

RESPONSE TO THE INFORMAL GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM REVIEW DRAFT PROGRAMMES OF STUDY FOR ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

1. I am responding to this informal consultation in a personal capacity, on the basis of my experience as the headteacher of a first school for nine years and as someone extensively involved in research, teaching at several levels from Masters' to children in Key Stage 2, writing and continuing professional development in the field of primary education for the last fourteen years.
2. The lack of an overall statement of aims about what the National Curriculum is intended to achieve, especially in relation to the 5-11 age group, means that it is impossible to say to what extent the Programmes of Study will help to meet, or hinder, such aims being met. While the Secretary of State's letter to Tim Oates recognises the importance of such a statement of aims, there is no indication of when this will be developed. However, this must precede and inform the detail of Programmes of Study.
3. The lack of any significant information of the nature or details of Programmes of Study in other subject areas means that it is extremely difficult to see how these fit into a broader picture of the National Curriculum; and establish how this will be used by schools in planning the whole curriculum offer.
4. However, the process adopted and the material included implies that there will continue to be a narrow focus on literacy and numeracy, and on measurable outcomes in these areas. While recognising the importance of these, especially literacy, I believed that a wealth of research, such as that summarised in the Cambridge Primary Review and that on high-performing jurisdictions, indicates that a broad and balanced curriculum is vital both as an essential part of what helps to develop the whole person and as the best route to higher standards of attainment. This is especially important with young children as a way of engaging them and developing the qualities, attitudes and dispositions necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing world. I am gravely concerned, especially, at the lack of emphasis on oracy in the draft Programmes of Study for English and more generally when this was, rightly, central to the Expert Panel's recommendations.
5. I am dismayed at the amount of, and the nature of the, material to be covered, especially in English. The need to cover this is likely, in my view, to make it much harder to provide breadth and balance across the curriculum (as this will tend *de facto* to sideline the humanities and the arts) and to develop the conceptual thinking which, again rightly in my view, underlay the research-informed approach of the Expert Panel.
6. I welcome the decision no longer to use level indicators. However, the level of prescription and the detail on a year by year basis is likely to limit the opportunities for many higher attaining children and create a sense of failure for many lower-attaining children and so to disengage, rather than motivate, a large number of children. I believe that the whole range of children, and their teachers and parents/carers, would be much better served by a National Curriculum which identified concepts to be understood over a whole Key Stage, or indeed the whole span from birth to adulthood, to encourage the

development of understanding these across subject boundaries and movement between levels, rather than seeing learning in so linear a way.

7. I am concerned at how these draft Programmes of Study, linked to new tests proposed in English at Year 1 and Year 6, indicate a lack of trust in teachers to plan, and indeed to create, the whole curriculum on the basis of their professional expertise and their knowledge of particular children and groups of children. Such trust, along with an expectation of high quality continuing professional development, is a feature of high-performing jurisdictions. It was also, I had thought, part of the present Government's expressed wish to give more autonomy to teachers.

I would also add that many schools will recognise the limitations of these Programmes of Study if they are finalised in anything like their current form. The increasing number of primary schools becoming academies which do not need to, and will not, adopt the National Curriculum means that only in name is this likely to be a National Curriculum. A National Curriculum which provides a framework for the children's entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, but which can be adapted to the needs of particular schools and communities, would have much more chance of becoming widely agreed.

I therefore urge the Government to:

- publish in draft a short statement of aims to outline what the primary curriculum is intended to achieve and encourage wider debate on this before making final decisions on the detailed Programmes of Study ;
- provide an indication of what the Programmes of Study in other subject areas are likely to include and delay the whole process by one year so that the draft National Curriculum can be seen as a whole; and
- review the draft Programmes of Study very substantially before the formal Consultation process so that the amount, and the nature, of the material included is considerably reduced and presented in a way which does not limit children's learning by being so content-heavy, prescriptive and set out within a year-by- year framework.

I would be happy to elaborate on any of these points.

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