

## **Response from The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust**

### **National Curriculum Review - Call for Evidence**

#### **What do you think are the key strengths of the current National Curriculum?**

From our perspective, the National Curriculum had a positive impact in improving practices in the initial teaching of reading and maths, lifting the level of average achievement and ensuring that outdated practices with dubious efficacy are much less common. As a framework which specifies the content and approaches that work for the majority, it is welcomed.

#### **What do you think are the key things that should be done to improve the current National Curriculum?**

There is a need to acknowledge the fact that the typical approaches embodying 'best practice' are but a framework against which the individual needs of different children can be identified and supported. Thus, the Curriculum should not be seen as a straightjacket with little room for deviation. Rather, there should be room for individual choices by teachers and schools, within a framework of increased professionalism and broad guide-lines as to key areas to cover.

#### **Do you think that the proportion or amount of lesson time should be specified *in any way* in the National Curriculum; eg for particular subjects and/or within particular key stages?**

Yes, at Key Stage 1, proportion of time on literacy and numeracy should be specified

#### **What knowledge do you regard as essential to include in the Programme of Study for English?**

We refer to the 2006 review from Sir Jim Rose and also his 2009 report on literacy difficulties and dyslexia and note that we are in full agreement with the recommendations in those reports. In addition, we wish to emphasise that it is critical that children be equipped at the end of Key Stage 2 with the skills in reading to enable them to work independently and efficiently using written sources; they should, in short, have reached the level of 'functional literacy'. This level of ability should reflect the fact that many children make effective use of technology in enabling them to access printed materials and in order to write and present their knowledge and ideas. Thus the focus should be on what children are able to achieve, using the resources and tools that are readily available to them, rather than specifying that something must be achieved in a specific way.

We would also add that the Key Stage 3 curriculum should not neglect the need to provide specific teaching both to strengthen and extend functional skills for those who have them and to support those with difficulties who have not reached that level. In short, literacy teaching and support should not be something that is seen only as the province of primary teachers. This will include access to specialists in literacy difficulties and dyslexia.

**What knowledge do you regard as essential to include in the Programme of Study for mathematics?**

We could make detailed recommendations in the area of mathematics, but here we would only wish to emphasise that it is critical that children be equipped at the end of Key Stage 2 with the functional numeracy skills. This level of ability should reflect the fact that many children make effective use of technology (eg calculators) to demonstrate these skills.

We would also add that the Key Stage 3 curriculum should not neglect the need to provide specific teaching to support those with specific difficulties in mathematics. This will include access to specialists in numeracy difficulties and specific learning difficulties.

**Art and design is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 1-3. In future, do you think art and design should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?**

Yes. For many children with SEN, the opportunity to find alternative means of expressing ideas and emotions through Art is invaluable. For many it is also important to develop their areas of strength which may lie in creative artistic and technological subjects

**Design and technology is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 1-3. In future, do you think design and technology should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?**

As for Art and Design, we believe that children need opportunities to express themselves in media other than printed and spoken words and that the opportunities to develop practical skills are critical from both the perspectives of the individual and of society. Indeed, we would argue that a training in Design is important for all as we seek to educate children to respond to the growing opportunities of new technologies and the growing needs to find increasingly 'intelligent' solutions to challenges created by the growing demands on the world's resources.

**Information and communication technology is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 1-4. In future, do you think information and communication technology should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?**

Effective use of ICT is a life-skill which may yet grow to rival literacy skills as a central educational tool. Whilst many children acquire these skills outside the school setting, there are many children who do not enjoy the same exposure to new technologies, and there are many situations in which the educational application of technologies may need to be made more explicit for all children.

Use of ICT is especially important for those children with special needs or disabilities who need to use alternative ways of accessing, recording and presenting information.

**Modern foreign languages is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stage 3 only. In future, do you think modern foreign languages should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?**

Language learning is infinitely easier when started early. Why do we usually wait until it is too late to begin in the UK? If we want to educate children to understand other cultures which includes an understanding of other languages, we have to start earlier and use methods (such as immersion teaching) which are known to be effective.

We are also of the view that those children with the most significant difficulties in mastering the use of spoken and written English should not be further traumatized by exposure to the challenges of an additional language. However, if built on sound principles of language teaching, the majority of children with specific learning difficulties should be able to succeed.

**Music is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 1-3. In future, do you think music should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?**

Our view is that music should be an essential element of the school curriculum and should be central to primary schools activities since music provides important ways of consolidating learning and understanding of key concepts as well as being of value in its own right. We believe it should remain central in secondary school, although not as a compulsory subject.

**Do you think the National Curriculum should continue to specify the requirements for each of the 8 levels of achievement?**

Especially in primary school, it is essential that parents and teachers are clear about what the basic minimum standards are that should be expected.

**Within each Programme of Study, how should the curriculum and attainment targets be defined to ensure appropriate education for pupils in a wide range of circumstances as learners?**

This question highlights the problem of the need to separate the specification of what should be included in a Programme of study (the curriculum) with the specification of what children should know and be able to do at different stages of their education. In our opinion, often the latter follows from the former, whereas it would be more logical to work from targets to the content to achieve this. Targets need specifying in a way that does not conflate different areas of skill so, for example, achievement in physics should reflect knowledge of physics and not the possible impact of specific literacy difficulties.

The target range of skills should not be tempered by 'expectations' about pupils in differing circumstances. Acceptable standards should be just that.

### **How do you think the needs of low-attaining pupils should be addressed through the National Curriculum?**

Where pupils have substantial additional difficulties that means that they have not been able to, or are judged unlikely to be able to learn from the methods and programmes that work for most, there is a clear need to provide additional kinds of teaching and support.

It is critical that the curriculum is not created in a way that leaves no room for the inclusion of such additional provision. It is also critical that opportunities to receive this kind of support are not at the expense of subjects often viewed as 'less academic' such as Art, Design and Music. These may seem a lower priority in contrast to literacy skills, for example, but they can be extremely important in enabling those students with additional needs to find alternative means of expression and representation of their work, and to have opportunities to show their talents in areas where their specific difficulties may create fewer problems.

It must also be recognised, that, where needs are severe and/or complex there will, inevitably, be pressure on time leading to a need to prioritise areas of study and, in exceptional cases, to work towards lower standards.

The reasons for low attainment should be thoroughly explored and understood so that expectations are not set too low for those with additional needs.

### **How do you think the needs of high-attaining pupils should be addressed through the National Curriculum?**

Sufficient space within the curriculum should help in providing extension programs and/or allowing greater differentiation to respond to the additional needs of high-attaining pupils. Note that some children with special educational needs may also be high-attaining. These should not be seen as alternatives.

### **How do you think the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND) should be addressed through the National Curriculum?**

The vast majority of pupils with Special Needs should be able to reach acceptable standards given special provision. These students should attain functional literacy and numeracy before progressing to secondary education.

It is critical that the curriculum is not created in a way that leaves no room for the inclusion of this additional teaching and support. It is also critical that special needs is not seen as a replacement for other subjects (such as Art, Design and Music) which may seem a lower priority but which can be extremely important in enabling those students with additional needs to find alternative means of expression and representation and to have opportunities to show their talents in areas where their specific difficulties create fewer problems.

As children progress through school and pressure on literacy, language and communication skills increases, there is need for greater flexibility in the content and manner of delivery of teaching programmes. Occasionally, dropping the study of a second language may be needed, for example.

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**How do you think the needs of other specific groups of pupils should be addressed through the National Curriculum?**

For children who are speakers of English as an Additional Language, there are needs for a) provision of English language support to both increase their knowledge and support access to curriculum materials and b) consideration of some first-language support. Current evidence shows that the best progress is made by 'second language learners' if the foundations in their first language are strong. It also shows that learning in some areas of the curriculum is substantially better if lessons are provided in the pupil's first language. The National Curriculum should support the inclusion of teaching in languages other than English for some students.

**Please give examples of any jurisdictions that could usefully be examined to inform the new National Curriculum. Please also briefly describe the reasons for the examples given.**

**Finland.** Both for its highly regular orthography and its highly professional teaching workforce.

**Considering your response to question 27a above, what features of their national curricula or wider education systems are most significant in explaining their success?**

In Finland, which consistently is at the top of league tables, teachers are highly qualified and selected from amongst the most able. They do not use extensive testing of pupils. Special needs still exist in this context, but they appear to be less limiting.

**What research evidence on how children learn provides the most useful insights into how particular knowledge should best be sequenced within the National Curriculum Programmes of Study?**

We refer here to the Review of the teaching of initial literacy by Sir Jim Rose (2006) and the Review on Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties (2009). These reports present the current available evidence showing the importance of:

- A strong foundation in spoken language skills;
- Linking awareness of sounds in spoken language to letters;
- Systematic, structured teaching of letter-sound-rules, segmentation and blending skills.

This structured language approach should be set in the context of a language rich curriculum, but the key area of phonics teaching should be at the core of that.

**What are the most important factors to consider in developing the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 to ensure a smooth transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage?**

We would endorse the recommendations made by Dame Clare Tickell in relation to this issue. In particular, the need for better cross-service working between health and education professionals, the need for better communication and reporting; the need to consider an integrated support plan for those with special needs extending from birth to age 25.

**What are the most important factors to consider in developing the National Curriculum for Key Stage 3 to ensure a smooth transition from Key Stage 2?**

We refer here to London Challenge report (Fuller *et al.*, 2005: 4-8) which classified good practice on transfer into five 'Transition [transfer] Bridges', each with a number of features. We emphasise the importance of cross-phase working and training; information sharing at the levels of pupil-to-pupil, parent-to-parent as well as between teachers, opportunities for extended split-site schooling in the June of Year 6.

**Please use this space for any other comments you would like to make about the issues covered in this section.**

We believe that transition from primary to secondary education for those children with special educational needs is a crucial point at which communication and record keeping is key. Throughout primary education often these children have built up relationships that support their education, confidence and progress. It is essential that these key elements are transferred and communicated to key staff in secondary education, If this is the case there should be no reason for these children's progress not to continue.