RESEARCH REPORTS

CHILDREN, THEIR VOICES AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL: WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE TELL US?

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A report for the Cambridge Primary Review Trust

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This is one of a series of research reports commissioned by the Cambridge Primary Review Trust, a not-for-profit company established in December 2012 with the aim of consolidating and building on the evidence, findings and principles of the Cambridge Primary Review.

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A briefing which summarises key issues from this report is also available. The report and briefing are available electronically at the Trust's website: www.cprtrust.org.uk. The website also provides information and other reports in this series, and about the many publications of the Cambridge Primary Review.

We want this report to contribute to the debate about the future of primary education, so we would welcome readers' comments on anything it contains. Please write to: administrator@cprtrust.org.uk. The report contributes to the Trust's research review programme, which consists of specially-commissioned surveys of published research and other evidence relating to the Trust's eight priorities. This survey relates to priority 2, **children's voice**:

> Advance children's voice and rights in school and classroom, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Abstract

This report draws on evidence from empirical studies which explore pupils' perspectives on aspects of their primary schooling. It builds on an earlier report 'Children and their primary schools: pupils' voices' (Robinson and Fielding, 2007, updated as Robinson and Fielding, 2010) which reviewed literature from studies based in the United Kingdom (UK) that reported on the experiences of primary school children. The overall aim of this report is to consider research literature published since 2007 and, in similar vein to the earlier publications, concentrate on findings from studies based in the UK which have focused on eliciting pupils' own perspectives of their primary school experiences.

In particular, the report focuses on pupils' perceptions of the ethos and organisation of primary schools, their perceptions of primary school learning, teaching and assessment, and their views on transfer from primary to secondary school. Specific attention is given to the significance now placed on acknowledging the rights of children, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and to the recent move by some schools to work towards developing a rights-respecting ethos.

Throughout, quotations from children themselves are given prominence by placing them *in italics*.

1 - INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of this report's predecessors in 2007 and 2010, there has been an increasing number of initiatives within the UK aimed at eliciting the views of children and young people about aspects of their lives, including schooling (e.g. The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures, DCSF, 2007; and Working Together: Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People; DCSF, 2008). A review of UK-based initiatives (Walker and Logan, 2008) demonstrated the wide ranging public and third sector organisations actively working towards developing ways of listening to, and acknowledging, pupils' perspectives on school related issues, with many providing resources for use in schools. Several of these organisations continue to develop work in this area, including, amongst others, School Councils UK, a charity which promotes the development of structures for pupil participation in schools, and The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) which provides guidance on learner voice activities.

The Cambridge Primary Review itself devoted considerable attention to children and their voices. Childhood was one of its overarching themes, and the condition of childhood today, children's development and learning, and their views about their lives inside and outside school featured prominently in the opening chapters of the Review's final report (Alexander *et al* 2010). Indeed, the Review's first task was to travel round the country talking to a wide range of educational stakeholders about children, their world and their primary education,

most prominently children themselves, and this formed the subject of the Review's first report (Alexander and Hargreaves, 2007).

The aim of the present report is to build on 'Children and their primary schools: pupils' voices' (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010, commissioned by the Cambridge Primary Review), and to review research literature published since then which has reported on practices in relation to children, their voices and their experiences of school. In similar vein to the earlier publications this report concentrates on findings from studies which convey the perspectives of pupils within the UK, and on studies which have explored pupils' experiences from the perspectives of pupils themselves, and not with studies which have reported teachers' perspectives of pupils' experiences. The report is divided into six main sections, as detailed below, to reflect recent published research reporting on the experiences of primary school children.

The report's six sections consider primary pupils' experiences and views on the following:

1. The ethos of primary schools.
2. The organisation of primary schools.
3. Learning within primary schools.
4. Teaching within primary schools.
5. Assessment within primary schools.
6. Transfer from primary to secondary school.

These sections differ slightly from those included within the earlier reports, which broadly comprised the six sections listed above, and a further three sections - 'The purposes of primary schooling'; 'The primary curriculum'; and 'Pupils' aspirations and preferences in respect of pupils' own futures'. The scant amount of published research relating to pupils' views on the primary curriculum has been incorporated within the sections on learning and teaching within primary schools and, due to the paucity of relevant published research, the remaining two sections from the earlier reports are not included within this review.

With the exception of work by Covell (2010; Covell *et al* 2011), research referred to in this report relates to work where authors have published only one study focusing on the experiences of pupils themselves. Covell has published research relating to pupils' perspectives on the implementation of a rights-respecting schools approach. However, much of her work relates to teachers' or to her own perceptions of pupils' perspectives, with only aspects of it reporting on pupils' own perspectives.

Most of the studies referred to involved between 100 and 450 primary pupils. However, three studies involved considerably fewer, and three involved between 1000 and 2000 participants. Surveys tended to be the favoured data collection methods in studies with larger numbers of participants, while questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were the preferred methods in other studies. None of the studies have purposefully built on findings reported in the original 2007 (Robinson and Fielding) review. However, there is resonance between some of the findings reported in the 2007 review and those reported here.

Before discussing each of the sections relating to pupils' experiences, consideration will be given to the current landscape in which schools are operating. It would be remiss to ignore the significant increase in attention now given to acknowledging the rights of children and young people as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). This development has gained pace since 2007, and reference to children's rights is now evident in many of the policies and practices relating to the lives of children and young people in the UK; this is having a profound impact on children's experiences, including their experiences of schooling.

The influence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UNCRC (1989) was ratified by the UK government in 1991. Since this time, knowledge and understanding of the 54 Articles within it, and what these mean in terms of children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, have slowly attracted public attention. Since the turn of the twenty-first century the work of numerous organisations has been significant in raising awareness of children's rights, and of measures that need to be taken to ensure the realisation of these rights. Of particular significance has been the work of the Children's Rights Alliances within England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the establishment and work of the various Offices of the Children's Commissioners within these four nations since 2001. Each of these initiatives promotes the rights, views and interests of children in policies and decisions affecting children's lives. Although the initiatives were instigated over a decade ago, it has taken time for their work to be widely recognised by groups and organisations working with children and young people, and for organisations to introduce policies and practices focusing specifically on upholding the rights of children.

The implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC

Within educational contexts, the growing interest in the realisation of children's rights has focused particularly on the implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989). This gives children and young people the right to express their views on all matters affecting them, and for these views to be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

Article 12 states:

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Specific reference to the UNCRC has been made in recent policy documentation in England. For example, in 2008, guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2008) - *Working Together: listening to the voices of children and young people* - made reference to the UNCRC. It asserts that schools have a duty to promote children's well-being

and that this requirement is underpinned by the UNCRC (2008: 3). It also clearly states there is an expectation for schools to ensure the views of children and young people are 'heard and valued in the taking of decisions which affect them, and that they are supported in making a positive contribution to their school and local community' (*Ibid:* 5). More recently, a requirement to uphold the rights of children in relation to Article 12 was explicitly built in to statutory guidance *Listening to and involving children and young people* issued by the Department for Education (DfE) (2014). This guidance, which requires all local authorities and maintained schools to give consideration to how best to provide opportunities for pupils to be consulted on matters affecting them, and to contribute to decision-making in school, states 'This legislation is underpinned by the general principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), … in particular, article 12…'. It stresses that 'Schools are strongly encouraged to pay due regard to the Convention', and outlines that the involvement of children and young people in decision-making encourages pupils to become active participants in a democratic society, and contributes to the achievement and attainment of pupils. The guidance further advocates the benefits of involving children and young people in decision-making within school and states:

> Increased confidence, self-respect, competence and an improved sense of responsibility have all been reported by young people who contribute in school. Schools also reported increased motivation and engaging with learning.

The work of UNICEF UK

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) UK has been instrumental in promoting awareness of the UNCRC in schools through the development of its Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA). UNICEF UK's RRSA started in 2004, and since this time has grown, with over 3,200 schools (approximately 13 per cent of the total number of schools), including just over 2,600 primary schools in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales now registered for the award. The RRSA seeks to put the UNCRC at the heart of a school's ethos, with the aim of improving children's well-being and developing every child's talents and abilities to their full potential. It is based on the premise that schools will use the UNCRC as their values framework and, by ensuring that children learn about their rights and responsibilities, they will learn how to become actively involved in school and the wider community, and will develop the skills to make informed decisions (Sebba and Robinson, 2010). When schools register to work towards RRSA, there is an expectation that pupils will work alongside adults in their school to plan and develop a school-wide rights-respecting approach. The significant number of schools now involved in working towards embedding or maintaining a rights-respecting ethos has impacted on the ways many schools work with children, and has reinforced understandings around the advantages of including pupils in school decision-making. Even where schools have not registered for UNICEF UK's award, the benefits of schools developing a rights-respecting ethos have been influential in supporting the move for children and young people in schools to work more closely with adults.

With these noteworthy developments in mind, consideration will be given here to primary pupils' views on each of the six areas of primary schooling identified to reflect recent published research. At the end of each section, findings will be outlined and key issues

summed up. Consideration will also be given to instances where findings build on those of the previous report and chapter, in order to develop a picture of the direction of change in terms of pupils' views of their school experiences, and of developments within pupil voice practices.

2 – PUPILS' VIEWS ON THE ETHOS OF THEIR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Relationships within schools

Within school settings pupils develop relationships with both adults and peers, and where positive relationships are forged, this can greatly enhance children's and young peoples' enjoyment of school. In an evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights-Respecting School (RRS) approach (Sebba and Robinson, 2010), pupils and staff from schools considered to be rights-respecting remarked on low incidents of bullying and on the positive relationships between and amongst staff and pupils; they considered that the introduction of working towards RRSA within their schools was a large contributory factor in these developments (*Ibid:* 19). Specifically, pupils considered that relationships and behaviour in lessons had improved since their schools had introduced a rights-respecting approach, and that this had helped to establish a respectful attitude to learning (*Ibid:* 20). Pupils from rights-respecting schools also reported a reduction in incidents of bullying and, where conflicts did arise, pupils reported that they were more likely than previously to resolve these for themselves (UNICEF, 2013: 22).

Feeling cared for and respected

Pupils in schools which had adopted an RRS ethos were more likely than those in schools not working towards RRS to rate their teachers as fair, respectful, caring and encouraging, and to rate their peers as cooperative, friendly and unlikely to tease or bully (Covell, 2010: 48). These pupils were significantly more likely than those in other schools to make more favourable comments about their school and to describe the general climate of their school in an affirmative way. When pupils from schools not actively working towards a rights-respecting ethos made favourable comments about their schools, however, they were more likely to remark on positive aspects of the school's physical resources, such as equipment and playing fields, rather than on a positive school ethos (Covell, 2010: 47). Pupils in schools where a rights-respecting approach had been developed stressed that they felt valued, cared for, respected and listened to in school, and they recognised that staff were genuinely concerned for their well-being (Covell, 2010; Sebba and Robinson, 2010).

Belonging to the school community

In John-Akinola *et al*'s (2014) study of 248 primary school pupils age 9-13, pupils reported that positive interpersonal relationships, and feeling a 'sense of belonging', were two aspects of their school experiences which were significant in contributing to pupils feeling they were members of the school community (*Ibid*.). When pupils were asked more generally about what made them feel part of the school, some of the most common responses included, *'having a school uniform'*, *'having friends'*, *'playing sports'*, *'teachers'* and *'school work/education'* (*Ibid*.: 25). The data also illustrated that pupils regarded school activities, including school

tours, drama, arts, recycling, reading and singing songs together, as important in making them feel a part of their school community (*Ibid*: 36).

In schools where a RRS approach was well established, pupils spoke about the presence of a positive atmosphere within the school and a 'sense of community' which had developed since introducing a rights-respecting approach (Sebba and Robinson, 2010: 19). Pupils also reported feeling a sense of security in their schools, and considered that this was largely attributable to the consistency with which their schools had adopted both a school-wide rights-respecting language, and an expectation that the whole school community would behave in a rights-respecting way (UNICEF, 2013: 22). Favourable attitudes towards inclusivity were reported by pupils in these schools, including by pupils from a range of ethnic, race and religious backgrounds, and from learners with English as an additional language (Sebba and Robinson, 2010: 5).

In a separate study, in which the focus was not on rights-respecting schools, when primary pupils were asked specifically about their views on pupils being excluded from school, they commented that they considered exclusions to be fair, at least on some occasions (Chamberlain *et al*, 2011: 31). The general feeling was that children whose behaviour was 'bad' should be removed from the class, as these pupils disrupted others from learning. One year 6 pupil commented: '*They should be excluded because they're stopping the people around them learning because of them, and they have as much right to learn as everybody else.*' (*Ibid:* 32).

Key issues

Findings from research studies clearly indicate that the formation of positive relationships amongst and between adults and pupils, together with the absence of bullying, are significant contributory factors in primary pupils' enjoyment of school. Where such relationships dominated in schools, pupils considered that this created a positive atmosphere and contributed to pupils feeling a sense of security within school. Much of the recent research literature reporting on pupils' views of the culture within their schools makes specific reference to pupils' perceptions of the favourable impact a rights-respecting school ethos has on their school experiences. This is a noteworthy difference to research reported on in the previous review (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010), in which there was an absence of reference to a rights-respecting schools approach, the work of UNICEF and the UNCRC.

Pupils from schools which are actively working towards developing a school-wide, rights-respecting culture reported that since the introduction of the approach, they had witnessed a change in their school's ethos, with staff and pupils now acting in a more collegial way and demonstrating greater degrees of respect, understanding and tolerance for each other. Inbuilt within the nature of rights-respecting schools is a move towards schools creating opportunities for adults and pupils to listen to each other's views. The movement towards listening to pupils had started to emerge in the earlier literature, and has evolved further, in particular within rights-respecting schools. While there is no suggestion of schools having developed an ethos of democratic inclusivity (Robinson and Taylor, 2007), we are witnessing a slackening of the more rigid hierarchical power relations which at one time dominated staff-pupil relationships, and a move towards adults and school staff engaging in more

deliberate dialogue about school-related issues. We need, however, to proceed with some caution and look critically beyond this initial insight to ensure that the stated intention of building positive, mutually respectful relationships is a reality experienced by all pupils, and there are not groups to whom this reality does not apply.

3 – PUPILS' VIEW ON LEARNING WITHIN THEIR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Factors which motivate and demotivate pupils

In a study involving 180 junior school pupils in years 3-6 (ages 7-11), Hopkins (2008) sought to elicit pupils' views of learning. She found that pupils from all four year groups viewed the chance to be active learners, and to be involved in hands-on activities, as important contributory factors to enjoyment of learning in school (*Ibid*: 397). Pupils in all four year groups also expressed a desire to be challenged, '*I like to struggle to find the answers*' and '*I like to be stretched*'. They liked to find answers themselves, with those in year 6 being particularly keen to be given the opportunity to learn independently, '*You learn loads when you do it yourself, like Science days when you do experiments and don't copy up work*' (*Ibid*: 397-8). The study concluded that pupils enjoyed, and were motivated by, lessons when the following conditions were in place: activities which require participation; an appropriate amount of teacher talk; appropriate social demands made by activities; opportunities for challenge and struggle; a firm, fair, positive and psychologically safe regime; a focus on the learning and achieving of individuals; a variety of activities; and activities which were an appropriate length (Hopkins, 2008).

Pupils became demotivated, however, when they considered teachers over-talked, with pupils expressing their perception that most teachers '*talk too much*'. Pupils' perceived such 'over-talking' to be the reason for them having insufficient time for completing work in lessons, '*She tells us again and again, then we run out of time*' (*Ibid*: 397). In addition to feelings of demotivation, pupils also experienced feelings of pressure when teachers rushed them to complete work '*because we have to get on with the next thing*'. Similarly, having insufficient time to work independently, and '*not having time to work out answers ourselves*' was viewed negatively by pupils (*Ibid*: 399). Chamberlain *et al* (2011) also reported that pupils in years 5 and 6 felt pressure to achieve in school, and that pupils felt unhappy and weary about the amount of pressure teachers placed on them, '*telling us, you can do better - we're just tired [of it]*' (*Ibid*: 17).

The variety of activities and length of time spent on each activity was found to have significant motivating or demotivating factors on pupils' learning. Pupils enjoyed and felt motivated when their experiences in lessons, and in school generally, involved a variety of activities; in particular, pupils enjoyed '*[being] able to break away from routines*', '*having different teachers*' and '*lots of variety in teaching (styles)*' (Hopkins, 2008: 399). However, pupils stated that they were bored by long lessons and the predictable routines and rhythms of school work, and they felt demotivated where their time in school and lessons involved '*too much writing*', '*repeating work*', '*every day being the same*', '*copying*' and '*working from books*' (*Ibid.*). Feelings of frustration at lack of challenge were expressed by one year 5 pupil who spoke about his science work being marked as correct, but then having to copy it out again, '*just to make it neat*' (*Ibid:* 398). Older primary pupils, in particular, complained about '*having*

to do the same things every day', and remarked that the '*best bits are in the afternoon, the morning is all SATs [Standard Assessment Tests]*'. 'For these pupils, the emphasis on covering the content of the Key Stage 2 (7-11 years) core curriculum subjects seemed to dominate their week at the expense of '*the good subjects*'. History, art, drama and music were valued by pupils and seen as '*subjects that teach you a lot*' but which were given too little time and attention in school (*Ibid:* 399).

Classroom conditions conducive to effective learning

If learners are to reach their full potential, the school ethos needs to support pupils' learning. Where schools were actively building a rights-respecting ethos, both adults and pupils reported that this led to the development of positive rights-respecting relationships, which in turn created a climate conducive to learning (Sebba and Robinson, 2010: 40). Other factors which primary pupils considered to be supportive of learning were the setting of clear learning goals and success criteria (Miller and Lavin, 2007; Wall, 2012), and lessons where there was a move away from teacher-directed activities, to pupils having opportunities to take ownership of their learning (Wall, 2012: 294). Chamberlain *et al* (2011: 17) found that primary pupils disliked learning being disrupted by other pupils '*talking or messing about and getting told off*' as this caused teachers to spend time dealing with disruptive pupils, rather than supporting pupils with their academic learning.

Pupils' view of learning within specific subject areas

Very few recent studies have reported on primary pupils' perceptions of their learning and experiences relating to specific subject areas. One exception, however, is a relatively large study conducted in Ireland involving 1,149 primary school children aged 6-12, which explored pupils' attitudes towards, and experiences of, science in school (Murphy *et al*, 2012). Findings from the study resonate with those from other studies exploring pupils' general views of learning within primary schools. They indicated that pupils enjoyed and engaged with hands-on science and would like science lessons to involve '*more experiments and less writing*', (*Ibid*: 426). Pupils also expressed a preference for working collaboratively with a friend in science, rather than on their own, and appreciated some of the benefits to learning when working collaboratively, '*you get to kind of learn more, because you hear other people's opinions*', and '*you'd have more help if you're stuck*' (Murphy *et al*, 2012.: 428).

When pupils were asked about their views of teachers demonstrating science experiments in science lessons, just over half of the participants responded positively. However, some pupils expressed a preference for '*less of teacher talking and explaining and more of you actually doing it [hands-on science]*' (*Ibid*: 430), '*I'd rather they did experiments with us…Than just talking about it*' (*Ibid*.). Where learning about science experiments was dominated by textbooks and worksheets, pupils commented, '*We could probably have more fun if we actually got to do it ourselves, rather than just reading from books and stuff*', and '*we basically copy it out of the book, which is pointless*' (*Ibid*: 431). Thus, similar to findings relating more generally to pupils' experiences of primary school, pupils were negatively disposed towards reading and writing in science and were particularly unenthusiastic about copying from the board (*Ibid*: 430).

Key findings

What has emerged from recent literature is pupils' acknowledgement of the prominence of positive, respectful teacher-pupil relationships in building a school ethos conducive to learning. This view was beginning to surface in the earlier review and chapter (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010) and resonates directly with an argument made by Pollard (2007) - that the relationship between teachers and pupils is the basis of the moral order of the classroom, and this establishes the climate in which teaching and learning takes place. It is clear from recent research that this view is now becoming more widely recognised. Two further issues raised in recent research which were also highlighted in the previous report (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010), are findings relating to factors which motivate and demotivate pupils; and findings relating to the pressure pupils perceive is placed on them to perform and achieve academically in school. In the original report, it was noted that pressure to get through large amounts of work activities resulted in pupils placing more emphasis on performance and completing work rather than understanding it (*Ibid:* 6).

While there may have been advances made in some schools, particularly those working towards developing a rights-respecting ethos, in terms of pupils and staff building closer working relationships and developing an environment conducive to pupils' learning, there is little evidence to suggest that pupils are regularly and significantly involved in shaping their learning experiences. We need to acknowledge the inconsistencies at play as schools work to build positive relationships with pupils, while simultaneously retaining strong elements of the hierarchical adult-pupil relationships through the pressures adults exert on pupils to complete large amounts of work and achieve high scores in national tests. Thus, while many teachers and school leaders acknowledge the benefits of developing learning partnerships between teachers and pupils, their preoccupation with the assessment and standards agendas serve to offset the extent to which they are prepared to involve pupils in decisions about their own learning. Pupils have the experience of being involved in a wide variety of learning activities, they are a rich resource, and they have a wealth of ideas about what supports their learning; it is, therefore, a missed opportunity to keep pupils on the periphery when it comes to discussing and setting learning agendas.

4 – PUPILS' VIEW ON CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

Studies reporting on pupils' views of classroom organization are lacking. The few studies which have given consideration to this have focused on working arrangements during lessons, in particular on pupils' views of collaborative learning, and their views of receiving additional support when teachers consider they are making slower academic progress than that of their peers.

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning can be defined as occurring when children work together to achieve a common goal or to solve a problem (Tunnard and Sharp, 2009: 159).

Findings from a study of 16 primary school pupils in years 5 and 6 from one school (eight boys and eight girls) determined that just over half of the children considered collaborative

learning helped them to understand new ideas. However, only a few stated that they felt they achieved more in group or paired situations than they would if working alone (*Ibid*: 161). Hopkins (2008) identified differences between the views of younger and older primary pupils and found that younger pupils enjoyed pair work, small groups and whole class work, whereas older pupils did not like 'talking partners' and preferred not to share ideas (*Ibid:* 397-398).

One significant advantage of collaborative learning from a pupil's perspective was that pupils found working collaboratively helped them to make friends, with pupils reporting that it was easier to make friends through working with people than at playtimes (Tunnard and Sharp, 2009: 161). Children demonstrated knowledge of a range of qualities needed to collaborate effectively, including listening, taking turns, being fair and valuing each other's opinions (*Ibid*: 163). The majority of children expressed the view that group skills were also important for collaborative learning. However, only a small number felt that the necessary skills required to work in groups could actually be taught (*Ibid*: 162).

Many pupils were cognisant of some drawbacks to collaborative working. They identified difficulties in concentrating in a noisy environment which often ensued when working with others, and they reported that it was disadvantageous to work with uncooperative individuals (*Ibid*: 161). Children expressed concerns over complications that could arise during collaborative learning due to personality clashes and, even when working with friends, they considered differences in working styles could lead to difficult situations. Some children expressed sensitivity towards others and felt that when given a choice about with whom to work, this might be unfair on those children who were less popular than others (*Ibid*: 162).

Additional learning support

Pupils are considered to need additional support if their teacher judges that they are making slower academic progress than that of their peers. This support tends to be in the form of withdrawing pupils from lessons to attend small group sessions where support in a specific area is given; alternatively, some pupils attend additional classes outside of school. Anderson (2009) reports on the experiences of four 10-11 year old dyslexic pupils at a primary school who were taken out of their mainstream class to receive additional specialist support. The findings suggest that pupils had mixed feelings about being taken out of class, and in some senses found themselves in a no-win situation. They commented that, when they were not taken out of the class they felt they missed out on receiving the additional support. However, when taken out of lessons, they felt they were missing out on the activities going on in the classroom (*Ibid.* 55). The nature of withdrawing pupils from mainstream lessons inevitably means they miss all or parts of the lessons. Pupils remarked that this resulted in them having difficulty in finishing off work, which they felt some disappointment about (*Ibid:* 58). Situations can arise, however, where pupils continue to be taken out of lessons as teachers judge that they need ongoing support, when in fact the pupils themselves consider the support is no longer required. Frustration was expressed by one pupil who no longer found the additional support sessions helpful: *'It's like they are trying to learn you stuff but some people already know about 'em - …they're telling me what I already know instead of what I don't know'* (*Ibid:* 55).

Casserly (2011) reported on a study of 20 primary school children who had attended a reading class, outside of their mainstream schools, which aimed at supporting pupils to develop strategies for coping with their dyslexia in school. The children in the study commented that in their mainstream classrooms they found the pace of work too rapid and they were unable to keep up with their peers, '*I tried my best, but sometimes I wouldn't catch on and the other children would move ahead of me*', they also experienced difficulty in completing homework. Children were highly self-conscious of what they perceived to be their 'inadequacies', particularly when reading in front of their peers in their mainstream classrooms, '*The class used to get annoyed when I couldn't read a word and wouldn't give me a chance. I don't put up my hand so the teacher wouldn't ask me*' (*Ibid*: 19). Overall, the children reported that they enjoyed the reading class; they talked positively about the friendly environment, the small class size, and the fact that there were others in the same class with similar difficulties, '*The teacher and the other children understand dyslexia. I have something in common with the other children.*' Pupils also talked favourably about the teacher taking time to explain concepts in detail, '*The teacher goes step by step*' (*Ibid*: 20).

Key issues

Teachers make decisions about whether they consider pupils will benefit from being removed from the classroom in order to receive separate, specialist tuition in some areas of their work. Specialist support is deemed advantageous where pupils are considered to be performing at a lower academic level than their peers, in situations where pupils are achieving at a higher level than their peers, and where teachers consider that they would benefit from opportunities to boost their performance further. Teachers also make decisions about the organisation of classrooms, the classroom activities, the amount of work pupils should complete in a given time, and whether pupils will work individually or collaboratively. This unquestioned acceptance by teachers, pupils and wider audiences of such implicit non-negotiable rules about working arrangements in the classroom raises questions about the extent to which children's rights are being met, or indeed are absent from discussions about their own learning. Given the current move for mainstream schools to include pupils with an increasingly diverse range of abilities and needs, this raises important issues about how schools will cater for, and find ways of acknowledging, listening to, and valuing the range of pupils with whom they will be working. If children's rights are to be taken seriously, schools need to create environments in which all pupils, regardless of their ability or need, are viewed and accepted as key players in decision-making about learning situations which best suit them.

One further outcome which is likely to arise as schools increasingly strive towards including pupils with varied learning needs, is the likelihood of schools developing forms of segregation practices intentionally designed to support the specific needs of groups and individuals. Care needs to be taken, however, to ensure that we do not end up doing precisely what inclusion policies were aiming to avoid, leaving pupils feeling marginalised as they are removed from their mainstream classes to receive the additional 'out of class' support they need if they are to fulfill their potential, but which cannot be provided in the general classroom.

5 – PUPILS' VIEW ON TEACHING, TEACHERS AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS WITHIN THEIR SCHOOLS

Children's perceptions of what makes 'good' and 'not so good' teachers

Primary pupils have definite views about the qualities and characteristics of 'good' teachers for whom they have high regard; they also acknowledge that they are aware when a teacher is 'not very good' (Chamberlain *et al*, 2011: 21). In primary pupils' eyes, a 'good' teacher is one who is strict and fair, who has good organisational skills, and has enthusiasm, commitment and excitement for the work in hand; a good teacher is also one who is not seen to have 'favourites' and one who makes pupils feel that '*everyone is special*' (Hopkins, 2008: 398). Good teachers are considered to be experts, they provide stretching work and reward pupils with praise which enables pupils to know that they are achieving (*Ibid*: 398). Pupils reported that teaching was helpful in supporting them to achieve academically when it involved the setting of targets and offering strategies about how to improve their work (*Ibid*: 399). Pupils had less regard for, and reported not liking, teachers who shout, especially those who shout at whole classes when the shouting is aimed at a minority of pupils, and '*moody teachers who did not like the work*'. Pupils also had low regard for 'messy teachers', and they reported not liking staff being absent from school when on courses or ill. Where teachers displayed these negative characteristics, this was considered to spoil pupils' enjoyment of school (*Ibid*: 398).

Teachers and pupils as co-producers of teaching

In an attempt to involve pupils as co-producers of teaching, pupils in some schools are now involved in observing teaching in lessons and in discussing their views with the teachers concerned. In a study by McBeath *et al* (2008) which ascertained pupils' perceptions of their experiences of observing lessons and feeding back their opinions to teachers, they found pupils were apprehensive about the actual process of 'feeding back' to teachers. Pupils were concerned teachers would not listen or agree with them, or that they might take offence and react badly to critical feedback which may lead the teacher to take a personal dislike to individual pupils (*Ibid*.).

Pupils' perceptions of the role of teaching assistants

The responsibilities placed on teaching assistants (TAs) have increased over recent years, with many now carrying out jobs which were once the sole remit of the teacher; this increased responsibility has led to a blurring of roles between teachers and TAs (Fraser and Meadows, 2008). Fraser and Meadows (*Ibid*.) explored primary children's perspectives of the role of TAs. They report on a study involving questionnaires completed by 419 junior children and interviews with 86 infant and junior pupils representing a cross section of pupils in terms of ethnicity, ability and social background (*Ibid*: 352). Their findings indicate that children were aware of the distinction in the power imbalance between the roles of teachers and TAs. They depicted the teacher as '*leading the lesson*' and considered teachers had the overall responsibility for the class, while TAs were viewed as '*just*' helping in the lessons (*Ibid*: 356). In most cases, however, children reported that they would work equally as hard for either the teacher or the TA (*Ibid*: 357).

Primary pupils preferred to have at least one TA present in their classroom, and viewed one of the main roles of TAs as being to support pupils' classwork directly. TAs were seen to offer help to pupils *'when they are stuck'*. In particular, they were considered to help with activities such as writing, reading and spelling, *'She tells you how to spell words'*, and helping with work generally, *'[she] explains really hard words', 'she would help you…she would give you a clue'* (*Ibid*: 358). TAs also provide help outside of the classroom in areas where pupils are deemed to need additional support; children talked positively about such experiences and reported that they enjoyed the extra attention they received from TAs (*Ibid.*).

The majority of children considered TAs were employed to help both pupils and teachers. Some also considered part of a TA's role was to help parents. Pupils had clear ideas of the characteristics they considered preferable for TAs to display, and commented that TAs should be caring, happy, helpful, kind and friendly women (the study participants had only worked with female TAs), of comparable intelligence to a teacher, they should have a good personality and, importantly, be good at listening. Many also commented that TAs should like and pay attention to children, they should know how to tell people off without upsetting them too much, and they should be calm, lovely, patient, understanding, funny, bright and not too strict (*Ibid:* 335-356). Other characteristics which pupils thought TAs should possess include skills which were indicative of the jobs TAs undertake. For example, they considered TAs should be good at typing, writing, spelling, computers, cooking, art and teaching (*Ibid.*). For some children the relationship they had built with individual TAs was of great importance, and they viewed TAs as having a pivotal role as a 'significant other' within school. They positioned specific TAs as reliable people who can be trusted, and people *'who you can talk to'* (*Ibid:* 354).

Key issues

The benefits to both pupils and teachers of consulting pupils about teaching and learning are well documented and were referred to in the earlier report (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010) and endorsed as recommendations in the Cambridge Primary Review final report (Alexander *et al* 2010). There appears to be continued interest by teachers and school leaders in developing measures that can be used to consult pupils about matters to do with teaching. However, there have been limited advances made when it comes to translating these interests into classroom practice, and there is a substantial lack of research reporting on the outcomes of such consultations. Thus, the situation remains where it is all too common for pupils to be excluded from discussions about the kinds of teaching that support or hinder learning. The existing power structures within schools serve to silence pupils' voices in these areas, and evidence of the reality of more participative practices and democratic ways of working with pupils in matters relating to teaching is rarely actualised beyond the rhetoric of many schools. Teachers have responsibilities to make decisions which are in the best interests of the children with whom they work. However, there needs to be a deliberate move away from these 'best interest' debates and decisions in relation to teaching, being based on only adults' perspectives, rather then being informed and guided by the opinions and perspectives of children themselves.

These matters bear more widely on the quality of pedagogy and the efficacy of dialogic approaches commended by Alexander (2008) and others and in the final report of the

Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander *et al* 2010, chapter 15). They also reinforce arguments about the key role of dialogue in assessment for learning presented in Harlen's report for the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (Harlen 2014). Both pedagogy and assessment are Cambridge Primary Review Trust priorities, and the Trust's statement on pedagogy commands particular attention to raising the profile and quality of classroom talk.

6 – PUPILS' VIEW ON ASSESSMENT WITHIN THEIR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

There has been very limited reference in recent published research to primary children's views of assessment in schools. The information reported here relates to one study commissioned by the Wellcome Trust (2012), which was reported on in the final research report and in a publication by Murphy and Kerr (2011). The study involved nearly 1000 pupils aged 10-12 in England and Wales and focused on pupils' perceptions of assessment in school science; the findings, however, shed some light on primary pupils' perceptions of how assessment impacts on their experiences of school more generally. The overwhelming majority of pupils considered assessment in science to be useful. They reported that primary science assessment helped them to learn more about the subject, to realise how much they had improved in science, and to acknowledge the areas in which they need to improve (*Ibid:* 33). Although children understood the purpose of science assessments, they did not always enjoy actually doing the assessments or preparing for them, nor did they like the emphasis that was placed upon the marks they received (Wellcome Trust, 2010: 3). Pupils reported that tests in science impacted negatively on their home lives as the lead up to tests resulted in pupils feeling pressured by people at home to study and perform well in the assessments, and they reported that the amount of time they felt they had to spend revising caused them to have less time to spend with their families. Some pupils considered that the pressure they felt under in the lead up to their science assessments led to tension between friends, '*You don't get time to talk to your family and sometimes you can break up with your friends because you're so pressurised and you can't think*' (Murphy and Kerr, 2011: 34). It was also common for children to feel stressed or nervous about science tests, and some reported being made fun of or bullied over their marks (*Ibid*.).

The stress felt by pupils prior to their science tests was felt more by pupils from English schools than pupils from Welsh schools, and pupils from English schools reported spending relatively more time on revising for the tests. This was related to the fact that for pupils in Welsh schools, there was no longer a requirement to undertake national tests. The national tests, known as Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), were abolished in Wales in 2004. In England, SATs were abolished at Key Stage 3 (taken at 13-14 years) in 2008, and it was announced in May 2009, just prior to the study taking place, that Key Stage 2 science SATs (taken at 10-11 years) would also be abolished. Interestingly, although primary children voiced concerns about the negative impact of assessment on them, most of the pupils in the study from English schools were opposed to the government's decision to stop SATs in science. They considered it may lead to them not learning as much, not being aware of their level of achievement in science, and may also lead to science becoming less important in schools. A small minority, however, welcomed the abolition of science SATs as they considered that it would reduce the stress they were under and would promote better learning (Wellcome Trust, 2010: 4).

Formative assessment

Black and Wiliam's (1998) work on formative assessment is well publicised, and has led to the widely accepted view that the effective use of formative assessment leads to academic gains, with formative assessment strategies now being an accepted part of primary school practice. In Miller and Lavin's (2007) study of 370 primary children, aged 10-12 in Scotland, children reported their experiences of formative assessment had made them more positive and more confident about their work, and had also helped them to attend more to the quality of their work (*Ibid*.). In formative assessment properly conducted, teachers take care through their questioning and feedback to elicit, probe and build on children's ideas in order to advance their learning, rather than merely judge what they do and say (Harlen, 2014, Alexander, 2008).

Children's views on how pupils should be assessed in school

When primary children were asked to imagine they were a primary school teacher and to suggest how they might assess children, they suggested that children should be given more choice over the style and timing of assessment. They commented that they strongly favoured being tested on a topic just after they had completed it, rather than waiting until the end of a longer period of teaching, as was the case with SATs (Wellcome Trust, 2010). Pupils also articulated a dislike of traditional pen-and-paper, sitting at a desk approach to testing, and expressed a preference for more active and fun-type assessments such as presentations, investigations, research, group work and project-based assignments (*Ibid*.).

Key issues

The previous review (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010) reported that pupils were assessed primarily, if not solely, on skills that can be measured by pencil and paper tests, and assessment is generally seen as a way of testing what pupils don't know rather than a means of developing learning (*Ibid*: 17). It also reported on the pressure experienced by pupils when involved in school assessments. The prolific use of pencil and paper tests, and the pressure experienced by pupils in the lead up to tests continues today, and there is an absence of pupils' views being taken into account in the planning of school and national assessments.

It is a moral prerequisite that pupils should be able, and encouraged, to express their views on matters that affect them, including on school-related issues and forms of assessment. The situation in schools, however, is far removed from this being a reality, and the likelihood of this changing is minimal given the continued emphasis on results from national tests being used as a measure by which to judge the performance of schools in England, and as a tool with which to hold schools accountable. This raises questions about the limited scope of existing forms of accountability in supporting pupils' learning. It signals the need for a reconsideration of the current forms of testing and accountability systems, and a move towards more varied means of testing in which less emphasis is placed on results from national tests. It also raises, as noted above, questions about pedagogy and assessment for learning, and the need for children's talk to be central to both.

7 – PUPILS' VIEW OF THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

The transition from primary to secondary school is a social and academic turning point for adolescents and, for some, can be the most difficult aspect of their school experience, leading to stress and concern (Topping, 2011). Primary school children reported that choosing a secondary school was worrying and, in some cases, confusing (Ashton, 2008; Chamberlain *et al*, 2011). Ashton (2008) found the informal aspects of school transition, including concerns about not getting their first choice of school, to be more important to pupils than concerns about academic issues.

Primary pupils talked positively about the fairness of secondary school admission procedures, and considered they had a choice of schools to attend, '*you have loads of choices - if you don't get to the best school you want to go to, you can go to the second best school*', (Chamberlain *et al*, 2011: 26). Some children, however, were less positive, as one year 6 pupil explained '*I would be devastated [if I didn't get my first choice of school] because all your friends are going into that school, and you're going to a school of strangers*' (*Ibid*.). Children viewed getting into a secondary school of their choice as having the potential to lead to opportunities to get a good job, as one year 5 pupil explained, '*If you don't get into good secondary schools you won't have a good job, as teachers might be poor, and if the teachers are poor then we don't learn much like we should*' (*Ibid:* 38).

Pupils' concerns and anticipations when transferring to secondary school

Research evidence suggests that, when transferring from primary to secondary school, the majority of pupils express anxieties about a range of issues associated with the formal school system, the size and layout of the school, and with anticipated social relationships. A study by West *et al* (2010) involving pupils from primary and secondary schools reported that pupils' concerns about how they would cope with the formal school system, and the size and layout of their secondary school, were more pronounced than concerns they had relating to peers and friendship groups (*Ibid*: 33). Pupils reported they had problems coping with the size of the school, the timetable and the volume of work. Ashton (2008: 179) also found that prior to their transfer, pupils in primary school worried about getting lost in their new school, they were concerned about finding their way around, and some pupils worried that the work in lessons would be too easy, while others worried that it would be too hard (*Ibid:* 180). They wanted to know what their new teachers would be like, how their teachers would act and what impression they would make on their teachers; several pupils also felt sad to be leaving their primary teachers behind (*Ibid:* 179). Despite these concerns, however, several year 6 pupils talked positively about the forthcoming transition to secondary school, with some reporting that they were looking forward to having more freedom and choice about, for example, where to go at break times and what to eat for lunch. Some pupils were worried about having to organise themselves. However, most were looking forward to taking charge of their own equipment and schedules, and pupils talked positively about the prospect of using new equipment that would be available to them in technology, physical education and science lessons (*Ibid*: 179- 180).

Being separated from their friends in the transfer to secondary school was a concern reported by many year 6 pupils (Ashton, 2008). They regarded friends as a source of support and wanted to know whether they would be in the same class as them (*Ibid*: 178). Children talked about being keen to make new friends once at their secondary school, but only with '*nice*' people, and many were anxious about falling in with a '*bad crowd*' (*Ibid*.). Friendship issues were a particular source of concern for those pupils where no other children from their primary school were transferring to the same secondary school (Ashton, 2008: 179). Some children worried they would be lonely and considered the prospect of having to make new friends to be frightening. Bullying was also a worry for some children (Ashton, 2008; West *et al*, 2010), with a few children being particularly concerned about racist bullying or fighting (Ashton, 2008), and some raising concerns about coping with 'older teenagers' (West *et al*, 2010). After the transition to secondary school, however, year 7 pupils affirmed that the older students were not threatening, and those they had encountered through peer support programmes '*teach you how to get through high school*' (Coffey, 2013: 266).

Transferring from a rights-respecting primary school

Where pupils attended a primary school which was working towards embedding a rights-respecting ethos, some specifically chose to also attend a rights-respecting secondary school. For these pupils it was important that the school they attended upheld the values associated with a rights-respecting approach (Sebba and Robinson, 2010: 33). Pupils who moved from a rights-respecting primary school to a non-rights-respecting secondary school reported that the relative lack of rights-respecting language and behaviour was noticeable within their secondary school, and at times pupils had difficulty in adjusting to this. They reported that they continued to act and behave in a rights-respecting way at secondary school. However, it was disconcerting when others in the school, particularly teachers, did not reciprocate with similar behaviour (*Ibid*.).

Key issues

The transfer from primary to secondary school is a significant turning point in most pupils' lives. Findings from recent published research supports evidence reported in the previous review (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010), that children look forward to the transfer from primary to secondary school with a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety.

There has been a shift towards developing rights-respecting relationships amongst and between pupils within secondary schools which are actively working towards embedding a rights-respecting approach. Many schools, however, are not working to change their ethos in this way; this paints a bleak picture for the vast majority of pupils transferring to non-rights-respecting secondary schools. In these schools there tends to be less emphasis on promoting a rights-respecting ethos, and less understanding around the significance for pupils of building positive relationships with staff. This is a matter of considerable educational importance and calls for an urgent need for secondary schools, in particular, to reflect on their existing staff and pupil relationships, and to consider measures to support the development of more collegial, respecting relationships between members of the whole school community.

8 - CONCLUSION: KEY FINDINGS

Findings presented in this research report give us some insight into the perceptions pupils have of their experiences of primary school. However, we must acknowledge that the published data from which we can draw is scarce and therefore may not truly represent the primary school population. There continues to be an overall lack of data reporting on pupils' perspectives of primary schools, in particular data reporting on areas of primary school life identified as important by pupils, which reiterates the situation reported in the previous reviews (Robinson and Fielding, 2007 and 2010).

Implications of the findings outlined within this report raise particular questions in relation to the following areas:

- the importance of acknowledging children's rights and developing a school ethos underpinned by the UNCRC;
- the need to reconceptualise the roles of teachers and pupils
- the need to listen to the whole school community
- the importance of empowering learners to lead their own learning.

The importance of acknowledging children's rights and developing a school ethos underpinned by the UNCRC

The UNCRC was ratified by the UK government in 1991. This provides for the rights and freedom of children and young people, and affirms that children are equally legitimate holders of human rights as adults. Within Article 12 of the UNCRC, children have a right to express their views freely and for their views to be given due weight in matters affecting them, and those working with children have a responsibility to acknowledge and uphold the rights of children. Thus, within schools, while teachers have a responsibility towards making decisions that are in children's best interests, they also have a responsibility to respect children's rights and to listen to, and acknowledge, their opinions and perspectives. Where schools adopt a rights-respecting approach, the UNCRC becomes a central document in informing decision-making processes throughout the school. In such schools, pupils report positively about the school's ethos, and assert that being members of a rights-respecting school community empowers them to demonstrate respect for the rights of others locally, nationally and globally, and for the environment (Sebba and Robinson, 2010: 39). Pupils within these schools have also reported improved relationships, between and amongst staff and pupils, due to better understandings by the whole school community of how to behave in a rights-respecting way, using the UNCRC as a guide (UNICEF, 2010: 39). As a consequence of these developments, pupils also reported a greater enjoyment of school, classroom conditions more conducive to learning, positive attitudes towards diversity, a reduction in bullying and, where there were conflicts, pupils were more likely to resolve these themselves (*Ibid.*).

Pupils in rights-respecting schools also reported feeling included in the decision-making process within school (*Ibid:* 40). A central argument drawn from these findings is that consideration needs to be given to how school policies, procedures and practices can

prioritise the development of a school-wide rights-respecting ethos underpinned by the UNCRC.

Fundamental changes to initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are also needed so that those entering the profession know and appreciate the principles of the UNCRC. New entrants to the profession need to be able to see the value of schools adopting a rights-respecting approach, and have an understanding about how to promote this work in schools.

The need to reconceptualise the roles of teachers and pupils

Pupils are expert witnesses, they are experts in knowing about their experiences of schooling, and about issues relating to what helps and what hinders their learning. If adults in schools are to listen to and act on pupils' views, they need to believe in children's capacity to engage in dialogue and contribute to discussions about school-related issues; and there needs to be a move away from some teachers viewing children as incapable and wholly dependent on adults to make decisions for them. This raises ethical issues in relation to the extent to which teachers trust children's competence to offer productive, insightful comments which can genuinely contribute to discussions about teaching, learning and other school policies and practices.

Current school practices of listening to pupils commonly take the form of a discreet set of initiatives which promote pupils' participation within limited aspects of school life and, all too often, these initiatives are related to eliciting pupils' views primarily for performativity purposes. We need to move beyond this narrow vision of listening to pupils, and enable the participation of pupils in a range of issues. If pupils and teachers are to genuinely work together on issues of, for example, teaching and learning, there needs to be a reconceptualisation of the roles of pupils and teachers and the development of new understandings about the possibilities and potential of each of these roles. This reconceptualization should of course pervade life inside as well as outside the classroom, and it underlines the need for more genuinely dialogic approaches to pedagogy, as recommended by the Cambridge Primary Review.

As schools shift towards this ideal, measures must be taken to ensure teachers feel confident that their authority won't be undermined. For some teachers, holding a position of power and authority relative to pupils may have been a significant part of their teacher identity for many years. Senior leaders must, therefore, be sensitive to teachers' needs and support them as they adjust their practices and start to position pupils as having the potential to offer insights into how improvements can be made, and become active participants in the development of teaching and learning policies and practices.

The need to listen to the whole school community

When working to develop an ethos of participation in schools, it is vital to develop ways of engaging a diverse range of voices in deliberate dialogue about school-related issues. There needs to be a genuine authenticity in which the adults have an interest in learning about the opinions and ideas of all pupils. There should not be situations in which the voices listened

to represent no more than a minority, where the only voices listened to concur exactly with what the school wants to hear, or where those who do not possess the school's cultural capital are silenced. If marginalised, less powerful voices are eclipsed by the more dominant voices, then decisions and actions taken will be based only on partial knowledge. This is an ethical issue, which raises questions about how schools support, and in some cases, discourage or exclude particular groups and individuals from participating in school decision-making. As part of this ethical consideration, attention also needs to be given to how the less articulate, and those with limited communication skills and special educational needs, can be enabled and encouraged to participate meaningfully in debates and decision-making processes.

There is a dearth of research in this area; thus, there is an urgent need to consult with marginalised groups and individuals, and with those who are considered to have particular educational needs, so that educators can develop deeper understandings about the sort of learning environments that support pupils' learning. Principles of inclusion will be overlooked, and children's rights violated, if schools do not listen to, and take seriously, the views of the whole student body. The extent to which schools need to be remodeled to achieve the meaningful participation of all pupils cannot be underestimated.

The importance of empowering learners to lead their own learning

Many pupils express conflict in their thinking between wanting to lead aspects of their own learning, while simultaneously wanting teachers to take charge of their learning as teachers are perceived as more knowledgeable and able to provide the information pupils need to help them achieve well in national tests and examinations. These conflicting discourses are maintained by teachers as they also share similar contradictory views due to their belief that enabling pupils to be autonomous learners will be of long term benefit to them, while simultaneously responding to pressure for pupils to achieve high grades in national tests by taking control of pupils' learning.

If teachers are to work towards building a pedagogic culture in which pupils are genuinely empowered to act as partners in their own learning, there need to be spaces for pupils to engage in learning dialogues with teachers which encourage pupils to exercise agency and be active partners in decision-making about teaching, learning and other classroom practices. Within the process of encouraging pupils to be active in leading their learning, they also need to be enabled to review their own progress; this raises the thorny issue of the position of current assessment practices within the education system. It also poses questions about how pupils can contribute to developments and new thinking about alternative forms of assessment which break away from traditional pen-and-paper testing and which support pupils' learning rather than merely feed the accountability agenda to which schools are obliged to subscribe.

For there to be a move by teachers and pupils along this continuum, away from absolute teacher control of pupils' learning and more in the direction of pupils leading their learning, a serious re-think of pedagogy and of the current testing and school accountability procedures is called for.

Implications of the research surveyed in this review

Implications of the research for policy and practice are detailed below. In considering these implications, however, we need to be mindful of one significant point that was raised in the earlier report (Robinson and Fielding, 2010) which continues to be pertinent today and underpins the suggested implications. That is, there is an urgent need to clarify the purposes of education in general, and primary education in particular, as without such clarification, the 'how' becomes little more than mechanisms devoid of moral or educational legitimacy.

(i) National Policy

The following suggestions included within the 2007 review and 2010 chapter (Robinson and Fielding) which continue to be of significance today, are as follows:

- We understand the pressures on policy-makers to set clear agendas that are seen to break new ground and address compelling issues of the day. However, we urge those concerned with the formulation and review of national policy to find ways of locating their work within the longer term trajectories that, amongst other things, bring to their attention relevant work that has been done in the past (*Ibid*.).

- There is surprisingly little evidence about the nature, experience and success of primary education that is rooted in data from pupils themselves. This suggests that longer term, more extensive exploration of pupils' perspectives on primary education might usefully be sought through academic research (*Ibid.).*

In addition to these recommendations, the following are also suggested:

- Increasing numbers of schools are demonstrating an interest in using the UNCRC as a guide to develop and embed a rights-respecting ethos. However, if this goal is to be aimed for by all schools, there need to be clear messages about the benefits of such an approach and about how schools can work to build and embed a rights-respecting ethos which is deep rooted and sustainable. In accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, particular attention needs to be placed on ensuring children have the right to voice their opinion on matters affecting them and for their voices to be listened to. The significance of the UNCRC and the duty schools have to uphold the rights of children need to be made explicit to all schools, and understandings around this need to be built into teacher training progammes.

Given the increasing number of schools opting out of local authority control, national policy and the work of national agencies are particularly significant in promoting the importance of the UNCRC being at the centre of school decision-making, and in encouraging and supporting schools to develop a rights-respecting school ethos.

(ii) National Agencies

- National agencies aiming to support schools could usefully build on the work of organisations such as UNICEF UK through developing creative and innovative ways

to assist schools in building a rights-respecting ethos. Their work might include initiating and funding research in this area, as well as supporting the development of imaginative ways of working with schools and professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders.

- We would also recommend a fundamental shift in ITE programmes and training to take account of the values and principles underpinning a rights-respecting schools approach, and suggest that ITE providers model this good practice within their programmes.

(iii) Local Authorities

- Drawing from ii) above, Local Authorities could develop imaginative ways of working with schools and provide professional development for school leaders and teachers to support the use of the UNCRC as a values framework within schools. Publications by UNICEF UK, such as the Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award (Sebba and Robinson, 2010), and UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award: A good practice review (UNICEF, 2013) would be helpful documents to draw on in developing such support.

- Note might be taken of Hampshire Local Authority's *Rights, Respect and Responsibility* (*RRR*) initiative. Hampshire's motivation for introducing the initiative was driven by the desire to improve school ethos through developing an education programme that would provide a shared values framework consistent with the UNCRC, for all school policies and practices (Hampshire Education Authority, 2003). The initiative has numerous similarities with UNICEF UK's RRSA. However, one of the strengths of the *RRR* initiative is that it was rolled out to simultaneously to several schools, to varying degrees, within one Local Authority. Teachers and school leaders from different schools attended joint training sessions and were able to share ideas and discuss the implementation of the initiative with others from local schools. Covell (2010) asserts that many schools within Hampshire are exemplary in both their incorporation of specific children's rights across the formal curriculum but also in their integration of children's rights across the hidden curriculum and in all aspects of school's social and regulatory functioning (*Ibid.*).

(iv) Primary schools

- Drawing from ii) and iii) above, schools could usefully build on the work of UNICEF UK, and other organisations working to realise the rights of children, and situate the UNCRC at the heart of all school developments and decision-making. Aligned to this, better use should also be made of practices of exemplary schools, for example those outlined in UNCEF UK's *Rights Respecting Schools Award: A good practice review* (2013).

- If pupils are to contribute to school improvement agendas there need to be opportunities for them to engage in deliberate dialogue with adults in schools, and for these adults and others in the school to have regard for the ideas and solutions

pupils suggest. Pupils will also need to have access to issues raised in academic research to enable them to make informed contributions.

- Schools need to provide ways of listening to pupils about matters important to the pupils themselves, and not just about issues which adults in the school consider to be important. Attention also needs to be given to ensure that there is a representation of pupils with diverse interests. Thus, a school's listening culture should be based around respecting the views of the whole school community and ways of actively listening to staff and pupils, including those with limited communication skills and those who may not agree with the dominant cultural norms of the school.

- It is a pupil's right to participate in decisions in matters that affect them, and it is the responsibilities of educators to encourage and enable pupils to do so. While some schools have an ambition to achieve high levels of pupil participation, there are inconsistencies in how this vision is taken forward in practice. It is a wasted opportunity to ignore the good work which is already happening in many schools. Thus, where schools are actively developing ways of engaging pupils in decision-making processes, factors which facilitate such participation need to be made known to a wider range of schools. As a cautionary note, however, as levels of pupil participation increase, we need to find ways of helping pupils understand the significance of some of the decisions they make in terms of the wider, long-term implications, while simultaneously not placing undue pressure on them.

Suggestions for further research

It is suggested that research be undertaken to explore in more depth the following areas. The first three suggestions were also made in the 2010 chapter (Robinson and Fielding). However, they continue to be relevant today:

- What the prime purposes of primary schooling are and how are these conveyed to pupils, families and the communities they serve (*Ibid.*: 42).

- The profound change in teacher-pupil relationships as pupils move from primary to secondary school and the effect such changes have on the extent to which pupils feel they 'belong' to or identify with the school, and whether there are resultant changes in a pupil's sense of identity as a learner. There needs to be further work on factors which help pupils develop and retain such an identity (*Ibid.*).

- Pupils' views of the general experiences of primary schooling. Comparisons could be made across gender, social and cultural groups and, in view of the move towards 'inclusion', comparisons could also be made across specific groups who are now 'included', within mainstream primary schools. There appears to be a distinct lack of data relating to pupils' aspirations and references in respect of their own futures (*Ibid.*).

In addition to areas outlined above, it is suggested that further research be undertaken in the following areas:

- **Pupils' views of their experiences of primary schooling**. Following on from the points raised above, there is a lack of research focusing on pupils' views of their experiences of primary schooling, including consideration of those elements of schooling which pupils themselves perceive as important. In particular, there is an absence of published research focusing on the views of pupils with special educational needs. Thus, there is a need to consult with pupils and for educators to learn from pupils' experiences and build learning environments to suit the specific needs of a range of pupils.

- **Ways in which educators make ethical decisions in relation to school policies and practices**, and how account is taken of children's rights within the UNCRC when making these decisions.

- **Ways in which schools work to embed the UNCRC at the heart of their school ethos** and promote the development of rights-respecting relationships, and how they minimise obstacles encountered in such endeavours.

- **The ways in which primary pupils and teachers can work together to co-produce and/or co-research teaching and learning within schools.**

- **Pupils' views of how testing can support pupils' learning.** Consideration should be given to pupils' perspectives on how testing can be made more engaging, and how alternative forms of testing to the traditional pencil and paper tests can support pupils' learning.

- **Pupils' perspectives on the value of peer mentors**. Given the recent increase in pupils taking on roles in schools as peer mentors, there is a need for research to consider how these roles can support pupils in school.

It is worth noting that the various drives to include children and young people's views about their school experiences, has led to a form of 'marketisation' of pupil voice. There are now profit-making organisations selling services to schools which include developing and analysing questionnaires and surveys to enable schools to elicit the views of their student body. The questionnaires and surveys can be tailored to the requirements of individual schools and are commonly marketed on the basis that the results will support schools in successfully fulfilling Ofsted requirements. While such surveys may inform schools on some aspects of their pupils' experiences, caution must be taken as such a depersonalised approach will not elicit depth and understanding of individual experiences, nor are they likely to be suitable for the youngest children and/or those who have limited reading skills.

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APPENDIX
'CORE' LITERATURE REFERRED TO IN THIS REPORT

The 'core' literature referred to in this report is as follows:

Sebba, J. and Robinson, C. (2010) *Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools'* *Award***, Final report, London: UNICEF UK**
This evaluation of UNICEF UK's RRSA was funded by a grant from the Department for Education (DfE). The project ran from 2007-2010 and included in-depth case studies of 12 schools over three years, and single visits to a further 19 schools. In total, 19 infant/junior/primary schools (for pupils aged 3-11), one middle school (for pupils aged 9-13) and 11 secondary schools (for pupils aged 11-18) were involved in the research. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the impact of RRSA on the well-being and achievement of children and young people in the participating schools. Interviews were held with headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants, midday supervisors, pupils, parent and governors. Findings in this report make reference to data which specifically reports on interviews with pupils from the infant/junior/primary schools.

UNICEF UK (2013) UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award: A good practice review, London: UNICEF UK
This research builds on findings from the Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award (Sebba and Robinson, 2010). Nine schools that demonstrated good practice in the UNICEF RRSA, including five primary schools, were identified to participate in the research. The research aimed to determine factors which support the development of a strong rights-respecting schools ethos and included interviews with pupils, staff, school leaders, parents and governors in each of the schools. Findings in this report draws on data from interviews with primary pupils.

Covell, K. (2010) School engagement and rights-respecting schools, *Cambridge Journal of Education* **40:1, 39-51**
Research by Covell (2010) reports on a study of 1289 9-11 year olds from 18 schools, six of which had implemented a Local Authority's Rights, Respect and Responsibility initiative, the others had not. The study reported pupils' self-reported engagement in schools that were explicitly respecting of children's rights, and compared this with pupils' self-reported engagement in traditional schools.

Chamberlain, T., Golden, S. and Bergeron, C. (2011) *Children and young people's views of education policy.* **London: Office of the Children's Commissioner**
A study commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) (2011) and carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (Chamberlain, Golden and Bergeron, 2011). The study aimed to explore children's and young people's perspectives of what works in educational policy and what does not. The study involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection with children and young people aged between nine and 16 years. In total, 1957 children and young people's responses were included in the quantitative dataset and 47 children and young people were involved in qualitative focus group discussions. The findings reported here refer to those specifically relating to the views of children in primary schools.

Hopkins, A. (2008) Classroom conditions to secure enjoyment and achievement: the pupils' voice. Listening to the voice of *Every child matters, Education 3-13* **36:4, 393-401**
A study by Hopkins (2008) focusing on what pupils believe to be the ideal classroom conditions which enable them to enjoy and achieve at school. Data was collected from 180 pupils from years 3-6 (aged 7-11).

John-Akinola, Y.O., Gavin, A., O'Higgins, S.E. an Gabhainn, S.N. (2014) Taking part in school life: views of children, *Health Education* **114:1, 20-42**
Research by John-Akinola *et al* (2014) documents the views of children about participation in school; 248 primary school pupils aged nine-13 years participated in the study.

Wellcome Trust (2010) 'Marks tell you how you've done…Comments tell you why' Attitudes of Children and Parents to Key Stage 2 Science Testing and Assessment, London: Wellcome Trust
Work commissioned by the Wellcome Trust which aimed to provide insights into English and Welsh pupils' and parents' views of testing in science at Key Stage 2 (age 11). Almost 1000 year 6 and year 7 (aged 10-12) children, and 245 parents participated in the study.

In addition, while the following research project did not focus directly on eliciting primary pupils' views of schooling, it has added greatly to our understanding of children's experiences.

A study commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) and undertaken by the National Children's Bureau and the Children's Rights Alliance for England (Davey, C., Burke, T. and Shaw, C., 2010).
The study examined the extent to which children living in England feel they have a voice and influence in matters affecting them at school, at home and in the area in which they live. Eighty-six children aged between three to 20 years were involved in the study. Findings conclude that most children are generally dissatisfied with their level of input into decision-making processes in school, in the home, and in relation to where they live. Most children accept the inherent power difference in adult-child relationships. However, they do not accept the low status adults often accord to them and they reported feeling belittled, powerless and undervalued when they were not listened to. Findings also concluded that even very young children can take a rational and reasoned approach to decision-making; *a finding which reiterates the importance of engaging children in participatory processes from a young age* (2010:42). The study was part of a larger study, involving an on-line survey with 1001 children aged 7-17 years. This study aimed to provide an up-to-date insight into the levels and ways in which children are currently involved in decision-making in order to inform the National Participation Forum's development of a National Participation Strategy for England.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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