

Independent review of the primary curriculum

School leaders had an opportunity to voice their views on how the primary curriculum should be reshaped in a recent talk2learn debate. The discussion formed part of a DCSF consultation for the independent review of the curriculum currently being carried out by Sir Jim Rose.

Key points to emerge were:

- The curriculum should put greater emphasis on skills
- Age related targets are obsolete and a barrier to personalised learning
- Valuable lessons can be learned from schools abroad on how languages are taught to primary children

Several leaders called for skills to be the backbone of the curriculum, rather than subjects.

"Compartmentalising learning is not good," said Catherine Rigby, a year 2 teacher in Lancashire. *"We need to make learning connections between the basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, number, science, ICT and writing."*

Emma Benham, a science coordinator in West Sussex, felt children should also be taught specific life skills.

"We should be teaching skills to learn and we should prioritise reading, writing and numeracy. But we should also be developing how children talk in the classroom and the skills to work well with their peers."

Age-related targets were seen as obsolete by some contributors, who called for more scope for personalising learning and an end to dividing children into year cohorts.

"Some children are not actually ready for school until six while others are ready at four," said Patricia Watson, a headteacher in the North-West. "Integrating the Foundation Stage into school should allow teachers and parents to decide when children should begin working on the national curriculum for Key Stage 1. Likewise progression to Key Stages 2 and 3



could be more fluid with children moving on after SATs. There should be less emphasis on age-related targets, which are often used to hold teachers to account, and more on individual progress and personalised learning."

Heather Brooks, a Key Stage 1 co-ordinator in Wakefield, was also concerned that using age as a determinant for when children begin school creates inequalities.

"Summer born children only have one term in which to integrate and yet, in year one, the expectations of them are the same as those children who had three terms of full-time education. *I think also that some children are ready for full-time education before others, it does not necessarily depend upon their actual age.* Surely we need to have greater flexibility but also acknowledge the abilities of the children?"

Elsewhere, experiences abroad had inspired many leaders' ideas of how languages could be taught in primaries. Marie Entwistle, an office manager in Burnley, had recently visited a primary bilingual school in Vienna.

"The children start at age seven doing 50 per cent English and 50 per cent German all day every day. Children equivalent to our year 3 could converse fluently in English and we were able to have a very good discussion. All schools are not fully bilingual but all primary schools do teach English (usually) for some part of the day. *I think if we teach a foreign language from an early age to our children and make it fun, we would have great results.*"

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