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Long term vision outlined for primary curriculum

The primary curriculum needs wholesale reform for the long term future rather than superficial short term changes, according to the most comprehensive curriculum review in the last four decades.



The [Cambridge Primary Review](#) has published *Towards a New Primary Curriculum*, an interim analysis of 29 interim reports published last year. The final report will be published later in the year, but elements have been brought forward in order to contribute to the Government's recent Rose Review of the primary curriculum.

The Review says that, although it shares many of the concerns raised by Rose, its remit "transcends the narrower debate prompted by Rose and offers a vision for the longer term". It is particularly concerned that any changes be well thought through. It asks "whether the Rose Review is more about curriculum re-arrangement than reform, with educational aims added after the event rather than argued from first principles".

The Review starts from the basis of what primary education is for and argues that, while a national curriculum is necessary, there also needs to be a protected community component which enables schools, local authorities and the communities they serve to respond to local needs and opportunities. It proposes that the national/community ratio should be 70/30 to allow schools the flexibility to meet local needs. The community element would be overseen by community curriculum councils convened by local authorities and schools would also be allowed a degree of flexibility as long as they covered the broad areas the Review outlines as essential and ensure these are taught to a high standard.

While the Review lists a number of successes in primary education, including recognition of gains from the government's national strategies, especially in numeracy, and the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, it identifies some major areas of concern. These include:

- the way national tests and strategies and the focus on

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standards have compromised children's entitlement to a broad and balanced primary curriculum

- pressures at the start and end of primary school, with conflict between play-based and formal teaching at the start and problems with a narrow focus on testing at the end
- acute anxiety about arts and humanities being squeezed out of the curriculum
- a mistaken belief that it is not possible to maintain standards within a broad curriculum
- confusion about the aims of the primary curriculum
- the dislocation of maths and English teaching by the national strategies for numeracy and literacy.

The Review, which is directed by Professor Robin Alexander, a Fellow at Wolfson College, proposes 12 aims for 21st century primary education, starting with wellbeing and empowerment. It calls for "serious and substantial changes", including in teacher training and in the way primary schools are staffed. It says that the 12 aims together with eight domains of knowledge, skills, disposition and enquiry should form the structure for the new curriculum. The eight domains would be arts and creativity; citizenship and ethics; faith and belief; language, oracy and literacy; mathematics; physical and emotional health; place and time; and science and technology.

The Cambridge Primary Review is the most comprehensive enquiry into primary education since the 1967 Plowden Report. It is based on 820 written submissions, many of them from major national organisations, reports on 87 regional and 9 national soundings sessions and over 140 other meetings and 28 surveys of published research commissioned from leading academics and drawing on nearly 3,000 published sources.

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