others – including children themselves (for CPR, like the Government, has signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and believes that this commitment must never be merely tokenistic). **We therefore commend the proposed CPR aims as an educationally valid and genuinely consultative alternative to what is proposed.**

The 12 CPR aims, which although proposed for primary education are generic and cross-phase, are in three groups:

- Concerning the needs and capacities of the individual: (i) wellbeing; (ii) engagement; (iii) empowerment; (iv) autonomy.
- Concerning the individual in relation to others and the wider world; (v) respect and reciprocity; (vi) interdependence and sustainability; (vii) local, national and global citizenship; (viii) culture and community.
- Concerning the educational process itself: (ix) knowing, understanding, exploring and making sense; (x) fostering skill; (xi) exciting the imagination; (xii) enacting dialogue.

These are the aim headings. To understand their meaning and intent it is essential to study the accompanying descriptors and rationale in the CPR final report: Alexander, R.J. (ed) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Routledge, chapter 12, especially pp 197-9.

Consultation Document (CD) 6.2. It is a pity, in a document that makes so much of the need for precision and accuracy in written English, that the notorious zeugma in the existing legislation ('promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society') has not been removed. People have minds and bodies amenable to mental and physical development. Societies do not.

2 Do you agree that instead of detailed subject-level aims we should free teachers to shape their own curriculum aims based on the content in the programmes of study?

Agree

✓ Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

This question is both leading ('Do you agree that ...?') and loaded (what kind of 'freedom' is possible when the curriculum for the core subjects is so heavily prescribed?) and therefore not really admissible in what purports to be an open consultation.

However, if content is to be prescribed, it should be driven by explicit aims. The principle of entitlement makes little sense if content is prescribed but aims are left to chance. A further problem here is the gross discrepancy between what is prescribed for the three core subjects and most of the others. For the core subjects the question about professional freedom over aims is irrelevant since the extent of prescription allows no aims other than those that the content very clearly expresses.

3 Do you have any comments on the content set out in the draft programmes of study?

Comments:

We comment in turn on the content proposals for each subject. Our comments are mostly fairly brief as we leave matters of detail to the relevant subject associations, whose submissions we urge Government to study.

ENGLISH

General points

We welcome:

- the emphasis on reading for pleasure, reading aloud, and giving children opportunities for discussion about texts;
- the importance given to reading across both fiction and non-fiction;
- the emphasis given to supporting children's development in writing. In particular the process outlined in Y5 and Y6 regarding composition is clear and comprehensive, emphasising audience and purpose.

We are concerned that:

- the developmental emphasis in writing, supported above, does not appear until Y5;
- the English PoS are not challenging enough or expansive enough to raise standards (especially in Y1);

- technical elements are emphasised to the detriment of the development of language in use;
- there is a gross and puzzling primary/secondary imbalance;
- when taken as a whole, the proposals do not amount to an appropriate English curriculum for the 21st century;
- they present an overly formalised view of literacy teaching;
- they do not reflect the evidence that children need to be active agents in their learning;
- they ignore the central importance of the development of spoken language in its own right - an immensely serious failing (see below);
- they appear, in places, more like a scheme of work than a PoS, because the degree of detail in the teaching of reading and the Appendices dictates with excessive precision what is to be taught, thus undermining the professional autonomy that the Secretary of State has promised to protect and enhance.

Reading

The emphasis on reading for pleasure, reading aloud, and giving children opportunities for discussion about texts is to be welcomed. Also to be welcomed is the importance given to reading across both fiction and non-fiction.

We are concerned about the lack of reference to the value of digital texts, media, popular culture, visual literacy, multimodal texts and new technologies. The PoS do not reflect what it means to be a reader in the 21st century.

In the early stages, particularly KS1, reading development is described in very narrow terms; essentially as the skill of using synthetic phonics to read words. Indeed it will be statutory that children in Y1 will not be able read books where any other strategy to read words is needed. Children will be limited by law to decodable texts. This is a nonsense and will lead, as a minimum, to frustrated children and non-fluent reading. Phonics are essential but not sufficient for accurate word reading, let alone the essential job of making sense of texts. The detailed statutory appendix devoted to phonic knowledge is excessively prescriptive.

In addition in the PoS decoding comes before comprehension, rather than alongside it as it should.

Writing

There is much in the PoS which is essential for supporting children's development in writing. In particular the process outlined in Y5 and Y6 regarding composition is clear and comprehensive, emphasising audience and purpose. However, we are concerned that this emphasis does not appear until Y5.

The PoS for younger children is very unbalanced, emphasising transcription skills at the expense of composition. In Y1 the PoS are insufficiently challenging and overly controlled as there are no opportunities for children to compose their own writing, instead focusing on teacher demonstration and sentence construction. This imbalance is unlikely to narrow the gap between standards of reading and writing and will not motivate children who want to write.

In addition there is an overemphasis on synthetic phonics in the development of spelling. There is a lack of reference to visual strategies and word families, for example.

Appendices

There are over 20 pages of appendices which will carry statutory weight. These appendices reinforce the emphasis on technical aspects of English. Spelling and grammar are key aspects of writing but they should not be taught in a decontextualised way. Statutory lists of spellings and grammatical terminology, which will form the basis of high stakes tests, are likely to lead to rote learning out of context, which research has shown has no positive impact on writing standards.

Spoken Language

We are pleased that the Secretary of State has accepted the recommendations of CPRT's Chairman that the current 'speaking and listening' be replaced by 'spoken language' and that the critical importance of spoken language across the curriculum should be asserted.

We are, however, deeply disappointed that far from raising the profile of spoken language above the level in the current national curriculum, these proposals have lowered it, because what is asserted as a general principle is not followed through. What is needed, and what we and many others recommended, is (i) a strong and explicit commitment to spoken language as a fundamental aspect of learning in every subject which is then highlighted and exemplified in every subject PoS, (ii) a much enhanced programme of study for spoken language within English. Instead, references to spoken language are scattered across the English and science proposals (fairly prominently in English and science, much less so in mathematics and not at all in the other subjects), while the exclusion of spoken language as a distinct programme of study within English, coupled with the way its development is mostly proposed as an adjunct of reading and writing, conveys a message which is wholly contrary to that for which we and others have argued and which the predecessor of the current Schools Minister said that he accepted.

The clear message of these proposals is that the development of pupils' capacity to use spoken language effectively, discriminatingly and powerfully as their prime means of communication and a crucial tool for educational and occupational advancement is not important; that talking is at best the servant of reading and writing; and that the massive body of international evidence about the essential contribution of cognitively-demanding talk to learning and educational standards can safely be ignored.

We understand that the reason for ignoring authoritative advice on this matter is that ministers feared that raising the profile of spoken language would encourage what the previous Schools Minister called 'idle chatter in class' and would militate against progress in literacy. Such reactions fundamentally miss the point. Not only is the development of the child's use of spoken language critically important in itself; it is also an essential ingredient in the teaching of reading and writing. In this matter, as in so much else in this review of the national curriculum, Government appears to have privileged ministerial prejudice over international research and professional experience.

Further, like the lukewarm stance on curriculum breadth, the approach to spoken language will militate directly against the pursuit of higher standards to which the Secretary of State says that he is dedicated. It will also aggravate the problems of poor oral communication which employers and university admission tutors repeatedly deplore, and will further disenfranchise those children for whom mastery of spoken language, alongside literacy, is a vital means of countering the social disadvantage they suffer.

We will not repeat the evidence on this matter presented to the Government at earlier stages in the national curriculum review. Instead, we refer Government to two documents already in its possession: Robin Alexander's paper *Improving Oracy and Classroom Talk in English Schools: achievements and challenges*, presented at the DfE seminar on spoken language in the national curriculum on 20 February 2012, and the letter to the Secretary of State of 14 August 2012 from Robin Alexander, Neil Mercer and Jim Rose briefly summarising the evidence and arguments and regretting the Department's failure to act on them to the degree required. Following further representations from the latter group and extensive discussions with the Department's National Curriculum Review team, there is evidence that DfE has sought positively to respond to some of the concerns expressed. However, there remain two fundamental weaknesses in what is proposed: there is still no programme of study for spoken language, which continues to be presented as a mere adjunct to literacy rather than a human and educational imperative of immense significance in its own right; and the attempt to encourage a permeative approach to spoken language across the curriculum, in line with the proposals' headline statements, is applied mainly to English, to a lesser degree to science and hardly or not at all to other subjects.

The proposals for spoken language are fundamentally misconceived. They cannot be allowed to stand as presented.

MATHEMATICS

We welcome:

- clarity about the format of written calculations;
- the general raising of expectations at KS2 in preparation for KS3.

We are concerned that:

- the mathematics curriculum as proposed focuses too exclusively on content acquisition, a tendency which reduces processual understanding (for example in long multiplication and division) to propositional knowledge. If algorithmic procedure is too tightly specified it will reduce the flexibility that teachers need in order to secure children's understanding, especially in cases where children encounter difficulties.
- although we support the raising of expectations in mathematics as across the curriculum as a whole, the transposition of some content from later to earlier years may prove problematic;
- the NC aims for mathematics emphasise the importance of using and applying but this has not then been threaded through the content of the PoS as a whole. This could seriously undermine children's mastery of key concepts and operations as teachers concentrate on getting through the content.

SCIENCE

We welcome:

- the strand of the draft PoS that ensures children will 'work scientifically' including carrying out independent investigations at KS2;
- the fact that unlike other subjects the PoS refer to the importance of spoken language in each key stage to support children's learning, in this case when they are working scientifically.

We are concerned that:

- expectations at KS1 are too low, and certainly by comparison with current requirements, and they include no requirement to make predictions or plan investigations at KS1;
- important knowledge and understanding at KS1, such as electricity and light and dark, have been removed;
- the specification of year-by-year content will create an inflexible approach to planning, teaching and learning

ART AND DESIGN

We value the inclusion of Art and Design in the proposed curriculum and the effort to include critical appreciation alongside designing and making. However the proposals are flawed in the following ways:

- Young children engage in learning through hands-on, practical experience. Naming the range of activity is a helpful start but using 'for example' before the list would acknowledge other kinds of activity that are not included here, such as printing. Other media might include use of light and shadow in KS1, pen and ink in KS2 and, in both key stages, working with digital media.
- Given the importance of hands-on experience, while introducing children to 'the language of art, craft and design' is important the appropriateness of such vocabulary will need to be considered. No guidance on this is given in the proposals.
- The suggestion that children will be able to compare and contrast artists, designers etc implies learning rather than merely being told. The lack of engagement with the social, cultural, economic and political context in which art and design are validated and valued makes it difficult for teachers and children to do this in any meaningful way.
- Aesthetic appreciation is highly complex and while the intention is laudable it is not clear how 'beauty' and 'aesthetically pleasing' are to be defined or evaluated. We raise a similar concern about the proposals for music, below.

- Introducing children in KS1 to the historical development of art forms in a meaningful way requires an understanding of chronology which some may find difficult (though children's capacity for learning and understanding at any age should never be underestimated).
- In KS1 and KS2, the emphasis on 'great artists, craftsmen and designers' implies that the field of art and design is clearly and uncontroversially defined, and it does not allow for appreciation of emergent forms of expression, or creators whose work has not entered the canon, or creations that cannot be attributed to named people (in the case for example of product innovation).
- The proposals for the KS2 curriculum seem oddly less demanding than those for KS1.
- There are very few high quality resources for primary education that cover the areas demanded in these proposals.
- Currently there are very limited opportunities for children to visit museums and places of interest that offer high quality learning experiences in the proposed periods of history.
- As in other subject areas there is a curriculum capacity issue. Many teachers may not have any knowledge of art and design beyond their own GCSE studies and some will not have studied this area beyond the age of 14 themselves. This is particularly problematic in respect of the next point.
- In common with other areas of the curriculum, it is not clear how children's progress might be evaluated.
- As with other subject areas, there is a risk that curriculum coverage will assume more importance than understanding.

In addition, implying that craft workers are men ('craftsmen') is unfortunate; 'craftspeople' is far more widely used as a gender-free term. We would also take issue with the statement that art and design 'embody the highest form of human creativity'. Important though creativity is in art and design, the same argument can be made for science and technology and it would be most unfortunate, at a point in human history which has possibly never before had such an intense need for creative approaches across all aspects of life, to imply that creativity is confined to art and design.

CITIZENSHIP

The introduction of citizenship to the national curriculum, following the report from Sir Bernard Crick, was one of the previous government's most welcome curriculum reforms. We are disappointed that the momentum of this reform has been halted by the current proposals. Citizenship education should start in the primary school but now it is confined to KS3/4, and in any event it is reduced mainly to the transmission of information about UK law and governance which in some respects looks suspiciously like propaganda. In line with the document's overall stance on knowledge, on which we comment elsewhere, the critical consciousness which is essential to a real understanding of national political systems – and to the most elementary concept of citizenship in action – has been excised. In its place, pupils are expected to take on trust notions like 'precious liberties.'

Further, while the 2005 EPPI citizenship review showed that citizenship education translates from information to practical action only when it is enacted by pupils and teachers in school and classroom, it remains in these proposals an entirely theoretical construct. The proposals appear to be more about compliant subjects than active citizens.

COMPUTING

We welcome:

- the increased emphasis on computer science and programming;
- the recognition of links to mathematics, science and design and technology;
- the change to a focus on computer science in line with the advice of learned bodies such as the Royal Society;
- evidence that here, unlike some other subjects, ICT experts were listened to in the development of the draft, leading to coherence in the proposals.

We are concerned that:

- there is justified anxiety in primary schools about the level of expertise and resources required to teach the proposed requirements at KS1 and 2;
- there is insufficient emphasis on creativity, digital literacy, information technology and e-safety;
- well-established practices to enhance ICT teaching and learning across the primary curriculum may be marginalised or lost.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

We welcome:

- The retention of the subject within the national curriculum despite the recommendation of the Expert Panel that it be dropped.

We are concerned that as drafted the PoS does not:

- promote progression in children's learning, build on existing good practice or clarify the distinctive nature of D&T education;
- provide the rigour and challenge needed for the 21st century or encourage curriculum innovation;
- provide an overarching framework for the subject or specify a coherent body of knowledge;
- relate D&T to the world beyond the home or acknowledge the cultural significance of D&T.

GEOGRAPHY

The proposals for geography are broadly welcomed. However:

- There are limited opportunities for the development of understanding of global issues.
- Opportunities for geographical knowledge to be incorporated into the study of history are limited.

HISTORY

The proposed history curriculum is deeply flawed:

- The subject content of the KS1 curriculum is unachievable beyond parroting of terminology.
- The requirement for 'simple vocabulary relating to the passing of time' misses the point entirely. The vocabulary is simple but the concepts are not.
- Rapid overview is favoured over depth of study.
- Chronological order is constraining and reduces opportunities for cross curricular links.
- The perpetuation of a strictly chronological approach tied to pupil ages reinforces the current condition of over-simplifying the more distant past and exaggerating notions of human progress to which adults, and British culture generally, are commonly subject.
- The treatment of history across the curriculum as a whole lacks coherence: historical knowledge is required in art, science, design and technology and music, but much of it relates to periods beyond the KS2 cut-off point and indeed beyond Britain.
- Young children learn most effectively when they have access to first hand experience and artefacts. The chosen periods of history that KS2 children are asked to study make this approach much more difficult.
- Understanding of concepts such as 'democracy' are best built over time – an improvement would be for these concepts to be taught throughout KS2 and KS3 in the context of each historical period.
- There are very few high quality resources for primary education that cover the areas demanded by the PoS.
- Currently there are very limited opportunities for children to visit museums and places of interest that offer high quality learning experiences in the proposed periods of history.
- There is a curriculum capacity issue. Many teachers may not have any knowledge of history beyond their own GCSE studies.
- There is a risk that curriculum coverage will assume more importance than understanding.
- By and large, the proposals represent a continuation of that traditional top-down, 'kings and queens' history that airbrushes the lives of the vast majority of people.

LANGUAGES

- It is right that the learning of other languages should be compulsory in primary schools.
- The proposed PoS provides a suitable balance of aspiration and practical, flexible approaches to language learning at KS2.
- There is a notable omission of reference to intercultural understanding as a key element of KS2 language learning. This is a real shame as many schools have enjoyed and benefited from learning about the culture of countries where a language is spoken.
- The range of languages which the government proposes is limiting. While many primary schools nationally have been teaching French and/or Spanish we share concern about the lack of linguistic diversity in relation both to schools' community circumstances and global economic and social trends. See also our comment at (9) below.
- We are concerned that the government does not intend to support the development of primary languages by providing additional funding and CPD. There are real fears that this will mean either poor teaching by primary generalists or the use of peripatetic teachers who by virtue of being mere visitors are unable to embed language learning in the wider school curriculum.
- Transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 remains an area of concern. At this stage, provision at KS2 is patchy in terms of languages taught, coverage, curriculum time and subject knowledge of teachers. This presents complex challenges for secondary colleagues. Meaningful dialogue and joint planning from KS2-4 require time and careful attention. There is currently little support, capacity or incentive for this to happen.

MUSIC

- We welcome the continued inclusion of music in the national curriculum and the flexibility offered by the proposals to those teachers who seek to integrate music's key elements of composing, performing and listening.
- We are concerned that in the stated aims for music its expressive significance is ignored in favour of what in the wrong hands could be an aridly analytical approach. In any case, in relation to music, as to any art form, terms like 'review and evaluate' beg many questions, as do the references to 'great musicians and composers.'
- The absence of reference to imagination and creativity in either KS1 or KS2, whether in terms of composing or performing, is regrettable. CPR's evidence from children themselves indicates clearly how highly many of them value the arts. Music has considerable potential for fostering the creative impulse and creative processes and for expressing the imagination.
- It would be useful if the proposals could include an equivalent aim to that proposed for Art and Design: 'produce creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences.' Such activities are no less important in music. As worded, these proposals convey a distinctly passive/transmissive view of music learning and teaching.
- The proposals are acutely lacking in ambition and substance at KS1, though KS2 offers a slightly more promising basis for school planning and teaching. Overall, however, in a curriculum framework which claims to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve, the proposals display a pretty impoverished view of what music is about and what good music teaching can achieve.
- We suspect that these low expectations, especially at KS1, reflect ignorance both of the nature of effective music teaching and of the musical powers and responses of which young children are capable, and we would commend in contrast the inspirational work of those many schools and musical organisations that daily and spectacularly demonstrate, often in partnership with each other, just how much, given good teaching, young children can achieve.
- Following the previous comment, music is as much a collective and collaborative activity as a solo one, and the proposals need to reflect this.
- Music is a subject where challenges to schools' curriculum capacity are particularly acute. It is all too easy for schools merely to 'get by', offering children musical experiences which neither engage nor challenge to a significant degree, and for school leaders to be unaware that this is

so because they themselves lack the requisite knowledge of music and music education. See our response to (11) below.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

We welcome the continued inclusion of PE in the national curriculum. However, the PoS are so brief that they are meaningless. Entitlement to high quality PE, dance and sports provision should be an entitlement for all children and even though all three are mentioned the proposals do little to ensure this. In dance, the proposed graduation from 'simple movement patterns' (KS1) through 'A range of movement patterns' (KS2) to 'advanced movement patterns' (KS3) is so basic and self-evident as to be pointless.

The proposals also illustrate the 'same only more so' problem of progression referred to at (6) below. Thus, for example:

KS3: 'Develop their technique and improve their performance in other competitive sports such as athletics and gymnastics ... Compare their performances with previous ones to achieve their personal best.'

KS4: 'Develop their technique and improve their performance in other competitive sports such as athletics and gymnastics ... Compare their performances with previous ones to achieve their personal best'.

4 Does the content set out in the draft programmes of study represent a sufficiently ambitious level of challenge for pupils at each key stage?

Sufficiently ambitious

Not sufficiently ambitious

Not sure

Comments:

We deal with this matter under the subject-specific headings at (3) above. However, as a general observation we would note that while – with the glaring exception of spoken language – the proposals for the three core subjects are reasonably ambitious if not always appropriately conceived, those for the non-core subjects are in contrast notably lacking in ambition and intellectual challenge, especially at KS1. This, we believe, reflects the Government's thinly-disguised assumption that only English, mathematics and science matter in today's world, and a wider lay belief that the arts offer little by way of economic relevance or intellectual challenge. Both assumptions are profoundly wrong. That agents of national curriculum reform should so unthinkingly subscribe to them is deeply worrying.

5 Do you have any comments on the proposed wording of the attainment targets?

Comments:

We support the removal of levels and level descriptors. However, it is regrettable that the proposals for new progress measures were not published alongside the draft curriculum. In our consultations with school leaders and teachers many colleagues have expressed their concern that reviewing the proposed programmes of study is very difficult without knowledge of how children's progress and attainment are to be assessed.

6 Do you agree that the draft programmes of study provide for effective progression between the key stages?

Agree

✓ Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

It depends which subjects are in question. Progression is certainly attempted in the core subjects but for the rest the limited amount of detail and the absence of exemplification ensure that schools will have to achieve progression unaided. In any case, progression is too often represented in the proposals as 'the same only more so'. In the core subjects, many schools, mindful of the pressures of accountability, will concentrate on content coverage within each school year and will hope that progression will follow. It may not.

Effective progression between KS1 and KS2 will only be achieved where schools have the confidence and capacity to examine each subject in turn, take the specified content demands of each programme of study and tailor the balance of national and school curriculum provision to the needs of each class of children. The Government may say that this represents the exercise of professional freedom, but given how much has been made during the NC review process of the importance of progression, a centrally prescribed national curriculum should not leave this vital matter to chance. The issue is all the more pressing given what we say at (11) and (12) below about curriculum capacity.

7 Do you agree that we should change the subject information and communication technology to computing, to reflect the content of the new programmes of study?

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

We support the proposed change of ICT to Computing. However, we feel that consideration should be given to whether a title such as 'ICT and Computing' would more accurately reflect the practice primary schools should be aiming for in KS1 and KS2. We believe that the increased emphasis on computer science in the draft PoS has the potential to impact positively on the teaching and learning of programming, enabling children to participate more actively in the digital world. We are pleased that this change has been proposed following the advice of subject experts and learned bodies such as the Royal Society. However, it seems that the final version did not sufficiently take on board the views of education professionals. We welcome the recognition that links should be made to mathematics, science and design and technology.

Having signalled our support in broad terms, we are concerned that the proposals for computing mark a radical departure from existing planning, practice and resourcing in KS1/2. The task for primary schools of building the curriculum capacity, expertise and confidence required to teach computing to a high standard should not be underestimated. We recommend that DfE commission and fund high quality, extensive CPD and non-statutory guidance in order to ensure successful implementation of the new requirements. We are also concerned that schools may lose aspects of current practice which are effective, such as the application of digital technologies that enhance learning across the primary curriculum. Schools should be encouraged to retain and build on this practice.

8 Does the new National Curriculum embody an expectation of higher standards for all children?

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

In English, particularly in the PoS for Y1, the programmes of study are not challenging or expansive enough to raise standards. The over-emphasis on technical aspects, such as phonics and grammar, will undermine the ability of children to apply these to reading comprehension or written composition.

Marilyn Adams (1990) emphasises that 'the degree to which children internalize and use their phonics instruction depends on the degree to which they have found it useful for recognizing the words in their earliest texts.' Thus 'immersion right from the start, in meaningful texts' is crucially important. The PoS as currently constituted insist on phonically decodable texts for practice 'that do not require use of other strategies to work out words'. This implies texts with no pictures or phonically irregular words, thus denying immersion in meaningful texts and undermining progress.

There is no evidence that learning grammatical terms and labelling words and phrases in sentences helps children to write better texts. Thus the attention which will now be given to this labelling both by the statutory grammar appendix (as well as in the new grammar test) may undermine both the effective teaching of grammar in context and, because of time wasted on standards unproductive teaching.

Similar arguments apply to other aspects of the proposals. The research evidence clearly shows that

well-structured and cognitively-challenging talk raises standards both in literacy and across the curriculum as a whole, yet spoken language has been downgraded to a low-profile servicing role. No less fundamentally, there is consistent and long-standing inspection evidence of an association between the range and quality of the wider curriculum and standards in literacy and numeracy. We are pleased that CPR's arguments on this matter were heeded to the extent that the very narrow focus of the initial national curriculum discussions and drafts was rejected. However, the persistence of the two-tier curriculum as examined in detail in the final CPR report will ensure that the new national curriculum fails to realise the full potential of a properly-conceived curriculum to secure transfer in learning, understanding and standards of attainment across curriculum domains.

The Government's refusal to countenance more than the narrowest conception of 'standards' is not only regrettable in itself; it also militates very goal of raising standards by which its conception is justified. It is a source of deep frustration to us that when set against the wealth of evidence on the conditions for securing quality and standards in learning - much of which the Government has at its disposal in the publications of the Cambridge Primary Review - the Government continues to subvert its own goals in this way and shoot itself in the standards foot.

9 What impact - either positive or negative - will our proposals have on the 'protected characteristic' groups?

Comments:

There are likely to be negative effects upon pupils for whom English is not their first language due to the emphasis on technical aspects of English at the expense of meaning-making.

The exclusion of prominent community languages such as Polish, Sylheti, Bengali/Bangla, Gujarati and Urdu from the foreign languages strand seems, on the face of it, discriminatory.

10 To what extent will the new National Curriculum make clear to parents what their children should be learning at each stage of their education?

Comments:

We support the proposal that parents should be able to understand what schools tell them about their children's progress. However, there are four shortcomings in the proposals as currently presented.

- The proposals focus on the reporting of what children know rather than what they can do and how they engage with learning and life. These are not mutually exclusive: all are important. Further, CPR's extensive evidence from parents across the country, and studies undertaken at Exeter and the Open University, show that parents see primary schools as places where their children develop social awareness and personal skills and dispositions alongside their 'school' knowledge, and they wish to know about their children's progress in these broader aspects of education and development as well as in literacy and numeracy.
- While we welcome the intention signalled in the proposals to involve parents more closely in their children's education, this process must act on what is already known about the problems and conditions of effective parental engagement. CPR's published evidence highlighted the risks involved for many children who live in families where parents struggle to engage with schools for a range of reasons. CPR also reported that many parents, including some from cultural and linguistic minorities and vulnerable groups, feel that schools do not engage sufficiently with them on a genuinely reciprocal basis. Further, CPR has found that the education system generally has a tendency to undervalue the significance of children's learning and lives outside school.
- Primary schools need to engage with parents through a wide range of home-school relations in ways that are seen by parents as relevant and where parents' values and children's lives out of school are respected and built upon. Informing parents about what knowledge their children have accumulated is an educationally inadequate and socially one-sided response to this challenge, and it perpetuates a view of parents as more clients of the school rather than partners in their children's upbringing and education whose understanding of their children's needs and capabilities may often exceed that of the schools themselves.
- This is all the more important when we note that disparities in parental involvement in children's learning may widen the gap between children whose parents are engaged and those who are not - a gap which may be exacerbated for looked-after children.

11 What key factors will affect schools' ability to implement the new National Curriculum successfully from September 2014?

Comments:

The key issue is curriculum capacity, defined not in the narrow sense of expertise in specific subjects, though this is undeniably important, but - as in the CPR final report, the CPR-prompted DfE curriculum capacity enquiry of 2010-11 and Robin Alexander's recent work for the National College - rather more comprehensively. We believe that schools need to possess and develop two kinds of curriculum capacity:

- relating to the aims, scope, structure, balance and content of *the curriculum as a whole*;
- relating to the content, sequencing, teaching and assessment of *specific subjects*.

Further, such capacity is required at three levels:

- *school level*: the capacity of school leaders to stimulate, inform and shape whole-school curriculum discussion, debate and planning;
- *intermediate level*: the capacity of subject leaders to plan, guide, monitor, support and where necessary teach their particular curriculum subjects or domains across the school;
- *classroom level*: the capacity of individual teachers to plan, teach and assess those specific aspects of the curriculum for which they are responsible - all of them in a generalist model, one or two of them in a specialist model, or a combination in the more flexible model of primary school staffing towards which some schools are tending and which CPR advocates.

It is evident that the Government tends to conceive of curriculum capacity mainly or only in the second sense above (relating to specific subjects) and in relation to class teachers more than subject and school leaders. Yet a curriculum is always more than the sum of its parts, and if primary schools are to translate the national curriculum proposals into a coherent curriculum in which vital relationships between subjects are fully exploited and children are taught to the highest standard in every subject (not just the core), then whole curriculum capacity and leadership will be vitally important.

We therefore refer the Government once again to the following sources:

1. Alexander, R.J. (ed) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Routledge, pp 429-434.
2. DfE (2011) *Primary Workforce Curriculum Capacity Project*, DfE.
3. Alexander, R.J. (2012) 'Strengthening curriculum capacity in primary schools: definitions, levels, roles and options', paper presented at DfE, 24 January.
4. Alexander, R.J. (2013) *Curriculum Freedom, Capacity and Leadership in the Primary School*, National College.

DfE officials and ministers have copies of these.

12 Who is best placed to support schools and/or develop resources that schools will need to teach the new National Curriculum?

Comments:

Evidence from inspection and research, much of it collated in the final CPR report, indicates that, overall, primary schools have insufficient curriculum capacity and expertise to teach all aspects of the *current* National Curriculum to a high standard. This situation will be exacerbated when the new Programmes of Study come into force. Building primary headteachers' and teachers' curriculum capacity, both in relation to the primary curriculum as a whole and within specific subjects as we argue under (11) above, should be the main goal of non-statutory guidance and CPD developed to support implementation of the new national curriculum.

As that curriculum's progenitor, DfE has a moral if not statutory responsibility to oversee, promote and, where necessary, commission the development of appropriate resources and support. It is neither sufficient nor responsible merely to prescribe what schools should do. However, the expertise required to develop high quality materials and deliver appropriate training lies beyond Government and its agencies. We anticipate that the following organisations are best placed to build the specialist and whole curriculum capacity required by primary schools: Cambridge Primary Review Trust, phase and subject associations, universities, teaching schools (subject to their individual specialist strengths), those local authorities that have retained viable advisory services, and some commercial companies and charitable organisations. However, with the Government-enforced decline in local authority advisory services and its closure of QCDA, the infrastructure available to support schools with curriculum implementation is now extremely limited.

Further, the gap is being plugged, in part, by commercial materials, websites and CPD of poor quality and doubtful provenance, and many schools are buying such materials on the basis of price, packaging or image rather than substance. In the primary sector, some schools are succumbing to the lure of curriculum packages labelled 'creative' or 'skills-based' in order to mitigate the emphasis on subjects in the Government's framework, but some of these are very poorly conceived. Government wishes to encourage the market to step in, and it will, but where young children's education is at stake it cannot permit the market to operate unmonitored and unfettered. Such a stance would be highly irresponsible. Quality assurance procedures are essential and DfE should make every effort to identify and work with those who can show that they are able to provide advice and support that are principled, firmly grounded in respected evidence and capable of helping schools both to implement what is required and to place such requirements in the context of a coherent, aims-driven school curriculum.

13 Do you agree that we should amend the legislation to disapply the National Curriculum programmes of study, attainment targets and statutory assessment arrangements, as set out in section 12 of the consultation document?

Agree

✓ Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

We most strongly urge the Secretary of State *not* to disapply any programmes of study. This has been tried before, and for similar reasons, but with disastrous results. In 1998, the Labour government disapplied the PoS of the non-core subjects at KS1 and KS2 in order to encourage schools to concentrate on its newly-introduced national literacy and numeracy strategies and the raising of tested standards, while requiring - exactly as proposed here - that the subjects themselves should be taught in some form. The result, as Ofsted evidence showed, was that in many primary schools treatment of the disapplied subjects became cursory, shallow and tokenistic, and the curriculum as a whole contracted to little more than what was tested. Not only did disapplication deny children their statutory right to a broad and balanced curriculum; it also had the opposite effect to that intended, for Ofsted also showed that the schools that were most successful in the KS2 tests were those that maintained a broad, rich and well-managed curriculum. (This episode is recounted in the CPR final report).

14 Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this consultation?

Comments:

The Consultation Framework Document (FD) provides no rationale for its proposed changes. This appears instead in the Consultation Document (CD), whose status is transitory. We believe that the final version of the framework should be preceded by a rationale and to support the development of this we comment on relevant numbered paragraphs of the Consultation Document.

CD 1.3-1.7. It is extremely disappointing that there is so little sign that the comment, advice and evidence submitted by CPR to DfE during earlier stages of the Review and referred to here – both on the Expert Panel report and during the 2012 pre-consultation – have been heeded. The statements at CD1 perpetuate many of the errors of their predecessors. For example, in DfE’s response to international comparisons, an undeniably essential aspect of national curriculum reform, we argued previously that (a) the documented limitations of PISA and TIMSS have been ignored, (b) the Department’s commissioned comparisons of other countries’ national curricula focus only on what is prescribed on paper and thus cannot conceivably provide the full explanation for differential national success in PISA and TIMSS that the exercise requires, and (c) that a much larger range of international evidence, including studies with much greater explanatory power than mere test results, has been entirely excluded from the Department’s analysis. Given the need to pay proper attention to the lessons of international comparison, not to mention the constant claims about ‘evidence-based’ policy and practice, this selectivity is inexcusable.

CD 1.8. We dispute the claim that three subjects can be the sole ‘building blocks’ of a proper education.

Arguably – and indeed the Cambridge Primary Review does argue this – a rounded education that ‘prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life’ must attend with no less conviction and seriousness to other subjects, especially at KS1/2 because primary education lays the foundations for later learning and student choice. Arguably, too, the one subject or domain that can claim absolute foundational primacy is English, in all its aspects, for while English can be taught without mathematics and science, the reverse is not possible. It is therefore all the more regrettable that the approach to English taken in the proposals lacks the comprehensiveness that its foundational status requires, especially in respect of spoken language (see our comments on English at (3) above).

CD 1.9. We do not see the implied connection between the Government’s advocacy of academies and Free Schools and national curriculum standards in maintained schools, especially as the former are not obliged to teach the national curriculum. The inclusion of this statement is baffling.

The primacy of knowledge. Here and in other statements about the proposals, we applaud the central place given to knowledge. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review, which argued against such untenable or woolly notions as the ‘skills-based’ or ‘creative’ curriculum (CPR final report, pp 245-251) and was commended by many for its fierce defence of knowledge properly conceived. However, in the Government’s proposals knowledge tends to be reduced to propositions, and in some subjects - history is a telling example – the possibility that ‘facts’ are by their nature open to challenge on evidential, ethical or other grounds is not even entertained.

In respect of the Secretary of State’s proper commendation of ‘rigour’, and to return to his (unacknowledged) reference to Matthew Arnold in the proposed national curriculum aims, Arnold certainly had something much more critically and imaginatively rigorous in mind than the transmission of unquestioned information when he defined culture as ‘the best that has been thought and said.’

CD 1.14. We are pleased to see that the Secretary of State has not followed his original intention to reduce the national curriculum to just three or four subjects and ignore the rest. However, the proof of the claimed commitment to ‘breadth and balance’ lies in (a) the way requirements for the subjects that constitute breadth are specified, and (b) how schools enact those requirements. The Cambridge Primary Review, along with Ofsted and other studies, has consistently warned against the perpetuation of the two-tier curriculum inherited from Victorian elementary schools. The gross discrepancy in the degree of content specified in the proposals as between the core and other subjects, coupled with the Secretary of State’s proposals for disapplication, the narrow focus of Ofsted inspection and the requirements for initial teacher education, all entrench this historic divide more deeply than ever, and with it the ignorance, to which the Government’s proposals bear witness, of the true individual, cultural and economic worth of the arts and humanities.

In echoing Arnold and arguing for the centrality of knowledge, the Secretary of State had an opportunity to break the mould. He has not taken it and as a result the lives of our children and the condition of our society will be the poorer. Further, because - as the Cambridge Primary Review, HMI, Ofsted, and international studies have also shown – there is an association between curriculum breadth aligned with quality on the one hand and standards on the other, the approach taken here towards the non-core subjects is likely to militate against those gains in KS2 test scores that the required heavy concentration on the core subjects is intended to achieve. Indeed, the allusion to Arnold in support of the Secretary of State’s stance is doubly and deeply unfortunate, because as a schools inspector as well as a poet and essayist, Arnold’s ‘best that has been thought and said’ was in part a reaction against precisely the narrow educational instrumentality that the Secretary of State now proposes.

CD 1.16. We strongly support the attempt to give schools greater flexibility, which is in line with the commitment to greater professional freedom in the 2010 Coalition Agreement. However, we fear that such flexibility and freedom will be illusory – not so much because of what is prescribed as on account of the way it will be enforced by Ofsted and the government’s accountability measures. We urge the Secretary of State to give thought to how its procedures for inspecting, assessment, testing and accountability can encourage and reward curriculum breadth and professional flexibility rather than

militate against them.

CD 2.2 and 4.3. Reference to KS 3 and 4 prompts us to ask why the imbalance in the level of detail and prescription as between primary and secondary schools is so striking. In relation to our earlier concerns about freedom and flexibility, this discrepancy strongly conveys the message that primary teachers cannot be trusted and curriculum freedom and flexibility are for their secondary colleagues only. CD 4.3 explains that greater detail for KS4 will be provided once the proposed GCSE reforms are further advanced, and this makes sense. However, it does not justify the discrepancy between KS1/2 and KS3.

CD 1.6. The statement 'research has shown that there are clear deficiencies in the current National Curriculum in England' is justified by reference to just one source: the 2010 paper by the chair of the NC Review Expert Panel – a paper which as published happens to include an introduction and ringing endorsement by the Secretary of State. Quite apart from the many flaws in the paper in question, this excessively restricted and politically partisan approach to research is symptomatic of the treatment of evidence throughout the entire exercise and it makes a mockery of Government claims about 'evidence-informed' policy and practice. Elsewhere we have criticised the Government's failure to take proper account of evidence on matters such as spoken language and primary schools' curriculum capacity, but the statement at 1.6 is even more unfortunate, for it shows that the Government is happy to take on trust the pathology tendered by a single witness, who for much of the period of the Review was on the DfE payroll, in order to justify its replacement of the current National Curriculum by its preferred model.

There are undoubtedly problems with the current national curriculum. It also has many positive features and these should not be so cavalierly jettisoned. For a more balanced assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of existing arrangements, grounded in a much wider array of evidence than that cited in the proposals, we refer the Government to the following material from the Cambridge Primary Review:

Alexander, R.J. (ed) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: final report of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Routledge, chapters 13 and 14, pp 203-278.

Alexander, R.J., Doddington, C., Gray, J.M., Hargreaves, L. and Kershner, R. (ed) (2010) *The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys*, Routledge, chapters 14, 15, 16 and 29, pp 341-430 and 792-817.

If the Government's diagnosis is wrong – and CPR's extensive published evidence shows that in many respects it is – then the cure will be wrong too and the problems may be even more deeply entrenched. In analysing the condition of the current National Curriculum the Government should have consulted and read much more widely.

Conclusion

Overall, we find the proposals in many respects educationally unsound and evidentially questionable. They are based on a flawed critique of existing arrangements and an overly selective response to international data. Their lack of serious educational rationale is confirmed by the decision to add an essentially cosmetic statement of aims after the priorities and content have been determined. They perpetuate some of the most damaging aspects of current and past arrangements, notably a curriculum which is divided not only in time but also as to quality and seriousness of purpose, especially where the arts and humanities are concerned. The proposals rightly prioritise knowledge but wrongly reduce it to unchallengeable proposition. They disregard both research evidence and expert opinion on matters such as spoken language and the teaching of reading, history and citizenship. They belittle or ignore aspects of cultural life and human development - such as drama, dance and the exploration of faith and belief - which ought to feature in any national curriculum. While claiming modernity they fail adequately to reflect the profound social and educational implications of the digital revolution.

Since the announcement of the current National Curriculum Review in 2010, CPR/CPRT has taken a careful and considered approach to the succession of statements, reports and proposals that have emerged, presenting focused and properly argued critique, avoiding strident adversarialism and seeking

every opportunity to engage directly and constructively with ministers and officials. Yet we cannot disguise our sense of the immense gulf that exists between what, in terms of the quality of consultation, evidence and vision, the Government has effected and what the Cambridge Primary Review aspired to and achieved. Nor can we stand aloof from the concerns expressed by other organisations, with the general thrust of many of which – if not always their tone – we find ourselves in broad agreement.

Finally, we take the liberty of offering seven criteria against which to test the Government's proposals as both conception and practice. They were advanced by the Cambridge Primary Review and will be upheld by the Cambridge Primary Review Trust:

All children are entitled to a curriculum which

- *enacts a coherent and properly argued set of educational aims;*
- *secures high standards in literacy and numeracy yet is also broad, balanced and rich;*
- *engages children's attention, excites and empowers their thinking, and advances their knowledge, understanding and skill;*
- *attends to children's present as well as their future needs, providing a proper foundation for later learning and choice;*
- *addresses the condition of society and the wider world;*
- *ensures progression from early years through primary to secondary without losing its developmental distinctiveness at any of these stages;*
- *is taught to the highest possible standard in all its aspects, not just in 'the basics'.*

To which we added, lest it be thought that this list is unrealistic or utopian:

Surely this is the least that one of the world's richest nations can do for its children.

These criteria relate to the national curriculum as enacted rather than prescribed, for a curriculum has little force or meaning until it comes alive in the classroom, and the Government, like its Expert Group, has made the elementary error of presuming that a paper curriculum will of itself raise standards. That indeed is the fundamentally mistaken premise of the attempt to emulate what is done in those other rich nations that, for the moment, score high in the PISA tests. However, what is prescribed can constrain as well as enable, and we believe that notwithstanding the positive features for which we give due credit in this response, the Government's national curriculum proposals are unlikely to deliver on several of the criteria above, or significantly to raise educational standards.

15 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand, complete etc.)

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

E-mail address for acknowledgement: rja40@cam.ac.uk

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes

No

All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

Responses should be completed on-line or emailed to the relevant consultation email box. However, if you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Carole Edge, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 16 April 2013

Send by post to:

Consultation Unit,
Area 1c,
Castle View House,
East Lane,
Runcorn,
Cheshire,
WA7 2GJ.

Send by e-mail to: NationalCurriculum.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk