



# The Primary Review

**what it is, why it's needed, and why NUT members should contribute**

*Primary education is undergoing its most wide-ranging review for 40 years. Robin Alexander, the review's director, explains why it is taking place and invites NUT members to contribute.*

SINCE 2004, when we started planning the Primary Review, the NUT has strongly supported our case. Now that the review is launched, we hope to build on that support.

## What is the Primary Review?

If readers log onto our website – [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk) – they will find detailed answers to this and many other questions. In a nutshell:

- The Primary Review is the most comprehensive enquiry into English primary education since the Plowden Report of 1967.
- It is wholly independent – politically, professionally and financially.
- That independence is combined with constructive engagement – not just with the NUT and other professional associations, but also with ministers, the Department for Education and Skills, opposition parties, the Commons Education Committee and statutory agencies such as Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and the Training and Development Agency for Schools, all of whom have agreed to assist us.
- The review's overarching concern is with children, the world in which they are growing up and the education they receive. Within this framework we are focusing on ten broad themes. These range from aims and values, through learning, teaching, curriculum, assessment, professional training and deployment, to wider questions about diversity and inclusion, parenting and caring, children's lives outside school, and the way the entire system is financed and run.
- We shall seek evidence around each of the themes on how well the system is

performing. At the same time we shall develop a vision for the decades ahead. This evidence will include:

- written/electronic submissions, open to all
- face-to-face soundings with key individuals and groups, especially with teachers, parents and children
- searches of official national and international data
- comprehensive surveys of published research.
- Once all the evidence is in, we shall issue interim reports. In the autumn of 2008, our final report will present findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future policy and practice.
- The review is based at Cambridge university's faculty of education. Its team is supported by a distinguished advisory committee chaired by Dame Gillian Pugh, and by over 60 research consultants.

## Why is the review needed?

Here are four reasons.

- Primary education is supremely important for children, both now and as adults, and for society. Yet there has been no comprehensive review of its purposes and character for 40 years, even though much has changed in both education and the national fabric in this time.
- Primary schools have been subjected to 20 years of unrelenting but piecemeal government reform, with initiative piling on initiative, often without proper evaluation of what went before. It's time to take stock: aside from the official rhetoric, what has been the real educational impact of all this activity?
- Today's children face an uncertain future. Some experts talk confidently about globalisation, the information revolution and the knowledge economy. Others worry about identity, social cohesion, climate change, and even whether humanity can survive. Alongside the familiar debate about standards we need a more fundamental one about values. What kind of primary education? For what kind of society? For what kind of world?

■ Education belongs to all of us. In a centralised system like ours, it's easy to assume that the official agenda is the only one possible. But the present government's mandate comes from a mere 22 per cent of the electorate and so only in the narrowest constitutional sense can government education policy be said to reflect the popular will. The Primary Review is a much-needed exercise in democracy.

We hope that this – and NUT support – will persuade readers to take part. Log on to the website, find out more, join the debate, submit evidence, make a difference. Our children, and their children, deserve no less.

*Robin Alexander, director of the Primary Review, is fellow of Wolfson College, university of Cambridge and emeritus professor of education, university of Warwick.*

## Have your say

The NUT supports the Primary Review and urges members to do likewise by:

- logging on to the review website – [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk) – to find out more
- encouraging debate about the review's themes and questions in your school
- submitting evidence, individually or via your school, to [evidence@primaryreview.org.uk](mailto:evidence@primaryreview.org.uk) by 1 March 2007
- contributing to the NUT's formal submission to the review. To do this, email Karen Robinson at [k.robinson@nut.org.uk](mailto:k.robinson@nut.org.uk) by 15 January with your answers to the following questions:
  - Which of the review's themes and questions particularly concern you?
  - What are the most pressing problems in primary education today?
  - What are the strengths that should be built on?
  - What changes are needed to make primary education truly responsive to the needs of children and society during the decades ahead?