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Reports on primary education released today

29 February 2008

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Four reports on the governance, funding and reform of primary education are released today as part of a major review by a team of researchers led by Cambridge University.

The reports look at issues such as what the balance of national and local in the running of England's system of primary education should be, whether the system is properly funded and how effective mechanisms of quality assurance are. It also looks at the wider picture of what the impact of two decades of education reform has been on schools, teaching and learning.

Key findings include the following:

The UK comes 18th out of 29 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in expenditure on primary education and the difference in expenditure per pupil between primary and secondary education is greater than in some OECD countries

central control in key areas of education has been strengthened through a 'state theory of learning' based on the idea that the repeated testing of pupils, a national curriculum and mandatory teaching of numeracy and literacy will raise standards

there have been improvements in standards have been achieved by many pupils over the last two decades of reform, but 'a decrease in the overall quality of primary education...because of the narrowing of the curriculum and the intensity of test preparation' there has been little improvement, and in some

cases decline has been noted, in teacher-pupil interaction as well as a narrowing of the range of teaching methods used
there is a tendency 'for narrowly-focused inspection to distort the curriculum'
there are complaints about the constant change in and burden of quality assurance procedures

The Primary Review, based at the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Education and directed by Professor Robin Alexander, is the biggest enquiry into English primary education for forty years. Launched in October 2006, it will run for two years and produce 32 interim reports. So far 23 have been published. Their aim is to encourage discussion and debate. However, the Primary Review reserves its own judgement on the matters with which these interim reports deal, pending its assessment of the full range of evidence.

The four reports published today, which have been commissioned from members of the Primary Review's team of 70 academic consultants, assess over 200 published sources of evidence on these matters, both official and independent. They are:

The Funding of English Primary Education, by Philip Noden and Anne West, London School of Economics and Political Science

The Governance and Administration of English Primary Education, by Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder, University of Bath

Quality Assurance in English Primary Education, by Peter Cunningham and Philip Raymont, University of Cambridge

The Trajectory and Impact of National Reform: curriculum and assessment in English primary schools, by Dominic Wyse, University of Cambridge, Elaine McCreery and Harry Torrance, Manchester Metropolitan University.

For more information or copies of the reports go to www.primaryreview.org.uk

For further information, please contact the University of Cambridge Office of

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