

At our March conference the Humanities Association compiled a response to the Interim Report on the Primary Curriculum Review. - Coming shortly to our website.....

The Humanities Association's response to the first 'Call for Evidence' for the review of the primary curriculum appears below.

Response of the Humanities Association to the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, April 2008.

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?

Comments:

- The desired outcomes for children should be identified with whatever is taught and learned making a clear contribution to those outcomes.
- Emphasis needs to be placed on how children learn best and on teacher strategies that inspire children to learn.
- Core and foundation subjects organised according to school's individual needs using a framework consisting of cross curricular units of work planned with built-in progression of skills. An enquiry approach should be used with the teacher as lead learner rather than deliverer of specific knowledge.
- Teachers must be empowered to adapt teaching and learning to the needs of their pupils. They need to have the confidence to develop their own broad and balanced curriculum from a more flexible National Curriculum.
- An integrated model is needed with clear objectives for progression in key skills and wider curriculum experiences that will challenge pupils and stimulate enjoyment in learning.

1 b) Should primary pupils continue to be introduced to all the subjects of the National Curriculum from Year 1?

Comments:

- Probably this is unnecessary. It might be better for there to be the expectation that they will be introduced to broad areas of learning encompassing elements of the national curriculum subjects but in the context of more holistic learning experiences.
- Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage already provides a strong and effective model to meet the needs of young children, and based on the principles of child development and learning. This can be built on, developed and extended for Yr 1 and Yr 2. Areas of Knowledge and Understanding of the World, and Physical and Creative development provide a broad and balanced curriculum which enrich the quality of play. It has potential for developing higher levels of enquiry and exploration skill development required by all subjects.
- KS2 could be extended in a similar way. Expectations for KS 2 should reflect the Existing and Planned Freedoms within the curriculum already listed in Excellence and Enjoyment a Strategy for Primary Schools Pages 16 and 17. These clear and sensible directions could a starting point for this review. In order to provide progression into KS3 the National Curriculum subjects should be introduced in KS2, but perhaps within a more integrated approach, e.g. humanities
- If there is still to be a reported assessment for English and Maths at the end of year 2, there must be a clear focus on reading writing and number skills in year 1. However, whether children actually learn more effectively by embarking so early on formal language and mathematical learning, or whether this inhibits creativity and learning (a view in some other European countries including Russia, which is well above Britain in Literacy for example.) is open to question.

1 c) What should be the position of science and ICT within the primary curriculum?

Comments:

- Science needs to retain its strong place as a practical experience which demands an enquiry method rather than the memorisation of facts. The expectation that as a core subject it requires more time than other foundation subjects needs to be changed - less prescriptive content more time for in depth scientific enquiry - children's knowledge and understanding becomes secure.
- There should be no statutory assessment of science at Key Stages one or two. It is unnecessary at Key Stage one and has become an English comprehension exercise at Key Stage 2 in its current form.
- The role of ICT is as a tool for learning not a core subject. This is why there is an emphasis on Communication – in ICT not IT. Children's IT skills improve when they have purpose. It is a tool for enquiry based learning, presentational skills, film and music. Most primary aged children spend a large proportion of out of school time on ICT – based activities. It is important at primary level to focus on interpersonal skills, speaking and listening and reading for pleasure.

1 d) Should some of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning and development, and pedagogy, be extended into the primary curriculum?

Comments:

- Yes could be extended to cover KS1. This has been implemented in Wales and is a welcome approach.
- A similar approach is suggested in the new KS 3 materials – a focus on outcomes for the learner.
- The pedagogy of the EYFS consistently endorses the key place of play and active learning as ways in which children learn best. Structured play is described in the Guidelines as “a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge” Play develops into exploration and supports creativity and imagination. Techniques such as problem solving and different role play scenarios are developed from the notion of play
- There is a need to focus on thinking skills, fostering creativity and collaborative learning
- From Year 2 upwards the approach to learning should become more sophisticated with a clear progression of skills and concepts to ensure a broad balanced and relevant curriculum
- EYFS principles for early years education (Page 11 of Guidelines) clearly define effective practice in early years settings. These are reworked as Principles of Teaching and Learning for Key Stages 1 and 2 in “Excellence and Enjoyment – a Strategy for Primary Schools” 2003 (Page 29)

- QCA materials ““Creativity Find it Promote It” provide case studies to support these principles
- Training for teacher strategies which develop exploration and enquiry based learning will need time and funding.

1 e) What is case and scope for reducing prescription and content in the programmes of study?

Comments:

- There is a need to redesign the programmes of study. Content should be more flexible. We need the opportunity to ask fundamental questions about what subjects we teach and when we need to start, with a clear view about the purpose of the curriculum which goes beyond the need to teach a range of subjects. Reducing prescription without having that discussion will lead to a distorted curriculum which lacks coherence and does not deliver an entitlement.
- Prescription and content in the programmes of study needs reduction.
- Need skills based, outcome based progression, clearly identified.
- Subject content directly related to overall aims for learners.
- Currently good teaching and learning is often sacrificed for the coverage of content. Subjects should be related to the development of higher order thinking skills – (geographical and historical enquiry require pupils to solve problems, use reasoning skills and apply their imagination). Opportunities for making connections across subjects and seeing relationships are often lost. Pupils should have holistic, relevant learning experience which develop social and personal skills as well as knowledge of the subject.
- CPD for Literacy and Numeracy has been plentiful and very well funded at the expense of teacher opportunities for developing non specialist areas after completing NQT induction. Whole school development in foundation subject skills or citizenship has had little or no status.
- The review provides an opportunity to develop a more meaningful curriculum, which develops the whole child.

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?

Comments:

- Training and documentation of structures and teacher skills for raising attainment in reading, writing and maths have been prioritised for the last 10 years. But has this been enough to raise attainment? Results have not shown the expected success of the national strategies. Other nations reportedly outstrip Britain in literacy despite the fact that they do not commence formal writing and reading until children are seven. Perhaps then they may be more ready. Writing should not be taught as an isolated discipline but for a purpose which engages the young writer. Reading should be for a purpose. Provision of a context within the wider curriculum to make connections with children's' interest will challenge and will raise attainment. (e.g. children might want to present a spoken argument using persuasive language to protest about injustice when finding out about issues of child labour. Pupils will want to develop their extended writing skills in the context of the rights of the child.)
- Numeracy should be of a more problem solving nature. Set in real context meaningful relevant. There need to be explicit lessons for Reading, writing and number work, but they should be appropriate for the individual pupil and related to real contexts.
- Focus on longer periods of time for literacy as a discrete subject does not on its own improve standards. The Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics 2006 speaks in favour of a structure that is more personalised, flexible and makes links between curriculum subjects to enhance the learning. We support this strongly.

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?

Comments:

- Provide good curriculum exemplars which are valued by Government. These need to emphasise ways of making curriculum experiences broader, balanced and more relevant to pupils' lives.
- A number of aspects of the numeracy strategy are good as basic operations need to be taught explicitly, but science, geography design technology and ICT all involve maths. The lack of success at present is due in part to inappropriate differentiation and low teacher expectation.
- Fund training and time for schools to re build their own curriculum plans
- Change the culture of testing. Preparation for SATs testing narrows the curriculum for a long period of time in YR. 6. Teachers feel they should support young children in a schedule of testing each year in KS2 to give data which demonstrates school improvement. Lots of curriculum time is taken up with this schedule – there should be opportunities for holistic learning exams which develop Numeracy and literacy skills.
- Levels of achievement in literacy should be retained as a framework to ensure progression of skills and lack of duplication.
- Daily discrete teaching of literacy need not be an hour :

Short, focused, and lively well planned sequences for phonics, spelling patterns, and grammar, taught in direct way can have benefits.

Comprehension strategies, prediction, imagining etc. can at appropriate times be taught in the context of the subjects such as geography history, RE and citizenship. These areas will interest and engage and be more meaningful because of the connection with other sessions. Thus giving real opportunities for developing thinking skills and reasoning which in turn will strengthen attainment in reading and writing.

Making learning real and vivid (Excellence and Enjoyment) will engage pupils and give a purpose for using skills such as analysing geographical fieldwork data or using and drawing maps at a range of scales in a maths lesson. Application of some maths skills is necessary and appropriate in subjects such as design & technology, science etc.

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?

Comments:

- Raising awareness in schools of the importance of MFL for young people including their future economic well-being.
- Engage schools in identifying internal expertise, including Teaching Assistants, and use support offered by LAs, via Standards Fund, to build capacity within school. Schools should draw on existing strengths and this may dictate the languages chosen.
- Government should extend opportunities in ITT which include the development of language teaching within the PGCE qualification.
- Teaching of MFL should be not only in the context of language lessons. It should follow the Framework for MFL which gives equal weighting to literacy, oracy and cultural awareness. It therefore should involve history, geography the way of life in the chosen country to make learning real and put language in context. Linking with a school in the chosen country also increases pupil involvement.
- Liaison and dialogue between primary and secondary colleagues should be fostered in order to improve transition and progression in MFL.
- Dissemination of information on Strategies which are effective in MFL teaching via CPD: These include: strong use of visual support, artefacts, images, video, etc. computer programmes, songs, - writing frames, scaffolding; story telling and role play etc.
- Very important – a programme for teacher CPD in MFL

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?

Comments:

Children need to

- have a positive disposition to learning and a positive approach to new experiences
- have a strong sense of identity and self worth
- have respect for others
- begin to recognise their role in society/community
- have social competences
- be able to form attachments
- have an awareness of set boundaries and understand behaviour expectations
- know how to participate in decision-making and how to work with others
- be aware of their place and that of others in the wider world
- respect and value diversity
-and more

Children should be developing self esteem, self respect and empathy for others. They should feel a capability to achieve according to their capabilities. They should be able to have an informed opinion and the ability to question, to discover information for her/himself and have the ability to make a positive contribution to our changing, multi-ethnic, socially diverse community. They should also be aware of their ability to contribute to improvement personally, locally and globally.

4 b) What is the most appropriate framework for achieving greater integration of these capabilities throughout the curriculum?

Comments:

Achieving these capabilities will not happen unless citizenship becomes a statutory part of the curriculum. Achieving ECM outcomes will not happen unless schools have a curriculum that equips a child to live confidently and make a positive contribution. If primary schools give learning opportunities which develop ideas and understanding of global citizenship then we can equip children to take responsibility for their future.

Reduction of content with retention of the rigorous processes and skills in the National Curriculum could build an integrated curriculum which will outline ways of making connections across subjects. A carefully planned framework of cross-curricular units of work based initially on what is appropriate for the school community. This should not mean a 'dumbing down' of the curriculum for pupils in areas of high deprivation but a framework related to the local rather than general. There should be a focus on emotional literacy with children encouraged to question, hypothesise and form opinions.

Schools will need the freedom to plan in both a thematic way that develops children's learning in a holistic way and sometimes in a discrete way in specific subject skills. This will happen according to the needs of the pupils and the school as well as responding to the community the school serves.

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?

Comments:

- Within the primary school there should be meetings with staff before and after transition to discuss the children. This includes transition from Nursery to EYFS. There should be more opportunities for KS3 teachers to liaise with primary schools to discuss pupils and observe practice. This is difficult in some schools where pupils disperse to 14 different secondary schools, or more.
- If a curriculum is developed which is successfully integrated by building on EYFS there will be continuity and progression for all children
- A less prescriptive thematic curriculum will give teachers of transition classes opportunities to plan a series of sessions that will cross the transition stage.

5 b) What are the options for providing more choice and flexibility in start dates for children entering primary school, especially summer-born children?

Comments:

This is complex issue which does depend on the readiness of the child. The established principle that parents must arrange to have their child in school at the beginning of term in which their child becomes five is already in place.

There are several models - all have advantages and disadvantages

- There is a useful model operated by some Local Authorities which gives parents the choice of part time schooling from September until the beginning of the term in which their child becomes five. It is a system with flexibility built in.
- All pupils enter school in the September of the school year when they are 5 with younger or more immature children having the choice of mornings only.
- A close relationship between nursery and reception so that pupils transfer when they are deemed ready
- Two start dates during the academic year one in September and one in January.
- We strongly feel that there needs to be more personalised provision for summer born children, who are currently entering school almost one quarter of their life, earlier than the older children. This builds in a cycle of under-achievement; inability to match the achievement of their older 'peer group'.

6 Do you have any other comments or contributions to make?

Comments:

- The new secondary curriculum with reduction in prescription and content and a focus on 'outcomes for learners' could provide direction for further ideas.
- Whatever changes are made to the curriculum there must provision for CPD for teachers in post and changes in ITT
- A barrier that could affect change is the concern of Head Teachers and teachers that school improvement is defined by levels achieved at the end of KS 1 and 2 in English and Maths, whatever the capabilities of the cohorts of pupils. They have invested 10 years in detailed planning for literacy and Numeracy, developed skills in teaching the literacy hour, developed resources and spent hours of whole school CPD on these two subjects. They know and understand that techniques and strategies for a strong cross curricular approach will raise standards, but accountability measures will reduce their preparedness to innovate and seek more personalised teaching and learning appeals.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child needs to be included explicitly in the curriculum and in professional development for teachers.

