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WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM?

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Rose proposals popular with teachers but in limbo

Comment

At the end of the last Parliament in the final horse-trading over what legislation would be rushed through to completion and what clauses would be dropped from Bills to fast track Bills onto the statute book one of the biggest casualties was the new Primary curriculum .

Most Primary teachers had clearly warmed to the idea as they see it of a more flexible, joined up and less prescriptive curriculum as suggested in the so called Rose Review . Indeed many had already invested time and energy to curriculum planning and development to incorporate the changes, given that officials were indicating until the eleventh hour that the proposals were signed and sealed. Apart from the wastage involved in production, distribution and digestion of a primary curriculum that is now not to be implemented, many Heads are bemused as to how the Government managed to run out of Parliamentary time with such a key piece of legislation. The Conservatives and Lib Dems blocked the measures.

The Tories believe that the Rose approach lacked rigour and did not afford sufficient weight to key academic subjects and, crucially, a sound knowledge base. The Tory position itself has been misrepresented by some in the media.

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With 'Knowledge' grossly parodied as not much more than trading obsolete facts.

So 'what now?' for the primary curriculum.

There were two recent fine reviews of Primary education and the curriculum. The broader, independent review, led by Professor Alexander known as the Cambridge Primary Review was almost instantly dismissed by a Minister in the last Government as out of date, to the Governments shame . The remark was patently untrue and such lengthy definitive research from some of the top academic experts on Primary education was clearly deserving of a more considered response. It certainly wasn't a knee-jerk reaction to the Rose Report. It was part of a three-year enquiry into primary education as a whole, the most comprehensive for 40 years. It drew on its own considerable evidence, provided its own analysis, proposed its own solutions, and above all keeps in view that basic question: what is primary education for? It talked of eight curriculum domains : arts and creativity; citizenship and ethics; faith and belief; language, oracy and literacy; mathematics; physical and emotional health; place and time; science and technology.

The other Review, under Sir Jim Rose, had been commissioned by the Government ,with a narrower remit. Rose said that the problem is 'quarts-into-pint-pots': finding ways to cram 14 subjects into a finite week or year. Sir Jim proposed six areas of Learning- Understanding English, communication and languages; Mathematical understanding; Scientific and technological

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understanding; Historical, geographical and social understanding;
Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing; Understanding
the arts

And you would have thought from the simplistic media coverage that the two reports were entirely different in their conclusions and recommendations.

In truth there were considerable overlaps. Both called for more holistic curriculum, incorporating more flexible approaches to teaching and learning that facilitated pupil and practitioner creativity and cross-disciplinary connections. While the two reports differed slightly in their recommendations concerning curriculum subject areas, they effectively shared a pared-down model, with Rose reducing the current thirteen subjects to six areas of learning, and a devolution of responsibility to schools for shaping delivery. This reduction of course worried the Tories as they interpreted it as eroding academic rigour and pupil's knowledge base. The Tories want to sort the curriculum out on their terms and don't want to be painted into a corner by a Review that took place under another Government.

Within the teaching profession and among educationalists there is a feeling that the Tories have actually misunderstood what the Rose Review is actually saying, preferring to see it through the prism of media reports and scary headlines . Indeed within the teaching community in the maintained sector (this doesn't seem to apply though to the independent sector) there is

considerable consensus and momentum towards the embrace of a more flexible and devolved curriculum, in policy but more importantly ‘on the ground’ in schools and even local communities.

Schools seem to want to take more responsibility on themselves and for making a new Primary curriculum more relevant, engaging, flexible and innovative and there was a degree of excitement surrounding the proposed reforms.

Tory policy, of course, is to help raise the status of the teaching profession, to give teachers back their professional voice in the classroom, to stop central interference in the running of schools, to give schools more freedom over the curriculum they deliver, and what happens in the classroom and to deliver real schools autonomy. But the paradox is that they also want to prescribe the content and structure of the Primary curriculum and ignore most of the advice afforded by two expert reviews. We know that Primary curriculum reform is needed- but are we really going to see the launch of another review? It seems so-certainly the coalition government wants fundamental changes at primary and secondary level, and both Michael Gove and Nick Gibb are intent on prescribing a core, more traditional curriculum to be enabled by an (Second) Education Bill in the autumn but with schools being given flexibility outside this core

The Lib Dem manifesto talked of getting rid of the “overprescriptive” National Curriculum and replacing it with a 20-page minimum curriculum guarantee

but said nothing about the Rose recommendations. They are also in favour of less centrally driven initiatives and school autonomy. If pushed the Tories lean towards the Cambridge Review but fall short of giving its recommendations their unqualified endorsement.

There will be efforts made by the education establishment to persuade the Coalition to re-think approaches to Primary curriculum reform, for sure and not to entirely drop its approach.

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4 RESPONSES TO “WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM?”

[LHorton](#) | [May 26, 2010 at 14:56](#) | [Reply](#)



I can only comment in a personal capacity as I no longer work for QCDA, but at the QCDA stand at the Education Show 2010, which I managed, the overwhelming response from teachers was positive

towards the primary curriculum review. Teachers were not necessarily positive about every other area of the then Government's education initiatives, and this is not a scientific method of sampling. But if the new Government does wish 'to put teachers and head teachers in the driving seat' this does create an interesting potential quandry they will need to resolve.

montrose42 | [May 26, 2010 at 15:42](#) | [Reply](#)



Its a crowded space-curriculum reform with far too much tinkering leaving teachers pupils and parents bemused

Interesting to see how Lib Dems and Tories really differ on curriculum issues. Tories certainly preach school autonomy and need to respect the professionals but then say this type of phonics must be applied in schools schools should set by ability etc

You cant have it both ways. As you point out a bit of a quandry

[Freida Kincaid](#) | [May 27, 2010 at 10:58](#) | [Reply](#)



If only I had a quarter for each time I came here... Great read!

[Pete McGuigan](#) | [June 9, 2010 at 08:43](#) | [Reply](#)





Well – what a mess. Pulling the plug at this stage is rather bizarre and hugely wasteful, particularly as the messages coming out are so contradictory and muddled.

So back to the old NC for the time being – which is visionary in its aims (go back to the first 12 pages of the NC handbook) – so not a bad result for the time being. The Rose review and consequent curriculum was a bit of a shuffle of the NC deckchairs – and was reflecting what good teachers and schools have worked out for themselves – that a coherent and exciting curriculum offer that makes links for children in their learning is the way to go. And this is not opposed to high standards – far from it – it is the huge achievement of many many schools to snatch real meaning for children from the jaws of endless tinkering and policy blundering that has characterised much of the last few years of Government. The new fashionistas, Gove & Gibb, are clearly set to outdo the previous stylists in their meaningless Jedward quiff of a curriculum. Of course it will eventually be made to work at school level by curriculum designs and plans that will smell suspiciously like Rose's...

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