

## Discussion Topic 1

# What drives the curriculum in your school?

### Key evidence from the CPR final report

The curriculum in many primary schools is being determined by a culture of compliance and dependence. The Review acknowledges the pressures that schools and teachers have been under to conform to Government frameworks and strategies over many years. However, it is equally clear that the quality of the curriculum ultimately depends upon the professional understanding, expertise, resourcefulness and leadership within each individual school.

### Key quote from the CPR final report

“teachers should be able to be able to give a coherent justification of their practices, citing (i) evidence (ii) pedagogical principle and (iii) educational aim, rather than offering the unsafe defence of compliance with what others expect. Anything less is educationally unsound.” p.496

### Food for thought

- Is your school’s curriculum driven by a set of agreed aims and principles?
- To what extent does it take account of authoritative, research-based evidence?
- To what extent are staff confident to use their own professional expertise to justify what they are planning and teaching?
- Can you think of instances where staff follow prescribed lessons too slavishly? Why do you think this might be happening?

## Discussion Topic 2

# What impact does the broader curriculum in your school have on English and maths?

### Key evidence from the CPR final report

There is a strong relationship between curriculum breadth and the standards achieved in English and maths. Ofsted reports show that schools that are the most successful in the KS2 tests are often those that provide a balanced, broadly-based and well-managed curriculum. This relationship could be due to a number of factors but is attributed by the Review to the role of the broader curriculum in providing meaningful contexts for children to develop and apply their learning.

### Key quote from the CPR final report

“Far from being a threat to achieved standards in ‘the basics’ a broad, rich, balanced and well-managed curriculum is actually the prerequisite for those standards.” p.215

### Food for thought

- Does this piece of evidence throw some light on the standards being achieved in your school?
- Are all the staff in your school aware of the relationship between breadth and standards?
- How systematically are English and maths embedded into the long and medium-term planning of other subjects?
- Do you feel that insufficient breadth in your school’s curriculum might be creating an ‘artificial ceiling’ on particular children’s achievement in English and maths?

## Discussion Topic 3

# Does the curriculum in your school take account of what children say?

### Key evidence from the CPR final report

Primary-aged children are clear about what helps them learn. They say they find it easier to learn when activities are exciting and varied. They want a sense of ownership in their learning and opportunities to work independently. Children expect their teachers to have sufficient subject expertise and to be enthusiastic about what they are teaching. Whilst English and maths are perceived as particularly vital for future job prospects, other subjects are seen as enjoyable, engaging and valuable in their own right. Children accept that learning cannot always be fun but note that a prolonged lack of engagement in learning may cause some children to become disruptive.

### Key quote from the CPR final report

“Children were clear about what helped them to learn. They relished a challenge and being given opportunities for active, ‘hands-on’ kinds of learning. They wanted to feel able to succeed and experience success.” p.148

### Food for thought

- How well does the curriculum in your school match the needs and interests of children?
- Is it broad enough for all children to be able to experience success and demonstrate their talents in subjects and aspects where they excel?
- Do you feel that the curriculum in your school takes account of what children say they find motivating and engaging?
- In what ways does the curriculum in your school have a positive or negative impact on children’s behaviour and discipline?

## Discussion Topic 4

# Is the curriculum in your school genuinely broad and balanced?

### Key evidence from the CPR final report

The breadth of the curriculum is not simply about how wide-ranging it is, how many subjects or areas are covered or the amount of time allocated to each. Crucially, it is also about the depth and quality of teaching and learning. The curriculum cannot be said to be genuinely broad and balanced unless there is quality across all subjects and aspects.

### Key quote from the CPR final report

“a truly ‘whole’ curriculum is one where the quality and seriousness of the teaching is consistently high across all its aspects, regardless of how much time is allocated to them. Breadth and balance are about the quality of provision no less than the allocation of time.” p.243

### Food for thought

- Why is it important that children receive a broad and balanced curriculum?
- Do you feel that the curriculum in your school is sufficiently broad and balanced on *paper*?
- Do you feel that the curriculum in your school is sufficiently broad and balanced in *practice*?
- Apart from English and maths, which areas of the curriculum do you feel are taught with enough quality and depth?

## Discussion Topic 5

### How much **importance** does your school attach to the **teaching of knowledge and skills?**

#### Key evidence from the CPR final report

The overall message from the Review is that it would be a mistake to follow either an exclusively skills-based or knowledge-based approach to curriculum planning. The tendency in many primary schools is to view knowledge narrowly and negatively, whilst skills are often looked on far more favourably. The most serious problem is where knowledge is equated with facts or information, such as the learning of dates. Knowledge is defined more broadly by the Review and includes understanding, explaining and making sense of the world. By comparison, the Review finds that the term 'skill' is sometimes used in an overblown way to cover knowledge, understanding and skills.

#### Key quote from the CPR final report

"Learning, knowing, understanding, acquiring skill and developing personal qualities are the essence of education." P.254

#### Food for thought

- When staff in your school say it is important to teach children the 'skills' what do they actually mean?
- Does your curriculum place a greater emphasis on the teaching of knowledge or skills?
- Do you agree that knowledge is more than simply facts or information?
- What is the relationship between knowledge and skills in your school's curriculum?

## Discussion Topic 6

### How **manageable** is the **curriculum** in **your school?**

#### Key evidence from the CPR final report

There is too much content in the current National Curriculum but it is not inherently unmanageable. In many schools the timetable and resources are skewed in favour of the 'basic' subjects because of the pressure of inspection and testing. This squeezes the rest of the curriculum. There is evidence that some schools successfully manage to fit the entire National Curriculum into the time available and therefore unmanageability is not just a consequence of there being too much curriculum content. The problem is also due to the availability of the curriculum expertise required to turn programmes of study into viable projects, units of work and lessons within the teaching time available.

#### Key quote from the CPR final report

"In all the talk of a divided and unmanageable curriculum, one possibility is rarely mentioned that the problems may relate to expertise as well as logistics." p.244

#### Food for thought

- To what extent do staff have difficulty covering everything in your school's curriculum map?
- Do they have enough flexibility to re-arrange the timetable and their approaches to planning in order to fit everything in?
- Would you agree that there is a linkage between how confident and expert a teacher is and their ability to manage curriculum content?
- What is the role of the headteacher and senior leaders in making the curriculum more manageable?

## Discussion Topic 7

# Is there enough **professional expertise** in your school to successfully plan and teach **all aspects** of the **curriculum**?

### Key evidence from the CPR final report

International research evidence indicates that a deep understanding of what is to be taught, based on well-developed subject knowledge, is a characteristic of the most effective primary teachers. However, for many years in England continuing professional development (CPD) and initial teacher training (ITT) across the broader curriculum has been seriously neglected. This has created a significant mismatch between the curriculum to be taught and the capacity of schools to teach all its aspects to a high standard.

### Key quote from the CPR final report

“every primary school must have access to the range and depth of curriculum expertise which is needed in order to plan and teach, with consistent quality across the full curriculum range, the curriculum that 5 to 11 year olds need and deserve.” p. 432

### Food for thought

- What systems do you have in place to update and develop teachers’ subject knowledge in your school?
- How important do you feel subject knowledge is in securing high quality teaching and learning?
- To what extent are newly qualified teachers (NQTs) equipped to teach all the subjects and aspects of your school’s curriculum?
- Is it reasonable to expect non-specialist primary teachers to provide high quality teaching across the entire curriculum? If yes, how can this be achieved? If no, what alternative approaches to staffing could be employed?

## Discussion Topic 8

# Is the **curriculum** in your school **divided**?

### Key evidence from the CPR final report

From Victorian times until the present day the primary curriculum has been divided into two parts according to the perceived status of subjects. In practice this means that in many primary schools there is not one curriculum but two. Curriculum 1 consists of the ‘basics’ of English, mathematics and, to a varying extent over recent years, science and ICT. Curriculum 2 comprises the remaining ‘low priority’ subjects and aspects of the curriculum. Whilst acknowledging that there will always be curriculum priorities, the Review found that this split has a negative impact on teaching and learning in Curriculum 2 subjects which often suffer an inadequate allocation of teaching time, CPD and resources.

### Key quote from the CPR final report

“for Curriculum 2 low valuation or priority is compounded by deprivations in time, resourcing and expertise. Taken together, these almost certainly mean that, for many pupils, minimal time is exacerbated by activities which are trivial, poorly conceived and lacking in cognitive or imaginative challenge.” p. 242

### Food for thought

- Do you recognise this split in the curriculum in your school?
- Are the Curriculum 1 and Curriculum 2 subjects in your school the same as the ones identified by the Review?
- To what extent is the status of a subject determined by factors within your school? To what extent is its status the result of external pressures and demands?
- Do you agree that a two-tier curriculum has negative consequences for children’s learning? If so, what strategies could you put in place to reverse the situation?

## Discussion Topic 9

### How effectively does the **primary curriculum** in your school build on the **Early Years Foundation Stage**?

#### Key evidence from the CPR final report

The early years of children's development are hugely important. A high quality experience pre-KS1 is essential for all children and particularly significant for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The original Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was well received, especially for its underlying principles and areas of learning and development. However, there is evidence that in some Reception classes downward pressure from KS1 and KS2 is undermining the breadth and appropriateness of the curriculum. Conversely, some schools have successfully extended approaches used within the EYFS to Years 1 and 2.

#### Key quote from the CPR final report

"The challenge now is to ensure that the EYFS principles and commitments are implemented. The emphasis must be on securing the most appropriate early learning experiences for young children in all settings, and on ensuring a smooth transition from the foundation stage to mainstream primary education." p.491

#### Food for thought

- To what extent do accountability measures in KS1 and KS2 have an impact on the curriculum children experience in the Reception Year at your school?
- What curriculum planning strategies do you use to ensure that there is a smooth transition between the Reception Year and Year 1?
- To what extent do you feel that your school's curriculum in KS1 is appropriate to children's developmental needs?
- What aspects of the EYFS curriculum could helpfully be incorporated into your school's curriculum at KS1 and KS2?

## Discussion Topic 10

### Does the **curriculum** in your school reflect the **local community** and meet **local needs**?

#### Key evidence from the CPR final report

A 'one-size-fits-all' model for the primary curriculum is not appropriate for meeting children's individual needs. Such is the diversity of England's 17,000 primary schools and the communities they serve, that for educational, social and cultural reasons a more flexible approach is required. The Review's aim of 'celebrating culture and community' underpins its recommendation that thirty per cent of teaching time should be allocated to a community-based curriculum where aspects of the primary curriculum are interpreted, developed and determined locally.

#### Key quote from the CPR final report

"The needs of communities and individuals are not merely scaled-down versions of national needs, and many needs in this sense are outside the knowledge and competence of a national government and require a genuinely local response." p.196

#### Food for thought

- Which subjects in your school are used most effectively to respond local needs and circumstances?
- To what extent does your curriculum draw on and celebrate the interests, capabilities and experiences that individuals and groups of children develop outside school?
- In what ways could locally determined aspects of the curriculum help to close the attainment gap for disadvantaged children?
- To maximise the scope for curriculum innovation in your school, would you consider committing a larger percentage of teaching time to a locally determined curriculum? If yes, to what extent could this be developed by listening to children, working with other schools and partners or consulting your local community?