

A Remit for Change

The Secretary of State has asked Sir Jim Rose to complete a “root and branch” review of the primary curriculum. This gives us the opportunity to think again about the knowledge, understanding and skills that we choose to set before the nation’s children. A curriculum that will challenge and inspire them, open out their imaginations, raise their aspirations and prepare them for whatever the new century might hold. A curriculum for better learning, stronger learners and a brighter future. We are inviting you to work with us, to seize this opportunity, and to be part of creating a 21st Century curriculum.

The remit letter from the Secretary of State sets out the parameters for our thinking. The parameters are very wide indeed, and the clock is ticking...

The remit letter says, **“We should be concerned with the development of the whole child as well as their level of attainment”**, and that **“the curriculum must inspire a commitment to learning that will last a lifetime”**. There will be few who disagree with these sentiments. Our job now is to translate these into reality. What will a national curriculum that is “concerned with the whole child” and which “inspires a commitment to lifelong learning” look like? Does the present national curriculum do these? If not, what needs to be changed? Does something need amending, or does something need adding? Or do we need to start again from the beginning?

The remit letter requires a curriculum that gives maximum flexibility: **“a strong coherent curriculum which has the flexibility to personalise...learning is crucial to driving up standards”** and **“the review should en-**

able schools to have an even greater flexibility to meet individual needs and strengths”. How can this flexibility be built into a national curriculum that still provides a ‘common core of entitlement’? If there is too little flexibility at the moment, does this come from the national curriculum itself, or from the QCA schemes of work – which are not statutory at all, but were introduced for illustration and guidance? Is it the flexibility for schools to add their unique contribution

The remit letter builds on this by stating that, **“personal development should be a central aspect of the primary curriculum. The review should develop a more integrated and simpler framework for the personal skills that all pupils should develop through their schooling.”** Is this the same as the structure of ‘personal, learning and thinking skills now in the secondary curriculum? Or does personal development involve more than this? Should it be more



and respond to local circumstances and their own pupils’ needs?

The review **“should build on developments in the new secondary curriculum”**. If you have not yet seen this new curriculum that starts for Year 7s in September 08, it can be found at www.qca.org.uk/curriculum. You will see three key elements:

- there are clear overall aims for each subject
- the subjects are slimmed down and presented in terms of key concepts and processes
- there is a structure of personal, learning and thinking skills

like the ‘personal, social and emotional’ area of the Early Years Foundation Stage? How do you provide for personal development in your school? Is there a programme, or is it manifest in the ethos and quality of relationships? Is it in PSHE or through every learning experience?

The remit also asks us to “consider how and when children should be introduced to the key ideas and practices of the other principal subject areas of learning... pupils should be introduced to a broad range of subjects, including languages, but the review should consider whether they should all be intro-

duced from Year 1” So not all subjects need to be studied from Year 1. Which ones would you start later? And how much later? Or is it a matter of some aspects of subjects starting later? If we look at the EYFS areas of learning, all the national curriculum subjects can be found there on one stepping stone line or another. And most of them are quite separate within their areas of learning. Some of you will be thinking, “Do we need subjects at all?”. If we took out a blank sheet of paper and wrote down all the things that we think primary children should learn, would we set them out in subjects? Are there some things that just don’t fit into subjects, but which every primary child ought to know, be able to do, understand or experience? Is there a different framework for setting out the primary curriculum? There are some big, and radical, questions here!

One thing that is fixed is that **“languages will be compulsory from key stage 2”**.

There are two considerations here. Firstly, what should this look like? Oral or written? Counting to ten, or studying French literature? Secondly, how can it be fitted in? Does something have to go, and if so, what? You may even be wondering who is going to teach it? At the same time, many of you are already providing for a modern language in your curriculum, and may be wondering what all the fuss is about, and why anyone would wait until key stage 2 when children learn languages best when they are young. More questions to answer!

Thinking of how young children learn, the remit asks us to consider, **“whether some aspects of the EYFS should be extended**

Some questions to consider...

1. Does the present national curriculum need slight amendment or radical change?
2. What are the three main things you would change in the present national curriculum?
3. What three aspects of the national curriculum is it essential to retain during any review?
4. Is there a better way of setting out, or arranging, learning at the primary stage?
5. Do we need separate key stages 1 and 2?

Answer these, and more, at www.qca.org.uk/qca_15561.aspx



into the primary curriculum. This might include...widening...opportunities for child-initiated and play-based activity.” Is the curriculum like this already in your school? Building on ‘pupil voice’ is now a strong element of many schools’ curriculum, and role-play in its many forms is already used across key stage 1 and 2. But how can we review the curriculum to build on this? How can we harness the way in which children learn naturally, and build on their enthusiasm?

Finally, the remit letter asks us to **“consider how reform of the primary curriculum might help to smooth transitions”**. Of course, we are reviewing the primary curriculum at a time when the EYFS and key stage 3 have just been reviewed themselves, so they are, in a sense, fixed points on the curriculum journey. Children ‘come out of’ the EYFS and must be prepared to start key stage 3 six years later. Does this mean stretching the key stage 3 curriculum back to year 1? Or continuing EYFS until year 6? Or having something in between that takes pupils seamlessly from reception to year 7? This raises the question of why we have two key stages anyway; could we not just have one continuous line of progress?

So, plenty of big questions here. This is an opportunity that seldom comes, so we must get it right. This is our chance to lay before the nation’s children a curriculum of which we can all be proud, and in which they will take delight.

Of course, we also need to think about those aspects of the present curriculum that

work well. What must we make sure that we do not lose in this review? How should we set all of this out. Are programmes of study and attainment targets for subjects the best way of specifying the national core? Or is there a better way of setting out what children ought to learn by the age of eleven?

To answer some of these questions we need your participation, your experience and your expertise. We shall be writing a series of articles over the coming weeks looking at the issues raised by the remit letter, and other aspects of the review. Each time we ask for your participation. To do so, visit www.qca.org.uk/qca_15561.aspx.

So, take this opportunity. The flag has been raised; the clock is ticking. Together we can help create a curriculum that will truly challenge and inspire all learners and prepare them for the future. A curriculum that will open out their imaginations, raise their aspirations and prepare them for whatever this new century might hold.



Jim



Nick Waters