

Primary Strategy for Change – Headteacher Consultation

1. Introduction

Representative headteachers met on 3rd March facilitated by Cliff Turner to discuss the educational implications of the Primary Strategy for Change building programme. This document aims to summarise the outcomes of that discussion for Members.

2. What is education for? (Cliff Turner)

- Getting ready for work - acquiring basic skills and technological expertise
- Living in the global village – learning how to get on with people different to ourselves
- Conveying culture - appreciating the best of the arts from the near and distant past, and encouraging new expressions of creativity
- Ensuring sustainability – maintaining the health and well-being of self, communities and the planet
- Preparing for the future – learning how to learn in an environment where the only certainty is change
- Celebrating spirituality – understanding what is important (learning values) and allowing ourselves times of awe and wonder

3. National Perspective (Jane Gabb)

Excellence and Enjoyment 2004

Excellence and Enjoyment is the government's current primary strategy. It is a useful document and many schools have used the associated audit tool. Each "unit" has several "themes":

Planning and assessment for learning

- Assessment for learning
- Designing opportunities for learning

Creating a learning culture

- Conditions for learning
- Classroom communication, collaboration, personalised learning

Understanding how learning develops

- Learning to learn: progression in key aspects of learning
- Learning to learn: key aspects of learning across the primary curriculum

Primary Reviews

There are two primary reviews at present – an independent review hosted by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and University of Cambridge, and a government-commissioned review of the primary curriculum conducted by Jim Rose. The Esmée Fairbairn review is a "big picture" review that questions the purpose and nature of primary education. It aims to:

- Stimulate debate about the current condition and achievements of state primary education in England, and about its future purposes and character.
- Ask the questions about primary education that need to be asked, without "fear or favour"
- Produce a well-argued final report, backed by evidence, which contains recommendations for future policy and practice in English primary education.

The Jim Rose study is more of a review of "how to deliver the curriculum?" rather than "what should be delivered?" We hope that the two reviews will come together to give a coherent perspective. Further details of both reviews are shown in Annex 1.

After the overly prescriptive days of the literacy and numeracy curriculum, we noted that the government is increasingly empowering heads to make their own decisions about curriculum and delivery. As we believe in self-managing schools, we welcome this trend, but it highlights the importance of quality school leadership. It always was important and now it is more important than ever.

4. Primary Strategy for Change (Ben Wright)

Ben began by saying that the PSfC is a genuine consultation. The ideas in the consultation paper reflect the best of “desktop knowledge” currently available. Ben pointed that this is a one-off opportunity to ensure that our primary school building stock is fit for future purposes. It is unlikely that we will need to move away from the classroom as a key location for curriculum delivery, but ICT is changing the way children are taught and classrooms are designed.

There is also a technocratic perspective to this consultation as we need to make sure that we have enough school places where children live. There are related economic considerations because large schools are more efficient than small ones. On the other hand, there is understandable reluctance to face the closure of small schools. Similarly, there are potentially contentious issues about the way we structure schools. Other forms of school organisation may be increasingly relevant in future e.g. federated arrangements.

Increasingly, schools are becoming hubs for community learning, not just for children.

Headteachers commented that greater openness in sharing data about schools (both standards and accommodation) would help to inform a more strategic view.

5. Middle School Perspective (Stuart Muir)

Middle schools feel they are in limbo. It would be helpful to have a steer from the officers and members about the future of middle schools. PSfC could be a catalyst for a fundamental decision being made about the middle schools. Stuart pointed to the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership: a model that sees middle schools as being integral education in the future.

Cliff commented on the middle school question. There is no plan at present to change the Windsor system, but there are systemic challenges facing middle schools: the fact that transition years do not line up with key stage assessment, the difficulties in recruiting subject leaders and middle-school career school-leaders. The priority is to make sure that we enable the middle schools to be as effective as they can be. Cliff has developed a catalytic role in encouraging middle schools to collaborate on curriculum development, to line up KS3 assessment with year 8, and to encourage the upper schools to adopt a strategic approach staffing in the interests of all children and young people in Windsor.

Ben said that the building schools for the future programme will be a decision point for middle schools.

6. Secondary School Perspective (Ian Hylan)

Headteachers of secondary schools are managing increasingly autonomous organisations. In this context, it would be difficult to get a cross-Borough strategy to stick (even if there was a clear strategy), as the “old levers” are not there anymore. The relationship has to be a partnership.

Carol Pearce pointed out that there is a need to educate school leaders and governors to look at new ways of developing school leadership: the succession-planning group have a key role in organising this. Governors can understandably be rather parochial and base decisions on what always has traditionally been done rather on what could be better for children in future.

7. Towards a primary education statement (Headteacher-led discussion)

Current situation

- At best we nurture children with care and keep a rigorous eye on data
- There are tensions between what we want to be doing and what we have to do
- A mixture of provision that at least provides parents with some choice
- An unhelpful variation in quality
- Assessment for learning is a helpful approach
- Allegations that the foundation stage is not covered well in some schools
- A lack of consensus about current practice and future direction
- Recruitment and retention issues

Ideas for the future

- Federations and amalgamations should start with pilots
- New buildings should be more flexible so they can be used in different ways. Spaces should be multi-purpose.
- Formal education should not begin so early, regardless of where children are educated. Young children learn best through play.
- Free school lunches for all?
- If all primary schools are good, parents will not need to travel far and this would support the sustainability agenda
- Less testing!
- Fewer systems!
- "All-through" schools for children from 4 to 18?
- Open schools for longer to make better use of resources
- Structure of class size according to purpose: there may be times when children should be taught in larger groups and times when they should be taught in smaller groups than the traditional "class of 30".
- Teachers are shifting their roles as "learning managers" supported by teaching assistants
- Develop a culture of hard work that brings personal satisfaction
- Continued flexibility in how to deliver the curriculum
- Access to good quality teaching is a right for all children but we recognise that there will always be some children who will not get needs met properly in mainstream school. We will always need special schools.

What do we want the primary curriculum to include?

- Children to fulfil the five outcomes of "Every Child Matters"
- An emphasis on learning to learn – independently and in groups
- Develop morally responsible citizens
- Exposure to challenging experiences to develop self confidence: agreeing a core entitlement for all Borough children would help
- Opportunities to learn from people in the community not just from teachers
- A chance to find out something that each child is good at so that everyone gets a sense of success
- More involvement of parents in education
- More extended services around schools
- Five hours of art and culture each week: creative curricula are important
- Teach social skills for children
- Teach parenting skills to ensure the next generation gets off to a good start
- Give children more choice so that we grow responsibility for self and respect for others. Do we have the confidence to let more pupil-led learning happen?
- Professional development should not subject bound
- Thinking skills: let's encourage children to problem-solve creatively

How can personalised learning be achieved?

- Ensuring activities are always differentiated according to need
- More debate in school about why we all doing things the way we do.
- Ensure all staff to have appropriate skills: continuous professional development
- Teaching skills of effective learning: how do we learn?

We recognised that opportunities to have quality big picture conversations about education are rare but valuable.

8. Implication for PSfC

8.1 We don't favour a piecemeal approach. This is a chance to think strategically. We may have to be robust in explaining why we are not seeking to replace the buildings for all our schools that are struggling.

8.2 The built environment does have an impact on standards – but this is a long-term benefit not a short-term effect. Looking at Ofsted categories is not a helpful criterion. Spaces for small group work could have a big impact on standards.

8.3 Considering deprivation as a factor in allocating expenditure is helpful as we could use additional capital to develop spaces for community learning.

8.4 We agree that maintaining 5% of surplus places is desirable.

8.5 We recognise that provision for at least 30 additional places is needed in Windsor. We noted that assuming that 50 places will be taken up elsewhere in Windsor schools might only be achieved at the cost of significant parental dissatisfaction. This approach could present problems for Slough parents.

8.6 The benefits of a small school can be replicated in a relatively large one, but the benefits of a large school cannot be replicated in a small school. It would therefore be sensible to look at what could be done to bring schools together. PSfC is an opportunity to draw up a plan before we face further headteacher recruitment difficulties. Schools should consider collaboration, federation or amalgamation – all of which are more acceptable than closure. Several authorities are adopting a rolling programme of reviewing provision across an area.

8.7 We agree that agreed admission numbers as multiples of 15 is a good idea, but there is no consensus that this is a priority.

8.8 On balance we favour moving to a single point entry in September for all rising 5s, (although there are arguments against splitting the Early Years Foundation Stage).

8.9 As systems need to be replaced it is obviously sensible to look at green alternatives to heating, roofing, etc., even if they cost more in the short term

8.10 As systems need to be replaced it is obviously sensible to maximise access for pupils with special educational needs.

8.11 We welcome consideration of ICT infrastructure – not just front-end provision.

8.12 We see extended services around schools as being here to stay and therefore they needs to be built into plans for accommodation and expenditure.

Annex 1 Primary Reviews

1. Esmée Fairbairn Review

Reports have been posted on the Primary Review website (www.primaryreview.org.uk):

- October 12, 2007 - *Community Soundings: the Primary Review regional witness sessions*
- November 2, 2007 - *How well are we doing? Research on standards, quality and assessment in English primary education*
- November 23, 2007 - *Children's Lives and Voices: research on children at home and school*
- December 14, 2007 - *Children in Primary Schools: research on development, learning, diversity and educational needs*
- January 18, 2008 - *Aims and Values in Primary Education: national and international perspectives*
- February 8, 2008 - *The Structure and Content of English Primary Education: international perspectives*

You can sign up to be alerted when there are new reports. For each report there is a briefing paper of 2½ - 3 pages which summarises the main findings of the 20-40 page report.

2. Rose Review of primary curriculum

(<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1537>)

This is also an independent review, although set up by Ed Balls, Secretary of State. The review concerns five aspects of primary curricula. The questions being asked are:

Questions 1a to 1e refer to Aspect 1: Curriculum Design and Content

- 1 a) In relation to the curriculum what is it reasonable to expect schools to provide and manage within the statutory time requirements of the primary school day?
- 1 b) Should primary pupils continue to be introduced to all the subjects of the National Curriculum from Year 1?
- 1 c) What should be the position of science and ICT within the primary curriculum?
- 1 d) Should some of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning and development, and pedagogy be extended into the primary curriculum?
- 1 e) What is case and scope for reducing prescription and content in the programmes of study?

Questions 2a and 2b relate to Aspect 2: Reading, writing and numeracy

- 2 a) How might schools be enabled to strengthen their focus on raising attainment in reading, writing and Numeracy?
- 2 b) What can be done to ensure that these vital subjects are taught thoroughly and systematically, and fully integrated within all areas of the curriculum?

Question 3 refers to Aspect 3: Modern Foreign Languages

- 3 What are the best ways of introducing a modern foreign language as a compulsory requirement of the curriculum at Key Stage 2 as recommended by Lord Dearing's Languages Review?

Questions 4a and 4b refer to Aspect 4: Personal Development

- 4 a) What are the personal, social and emotional capabilities that children need to develop through their schooling?
- 4 b) What is the most appropriate framework for achieving greater integration of these capabilities throughout the curriculum?

Questions 5a and 5b refer to Aspect 5: Transition and progression

- 5 a) How might schools make best use of the information available about prior learning, and information from parents and other professionals working with children, to secure optimum continuity and progression for all children from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, paying particular attention to the key transition points?
- 5 b) What are the options for providing more choice and flexibility in start dates for children entering primary school, especially summer-born children?