



Endorsed by: Geographical Association and Association for Citizenship Teaching

23 March 2011

National Curriculum Review
Department for Education Consultation Unit
By email
NCRReview.RESPONSES@education.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Think Global and Oxfam response to National Curriculum Review call for evidence

1. About Think Global

- 1.1 Think Global is a membership based charity that helps school children in the UK learn about global issues such as poverty and find out how they can play a part in creating a more just and sustainable world.
- 1.2 Our national network of members shares our vision that all citizens should have opportunities to understand and respond to the global challenges we face. Think Global's 200 members include a wide network of schools, NGOs, universities and other civil society bodies.
- 1.3 Think Global is submitting this evidence in partnership with Oxfam. This submission has been developed in consultation with Oxfam's UK campaigns department, and represents the views of both organisations. Oxfam is part of the Democratic Life campaign.
- 1.4 This response is endorsed by the Geographical Association and the Association for Citizenship Teaching.

2. Summary of response

- 2.1 We agree with the reduction in prescription, and a move towards greater teacher autonomy.

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- 2.2 However, this needs to be implemented thoroughly, so that there is time every day, in every class and in every school for teachers to teach a broad and balanced curriculum using their professional autonomy and creativity.
- 2.3 The reduction in prescription needs to be implemented consistently; if the department allows some areas to be prescribed (either directly, or indirectly through accountability mechanisms such as league tables) they will lose many of the benefits of the drive for autonomy.
- 2.4 Freeing up the curriculum also needs to be combined with increased professional autonomy for teachers. This will require reform of the accountability structures in schools, including Ofsted and the testing regime: for teachers to be truly free to use their professional autonomy, a legitimate need for accountability needs to be balanced with space for creativity without undue fear of penalties in inspections or league tables.
- 2.5 An **essential component of a slimmed-down 21st century curriculum is teaching about interdependence and sustainability** to help young people make sense of the globalised and interconnected world in which they are growing up. Pupils, parents, teachers and wider society all think it is vital that schools teach about these topics:
- 2.5.1 Research with school pupils (Ipsos MORI, 2008) highlights that **over three-quarters (78%) think it is important that schools help pupils to understand what people can do to make the world a better place.**
- 2.5.2 Research with teachers (Ipsos MORI, 2009) found that **the vast majority of teachers in England see learning about global issues as an important aspect of teaching in schools: 94% feel that schools should prepare pupils to deal with a fast-changing and globalised world.**
- 2.5.3 Research amongst wider society (Ipsos MORI, 2010) finds that **almost nine in ten (86%) of the British public agree that learning about global issues in school is crucial** if these issues are to be tackled in future.
- 2.5.4 Research with parents (YouGov, 2011) shows that the **overwhelming majority of parents of school-age children think it is important that schools teach about global issues** such as environmental sustainability (84% of parents) and international poverty (73%).
- 2.6 Ofsted highlights that incorporating an ethos of interdependence and sustainability throughout the curriculum helps to improve teaching and learning (Ofsted 2009):
- "Learning about sustainability captured the interest of children and young people because they could see its relevance to their own lives...The pupils reacted very positively to being able to work collaboratively, to conduct research and to take part in debates and discussion. In several instances,*

*this led to **more positive attitudes to learning in general, better behaviour and attendance, and to improved standards and achievement.***”

- 2.6.1 Ofsted (2009) emphasises the importance of incorporating learning about interdependence and sustainability throughout the curriculum:
“In the most successful schools, education for sustainability was an integral element of the curriculum...”
- 2.7 Prescribing this teaching through cross-curricular dimensions had mixed results; it gave teachers legitimacy to teach about an area of knowledge that society acknowledges is vital for young people, but at the same time it further complicated an already bureaucratic national curriculum.
- 2.8 A more effective approach would be to follow the Cambridge Primary Review’s proposed curriculum aims. We join the Review in **rejecting the dichotomy between ‘the basics’ and a broad and balanced curriculum**. We reiterate the Review’s conclusions that **learning about interdependence and sustainability should be one of the core aims of the future curriculum** to prepare young people for life in the 21st century.
- 2.8.1 Whilst knowledge about interdependence and sustainability may not be ‘basic’ knowledge, it is ‘essential’ knowledge for young people growing up in a globalised and environmentally constrained world.
- 2.8.2 We agree that basic skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as basic subject knowledge, allow young people to access and learn from more complex concepts and topics such as interdependence and sustainability. However, it is not enough for schools to teach only these basic skills and knowledge; if they do not teach about the wider world then young people will not be able to access the opportunities associated with an interdependent society and globalised economy.
- 2.8.3 Literacy, numeracy and subject knowledge is in many cases best taught in context not in the abstract; globalisation and interdependence provide contexts that reflect the realities of young people’s lives today.
- 2.9 Some subjects play a particularly important role in teaching essential knowledge about interdependence and sustainability, including geography, science and citizenship.
- 2.10 Geography includes many topics which assist pupils in making sense of the world. For this reason we argue that **geography should join science as a compulsory subject** in the curriculum for Key stage 1, 2 and 3.
- 2.11 The review is also a chance to strengthen citizenship teaching. Citizenship is essential to develop young people as active local and global citizens

who participate in civic life, both within and beyond school. For this reason we argue that **citizenship should also become a compulsory subject** in the curriculum for Key stage 2, 3 and 4. It is unique in providing a blend of key knowledge on politics, democracy, economics and law, with opportunities to put such learning into context through pupils planning, organising and taking action on real and current issues.

- 2.11.1 Research from the 2010 Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) illustrates that **citizenship can have strong positive impact on pupils attitudes towards civic engagement when it is taught regularly as a discrete part of the curriculum.**
- 2.11.2 Citizenship is the fastest growing subject at GCSE, with over 100,000 pupils taking the qualification annually, illustrating its **popularity and relevance.**
- 2.12 The recent IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) shows that 20 out of 38 countries surveyed include a specific subject for civic or citizenship education in their national curricula. Finland, the country who tops the international comparison tables for reading and science in PISA 2009, also had the highest country civic knowledge scores (along with Denmark). England was 13th in the ICCS civic knowledge country scores and 24th (or last) amongst European countries in civic knowledge of the European Union, its institutions, laws and policies. Therefore strong citizenship teaching could help **improve England's international standing on civic knowledge.**
- 2.13 The opportunity to learn about and participate in civic space is an entitlement of every child, and therefore citizenship should be retained as a compulsory subject. However a great opportunity exists to enable a proportion of the **content to be decided locally not by central government.** There should be clear guidance that the government supports the role of schools in helping young people develop into local and global citizens.
- 2.14 One of the ways in which young people learn is through thinking critically and creatively, and being supported to come to their own conclusions on complex issues. Removing references to *how* teachers teach from the national curriculum will require teachers to make more decisions about pedagogy themselves. This is an area where teachers will benefit from additional support, CPD and sharing good practice in curriculum-making. **Without effective support for teachers there is a real danger that focusing a revised national curriculum purely on knowledge will lead teachers to return to less effective teaching methods such as rote learning.** Whilst the national curriculum does not have to prescribe teaching methods, we share the Cambridge Primary Review's assessment that it is not possible to separate curriculum and pedagogy. As such, an important complement to the curriculum review is **a review of teacher**

capacity to use their autonomy to teach in critical and creative ways. There are practical measures that the department can take to support teachers to use their autonomy to teach in this way.

- 2.15 Moreover, critical and creative thinking about subject content will lead pupils and teachers to make links across curriculum subjects. Whilst the new curriculum may not seek to prescribe those links, the department should be careful not to discourage teachers to make such links themselves.
- 2.16 Encouraging local flexibility in the school curriculum is a very positive step; it will help teachers to make links to the particular heritage and make-up of their school's local community.

3. Answers to specific questions

- 3.1 *6 a) What do you think are the key strengths of the current National Curriculum?*
- 3.2 It gives teachers the legitimacy they need to teach about the wider world, including concepts such as interdependence and sustainability. The vast majority of teachers want to teach about these issues, and the current curriculum encourages them to do so, for example through the cross-curricula global dimension, as well as through the curriculum content of geography, science, citizenship and other subjects.
- 3.3 *6 b) What do you think are the key things that should be done to improve the current National Curriculum?*
- 3.4 It should be simplified significantly, and where appropriate subject content should be determined locally. If the National Curriculum is to be slimmed-down, it needs also to take up less of a teacher's day; instead they should have a significant proportion of each day available to go beyond what is prescribed in the National Curriculum, using their professional autonomy to determine a local curriculum that meets their pupils' needs.
- 3.5 *11 a) **Science***
- 3.6 *What knowledge do you regard as essential to include in the Programme(s) of Study for **science**? Please also set out **why** this is essential and at what age or key stage. If you prefer to submit evidence separately on this matter, please send this to:
NCRReview.DOCUMENTS@education.gsi.gov.uk*
- 3.7 *If you prefer, you may wish to set out your response in relation to the three separate science disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics.*
- 3.8 It is essential that young people learn about the science of our changing planet, including the science behind climate change and the importance of global biodiversity. These topics will depend on understanding pre-existing

science concepts, and so should be taught from Key Stage 2 onwards, particularly at Key Stage 3.

- 3.9 *15 a) **Citizenship** is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 3 and 4. In future, do you think **citizenship** should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?*
- 3.10 Yes, because it makes an important contribution to the Cambridge Primary Review's proposed curriculum aims of: promoting interdependence and sustainability; encouraging respect and reciprocity; and empowering local, national and global citizenship.
- 3.11 *15 b) If yes, please tick all key stages to which this should apply.*
- 3.12 Key Stage 2, 3 and 4, but with at least 50% of the content determined locally by schools and colleges.
- 3.13 *17 a) **Geography** is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 3 and 4. In future, do you think **geography** should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?*
- 3.14 Yes, because it helps young people to make sense of the world we live in today, including concepts relating to global interdependence, sustainability, global trade, inequality and poverty around the world.
- 3.15 *15 b) If yes, please tick all key stages to which this should apply.*
- 3.16 Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

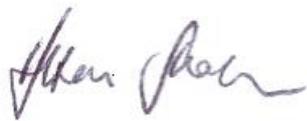
4. Recommendations

- 4.1 We recommend that:
- 4.1.1 **The national curriculum incorporate an ethos of teaching about interdependence and sustainability throughout subject content**, reflecting the desire amongst parents, pupils, teachers and wider society for these topics to be a core part of the curriculum.
- 4.1.2 **Both the primary and secondary curriculum incorporates the findings from the Cambridge Primary Review**, specifically that learning about interdependence and sustainability should be one of the core aims of the future curriculum to prepare young people for life in the 21st century.
- 4.1.3 **Geography is a compulsory curriculum subject** at Key Stages 1,2 and 3.
- 4.1.4 **Citizenship is a compulsory curriculum subject** at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. However, we recommend that at least 50% of the curriculum content for citizenship be determined locally, rather than centrally prescribed.

4.1.5 **The Science curriculum includes knowledge about the science of our changing planet.**

4.1.6 **The Department seek out practical measures to ensure that teachers have capacity to use their professional autonomy effectively.** In relation to teaching about interdependence and sustainability, one practical measure would be to promote resource banks such as the Global Dimension website (www.globaldimension.org.uk) to schools.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Hetan Shah', written in a cursive style.

Hetan Shah
Chief Executive
Think Global