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Our primaries are heaven

Helen Ward

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They provide a safe and secure haven for children in a troubled world, says academic

PRIMARY SCHOOLS are increasingly valued as havens in a world where children's lives are dominated by the break-down of family life in a materialist, celebrity-obsessed society, an in-depth survey has found.

The Primary Review is the most comprehensive inquiry into primary education for 40 years. In its interim report Community Soundings published today, it says: "Today's children are growing up too soon and the prospects for the society and the world they will inherit look increasingly perilous."

The report's director, Professor Robin Alexander, of Cambridge University, and his team interviewed parents, teachers, children and community representatives on primary education, childhood and the wider world.

He says: "There was a remarkable consensus. On the big issues to do with the curriculum, testing, the state of society and the wider world, there was deep anxiety. There was also the sense that primary schools are doing a good job but what is beyond them, the future for children, is disturbing."

There was widespread concern that children were being over-tested and that the school curriculum is too narrow and rigid. However, the report says: "Primary schools themselves provide unfailing positive and dynamic settings for children's development and learning."

John Bangs, head of education for the National Union of Teachers, said: "The overarching message is that we have to cherish our schools as being totally vital to their communities. They can also be eroded by aggressive accountability procedures including national curriculum tests and a prescriptive curriculum."

The report says smaller primaries often struggled with the Government's one size-fits-all policies. An official report due next week and written by funding consultant George Phipson is expected to detail the funding and management shortfalls that mean some small primary schools are not giving teachers their full entitlement to time for preparation and marking.

The Primary Review's final report will be published next year. New primary targets were announced this week. By 2011, 78 per cent of pupils will be expected to reach level 4 in English and maths.

New targets, page 4

Primary Review, pages 12-14

Leading article, page 28

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