

Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum - Call for Evidence

Response Form

The closing date for responses is: 30 April 2008
Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for
children, schools and families

THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online or offline response facility available on the Department for Children Schools and Families e-consultation website (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>).

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department. This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically-generated e-mail confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

Name Early Childhood Forum
Organisation (if applicable))C/o National Children's Bureau
Address: 8 Wakley Street, London, EC1V 7QE

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the review you can contact Colin Seal on:

Telephone: 020 79256777

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Please tick one box that best describes you as a respondent:

<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Governor
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Association/Professional Body	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Union	<input type="checkbox"/> Early Years Professional
<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority	Other Yes (please specify)	

Please Specify:

ECF is a voluntary organisation hosted by the National Children's Bureau (NCB). It is a coalition of 55 professional associations, voluntary organisations and interest groups united in their concern about the care and education of young children from birth to eight. The Forum's geographical remit is England, although it is recognised that member organisations may have a wider sphere of work.

ECF has five central areas of work which form the basis of its policy agenda:

- Championing children's rights and entitlements
- Supporting training, development and education of early childhood practitioners and all who work with children and their families
- Working in partnership
- Addressing inequalities and valuing diversity
- Evaluating practice and ensuring quality

Early Childhood Forum Members

4children

Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP)

Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

British Association of Community Child Health (BACCH)

Campaign for Advancement of State Education (CASE)

Children in Scotland (CiS)

Children's Society

Children in Wales (CiW)

Children's Links

Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE)

Council for Disabled Children (CDC)

Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA)

Daycare Trust (DCT)

Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network

Early Education

Early Years (formally NIPPA)

Early Years Equality (EYE)

Fatherhood Institute (formally Fathers Direct) (co-opted member)

Forum for Maintained Nursery Schools

High/Scope UK

ICAN

Learning Through Landscapes (LTL)

Local Authority Early Years Network (LAEYN)

Mencap

Montessori Education UK

National Association of Education Inspectors, Advisors & Consultants
(ASPECT)

National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)

National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)

National Association of Nurseries in Colleges & Universities (NANCU)

National Autistic Society (NAS)

National Children's Bureau (NCB)

National Campaign for Nursery Education (NCNE)

National Childminding Association (NCMA)

National Council for Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA)

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)

National Network Of Children's Information Services (NACIS)

National Portage Association (NPA)

National Union Teachers (NUT)

Parenting UK

Parents for Inclusion

Play England (formally Children's Play Council)

Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA)

REU (formerly Race Equality Unit)

Refugee Council

Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB)

Save the Children (SCF)

Scope

Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF)

Training, Advancement & Co-operation in Teaching Young Children (TACTYC)

UNISON

Voice - Union for Education Professionals (formally PAT / PANN)

What About the Children (WATCh)

World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP)

Young Minds

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?

The Early Childhood Forum welcomes the principle within the Children's Plan which states that 'children should enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life'. From this principle it follows that young children should not be over-pressured by formalised or too narrowly focused teaching and learning. In particular literacy and numeracy should not be focussed on to the exclusion of other fundamentally important areas of development and learning, it should have equal (not greater) status with all key areas of learning. Inappropriate pressure and focus prevents children's own natural, exploratory drive developed through their self-directed play. ECF believes that getting this balance right is critical, not just in the Early Years Foundation Stage but in Key Stage 1. We believe that broad and balanced learning experiences should be experienced by all children throughout their primary schooling enabling them to become competent learners who are resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

In a recent report Professor Angeline Lillard (University of Virginia) said children should be allowed to move around the classroom and to talk to each other as it can help their learning. She argues that the traditional 'factory model' where children sit silently in rows during class is used by too many schools and runs counter to everything psychologists have learnt over the past 100 years about how children learn. Professor Lillard is particularly critical of early education in Britain, saying that children under six are more interested in 'parallel play - often playing alongside each other without really interacting'. She continues that once children start primary school 'that's when they start being really interested in their peers and taking notice of how they react. But that is precisely the time when we take them away from learning and playing in groups and sit them in desks in ones and twos'.

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

Comments:

The six areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage are more appropriate than a subject based curriculum – children should have an integrated, broad and balanced experience. They should not be narrowly shoe-horned into a limited literacy and numeracy diet. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a broad curriculum with all six areas having equal status and schools should be expected to develop a curriculum which is built on the development of attitudes and skills which will be relevant to children for the rest of their lives. Not just on knowledge that may well be out of date in a short time. A strong example is the work in Wales where the Welsh national curriculum develops this approach through a *Skills framework for 3-19 year olds in Wales*. The approach taken in Wales runs contrary to the narrow emphasis being adopted in England, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy. It begs the question of whether the targets (National Indicators 72 & 92) will become the driver of early years outcomes in England rather than the appropriateness and efficacy of the curriculum offered.

The approach should be based on broad areas of learning. All areas of learning should carry equal importance as collectively they support all children to play to their strengths and develop a wide base of capability.

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

The EYFS offers a single framework underpinned by clear principles, with scope for flexibility and interpretation. It provides a strong framework which can be used to meet the needs of all children, in particular younger children moving into key stage 1. Practitioners need to be empowered to make principled professional judgements as to when individual children are ready to start more formalised learning (e.g. systematic phonics work). ECF believes that the flexibility offered within the strongly principled learning framework of the EYFS needs to underpin Key Stage 1. Continuing the principles of EYFS, and the 6 areas of learning, will provide a good framework for children up to the end of KS1 and provide integrated, broad and balanced learning experiences rather than dividing learning into 'subject areas' at age 5 or 6. This approach will help widen the curriculum for play based learning opportunities.

The Forum believes that that the six areas of learning would form an appropriate way of organising the primary curriculum throughout Key Stage 1 rather than the current subject based approach exploiting natural links between subjects in order to achieve a more integrated curriculum. The principle that all 6 areas of learning are inter-dependent and equally important should also be extended throughout the primary years.

Children continue to need opportunities to initiate their own learning, learn from each other and pursue their own interests throughout the primary years. Play based learning and opportunities to learn on a large scale, including outdoors, would continue to allow children to learn with both challenge and enjoyment and do much to address the disengagement of many boys as they move through primary school.

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

Comments:

The Early Childhood Forum believes that a play based curriculum is essential in early childhood. But play is also important for older children and all schools should support and facilitate children and young people's play. There is research which indicates that over formalised approaches to teaching and learning can disaffect learning, play must be present in children's school life, it is when they define their own goals and interests, decide what is success or failure and pursue those goals in their own way. Children's enjoyment through play is linked to the control and choice they are able to exercise.

Schools should be encouraged to make use of the freedom they already have to plan and provide a broad based curriculum that meets the particular needs of the children, families and communities they serve. It should reflect the school's commitment to promote the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. In particular, the school day must allow time for children to play freely with their friends. Young children learn best through play and, as they get older, play supports and enriches their learning.

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:

Within the EYFS there is a need reduce the detail and specificity of phonics in Communication, Language and Literacy and increase the emphasis in this part of the curriculum on oral language, e.g. vocabulary, sound play, narrative. Knowledge and skill in these areas can be enhanced through conversations, drama, poetry, language games. There is also some confusion over the fact that the phonic guidance is not statutory and ECF would support the Early Years Advisory Group (EEAG) requesting that the DCSF clarify the situation through a letter to all schools, early years settings and Children's Trusts, that the phonics guidance is non statutory.

The EYFS profile needs significant adaptation and ECF believes that it is not appropriate to provide clear summative profiles at end of 5 and that assessment approaches need to stretch up through KS1 and to inform the next stage of learning. Current Foundation Stage profile data indicates that in many authorities more children are struggling to reach national expectations in communication, language and literacy than in personal, social emotional development, This leads ECF to question the level set in the literacy learning goals for EYFS – are they set too high and should they be moved into key stage 1?

Schools need to strengthen their approach to oracy and particularly on language for communication and thinking. Using a play based approach, particularly for boys, can play a significant part in developing positive attitudes and dispositions in relation to early writing and reading skill development.

ECF welcomes the new workforce plan and the continuing emphasis on raising the skills, knowledge and qualifications of the early years workforce. The roll out by the Primary National Strategies of specific programmes to develop practitioners' knowledge and expertise in developing children's speaking and listening skills and supporting their social and emotional development. In addition to this we would wish to point up the duty in the Childcare Act to listen and take account of young children's views. The NCB supported Young Children's Voices Network (www.ncb.org.uk/ycvn) is an important element of developing expertise of practitioners and local authorities in listening to young children which will contribute to developing the communication skills of both practitioner and children.

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?

Comments:

Young children SHOULD NOT be over-pressured by formalised or too narrowly focused teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of other fundamentally important areas of development and learning (as set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage which gives all areas equal status). There is concern that the current dwarfing of the broad reach of the Early Years Foundation Stage by the Letters and Sounds agenda does not seem to sit well with the Children's Plan's overall intentions and principles for developing a sense of well being in childhood and is likely to depress rather than raise attainment.

Children need time and opportunity to practice and apply their developing skills throughout the curriculum in ways that are creative, meaningful and engaging and do not over-emphasise the mechanics of literacy and mathematics.

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:

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:

The Forum believes that personal, social and emotional development should be a statutory core area throughout the primary years as one of the core areas. The materials in the SEAL programme are welcomed and dovetail with the emphasis in the EYFS on personal, social and emotional development. By moving the EYFS framework into key stage 1 there would be a stronger and continued emphasis on the development of personal, social and emotional well-being.

PSED should not be taught as a 'subject' but used throughout the curriculum, for example many skills come through collaborative working so the curriculum and pedagogy throughout the primary years should focus more on children working together for common purposes rather than working as individuals.

A recent report from NCH on children and young people's emotional well-being¹, using the British Cohort Study data, shows that certain emotional and personality attributes, particularly locus of control, application and self-esteem are as significant in determining mental health outcomes at age 16 than any other type of indicator. The report includes earlier evidence that these factors are about as important as cognitive abilities (literacy and numeracy) in determining earnings in later life. Interestingly these non-cognitive factors are four times more important for low-skilled men as cognitive abilities in determining their wages in adulthood. The major implication of this research is to question the prioritisation, particularly in early childhood, of cognitive development over the development of emotional well-being in schooling.

It is essential that in early years and primary school settings, partnerships are developed with parents to enable them to develop their children's learning. Settings can help parents feel confident in their ability to support their children's emotional and social development. NCB's Early Childhood Unit has developed PEAL training for practitioners to support parents in their children's learning and development.

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

¹ Margo, J, Sodha,S (2007) Get Happy:Children and young people's emotional well-being. NCH London

Comments:

ECF welcomes the continued emphasis in the Children's Plan on personalised learning. As defined in the Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group: "*Put simply, personalised learning and teaching means taking a highly structured and responsive approach to each child's and young person's learning, in order that all are able to progress, achieve and participate. It means strengthening the link between learning and teaching by engaging pupils - and their parents - as partners in learning.*"

This will mean a need to configure the design, resources, curriculum and organisation around the needs of young children reflecting a professional ethos that assumes and builds on the strength of each child's knowledge and skill base, as well as varying aptitudes and aspirations. A flexible curriculum is vital if the benefits of personalised learning are going to be realised.

Personalised learning provides the underpinning concept of a broad framework, which professionals adapt around the needs of the individual child ensuring that the learning goals are developmentally appropriate. With highly skilled practitioners (including QTS teachers trained for the age phase 0-7) there should be less need for so much detail in some of the regulations.

ECF welcomes the move to develop 'stage not age' tests that children take when they are ready and supports the Forum's view that the professional judgement of well trained practitioners is fundamental to providing personalised learning.

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:

The Early Childhood Forum believes that the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile should be used as a continuous assessment process across the whole of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. It should not be used as a summative assessment by which to make judgements on local authorities and their leadership of early education. The use of National Indicators (72 and 92) within the Local Area Agreements is not helpful as it was always agreed that the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile would be only be used as a way of recording children's development and planning for progression. We strongly argue that the links of EYFS profile with national and local target sets should be removed as they are inappropriate and engender a target setting culture for 5 year olds.

The profile is intended to bring together a holistic picture of children's interests, preferred ways of learning and needs as well as development. This information is essential, particularly at transition points, and local authorities should be required to ensure that settings share information with other settings. There is limited evidence that schools are using prior information to make assessments and to plan children's learning and developmental opportunities. It is not possible to improve continuity and progression for children from EYFS into KS1 without much stronger and effective links between all early years providers in a locality who work with children in the EYFS and KS1. Early Years Consultants in local authorities should have leadership of transition as a primary role, and the promotion of shared information.

If the EYFS profile is used as continuous assessment, rather than a summative 'target', it would help plan for children's development into Key stage 1 and reduce the emphasis on outcomes at age 5. Summer born children would not then face such discrimination if all children are taught in a developmentally appropriate way and their progress takes full account of their birth date. It has to be remembered that a number of children enter key stage 1 without having met the Early Learning Goals and therefore the EYFS curriculum offer needs to continue well into Key Stage 1, at least to the end of Year 1.

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:

There are vast differences between pre-school settings and school settings which cause concern with regulations applying to early years settings with 30 children to one teacher, who may not be trained or qualified early years practitioners in the pre-school sector so there must be an drive on ensuring that in reception years, The Forum believes that teacher training (QTS) should be reformed so that tea

The needs of summer born children can be met if there are highly skilled qualified teachers and an option of delaying the start of school for summer born children, parents are reluctant to take up this option there would be greater continuity of provision than currently exists. We must make sure that reception needs to be a highly skilled workforce and there must continue to be free play both indoors and outdoors

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

Comments:

The Early Childhood Forum is disappointed that the Early Years is not seen as part of the Primary Review. With all the recent investment and changes brought about from the Childcare Act, this is an opportune time to review and reflect on the efficacy of the EYFS and Children's Centres. The role of parents is paramount and there should be greater emphasis on ensuring continuity of engagement of parents who are involved in children's centres or voluntary settings into school. There is much to build on from the early years which can better support the Primary Curriculum if only we can move early years away from the target setting culture inherent in the Early Years Outcome Duty.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

Here at the Department for Children Schools and Families we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes

No

Thank you for taking time to respond to this review.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 30 April 2008

Send by post to: Primary Review Secretariat
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Great Smith Street
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Send by e-mail to: primary.review@dcf.gsi.gov.uk